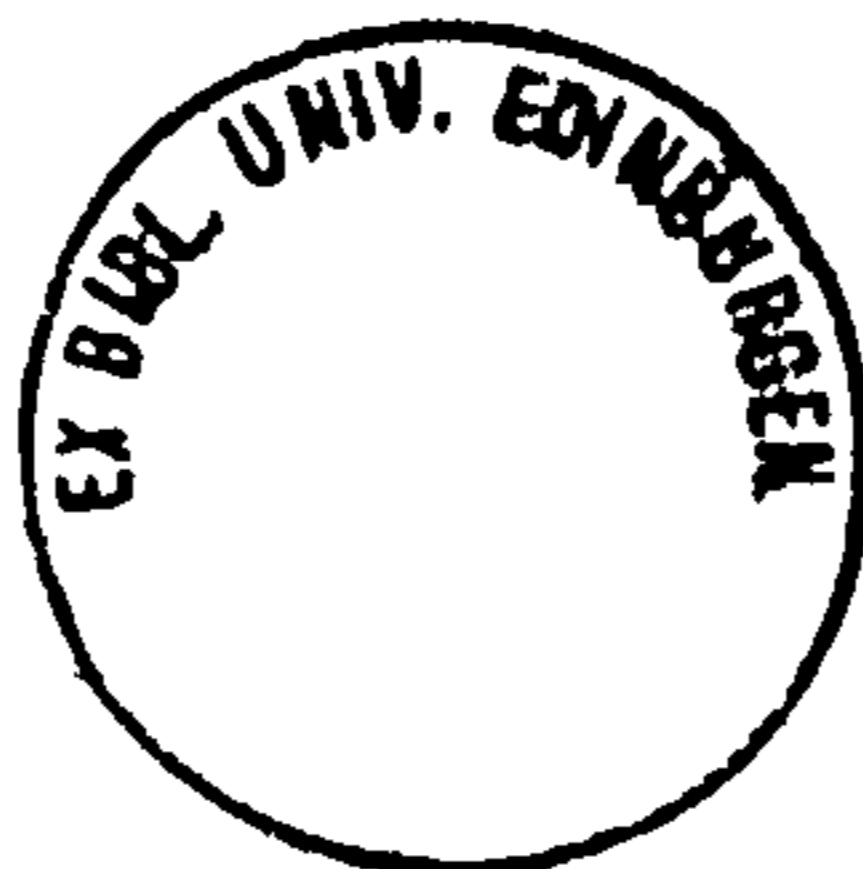


THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF REVELATION AND REASON:
THE VIEWS
OF
AL-FĀRĀBĪ AND AL-GHAZĀLĪ

by

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Thesis presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Arts
University of Edinburgh.
February, 1998



I hereby declare that this thesis has been written
by me and does not represent the work of any
other person.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Isham', is written above a long, horizontal, slightly curved underline.

Isham Pawan Ahmad

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Notes on Transliteration

System Of Transliteration of Arabic Characters.

Consonants

ء	'	ز	z	ق	q
ب	b	س	s	ك	k
ت	t	ش	sh	ل	l
ث	th	ص	ṣ	م	m
ج	j	ض	ḍ	ن	n
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	ه	h
خ	kh	ظ	ẓ	و	w
د	d	ع	'	ي	y
ذ	dh	غ	gh		
ر	r	ف	f		

اَ
ال (article), al-

Long Vowel

أ	ā
و	ū
ي	ī

Diphthongs

و	aw
ي	ay

Short Vowel

a	اَ
u	اُ
i	اِ

اِيَّ (final form ī)

اُوَّ (final form ū)

Table of Abbreviations

<u>Abbreviation</u>	<u>Full Description</u>
al-Iqtisād	al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād
al-Munqidh	al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl
Fayṣal	Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-islām wa al-zandaqa
Iḥyā	Iḥyā 'ulūm al-dīn
al-Qiṣṭās	al-Qiṣṭās al-Mustaqīm

Abstract

The questions "what is revelation?", "what does revelation tell us and what are its implications on man?" are important questions which Muslims have been attempting to answer since early Islamic times and for which we are still seeking answers even today. The answers to these questions would ultimately shape our *Weltanschauung*.

All Muslims accept revelation. However, they differ on its meaning and implication. For *falsafa*, its major proponent, al-Fārābī, sees revelation as the ultimate culmination of the highest intellectual truths transformed and put into a symbolic language with power to motivate man to right action. Chapter 1 examines how al-Fārābī conceives of revelation as being the culmination of the highest intellectual truths transformed into moving expressions able to be understood by all and to drive all to action. Thus, revelation is an extension of reason, an expression of reason. Chapter 2 examines the role of reason in the works of al-Fārābī in discovering knowledge by itself and the role of reason *vis à vis* revelation.

The rest of the thesis deals with al-Ghazālī's understanding of revelation. Al-Ghazālī as a representative of a major school of *kalām*, the Ash'arites', saw revelation as an expression of God's will. Al-Ghazālī sought to place God's power and will as absolutes above everything. He rejects any notion that it was necessary for God to act in a certain manner for it would be an impingement on God's power and will. Chapter 3 examines al-Ghazālī's direct discussions on revelation. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 attempt to obtain al-Ghazālī's understanding of revelation through indirect means by deducing from his positions on religious issues his perception of revelation. Chapter 7 examines the role of reason in al-Ghazālī in discovering knowledge by itself and the role of reason *vis à vis* revelation.

Introduction

Discussions on revelation in any revealed religion have never been an easy subject to deal with. Issues surrounding the concept of revelation such as what is revelation, i.e. what kinds of knowledge does it actually give us and more importantly, what is the ultimate purpose of this revelation revealed to man are rarely discussed by religious scholars in any systematic manner. This lack of discussion is surprising since a religious scholar's position on any subject must inevitably be influenced and shaped by his/her understanding of revelation. However, any religious scholar's position on revelation can still be obtained, albeit with difficulty and through an indirect route by careful study of his/her position on other religious issues. From his/her opinion on these related issues, we can carefully derive and draw conclusions on his/her views of revelation.

In the Islamic religious tradition, a Muslim religious scholar's opinion on the issues surrounding revelation is very difficult to obtain and point out clearly. Muslim religious scholars seem to discuss endlessly in minute detail every subject under the sun but they tiptoe ever so carefully around the fundamental subject, revelation, the source from which all their endless debates is supposed to spring, or at least have its grounding in.

The Muslim philosophers at least fare much better on this issue. They discuss the issues surrounding revelation because it is essential in their discussions on how to obtain certainty in knowledge and to their claims of possessing certain knowledge. So, the Muslim philosophers make some systematic attempts to explain the issues surrounding revelation. The Muslim philosophers were confident that they must and could interpret and assimilate philosophy, i.e. Greek philosophy, into the Islamic ethos. The Muslim philosophers' reasoning on why it was necessary to incorporate philosophy into the Islamic ethos is because philosophy provided the proofs for theoretical opinions in religion. The Muslim philosophers also felt

confident that they could make philosophy acceptable to their Muslim audience. This is because of their conviction of the universality of the human condition, both physical and spiritual. Man's rationality and sociability are viewed as part of a universe which is eminently and naturally ordered and benign.¹ In order to reconcile philosophy into a religion which is revelation-centric, they had to find a formula on how to incorporate revelation in philosophy. Their attempt to incorporate revelation into philosophy resulted into one of the Muslim philosophers' major contributions to the advancement of philosophy.

All other Muslim religious thinkers apart from the philosophers seem to have accepted revelation as a given source of knowledge, needing neither further explanation, examination nor study. Rather they saw their task only as the transmitters of this knowledge through explaining and elaborating the content of the revelation and how to apply it in practice, i.e. daily life. However, it is from their explanation and elaboration of their religious positions derived from their understanding of revelation that we can derive and spell out their concept of revelation. Instead of trying to find a direct and systematic discussion of their concept of revelation, because such a discussion is extremely scarce, and on the rare occasion when it does appear, it is only in passing and usually incoherent, we will have to resort to an analysis of their religious positions derived from their understanding of revelation in order to shed some light on their concept of revelation.

To explain, examine and study all Muslim religious scholars' concept of revelation individually is an impossible task and one which might yield somewhat confusing results since it might fail to produce any pattern of thought on this subject. But, rather it might only yield individual preferences and subtleties resulting in a hodge-podge of subtle opinions. It would appear to be more beneficial for us to examine one great individual representative of Muslim religious scholars.

¹Alfred L. Ivry, "Al-Fārābī", in Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period, ed. M. J. L. Young, J. D. Latham and R. B. Serjeant, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1990), 384.

In order to explain, examine and study how the Muslim philosophers tried to reconcile philosophy into religion through incorporating the concept of revelation into philosophy, we will examine al-Fārābī's ((AD. 870-950) concept of revelation. Al-Fārābī serves as an excellent choice to represent the philosophers on explaining their concept of revelation because not only, as Badawi points out, did all later Islamic philosophy find its sources in al-Fārābī¹ and thus, al-Fārābī set the tone for all the discussions in Islamic philosophy but also because al-Fārābī extensively developed and integrated his concept of revelation into his philosophical system.

In contrast to the approach of the philosophers to the concept of revelation, we will study and examine al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) as a representative of the traditional Islamic thinkers. Al-Ghazālī was an extremely versatile scholar whose area of knowledge and writings² encompassed all areas of Islamic religious thought. He was not only an outstanding jurist, theologian and Sufi but also an ardent critic of philosophy. Al-Ghazālī being conversant in all these different areas makes him serve as an excellent choice to represent the religious thinkers outside the philosophers. However, because al-Ghazālī did not systematically deal directly with the issues surrounding the concept of revelation, we will begin with firstly examining his direct writings on the issue which are very terse and usually in relationship to other discussions, but we will have to resort to deducing his views on revelation indirectly from his position on other religious issues.

The purpose here is to study al-Fārābī and al-Ghazālī's concept of revelation. I will seek answers to the following four questions surrounding the concept of revelation which are: 1. what is revelation?: what kinds of knowledge does it actually give us?; 2. how is this knowledge ultimately transmitted to us?; 3. by whom is it transmitted to in order to ensure its purity and originality?; 4. and most importantly, what is the ultimate purpose of this revelation revealed to man?

¹Abd al-Rahman Badawī, Histoire de la Philosophie en Islam, (Paris, 1972) vol. 2. 575.

²For a list of al-Ghazālī's writings see, A. Badawī, Mu'allafāt al-Ghazzālī, (Cairo, 1961), G. F. Hourani, "The Chronology of Ghazālī's Writings," Journal of American Oriental Society, (1959), 79:225-33 .

It would seem somewhat wanting if we did not at least contrast both these thinkers' understanding of revelation with their understanding of the role of reason. Thus we will examine what is the role of reason and what is reason's relation *vis a vis* revelation.

CHAPTER ONE

AL-FĀRĀBĪ'S CONCEPT OF REVELATION

Introduction

Muslim philosophers in spite of the variety of places in which they lived and wrote their works have an undeniable unity in the themes of their writings and in the questions which they raised and attempted to answer. Anawati points out three major factors that unite the themes of Muslim philosophers: 1) they had the same starting point viz. the Qur`ānic truths, and the everyday teachings of Islam, 2) they saw their philosophy as a continuation of past wisdom, 3) they were convinced of the oneness of all knowledge, crowned by metaphysics or *Illāhiyyāt*¹.

Muslim philosophers never challenged or doubted the teachings of the Qur`ān but rather resorted to an allegorical interpretation of the Qur`ān; for example on the issue of creation in time, or the resurrection of the body when it seemed that the literal interpretation of the Qur`ān conflicted with their views². In any case, as far as the Muslim philosophers were concerned, they were the ones with the right understanding of the revealed text i.e. the Qur`ān because they held the right interpretation of it.

Muslim philosophers had gained much of their knowledge from non-Muslims and especially from the Greek philosophers. They considered that God had given wisdom to all men both through the use of his intellect and that since the beginning of

¹George Anawati, "Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism", in The Legacy of Islam, ed. Joseph Schacht with C. E. Bosworth, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974) 356-7.

²George Hourani, Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy, A translation with introduction and notes, of Ibn Rushd's Kitāb fasl al-maqāl, (London: Messrs. Luzac & Co., 1967), 50-71. Here Ibn Rushd resorts mainly to allegorical interpretations of Scripture to justify some of the controversial positions of the philosophers. See also Iysa Bello, The Medieval Islamic Controversy Between Philosophy and Orthodoxy (Ijmā` and Ta'wil in the Conflict Between al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd) (Leiden : E. J. Brill, 1989).

man God had sent through His continuous line of prophets to all peoples and all nations enlightening them, culminating in the last prophet, Muhammad. The Muslim philosophers saw no problems in accepting truth from wherever it came. They saw the Qur'ānic revelation as the consummation of this wisdom.

The Muslim philosophers were convinced of the oneness of knowledge. In his book, *Ihsā' al-'ulūm* (Categories of the Sciences), al-Fārābī lists and describes the various sciences and argues that philosophy must be their head because it ensures the certainty of all knowledge through the use of apodeictic reasoning.¹

The Muslim philosophers were confident that they must and could interpret and assimilate philosophy, i.e. Greek philosophy, into the Islamic ethos. The Muslim philosophers' reasoning on why it was necessary to incorporate philosophy into the Islamic ethos is because philosophy provided the proofs for theoretical opinions in religion. Al-Fārābī says, " Theoretical opinions in religion have their proofs in theoretical philosophy, while they are taken in religion without proof."²

The result of this assimilation of philosophy into the Islamic ethos is the development of man's reasoning from the lesser forms of reasoning--rhetoric, dialectic and sophistry to the highest form, demonstrative reasoning.³ The Muslim philosophers also felt confident that they could make philosophy acceptable to their Muslim audience because of their conviction of the universality of the human condition, both physical and spiritual.⁴

In order to reconcile philosophy into a religion which is revelation-centric, they had to find a formula on how to incorporate revelation into philosophy. Their attempt to incorporate revelation into philosophy resulted into one of the Muslim philosophers' major contributions to the advancement of philosophy. The Muslim philosophers, using the materials from late Hellenistic thought pressed and shaped it

¹George Anawati, Philosophy, Theology and Mysticism, in The Legacy of Islam, 357. Al-Fārābī, *Ihsā' al-'ulūm*, (ed.) 'Uthmān Amīn, (Cairo, 1949), 53-4.

²al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-millah wa nuṣūs ukhrā*, ed. M. Mahdi, (Beirut, 1968), 47.

³Alfred L. Ivry, al-Fārābī, in Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period, ed. M. J. L. Young, J. D. Latham and R. B. Serjeant, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 384.

⁴Ibid.

into a new direction so that a novel, original pattern emerged from them¹. This incorporation of revelation is major because it led the way for incorporating philosophy into religion and influenced the way for both medieval Jewish² and Christian³ philosophers on how to reconcile philosophy into religion.

This attempt to reconcile philosophy into religion was a dynamic process . The philosophers were not only inheritors of and preservers of earlier philosophical truths, but were also Muslims, believers in a faith in which revelation pervaded all aspects of life. The Muslim philosophers viewed their task to reconcile philosophy into the Islamic religion not simply to accommodate religion but, rather as the correct understanding of religion. Marmura explains how the philosophers perceives this task as follows:

They (these philosophers) viewed themselves as we had mentioned earlier, not only as inheritors and preservers of earlier philosophical truths, but as continuing the quest after the true nature of things. At the same time , they were part of a culture that was Qur'āno-centric, a culture whose ethos was religion. The Qur'an and the mission of the prophet were the central fact of their history. As metaphysicians they could not bypass such facts. Here they were in search of "the true nature" of what was at the core of their way of life. Their

¹Fazlur Rahman, Islam, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 119

²For al-Fārābī's influence on Maimonides, see, Lawrence Berman, "Maimonides the Disciple al-Fārābī", Israel Oriental Studies 4 (Tel Aviv, 1974) 154-178. For a general discussion of Maimonides' relationship to al-Fārābī, see also, Shlomo Pines, "Translator's Introduction" in Moses Maimonides the Guide of the Perplexed ((Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1963). xxviii-xcii. Maimonides describes al-Fārābī's contribution and influence by saying, " I tell you: as for the works of logic, one should only study the writings of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī. All his writings are flawlessly excellent. One ought to study and understand them. For he is a great man. Though the works of Avicenna may give rise to objections and are not as [good] as those of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, Abū Bakr al-Ṣā'igh [Ibn Bajja] was also a great philosopher, and his writings are of a high standard." Moses Maimonides the Guide of the Perplexed , ix.

³See Robert Hammond, The Philosophy of al-Fārābī and Its Influence on Medieval Thought, (New York, 1947)). In this book, especially in the chapters on Proof on God's Existence, Epistemology, the author tries to show how much St Thomas Aquinas was influenced by al-Fārābī. See also, Etienne Gilson-The Elements of Christian Philosophy, (New York, 1963). See also, Etienne Gilson, Etudes de philosophie médiévale French trans. by Roland Huret, Strasbourg, 1921). Gilson describes Averroes' treatise Agreement of Philosophy and Religion as a landmark in the history of Western civilization. Etudes de philosophie médiévale, 51.

interpretation of Islamic philosophy must hence be viewed in part as an attempt at self understanding.¹

Their attempt to incorporate philosophy into the Islamic religion must not be seen as superficial, and there is no compelling reason to doubt that they were fully convinced² that not only was their concept of Islam in harmony with the Qur'ān but it was also the true interpretation of the Qur'ān and hence the true interpretation of Islam.

In order to illustrate how the Muslim philosophers tried to reconcile philosophy into religion through incorporating the concept of revelation into philosophy, we will examine al-Fārābī's (AD. 870-950) ideas on this issue. Firstly, we will examine al-Fārābī's epistemology because understanding it is an essential key to understanding his concept of revelation. Next we will examine al-Fārābī's definition of revelation. In examining this definition, we will discuss four issues; 1. what is revelation?; 2. how is revelation received?; 3. who receives revelation, i.e. prophets?; and 4. finally and most importantly, what is the purpose of revelation? After examining al-Fārābī's concept of revelation, I will show that for al-Fārābī, revelation is not only an important but an essential factor for the fulfilment of the purpose of philosophy. I will argue that for al-Fārābī, the importance of philosophy is to benefit not just the individual but others i.e. society. Thus, in order for philosophy to benefit not just the individual it must pass from the theoretical to the practical. This transformation of theoretical truths into practical actions is done through the power and convincing force of revelation. Therefore, for al-Fārābī, revelation is neither superfluous nor inferior to philosophy but actually fulfils one of

¹Michael Marmura, "The Islamic Philosophers' Understanding of Islam, in Islam's Understanding of Itself, Richard Hovannisian and Speros Vyronis (eds.), (California: Undena Publication, 1983) 101-2.

²Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa, ed. Sulāyman Dunyā (Cairo, 1987), translated into English by Sabih Ahmad Kamali as, al-Ghazali's Tahafut al-Falasifah, (Lahore:Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1974). In this book, al-Ghazali criticizes the philosophers in general and al-Fārābī and in Ibn Sina in particular for misunderstanding certain key concepts in Islam which might even cause one to become an infidel. But he never accuses them of insincerity or disbelief but rather of gravely wrong misunderstanding.

the essential missions of philosophy, to transcend the individual philosopher and influence and shape society.

Al-Fārābī's Epistemology: The Soul and Its Cognitive Powers

Abū Naṣr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Tarkhān ibn Uzalāj al-Fārābī (258/870-339/950) better known in the traditional Islamic sources as simply Abū Naṣr, the second outstanding representative of the Muslim peripatetic (*mashshā'i*) school of philosophy after al-Kindi (185/801-260/873), gave Islamic philosophy its direction¹. Al-Fārābī is celebrated as a great commentator on Aristotle and is called with enormous affection and appreciation "the second teacher", the successor to the great Aristotle, the first teacher. Netton points out that Ibn Khallikan claimed that al-Fārābī is the greatest Muslim philosopher and underlines the great debt the great Ibn Sīnā owed to him.² In present times, Netton points out the opinion of Badawi who claims that all later Islamic philosophy found its sources in al-Fārābī³, and thus it is not only the Muslims who are indebted to him, but also the West through the works of al-Fārābī and other Muslim philosophers translated into Latin in the Middle Ages.⁴

¹Michael Marmura, "The Islamic Philosophers' Understanding of Islam", in Islam's Understanding of Itself, 93. For al-Fārābī's place and role in establishing the main framework of Islamic philosophy, see, Muhsin Mahdi, "Al-Fārābī and the Foundation of Philosophy", in Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism, ed. by Parviz Morewedge (New York: 1981). 3-22.

²Ian Netton, Allāh Transcendent, (Surrey, 1994), 99. Ibn Khallikān, Wafayāt al-a'yān wa anbā abnā' al-zamān, vol. 5 (Beirut, 1977). 153-4.

³Ian Netton, Allāh Transcendent, 99. Abd al-Rahman Badawī, Histoire de la Philosophie en Islam, (Paris, 1972) vol. 2. 575.

⁴Ian Netton, Allāh Transcendent, 99. Robert Hammond, The Philosophy of AlFarabi and Its Influence on Medieval Thought, (New York, 1947). 54-4.

Muslim philosophers including al-Fārābī attempted to reconcile philosophy with religion through incorporating the concept of revelation into philosophy, this constitutes a central point of mutual confrontation between the traditional Islamic thought and the Muslim philosophers. Al-Fārābī's attempt to incorporate revelation into his philosophy must not be seen as superficial or as an afterthought, for this would be a major mistake, since his theory of prophethood and revelation occupies a central role in the structure of his philosophy, because without revelation the philosopher would be incomplete since he would be unable to enlighten and motivate others.¹ For al-Fārābī, true philosophy must not only benefit the philosopher, but transcend him to encompass all and benefit everyone in accordance with their capacity to receive understanding.

Al-Fārābī's theory of revelation is built upon his theory of the soul and its powers of cognition. Therefore, al-Fārābī's theory of the soul and its cognitive powers, i.e. his theory of knowledge, is pertinent and essential to understand in order to comprehend his theory of revelation. In his treatment of revelation through the medium of the prophets, he connects prophecy with an innate faculty of the soul itself and does not describe it as a state of possession by supernatural power.² However, he qualifies this statement that it is not a state of possession of supernatural power by pointing out that this innate faculty must be endowed and cannot be acquired by learning.³ Thus, for al-Fārābī, although prophecy is not a possession of a supernatural state, it cannot be sought to be acquired through exertion of effort but

¹Al-Fārābī, Tahsīl al-sa'āda, ed. Ja'afar Yasin, (Beirut, 1981). Translated into English by Muhsin Mahdi entitled, AlFarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, (Ithaca, 1969. Hereafter, referred to as Al-Fārābī, Tahsīl al-sa'āda, (Arabic text page), Mahdi (trans. text page). Al-Fārābī, Tahsīl al-sa'āda, 94-96. Mahdi, 48-9.

²Richard Walzer, "Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy and Divination", Journal of Hellenic Studies 27, 1957, 142.

³Al-Fārābī's The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya) Partially translation into English by Muhsin Mahdi entitled, Al-Fārābī's The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya) Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi ed., in Medieval Political Philosophy, (New York: Cornell Universtiy Press, 1986). Where partial English translation is available, I will cite both the Arabic text and the English translation and simply refer works as Al-Fārābī's The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya), (Arabic text page), Mahdi. (English translation page). Al-Fārābī's The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya), 79. Mahdi. 36.

still remains a unique gift of God to certain individuals who are chosen by God, therefore, such individuals are given special qualities which are necessary in order for them to receive revelation and hence become a prophet.

For al-Fārābī, these necessary special qualities in order to receive revelation lie in the perfection of the innate faculties of the soul. The perfection of the innate faculties of the soul lies in its ability to gain knowledge. He gives a detailed description of these faculties of the soul in his *magnum opus*, *Mabādī' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila*, by saying:

Once a man comes to be, the first thing that arises in him is the faculty by which he takes nourishment, namely the nutritive faculty (*al-quwwa al-ghādhīya*) [also known as the vegetative faculty], then afterwards the faculty by which he perceives the tangible like heat and cold and the other tangibles; and the faculty by which he perceives the objects of taste; and the faculty by which he perceives scent, and the faculty by which he perceives sound; and the faculty by which he perceives colour and all visible objects like rays of light. Together with the senses another faculty arises which consists in an appetite towards the object of perception so as to desire or to dislike them. Then afterwards another faculty arises in him by which he retains the imprint of the sensibles in the soul when these sensibles are no longer perceived, this being the faculty of representation (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*). By this faculty, he connects some of the sensibles with each other and disconnects others in different connections and disconnections, some being false, some true. An appetite towards the object of representation is joined with this faculty as well. Then afterwards the rational faculty (*al-quwwa al-nāṭīqa*) arises in man; by it he is able to know the intelligibles and by it he distinguishes good and evil and by it he grasps the arts and sciences. An appetite towards the object of reasoning is joined with this faculty as well.¹

The objective of this rather lengthy quotation from al-Fārābī is to show that for him the human soul undergoes a development. The order of development of the faculties of the human soul is the vegetative, next the sensitive (*al-quwwa al-hāssa*), the appetitive (*al-quwwa al-nuzū'iya*), the imaginative (*al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila*) and finally culminating in the rational faculty (*al-quwwa al-nāṭīqa*). This order of the development of the soul is important to establish al-Fārābī's idea of the hierarchy of

¹Richard Walzer (Arabic text with translation), *Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State: Abu Nasr al-Fārābī's, Mabādī' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fādila*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 164-5.

faculties of the soul, since each faculty exists for the sake of the one above it, with the rational faculty being the highest because it rules or orders all other faculties.

Al-Fārābī in his book *Risāla fī al-'Aql* divides the intellect according to Aristotle's description in the *De Anima* into four intellects , potential intellect (*al-'aql bi-al-quwwa*), actual intellect (*al-'aql bi-al-fi'l*), acquired intellect (*al-'aql al-mustafād*) and the external intellect, the Active Intelligence (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*).¹

According to al-Fārābī, all human beings share a natural disposition or an initial capacity which he called the potential intellect, also known as the "rational faculty", "material intellect", and the "passive intellect"² He defines the potential intellect as follows:

The intellect which is in potentiality is some soul, or part of a soul, or one of the faculties of the soul, or something whose essence is ready and prepared to abstract the quiddities of all existing things and their forms from their matters.³

As long as there is no knowledge (universals, intelligibles or form) in the potential intellect, it remain^s in its potentiality.

The potential intellect is actualised in men who begin to acquire knowledge. What kind of knowledge is al-Fārābī talking about here and how is this knowledge then acquired? The knowledge that al-Fārābī is discussing here is not knowledge of particular things but rather the essences of things i.e. the knowledge of universals, intelligibles or forms (*ma'qūlāt*).

¹ Al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-'aql*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beirut, 1983). Al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-'aql*, partially translated into English by Arthur Hyman, entitled, Al-Farābī's *Risāla fī al-'aql*, in *Philosophy in the Middle Ages*, ed. Arthur Hyman and James Walsh, (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 1973). Al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-'aql*, 12. Hyman, 215. Al-Fārābī says:

"Aristotle set down the intellect which he mentioned in the *De Anima* according to the four senses, potential intellect, actual intellect, acquired intellect and Active Intelligence".

See also *Introduction to Aristotle*, trans by Richard McKeon with general introductions and introductions to the particular works, (New York: The Modern Library, 1947), *De Anima* 3.5.430a, pp. 219-220.

²*Risāla fī al-'aql*, 215. I have taken a number of quotations on al-Fārābī's concept of intellect from this treatise, *Risāla fī al-'aql*, because it serves as an excellent summary and has an overall structure of a lexicon and thus should be seen as an end product of his thought on this matter.

³Al-Fārābī, *Risāla fī al-'aql* 12. Hyman. 215.

Universals, intelligibles or forms are essences of a thing abstracted from their matter. He describes universals, intelligibles or forms as follows:

But when they become intelligibles in actuality, then their existence insofar as they are intelligibles in actuality is not the same as their existence insofar as they are forms in matter.Now, their existence in themselves (as forms in matters) follows the rest of that which is joined to them, namely, sometimes place, sometimes time, sometimes position, at times quantity, at times being qualified by corporeal qualities, at times acting and at times undergoing action. But when these forms become intelligibles in actuality, many of those other categories are removed from them, so that their existence becomes another existence, different from this existence.¹

How does the potential intellect acquire these intelligibles? For the potential intellect to acquire these intelligibles, and thus be actualised, it requires an outside external factor, the Active Intelligence (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*). The Active Intelligence (which according to Muslim philosophers is the last and lowest of the series of ten² intelligences³ emanating from God) sends out light which transforms the images of sensible(particulars) things, stored up in man's imaginative faculty, it(Active Intelligence) abstracts them (the particulars) and transforms them (the particulars) into intelligibles or universals.⁴

¹Al-Fārābī, Risala fī al-'aql, 16-7. Hyman. 216 However, there are also forms which were never in matter. Here, he is referring to the First Cause(God) and the whole hierarchy of separate intelligibles. He says in this book:

" But if there exist things which are forms which have no matter, it is not at all necessary that this essence[the intellect in potentiality] abstracts them from matters, but it encounters them as abstracted and thinks them just as it encounters itself".

Al-Fārābī, Risala fī al-'aql, 20. Hyman. 217.

²The reason why there are ten intelligences has to do with the number of planets in the solar system. We must understand that people in al-Fārābī's time had no conception of centrifugal force nor gravity. So, they assumed these planets are living being which have rational souls. Herbert Davidson in his book, Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 45-6. He says:

" The universe envisioned by al-Fārābī is fashioned of Aristotelian bricks and of mortar borrowed from Neoplatonic philosophy. Aristotle, who of course had no notion of centripetal or centrifugal force, had pictured the universe in which the heavenly bodies are continually borne around a stationary earth by rotating spheres. And he had concluded that the unceasing movements of the celestial spheres must depend on the inexhaustible source of power, and hence upon an incorporeal mover, that in fact each distinct circular movement distinguishable or inferable in the heavens must be due to a distinct sphere with its own incorporeal mover..... each celestial sphere also has a rational soul, and the continual motion proper to each sphere is an expression of that desire that the sphere's soul has to emulate the perfection of the incorporeal mover."

³For an excellent graphic display of these ten intelligences, see Figure 2: Emanation and al-Fārābī, in Ian Netton, Allāh Transcendent, 116.

⁴ Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State, 200-1. Al-Fārābī says:

For al-Fārābī, the potential intellect cannot be actualised by its own self. The potential intellect requires an actual intellect, the Active Intelligence to transform all the potential intellect's efforts to gain images of sensibles and particulars and transform these particular images in a miraculous leap into concepts, universalising these particulars. Without the assistance of the Active Intelligence the potential intellect would never gain true knowledge or be actualised. Al-Fārābī equates the Active Intelligence with the *malakūt* and the *rūh al-amīn* (the Trusted Spirit) or the *rūh al-qudus* (the Holy Spirit), i.e. the angel of revelation.¹ Thus, it is ultimately this Active Intelligence, the angel which transforms man's knowledge of particular into true knowledge, knowledge of universals.

The forms which flow from the Active Intelligence are to render both the sensibles and the potential human intellect 'luminous'. Al-Fārābī says:

When, then, that thing which corresponds to light in the case of sight arises in the rational faculty from the Active Intelligence, intelligibles arise at the same time in the rational faculty from the sensibles preserved in the imaginative faculty (*al-quwwat al-mutakhayyila*).²

When this happens, the potential intellect thus becomes one with the abstracted intelligibles³ and becomes actual i.e. the actual intellect.

The Active Intelligence actualises the potential intellect in two ways. Firstly, the emanations of the Active Intelligence upon the potential intellect provide the potential intellect with the first axioms of thought (*al-ma'qūlāt al-awwal al-mushtaraka*), primary knowledge. The result is that the Active Intelligence puts into

"They are in need of something else which transfers them from potential to a state in which (the intellect) can make them actual. The agent which transfers them from potentiality to actuality is an existent. Its essence is an actual intellect of a particular kind and separate from matter."

¹Al-Fārābī's *The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya)*, Arabic text, edited with Introduction and Notes by Fauzi Najjar, (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1964). 32.

²Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State, 203.

³Al-Fārābī, *Risala fī al-'aql* 14. Hymān, 215. Al-Fārābī uses the example of wax to demonstrate the abstraction of essence from matter. He says:

"That essence is like matter in which forms come to be. Now, if you imagine some corporeal matter, for example a piece of wax on which an impression is stamped, and that impression and that form comes to be in its surface and its depth and that form get possession of all matter so that matter in its complete totality becomes that form because the form is spread out in it- then your imagination is close to picturing the manner in which the form of things come to be in that essence which is like matter and substratum for that form."

the potential intellect the first principles of thought common to all men and given to all men. Examples of this primary knowledge are that everyone knows intuitively without question or in need of any further examination that the whole is greater than its parts, and that things equal in size to one and the same thing are all equal to one another.¹ These kinds of intelligibles are acquired by all individuals without any inquiry or prior desire to know them. In fact, individuals are unaware of how and when these intelligibles come to exist in their intellect.

Secondly, this emanation of the Active Intelligence gives secondary truths which are deduced from the primary, the knowledge of the middle term of a syllogism and the universal concepts. This is done by transforming the perceptions stored up in the imaginative faculty into principles. Al-Fārābī says:

In giving [these perfections] to man, the Active Intelligence follows a course similar to that followed by the celestial bodies. First, it gives him a faculty (*quwwa*) and a principle (*al-mabda'*) with which, of his own accord, he seeks, or is able to seek, the remaining perfections. That principle consists of the primary knowledge (*al-'ulūm al-awwal*) and the first intelligibles (*al-ma'qūlāt al-awwal*) present in the rational part of the soul; but it gives him this kind of knowledge and those intelligibles only after man; (a) first develops the sensitive part of the soul and the appetitive part, which gives rise to the desire and aversion that adheres to the sensitive part.....(b) Next, there has to develop the imaginative part of the soul, and the desire that adheres to it.....After these two wills develop, it becomes possible for the primary knowledge that emanates from the Active Intelligence to the rational part to take place. At this point a third kind of will develops in man—the desire that follows from intellecting—which is specifically call "choice" (*ikhtiyār*). This pertains specifically to man, exclusive of all other animals. By virtue of it, man is able to do either what is commendable or blameable, noble or base; and because of it there are reward and punishment.²

After man has developed the sensitive, appetitive and imaginative part of his soul, man will be able to utilise the primary knowledge (*al-'ulūm al-awwal*) and the first intelligibles (*al-ma'qūlāt al-awwal*) present in the rational part of the soul bestowed by the Active Intelligence and he seeks or is able to seek the perfection of this faculty,

¹Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State. 202-3.

²Al-Fārābī's The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya). 71-2. Mahdi. 33-4.

the rational faculty and principles stored in it. The result of the activities is that the Active Intelligence bestows upon man these principles which consist of the principles of mathematical sciences, principles of ethics or practical reason and the principles of physics and metaphysics. Al-Fārābī explains the results of the process as follows:

The first common intelligibles (*al-ma'qūlāt al-awwal al-mushtaraka*) are of three kinds, (a) the principles of productive skills (*awā'il al-mihan al-'amaliyya*) [principles of mathematical sciences], (b) the principles by which one becomes aware of good (*al-jamīl*) and evil (*al-qabīh*) in man's actions [principles of ethics], (c) the principles which are used for knowing the existence which are not the objects of man's actions, and their primary principles and ranks (principles of physics and metaphysics): such as the heavens and the first cause (*al-sabab al-awwal*) and the other principles (*sā'ir al-mabādi'*) and what happens to come to be out of those primary principles.¹

Al-Fārābī does not mean to say here that the Active Intelligence bestows all these principles on the potential intellect at the outset or at one time. Rather, the Active Intelligence provides general principles at the start, and then consequently provides the principles of the individual science to men at the appropriate time when a man has prepared himself and is capable of receiving it.² Unlike the first principles of thought which are given by the Active Intelligence to all men, these principles of mathematical science, principles of ethics or practical reason and the principles of physics and metaphysics must be deliberately sought out by man. These principles arise in man's intellect only as a result of man's inquiry and experiences which are stored up as sensibles in man's imaginative faculty which man obtained through his own initiative by hard work and effort and are then transformed by the Active Intelligence.

Al-Fārābī defines the actual intellect as the transformed potential intellect and the actual intelligibles which become the content of the actual intellect as the transformed potential intelligibles. He says:

¹Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State. 202-5.

²Al-Fārābī's *The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya)*. 71-2. Maḥdi. 33-4

And as long as there is not within it any forms of existing things, it is potential intellect. However, when there come to be in it forms of existing things,.....then that essence becomes actual intellect. This is the meaning of actual intellect. And where there comes to be in it the intelligibles it abstracts from the matters, then those intelligibles become intelligibles in actuality. Before they were abstracted from their matters, they were intelligibles in potentiality, but when they were abstracted they became intelligibles in actuality, because they became form for that essence.¹

When this happens, the potential intellect thus becomes one with the abstracted intelligibles and becomes actual. Before the potential intellect and the potential intelligibles become actual, their existence was in matter, not separate, but once actualised ,they take on a new career as a separate entity.²

The actual intellect, however, will remain partially a potential intellect until it has in it all the intelligibles and is in no need of thinking of existing things outside itself. Al-Fārābī says:

Now, it is in the nature of all existing things that they can be thought and that they can become forms for that essence (potential intellect). Since this is the case, it is not impossible that the intelligibles insofar as they are intelligibles in actuality, and this is the actual intellect, can be thought. And that which is thought is then nothing but that which is in actuality an intellect. However, that which is in actuality an intellect because some intelligibles has become a form for it, is only an intellect in actuality in relation to that form, but it can be an intellect in potentiality in relationship to some other intelligibles which has not yet come to it in actuality.³

However, al-Fārābī argues that every intelligible thing can be thought by the actual intellect by receiving its form, and ultimately the actual intellect can acquire all the intelligibles until all the intelligibles are within it and it requires to contemplate nothing outside itself⁴. He says:

¹Al-Fārābī, Risala fī al-'aql, 15. Hyman. 215-6..

²Al-Fārābī, Risala fī al-'aql, 18 Hyman. 216. He says:

" When (the intelligibles) become intelligibles in actuality, they become, then, one of the thing existing in the world, and they are counted insofar as they are intelligibles, among the totality of existing things."

³Al-Fārābī, Risala fī al-'aql. 18. Hyman. 216.

⁴Herbert Davidson in his book , Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 49. Herbert Davidson attributes this confidence that man can know everything to medieval mentality. Davidson says:

"To gain all possible thoughts is no small enterprise for a man of flesh and blood, the medieval intellectual universe, like the medieval physical universe, was finite, and al-

And when it becomes an intellect in actuality in relation to all intelligibles and it becomes one of the existing things because it became the intelligibles in actuality, then, when it thinks that existent thing which is an intellect in actuality, it does not think an existing thing outside of itself [or: its essence] but it is only thinking of itself [or: its essence]. It is clear that if the intellect thinks itself [or: its essence], insofar as itself [or: its essence] is an intellect in actuality, there does not come to it from that which it thinks of itself [or: its essence], some existing thing whose existence in respect to itself [or: its essence] is different from its existence, namely as an intelligible in actuality; but it thinks of itself [or: its essence], some existing thing whose existence namely as an intelligible, is its existence in itself [or: its essence].¹

He argues here that not only can the actual intellect ultimately become self contained, i.e. all the intelligibles exist within it, but also that it becomes self intellectual because when it thinks anything, it is thinking of itself. When the intellect becomes both self intelligible and self intellectual, it becomes a form of forms and it becomes in al-Fārābī's terminology an acquired intellect (*'aql mustafād*)².

For al-Fārābī the acquired intellect is the developed and final form of the human intellect. Al-Fārābī in discussing the hierarchy of the human intellect, states that the highest form of the human intellect is the acquired intellect, the actual intellect, and the lowest is the potential intellect. He says:

However, these forms can only be perfectly thought after all intelligibles or most of them have become thought in actuality, and the acquired intellect has come into being. Now, the acquired intellect is like a form for the intellect which is in actuality, and the intellect in actuality is like substratum and matter for the acquired intellect, and the intellect in actuality is like a form for that essence [the intellect in potentiality] and that essence is like matter. With that the forms begin to descend to the corporeal, material form, while before this they ascended little by little until they were separated from matter one after another little by little.³

After establishing the acquired intellect as the highest point of development of human intellect, al-Fārābī goes on to compare the acquired intellect with the Active

Fārābī here assumed that the wholly comprehensive knowledge does lie within man's power".

¹Al-Fārābī, *Risala fī al-'aql*. 18-9. Hyman. 216-7.

²Al-Fārābī, *Risala fī al-'aql* 19-20. Hyman. 217.

³Al-Fārābī, *Risala fī al-'aql*. 22. Hyman. 217

Intelligence since both are form of forms because they both are self intellectual and self intelligible. He defines the Active Intelligence as:

The Active Intelligence which Aristotle mentioned in the third treatise of the *De Anima* is a separated form which never existed in matter nor will ever exist in it, and it is in a certain manner an intellect in actuality close in likeness to the acquired intellect. And the Active Intelligence is the principle which makes that essence which was an intellect in potentiality, an intellect in actuality and which makes the intelligibles in potentiality, intelligibles in actuality.¹

After stating that the Active Intelligence is the principle or agent which actualises the human intellect, al-Fārābī argues that the Active Intelligence is higher in rank than the acquired intellect not only because it is the principle which actualises the potential intellect into the acquired intellect and therefore logically must exist prior to the acquired intellect, but also because it contains intelligibles in a simple way (*basīṭ*) and not as a plurality.² He argues the Active Intelligence thinks in the opposite manner to the human intellect because the Active Intelligence thinks from the most perfect existing things. He says,

Therefore, it is necessary that the order of existing things in the intellect in actuality is the opposite of that which is in the Active Intelligence (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*). And the Active Intelligence thinks first the most perfect of existing things,. The forms which here are in matter are in the Active Intelligence abstract forms, but not such that they first existed in matter and then were abstracted, but those forms never cease in its actuality. And it[the Active Intelligence] is imitated in the realm of first matter and of other matters, because they [the matter] were given in actuality the forms which are in the Active Intelligence.³

In addition, the Active Intelligence also thinks in a holistic manner and is able to grasp the relationship of everything to each other rather the manner the acquired

¹Al-Fārābī, *Risala fī al-'aql* 24. Hyman. 218.

²Al-Fārābī, *Risala fī al-'aql* 29. Hyman. 219. It must be noted that in Greek philosophy, simple has a very positive implication rather than in modern times where simple means unsophisticated and naive. Simple in this context is understood as the ability to see everything as interrelated, integral and as a whole, rather than in a fragmented and disassociated manner.

³Al-Fārābī, *Risala fī al-'aql*. 28-9. Hyman. 219

intellect must think which is in a piecemeal manner. Al-Fārābī explains the manner in which the Active Intelligence thinks as follows:

In the Active Intelligence, forms are indivisible, while in the first matter they were divisible. And it cannot be denied that the Active Intelligence which is indivisible or whose essence consists of things which are indivisible gives matter a likeness of that which is in its substance, but [matter] does not receive it except as divided.¹

The main differences between the Active Intelligence and the acquired intellect then are four: 1. the Active Intelligence is prior in existence to the acquired intellect; 2. the Active Intelligence actualises the acquired intellect; 3. the manner of thinking of the Active Intelligence is opposite the acquired intellect; 4. the Active Intelligence thinks in a simple holistic manner while the acquired intellect thinks in a piece meal manner. Thus the Active Intelligence is always a separate entity from the acquired intellect.

The task and function of the Active Intelligence is to seek out to rational animals and transform them to reach the highest level of perfection that man is able to reach.² But how does this Active Intelligence seek out this rational animal to enlighten? Does the Active Intelligence enlighten everyone or is it selective in who it enlightens?

In order to understand how the Active Intelligence enlightens man, we must recall our discussion on the potential intellect which exists in all men.³ According to al-Fārābī, the potential intellect which exists in all men is only capable of obtaining knowledge of particulars obtained from its senses and then stored up in its imaginative faculty. The task of the Active Intelligence is to use the knowledge of particulars stored up in each man and transform it into knowledge of universals. It must be emphasised here that without the help of the Active Intelligence, man can only have knowledge of particulars which is not really knowledge, because al-Fārābī following

¹Al-Fārābī, *Risala fī al-'aql*, 28-9. Hyman. 219

²Al-Fārābī's *The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al Madaniyya)*. 32.

³See above, 13-15.

Plato¹, states that particular objects are constantly changing or in the state of flux and therefore no one can know a particular object because the object is never the same. Thus, to have knowledge of a particular is to have no knowledge at all. Without the Active Intelligence, man can only have knowledge of the particulars and thus inevitably man has no knowledge at all.

Is the Active Intelligence selective about which man it enlightens and to whom it gives knowledge? Al-Fārābī answers a firm negative. According to al-Fārābī, the Active Intelligence enlightens anyone and everyone who is in tune with it. The Active Intelligence transforms the particulars stored up in man's imaginative faculty and changes them into universals. Al-Fārābī uses the example of wax which serves as the potential intellect which is then moulded by the Active Intelligence into a shape, thus transforming the unmoulded wax into a form. To use a rather modern example given by Ralph Learner in one of his class lectures at the University of Chicago on al-Fārābī, he states that the Active Intelligence acts like a radio station which is broadcasting its radio waves to all. But only the few who are tuned to the right frequency will receive its broadcast. Thus it depends on the individual to be prepared to receive this information. Like the radio station, the Active Intelligence is constantly illuminating intellects which are tuned to it and not a selective group of people but rather anyone prepared to be enlightened.

It is important to note here that by using the emanation theory of the Active Intelligence² which is responsible for enlightening the human intellect, I think al-Fārābī was trying to integrate the Greek conception of God as mind with the Islamic

¹Francis M. Conford, Plato's Theory of Knowledge (The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato), (New York: The Bobbs Merrill Company Inc., 1957), 202-248. See also Book V of the Plato's Republic.

² Fazlur Rahman explains the conscious choice the Muslim philosophers made to adopt this concept of Neo-Platonic doctrine of emanation rather than Aristotelian concept of God was because it was more in line with their understanding of God. He says:

"In the making of this doctrine of emanation, it (the Muslim philosophers) sought the help of the monistic Neo-platonic doctrine of emanation and discarded the Aristotelian theory of dualism between God and matter. Matter, therefore, instead of being an existence per se independent of God, was derived ultimately from God at the end of the emanation process."

Fazlur Rahman, Islam, (Chicago:University of Chicago Press, 1979). 118.

concept of God as creator, caretaker and provider of His creation. In Greek philosophy, the conception of perfection¹ is that there must be no change², because there must be some reason for change. If something was perfect, why would it then change? If it were to change, then it would mean that it was changing from one perfection to another perfection and that is illogical. Thus Aristotle's God³ which is pure perfection never changes and therefore never does any activity except think of itself. Because Aristotle's God never does any other activity except think of itself, even to the extent that it does not know of anything except itself, it does not create anything and thus is totally passive with regard to everything outside itself. However, Aristotle's God indirectly causes all change by influencing uncreated eternal matter to change itself by trying to imitate the beauty and perfection of God. God, then indirectly is the cause of all change and all movement but He Himself does not change nor move. Thus from this we obtain Aristotle's idea of God as the Unmoved Mover. This conception of Aristotle's God, which does not do any activity other than think of itself and does not create, is totally unacceptable to the Quranic concept of a God⁴ which is not only omniscient but also active through creating, being compassionate and caring, having power, will, speech, hearing and seeing. Thus, as I see it, in order to solve this inherited Greek problem of perfection meaning not changing, and thus positing God as inactive, with the Quranic concept of an action oriented God, al-Fārābī accepted the theory of emanation. This emanation theory makes God ultimately responsible for everything that happens through the activities of the Active Intelligence which God indirectly created through His emanation. However, because it remains the activity of the Active Intelligence that does all this activity, God remains unchanged and thus perfect.

¹H.P. Owen, "Perfection" in Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards, (New York, 1972), vol. 5-6, 87.

²Milic Capek, "Change" in Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards, (New York, 1972), vol. 1, 75-6.

³Richard McKeon, Introduction to Aristotle, (New York: The Modern Library, 1947), 238-297.

⁴Fazlur Rahman, Major Themes of the Qur'ān, (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), chapter 1.

Al-Fārābī's epistemology is based upon the theory of emanation with its main players the Active Intelligence and the recipient the human intellect. By putting forth this theory of epistemology, al-Fārābī has egalitarianised the acquisition of knowledge because the Active Intelligence enlightens anyone and everyone who is prepared to receive its illumination. Thus, anyone who struggles hard is able to better himself/herself and acquire this highest degree of knowledge. We can deduce that for al-Fārābī, anyone can reach the highest form of human perfect, i.e. intellectual perfection which is the acquired intellect.

Revelation, the Transmission of Revelation , Prophets and Prophecy

(1) Revelation Defined

From al-Fārābī's doctrine of the intellect, we can surmise that for al-Fārābī the soul obtains real knowledge from looking up, i.e. to the Active Intelligence, and not from looking down, i.e. to the natural world. It is the Active Intelligence which actualises man's potential intellect through providing it firstly with the first principles of thought i.e. the axioms and secondly by transforming the perceptions stored in the imaginative faculty into principles i.e. principles of science, principles of ethics or practical reason, and the principles of physics and metaphysics.

The first principles of thought are given to all men except idiots at the outset or all at one time. However, the second principles are only obtained through the enlightenment of the emanation of the Active Intelligence after man deliberately seeks it out through his/her own initiative. Thus for al-Fārābī, all of man's knowledge is obtained through the assistance of the Active Intelligence. Therefore, in a way, for al-Fārābī, all human knowledge is of divine origin via the Active Intelligence. We would be correct to make this radical conclusion that for al-Fārābī, all human knowledge is obtained from God via the Active Intelligence, i.e. the Archangel of divine revelation, and thus using the jargon of religion, revealed. Thus, for al-

Fārābī, all human knowledge in a way is revealed to him/her. The intellectual link to the divine is the predominating factor in human knowledge.

Although all human knowledge in a way is revealed to man, al-Fārābī does distinguish knowledge revealed to all men and knowledge revealed through prophets i.e. revelation. What is the content of this knowledge revealed through prophets? The questions that need to be raised concerning the content of revelation are: 1. What is the content of revelation?; 2. What kind of knowledge or information does it give us? Does it give us new knowledge or information that we never knew before? Is the knowledge or information that it gives all new or only some of it new and the rest we already know and thus it serves only as a reminder?; 3. What is the value of the knowledge that revelation gives us? Is the knowledge or information that revelation gives us already known? Or can it be known to us by ourselves and revelation is a strong reminder for man of what is expected of him/her and his/her future?

Al-Fārābī answers the first question raised above concerning the content of revelation by arguing that the content of revelation consists of both theoretical and practical knowledge. Al-Fārābī says:

The virtuous religion (*al-milla al-fāḍila*) is similar to philosophy in that both possess theoretical (*naẓariyya*) as well as practical parts (*ʿamaliyya*). Theoretical and speculative refer to that which cannot be performed even when a man knows it, while practical refers to that which, once known, a man may do. The practical part of religion consists of those (actions) whose universal (rules) are found in practical philosophy. That is to say, what religion (*al-milla*) possesses of practical matters consists of the universals (*al-kulliyyāt*), qualified in a certain manner..... Consequently, all virtuous laws (*al-sharāʾiʿ al-fāḍila*) ([because they are qualified] are subsumed under the universals of practical philosophy (*al-falsafa al-amaliyya*). The theoretical opinions of religion are demonstrated in theoretical philosophy (*al-falsafa al-naẓariyya*) though they remained undemonstrated (*bi lā barāhin*) in religion. Thus, both parts of religion are subsumed under philosophy. Something is said to be part of, or subsumed under a science in two possible manners: either that which is adopted without proof is demonstrated in that science, or its particulars are given an underpinning by the universal axiom possessed by that science. Accordingly practical philosophy provides the underpinnings for the conditions by which (a religion's) actions are determined, taking into account the things legislated and the end sought by these. Further, this part of philosophy supplies proofs for the theoretical part of religion insofar as these are susceptible of demonstrative knowledge. The theoretical part of philosophy provides

proofs for the theoretical part of religion. Philosophy can be seen to offer proofs for that which a virtuous religion includes.¹

Thus, we can conclude that the content of revelation for al-Fārābī consists of both theory and practical action. The theoretical part refers to that which cannot be performed even when a man knows it. The theoretical part of religion using religious terminology is beliefs. In religious terminology, the foundational beliefs in the six pillars of Islamic faith (*arkan al-imān*).² The result of this faith is practical action. On the other hand, the practical action refers to that which, once known, a man may do or act upon. These practical actions using religious jargon are embodied and prescribed in the Islamic *sharī'a*.

Al-Fārābī answers question two about what kinds of knowledge or information revelation gives us by arguing that the theoretical opinions of religion are demonstrated in theoretical philosophy, although the reasons are undemonstrated in religion. And for practical part of religion, these are particular actions whose universal rules are found in practical philosophy. Thus for al-Fārābī, both the theoretical and practical knowledge, i.e. all the knowledge revealed through the prophets, can ultimately be known through philosophical endeavours. It must be emphasised that for al-Fārābī, truth can be known with certainty either independently through primary knowledge or logical demonstration. Al-Fārābī says:

The opinions prescribed in a virtuous religion will either be true (*al-ḥaqq*) or will resemble truth (*mithal al-ḥaqq*). Truth is entirely that which one knows with certainty either independently through primary knowledge or through (logical) demonstration (*barāhīn*). Therefore, those religion whose opinion include neither that which may be certainly known, nor the likeness of things which may be so known are religions of error.³

¹al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-millah wa nuṣūṣ ukhrā*, ed. M. Mahdi, 47-8..

²The six pillars of Islam belief are; Belief in God, the Angels, Revealed Books, Prophets, Day of Jugement and the Divine decree (*Qadr*) in good and evil. For further information, see, Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Fath al-bārī bi-sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukharī*, ed. Muḥibb al-Dīn al-Khatīb Vol .1. (Cairo, 1986), Chapter Two: The Book of Faith . 60- 169.

³Al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-millah wa nuṣūṣ ukhrā*, 46.

Thus for al-Fārābī, the truth of revelation revealed through the prophets can be verified either through primary knowledge or logical demonstration.

Since, for al-Fārābī, the knowledge revealed through revelation can be ultimately be known through the efforts of philosophy, does this mean that for al-Fārābī, revelation revealed through prophets has little or no value at all? In dealing with question three, al-Fārābī answers that revelation revealed through prophets has a real and true value. By answering the question on the true value of revelation revealed through prophets, he answers questions three to five raised above. Al-Fārābī argues the value of revelation revealed through prophets by pointing to three factors: 1. a form of God's guidance in educating man; 2. revelation's ability to convey truths to all levels of mankind; 3. revelation's ability to motivate man to action.

It must be remembered that, for al-Fārābī, in a way all knowledge is 'revealed' to man, whether it be a specially chosen individual, i.e. prophets or ordinary men. It is God, who illuminates, enlightens and thus educates all men through the activities of the Active Intelligence, i.e. the Angel of Revelation. Therefore, for al-Fārābī, revelation revealed through prophets should be seen as a form of God's guidance in educating man.

This revelation, seen as a form of God's guidance in educating man, is the true value of revelation revealed through prophets. The knowledge given by revelation can ultimately be obtained through the efforts of philosophy because truth is one and indivisible. However, this philosophical endeavour requires a very long and arduous endeavour and only very few individuals can finally reach this very high level of understanding. For example, one can relatively easily understand a scientific principle after it has been explained to one, even to the extent that one wonders why one has never thought of it before, but it is extremely difficult, next to impossible, to discover these scientific principles by oneself. Thus, revelation enables one to easily accept what revelation prescribed as good and evil acts and how one should live a good life, rather than oneself discovering, creating and inventing this understanding

and actions by oneself. This is because one can understand the rationale underlying the prescriptions of revelation.

More importantly, the knowledge given by revelation uses symbols to convey its truths. By using symbols, revelation achieves two major objectives. Firstly, it is able to convey its truths to everyone with varying levels of intellectual capacity and ability. Thus, revelation is able to convey its message to everyone at some level of understanding.

Secondly, it is able to motivate people to action. This is because unlike intellectual truths, which one can only be arrived at through intellectual endeavours, about what one ought to do and not to do, i.e. the concept of right and wrong, revelation impels man to action. How does revelation achieve this? After a long strenuous process of intellectual endeavour, one can arrive at the conclusion that if one pursues the moral good, it will be beneficial for the mind, freeing it to attain spiritual freedom and ultimately bliss. Instead, for example, revelation compels man to action by telling man of the physical rewards and punishments man will receive for his action both in this life and in the after-life.

Transmission of Revelation: How Revelation is Received?

The many different levels of knowledge among men, however, call for a distinction among the levels of 'revelation'. In one sense, all that man knows is revealed by the divine, God, through the activities of the Active Intelligence and thus, in a way, a 'revelation'. However, it is clear that for al-Fārābī, there is a distinction between the 'revelation' that is revealed to all men and enlightens them and gives

them knowledge and the revelation that is revealed through a specific person, i.e. a prophet in a revealed text such as the Qur'ān. Al-Fārābī attributes this difference of the levels of revelation as being due to the faculties of the soul existing in individual men, i.e. the imaginative faculty and the rational faculty.

The emanation from the Active Intelligence can pass beyond the rational faculty into the human imaginative faculty. This will result in the imaginative faculty manipulating this knowledge obtained from its own rational faculty as the result of the emanation of the Active Intelligence into symbols. The imaginative faculty is a faculty of the soul serving the rational faculty. The function of the imaginative faculty are three, retentive, compositive and in a manner creative. Firstly, it is retentive because it stores the sense perceptions (*maḥsusāt*) or the impressions of the objects when they are no longer in sight¹. Secondly, it is compositive because it manipulates the sense perceptions retained in it, separating them or combining them into figures that may or may not exist in reality such as a unicorn or a golden mountain.² Thirdly, it is in a manner creative or a reproductive imitation because it can create figurative images (*muhakāt*) that symbolise rather than strictly represent a given object. For example, when one is asleep, it is the activity of the imaginative faculty that creates dreams. If, for example, while one is asleep, the body becomes wet, the imaginative faculty may be led to create a dream concerning water or swimming.³

The result of the emanation of the Active Intelligence through the rational faculty to the 'adjoining' imaginative faculty is at two levels. The two levels are the result of the nature of the rational faculty which has both a theoretical and practical character, thus, the knowledge imparted by the Active Intelligence through the rational faculty, acts upon the 'adjoining' imaginative faculty in a twofold manner as well.

Al-Fārābī says:

Since it has been made clear that the Active Intelligence is the cause of the potential intelligibles becoming actual and of the potential intellect

¹ Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State. 168-9.

² Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State: 168-9.

³ Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State: 212-3.

becoming actual; and that it is the rational faculty which is made to become actually intellect; and that there are two forms (species) of the rational faculty, theoretical and practical, and that the function of practical reason is to direct action towards present and future particulars, and that of theoretical reason to become aware of the intelligibles which cannot be translated into action; and since the faculty of representation is closely connected with the two forms(species) of the rational faculty-for what the rational faculty obtains from the Active Intelligence (which is to it as light is to sight) emanates sometimes from the Active Intelligence to the faculty of representation(imaginative faculty)-it follows that the Active Intelligence acts in some way upon the faculty of representation(imaginative faculty) as well, by providing it sometimes with the intelligibles whose proper place is in the theoretical reason and sometimes with particulars in the form of sensibles whose proper place is in practical reason.¹

The knowledge obtained from the Active Intelligence has either a theoretical or practical content.

The knowledge, imparted by the Active Intelligence to the imaginative faculty which has a theoretical content, consists of metaphysical truths. When the imaginative faculty receives theoretical knowledge, it must recast this knowledge into figurative images. This is because the imaginative faculty is a physical faculty, capable only of handling physical impressions, and thus unable to receive theoretical truths in pure abstract form. Al-Fārābī explains this process, which the imaginative faculty takes in transforming the theoretical truth into figurative images, by saying:

The faculty of representation(imaginative faculty) also imitates the rational faculty by imitating those intelligibles which are present in it with things suitable for imitating them. It thus imitates the intelligibles of utmost perfection, like the First Cause, the immaterial things and the heavens, with the most excellent and most perfect sensibles, like things beautiful to look at; and the defective intelligibles with the most inferior and defective sensibles like things ugly to look at.²

The imaginative faculty tries to imitate the knowledge given to it with the thing most suitable for imitating them. This theoretical knowledge obtained by the imaginative faculty is the higher of the two levels of knowledge received from the Active

¹ Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State. 218-221.

² Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State: 218-9.

Intelligence via the rational faculty. This higher level is exclusive to the fortunate man who has developed his/her intellect to the highest stage, the acquired intellect.¹

The knowledge imparted by the Active Intelligence to the imaginative faculty which has a practical content consists in sense perception of a certain kind. They are 'particulars' that relate to events in the present or future and are related to the practical side of reasoning, the performance of deliberation. The imaginative faculty here visualises the events occurring at a distance and foresees future events. These events appear to it as they were being perceived by the sense organs, although in actuality they are beyond the perception of the sense organ. Davidson explains this process that the imaginative faculty undergoes by saying:

Under the influence of the Active Intelligence, present and future events sometimes show themselves to the imaginative faculty "as they are"; the imagination perceives an event at a distance or a future event in the exact shape it has or will have when it occurs. Alternatively, events may be recast by the imagination in figurative images.²

The imaginative faculty recasts all knowledge that it receives through the rational faculty into figurative images.

The lower of the two levels of knowledge which the imaginative faculty receives from the Active Intelligence which has the practical content, is received by all men, even those who have not perfected their rational faculty. Al-Fārābī labels this level specifically as 'prophecy' (*nubuwwa*). Al-Fārābī, explaining the impact of the emanation of the Active Intelligence upon imaginative faculty says:

It is not impossible, then, that when a man's faculty of representation (imaginative faculty) reaches its utmost perfection, he will receive in waking life, from the Active Intelligence, present and future particulars of their imitation in the form of sensibles, and that he receives the imitations of the transcendent intelligibles and the other glorious existents and sees them. This man will obtain through the particulars which he receives 'prophecy (supernatural awareness) of the present and future events, and through the intelligibles which he receives prophecy of things divine. This is the highest rank of

¹D. M. Dunlop ed., Al-Fārābī's Fuṣūl al-madani, (Aphorisms of a Statesman), (Cambridge, University Press, 1961). 74.

² Herbert Davidson, Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) . 59

perfection which the faculty of representation (imaginative faculty) can reach.¹

Al-Fārābī relegating the term 'prophecy' (*nubuwwa*) for the lower of the two levels of the result of the emanation of the Active Intelligence upon man needs some explanation, especially since in his book, *Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-madīna al-fāḍila*, usually avoids the use of key Islamic terms, opting rather for more universal terms applicable to all religions. Al-Fārābī throughout the first fourteen chapters of this book avoids such terms as '*nubuwwa*'. The first reference to the term '*nubuwwa*' is in chapter fourteen. Two possible explanations can be given as to why al-Fārābī uses the term '*nubuwwa*' here. The first explanation put forth by Walzer is that 'it is a denigration of a fundamental tenet of Islam by reducing visionary prophecy to the second rank of human perfection and making it dependent on philosophical reason'.² On this point, I cannot agree with Walzer. Al-Fārābī considers that all knowledge ultimately comes from God and that the individual prophets are individuals with the highest degree of perfection of both their imaginative faculty and rational faculty³, thus making them unique and extremely rare individuals, therefore, al-Fārābī does not in any way undermine the integrity of prophecy. It is clear that an idiot cannot become a prophet. Therefore, prophecy should be seen as the culmination of the perfection of the intellect and imaginative faculty and the intellect's ability to transform this knowledge utilising the naturally fully developed imaginative faculty into symbols for all to understand. The second possible explanation for this which I feel is far more plausible is that al-Fārābī was using this term '*nubuwwa*' in a more general manner and thus applying it to any form of symbolisation.

¹ Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State. 224-5.

² Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State. 440.

³ Al-Fārābī's The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya). 49.

Prophets: The Medium of Revelation.

Al-Fārābī makes a clear distinction between the 'revelation' that is revealed to all men and enlightens them and gives them knowledge and the revelation that is revealed through a specific person i.e. a prophet in a revealed text such as the Qur'ān. Al-Fārābī explains that this difference of the revelation to the prophet is due to the faculties of the soul existing in the prophet. i.e. the naturally fully developed imaginative faculty and the highest degree of development of the rational faculty. Revelation to prophets is defined as the union of the highest philosophical knowledge with the highest form of representation.¹ Thus, the prophet must possess an intellect developed to the highest stage, the acquired intellect and a fully naturally imaginative faculty. This is because the prophet must not only be able to comprehend philosophical truths that he receives from the Active Intelligence through its emanation to his rational faculty, but also must possess a fully naturally developed imaginative faculty, because he must translate these truths into figurative symbols capable of leading to action. Al-Fārābī says:

When this occurs in both parts of his rational faculty, namely the theoretical and practical rational faculties, and also in his representative (imaginative faculty) then it is this man who receives Divine Revelation (*yuwahī ilaihi*), and God Almighty (*Allāh 'azza wajja*) grants him Revelation through the mediation of the Active Intelligence, so that the emanation from God Almighty to the Active Intelligence is passed through the mediation of the acquired intellect, and then to the faculty of representation (imaginative faculty). Thus he is, through the emanation of the Active Intelligence to his passive intellect, a wise man and philosopher and an accomplished thinker who employs an intellect of divine quality, and through the emanation from the Active Intelligence to his faculty of representation (imaginative faculty) a visionary prophet (*nabī*): who warns of things to come and tells of particular things which exist at present. This man holds the most perfect rank of humanity and has reached the highest degree of felicity.²

Revelation is the auxiliary to the rational faculty and as such an indispensable ingredient in man's perfection. Hence, the prophet is an individual endowed with an

¹Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State. 244-245.

²Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State. 244-245.

extraordinary rational faculty and a fully naturally developed imaginative faculty capable of understanding the highest philosophical truths and able to translate these truths through his imaginative faculty into figurative symbols capable of leading people to right action.

The prophet is a person of extraordinary intellect, so endowed that he is able to know all things by himself without the help of instructions by an external human source.¹ Although al-Fārābī contends that the prophet's intellect should go through stages of development, preceded by ordinary philosophical thinking, only then does revelation come to him. Al-Fārābī says:

The supreme ruler without qualification is he who does not need anyone to rule him in anything whatsoever, but has actually acquired the sciences and every kind of knowledge and has no need of a man to guide him in anything. This is found in the one who possesses great and natural dispositions, when his soul is in union with the Active Intelligence. He can only attain this (union with the Active Intelligence) by first acquiring the passive intellect, and then the intellect called the acquired intellect; for, as it is stated in 'On the Soul', union with the Active Intelligence results from acquiring the acquired intellect..... This man is the true prince according to the ancients; he is the one of whom it ought to be said that he receives revelation. For man receives revelation only when he attains this rank, that is, when there is no longer an intermediary between him and the Active Intelligence..... It is the power that enables man to understand how to define things and actions and how to direct them towards happiness, which emanates from the Active Intelligence to the passive intellect. This emanation that proceeds from the Active Intelligence to the passive through the mediation of the acquired intellect is revelation.²

From this rather lengthy quotation of al-Fārābī's on the intellectual capacity and ability of the prophet, we can deduce four points concerning the prophet's intellectual capacity and ability. The four points are: 1. the prophet's mind is endowed with an extraordinary intellect; 2. the prophet's intellect does not need an external instructor to develop but develops by itself with the aid of the Active Intelligence even though it goes through the stages of actualisation that any ordinary intellect passes; 3. at the end of this development of the prophet's intellect, he attains contact with the Active

¹Al-Fārābī's *The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya)*. 49-50. Mahdi. 36

²Al-Fārābī's *The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya)*. 49-50. Mahdi. 36

Intelligence and receives for it revelation¹; 4. the Active Intelligence gives him the power to understand how to define things and actions and how to direct them towards happiness, i.e. the ability to translate abstract truths into figurative symbols able to lead to action. Fazlur Rahman, commenting on the intellectual ability of the prophet and how and why it is different from other intellects says:

He (the prophet) already possesses an assurance, so that by the aid of the Active Intelligence he can create all knowledge by himself.....Again, whereas an ordinary mind cannot know all the relations between things since its knowledge is piecemeal, the prophet has all the relations at once present in his mind. This is not merely a quantitative difference but a qualitative one. The most glaring difference will be in the sphere of law and morality, as we shall see. It is the prophet alone, who seeing the nature of the whole course of history at a glance, is able to create moral values and to embody them in legal prescriptions.²

In addition to the four points made above concerning the prophet's intellectual ability, we can add that the prophet's intellect is unique and different from other intellects because of its ability to have knowledge in unity and not in a piecemeal manner. This is a very significant difference and essential for him to be able to create moral values and to embody them in legal prescriptions.

The idea that the prophet creates moral values and embodies them in legal prescriptions does not mean that the prophet himself consciously writes out the text of the revelation as a legislator writes a writ. Rather, revelation should be seen as the impact of the emanation of the Active Intelligence on the prophet's intellect which is automatically translated by his imaginative faculty unconsciously without any of his own conscious control or interference. Fazlur Rahman says:

The Muslim philosophical tradition of revelation does not envisage that total 'otherness' of the giver of revelation which is characteristic of the Semitic tradition. This total 'otherness' was safeguarded by Philo who regarded revelation as the suspension or suppression of the prophet's self by God or by a divine agent; and he seems to have safeguarded it in order to establish the purity of verbal revelation. The Muslim philosophers regarded revelation not as a suppression of the prophet's personality but as its enlargement, an enlargement which

¹See also, Fazlur Rahman, Prophecy in Islam (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 31.

²Fazlur Rahman, Prophecy in Islam, 68.

already lies potentially in the prophet and which when actualised, makes him a member of the ideal world.¹

Basically, the verbal words of revelation are not the production of the direct divine agency but rather God supplies the inspiration to the prophets which then the prophet himself unconsciously translates into verbal form.² The exact words of the verbal revelation are neither distorted nor altered through this process. In other words, the exact words of the verbal revelation would be exactly the same had God Himself uttered it Himself to man directly.

(4)The Mission of Prophecy: The Purpose of Revelation.

According to the Muslim philosophers, for example al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, at the intellectual level the prophet and the true philosopher of the highest degree are identical except the prophet's knowledge is in a unity while the philosopher's knowledge is piecemeal.³ This is not to say that every single philosopher is at the same intellectual level of a prophet but, rather the exceptional, outstanding philosopher who has reached the highest pinnacle of intellectual excellence and a prophet are both equal at the intellectual level. More importantly, however, the prophet is distinguished from the others by his ability to receive revelation through his strong imaginative faculty. A naturally fully developed representative faculty is essential for the prophet. As we discussed above, revelation which is the figurization and symbolisation of truths is a function peculiar to the imaginative faculty. Every datum, whether it is intellectual or sensible or emotional, is transformed by the

¹ Fazlur Rahman, Prophecy in Islam, 69.

² Fazlur Rahman, Prophecy in Islam, 73. Fazlur Rahman says:

"Plutarch returns to this theme again and again, (de. Def. Orac. 9) (says) Certainly, it would be foolish and childish in the extreme to imagine that the God himself, after the manner of ventriloquist enters into the body of his prophets and prompts their utterances, employing their mouths and voices as instruments." Prophecy in Islam, 73.

³Fazlur Rahman, Prophecy in Islam, 36.

imaginative faculty into vivid and potent symbols capable of impelling action. This potent symbolisation is essential for the prophet because he must not only know the truths but must be able to communicate it to others and move them to action

We have up to this stage looked at: what revelation is; how revelation is transmitted and to whom it is transmitted; i.e. the prophets. However, the most important issue is to examine the task or function of revelation, i.e. the mission of prophecy. The task or function of revelation, i.e. mission of prophecy, is to lead man right action. Fazlur Rahman sums up the mission of prophecy by saying:

A true prophet or a genuine philosopher, merely by virtue of being this, cannot remain within the confines of his own personality but must go forth to humanity, or to a nation, both with a divinely revealed religion and with a law based upon it. He must be able to formulate his religious consciousness into a definite pattern of religio-political life for people to follow.¹

We can conclude from this that the prophet is not only concerned with the perfection of himself and his own happiness, but also with the perfection and happiness of others. The prophet achieves his task by the ability to translate religious consciousness into a definite pattern of laws for people to follow. In order to achieve this, the prophet must not only be a true philosopher of the highest degree with total comprehension of theoretical knowledge, but also have the ability to translate these theoretical truths into action for people to follow through the promulgation of laws. Thus, the prophet must also be a law-giver.

Al-Fārābī's concept of the perfect philosopher reverberates with this same demand made on a prophet, namely that he must transcend the confines of his own personality and go forth to humanity, or to a nation, to be a genuine philosopher. For al-Fārābī, a true philosopher must not only possess the theoretical sciences for his own benefit but must be able to exploit this knowledge for the benefit of all others in accordance with their capacity to receive this knowledge. Al-Fārābī says:

¹Fazlur Rahman, Prophecy in Islam, 57.

When the theoretical sciences are isolated and their possessor does not have the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of others, they are defective philosophy. To be a truly perfect philosopher one has to possess both the theoretical sciences and the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of all others according to their capacity. Were one to consider the case of the true philosopher, he would find no difference between him and the supreme ruler. For he who possesses the faculty of exploiting what is comprised by the theoretical matters for the benefit of all others possesses the faculty for making such matters intelligible as well as bringing into actual existence those of them that depend on the will. The greater his power to do the latter, the more perfect is his philosophy.¹

Therefore, intellectual perfection is not limited to the perfection of one's own self, but must transcend one's limited self. Thus, intellectual perfection includes the ideals of missionary zeal and the ability to transform these ideals through the formulation of laws. Both of these facets of intellectual perfection are distinct characteristics of a prophet.

Al-Fārābī, however, adds to these two characteristics of the prophet, an intellectual dimension. He says:

Therefore, if he intends to possess a craft that is authoritative rather than subservient, the legislator must be a philosopher. Similarly, if the philosopher who has acquired the theoretical virtues does not have the capacity for bringing them about in all others according to their capacities, then what he has acquired has no validity. Yet, he cannot find the states and conditions by which the voluntary intelligibles assume actual existence, if he does not possess the deliberative virtue, and the deliberative virtue cannot exist in him without the practical virtue. It follows that the idea of Imam, Philosopher, Legislator is a single idea. However, the name philosopher signifies primarily theoretical virtue. But if it be determined that the theoretical virtue reach its ultimate perfection in every respect it follows necessarily that he must possess all the other faculties as well. Legislator signifies excellence of knowledge concerning the conditions of practical intelligibles, the faculty of finding them, and the faculty of bring them about in nations and cities.....As to the idea of Imam in the Arabic language, it signifies merely the one whose example is followed and who is well received; that is either his perfection is well received or his purpose is well received.²

From this passage, we can conclude that, for al-Fārābī, not only must the prophet have a superior intellect and the ability to translate philosophical truths into symbols

¹Al-Fārābī, Tahsīl al-sa'āda, 89-90. Mahdi, 43.

²Al-Fārābī, Tahsīl al-sa'āda, 91-2. Mahdi, 46.

for everyone to understand but that he must also possess the ability to lead, have the will and an ardent desire to lead mankind and transform peoples, i.e. society and states. This understanding of al-Fārābī that philosophy must benefit not only oneself but others through the transformation of society and state is not Platonic but closer to the Aristotelian viewpoint and very much in line with the Qur'ānic missionary zeal. Plato had argued in his *magnum opus*, *The Republic*, that philosophers who have caught the vision of the good would prefer to remain in their intellectual paradise rather than go down and educate others.¹ Aristotle instead argues in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that a virtuous individual is an imperfect concept since real moral virtue can only be realised in a community².

Since, for al-Fārābī, the virtuous individual must influence others, the prophet as a virtuous individual must go forth and influence society positively. Men should not be left alone to their own opinions concerning how to reach this ultimate happiness because they will differ each from the other, every man considering as good that which favours him and as evil that which works against his advantage in accordance to their differing levels of intellectual capacities. How then does the prophet influence and transform society? Since the prophet is an individual who

¹Plato, Plato: The Collected Dialogues, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985) Republic VII 519b-d, 751-2, Plato says:

"Well then, said I, is not this also likely and a necessary consequence of what has been said, that neither could men who are uneducated and inexperienced in truth ever adequately preside over a state, nor could those who have been permitted to linger on to the end in the pursuit of culture-the one because they have no single aim and purpose in life to which all their actions, public and private, must be directed, and the others, because they will not voluntarily engage in action, believing that while still living they have been transported to the Island of the Blessed?.....we must not allow what is not permitted What is that? That they should linger there, I said, and refuse to go down again among those bondsmen and share their labors and honors, whether they are of less or of greater worth. Do you mean to say that we must do them a wrong and compel them to live an inferior life when the better is in their power?"

²Joachim, H. H. Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1952), 1094b. Aristotle says:

" For even if the good is the same for the individual and the state, the good for the state is clearly the greater and more perfect thing to attain and to safeguard. The attainment of the good for one man alone is, to be sure, a source of satisfaction; yet to secure it for a nation and for states is a nobler and more divine."

See also, Ernest Baker, The Political thought of Plato and Aristotle (New York, 1958), 284-292.

receives revelation, he is able to comprehend each one of the things that he ought to do, how to do them in guiding others, and to determine, define and direct actions toward achieving this end, i.e. happiness. The prophet is a man who is able to translate his knowledge into a set of beliefs and a socio-political order, i.e. the *sharī'a*. The prophet is a man able to lead men to right action in order to reach this ultimate goal of happiness. Al-Fārābī says:

This man holds the most perfect rank of humanity and has reached the highest degree of felicity. His soul is united as it were with the Active Intelligence, in the way stated by us [i.e. a prophet]¹ He is a man who knows every action by which felicity can be reached. This is the first condition of being a ruler. Moreover, he should be a good orator and able to rouse (other people's) imagination by well chosen words. He should be able to lead people well along the right path to felicity and to actions by which felicity is reached.²

How does the prophet lead men ? In order for the prophet to lead men, he must become the ruler. As a ruler, he will establish the laws and thus is also the lawgiver. Al-Fārābī says:

Now because the Active Intelligence emanates from the First Cause, it can for this reason be said that it is the First Cause that brings about revelation to this man through the mediation of the Active Intelligence. The rule of this man is the supreme rule; all other human rulership is inferior to it and derived from it. Such is its rank. The men who are governed by the rule of this ruler are the virtuous, good and happy men. If they form a nation, then that is a virtuous nation.³

We can conclude that for al-Fārābī, whenever there is a prophet alive in that time, he must become the ruler. This is because his rulership is superior to all other forms of rulership because not only does he perfectly understand the theoretical knowledge but he is able to translate this knowledge into symbols which are best able to represent these truths and also at the same time motivate man to action and live according to these truths.

The prophet is not the kind that comes into the world in every age. It thus follows that the prophet in his capacity as a lawgiver must devise ways and means of

¹This inclusion [i.e prophet] is my own conclusion drawn from the context.

²Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State, 244-7.

³Al-Fārābī's The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya), 66-7. Maḥdi. 36-7.

securing the survival of his code and law in all spheres of human welfare. This law should be codified and preserved . If other law-giver(prophets) come after him , that law-giver will be able to change the laws accordingly to suit the times , for if the first law-giver had been there, he would have done the same thing to revise the law to suit the present conditions.

If there is no prophet after him, then the next ruler should follow all his laws . If the next ruler is not a prophet, he should at least have these six qualities. According to al-Fārābī, these qualities are:

The next sovereign..... should be distinguished by the following six qualities: (1) He will be a philosopher. (2) He will know and remember the laws and customs with which the first sovereign had governed the city, conforming all his actions to all their actions. (3) He will excel in deducing a new law by analogy where no law of his predecessors has been recorded, following for his deductions the principles laid down by the first *Imam* (4) He will be good at deliberating and be powerful in his deductions to meet new situations(5) He will be good at guiding the people by his speech to fulfil the laws of the first sovereign as well as those laws which he will have deduced in conformity with those principles after their time. (6) He should be of tough physique....¹

For al-Fārābī, the next ruler should not follow the laws literally but should follow their intent, using this to be able to deduce new laws to suit his own time while still preserving the original intent of the first lawgiver.

The law established by the lawgiver applies to everyone. The philosopher is not above or beyond the law. The philosopher must also perform the external (bodily) acts and observe the duties of the law. This is because the ordinary philosopher may understand the intention of the lawgiver but he is unable to institute a new law. The status of the lawgiver (prophet) is, for example, like that of a doctor who prescribes medicine for the cure of a patient. Whether the patient understands or not, the effect of each of the medicines prescribed by the doctor that he/she takes is that he/she still gets cured as long as he/she takes the prescription as prescribed. Thus, even if a philosopher understands the reasons behind the performance of external (bodily) acts and the duties of the law, he must carry out these prescriptions to the letter because

¹Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State, 252-3.

only by carrying them out will he be able to benefit from them. Therefore, the theoretical understanding of the value of this or that practical action does not negate the duty to carry out the practical action but in fact enhances the appreciation, and thus, the value of the act.

The laws the prophet establishes are by communicating these truths that he knows in such a manner to men that it will drive them to action. The prophet communicates these truths to others by figurative symbols persuasive enough to lead them to act rightly. Using religious symbolic language, the prophet tells the multitudes what to believe, prescribes certain action and creates just laws. It is not necessary and it will be unwise for him to tell them the philosophical reasons for his prescriptions of opinions and the actions he tells them to do because to do this may impose a great strain upon the multitudes and would only confuse them. For example, he would establish in them the belief in the afterlife, in a manner that comes within the range of their imagination and will satisfy their soul. He will liken the happiness and misery there to be experienced in terms that they can understand and conceive. He might say that the pleasure awaiting us beyond the grave is a mighty kingdom while the pain is an abiding torment.

These religious symbols, however, may differ from one people to another. Although the essence of truth is identical and unchangeable, because these things (philosophical truths) are thus allegorised for every nation or people in terms familiar to them, it is possible that what is familiar to one is foreign to another. Al-Fārābī says:

Now these things (truths) are reproduced by imitations for each nation and for the people of each city through those symbols which are best known to them. But what is best known often varies among nations, either most of it or part of it. Hence these things are expressed for each nation in symbols other than those used for another nation.¹

Here al-Fārābī recognises that different nations are motivated by different symbols and thus the revelations revealed through prophets produce differing symbols

¹ Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State. 280-1..

representing the same truth which is one and unchangeable in order to best produce the desired result of action.

The spiritual content and background of all true religions is identical since truth is one and universal. However, since truth is symbolised in religions, this truth is not always expressed at the same level. Some symbolic expressions better express the truth and thus are nearer to the truth than others. Some symbolic expressions are more adequate than others in leading humanity to the higher truth. Some symbolic expressions are more effective than others in gaining the belief of people and in becoming the directive force of their lives. Al-Fārābī says:

Now, while the meanings and the essences of those things are one and immutable, the matters by which they imitated are many and varied. Some imitate them more closely and others do so only remotely.....The imitation of those things differ in excellence: some of them are better and more perfect in imaginative representation, while others are less perfect; some are closer to, other are more removed from the truth.....But if they are not of equal excellence, one should choose the ones that are the most perfect imitations and that are either free from contention or in which the points of contention are few or unnoticeable; next, those are closer to the truth; and discard all other imitation.¹

Thus by using symbolic expression in order to convey the truth, some religions are more effective than others. Therefore, al-Fārābī recognises grades of religions.

All this symbolisation does not restrict the lawgiver in his discourse, interspersing it with sundry hints and allusions, to attract those qualified for speculation to undertake philosophical research into the nature of religion. The ultimate aim of the state is the diffusion of philosophy among the people in so far as it is possible, and bringing them nearer to God. The origin of morality and law as a dire necessity to prevent excessive self interest and the end of the law is to prepare men for a spiritual purpose: the benefit of religious acts.

We can conclude here, that for al-Fārābī, the function of revelation i.e. the mission of prophecy, is not only to educate the people about the 'ultimate principles but also about the ultimate aim, the way to reach it, the supreme happiness.

¹Al-Fārābī's The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya). 74-5. Mahdi. 40-1

Revelation, similar to philosophy is partly theoretical and partly practical. The theoretical part relates to the beliefs. The beliefs influence and shape the practical part which is embodied in the laws, i.e. the *sharī'a* which deals with the duties and observances of men in order to lead a virtuous life. The function of the revelation is to persuade the masses of the laws and rules, to instruct them in it and to educate them in it using persuasive means to action in order to attain the ultimate success, supreme happiness.

Concluding Remarks.

Al-Fārābī had created a theory of revelation which is essentially a fusion of neo-Platonic cosmology, i.e. a theory of emanation with the idea of symbolisation in expressing religious truths. In this manner, al-Fārābī constructed a comprehensive and complex theory of prophecy. Al-Fārābī's prophet not only received intellectual truths from God through the mediation of the Active Intelligence which is identified with the Angel of Revelation, Gabriel, but also translates these intellectual truths unconsciously through his fully developed imaginative faculty into symbolic truths for everyone to understand and these symbolic truths have the power to lead and motivate man to right action. Al-Fārābī's prophet is actively involved in guiding man and using these symbolic truths, he is able to create the best kind of law in order to lead man to right beliefs and actions that are necessary for man to attain happiness.

However, it is interesting to question and speculate why al-Fārābī chose to create this theory of revelation which has no parallel in Islamic intellectual thought before al-Fārābī. Al-Fārābī's theory of revelation can be seen as a philosopher's attempt to understand his religion, Islam in terms of his own rationalism. Thus, al-Fārābī's theory of revelation can be seen as his attempt to reconcile revelation with reason and therefore, a rational defence of religion.

I think that al-Fārābī adopted this neo-Platonic theory of emanation as a solution to the problem raised by Aristotle concerning change. According to Aristotle, change means imperfection. Aristotle had posited a theory of dualism between God and Matter. God and Matter existed independently of each other and are both eternal. God for Aristotle is pure perfection and thus cannot change and therefore does nothing but think of Himself. Matter which is pure imperfection continuously changes trying to imitate the perfection of God which it can never ever attain because of its nature as matter. It is the changing actions of Matter which produce this world. This theory of dualism of Aristotle, by which God did not actively create anything, is totally unacceptable to any Muslim. Thus, I would like to speculate here that al-Fārābī, inheriting this problem raised by the great Aristotle, saw the Neo-Platonic theory of emanation as a solution to the problem raised by Aristotle because it is able to achieve two objectives: the first, to allow God not to change; and the second, without God changing, to make Him still ultimately responsible for creating matter, creating everything. By accepting this theory of emanation, everything is ultimately derived from God through the process of the emanation. Therefore for al-Fārābī, this theory of emanation is in a way a defence of God's perfection and at the same time God's creation of everything without having to change.

The subject matter and aims of the revelation revealed by God to his prophets have great similarities with al-Fārābī's conception of the role and aims of philosophy. It is in the method that revelation and philosophy seem to differ. It is important to keep in mind that, for al-Fārābī, 'revelation' is not only that which is revealed to prophets but that all human knowledge is 'revealed', and revealed not only to prophets but all human beings. Thus for al-Fārābī, all knowledge comes from God.

If all knowledge comes from God, what distinguishes revelation revealed through prophets from other forms of knowledge? In both subject matter and aims, revelation revealed through prophets and philosophy deal with the same subject. Al-Fārābī summarises these similarities by saying:

Both (religion and philosophy) comprise the same subjects and both give an account of the ultimate principles of beings . For both supply knowledge about the first principle and cause of beings and both give an account of the ultimate end for the sake of which man is made- that is, supreme happiness and the ultimate end of every one of the other beings.¹

Revelation revealed through prophets and philosophy consist of both theory and practical action.² The theoretical part in religion is called beliefs while in philosophy it is theoretical philosophy. The main difference being that ' the theoretical opinions of religion are demonstrated in theoretical philosophy, though they remained undemonstrated in religion.³ Thus the theoretical foundations of both religion and philosophy are similar but differ in their methods of proofs.

The practical actions in religion consist of actions imposed upon individuals and society collectively, embodied in the *sharī'a* with the ultimate aim of the success of the individual in this life and the hereafter. The practical actions in religion can find their origins and justification in the universal rules of practical philosophy. The practical actions in religion are subsumed under the universal rules of practical philosophy.⁴ Therefore philosophers will be able to understand the intention of the practical actions imposed by the *sharī'a* through using their understanding of universal rules in practical philosophy and thus they must obey the *sharī'a* and perform the external bodily acts and duties of the law in order to gain benefit from it. Thus both the theoretical and practical aspects of religion are incorporated in philosophy but the methods and their proofs differ from each other.

If, for al-Fārābī, both the theoretical and practical aspects of religion are incorporated in philosophy, is then religion only a useless copy of philosophy? Al-Fārābī answers that religion is not useless but of true value. He attributes the value of religion to its ability to persuade people at large to right beliefs and to right actions in

¹Muhsin Mahdi, Alfarabi's Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle (New York: Cornell University Press, 1962) 44.

²al-Fārābī, Kitāb al-millah wa nuṣūṣ ukhrā, 47.

³al-Fārābī, Kitāb al-millah wa nuṣūṣ ukhrā, 47.

⁴al-Fārābī, Kitāb al-millah wa nuṣūṣ ukhrā, 48.

order for them to obtain the supreme happiness through its unique and powerful symbols which convincingly persuades and strongly motivate man to leap to action. Daiber aptly summarises al-Fārābī's attitude towards the relationship of religion and philosophy by saying:

Religion persuades the citizens of the virtuous city, to believe and to act for the sake of obtaining supreme happiness- what can be proved by philosophy but what cannot be deduced from philosophy.For the relation of philosophy to reality in the eyes of al-Fārābī not only justified by the Aristotelian theory of cognition, of interrelation between thought and perception; the virtuous religion is also a concrete and by philosophy provable example for the relation between scientific cognition and moral insight. By the 'rules' and 'laws' religion takes care of the relation of ethics to reality and tries to realise the practical prudence of philosophy.¹

Thus for al-Fārābī, although all the knowledge revealed through revelation can ultimately be known through the efforts of philosophy, the results that it wants to achieve can best be done by religion. The unique symbolic language of religion which fires ones imagination and stirs one's soul inspires man to righteous action is what philosophy aspires to, but cannot achieve through its dry intellectual endeavours.

¹Hans Daiber, The Ruler as Philosopher: A New Interpretation of al-Fārābī's View, (Amsterdam, 1986) 13-4.

CHAPTER TWO

AL-FĀRĀBĪ'S CONCEPT OF REASON

Introduction

We began our study of revelation in order to understand how al-Fārābī conceived of revelation as a source of knowledge. We concluded that for al-Fārābī, revelation is intimately connected to reason ('*aql*). It is this connection that we wish to explore further here, thus revealing the role of reason *vis a vis* revelation. We also will examine the role of reason *per se*, by itself for obtaining knowledge

Harking back to the Brahman's challenge and conundrum against the existence of revelation for discovering and revealing the truth because the Brahmans argued that if revelation existed it would be made unnecessary and redundant by reason¹ poses a great challenge to the reason for and the method of incorporating revelation in the elaboration of the role of reason, especially among the philosophers. In addition to this, we have the accusation both from the Muslim tradition² and modern Western

¹Imām al-Haramayn al-Juwaynī, Kitāb al-*Irshād ilā qawāti' al-adilla fī usūl al-i'tiqād*, ed. Muhammad Yousof Musa, (Cairo, 1950).302-4. See also discussion below on al-Ghazālī's rejection of the Brahmans position, Chapter 3.

²Alfred Guillaume cites the accusations directed against the Muslim philosophers from the Muslim tradition. He says;

" Philosophy was called 'wisdom mixed with unbelief'. Book-titles such as An Exposure of Greek Infamies and a Sip of Religious Counsels and Ocular Demonstration of the Refutation of Philosophy in the Ouran, tell their own story. A tale was circulated that a well known philosopher on his death-bed recanted his doctrines, his last recorded utterance being 'Almighty God has spoken the truth and Avicenna is a liar'. Alfred Guillaume, "Philosophy and Theology", in Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume (eds.) The Legacy of Islam (Oxford, 1931). 240.

scholarship,¹ accusing the philosophers of only paying lip service to Islamic beliefs in order to pass as good Muslims.

These accusations, although serious, must be taken in the context of a strong reaction against outside influences, seen as innovations of foreign origin. There is little doubt that the Muslim philosophers had constructed their philosophical system from Greek ideas or those deduced from them. However, as Fazlur Rahman points out, 'the Muslim philosophers made conscious efforts in their choosing this or that particular Greek idea and exerted great efforts to try to correspond their philosophy with the metaphysics of Islam'². More importantly, it can be demonstrated from al-Fārābī's philosophical system how important the role of prophets, revelation and the revealed law are. In fact al-Fārābī insists that a true philosopher is one who not only possesses this theoretical knowledge but is able to exploit this knowledge for the benefit of others³. Failure in the philosopher's ability to benefit other than himself results in him being a false philosopher. Al-Fārābī contrasts this definition of the true philosopher with that of the false philosophers as follows:

The false philosopher is he who acquires the theoretical sciences without achieving the utmost perfection so as to be able to introduce others to what he knows insofar as their capacity permits.⁴

The false philosopher may possess the knowledge of the theoretical sciences, but his failure to exploit this knowledge for the benefit of others is his downfall.

The way this theoretical knowledge can benefit others for al-Fārābī is that this knowledge has to be transformed in accordance to the capacity of others to

Al-Ghazālī who we are also examining in this study, makes this type of accusation against the Muslim philosophers that they are not serious in their religious convictions but only pay lip service to it. Al-Ghazālī says; These are men[the philosophers] who bedeck themselves with the trappings of Islam. Often you may see them reciting the Qur'ān and attending the assemblies and public prayers and paying lip service to the Shari'a." al-Munqidh, 96. McCarthy. 104.

¹Fazlur Rahman, "Avicenna and Orthodox Islam: An Interpretative Note on the Composition of His System" in Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee (Jerusalem, 1965). Vol.2, 667.

²Fazlur Rahman, Islam. 117.

³Al-Fārābī, Tahsīl al-sa'āda, 89-90. Mahdi, 43.

⁴Al-Fārābī, Tahsīl al-sa'āda, 95. Mahdi, 48.

understand. The transformation of the theoretical knowledge is done by employing the following means:

Therefore, he who is truly perfect possesses with sure insight, first the theoretical virtues, and subsequently the practical.... Since it is impossible for him to possess the faculty to bring them about except by employing certain demonstrations, persuasive methods as well as methods that represent things through images, and this is either with the consent of others or by compulsion, it follows that the true philosopher is himself the supreme ruler.¹

The best means to achieve this transformation of the theoretical knowledge is through the imaginative faculty transforming these abstract philosophical truths into understandable, motivational and persuasive truths. This transformation is best achieved in prophets who possess the highest intellectual capacity combined with their naturally fully developed imaginative faculty. For the prophet, the imaginative faculty automatically converts these purely philosophical truths into the strong, powerful, emotionally charged, persuasive language of revelation driving man to right action. This transformation of course occurs automatically and not with the conscious effort of the prophet. Thus, for al-Fārābī, the literal words of revelation are not the conscious words created by the prophet, but the transformation done by Active Intelligence through the prophet, or in other words, the revelation is the word of God through the Active Intelligence via the prophet.² Since for al-Fārābī, the more the philosopher has the power to exploit his theoretical knowledge for the benefit of others, the more perfect is his philosophy, therefore, the prophet's ability to transform theoretical knowledge into revelation which is the best form of persuasion benefiting the greatest number of people must be seen as the most perfect philosophy³. Thus, for al-Fārābī, the role of the prophet and of the revelation are central to his philosophical system and their importance should never be underrated. Therefore, these accusations against the philosophers that they only pay lip service to

¹Al-Fārābī, Tahsīl al-sa'āda, 89-90 Mahdi, 43-4.

²For further discussion on the literal words of revelation, refer back to section on Prophet: The Medium of Revelation, 30-1.

³Al-Fārābī, Tahsīl al-sa'āda, 89. Mahdi, 43

Islamic beliefs in order to pass as a good Muslim are not substantiated. In the light of these accusations, the elaboration of the Muslim philosophers' concept of the role of reason in philosophy, has an added dimension of urgency and importance *vis a vis* their relationship to the religion, Islam.

Here, we will limit our attempt to examining only the boundaries of reasoning, identifying its scope and limitations, if any such limitations exist. Since al-Fārābī considers reason to the cornerstone and foundation of all knowledge, this should simplify our task in examining and elaborating the role of reason.

In examining the role of revelation, we had raised four questions to revelation. These questions were: 1. what is revelation: what kinds of knowledge does it actually give us; 2. how is this knowledge ultimately transmitted to us; 3. by whom is it transmitted to in order to ensure its purity and originality; 4. and most importantly, what is the ultimate purpose of this revelation revealed to man. It is these same questions that we will now pose to reason. However, we will subsume these four questions under two broader questions. The first is the role of reason *per se*, by itself, in obtaining knowledge. The other category is the role of reason *vis à vis* revelation.

The Role of Reason.

For al-Fārābī the role of reason is supreme drawing its *raison d'etre* from a rational God, who manifests this rationality in all creation. Marmura points out that this relationship of reason to God is for al-Fārābī as follows:

The universe for Alfarabi is an orderly, rational one, emanating in degrees from the supreme mind, God. Man, on this earth, being endowed with voluntary action, must order his own life and society to

be in tune with the rational, harmonious order of the universe. Only thus can man attain happiness. Just as the universe is ordered by a supreme rational being, God, and each heavenly sphere is governed by an intelligence, so man, a small universe in his own right, ought to govern himself by his reason. The same holds for human society.¹

Thus, for al-Fārābī, reason reigns supreme because it can comprehend not only the physical world we live in, but also the meaning and goal of human life, since the God who created the world and man, created the world and man in a rational manner. Thus, a man, utilising his reason is able not only to understand the physical world but also will be able to attain the aim and perfection of man.

Al-Fārābī bases his argument on the premise that the world is created by a rational God and therefore, the world is created in a rational and orderly fashion. Based on the premise that the world is created in a rational fashion, man, who forms part of this world, must also act rationally in order to attain his perfection and thereby, ultimately his happiness. Thus, for man's own sake, he ought to govern himself by his reason.

Man ought to act in accordance with the knowledge that he obtains through the use of reason. But, what can reason know and how does reason know? Here, we do not intend to delve into the inner workings of reason for that would be better left to an indepth study of logic. Rather, we will focus here on the boundaries of reasoning, identifying its scope and limitations, if any such limitations exist.

How reason obtains knowledge is mysterious. Numerous answers have been given down through the ages. However, al-Fārābī's epistemology arises from and is based on his emanationist cosmology. I will only provide a brief summary of al-Fārābī's epistemology here since I have dealt with it in depth in the previous section; *Al-Fārābī Epistemology: The Soul and Its Cognitive Powers*.² For al-Fārābī, initially everyone possesses a potential intellect. This potential intellect becomes an

¹Michael Marmura, "God and His creation: Two medieval Islamic views", in R. M. Savory (ed.) *Introduction to Islamic Civilization* (Cambridge, 1976.), 51.

²See above Chapter 1 : Al-Fārābī's Concept of Revelation, section on, Al-Fārābī's Epistemology: The Soul and Its Cognitive Powers.

actual intellect when an external intellect, already an actual intellect, the Active Intelligence enlightens the potential intellect by transforming the knowledge of particulars which the potential intellect had made efforts to obtain and changing these particulars to universals through the abstraction of forms from matter. Once this is achieved, the potential intellect becomes an actual intellect in possession not of particular knowledge only but of the universal forms which constitute real knowledge¹. The second stage is when the actual intellect begins to think about the intelligibles/universals which it has obtained from the Active Intelligence. When the actual intellect has finally obtained all the intelligibles/universals, there is no need for it to think of existing things outside itself. Thus, when the intellect thinks, it is thinking of itself and reflecting upon itself and therefore becomes self intellectual. When the intellect reaches this stage, it becomes a form of forms and in al-Fārābī's terminology an acquired intellect (*'aql mustafād*). This is the highest development and the final stage of the human intellect.

The result of Al-Fārābī's epistemology with its main players the Active Intelligence and the recipient the human intellect, is that he has egalitarianised the acquisition of knowledge because the Active Intelligence enlightens anyone and everyone who is prepared to receive its illumination. Thus, anyone who struggles hard is able to better himself/herself and ultimately able to acquire the highest degree of knowledge. We can deduce that for al-Fārābī, anyone can reach the highest form of human perfection, i. e. intellectual perfection which is the acquired intellect.

It is not my intent here to repeat the previous discussion of al-Fārābī's epistemology. However, this summary seems appropriate as a prelude to a discussion of the boundaries of reason. From al-Fārābī's emanative epistemology, we perceive that it is the Active Intelligence, and therefore indirectly God, which gives man knowledge. Without the assistance of the Active Intelligence, man's

¹For an explanation of why particular do not constitute real knowledge, see above Chapter 1 : Al-Fārābī's Concept of Revelation, section on, Al-Fārābī's Epistemology: The Soul and Its Cognitive Powers.

knowledge would only be restricted to the particulars and therefore, he would actually know nothing. The Active Intelligence gives man knowledge by abstracting the form from matter and thus, giving man the form of each and everything and therefore, the principles of everything. This is only possible because each and everything has its own form, its own inherent nature, and acts in accordance to that very nature¹. Therefore, the man, who has obtained the forms, knows the true nature of things and thus is able to judge and predict the actions of matter which conform to the same rational principle that man's intellect is based upon. Therefore, he can utilise his theoretical knowledge and put it into practice. Thus, he knows about God and what is good and evil, and ultimately what is man's nature and true objective and how to achieve man's perfection.

Through the assistance of the Active Intelligence which means indirectly the assistance of God acting on man's reason, all knowledge is in a way revealed to man. Through God acting via the Active Intelligence on man's reason, he can know everything which is necessary for him to attain his perfection, his happiness.

Reason vis a vis Revelation.

Al-Fārābī picked up the gauntlet thrown down by the challenge of the Brahmans against the existence of prophecy and revelation.² Al-Fārābī accepts the same assumptions on reason that the Brahmans held, but he reached a totally opposite conclusion on the relationship of reason vis a vis revelation. For al-Fārābī, reason is not beyond or above revelation but revelation is a transformation of reason into symbolic and metaphoric language with the power and motivation that can make

¹Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arites reject his idea of inherent nature and therefore, it becomes impossible for reason to make a rational objective judgement on anything, for further discussion on this point, refer to chapters discussing al-Ghazālī.

²I have so far not come across any reference to the Brahmans by al-Fārābī. However, he probably was aware of it since Muslim philosophy was not only influenced by Greek philosophy but also by Persian and Indian philosophy.

people understand the same truths that reason uncovers, however, in accordance to their own capacities to comprehend. In answer to the Brahmans, revelation *vis a vis* reason is certainly not redundant nor futile but revelation is actually an extension of reason with the motive of enlightening all in accordance with their ability.

All human knowledge for al-Fārābī is in a way 'revealed' to man. For al-Fārābī, God indirectly via the Active Intelligence is responsible for giving man knowledge by the Active Intelligence acting upon man's intellect. Revelation is seen as just another means by which God conveys knowledge to man. The relationship between revelation and reason is certainly not antagonistic, contradictory, competing against each other nor the Latin Averroes' dual truth idea¹. Rather, revelation is the transformation of reason and therefore, revelation and reason complement each other in conveying the same truths to all men.

Al-Fārābī argues that revelation is not only an important but an essential factor for the fulfilment of the purpose of philosophy. The importance of philosophy is to benefit not just the individual but others i.e. society. Thus, in order for philosophy to benefit not just the individual, it must pass from the theoretical to the practical. This means of transforming theoretical truths to practical actions occurs through the means of revelation.

How revelation is transmitted to the prophet is essential to comprehend before we can discuss revelation's relationship *vis a vis* reason. Al-Fārābī links prophecy with the perfection of the innate faculties of the soul itself and does not describe it as a state of possession by supernatural power² which suppresses the prophet's

¹This dual truth theory of the Latin Averroes has no relationship to Averroes himself. Stuart MacClintock explains this dual truths idea as follows; "that such thinkers (Latin Averroist) were actually practising a system of 'double truths' in which a proposition can be true in natural philosophy but contradict a proposition true in theology and conversely". Stuart MacClintock, Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, vol. 1, 224.

²Richard Walzer, "Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy and Divination", Journal of Hellenic Studies 27, 1957. 142.

personality but rather prophecy enlarges what already lies potentially in the prophet's personality, thus transforming it and thereby actualising this potential. However, he qualifies this statement that it is not a state of possession of supernatural power by pointing out that this innate faculty must be endowed and cannot be acquired by learning.¹ Therefore, al-Fārābī argues that although prophecy is not possession of a supernatural state, it cannot be sought to be acquired through exertion of efforts but remains a unique gift of God to certain individuals whom He chooses. Therefore, God gives these men special qualities necessary in order to receive revelation and hence become a prophet.

This has been dealt with in greater detail under the sections: *The Transmission of Revelation and Prophets; The Medium Of Revelation*. However, this summary is appropriate as a prelude to the discussion on reason's connection to revelation and also of how revelation fulfils the mission of philosophy.

For al-Fārābī, revelation occurs as a result of the emanation from God via the Active Intelligence on an individual who possess a fully developed rational faculty combined with an endowed, fully naturally developed imaginative faculty. The individuals who possesses both these faculties are extremely rare as they only occur in prophets². Al-Fārābī explains this process of transmitting revelation as follows,

God Almighty (*Allah 'azza wajja*) grants him Revelation (*yuwahī ilaihi*) through the mediation of the Active Intelligence, so that the emanation from God Almighty to the Active Intelligence is passed through the mediation of the acquired intellect, and then to the faculty of representation (imaginative faculty). Thus, he is, through the emanation from the Active Intelligence to his Passive Intellect, a wise man and a philosopher and an accomplished thinker who employs and intellect of divine quality, and through the emanation from the Active Intellect to his faculty of representation (imaginative faculty) a visionary prophet (*nabī*): who warns of things to come and tells of particular things which exist at present. This man holds the most perfect rank of humanity and has reached the highest degree of felicity.³

¹Al-Fārābī's The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya), 79. Mahdi. 36.

²Al-Fārābī's The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya), 79. Mahdi. 36.

³Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State. 244-245

Thus, for al-Fārābī, revelation is a gift of God to His prophets. However, this revelation is a gift from God which occurs via the emanation of the Active Intelligence acting upon the prophet's intellect which is then transformed automatically through the imaginative faculty into symbolic language. Therefore, revelation is the product of the highest philosophical truths combining with the fully naturally developed imaginative faculty resulting in a transformation of these philosophical truth into symbols. Thus, revelation should not and cannot be seen as inferior to reason nor beyond reason but as a transformation of reason.

Why reason has to be transformed into revelation is closely connected with the mission of philosophy and the purpose of revelation. But, how then does revelation fulfil the purpose of philosophy? Al-Fārābī repeats over and over again in all his writings the idea that true philosophy must benefit not just the philosopher but also all others. Al-Fārābī explains the means of instruction utilised by philosophy and that of religion as follows:

Every instruction is composed of two things: (a) making what is being studied comprehensible and causing its idea to be established in the soul and (b) causing others to assent to what is comprehended and established in the soul. There are two ways of making a thing comprehensible: first, by causing its essence to be perceived by the intellect, and second, by causing it to be imagined through the similitude that imitate it. Assent, too, is brought about by one or two methods, either the method of certain demonstration or the method of persuasion. Now when one acquires knowledge of the beings or receives instruction in them, if he perceives their ideas themselves with his intellect, and his assent to them is by the means of certain demonstration, then the science that comprises these cognitions is philosophy. But if they are known by imagining them through similitude that imitate them, and assent to what is imagined of them is cause by the persuasive methods, then the ancients call what comprises these cognitions religion.¹

Al-Fārābī argues that revelation and reason intend to instruct and educate people in the same subject and the same truths but utilise different methods in conveying the same truths.

¹Al-Fārābī, Tahsīl al-sa'āda, 89. Maḥdi, 44.

The same subject matter is dealt with by revelation and reason. Both seek the ultimate perfection and happiness of man. Therefore, both give an account of the existence of the universe and where man fits in it and what is the ultimate aim of man and how to attain this goal of man, happiness. Al-Fārābī explains the two different ways that revelation and reason utilise to describe the existence of the universe and the purpose of man as follows:

Philosophy gives an account of the ultimate principles (that is the essence of the first principles and the essence of the incorporeal second principle), as they are perceived by the intellect. Religion sets forth their images by means of similitudes of them taken from corporeal principles and imitates them by their likeness among political offices. It imitates the actions of natural powers and principles by their likeness among the faculties, states, and arts that have to do with the will, just as Plato does in the *Timaeus*. It imitates (*taḥākā*) the intelligibles by their likeness among the sensibles: for instance, some imitate matter by the abyss or darkness or water, and nothingness by darkness. It imitates the classes of supreme happiness- that is, the end of the act of human virtues-by their likeness among the goods that are believed to be the ends. It imitates the classes of true happiness by the means of the ones that are believed to be happiness. It imitates the ranks of the beings by their likeness among the spatial and temporal ranks. And it attempts to bring the similitudes of these things as close as possible to their essences. Also in everything of which philosophy gives an account that is demonstrative and certain, religion gives an account based on the persuasive arguments.¹

It is clear that the methods used by revelation and reason are different. However, the message they intend to convey remains the same. Both attempt to teach peoples about the existence of the universe and man's place and role in it. Philosophy explains utilising demonstrative means. Religion explains utilising persuasive arguments. However, because of philosophy's demanding method only the few can comprehend its message and therefore, its audience is limited. Thus, reason's ability to convey its message is limited. Because of reason being a difficult, dry and abstract intellectual method, its ability to educate the masses is limited and reason is impotent in motivating and driving most men to right action. Revelation, on the other hand, can reach a mass audience from the educated to the layman. Through its means of

¹Al-Fārābī, *Tahsīl al-sa'āda*, 90-1. Mahdi, 45.

persuasive arguments it not only educates all in accordance to their capacity but revelation fires imaginations and stirs souls inspiring people to righteous actions.

One may obtain the wrong impression here that revelation is merely an imitation of reason. In other words, revelation is reduced to only a popular philosophy for the uneducated man. This perception is inaccurate. Revelation has the ability to reach and educate the masses which reason by itself cannot and fail to achieve. However, for al-Fārābī the more the philosopher has the power to exploit his theoretical knowledge for the benefit of others, the more perfect is his philosophy. Therefore, the role of revelation should never be underrated in the al-Fārābī's philosophical system. Since, through the prophets, theoretical knowledge is transformed into revelation which is the best form of persuasion benefiting the greatest number of people, the prophets are the ones who must be seen as possessing the most perfect philosophy. Thus, for al-Fārābī, the role of the prophet and the revelation are central to his philosophical system and their importance should never be underrated.

CHAPTER THREE

AI-GHAZALI'S CONCEPT OF REVELATION

Introduction

In the Islamic religious tradition, a Muslim religious thinker's opinion on the issues surrounding revelation is very difficult to obtain and point out clearly. Muslim religious thinkers seem to discuss endlessly in minute detail every subject under the sun but they ever so carefully tiptoe around a fundamental subject, revelation, the source from which all their endless debates are supposed to spring, or at least have their grounding in, i.e. revelation, in the Muslim tradition, the Qur'ān.

The Muslim philosophers at least fare much better on this issue. They at least made an attempt to discuss the issues surrounding revelation because it was essential in their discussions on how to obtain certainty in knowledge and to their claims of possessing certain knowledge¹. Thus, the Muslim philosophers made some systematic attempts to explain the issues surrounding revelation.

All other Muslim religious thinkers seem to have accepted revelation as a given source of knowledge, needing neither further explanation, examination nor study. Rather they saw their task only as the transmitters of this knowledge through explaining and elaborating the content of the

¹Refer to the chapter on al-Fārābi's Concept of Revelation.

revelation and how to apply it in practise. However, it is from their explanation and elaboration on religious issues that we can derive and spell out their concept of revelation. Since a direct and systematic discussion on a religious scholar's concept of revelation is extremely scarce, and when it does appear, it is only in passing and usually incoherent, we will have to resort to an analysis of their understanding of religious issues in order to shed some light on their concept of revelation.

In this study, I will limit myself to examining one of the greatest representatives of Muslim religious thinkers, al-Ghazālī. Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) was considered by his contemporaries as the reformer (*mujaddīd*) of the fifth century of the Islamic era and was known by the honorific title of proof of the faith (*ḥujjat al-islām*)¹. He was an extremely versatile scholar whose range of knowledge and writings² encompassed all areas of Islamic religious thought. He was not only an outstanding jurist, theologian and Sufi but also an ardent critic of philosophy. However, even the versatile al-Ghazālī never discussed the issues surrounding revelation in any systematic manner. Nonetheless, we can still attempt to derive an understanding of his views on the issues surrounding revelation through the indirect method by looking at his positions on other religious issues. I purpose here to study al-Ghazālī's concept of revelation using his acceptance and use of Ash'arite theology. I believe that by examining closely al-Ghazālī's theological elaborations, I can answer the four questions I had asked originally surrounding the concept of revelation, namely: 1. what is revelation: what kinds of knowledge does it actually give us; 2. how is this knowledge ultimately transmitted to us; 3. by whom is it transmitted in order to ensure its purity and originality; 4. and

¹Mohamed Ahmed Sherif, Ghazali's Theory of Virtue (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975) 1.

²For a list of al-Ghazālī's writings see, A. Badawī, Mu'allafāt al-Ghazzālī, (Cairo, 1961), G. F. Hourani, "The Chronology of Ghazālī's Writings," Journal of American Oriental Society, 79:225-33 (1959).

most importantly, what is the ultimate purpose of this revelation revealed to man.

Before we proceed to try to derive al-Ghazālī's concept of revelation from his theological views, let us first look at the background surrounding the challenges that al-Ghazālī was facing and attempting to answer the questions related to revelation. We will then examine his scarce and scanty direct discussions on revelation itself. Only then will we proceed to derive his concept of revelation from his theological views.

Issues Surrounding Revelation

Abū Hāmid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Tūsī al-Ghazālī (450/1058-505/1111) is better known in the traditional Islamic sources as simply al-Ghazālī. Many scholars have claimed that he is one of the greatest thinkers in the Islamic tradition and the man who influenced Islamic thought after the sixth/twelfth century more than any other¹. Al-Ghazālī had earned the title of the proof of the faith (*ḥujjat al-Islām*) because of his vehement intellectual defence of the faith against the non-believers, the Mu'tazilites, the

¹Adib Nayif Diyab, "al-Ghazālī", in Religion, Learning and Science in the Abbasid Period, edited by M.J.L. Young, J.D. Latham and, R.B Serjeant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 424. See also W. Montgomery Watt, Muslim Intellectual: A Study of al-Ghazālī (Edinburgh, 1963)173-180.

¹For further discussion on the Ismā'īlites by al-Ghazālī, see al-Ghazālī's work, Fadā'ih al-bāṭiniyya wa fadā'il al-Mustazhiriyya (The Shames of the Bāṭanites and the Excellence of the Supporters of al-Mustazhir), (Amman, 1993). For an Ismā'īlī's response to al-Ghazālī's criticism, see Henry Corbin, "The Ismā'īlī

Ismā'ilītes¹ and questionably dealing a death blow to philosophy.² Al-Ghazālī's attitude concerning the issues surrounding revelation raised by the groups mentioned can best be summarised in his own words in his book *al-Risāla al-qudsiyya*.³

....that God most high is the creator of His servants' actions; that these actions are acquired (*muktasaba*) by His servants; that they are willed by Him; that He is gracious to create and create from nothing; that it is His prerogative to impose duties (*taklīf*) beyond the capacity [of His servants], and to cause pain (*ilām*) to the innocent; that it is not incumbent on Him to do the most favourable [to His servants]; that [man's] obligations are laid down in the divine law; that His sending of prophets is not impossible (*jā'iz*); and that the prophethood of our prophet Muhammad (God bless and save him) is proved and confirmed by miracles.⁴

Response to the Polemic of al-Ghazālī" in *Ismā'ilī Contributions to Islamic Culture*, ed. by S. H. Nasr, (Tehran, 1977). 67-99.

²Mohamed Ahmed Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue*, 1. See also A.J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1965). 61.

³*al-Risāla al-qudsiyya* forms part of *Kitāb Qawā'id al-'aqā'id* which is Book Two of al-Ghazālī's *magnum opus Ihyā 'ulūm al-dīn*. This tract is an excellent and concise summary of al-Ghazālī's theological position. *al-Risāla al-qudsiyya* has been edited, translated with an introduction by A. L. Tibawī, " al-Ghazālī's Tract on Dogmatic Theology," *Islamic Quarterly*, vol. 9 (1965). All further quotation from this tract will be based upon Tibawī's translation of it. Furthermore, I will simply refer to it as *Ihyā* (Arabic text)., Tibawī (translation page)

⁴*Ihyā*. 125, Tibawī, 96. I will compare the relevant passages of *al-Risāla al-Qudsiyya* cited here with al-Ghazālī's other major work on theology, *al-Iqtisād*. This method will not only enable us to corroborate al-Ghazālī's consistency of thought on this subject but also help to verify that he wrote both works, especially since there seems to be doubt on the authenticity of a number of works attributed to al-Ghazālī. On the question of authenticity of al-Ghazālī's works, see W. M. Watt, "The Authenticity of the Works Attributed to al-Ghazālī," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1952), 24-45, see also Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur., 1992) 165-171. In order to compare the two texts the *al-Risālah al-qudsiyya* and *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād* on this matter, I will however only cite the relevant passages of *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād* in the footnote. See also Al-Ghazālī's, *al-Iqtisād*, I. A. Çubukçu and H. Atay (eds.) (Ankara, 1962). 180-1.

"We claim that it is possible for God Most High not to impose obligations on His servants. It is possible that He imposes on them (His servants) what they are not capable. It is possible for Him to cause suffering of (His) servants without compensation or perpetration of a crime. It is not necessary (for Him) to consider what is advantageous for His servant. It is not necessary for Him to reward the obedient and punish the disobedient. For the servant, it is not necessary for him to do a thing (out of the obligation imposed) because of his reason but because of the *sharī'a* (law). It is not necessary for God that He send prophets. If He does send them(prophets), then it is neither evil nor

Before we can even proceed to examine al-Ghazālī's arguments concerning revelation against the standpoint of the other groups mentioned above, we must deal with the accusation raised by the Brahmans¹ which attacks the very foundation of revelation, its very existence. It is in reply against the Brahmans'² attack against the possibility of prophecy, the medium of revelation, that al-Ghazālī made the above statement,³ that His sending down of prophets is not impossible (*jā'iz*), thus affirming the possibility, but, not however the necessity of prophethood³. The Brahmans' arguments against the possibility of prophecy were based on two types of argument, one ethical and the other epistemological.⁴ The Brahmans' ethical argument is essentially that since all men are of the same genus (*al-jins*), it would be unfair for God to bestow revelation on one and not the other because God would be favouring one individual over another. It would be unjust for God

absurd. It is possible to show their truth by miracles. All of these claims are based upon the discussions of the meaning of the necessary (*wājib*), the good (*al-ḥasan*) and the evil (*al-qabīḥ*)."

¹Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī's renowned teacher reports this debate against the Brahmans in his work *Kitāb al-Irshād*.

Al-Juwaynī says:

"The Brahmans reject prophecy and renounce prophets [because of] reason. They disclaim the sending of the tidings [revelation] of the prophets. We mentioned what they believe from their specious arguments and we separate ourselves from this. Firstly, they said if we consider the coming of a prophet, there is no doubt what he brings with him [revelation] is that which is anticipated by the judgement of reason or it is not anticipated by it [reason]. If what he brings with him is that which reason can arrive at, then there is no benefit in sending him [prophet] and they consider this objective truly useless and foolish. And if what he [the prophet] brings with him is that for which reason has no proof, then, there is nothing that requires its acceptance since the acceptance is only by the proof of reason."

Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā qawāṭi' al-adilla fī usūl al-i'tiqād*, ed. Muhammad Yousuf Musa, (Cairo, 1950).302-4.

²It is not known how well versed al-Ghazālī was concerning the Brahmans. For further information on the Brahmans, see Fazlur Rahman, "Barāhima", *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd Edition).

³I will explain later on why al-Ghazālī does not accept the necessity of prophethood. This has to do with his theological position and thus is more appropriately explained there.

⁴al-Bāqillānī cites both aspects, the ethical and epistemological arguments presented by the Brahmans, but the accounts are not clearly differentiated by al-Bāqillānī. See, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, (ed.) Richard McCarthy, (Beirut, 1957.) 104-5.

to enlighten the one individual with revelation and not the others¹. The Brahmans argue that God may enlighten one individual with revelation if and only if there is some specifying principle that may set aside one man over the others. However, because all men are of the same genus, there is no specifying (*al-takhsīs*) principle. Thus for the Brahmans, since God is and must be fair, prophecy is impossible. Against this Brahmans' objection to the possibility of prophecy, al-Ghazālī redefines the cornerstone concept holding together the Brahmans' argument, the concept of justice. Al-Ghazālī defines justice in terms of God's actions. Whatever God does is just. Therefore it would be a contradiction in terms to consider any of God's actions as unjust.

The epistemological argument against the possibility of prophecy attributed to the Brahmans is related to the divine attribute of wisdom². God, the Brahmans maintained, had created man with reason. It is this gift of God, reason, which enables man to arrive at what is good and what is its opposite, evil. Therefore, it would be redundant for God to send prophets to reveal to man the good which he can reach by himself. And what is redundant is superfluous. And what is superfluous is an unwise act. However, God is the Wise. Thus, He would not send prophets. Al-Ghazālī counters the argument presented here by the Brahmans by undermining the very basis of the Brahmans' argument which is the ability of reason to arrive at the good. Al-Ghazālī gives a strong reply in *al-Risāla al-qudsiyya* by saying:

The ninth fundamental is that the mission (*bi'tha*) of the prophets is not impossible. This is contrary to the Brahmans who maintain that no benefit could be derived from sending prophets since reason is a (better) alternative to them. (But reason is not an alternative) because it does not guide to the works which earn salvation in the hereafter, just as it does not guide to medicines useful to health (in the world). Hence the need for God's creatures for prophets is as their need for physicians, but whereas the truthfulness of the physician may

¹ Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 104-5.

²*al-Iqtisād* 180-1. See also, al-Juwaynī, *al-ʿIrshād*, 302-4.

be known through trial, that of the prophet is known by miracles¹.

Al-Ghazālī affirms here that the good is only what God commands. And these commandments can only be known through the prophets. For God reveals His commandments to man through His revelations to His prophets. In al-Ghazālī's reply to the Brahmans, al-Ghazālī affirms that God's sending of prophets is possible and that this does not in anyway contradict any divine attributes.

After dealing with al-Ghazālī's counter arguments against the Brahmans and thus at least for al-Ghazālī establishing the possibility of prophecy, therefore the possibility of revelation, we will next deal with al-Ghazālī's main two opponents, the Mu'tazilites and the philosophers². Al-Ghazālī vehemently opposed the Mu'tazilites' and the philosophers' view that reason unaided by revelation is capable of arriving at the good. Even though the Mu'tazilites and the philosophers agree that reason unaided by revelation can ultimately arrive at the good, the Mu'tazilites' and the philosophers' views are different. Therefore, we will have to deal with and discuss al-Ghazālī's responses to them separately.

The Mu'tazilites at the time of al-Ghazālī had already ceased to be a powerful school, seem to have had few living advocates, and to have lost all political support for their doctrines³. However, even though they had ceased

¹Ihyā 135, Tibawi, 117. See also al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād, 180-1.

²For a full discussion of al-Ghazālī's detailed criticism of the philosophers, refer to his work, Tahāfut al-falāsifa (ed.) Sulayman Dunya, (Cairo, 1972). Translated into English by Sabih Ahmad Kamali under the title, al-Ghazali's Tahāfut al-falāsifah, (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1974). In future, referred simply as Tahāfut al-falāsifa(Arabic text page), Sabih Ahmad Kamali (translation page).

³It is interesting to note how much importance al-Ghazālī seems to give in refuting the Mu'tazilites. When we look at the historical period it seems strange for al-Ghazālī to take up so much of his time refuting the Mu'tazilites doctrines especially since by al-Ghazālī's time the Mu'tazilites had ceased to be a powerful school, had only few living advocates and no political backing from the ruling power, the Sunnite Seljuks. The Mu'tazilites' main proponents may have died by al-Ghazālī's time but I have to concur with George Hourani, commenting on al-Ghazālī's teacher, al-Juwaynī's interest in the Mu'tazilites was because the Mu'tazilites' ideas live on 'as authors of influential books still

to be influential, their books were widely read and known¹. The Mu'tazilites who had begun their career as defenders of the Islamic faith against outside attacks of Manichaeism, Gnosticism and Materialism², had built their doctrines on five basic tenets : unity and justice, the inevitability of God's threats and promises, the intermediary position, the injunctions of right (*ma'rūf*), and the prohibition of wrong (*munkar*)³. Fazlur Rahman succinctly explains the implications of one of the Mu'tazilites' most important doctrines, justice. He says:

From among the various constituents of the Qur'ānic concept of God, power, mercy, will, justice, they isolated this last one and carried it to its logical conclusions that God cannot do the unreasonable and the unjust. In this connection they developed their doctrine of the 'Promise and Threat' according to which God can neither pardon the evil doer (and therefore violate His Threat) nor punish the good-doer (and violate His Promise).Consequently, the Qur'ānic dicta concerning the mercy and grace of God were interpreted by them in terms of necessity and duty: God must do the best for man; He must send Prophets and revelation to mankind. If He did not do the best for man, He would neither be just nor God⁴.

The Mu'tazilites saw themselves as defenders of God, through defending an essential feature that makes God, God, His Justice. The concept that God is Just entails that He acts justly. However, it is in this definition of 'just' that problems arise. The Mu'tazilites had subsumed the idea of God as Just under the human understanding of justice. It is this idea that human concepts can be imposed upon God which seems most repulsive and repugnant to al-Ghazālī.

being read by Muslims in the later eleventh century - or at any rate as thinkers whose theories were still widely known at second-hand.because the theory as we know it from 'Abd-al-Jabbār was an elaborate one, which demanded an answer in some detail '. George Hourani, "Juwaynī's Criticism of the Mu'tazilite Ethics" in Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 126. I believe this same explanation can also be used to explain al-Ghazālī preoccupation with the Mu'tazilites .

¹George Hourani, "Juwaynī's Criticism of the Mu'tazilite Ethics", 126.

²Fazlur Rahman, Islam, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979) 88.

³Al-Khayyāt(d. 902), Kitāb al-Intisār, (Beirut, 1957), 30.

⁴Fazlur Rahman, Islam 89. See also Majid Fakhry, " Some Paradoxical Implications of the Mu'tazilite View of Free Will," Muslim World 43 (1953), 98-108.

We will however restrict our discussions on the Mu'tazilites¹ to only those objections that al-Ghazālī had raised against them concerning the implication of their upholding the ideas that reason unaided by revelation can arrive at the good and that God must act justly. The implication of these ideas have consequences especially on God's ability to impose obligation (*taklif*) on man, the amount of obligation that God may impose upon man, and ultimately the limitation of God's ability to act concerning giving rewards and punishing evil, and His ability to forgive the sins of His servants.

Al-Ghazālī challenged the Mu'tazilites' contention that reason unaided by revelation can know the good. Al-Ghazālī argues that the Mu'tazilites arrived at this contention due to their misunderstanding of what is the good. The Mu'tazilites had understood the good as that which is beneficial for man. Al-Ghazālī explained the Mu'tazilites' misunderstanding of the concept of the good by saying:

...the knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of God and obedience (*ta'ah*) to Him is a duty imposed [upon man] by God's command and the law (*shar'*), and not as the Mu'tazilites maintain by human reason (*'aql*). For were obedience dictated by reason, it would be either for no benefit, which is impossible, since reason does not dictate what is futile, or it would be for a benefit or selfish aim. This [motive] must either refer to God (*al-ma'būd*) which is impossible since He is inviolably above selfish aims and desires, nay, belief and unbelief, obedience and disobedience in reference to Him Most High, are indifferently alike; or it must refer to man's (*al-'abd*) selfish aims which is also impossible since his [expected] benefit is in this world or the next : in this world, he has none but that which causes him toil and deflects him from indulging his sensual appetites; in the next he can expect nothing but reward and punishment. But how can [man] know that God most high rewards for obedience and disobedience and does not punish for them, since obedience and disobedience are in reference to Him indifferently alike, and He has no preference to, or identification with, the one or the other. It is only

¹For an excellent discussion on the Mu'tazilites' theological position which has a great deal to do with their ethics and epistemology see, George Hourani, Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of 'Abd al-Jabbar, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). See also Judith Katz Hecker, Reason and Responsibility: An Explanatory Translation of Kitab al-Tawhīd From al-Mughnī fī Arwār al-Tawhīd wa-l 'Adl by Qadi 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhani, with Introduction and Notes, (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis: University of California, Berkeley, 1971)

through God's law (*sharī'a*) that such matters can be comprehended; and verily he errs who derives his comprehension of them from an analogy between the Creator and His creature, who [unlike the Creator] is not indifferent to gratitude and ingratitude and the amount of satisfaction, excitement, and enjoyment which he derives from one and not the other.¹

This lengthy quote serves to explain al-Ghazālī's understanding of the Mu'tazilite position and provides his objections to them. Al-Ghazālī asserts here if obedience is dictated by reason, then reason demands it must be for a benefit. If it is not for a benefit, then reason would not be able to make an evaluation of it because reason's judgement is based upon deciding on the benefit. If it is not for a benefit, then, it would be futile, which is contrary to reason. This benefit must either be for the Creator, God or His creation, man.

Al-Ghazālī asserts that these obligations cannot be for the benefit of God, for He is above all selfish aims or desires and is never in need or in desire of anything at any time. With regard to the obedience or disobedience of man to God, He is indifferent to it. If al-Ghazālī asserts that this benefit cannot be for God, then is it possible that this benefit be for man? Again al-Ghazālī answers negatively. Al-Ghazālī asserts if it were for the benefit of man, it must benefit him either in this world or in the next. Interestingly enough, contrary to Greek traditions and philosophy which al-Ghazālī was well versed in, al-Ghazālī asserts in this world that the only benefit man can obtain is in the sensual appetites. In the next world, man cannot know whether God will reward or punish him for his actions, since God is indifferent to man's obedience or disobedience anyway. Thus, the only way to know the good, al-Ghazālī asserts, is not through reason but through revelation. The good is defined through revelation which thus informs man what God wants man to do and rewards him for these action.

¹Ihyā 134, Tibawi, 115-6. See also al-Iqtisād 86-7.

Al-Ghazālī asserts that God's imposition of obligations on man is also known only through revelation. Al-Ghazālī says:

..... creation from nothing and the imposition of duties (*taklīf*) upon His servants are by His grace and favour the Most High. Neither creation nor such imposition was ever an obligation (*wājib*) upon Him. The Mu'tazilah maintain that they were obligations upon Him because they are in the interest (*maṣlaḥa*) of His servants. But this is impossible since it is He who imposes obligation (*mūjib*), He who commands and He who prohibits. How can He be liable to any obligation or be subject to any compulsion or command.....The [Mu'tazilah] assertion that [creation and imposition of duties are] obligatory in the interest of His servants is fallacious. For if no injury befalls Him through neglecting what is in the interest of the servants then obligation would be meaningless. Further, the interest for the servant is for Him to create them in Paradise, and thus those endowed with intelligence find no comfort in that He created the servants in the abode of calamities and exposed them in it to sin, and later He subjects them to the dangers of punishment and the awe of resurrection and judgement¹.

From the above statement, al-Ghazālī attributes the Mu'tazilite position as making it obligatory for God to impose obligation upon His servants because it is in their best interest. Thus, the Mu'tazilites contend that God acts in accordance with what is best for His servants. Al-Ghazālī totally reject any hint of any obligation for God to do anything. For al-Ghazālī, God acts in accordance to His own will (*irāda*). He acts in accordance with His Power (*qudra*). God is the one who imposes obligations. He is the one who commands (*'amr*) and prohibits (*nahy*). It is impossible that He be liable for any obligation, or be subjected to any compulsion or command. Al-Ghazālī argues against the Mu'tazilites' contention that it is obligatory for God to act in the interest of His servant as simply fallacious. The reason being that if there were no injury to God for neglecting what is in the interest of His servants, then that obligation would be meaningless. Furthermore, al-Ghazālī struggles to put down the Mu'tazilite contention that God is obliged to do what is in the best interest of His servants by pointing out how God created the process of

¹*Ihyā* 133, Tibawi, 112-3. See also *al-Iqtisād*, 86.

living for His servants, subjecting them to calamities of this world and exposing them to the sins in it, and then only later to be subjected to the danger of punishment on the Day of Judgement. If God had acted in the interest of His servants, al-Ghazālī contends, then it would be in the best interest of his servants not to have to undergo these many trials and tribulations of life but for Him to have created them in Paradise.

Once al-Ghazālī had countered the Mu'tazilites' contention that God's imposition of obligation can be known through reason because it is done for the benefit of His servant, man, al-Ghazālī then proceeds to take the argument further by asserting that not only can God impose any obligation He wants on man without any reason, but that God may even impose obligations upon man greater than he can bear or is capable of achieving. He says:

Contrary to the Mu'tazilah, God may impose obligations upon the servants which are beyond their ability. For were it not so, it would be impossible for them to pray to Him not to impose on them; and they did in fact pray to Him saying : Our Lord, do not Thou burden us beyond what we have strength to bear¹. Also God most high informed His prophet(God bless him and save him) that Abū Jahl would not believe him, and then He commanded the prophet to call Abū Jahl to believe all God's words which included the [prediction] of Abū Jahl's disbelief. How then could he believe Him by not believing ? Is this [proposition] anything but impossible to conceive?²

Thus for al-Ghazālī, not only does God impose obligations on men for no reason except by God's command (*'amr*), but He, God, may impose obligation on man, even beyond man's ability to comply.

If, for al-Ghazālī, God can impose obligations upon man for no reason even beyond man's ability to comply, God can do with man as He pleases. For al-Ghazālī, God can do with man as He pleases even to the extent of

¹Qur'ān, Surah 2:286. In order to support his position on this matter, al-Ghazālī turns a blind eye to the continuing passage of the same Quranic verse, Qur'an 2:286, which says, " God charges no soul save to its capacity". This section of the verse seems to oppose his position.

²Ihyā 133, Tibawi, 113. See also al-Iqtisād 180.

inflicting pain on His creatures or tormenting them for no previous offences, or not to reward them at all. Al-Ghazālī says:

Contrary to the Mu'tazilah, God (to whom glory and majesty belong) may inflict pain on His creatures or torment them for no previous offence or subsequent reward. For He has absolute control over [His creatures in] dominion (*malakihi*), and any dominion outside it is inconceivable for His control to embrace it. Thus, injustice, which is the disposal of what belongs to others without permission, is impossible for God Most High, for He encounters no possessions of others besides Him so that His disposal of these possessions could be injustice.....Thus the slaughter of animals, and the various kinds of torture they suffer at the hands of man, is for no previous offence that they committed. If it is said that God will reward such animals in the next world for what they had suffered, and that this was incumbent upon Him, we would reply as follows: He would go beyond the bounds of religious law and reason who would maintain that it is incumbent upon God to bring back to life every ant killed under the feet, and every bug crushed between the fingers, in order to reward it for its suffering¹.

Thus, for al-Ghazālī, God can impose any kind of obligation upon man but at the same time there is not, and cannot, be any obligation upon God. God is free to do whatever He pleases. There cannot be even the slightest hint of obligation upon God because that would curtail His will and power. Al-Ghazālī's debate against the Mu'tazilites must be seen in context, where al-Ghazālī sees himself as the defender of God, the defender of God's Power and Will against the Mu'tazilites, who seem to want to usurp God's power and will by curtailing God's ability to act in anyway He pleases.

In the light of many of al-Ghazālī's works in which ethics² is the major theme, if not the central theme, it seems difficult to understand al-Ghazālī's vehement attacks on the Mu'tazilites' understanding of right and

¹*Ihyā*, 133, Tibawi, 113-4. See also *al-Iqtisād*, 182-3.

²In W. Montgomery Watt's introduction to Muhammad Abul Quasem's book, *The Ethics of al-Ghazālī: A Composite Ethics in Islam*, (Selangor, Malaysia, 1971), Watt so aptly points out that 'Muslim scholars did in fact discuss ethical problems but did so as part of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence)'. He should, however, have included that their perceptions on theology also have some bearing on their concept of ethics. These differing perceptions do not necessarily mean differing ethical actions but the perception of what these ethical actions mean to the individual.

wrong, rewards and punishment which constitute key elements in motivating people to act ethically. For al-Ghazālī, God is All Powerful, All Willing. There cannot be even the slightest hint that God must do anything or must act in a certain manner. Any hint that He must do certain things, act in a certain manner, implies obligation. It is impossible that there can be any obligation on God.

It appears that al-Ghazālī seems to have failed to understand or missed the point that God may impose obligations upon Himself in al-Ghazālī's all blinding quest to defend and establish God's absolute power and will. God's revelation, i.e. in the Muslim context, the Qur'ān, describes over and over again man's obligations to God but at the same time informs man of God's promises to man. It could be argued that it is God who promises to reward man. It is God who threatens to punish man. It is God who imposes upon Himself to undertake these obligations. I am sure al-Ghazālī would agree with me that God is all knowing, and certainly God is not a liar. Therefore, when God made those promises and threats to man, He knew what He was doing, and that He knew He would fulfil His promises and threats as He knows the past, the present and the future. It is God who imposes upon Himself to act in a certain manner. Thus, it seems difficult to come to terms with al-Ghazālī's insistence that, since God is All Powerful and All Willing and therefore can act in any manner He wishes, God does not have any obligation which He has imposed upon Himself, and does not have to fulfil either the promises or the threats which He has made.

Challenging the Philosophers

Al-Ghazālī's vehement attacks on the philosophers can also be seen in the context of al-Ghazālī defending God. The philosophers' concept of the nature of God, and the ways in which God is made known to His creations, have serious religious implications. For the purpose of this discussion, however, we will deal only with those ideas held by the philosophers which have relevance to our discussion on revelation. Thus, we will be restricting our discussion to the philosophers' concept of the nature of God in the relationship of God as the agent and maker of the world, God's knowledge and how He knows, and finally, how He is made known to His creation.

Before we proceed to deal with al-Ghazālī's objections to the philosophers concerning issues surrounding revelation, let us first look at al-Ghazālī's approach to the study of philosophy. Ultimately, his study of philosophy led him to conclude that philosophy cannot lead to certainty of truth, that it has misled its adherents with false claims and that acceptance of their false doctrines is based upon authority (*taqlīd*) and has grave implications on their doctrine on religion.¹

¹al-Ghazālī, al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl, ed., 'Abd-al-Mun'im, (Damascus, 1994), translated into English by Richard McCarthy under the title, Freedom and Fulfillment : An Annotated Translation of al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazzālī, (Boston, 1980). 67-96. In future, referred to as simply, al-Munqidh (Arabic text page), McCarthy (translation page). For further references on other translations of the Munqidh, see *ibid.* xxv. It is interesting to note that al-Ghazālī points out that once one abandons servile conformism (*taqlīd*), the danger is that there is no turning back to that complacency and certainty that conformism brings about. Al-Ghazālī says, " For there can be no desire to return to servile conformism once it has been abandoned, since a prerequisite for being a servile conformist is that one does not know himself to be such. But when a man recognizes that, the glass of his servile conformism is shattered-an irreparable fragmentation". al-Munqidh 47. McCarthy, 67.

In his spiritual autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, al-Ghazālī recognized only four groups in seeking out truth. These four groups comprise the theologians, Bāṭinīyah, philosophers and Sufis. Al-Ghazālī says:

I was of the view that the categories of those seeking the truth were limited to four groups:

1. the *mutakallimūn* (theologians), who allege that they are men of independent judgement and reasoning.
2. the *bāṭinītes*, who claim to be the unique possessors of *al-ta'līm* (the charismatic teachings of the infallible and impeccable Imam) and the privileged recipients of knowledge acquired from the Infallible Imām;
3. the philosophers (*falāsifa*) who maintain that they are men of logic and apodeictic reasoning demonstration (*al-burḥan*);
4. the *sufis*, who claim to be the familiars of the Divine Presence and the men of mystic vision and illumination.

I then said to myself: 'The truth cannot transcend these four categories, for these are the men who are the following the path of the quest for the truth. Hence, if truth eludes them, there remains no hope of ever attaining it.'¹

Al-Ghazālī's insistence that the truth must be found only among these four groups, the *mutakallimūn* (theologians), the *bāṭinītes*, the philosophers (*falāsifa*), or the *sufis*, poses an interesting question on why he did not consider a fifth group, those who would follow only the Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*.

In *al-Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī states that he had studied philosophy by 'private study without the help of an instructor'² and had spent two years in studying philosophy and another year in reflection on the problems in philosophy³ until he had 'become so familiar with the measure of its deceit and deception, and its precision and delusions, that I had no doubt of my thorough grasp of it'.⁴ Al-Ghazālī also states that the reason for taking up a serious study of philosophy is because he saw 'not a single Muslim divine

¹*al-Munqidh*, 47. McCarthy, 67.

²*al-Munqidh*, 51. McCarthy, 70.

³*al-Munqidh*, 51. McCarthy, 70.

⁴*al-Munqidh*, 51. McCarthy, 70.

('alīm) had directed his attention and endeavor to that end [the study of philosophy]'.¹ Thus, the 'ulamā's reply to the challenges of philosophy had been 'so plainly erroneous and inconsistent that no person of ordinary intelligence would be likely deceived, far less one versed in the sciences'.² Therefore, al-Ghazālī undertook the study of philosophy in order to expose its deceptions and confusion.

Al-Ghazālī's method of study was that one had to first try to understand a subject as its exponents understood it and only then evaluate and give a critique of it.³ Applying this method, he first wrote the *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*⁴ which is a work describing the methods and doctrines of the philosophers. This work is a summary of philosophy based on Avicenna's *Danishnāma-yi-alāi* (The Book of Science dedicated to 'Alā al-Dawlah).⁵ Immediately following the *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, al-Ghazālī wrote the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* in order to refute the doctrines of the philosophers. Then he wrote the *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-islām wa al-zandaqa* (The Decisive Criterion for distinguishing Islam from Heresy),⁶ providing legal arguments for condemning the philosophers for infidelity (*takfīr*).⁷

¹al-Munqidh, 50. McCarthy, 70.

²al-Munqidh, 51 McCarthy, 70.

³Al-Ghazālī claims that the best way to understand something under study is firstly to understand it as its exponents understood it and only then go beyond this understanding of the exponents in probing the difficulties, problems and weaknesses of the subject. (al-Munqidh, 51. McCarthy, 71.). I believe that this is an admirable method of study. One should always try to understand and appreciate a subject as understood by its' exponents first before making any evaluation. However, this method is seldom used by the 'ulamā of the past and many in the present who seem to have some obsessive fear that if they were to present the ideas of their opponents well, then their readers would be unduly influenced by these ideas before they had a chance to read their rebuttal of them. Thus, they resort to writing oversimplified ideas about their opponents and therefore fail to convince anyone of the importance of the challenge their opponents pose and of their own critiques of them.

⁴Maqāṣid al-falāsifa, (Cairo: al-Maṭbah al-Muhammadiyah, 1936).

⁵Osman Bakar, Classification of Knowledge in Islam, (Malaysia, 1992). 160.

⁶al-Ghazālī, Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-islām wa al-zandaqa (ed.) Sulayman Dunya, (Cairo, 1961), translated into English by Richard McCarthy as "Appendix 1 " in Freedom and Fulfillment, (Boston: G. K Hall and Co. 1980). Furthermore referred to simply as Fayṣal (Arabic text), McCarthy, (translation page).

⁷Fayṣal 197, McCarthy, 164.

Al-Ghazālī's encounter with philosophy was not all negative however. He approved of the study of the philosophical sciences of mathematics (*riyāḍiyāt*) which included arithmetic and geometry,¹ and natural sciences or physics (*ṭabī'iyya*) but with some reservation.² He claims the politics (*siyāsiyya*) of the philosophers were based on borrowings from 'the scriptures to the prophets by God Most high and from the maxims handed down from the predecessors of the prophets'³ and their ethics (*al-khaliqiyya*) 'this they simply took over from the saying of the Sufis'.⁴ Logic (*al-mantiqiyya*) is the subject vigorously approved of⁵ and positively encouraged.⁶

The large number of works that al-Ghazālī wrote on philosophy showed his great fascination with philosophy. His strong negative concerns were displayed in al-Ghazālī's works, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* and the *Fayṣal*, where he charged the philosophers with infidelity (*takfīr*) for holding certain doctrines. In *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, al-Ghazālī enumerated twenty objections⁷ against the philosophers heretical doctrines for which they must be exposed and against which the Muslim masses must be warned.⁸ The

¹al-Munqidh, 56-58. McCarthy, 72-4.

²al-Munqidh, 57. McCarthy, 73-4.

³al-Munqidh, 61. McCarthy, 77. McCarthy translates the Arabic term *salaf al-anbiyā'* as predecessors of the prophets. I think it would be less confusing if he himself had accepted his own suggestion in his footnote 111 on this matter that "the translation "the ancient prophets" may be better." al-Munqidh, McCarthy, 130.

⁴al-Munqidh, 61. McCarthy, 77.

⁵Al-Ghazālī did not consider that the philosophers were the first and only ones to use or introduce the study of logic (*mantiq*). He says:

"The philosophers have changed its name to logic to make it look formidable. We often called it the Book of Disputation or the Data of the Intellects. When a gullible enthusiast hears the word 'Logic', he thinks that it is a new subject unknown to the mutakallimun and cultivated by the philosophers alone. (Tahāfut al-falāsifa 85, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 10).

⁶Al-Ghazālī wrote three works on logic using the philosophers' terminology. These works are; 1) First part of the Maqāsid al-Falāsifa, 2) Mi'yar al-'Ilm (The Standard of Knowledge), 3) Mihakk al-Nazar fi'l-mantiq (The Touchstone of Logical Thinking)

⁷For the list of twenty objections, see Tahāfut al-falāsifa 86-7. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 11-2.

⁸One of the main reasons that al-Ghazālī wrote Tahāfut al-falāsifa is in order to discredit the philosophers in front of the masses. Al-Ghazālī says, "Let it be

style of writing in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* is dialectic. Al-Ghazālī argues against the philosophers with the aim 'of exposing the incoherence and contradiction in philosophical thought'¹ using the philosophical method of logic with the intention of proving its limitation and exposing the philosophers' metaphysical claims as flawed and plagued with inconsistencies precisely because when 'in metaphysics, they finally come to discuss questions touching on religion, they cannot satisfy those conditions (which they lay down in logic), but rather are extremely slipshod in applying them'.² To strengthen his assertion, al-Ghazālī points to the results of the philosophers' metaphysical questioning, 'owing to the fact that they could not carry out apodeictic demonstration according to the conditions that they have postulated in logic, they differ a great deal about metaphysical questions'.³

The seriousness of al-Ghazālī's attacks on the philosophers is clearly evident when out of the twenty objections that al-Ghazālī raised against the philosophers' doctrines in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, he declared that believing in three of these doctrines was tantamount to infidelity (*takfīr*).⁴ These three doctrines are; the eternity of the world; God's ignorance of the particulars; and the denial of the bodily resurrection.⁵ For acceptance of the rest of the seventeen objections, he charges them with heresy (*bid'a*).⁶

All twenty objections that al-Ghazālī raised in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* were concerned with the philosophers' concept of God and His relationship to

known that it is our purpose to disillusion those who think too highly of the philosophers and consider them to be infallible". (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa* 82, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 8)

¹*Tahāfut al-falāsifa* 82, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 8.

²*al-Munqidh*, 58. McCarthy, 75.

³*al-Munqidh*, 59. McCarthy, 76.

⁴The charging of the philosophers with infidelity is a legal pronouncement with grave legal implications. In the *Faysal* al-Ghazālī explains these legal implications by saying "taxing with infidelity is a legal qualification which comes down to declaring the licitness of (the confiscation of) goods and the shedding of blood and the sentence of eternity in the Fire". (*Faysal*, McCarthy, 164.)

⁵*al-Munqidh*, 61. McCarthy, 76-7.

⁶*al-Munqidh*, 61. McCarthy, 77.

His creation. It is not within the scope of this study here to go through and evaluate each objection that al-Ghazālī raised against the philosophers.¹ Rather, we will focus our attention on al-Ghazālī's arguments concerning God's nature as agent and maker of the world, God's knowledge of particulars and how He is made known to His creation i.e. through His prophets.

Al-Ghazālī strongly protested against the philosophers' concept of God as agent and maker of the world. The philosophers' concept of God and how He creates was derived from their acceptance of the monistic Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation.² The monistic Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation explains creation as all being derived from God at the end of the process of emanation. The philosophers' concept of creation can be basically described by summarising al-Fārābī's explanation of the process of emanation. The First Cause (God), the deity, stands at the head of the universe and above the movers of the spheres. From the First Cause, a first incorporeal intelligence "emanates" (*yufīḍu*) eternally. The first intelligence has two thoughts, a thought of the First and a thought of its own essence. By the virtue of the former thought, the existence of a second intelligence "proceeds necessarily" (*yalzamu*), and by virtue of the latter, the existence of the first sphere "proceeds necessarily". The second intelligence similarly has a thought of the First Cause of the universe and of its own essence. It thereby eternally brings forth the existence of the third intelligence and of the second sphere, and the process continues down to the tenth intelligence from which emanates the ninth sphere, the sphere of the moon.³

¹For a philosopher's response to al-Ghazālī's objections to the philosophers, Ibn Rushd wrote four books which are; Faṣl al-Maqāl, Damīmat al-'Ilm al-Ilāhī, al-Kashf 'an Manāhij al-Adillah and Tahāfut al-Tahāfut.

²Fazlur Rahman, Islam (Chicago, 1979), 118. In accepting the monistic Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation for creation, the philosophers consciously chose this doctrine over the Aristotelian explanation of the world and discarded the Aristotelian theory of dualism between God and Matter i.e. the world.

³A summary of al-Fārābī's explanation of the creation of the universe as he described it in his work Al-Madīna al Fāḍila, translated into English by

The philosophers' concept of how God creates was totally unacceptable to al-Ghazālī. The implications of this concept for al-Ghazālī was that God did not act out of His will and power but everything, i.e. creation necessarily emanates (*fayḍ*), overflows from Him. The result is a God who has an impersonal relationship to His creation, whereas the relationship al-Ghazālī had sought to establish is that of a personal God, acting as an agent with total freewill and power over His creation.

Al-Ghazālī describes the philosophers' position on God's nature as agent by saying:

All the philosophers agreed that the world has a maker: that God is the maker or agent of the world, and the world is His action or product. But this is a dishonest distortion of their principles.....The reason which is to be found in the nature of the agent is that it is necessary for an agent to have the will for action: to have free choice, and to know what he wills. But, according to the philosophers, God has no will. Nay, He has no attribute at all. Whatever proceeds from Him is a necessary consequence.¹

For al-Ghazālī, the result of the philosophers' concept of creation resulting from the necessary emanation from God denudes God of the will to act by choice.

Al-Ghazālī then proceeds to answer the philosophers' claim that creation proceeds necessarily from God by arguing as follows:

An agent is he from whom an action proceeds because of the will for action: by way of free choice, and alongside the knowledge of what is willed. But in your (philosophers) view the world bears the same relation to God as an effect to its cause. So it follows from Him by way of necessary causation. And, therefore it is inconceivable that God should have been able to avoid His action, even as the shadow is unavoidable to a person or light to the sun.²

Richard Walzer under the title, Al-Farabi on the Perfect State, (Oxford, 1985), 100-105.

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa 134, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 63.

²Tahāfut al-falāsifa 135, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 64.

What al-Ghazālī is trying to achieve here is to substitute the philosophers' concept of a God who is a passive participant, acting necessarily, unable to change or choose His own actions with an active God choosing His own actions, acting voluntarily out of His own will and power.

Al-Ghazālī also objected to the philosophers' concept that God knows only universals.¹ For al-Ghazālī, this understanding that God knows universals has a direct implication on God knowing individual prophets and their individual messages. Al-Ghazālī states the position of the philosophers as follows:

They (philosophers) are all agreed on this. Those who believe that God knows nothing but Himself are obviously committed to it. But even those who hold that He (God) knows the other- the position adopted by Ibn Sīnā - assert that He knows things by a universal knowledge which does not fall under Time and does not change through the Past, the Present and the Future. And in spite of this, it is asserted (by Ibn Sīnā who represents the latter) that "nothing - not even as much as a particle of dust, in the heavens, or on the earth- is hidden from His knowledge"- only that He knows the particulars in a universal manner.²

The result of the philosophers' concept that God knows universals as understood by al-Ghazālī is that God does not know particulars. The philosophers never said that God did not know particulars, for that would lead to an inconceivable conclusion that God only knew certain things and not others and therefore He cannot be omniscient. What the philosophers meant by saying that God knows through universal knowledge does not necessarily mean that God knows only universals but that he knows everything through the means of His universal knowledge³. However, al-Ghazālī seems to have

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa 207, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 153. For the philosophers, God knows universals because as Fazlur Rahman aptly explains, "in light of the Greek theories of Aristotle and Plotinus, it was impossible that God should know particulars: He could cognize only universals since a cognition of particulars would introduce change in the Divine Mind both in the sense of a temporal succession and a change of different objects." Islam, 18.

²Tahāfut al-falāsifa 207, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 153.

³Fazlur Rahman summarises Ibn Sīnā's position on God's knowledge by saying: "Avicenna devised a clever theory which would do justice both to the

misunderstood or misconstrued this and to have taken this concept to mean limiting God's knowledge. The philosophers' concept that God knows universals, for al-Ghazālī, would result in, for example, that while God knows the particular class of men called prophets, God does not know the details of the individual prophets. Al-Ghazālī says:

They (philosophers) are bound to say that Muhammad (may God bless him and grant him peace) proclaimed his prophecy, while God did not know that he had done so. And the same will be true of every other prophet, for God only knows that among men there are some who proclaim prophecy, and that such and such are their attributes; but He cannot know a particular prophet as an individual, for that is to be known by the senses alone. Nor can He know the circumstances arising out of an individual's particular character. For such circumstances are divisible in time which measures his particular person. And the apprehension of those circumstances in all their diversity necessitates change in the cognisant being.¹

Al-Ghazālī concludes that the acceptance of the philosophers' concept that God knows universals would result into accepting that God does not know the particular prophets sent to a particular people and thus it would necessarily follow that the prophet could not be sent with an individual message for a particular people, in a particular situation, at a specific time.

Al-Ghazālī objected to the philosophers' concept of how the prophet receives revelation. The philosophers' concept of how the prophet receives revelation was coloured and shaped by their all pervading doctrine of

demands of religion and the requisites of his philosophy. God, according to this theory, knew all the particulars since He, being the ultimate cause of all things, necessarily knew the whole causal process. Thus, God knew from eternity that, for example, a solar eclipse would occur, with all its particular characteristics, at a particular point of the causal process. This type of knowledge would require no change in the Divine knowledge since it removes the necessity of perceptual knowledge which occurs at a definite time and place". *Islam*, 118. For a more detailed discussion on how for Avicenna, God does have knowledge of the particulars, refer to, Michael Marmura, "Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol LXXI (1962). 292-312. And see also, Fazlur Rahman, "Avicenna and Orthodox Islam: An Interpretative Note on the Composition of His System", in, *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee*, vol 2 (Jerusalem: American Academy for Jewish Research: 1965). 667-676.

¹*Tahāfut al-falāsifa* 211-2, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 156.

emanation. Through this process of emanation, God does not create actively but is a passive participant, because everything is derived from Him through a process of emanation or overflowing from Him.¹ Through this process of emanation, the end results in the creation of ten intelligences and nine spheres.² The lowest of the ten intelligences is known as the Active Intelligence, which al-Fārābī equates with *al-rūḥ al-amīn* or *al-rūḥ al-quḍus*, the angel of revelation.³ According to the philosophers, the process of the Active Intelligence emanating eternally into the human intellect and passing through it into the imaginative faculty transforms the theoretical knowledge in the human intellect through the use of his imaginative faculty into symbols. The Active Intelligence emanating eternally on unique and rare individuals, prophets, who possess the perfection of the intellect and a fully developed imaginative faculty, transforms the knowledge in their intellect, by utilising their imaginative faculty, into symbols, for all to understand.⁴ The result of this is revelation. Under the influence of the Active Intelligence, the prophets are able sometimes to see present and future events as they really are.⁵

Al-Ghazālī explains the philosophers' understanding of this process by the following exposition of their argument:

In this way a prophet (*nabī*) has a glimpse into the Hidden world. The psychic powers (*al-quwwa al-nafsiyya al-nubūwiyya*) are so high that the outward senses do not submerge them. It is for this reason that he sees in the waking life what others see only in dreams. Even in the case of the prophet, the imaginative faculty represents through symbols what is seen. Sometimes the actual thing remains in his memory; at others, it is a symbol of it which remains. Therefore this kind of inspiration (*al-wahy*) requires to be interpreted, even as dreams require interpretation. If all that is

¹Al-Madīna al-Fādila, Walzer, 100-5.

²Al-Madīna al-Fādila, Walzer, 104-5.

³al-Fārābī's The Political Regime (al-Siyāsa al Madaniyya), Arabic text, edited with Introduction and Notes by , Fauzi Najjar, (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1964) 32.

⁴Al-Madīna al-Fādila, Walzer, 240-1.

⁵Al-Madīna al-Fādila, Walzer, 224-5.

to be did not exist in the Preserved Tablet, the prophets could not know the Hidden things in dreams or in waking life.¹

Al-Ghazālī, however, fails to see why the philosophers felt it necessary to construct such an elaborate theory of revelation which he felt cannot be proven or substantiated. Rather, al-Ghazālī argues that the philosophers should accept that it 'is possible that the prophets know such things because they have been disclosed to them by God or the angels'.² Al-Ghazālī then continues to undermine the philosophers' theory of revelation by asserting that they, the philosophers, provide no proof for holding this theory. Al-Ghazālī says:

Therefore all that you have described (the philosophers' theory of revelation) is superfluous; there is no argument to prove it . Nor can you advance an argument to prove things like the Preserved Tablet and the Pen....The meaning that you have given to these things is not recognised by the followers of the Sacred Law. Since it is not open to you to approach these things from the point of view of that Law, all that remains to you is to take the rational point of view. But even if the possibility of all that you have mentioned is taken for granted, still its existence cannot be known and its reality cannot be verified. The source of these things is the Sacred Law, not reason.³

After undermining the philosophers' theory of revelation, al-Ghazālī proceeds to attack the philosophers' limited acceptance of miracles. The philosophers accept the possibility of what they consider to be the miracles of the prophet but for al-Ghazālī they do not go far enough. Al-Ghazālī provides us with the philosophers' explanation which limits the possibility of miracle in the following analysis of their views :

This faculty (practical faculty of the soul) develops to such an extent that physical things can be influenced and controlled by it. For example, when our soul imagines something, the limbs

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 229. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 175

²Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 229. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 176

³Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 229. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 176.

and their faculties serve it, moving towards the direction imagined to be desirable.....Therefore, it is not improbable that the power of a soul should be so great that the physical forces outside its own body should serve it.....If, therefore, the physical parts of its own body can obey the soul, it will not be impossible for such parts outside the body to do the same.¹

Thus, the philosophers explain the prophet's miracles through the power of his mind itself which can affect not only his own body but transcends his physical self and affect the physical forces outside his body.

However, the philosophers limited this form of miracles to the capacity of the natural physical forces. Al-Ghazālī cites the philosophers' explanation as follows:

When a man's soul contemplates the blowing of the wind; the falling of the rains; the gathering of the thunderbolt or the trembling of the Earth, which are all natural phenomena whose occurrence depends on the appearance of heat or cold or motion in air-then such heat or cold appears in the soul, and these phenomena arise therefrom, although no perceptible physical cause is present. This is the miracle of the prophet. But such a thing is bound to occur in the air which is prepared to receive it. It is not possible for the miracle to go to such an extent as to transform a piece of wood into an animal, or to split the Moon which is incapable of being split.²

Thus, the philosophers are able to accept the prophet's miracles such as causing the blowing of winds and earthquakes because they are natural phenomena which the prophet's mind is able to manipulate. But they deny the possibility of the prophet's miracles of transforming wood into an animal or splitting the Moon because this is not a possible manipulation of natural phenomena.

Al-Ghazālī condemns the philosophers for their limited acceptance of miracles. His main objection is because by their acceptance of limited miracles, the philosophers are qualifying the idea that God has power over

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 237-8. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 183-4.

²Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 238. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 184.

everything¹. Again, here we see al-Ghazālī attacking the philosophers in the defence of God's power. In order to establish God's absolute power, al-Ghazālī denies natural causation. He tries to show that neither observation nor reason can prove necessary causation in nature.² To prove his point al-Ghazālī says:

They (the events) are connected as a result of the Decree of God (holy be His name), which preceded their existence. If one follows the other, it is because He has created them in that fashion, not because the connection in itself is necessary and indissoluble. He has the power to create the satisfaction of hunger without eating, or death without the severance of the head, or even the survival of life when the head has been cut off.....³

Al-Ghazālī's denial of necessary causation does not mean there will be chaos and that whatever could happen would occur. The philosophers accuse al-Ghazālī of rejecting necessary causation and thus positing a world of total chaos. Al-Ghazālī reports the philosophers' accusation:

One who has left a book in his house might return to find it transformed into a slave boy, intelligent and resourceful; or into an animal.⁴

Al-Ghazālī counters the philosophers' accusations by stating that God is able to allow this to happen and it is possible that these things may happen, but " God has created for us the knowledge that He would not do these things, although, they are possible. We have never asserted that they are necessary."⁵ Does al-Ghazālī imply here that for all practical purposes God will not change the nature of things as we understand them till the end of time even though it is not necessary for Him to do so. If this is so, then, we should for all practical

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 244-5. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 189.

²For al-Ghazālī's complete argument against necessary causation, see; chapter 17 of the Tahāfut al-falāsifah entitled: *Refutation of Their Belief in the Impossibility of a Departure from the Natural course of Events*. Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 239-251. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 185-96.

³Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 239 Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 185.

⁴Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 244. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 189.

⁵Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 244. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 189.

purposes accept the idea that all things work on the principles of cause and effect, for if not, we would not have any knowledge of how things work. However, al-Ghazālī would never accept such a conclusion. Thus, it is difficult to comprehend what he actually means here.

Al-Ghazālī concludes his debate with the philosophers by pointing out the great damage they have done, destroying the glory and greatness of God and calling upon them to repent and give up their investigations and accept the prophet as the final authority in these matters and not their intellect. Al-Ghazālī accuses the philosophers' investigations of resulting in a great injustice to God. Al-Ghazālī says:

The final results of their investigations into the Divine Glory is that they have destroyed all that Glory signifies. They have made His condition comparable to that of a dead man who has no awareness of what goes on in the world - the only difference between Him and a dead man being that He knows Himself.¹

Al-Ghazālī then proceeds to call upon the philosophers to give up their misguided faith in their intellects and turn to the prophets and follow them. He says:

Therefore, let us accept the authority of the prophets in regard to the fundamentals of these things. Let us submit to that authority for reasons have not been able to contradict it. Let us give up the inquiry concerning the 'Why?' and "How much" and 'What'. For these are things beyond the power of man.²

Al-Ghazālī's encounter with the philosophers is difficult to evaluate. Al-Ghazālī attempts to test and undermine the claims of the philosophers using their own yardstick, the yardstick of logic. He seems rather successful in casting doubts on the certainty of the philosophers' metaphysical claims.

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 148. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 80.

²Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 154. Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 88.

However, in his quest to debunk the philosophers, he provides very little if any of his own thoughts or more importantly, an alternative explanation.

The philosophers had been trapped in the eternal problem of a God who does not change but at the same time creates everything. The philosophers devised an elaborate explanation in order to enable God to create everything and yet at the same time He does not change one iota. For the philosophers, change meant change for the better or worse and this was either an increase or decrease in God's perfection. This was totally unacceptable to them because God is perfection and perfection can never change. Even the slightest hint of change implies that God is imperfect, a totally blasphemous conclusion. Therefore, the philosophers saw it as their duty to defend the position that God does not change in order to establish His perfection, but at the same time He creates the world, knows about everything, past, present and future in every detail and is made known to His creation. This difficult balancing act resulted in the philosophers devising the theory of creation through emanation, in which God creates the world but without any change. God knowing everything, past, present and future to every single particular detail without changing is made possible because He knows through universals from eternity. God is made known to His creation through the eternal emanation of the Active Intelligence on the prophetic intellect. Again this is devised to make God known to man without God actively acting to inform him. The results of the philosophers' defence of God's perfection is to create an impersonal God, stripped of any voluntary action of will, a God totally absorbed in Himself and not concerned with His creation, a God who does not actively participate, interfere and provide assistance and succour in the lives and fate of His creation, but passively affects everything through emanation.

Al-Ghazālī instead saw his task in challenging the philosophers also as defence of God, but particularly here as a defence of God's Will and Power.

Thus, what al-Ghazālī wants to achieve here is to substitute the philosophers' impersonal, passive God with a vibrant God who acts voluntarily out of His own will, and is able to influence, shape and interfere in the daily lives and activities of His creation. Al-Ghazālī even denies necessary causation in order to establish God's absolute power over everything. God can create, change and shape anything and everything in any fashion without having to go through any steps or process of necessary causation. What al-Ghazālī wishes to establish is a God who acts and does as He wills with no limitations whatsoever.

Al-Ghazālī's Writings on Revelation: The Direct Approach

Al-Ghazālī's actual writings on revelation, as has been stated earlier in this chapter, are clearly not systematic and are scattered and at best described as either being discussed only in passing or as background information for other discussions. We will attempt here to give a fair representation of al-Ghazālī's writings on revelation. We will examine these writings by firstly reproducing them either in total or at least the parts which are directly relevant to our discussions on revelation. What we most desire to see here is how al-Ghazālī develops his concept of revelation and the implication of his concept of revelation. Therefore, instead of reproducing each and every sentence of al-Ghazālī's discussions on revelation here, we will present those aspects of al-Ghazālī's discussion on revelation which are more developed, and indicate how he shaped his concept of revelation.

The most important of al-Ghazālī's writings on this subject and a fair representation of his thoughts on this subject lie in his theological tracts, *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād* (*The Moderation in Belief*), *Kitāb al-'ilm* (*The Book of Knowledge*), which forms the first book of his *magnum opus*, *Iḥyā 'ulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of the Sciences of Religion*), and *al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*. All three of these works have been accepted as the works of al-Ghazālī. I will discuss these works in accordance with their chronological order. In examining them in their chronological order, we will be able to see the development of al-Ghazālī's concept of revelation.

Al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād

Al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād (*The Moderation in Belief*) is arguably al-Ghazālī's most important work on theology since it presents his own ideas, covering an extensive breadth of topics and most importantly, the presentation of well developed arguments. In *al-Iqtisād*, al-Ghazālī articulates a systematic exposition of the Islamic beliefs aimed at informing the Muslims what they must believe and as a defence against innovation (*bid'a*).

In *al-Iqtisād*, al-Ghazālī provides a very broad definition of theology. He defines theology as "the study of God".¹ This study of God comprises: 1. The fundamental (*dhāt*) nature of God; 2. attributes (*ṣifāt*) of God; 3. actions (*af'al*) of God; 4. the prophet of God and the revelation.² Richard Frank elaborates on this definition of *kalām* by saying:

The *kalām* does nonetheless articulate in analytical form what it sees as the essential and fundamental content of Islam's belief, constructing in the form of a dialectic discourse the speculative framework according to which it understands the rational content and coherence of the principles and elements of this belief. The original and originating problem for Islam, and so for the *kalām*, is that of the questions raised and implied in the texts of the revelation and the canonical tradition.³

The main method used by *kalām* for learning and research is disputation and argumentation (*munāẓara*).⁴ However, it would be a grave error to conclude that the method, disputation and argumentation, is the aim and end of *kalām*. This method of disputation and argumentation of *kalām*

¹*al-Iqtisād* 4. *Kalām* is also known as *ilm 'uṣūl ad-dīn*.

²*al-Iqtisād* 4.

³Richard Frank, "Kalam and Philosophy, A Perspective From One Problem", in Islamic Philosophical Theology, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979). 73.

⁴Richard Frank, "Kalam and Philosophy, A Perspective From One Problem", 72. See also Josef Van Ess, "The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology," in Logic in Classical Islamic Culture, ed. by Gustave von Grunebaum, (Wiesbaden, 1970). 24.

must rather be seen as a means to articulate, establish and defend the teachings of Islam. Al-Ghazālī explains the *raison d'être* of *kalām* as:

So God Most High raised up the group of the *mutakallimūn* and motivated them to champion orthodoxy by a systematic discussion designed to disclose the deceptions introduced by the contriving innovators contrary to the traditional orthodoxy. This gave rise to the science of *kalām* and its practitioners. A group of *mutakallimūn* did indeed perform the task assigned to them by God. They ably protected orthodoxy and defended the creed which had been readily accepted from the prophetic preaching and boldly counteracted the heretical innovations.¹

Al-Iqtisād is written in a manner which is formally bound to the conventions of the traditional (theological) manuals. Al-Ghazālī divides his *al-Iqtisād* into five parts. In the first part which is a long introduction, he discusses the importance of why *kalām* must be studied and who must study it. He divides the introduction into four sections. The four sections are, Section One: On the elucidating on importance of this knowledge (*kalām*) for religion²; Section two: On the elucidating that it (*kalām*) is not (to be studied) by all Muslims but only some of them (the Muslims), (who become) experts (*makhṣūṣīn*)³; Section three: In elucidating that it (the study of *kalām*) is a collective duty (*farḍu kifaya*)⁴ and not an individual duty (*farḍu*

¹*al-Munqidh*, 48, McCarthy, 68. Al-Ghazālī commended the intent of the *mutakallimūn* to articulate faith in defence against the innovators. However, he censured *kalām* methodology as limited and unable to arrive at sure and certain knowledge. He says, "Most of their polemic was devoted to bringing out the inconsistencies of their adversaries and criticising them for the logically absurd consequences of what they conceded. This, however, is of little use in the case of one who admits nothing at all except the primary and self-evident truths. So *kalām* was not sufficient in my case, nor was it a remedy for the malady of which I was complaining.....therefore, it (*kalām*) did not provide an effective means of dispelling entirely the darkness due to the bewilderment about the differences dividing men. I do not regard it as improbable that such may have been the result in the case of others. I do not even doubt that it has been the actual experience of a limited group of men, but in a way vitiated by servile conformism in some matters which are not among the primary truths". *al-Munqidh*, 48-9, McCarthy, 68-9.

²*al-Iqtisād*, 6-8.

³*al-Iqtisād*, 9-13.

⁴*Farḍu kifayah* means engaging in a collective duty. If there are some people in the community who have engaged and discharged this duty, it relieves the others in the community of the obligation to this duty. In this case, the

al-'ain)¹, Section four: On the detailed explanation of the stages of proof which I have presented in this book².

This long introduction serves to prepare the believer to recognise the importance and role that *kalām* plays in defence of the religion. The next three sections of the book is an exposition of the issues discussed in *kalām* which seeks to explain and provide proof; of the nature and essence of God³, (2) on the seven essential attributes of God⁴ and finally, God's actions⁵. The last section is divided into four chapters⁶, beginning with a chapter which is devoted to the affirmation of the truth of the prophecy of Muhammad, the message i.e. revelation he brings and its implications⁷. It is this chapter which we are mostly concerned with here.

(1) Revelation Defined

Al-Iqtisād deals with theological formulations and nowhere does it discuss the concept of revelation directly⁸. The closest it approaches to shedding any light on the questions raised by the concept of revelation is in the last part of the book, the part concerned with the affirmation of the prophecy of Muhammad and the message, i.e. the revelation he brought with him and its implications. In the last part of *al-Iqtisād*, al-Ghazālī argues for the

engaging in the study of *kalām*. Thus, there must be some experts in *kalām* in order to defend Islam but not everyone needs to be or can be an expert.

¹*al-Iqtisād*, 13-15.

²*al-Iqtisād*, 15-24.

³*al-Iqtisād*, 24-79.

⁴*al-Iqtisād*, 79-160.

⁵*al-Iqtisād*, 160-202.

⁶The four chapters are; 1: affirmation of the truth of the prophecy of Muhammad and the message i.e. revelation he brings and its implications, 2: On self-discipline, 3: On leadership (*al-Imāma*), 4: Elucidation on those who must be considered infidels (*takfīr*) from among the sects (*al-firaq*).

⁷*al-Iqtisād*, 202-210.

⁸We have already stated at the beginning of this chapter that there will be approaches to obtaining al-Ghazālī's concept of revelation, 1) direct approach- actual writing on the subject of revelation, and 2) indirect approach- analysing his theological positions which have bearing on the concept of revelation.

possibility of God sending prophets contrary to the Brahmans' assertions of the impossibility of prophecy, he provides proof of the prophecy of Muhammad, and affirms the revelations brought by the prophets.

It is in this last part of this work that al-Ghazālī provides some explanation of the role of revelation and reason. He says:

In elucidating the necessity of belief in matters brought by revelation (*shar'*)¹ and that which is considered possible by reason (*'aql*).... That which is not known by necessity (*ḍarūrī*)² is divided into: 1. what is known by proof (*dalīl*) of reason without revelation; and 2. what is known by revelation without reason; and 3. what is known through (the use) of both of them (revelation and reason).

Concerning the knowledge by the proof of the reason without revelation, it is that (knowledge) of the beginning of the world (*ḥudūth al-'ālām*)³, and (from this premise that the world is caused and thus created⁴, (therefore) the necessity of the Creator of the caused world, who necessarily possesses power (*qudra*), knowledge, and will. If all of that (the necessity of the Creator of the new world, who necessarily possesses power (*qudra*), knowledge, and will) is not affirmed (by reason), it (the necessity of the Creator of the

¹W. C. Smith explains and differentiates this term *shar'* from *sharī'a* by saying "Al-shar' is God ordaining that man shall act thus-and-so; al-sharī'a is the systematic formulation of the ordinances into an explicit (revealed) pattern or statement. Al-shar' is that by which man becomes morally obligated to act thus-and so; al-sharī'a is that by which man knows that he is obligated. Al-shar' is something that God does.....", W. C. Smith, "The Concept of Shari'a Among Some Mutakallimun", in Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honor of Hamilton A. R. Gibb, edited by George Makdisi (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965).598-9.

²*Darūrī* here means that knowledge which man knows as obvious, *vis à vis* the concept of axioms (*badīhiya*). Walzer explains this term *ḍarūrī* as "that which is given to man without any action on his part". Walzer (trans.), Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State: Abu Nasr al-Fārābī's, Mabādi' Arā Ahl al-Madīna al-Fādila, (Oxford 1985). 461.

³George Anawati, "Ḥudūth al-'Ālām" Encyclopaedia of Islam, 548. Anawati explains this term "ḥudūth is the *masdar* of *ḥadatha*, which signifies: (1) to appear, to arise, to have come into being recently; (2) to take place, to happen. With Muslim thinkers the term has two meanings: one denotes the existence of a thing, after its non-existence, in a temporal extension: this is al-ḥudūth al-zamānī... For the *mutakallimūn*, ḥudūth al-'ālam bears only the sense of a beginning in time".

⁴For further discussions on al-Ghazālī's arguments that the world is new and thus created, see, "Refutation of Their(Philosophers') Belief in the Eternity of the World", forming chapter 1 in Tahāfut al-falāsifa 89-123, Sabih Ahmad Kamali 13-53, Michael Marmura, "The Logical Role of the Argument From Time in the Tahāfut's Second Proof for the World's Pre-Eternity", The Muslim World, XLVIII, (1959). 306-314, George Hourani, The Dialogue Between al-Ghazālī and the Philosophers on the Origin of the World, " The Muslim World, XLVIII, (1958), 189-198.

new world, who necessarily possesses power (*qudra*), knowledge, and will) cannot be affirmed in revelation, because the revelation is based upon (God's) eternal speech (*kalām*)¹ If (God's) eternal speech (*kalām al-nafs*)² is not affirmed, revelation is not affirmed. For all that [the proof of] is preceding in ranking to (God's) eternal speech (*kalām al-nafs*), its proof is impossible by (God's) eternal speech (*kalām al-nafs*) and what is based on (God's) eternal speech (*kalām al-nafs*). In this same discussion³ also, in which we explain its (God's eternal speech), proof is not possible by revelation.⁴

Al-Ghazālī classifies here the instruments or means through which man knows. This classification of the means of knowledge given here is not meant to be exhaustive. From the above passage, al-Ghazālī recognises at least four means of obtaining knowledge; the first, by necessity (*ḍarūrī*); second, reason; third, revelation; and fourth a combination of both reason and revelation.

Without elaborating on the knowledge known through necessity (*ḍarūrī*), al-Ghazālī proceeds directly to discuss the second and third means of knowledge, that obtained by reason and that obtained by revelation. It is reason that al-Ghazālī uses to establish and lay the essential foundation which serves as a necessary stepping stone for obtaining any and all knowledge. Even the existence of revelation has to be first established by reason. Why

¹In this context, *kalām* not only means speech but the speech of God. Gardet explains the meaning of the term "*kalām*" by saying, "*kalām* in the sense of *kalām Allāh*, the Word of God, must be distinguished from; '*ilm al-kalām*, "defensive apologetics"[q.v.]' or "the science of discourse" (on God); and [q.v.] which, in the expression *kalima Allāh* means "a (single) divine utterance". Louis Gardet, "Kalām", Encyclopaedia of Islam (2nd. edition.).

²Fazlur Rahman explains this technical term *kalām al-nafs*. He says:

"The great leaders of the orthodoxy like Abū' al-Hasan al-Ash'arī and others, were then led to declare that "the Qur'ān as it is read and heard and seen is not the Word of God". They explicitly stated that the eternal Word of God is "a simple eternal, indivisible mental act of God (*kalām al-nafs*) of which the Qur'ān and other Revealed Books are the effects- the Qur'ān being the latest and final in the series of Revelations." Fazlur Rahman, "Divine Revelation and the Prophet (P. B. H.)", in Essays on Islam: Felicitation Volume in Honour of Dr. Muhammad Hamiddullah, ed. Hakim Mohammed Said, (Karachi, 1992). 106-7.

³It is most likely that al-Ghazālī here is referring to his previous discussion on an attribute of God; in the chapter on "The Seventh Attribute (of God): Speech (*kalām*). *al-Iqtisād*, 114-129

⁴*al-Iqtisād*, 210

does al-Ghazālī insist that we must first establish that existence of revelation by reason?¹ Before al-Ghazālī can prove the existence of revelation, he needs first to establish the existence of the sender of revelation, i.e. God. The means by which al-Ghazālī seeks to establish the existence of God is through the existence of the world. Al-Ghazālī says:

It is that (knowledge) of the beginning of the world, and (from this premise that the world is caused and thus created, (therefore) the necessity of the Creator of the caused world².

Anawati frames al-Ghazālī's argument in a syllogistic form as follows:

Every being that has a beginning in time (*ḥādith*) necessarily has a cause that brings it into existence.

Now the universe is a being that begins to exist.

Therefore: It necessarily has a cause (i.e. God)³

After establishing through the use of reason that God exists, by proving that He(God) is the creator of the world, the next step is to point out that the creator of the world must possess some attributes, obviously at least these attributes⁴, power, knowledge and will, for these attributes are absolutely necessary for creation. Al-Ghazālī must first establish the existence

¹One has to wonder who al-Ghazālī is addressing here. It is most likely that al-Ghazālī is trying to counter the Brahmans' objections to the possibility of prophecy. The Brahmans asserted that "the sending of prophets is impossible". *al-Iqtisād*, 195.

²*al-Iqtisād*, 210

³George Anawati, " Ḥudūth al-'Ālam", Encyclopaedia of Islam, 548. This form of syllogism is the syllogistic form of *modus ponens*.

P then Q

P

Therefore : Q

P {Every being that has a beginning in time(*ḥādith*)} then Q {necessarily has a cause that brings it into existence}.

Now P {the universe is a being that begins to exist}.

Therefore: Q {It necessarily has a cause(i.e God)}

⁴For a full discussion of al-Ghazālī's concept of the attributes of God, see his book, al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma'ānī asmā'.

of the sender of revelation i.e. God, before he can proceed to argue for the possibility of revelation i.e. the speech of God. It is with God's attribute of *kalām* that we are most concerned here. It is through this attribute of *kalām* that revelation is produced. In order to prove that God possesses the attribute of *kalām*, al-Ghazālī refers to the attribute of His creation, man. The principle al-Ghazālī applies here is that every perfection that is an attribute of the creation must necessarily exist with the Creator. He argues:

It is said either that (speech) is perfection or imperfection- or that it is neither imperfection nor perfection- but since it is absurd to say that it is not imperfection and/or neither perfection nor imperfection, it would be necessarily established that it is perfection. Therefore, every perfection [which can] exist in man necessarily exists in the Creator¹ as we pointed out above.²

After arguing that God possesses the attribute of speech, al-Ghazālī explains in chapter six of *al-Iqtisād: On the Seventh Attribute(of God): Concerning Speech*³, why it is important to affirm the speech of God i.e. revelation through the use of reason. He says:

If one attempts to affirm the divine speech (*kalām*) on the [the authority of] the consensus and/or on [the strength] of the Tradition of the Messenger, one would wrong oneself because the consensus leans on the Tradition of the Messenger; and if one denies the Benefactor's being speaking, one necessarily denies the concept of messengership since being a messenger means transmitting the message of the sender. If it is inconceivable that the one who asserts that he is a sender speaks, how could a messenger be conceived? We do not, for example, listen to one who tells of being the messenger of the earth or the mountain to us, because we believe in the

¹This principle that every perfection which is an attribute of man must necessarily exist in the Creator in Arabic is expressed by - *kullu kamālu wujūd li al-makhlūq fa huwa wājib li-wujūd al-khāliq*. I have modified Abdu-r-Rahman Abu Zayd's translation of the above principle in the quotation because it is unclear.

² The above English translation is from a partial translation of the *Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād* by , Abdu-r-Rahman Abu Zayd, *Al-Ghazālī On Divine Predicates and Their Properties*, (Karachi, 1974). In future, referred to as *al-Iqtisād* ,(Arabic text page), Abdu-r-Rahman Abu Zayd (translated page). *al-Iqtisād* , 115. Abdu-r-Rahman Abu Zayd. 48.

³*al-Iqtisād*, 114-129

impossibility of a speech or a messenger from either the mountain or the earth. To God alone is the highest ideal.

Whoever believes in the absurdity of attributing speech to God could not possibly believe in a messenger, because whoever deems the divine speech a lie would necessarily deny its transmission. The message is an expression of the transmission of speech and the messenger an expression of the transmitter.¹

For al-Ghazālī, the authority of the consensus (*al-ijmā'*) cannot affirm revelation because authority of the consensus is based on the strength of the tradition of the prophet (*bi-qaul al-rasūl*) which is dependent on the truth of the revelation. Thus, to try to affirm revelation through either the authority of consensus or the tradition of the prophet is a logical fallacy. Revelation must be affirmed by an instrument which is not dependent on revelation. For, al-Ghazālī that instrument is reason. Thus, al-Ghazālī makes great efforts to prove the possibility of revelation through using reason, thereby making reason the basis for the affirmation of revelation.

This demonstrates that al-Ghazālī recognises both revelation and reason as sources of knowledge. He explains that there are certain kinds of knowledge which are known through revelation alone, others by reason alone and there is also knowledge which is known through a combination of both sources, revelation and reason. He says:

Concerning the knowledge which is only based on revelation.... We know from God Most High through revelation (*wahy*) and inspiration (*ilhām*). We know from revelation by hearing (*bi-samā'*) concerning the Day of Resurrection, the reward and punishment and similar matters.²

The knowledge which can be known through revelation is, for example, the knowledge concerning the Day of Resurrection, the reward and punishment in the Hereafter. However illuminating these examples provided by al-Ghazālī of the knowledge obtainable only through revelation are, they still do not give

¹*al-Iqtisād*, 114-5. Abdu-r-Rahman Abu Zayd, 47-8.

²*al-Iqtisād*, 211.

us any discernible category of knowledge under which these types of knowledge fall , so that it will enable us to categorise what kinds of knowledge are known only through the means of revelation. For example, do we know right from wrong through revelation? Is it possible by knowing what actions are rewarded, and what are punished which are known only through revelation, that we may deduce from this what is right action and what is wrong action. From the above examples, it seems very difficult to answer this question. However, this issue of right or wrong may be better resolved by using al-Ghazālī's theological positions, especially on God's commands and actions.

Al-Ghazālī also states that we know God not only through revelation (*waḥy*) but also by inspiration (*ilhām*). Revelation and inspiration are means by which God makes himself known to man. Both revelation and inspiration are gifts of God to man, to whoever He wishes. Al-Ghazālī recognises that revelation and inspiration are two different sources of knowledge. However, he fails to tell us here from the perspective of what kinds of knowledge they give us how these two sources of knowledge are different. Do they provide us with the different kinds of knowledge or are they the same, complementary, but with different degrees of certainty?

Concerning the knowledge which can be known by reason alone, he bases it on knowledge of this world. By knowing the world is originated and therefore, created, we are able to deduce that it must have a creator. In order for the creator to create, He must possess power (*qudra*), knowledge, and will. Thus, we are also able to deduce that this creator has power (*qudra*), knowledge, and will. If we start from the premise that the world is created, we easily deduce that the creator has the power, knowledge and will which are prerequisites in order to create this world but can we deduce much more than that? Using this premise that the world is originated and thus created, can we by using reason arrive at, for example, the conclusion that

God must be one, all powerful, all knowing ? Is it then possible to build on these deductions a whole framework of what God is and therefore deduce a whole theology using reason? This seemingly simple premise that the world is originated and thus created, when utilised creatively and logically, and then pushed to its ultimate conclusions, may lead to some very interesting implications. However, al-Ghazālī's conclusion that reason can deduce from the world being new that it is created and therefore there must be a creator, who obviously must possess power, knowledge and will, takes this premise only one step forward. Al-Ghazālī does not take the trouble to elaborate the use of reason here, leaving instead a great deal to be desired.

Al-Ghazālī then proceeds to deal with the knowledge obtained through using both sources of knowledge, revelation and reason. He says:

Concerning knowledge through both (revelation and reason), it is within the scope of the reason and next (lower) in ranking to affirming the speech of God, like the problem of seeing of God, and (the fact that) God Most High alone creates all movements and accidents, and similar matters. Whatever revelation brings, reason must consider it. If reason considers it possible, the necessity of belief in it is definite. (Assuming) that the revelational proof is unmistakably in the text and it rests upon no other possible (interpretations).¹

Al-Ghazālī concludes the discussion on the role of reason here by setting it in judgement of revelation but only in terms of whether what revelation brings is possible. This is the only means by which reason can judge revelation. Al-Ghazālī here is only saying that revelation cannot and does not contradict reason. Reason stands in judgement of revelation only in terms of assessing what revelation brings as a possibility among other possibilities. If reason deems it possible, then reason must accept and assent to the demand of what revelation brings. The role of reason is limited to just making sure what revelation says is possible. It is not the role of reason to affirm nor deny revelation or even give rational reasons in support of it. However, al-Ghazālī

¹al-Iqtisād , 213.

makes a very interesting concession to reason. If reason deems that this particular statement of what revelation brings is impossible according to the standards set, I assume, by reason, then this revelation must be reinterpreted.

He says:

Concerning what reason considers impossible (*istiḥāla*), it is necessary to interpret what revelation (*sam'*) brings. It is inconceivable that revelation contains an unmistakable contradiction to reason. Most of the phenomena of prophetic reports (*ḥadith*, pl. *aḥadith*) on God's anthropomorphism are false. The true prophetic reports among these reports are not final but susceptible to interpretation.¹

Al-Ghazālī makes a similar argument for the interpretation of orally transmitted religious statements when they seem to contradict reason in - another work, *Fayṣal*. In *Fayṣal*, he provides examples to explain this point.

He says:

The second example is the saying of the Apostle-God's blessings and peace be upon him!-"God Most High leavened (*khammara*: here equivalent of "kneaded"-?) the clay of Adam with His hand for forty mornings." Thus he indeed affirmed of God Most High a hand. Now he who has solid apodeictic proof of the impossibility of God Most High's having a hand which is a sensible or imaginable member affirms that God-Praised be He!-has a spiritual and mental hand. I mean that he affirms the meaning and essence spirit of the hand, not its (physical) form.²

By comparing and contrasting al-Ghazālī's concepts of revelation and reason, we are better able to understand these concepts. However, discovering any coherent understanding of these concepts from al-Ghazālī's direct writings on these subjects in this theological tract is very difficult. From these scant discussions on these subjects in this book, we only can obtain a vague idea of al-Ghazālī's concept of revelation. It leaves us, however, with more questions than answers.

¹*al-Iqtisād*, 213.

²*Fayṣal*, 181-2. McCarthy, 154.

(2) Transmission of Revelation: How is Revelation Received?

In *al-Iqtisād*, al-Ghazālī states that revelation is given to prophets¹ with the mission of conveying this message to man. In this theological work, in relationship to his discussion of the attribute of speech of God (*kalām Allah*), al-Ghazālī rejects the philosophers' notion of how revelation is transmitted to the prophets. He summarises his understanding of the philosophers' notion of how revelation is transmitted to the prophets as follows:

The philosophers pushed ahead their analogy to "the will" (*irāda*) and as for the speech, they say He is speaking in the sense that He creates in the essence of the Prophet the hearing of the arranged sounds either in [the Prophet's sleep] or in his state of consciousness, and that these sounds would have no existence outside the essence. Rather [these sounds exist] in the hearing of the Prophet just as a sleeping person would see non-existent individuals though their forms occur in his mind (*dimāgh*). He also hears non-existent sounds which a person present [at the side] of a sleeping person does not hear while the person who is sleeping may hear [these sounds] and may become terrified and disturbed and [hence] awake frightened and alarmed. They [also] claim that if a prophet ranks high in prophecy (*'ālā al-rutba fī al-nubuwwa*), the purity of his soul leads to his seeing in his state of consciousness marvellous forms and he hears from harmonious sounds which he learns by heart while those around him hear and see nothing. By [these marvellous forms] they mean the vision of the angels and the hearing of the Qur'ān from them. But [he] who does not rank high in prophecy (*al-nubuwwa*) sees these [forms] only in [his] sleep. This is the gist of the doctrine of the misguided.²

Al-Ghazālī rejects the philosophers' concept of transmission of revelation which the philosophers argue occurs internally in the prophet's mind through God via the Active Intelligence acting on the prophet's intellect and this

¹*al-Iqtisād*, 195.

²*al-Iqtisād*, 130. Abdu-r-Rahman Abu Zayd, .65-6.

enlightenment is transformed by the prophet's imaginative faculty into the symbolic and metaphorical truths of revelation. Instead, al-Ghazālī affirms the traditional view that the Angel of Revelation appears physically in front of the prophet reciting to him verbally the verses of the Qur'ān¹.

His attacks directed against the philosophers' concept of the transmission of revelation to the prophet as occurring internally are aimed at establishing the otherness, objectivity and verbal character of the revelation. For al-Ghazālī, the philosophers' concept of the transmission of revelation to the prophet as occurring internally would result in the rejection of the divine law itself. Al-Ghazālī explains why this is the result if one accepts the transmission of the revelation to the prophet as occurring internally as follows:

As for the philosophers, they have fallen into contradictions concerning the attribute of speech. Their position is invalid from two positions: First, they say that God is speaking though they neither affirm the inner speech (*kalām al-nafs*) nor do they affirm the existence of sound externally. They, however, affirm the hearing of sounds which they hold are created in the ears of the Prophet, peace be upon him, without any external sounds. If it is permissible that He be described as speaking through that which occurs in the mind (*dimāgh*) of someone else [i.e. the Prophet's mind] it should be permissible that He be described as sound producing and moving through the existence of sound and motion in someone else, which is absurd.

Secondly, all that which they have mentioned is a rejection of the Divine Law (*sharī'a*) in total because what is perceived by a sleeping person is phantasm, not real. If the Prophet's knowledge of the Divine Speech is attributed to imagination which is like confused dreams, the Prophet would not trust it and it would not be knowledge.²

Al-Ghazālī's attacks, directed against the philosophers' concept of the transmission of revelation to the prophet as occurring internally, is aimed at establishing the traditional view that the Prophet received revelation through an external source in order to safeguard the purity, objectivity and verbal

¹*Ihyā*, 105, Nabh Amin Faris 234.

²*al-Iqtisād*, 137-8. Abdu-r-Rahman Abu Zayd, 73-4.

literalness of the revelation which ultimately affect how we perceive the divine law derived from the revelation.

(3) Prophets: The Medium of Revelation

In *al-Iqtisād*, al-Ghazālī does not discuss whether there are any pre-requisite qualifications for being a prophet. However, it would be inconceivable that he may accept an idiot or a person of unsound mind as a prophet. He does make a claim in the *Ihyā* that a prophet is one who possesses such an intellect that he requires no instruction from anyone except God. He is however, silent and does not discuss that issue in this work.

(4) The Mission of Prophecy : The Purpose of Revelation

After rejecting the Brahmans' assertions that prophecy is impossible and the Mu'tazilite position that prophecy is necessary for God, al-Ghazālī affirms the Ash'arite position that the sending of prophets by God is possible. A true prophet is confirmed by miracle. The mission of the prophet is to convey the revelation he receives to everyone. This mission ultimately points to the purpose of revelation itself. Since the purpose of prophecy is to convey the message of revelation, thus, conveying the content of the message of

revelation must be the purpose of revelation. We know from revelation by hearing (*bi-samā'*) concerning God, the Day of Resurrection, the reward and punishment and similar matters.¹ Al-Ghazālī accepts that we also know certain things about God through the use of reason, at the very least that God is the Creator of the created world possessing knowledge, will and power. Thus, the revelation confirms these attributes of God and provides us with a much fuller description of God. Revelation also gives us knowledge which we cannot obtain elsewhere, such as, for example, the knowledge concerning the Day of Resurrection, the reward and punishment in the Hereafter.² However illuminating these examples provided by al-Ghazālī of the knowledge obtainable only through revelation are, they still do not give us any discernible category of knowledge under which these types of knowledge fall to enable us to categorise what kinds of knowledge are known only through the means of revelation.

¹al-Iqtisād, 211.

²al-Iqtisād, 211.

(1) Kitāb al-'ilm

Al-Ghazālī begins his magnum opus, *Ihyā 'ulūm al-dīn* with the discussion on the types and classification of knowledge. The first book of the *Ihyā* is titled *Kitāb al-'ilm* (*The Book of Knowledge*). We will focus here on this *Kitāb al-'ilm* rather than his theological chapter the *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* (*The Principles of Belief*) in the *Ihyā* because I think his other theological work the *Iqtisād*, is far more developed and better presented¹ on the concept of revelation than his *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*. Al-Ghazālī divides his *Kitāb al-'ilm* into seven parts in which he discusses the types and classification, values and aims of knowledge and concludes the chapter interestingly enough with a discussion of the definition and divisions of the intellect ('*aql*) of which he speaks with high praise.

Al-Ghazālī explains why he wrote this book by saying:

To tread the crowded and dangerous path of the hereafter (*ṭarīq al-'akhira*) with neither guide nor companion is difficult, tiring and strenuous. The guide for the road are the learned men who are the heirs of the prophet, but the times are void of them now and only the superficial are left..... Everyone of them was so wrapped up in his immediate fortune that he came to see good as evil and evil as good, so that the science of religion ('*ilm-al-dīn*) disappeared and the torch of the true faith was extinguished all over the world. They duped the people into believing that there was no knowledge except such ordinances of government as the judges use to settle disputes when the mob riots; or the types of arguments which the vain-glorious display in order to confuse and refute; or the elaborate and flowery language with which the preachers seek to lure the common folk. They did this because, apart from these three, they could find no other way to snare illegal profits and gain the riches of the world. On the other hand the science of the path of the hereafter, which our fore-fathers trod and which includes what God in His book called law (*fiqh*),

¹I concur with Michael Marmura's comments while comparing the style and content of *al-Iqtisād* and *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*. He argues that 'the *Iqtisād*'s arguments are more developed and he argues that it serves as the sequel to al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifah*. See, Micheal Marmura, " al-Ghazālī on the Bodily Resurrection and Causality in Tahafut and the Iqtisad, in Aligarh Journal of Islamic Thought, (1989). 50-51.

wisdom (*ḥikma*), knowledge (*'ilm*), enlightenment (*diyā'*), light (*nūr*), guidance (*hidāya*) and righteousness (*rushd*), has vanished from among men and has been completely forgotten. Since this is a calamity afflicting religion and a grave crisis overshadowing it, I have therefore deemed it important to engage in writing of this book to revive the science of religion, to bring to light the exemplary lives of the departed imams, and to show what branches of knowledge the prophets and the virtuous fathers regarded as useful.¹

After a rather strong condemnation of the state of religious leadership and teaching of his times, especially of the hair splitting jurists, dialectical theologians, and the popular preachers, al-Ghazālī saw his task as to revive the true teachings of religion which is the science of religion.

Al-Ghazālī then proceeds to define the science of religion as divided into two sciences which are the science of revelation (*'ilm al-mukāshafa*)² and the science of practical religion (*'ilm al-mu'āmalā*). He defines *'ilm al-mukāshafa* as 'knowledge and only knowledge'.³ In contrast, he defines the science of practical religion as 'knowledge as well as action in accordance with that knowledge'.⁴

Al-Ghazālī discusses revelation in *Kitāb al-'ilm* not as a concept by itself but under the study of *'ilm al-mukāshafa*. It is al-Ghazālī's discussion of *'ilm al-mukāshafa* as discussed in this book which we will have to focus upon here. Al-Ghazālī himself only discusses revelation here in regard to its

¹Al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-'ilm* is in Vol. 1 of *Ihyā.*, (Cairo, 1987), (4 Volumes). *Kitāb al-'ilm* has been translated into English by Nabih Amin Faris under the title of *The Book of Knowledge*, (Lahore, 1962). Hereafter referred to as *Ihyā* (Arabic text page) Nabih Amin Faris(translation page). *Ihyā* 10. Nabih Amin Faris, 2.

²There is a serious flaw in using Faris' translation of the term *'ilm al-mukāshafa* as the science of revelation. Al-Ghazālī defines (*'ilm al-mukāshafa*) as "that science whereby the cover is removed so that the truth regarding the truths of these things become as clear as if it were seen by the eye, leaving no room for any doubt." *Ihyā.* 31. Nabih Amin Faris, 48. Such a translation of the term *'ilm al-mukāshafa* as the science of revelation is not only inaccurate but for our purposes here confuses our discussion on revelation which is *wahy*. Thus, while still utilising Faris' translation, wherever the term *'ilm al-mukāshafa* occurs, we will use the Arabic term instead of Faris' English translation of it as the science of revelation.

³*Ihyā.* 12. Nabih Amin Faris, 6.

⁴*Ihyā.* 12. Nabih Amin Faris, 6.

relationship with *'ilm al-mukāshafa*. He points out he will discuss revelation under the study of *'ilm al-mukāshafa* in the following way:

As to the stages of revelation (*waḥy*), they are many, but to embark on a discussion of them under practical religion (*'ilm al-mu'āmalā*) is not fitting, because they fall under the science of revelation (*'ilm al-mukāshafa*). Do not think, however, that the knowledge of the stages of revelation (*darajāt al-waḥy*) requires that a person be himself a receiver of revelation, because it is not unlikely for a physician to know the different stages of health.....Consequently, not everyone who knows what prophethood (*al-nubuwwa*) and sainthood (*al-wilāya*) are will be a prophet (*nabī*) or a saint (*walī*), and not everyone who knows piety (*al-taqwā*) and godliness (*al-wara'*) will be pious or godly.¹

There emerges from the above passage some very important issues on how al-Ghazālī discusses revelation in this work. Firstly, he plans to discuss revelation under the study of *'ilm al-mukāshafa*. Secondly, he at least acknowledges that one can actually know about revelation without having to become an actual prophet who receives revelation. Not only can one come to know about revelation without having to be one who has experienced revelation, but he also recognises that having knowledge is one thing and acting on it or benefiting from it is quite another.

He further elaborates the use of the science of revelation in trying to comprehend revelation as follows:

Through it (*'ilm al-mukāshafa*) is also attained the knowledge of the meaning of prophecy (*al-nubuwwa*) and the prophet (*nabī*) and the import of revelation (*waḥy*).....Through it is known how the Angels (*al-mala'ika*) appeared to the prophets (*al-anbiyā*) and how they [the prophets] received the (divine) revelation (*waḥy*).²

Therefore, for al-Ghazālī here, the key to understanding the revelation is through understanding *'ilm al-mukāshafa*. First and most importantly, at least as far as understanding revelation is concerned, al-Ghazālī acknowledges

¹*Ihyā*. 105. Nabih Amin Faris, 234.

²*Ihyā*. 31. Nabih Amin Faris, 47

that even one who has not experienced revelation can come to understand revelation. Next, he plans to discuss revelation under the discussion on *'ilm al-mukāshafa* because it is through this *'ilm al-mukāshafa* that one comes to attain the knowledge of the meaning of prophecy, prophethood and revelation. In addition to this, through *'ilm al-mukāshafa*, one comes to know how the Angel appeared to the Prophets and gave them the revelation. Thus, for al-Ghazālī, *'ilm al-mukāshafa* is the key to understanding revelation itself.

However, al-Ghazālī's discussions on *'ilm al-mukāshafa* in this work pose some problems. He states in regard to *'ilm al-mukāshafa* as follows :

One is not permitted to record in writing, although it is the ultimate aim of saints and the desire of the eye of the sincere¹

'Ilm al-mukāshafa, a science withheld from men and its discussion proscribed. The limits into which it is permissible to go into its discussion is to say that it is a precious jewel and a pearl of inestimable worth, more excellent than all material objects.²

This attitude towards *'ilm al-mukāshafa* makes an analysis of revelation difficult because as a result of this attitude there is no systematic discussion of *'ilm al-mukāshafa* and therefore no systematic discussions on revelation itself. However, as we stated earlier, an analysis of revelation is not impossible because one finds some discussions on revelation in relation to other discussions. We will thus have to try to make do from these brief and scattered discussions on *'ilm al-mukāshafa* to abstract an analysis of revelation.

We will subject our analysis of al-Ghazālī's *'ilm al-mukāshafa* as discussed here in *Kitāb al-'ilm* to the same analysis as we stated in the beginning of this chapter. In short, we will try to obtain from al-Ghazālī's

¹*Ihyā.* 12. Nabih Amin Faris, 6

²*Ihyā.* 68. Nabih Amin Faris, 142.

writing of the *Kitāb al-'ilm* concerning revelation: 1. what kinds of knowledge does revelation actually give us; 2. how is this knowledge ultimately transmitted to us; 3. by whom in order to ensure its purity and originality; 4. and most importantly, what is the ultimate purpose of this revelation revealed to man.

Revelation Defined

In this book, *Kitāb al-'ilm*, al-Ghazālī does not discuss revelation by itself but as part of his discussion of *'ilm al-mukāshafa*. Thus, we will here present al-Ghazālī's discussions on *'ilm al-mukāshafa*. From these discussions, we hope to be able to abstract al-Ghazālī's concept of revelation.

In *Kitāb al-'ilm*, we find no statement on the definition of revelation. Rather, we do find al-Ghazālī classifying knowledge into sacred knowledge (*sharī'a*) and non-sacred knowledge (*ghayr sharī'a*). A closer examination of the classification of sacred knowledge will unveil al-Ghazālī's definition of revelation. This is because revelation is the source of sacred knowledge. Thus, by defining sacred knowledge, we are indirectly defining its source, revelation.

Al-Ghazālī defines sacred knowledge (*sharī'a*) by saying:

By sacred sciences I mean those which have been acquired by the prophets and are not arrived at either by reason, like

arithmetic, or by experimentation, like medicine, or hearing (sam'), like language.¹

For al-Ghazālī, sacred knowledge which is the product of revelation is neither obtained through reason, experimentation, or hearing, but it is acquired from God through His prophets. Thus, if sacred knowledge is neither obtained through reason, experimentation, or hearing, then its source, revelation, also cannot either be obtained through these means. Therefore, since the sacred knowledge which is the product of revelation is acquired from God through His prophets, thus, revelation itself must be acquired from God through His prophets.

To substantiate al-Ghazālī's claims that revelation gives us knowledge which we can not obtain either through reason, experimentation, or hearing, but are only obtainable through the prophets, al-Ghazālī proceeds to give us a long list of examples of knowledge that the science of revelation provides. Al-Ghazālī says:

'Ilm al-mukāshafa is the science concerned with the saints and the favourites of God. It stands for a light which shines in the heart when it is cleansed and purified of its blameworthy qualities. Through this light is revealed the truth of several things, and to which several ambiguous and obscure meanings have been attached.

1. Through it, these truths are clarified until the true knowledge of the essence of God is attained together with that of His eternal and perfect attributes, His work and wisdom in creation of this world and the hereafter.²
2. As well as the reason for His exalting the latter over the former.
3. Through it is also attained the knowledge of the meaning of prophecy and the prophet and the import of revelation (*wahy*).
4. Through it is obtained the truth about Satan, the meaning of the word angels and devils, and the cause of enmity of Satan and man.
5. Through it is known how the Angel appeared to the prophets and how they received the (divine) revelation (*wahy*).
6. Through it is achieved the knowledge of the kingdom of heaven and earth, as well as the knowledge of the heart and how the angelic hosts have confronted the devils.

¹*Ihyā*. 28. Nabih Amin Faris, 36-7.

²I have provided the numbering of this list (1-10) to simplify and highlight the different areas the examples cover.

7. Through it is gained the knowledge of how to distinguish between the company of heaven and the company of the Devil, a knowledge of the hereafter, Paradise and hell-fire, the punishment of the grave, the bridge (*al-ṣirāt*) across the internal fire, the balance of the judgement-day, and knowledge (of the day) of reckoning.

8. Through it is also comprehended the meaning of the following words of God: " Read thy Book; there needeth none but thyself to make out an account against thee this day;" (*Sura* 17:15) and " Truly the hereafter is life indeed ! (*Sura* 29:64).

9. Through this same light is revealed the meaning of meeting God and of occupying a place in His proximity; the meaning of attaining happiness through the communion with the heavenly hosts (*al-malā al-a'lā*) and association with the angels and the prophets.

10. Through it also the distinction between the ranks of the people in the different heavens is determined until they see one another in the same way as Venus is seen in the heart of heaven.¹

The long list of examples al-Ghazālī provides here as examples of knowledge that *'ilm al-mukāshafa* gives us is certainly not exhaustive. However, it provides a fascinating insight into what kind of knowledge al-Ghazālī considers *'ilm al-mukāshafa* gives us. From the many examples al-Ghazālī provides on knowledge the *'ilm al-mukāshafa* gives us, we can deduce that at the very least that *'ilm al-mukāshafa* gives us a description of God, man's relationship with God and vice-versa, and man's life after death. However this relationship of *'ilm al-mukāshafa* to the revelation itself is still somewhat vague. Are we to assume that all that can be known through *'ilm al-mukāshafa* ultimately means knowing the revelation itself, since al-Ghazālī argued that it is through *'ilm al-mukāshafa* that one attains knowledge of the meaning of prophecy, prophet and the revelation. If this is so, then the knowledge gained from *'ilm al-mukāshafa* directly reflects the knowledge that can be gained from revelation. If this is so, then, since *'ilm al-mukāshafa* gives us a description of God, man's relationship with God and vice-versa, and man's life after death, we can then deduce that revelation also gives us this same knowledge. It still remain unclear whether *'ilm al-*

¹*Ihyā*. 31. Nabih Amin Faris, 47-8.

mukāshafa provides us with more knowledge than the revelation itself or less. If *'ilm al-mukāshafa* provides us with more knowledge than the revelation itself, how do we distinguish this added extra that *'ilm al-mukāshafa* provides? From the long list of examples given above, it would seem that *'ilm al-mukāshafa* provides more detailed information than those provided in the revelation. However, without al-Ghazālī specifically specifying that this more detailed information is what distinguishes the information from *'ilm al-mukāshafa* from the revelation itself, that in fact all the *'ilm al-mukāshafa* does is to expand and provide a detailed explanation or commentary on the terse statements of revelation, we can only speculate that this is so. Thus, it is most likely that the information given by *'ilm al-mukāshafa* reflects a contemplation on the information given in the revelation. Therefore, if we denude the information given in *'ilm al-mukāshafa* of its detailed aspects, we should be able to arrive at the crux of the knowledge that the revelation provides us.

However, al-Ghazālī's later comments on *'ilm al-mukāshafa* raises some problems of its essential nature which ultimately effect his understanding of revelation itself. He says:

We, therefore, mean by *'ilm al-mukāshafa* (that science whereby) the cover is removed so that the truth regarding the truths of these things becomes as clear as if it were seen by the eye, leaving no room for any doubt. Man would by himself be capable of such a thing had not rust and rot resulting from the filth of this world accumulated over the surface of the mirror of his heart. By the science of the road of the hereafter (*'ilm al-tarīq al-'akhira*), we mean the knowledge of how to remove from the surface of this mirror the filth which bars the knowing of God, His attributes, and His works. The mirror is cleansed and purified by desisting from lust and emulating the prophets in all their states. Thus to whatever extent the heart is cleansed and made to face the truth, to that same extent it will reflect His reality. But there is no way to this except through discipline (which will be discussed in the proper place) learning and instruction.¹

¹*Ihyā*, 31-2. Nabih Amin Faris, 48-9.

The above statement made by al-Ghazālī causes great confusion to his concept of *'ilm al-mukāshafa* which will ultimately affect his concept of revelation itself. From the above statement, 'man would by himself be capable of such a thing had not rust and rot resulting from the filth of this world accumulated over the surface of the mirror of his heart', I have a great deal of trouble in trying to understand what al-Ghazālī means by this. Does al-Ghazālī mean that if men's hearts were not rusted or filthy, then *'ilm al-mukāshafa* is not necessary? Would this then imply that if men's hearts were not rusted nor filthy, then he would by himself obtain the knowledge that *'ilm al-mukāshafa* gives him. If this is so, then, *'ilm al-mukāshafa* only became necessary because men's hearts became rusted and filthy, and thus were unable to obtain this knowledge by themselves. However, the knowledge that *'ilm al-mukāshafa* gives us is closely related to the knowledge that revelation gives us. If *'ilm al-mukāshafa* only became necessary because men's hearts became corrupted, then, how does this understanding affect the necessity of revelation itself. Unless for al-Ghazālī, inevitably each and every men's hearts will become rusted and filthy and thus they will all fail to obtain this knowledge without the help of *'ilm al-mukāshafa*. It must be borne in mind that since al-Ghazālī said that sacred knowledge (*sharī'a*) is neither obtained through reason, experimentation, or hearing, then its source, revelation, also cannot either be obtained through these means¹. The relationship of *'ilm al-mukāshafa* to revelation itself remains unclear.

¹*Ihyā*. 27 . Nabih Amin Faris, 36-7

Transmission of Revelation: How is Revelation Received?

In *Kitāb al-'ilm*, al-Ghazālī points out that revelation (*wahy*) is only given to prophets.¹ He differentiates acquired knowledge which is learnt and heard, and that which is given through inspiration (*ilhām*) from revelation (*wahy*). For al-Ghazālī, acquired knowledge which is learnt or heard is obtainable by everyone. For learnt knowledge is obtainable through reason and experimentation, and heard knowledge is language.

The knowledge obtained from inspiration (*ilhām*) and revelation (*wahy*) is given by God to man. However, who receives them and the methods of their reception are different. Both prophets and non-prophets can receive inspiration. Al-Ghazālī explains inspiration (*ilhām*) as:

The question may be asked, how did the person who related this know what the Devil has said especially since no one has seen the Devil or talked with him? Then you shall know that those whose hearts have been sanctified have the secrets of the heavens made known to them either by inspiration (*ilhām*) which dawns upon them from where they know not, or by actual vision (*al-ru'ya al-ṣādiqa*) (in their sleep), or in their wakefulness which unfolds to them the mysteries through the contemplation of types just as in sleep.²

From this explanation of inspiration, we can deduce that for al-Ghazālī, inspiration makes known to us what we had not known before. The types of knowledge that inspiration provides are not clearly defined. From the example given above, inspiration gives us a knowledge of what the Devil has said, even though no one has ever seen or talked with the Devil. This seems to imply that inspiration can give us knowledge beyond sensory perception since no one has physically seen nor literally talked to him. It also seems to imply

¹*Ihyā*. 105. Nabih Amin Faris, 234

²*Ihyā*. 97. Nabih Amin Faris, 218.

that it gives knowledge which is beyond reasoning because no one could reason out what the Devil would say. Therefore, the knowledge from inspiration is knowledge beyond human physical perception and beyond ratiocination. This does not mean that this knowledge contradicts reason for it may be within the realm of possibility but it cannot be confirmed by reason.

Al-Ghazālī does distinguish inspiration from revelation. Al-Ghazālī says that the process of communication between God and man can never be direct but is achieved through an intermediary, for example through the means of the angels. Al-Ghazālī proceeds to describe this communication from God to man as revelation by saying:

Besides, the light of knowledge is not made to shine upon the heart of man except through (the instrument of) the angels, and it is not possible for any man to have any communication with God except through revelation or through a veil or through a messenger whom God sends and instructs to declare His will. Similarly, whatever knowledge is sent by the grace of God to the human heart is transmitted by the angels who have been entrusted (*muwakkalūn*) with this responsibility. They are angels who have been made holy, pure and free from all blameworthy traits. They attend to no one but the good, and with what they possess of the mercy of God, they reform no one but the pure.¹

However, revelation can only be received by specially chosen individuals, the prophets. Al-Ghazālī describes the difference between inspiration and revelation by saying:

This kind of imparting information by the angels to the prophets is different from explicit revelation (*wahy*) which involves hearing a definite voice with an ear and seeing the angel with the eye.²

From the above statement, al-Ghazālī clearly differentiates inspiration from revelation. However, he did not here distinguish the kinds of knowledge that one receives from inspiration from that which one receives from revelation.

¹*Ihyā*. 62, Nabih Amin Faris, 126-7. See also the Quran 42:51 which says; "It is not fitting for a man that God should speak to him except by inspiration(*wahy*) or from behind a veil or by sending a messenger to reveal with God's permission, what God wills; for He is Most High, Most Wise."

²*Ihyā*.105. Nabih Amin Faris, 234

The issue here is whether the kinds of knowledge that one receives from inspiration and that from revelation are different either in content, degree of importance or even degree of certainty. Al-Ghazālī, however, does make the distinction between inspiration and revelation in the technical form of how it is transmitted to the prophet. Revelation is transmitted to the prophet by him hearing a definite voice and seeing the angel communicating it to him.¹ Thus, for al-Ghazālī the revelation itself is transmitted word for word, verbatim and by an external factor, the trustworthy angel. To emphasise these two factors that the revelation is transmitted word for word, and by another to the prophet, the imagery of the angel being seen by the prophet and the angel speaking and being heard by the prophets is essential and important to emphasise. This is in sharp contrast to the philosophers' view on the transmission of revelation.²

After stating that revelation is transmitted to the prophets verbatim, we take a closer look at how the prophet communicates *'ilm al-mukāshafa* to others. Al-Ghazālī says:

The science of practical religion (*'ilm al-mu'āmalā*) is merely a path which leads to [science of] revelation and only through that path did the prophets of God communicate with people and lead them to Him. Concerning *'ilm al-mukāshafa* itself, the prophets spoke figuratively (*bi-al-ramz*) and briefly through signs (*al-tamthīl*) and symbols, because they realised the inability of man's mind to comprehend (*bi-quṣūr afhām al-khalq*).³

From the above statement, we find al-Ghazālī arguing that the prophets spoke figuratively utilising signs and symbols concerning *'ilm al-mukāshafa*. The prophets did this in that manner for the purpose of conveying to man *'ilm al-mukāshafa* in a manner that is in accordance to his ability to understand. Contrast this usage of symbolic language to educate in accordance with one's audience's ability to understand with the philosophers who have argued that

¹*Ihyā*. 105. Nabih Amin Faris, 234.

²For the the philosophers' view on the transmission of revelation to the prophets, see Chapter One, Section 2.2 : Transmission on Revelation.

³*Ihyā* 12. Nabih Amin Faris, 6.

the revelation uses figurative language and signs for the same purpose of conveying to men a message of belief and action in accordance with his ability to understand. However, al-Ghazālī states that the prophet receives the revelation from the angel verbatim and conveys it to man verbatim. He, however, does not discuss whether the revelation utilises figurative language and signs in this work. In *al-Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī criticises the philosophers for taking the commands of the religious laws based on the revelation in a figurative sense, regarding the laws' aim only as a means to control the common man. Al-Ghazālī says concerning the philosophers' view towards religious laws as he understood it :

...the aim of the religious prescriptions is to control the common people and to curb them from internecine strife and contention and from unrestrained indulgence in their passion. Hence I [the philosopher] am not one of the ignorant masses and therefore subject to commandments.¹

I do not wish here to address the issue whether al-Ghazālī was right, wrong or had oversimplified the philosophers' view on the religious prescriptions, for that has been dealt with in the Chapter on al-Fārābi's Concept of Revelation. What is at issue here is that this is how al-Ghazālī had perceived the philosophers' view on religious prescription, a view which he clearly condemns. Thus, it is most likely that even though al-Ghazālī has argued that the prophets in conveying *'ilm al-mukāshafa* had utilised a figurative language, he would probably conclude that the revelation itself must be taken literally

¹al-Munqidh, 96. Mc Carthy. 104.

(3) Prophets: The Medium of Revelation.

Al-Ghazālī in *Kitāb al-'ilm* does recognise the differences in the native intellect men are endowed with and seems very much to concur with the philosophers here that there are pre-requisite qualifications for becoming a prophet at least in terms of an intellectual pre-requisite. In comparison to the philosophers who insist that the prophet should not only have a intellectual pre-requisite but also the imaginative pre-requisite¹, al-Ghazālī requires only the intellectual condition. Al-Ghazālī says:

In fact, he who denies the disparity of men in this instinct [the intellect] is loose outside the confines of sanity, and he who thinks that the intellect of the Prophet is the same as that of any of the outlandish peasants and desert ruffians is himself filthier than any of those peasants. Furthermore how could the disparity of intellect [i.e. the native intellect] be denied when without it men would not have varied in their ability to understand knowledge, nor would they have been divided into the stupid who fail to understand anything except after a long and tedious explanation by a teacher, the brilliant who respond to the least sign, and the perfect (*kāmil*) from whose souls truth emanates (*tanba'athu*) without any previous instructions....Such are the prophets to whom recondite things are clarified in their inward thoughts without having learned or heard anything of the sort.²

It is clear here that al-Ghazālī differentiates the prophets from others at least in terms of the their native intellectual capacity with which they are endowed and cannot be obtained by them through other means. Thus, the prophets obtain knowledge through their souls in their inward thoughts without having to learn or hear from others. However, al-Ghazālī neglects to explain further what exactly is the meaning of his view that the prophets are in no need of instruction but instead things are clarified to them in their inward thoughts.

¹For the philosophers' discussion of the pre-requisite qualifications of the prophet, see Chapter One: Section 2.3: Prophets: The Medium of Revelation.

²*Ihyā*. 105. Nabih Amin Faris, 233-4

Al-Ghazālī fails to explain what kinds of knowledge the prophets obtain through this means. Do the prophets obtain all their knowledge through this means or only a certain kind of knowledge? If the prophets obtain knowledge through their own soul, what then is the role of the angel of revelation in bringing them revelation and giving them this knowledge of revelation? Al-Ghazālī's statement on the status of the prophets' native intellectual capacity is indeed revealing. However, without him elaborating further how this works and what are its implications, we have great difficulty in trying to comprehend the intellectual role in the career of a prophet.

The intellect's role in the career of a prophet may have been left unclarified satisfactorily by al-Ghazālī here but the duties of the prophet are clearly stated. Once a person receives revelation and thus becomes a prophet, then he must discharge the duties of prophethood. For al-Ghazālī, it is revelation that makes the person become a prophet. He says:

Knowledge however is in itself an absolute excellence apart from any attribution. It is the description of God's perfection and through it the angels and the prophets were imbued with honour.¹

The task of prophethood then is conveying it to everyone. Al-Ghazālī explains the role of the prophet as follows:

The Prophet said, " God does not give the learned any knowledge unless He entered with them into the same covenant He entered with prophets- namely to make it known and not to conceal it."²

A person who is blessed with receiving revelation becomes a prophet. Once he becomes a prophet, he is burdened with the task of conveying the message of revelation to man.

¹Ihyā .23, Nabih Amin Faris, 25.

²Ihyā 20 , Nabih Amin Faris, 20

(4) The Mission of Prophecy: The Purpose of Revelation.

The mission of the prophet is to convey the message that he receives from revelation to everyone. This mission points to the purpose of prophecy and thus ultimately to the purpose of revelation itself. Revelation's goal is to give man knowledge which will inform him on how to act and motivate him to action.

Al-Ghazālī stated that sacred knowledge (*sharī'a*) which is the product of revelation is neither obtained through reason, experimentation, or hearing (*sam'*), but is acquired from God through His prophets¹. Thus, if sacred knowledge is not obtained through reason, experimentation, or hearing, then its source, revelation also cannot either be obtained through these means. Therefore, since the sacred knowledge which is the product of revelation is acquired from God through His prophets, revelation itself must be acquired from God through His prophets. Al-Ghazālī does not state anywhere in this book whether the knowledge obtained from revelation is contradictory to reason. It is plausible that reason may not be able to derive this knowledge, but once reason knows it, it may be able to comprehend and understand and accept the truth of this knowledge. Al-Ghazālī must have realised that the understanding of revelational truths must be through the limited capacity of man's intellect. Thus, man's ability to understand and how he comprehends revelational truth is somewhat influenced by his intellect. Therefore, to conceive of revelational truths and intellectual truths as mutually exclusive is problematic. At the end of *Kitāb al-'ilm*, al-Ghazālī gives very high praise to man's intellect, however, even here he does not clarify the role of intellect in relationship to revelational truths, its understanding and application in man's daily lives.

¹*Ihyā*. 27. Nabih Amin Faris, 36-7

The application of revelation, which has a revolutionary impact on man's life, is the aim and goal of revelation. Revelation does not only provide knowledge that man must know. But this knowledge must be applied in action. Thus, al-Ghazālī says, " The gist of it all is knowledge of how to perform works whose discharge is obligatory".¹ Al-Ghazālī's use of the term obligatory (*wajīb*) is very important. It denotes that man has obligations and he must discharge these obligations. Revelation informs man of his obligations to God and how to discharge these obligations. It must be borne in mind that, when we discuss al-Ghazālī's theological works, that for al-Ghazālī, these obligations only go in one direction. Man is obligated to God. God has no obligation to anyone, whosoever and for whatsoever.

Al-Ghazālī then proceeds to describe the relationship between knowledge and action. He says:

That with which (men) draw closer to God is divided into three parts: pure knowledge which is *'ilm al-mukāshafa*; pure works such as, for example, the justice of the magistrate and his rule among men; and a mixture of works and knowledge which is the science of the path of the hereafter (*'ilm-ṭarīq-al-akhira*) whose possessor belongs to both men of knowledge and the men of works.²

From this above statement, we can deduce that for al-Ghazālī, the relationship between knowledge and work is dynamic. One has to have knowledge in order to know how to act. And it is in the action that one gains benefit from the knowledge. All knowledge and action is in order to know and please God.

Al-Ghazālī says:

It is therefore wise to acquire the best of everything, satisfying oneself, so to speak, with the mere tasting of it while directing whatever power one has left, after having obtained all available knowledge, towards mastering that the noblest of all sciences, the science of the hereafter (*'ilm al-akhira*) including the science of practical religion (*'ilm al-mu'āmalā*), as well as *'ilm*

¹*Ihyā*.26. Nabih Amin Faris, 35.

²*Ihyā* 35. Nabih Amin Faris, 58

al-mukāshafa The goal of the science of practical religion (*'ilm al-mu'āmalā*) is *al-mukāshafa* and the goal of *al-mukāshafa* is to know God. By this I do not mean the creed which the common folk receive from their parents or accept on the authority of others, nor the rules of dialectic and argumentation in the defence of one's position against the devious attacks of adversaries which is the aim of the theologians. What I mean is a form of conviction which is a result of a light with which God floods the heart of a servant who, through self mortification has purified his soul from all impurities until he has attained to the measure of Abu-Bakr's faith which, as the Lord of creation testified, would outweigh the faith of all the world if it were ever compared with it.¹

Even with al-Ghazālī's emphasis on knowledge, he still feels that true conviction is not attained through the efforts of the intellect. Rather it is attained through self mortification. Self mortification (*mujāhada*) purifies the soul from all impurities and allows the light from God to flood the heart of the servant.

Al-Ghazālī proceeds to describe the process of self mortification and its results. He says:

For self mortification leads to contemplation (*mushāhada*), and through the intricate details of the sciences of the heart fountains of wisdom gush forth. Books and formal education are of little help in this field because the wisdom which passes all understanding is only achieved through self mortification, observation and watching, the active fulfilment of outward and inward duties, coming before God (*julūs*) in solitude (*khalwa*) and bringing the heart before His presence (*huḍūr*) through pure reflection (*fikr*) and sole devotion to Him. This is the key of inspiration (*ilhām*) and the fountainhead of unveiling (*kashf*).²

The relationship in al-Ghazālī between these three concepts knowledge, action and self-mortification, is complex. Revelation is the source of knowledge. Action is the result of obeying the knowledge gained from revelation. The relationship of self-mortification is not so easy to understand. However, it obviously plays an important role for al-Ghazālī.

¹*Ihyā*. 65 Nabih Amin Faris, 135

²*Ihyā*. 86. Nabih Amin Faris, 189.

(3) Al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma'ānī asmā' Allah al-ḥusnā

*Al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma'ānī asmā' Allah al-ḥusnā*¹(The Noblest of Aims in the Explanation of God's Fairest Names) is essentially a work on theology. However, its style and themes are not bound to the conventions of the traditional theological manuals like *al-Iqtisād* which al-Ghazālī had written earlier in his career. Instead, Frank aptly summarises the uniqueness of this work by saying " he (al-Ghazālī) tends to express himself more forthrightly and with greater clarity than he generally does elsewhere in treating the same basic matter (theological debates)"². It is precisely for this reason that this work represents al-Ghazālī's own thoughts rather than him being formally bound to regurgitate certain conventional positions or arguments such as in *al-Iqtisād* or al-Ghazālī speculating only for the purpose of debunking others' positions and arguments such as he did in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. This is the real and true value of this work. Thus, we have chosen this work among the three theological works reviewed in order to lay bare al-Ghazālī's own ideas on theology and their implications for his concept of revelation.

¹al-Ghazālī, al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma'ānī asmā' Allah al-ḥusnā, ed. Fadlou A. Shehadi, (Beirut, 1971). This work has been translated into English under the title, al-Ghazālī : The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God, by David Burrell and Nazih Daher, (Cambridge: 1992). Hereafter referred to as simply al-Maqṣad (Arabic Text page), David Burrell (translation page).

²Richard Frank, Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazālī and Avicenna, (Heidelberg, 1992), 10-11. It should be noted also that although this work is of great interest and a welcome addition to the discussion of the impact of philosophy on the Islamic tradition, I cannot agree with many of Frank's conclusions on al-Ghazālī especially on causality and how Frank translates as he wishes certain Arabic terminologies to suit his arguments. For an excellent critique and review of this book, see Michael Marmura, "Ghazalian Causes and Intermediaries (Review Article)", Journal of the American Oriental Society, (1995) 115:89-100.

Al-Ghazālī divides *al-Maqṣad* into three parts. Part One is theoretical.

Part one consists of:

(1) explaining the truth of what is to be said concerning the name, the named, and the act of naming, (2) exposing the errors into which most groups have fallen regarding this matter, and (3) clarifying whether it is permitted for those names of God which are close to one another in meaning -like *al-'Azīm* (the Immense), *al-Jalīl* (the Majestic), and *al-Kabīr* (the Great)- to be predicated according to a single meaning so that they would be synonymous, or must their meanings differ? Furthermore, (4) it explains about a single name which has two meanings: how does it share these two meanings? Is it predicated of both of them, as a general predicate of the thing it names {as 'animal' is said of lion and a lamb}, or must it be predicated of one of them in particular? Finally, (5) it explains how man shares in the meaning of each of the names of God- great and glorious¹.

The second part deals with explaining and elaborating the meanings of each and everyone of the ninety-nine names of God as it pertains to God and also to his creation, man. The second part consists of:

(1) the clarification of the meaning of the ninety-nine names of God and (2) the explanation how the people of the Sunna reduce them all to an essence with seven attributes, and (3) how the doctrine of the Mu'tazilites and the philosophers reduces them to a single essence without multiplicity².

The third and final part deals with all other questions that arise out from these discussions on the ninety-nine names of God. The third part consists of:

(1) that the names of God-Most High exceed the ninety-nine by divine instruction, and explains (2) how it is permissible to describe God Most High by whatever may qualify Him even if no permission or divine instruction be found-so long as it is not prohibited. Finally, it explains (3) the advantage of the enumeration and specification of the one hundred-minus-one names³.

¹*al-Maqṣad* 21. David Burrell. 3.

²*al-Maqṣad* 21. David Burrell. 3.

³*al-Maqṣad* 22. David Burrell. 3.

It is the final section of part one and the beginning section of part two of this book dealing with how the ninety-nine names of God apply to God and how man may share in these attributes of God which I find to be most interesting and useful for our purposes here.

In the final section of part one, al-Ghazālī sets out the epistemic problem of the limitation of man's ability to comprehend God, and the importance of understanding the meaning of the names of God for the happiness and perfection of man. For al-Ghazālī, man's ability to know God is limited. This limitation according to al-Ghazālī is because man cannot understand anything unless he has in him something to correspond it with. He points out:

And if one asks: How might He (God) be powerful, we answer: as you are powerful. For a man cannot understand anything unless he has in him something corresponding to it. He first knows what characterises him, and then knows something other than himself by analogy with it. So if God had an attribute or a specifying property, and there were nothing in us corresponding to it or sharing its name -even so much as the sweetness of sugar shares in the pleasure of intercourse-it would be inconceivable that we would ever understand (that attribute or property) at all. For each person understands himself, and then compares his own attributes with those of God Most High.¹

Al-Ghazālī then proceeds to illustrate this point that man can only understand by comparing what is in him with others experiences. Man compares one human activity with another as reference if he has not yet experienced this activity. He says:

I would say were a small boy or an impotent person to say to us: what is the way to know the pleasure of sexual intercourse, and to perceive its essential reality? We would say that there are two ways here: one of them is for us to describe it to you, so that you can know it, the other is to wait patiently until you have experienced the natural instinct of passion in yourself, and then for you to engage in intercourse so that you experience the pleasure of intercourse yourself, and so come to know it. This second way is the authentic way, leading to the reality of knowledge.

¹al-Maqsad 52. David Burrell. 40.

The first way leads only to imagining and comparing it with something which is not like it, since the most we can do is represent the pleasure of intercourse by something whose pleasure an impotent man can experience, like the pleasure of food and drink. So we would say to him; Do you not know that sweets are delicious for when you take some you reach a pleasant state and feel delight in your soul? He will say 'certainly' and then we would say: 'sexual intercourse is like that as well. Do you think that this brings him to understand the real pleasure of intercourse as it is, to the point of occupying in his knowledge the place occupied in one who has tasted that pleasure and experienced it? Hardly! In fact, the most that this description could be would be an imagining and a misleading comparison, an illustration sharing nothing but the name.

So far the imagining is concerned, he would imagine that it [intercourse] was something pleasant in a general way. As for the comparison, it amounts to likening intercourse to the sweetness of sugar, and this is misleading since there is no correspondence whatever between the sweetness of sugar and the pleasure of intercourse. And as far as he is concerned, he knows that it deserves to be called pleasure.¹

Convincing as this example may seem to support al-Ghazālī's position that man knows only through comparison, we may turn the tables against al-Ghazālī, by asking how does man obtain the first idea in order to compare anything with. Utilising this same argument, how does man obtain this general principle of pleasure² in the first place, thus enabling him to compare all other pleasures against this benchmark and therefore obtains the same results that sweetness of sugar is pleasurable and so is sexual intercourse. Al-Ghazālī either did not see this problem that his methodology of knowledge might raise or he just neglected to provide us with an answer here.

This brief discussion on al-Ghazālī's epistemology on how man knows, is important because al-Ghazālī then proceeds to argue that man can know God also in two ways: the inadequate way of comparing names of God

¹al-Maqṣad 50-1. David Burrell.38-9.

²It should be noted that even if we limit our understanding of the concept of pleasure to physical pleasure, different people seem to derive pleasure from different things and to different degrees. For example, certain kinds of foods brings great pleasure to one and have the totally opposite effect on another even though all human beings have the same physical senses, therefore, how is it possible that they experience pleasure differently?

with what we know of ourselves, and the impossible way or closed way of experiencing God by becoming God.

Al-Ghazālī explains the first way as follows:

The inadequate way consists of mentioning names and attributes and proceeding to compare them with what we know from ourselves. For when we know ourselves to be powerful, knowing, living, speaking and then hear those terms attributed to God—great and glorious, or when we come to know them by demonstration, in either case we understand with an inadequate comprehension, much as the impotent person understood the pleasure of intercourse from what was described for him of the pleasure of sweets¹.

The second way which will provide authentic knowledge is, however, impossible. Al-Ghazālī says:

The second way—the one that is closed—consists in one's waiting to attain all the 'lordly' (i.e. divine) attributes to the point of becoming a 'lord'.....But this path is closed, since it is impossible that this reality be attained by anyone other than God the Most High. There is no other way to authentic knowledge than this, yet it is utterly closed except for God the Most high and Holy One².

Thus for al-Ghazālī, it is impossible for anyone to truly know God other than God Himself.

He then seems to make a principle of this method of experience at least as it applies to prophets. He says:

But I would also say : it is impossible for anyone other than a prophet to know a prophet. For whoever has no part in prophecy understands nothing of prophethood except the name: that is a property existing in a man which distinguishes him from one who is not a prophet; yet he does not know the quiddity of that property except by comparison with his own attributes³.

It would prove very problematic to know much, if al-Ghazālī insists that to know something is to experience it, for man's experiences are limited. Al-

¹al-Maqṣad 52. David Burrell. 39

²al-Maqṣad 53. David Burrell.40.

³al-Maqṣad 53. David Burrell.41.

Ghazālī is silent on whether this experience must be experience through man's five senses or not. If it must be experience through man's senses, then, man can indeed only know very little.

Al-Ghazālī considers it important that man make great efforts to understand the meaning of the names of God for his/her own happiness and perfection. Man may benefit from understanding this because it will help him/her draw near God through three ways. Firstly, by trying to understand the names of God, he/she gains knowledge about God¹. Second, from this knowledge, he gains " a longing to possess these attributes in every way possible, so that he may grow closer to the truth."² The third and final stage, is he/she acts upon this longing and makes the effort to acquire whatever is possible of these attributes. He says:

The third share follows upon the effort to acquire whatever is possible of those attributes, to imitate them and be adorned with those qualities, for this way man becomes 'lordly'-that is close to the Lord Most High, and so becomes a companion to the heavenly host (*al-mala' al-a'lā*) of angels for they are on the carpet of proximity (to God). Indeed whoever aims at a likeness to their qualities will attain something of their closeness to the extent that he acquires some of their attributes which bring them closer to the Truth Most High.³

Thus, for al-Ghazālī, man can greatly benefit from trying to understand the names of God.

In the beginning section of part two, al-Ghazālī sets out to explain each and everyone of the ninety-names in accordance to how firstly they pertain to God and next, how man may share in these names. The length of explanation for each name varies in length from a few pages to just a few lines. These expositions utilise rational arguments and build upon them. He does cite many Qur'ānic verses and prophetic traditions but they are used as supportive

¹al-Maqsad 43. David Burrell. 31.

²al-Maqsad 43 David Burrell.31.

³al-Maqsad 44. David Burrell.32.

evidence for his arguments and not as an absolute and final proof of his exposition.

It is in this exposition of the ninety-nine names of God that we see al-Ghazālī freely expressing his own thoughts unhindered by the conventional theology, presenting directly or indirectly his own whole world view, through how he perceives the Creator and His creation. From al-Ghazālī's explanations of the names of God, we can deduce how al-Ghazālī conceives of God. While explaining how the ninety-nine names apply to God, he simultaneously explains how these names may be shared by man. From al-Ghazālī's explanation of these names and how they may be shared by man, we can see how al-Ghazālī conceives of man, and his/her relationship to God. Combining both of these views of God and man, it would not be far fetched to say that we may be able to derive from *al-Maqṣad*, al-Ghazālī's *Weltanschauung*.

I believe that the explanation of the ninety-nine names of God which al-Ghazālī provides in this book can give us great insights into al-Ghazālī's thoughts. The true value of this book is not in al-Ghazālī's explanation of how the names apply to God even though that is extremely insightful, but in his explanation of how man shares these names of God.

(1) Revelation Defined

Al-Ghazālī's purpose in writing this book is to explain the importance of the names of God and their implications for mankind's happiness and perfection. Al-Ghazālī's explanation of the names of God involves him in dealing with a wide variety of topics ranging from God's nature, ability and actions. However, even with al-Ghazālī's presentation of these various

topics, we find no significant direct discussions¹ on the content and method of God conveying His message, wishes and commands to man. Again, even here, we will have to resort to the indirect method, using al-Ghazālī's theological positions in order to shed light on the question of revelation.

In *al-Maqṣad*, al-Ghazālī has no systematic discussion on the relationship of revelation and reason. However, in some statements that he makes in various parts of the book, he alludes to his understanding of this relationship. In his discussion on *ilhām*, he says:

Now you might say: the words of the Sufis are based on visions given (*ilhām*) to them in the stage of friendship (*ṭawr al-wilāya*), and reason falls short of grasping that, yet all that you have said involves the exercise of reason. Yet you should know that it is not possible to see in the stages of friendship anything which reason judges to be impossible. Certainly, it is possible for one to see something which exceeds reason, in the sense that one will not grasp it by reason alone. For example, it may be made known to a holy man that someone will die tomorrow and that will not be known by the powers of reason because reason falls short of it. But it is not possible that it be made known that God-may He be praised and exalted-will create tomorrow someone like Himself, for reason shows that to be contrary to it[reason], rather than exceeding it.²

From his discussions on *ilhām*, we can conclude that firstly, al-Ghazālī accepts that there are different sources of knowledge, for example knowledge from reason and *ilhām*. Secondly, he asserts that *ilhām* can provide knowledge that reason cannot give us. This is a very important assertion. This is because for al-Ghazālī, *ilhām* is a source of knowledge that goes beyond reason. However, al-Ghazālī qualifies the knowledge that *ilhām* provides us, by stating that this knowledge from *ilhām* cannot be contrary to reason. This is because for the knowledge that *ilhām* brings to be true, reason

¹As already stated at the beginning of this chapter there will be two approaches to obtaining al-Ghazālī's concept of revelation, 1) direct approach- actual writing on the subject of revelation, and 2) indirect approach- analysing his theological positions which have a bearing on the concept of revelation.

²*al-Maqṣad* 170. David Burrell. 157.

must consider it possible and not impossible according to the standards set by reason.

Al-Ghazālī in the above passage provides us with an example of the knowledge that *ilhām* can give us. In this passage, he says " for example it may be revealed to a holy man that someone will die tomorrow and that will not be known by the powers of reason because reason falls short of it". The example he provides here deals with a very specific event, the foretelling of the death of a specified individual. It is difficult to understand how knowledge of when the death of a specific person will occur is significant in terms of the whole schema of religious knowledge. It is extremely difficult to draw any general principle from this example on the types of knowledge that *ilhām* can provide us.

Al-Ghazālī's discussions on *ilhām* as a source of knowledge is important here because al-Ghazālī considers the knowledge that *ilhām* brings is beyond, he also considers that the knowledge that revelation brings is also beyond reason. Just as al-Ghazālī considers *ilhām* a source of knowledge not derived from reason, he also considers revelation as another source of knowledge not derived from reason. Al-Ghazālī says:

Just as a true understanding of discernment is difficult for an infant before it has attained the level of discernment, and a true understanding of reason and the true wonders revealed in this stage is difficult before the attaining to the level of reason, in a similar way understanding the stage of holiness and prophecy is difficult during the stage of reason. For holiness is a stage of perfection that comes after the creation of reason, as reason is a stage of perfection after the creation of discernment, and discernment is a stage after the creation of the senses¹.

It can be deduced from the above statement that al-Ghazālī recognises different means and stages of knowledge. He recognises from the two above

¹al-Maqṣad 135. David Burrell. 122

quotations at least four different means of gaining knowledge, senses, reason, *ilhām*, and revelation.

Al-Ghazālī also recognises different stages of knowledge. Sense perception is the lowest stage of knowledge. Reason is the next stage. Reason is followed by *ilhām*. The highest stage of knowledge is revelation. *Ilhām* is higher than reason since it provides knowledge which is beyond reason. Similarly, al-Ghazālī considers prophecy to be " a stage of perfection that comes after the perfection of reason"¹. This statement seems to imply that revelation gives us knowledge which reason by itself is unable to arrive at. Referring back to the example al-Ghazālī provides in his explanation on *ilhām*, concerning the knowledge on the future of a particular individual, it is clear that *ilhām* gives us knowledge which reason is unable to arrive at. However, al-Ghazālī does qualify the truthfulness of the knowledge that *ilhām* brings by it being not contrary to reason. Al-Ghazālī is silent at least in this book on whether the knowledge that revelation brings is also subject to this criterion of not being contrary to reason.

More importantly, al-Ghazālī is silent on the categories of knowledge which each of these means of knowledge provide us. He is silent as to whether the knowledge, which these four means of knowledge stated above provides us with, are different kinds of knowledge exclusively, or do they overlap and supplement each other. Without a direct discussion of revelation, it is extremely difficult to determine his views on the relationship of revelation to reason.

¹al-Maqṣad 135. David Burrell. 157.

(2) Transmission of Revelation: How Revelation is Received?

In *al-Maqṣad*, al-Ghazālī does not discuss the technical aspects of how revelation is transmitted to the prophets nor in what form it is transmitted to the prophets, whether the revelation is in literal form or in symbols. However, al-Ghazālī does categorically state that God has sent prophets to the world. He says:

So the creation of sensory perception after creating the spiritual foundation is another creation, while the creation of discernment which appears after seven years is yet another creation, and the creation of reason after fifteen years (or thereabouts) is further creation. So each origination is a stage, so He created you by [divers] stage (71:14). Furthermore, the appearance of the characteristics of holiness (*wilāya*) in the ones endowed with this quality is another creation, while the appearance of prophethood after that is yet another [creation], indeed it is a kind of resurrection. So God-may He be praised and exalted-is the one who raises (*bā'ith*) up the messengers, as He is the one who will raise us all up on the day of resurrection.¹

In *al-Maqṣad*, al-Ghazālī does not say much on the transmission of revelation except to affirm the transmission of revelation through medium of the prophets.

¹al-Maqṣad 135. David Burrell. 121-2.

3) Prophets: The Medium of Revelation

Al-Ghazālī seems to imply that there are some intellectual qualifications for becoming a prophet. Comparing this view with the philosophers who insist that the prophets not only have an intellectual faculty pre-requisite but also an imaginative faculty pre-requisite¹, al-Ghazālī considers that the prophets do not need any directions or help from others but he qualifies that to that knowledge concerning the next life from anyone except God. Al-Ghazālī says:

This is the level of the prophets--may God's blessings be upon them. For they have no need for directions to the next life from anyone except God--great and glorious-- while everyone needs it from them. They are followed in this kingship by religious scholars, who inherit the legacy of the prophets. Their kingship, however, is proportional to their ability to guide the people, and to their lack of need for asking for guidance².

Prophets are exceptional human beings who need no guidance concerning the next life from anyone else except God.

Prophets are also exceptional human beings in comparison with other human beings. The prophets have attained the rank of the highest human beings. Al-Ghazālī says:

It is inconceivable that man be absolutely high, since he does not attain any rank without there being a higher existence, namely the rank of prophets and angels. Of course it is conceivable that one attain the rank such as there is none above it among people, and that is the rank of our prophet Muhammad--may God's blessings and peace be upon him. Yet even he falls short by comparison with the absolute height³.

¹For the philosophers' discussion on the pre-requisite qualifications of the prophet, see Chapter One: Section on Prophets: The Medium of Revelation.

²al-Maqṣad 71. David Burrell. 58.

³al-Maqṣad 118. David Burrell. 104-5.

Thus, for al-Ghazālī the prophets are the highest ranking human beings. However, even among the prophets there are different rankings. Al-Ghazālī considers the Prophet Muhammad to be the highest ranking prophet and therefore the highest ranking human being. He cites a prophetic hadith in order to show that had any other prophets lived in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, they would be below him in ranking in comparison to him and therefore would have to follow him.

The master of men (Muhammad)-may God's blessing and peace be upon him-enjoyed this attribute, inasmuch as he said: 'Were Moses the son of 'Imran alive he could not but follow me, for I am the master of Adam's offspring-and that is no boast.'¹

For al-Ghazālī, prophets are exceptional human beings who are the highest ranking among human beings. They have no need for guidance nor assistance concerning the next life from anyone else except God, but they are the ones who guide and direct human beings to the happiness of the world to come.

(4) The Mission of Prophecy: The Purpose of Revelation

The mission of the prophet is to convey the message that he receives from revelation to everyone. This mission points to the purpose of prophecy and thus ultimately to the purpose of revelation itself. Al-Ghazālī summarises the essential task of prophecy as being to convey knowledge to people which will bring them towards God. He says:

And should a man have a way of conveying knowledge to people and calling them to the Most High that would be a kind of revivification, and such would be the level of prophets and the scholars who are their heirs.²

¹al-Maqṣad 78-9. David Burrell. 66-7.

²al-Maqṣad 136. David Burrell. 123.

The task of prophecy and the message of revelation is essential for the benefit and salvation of man.

Those men will be most worthy of the name 'faithful' who are instrumental in protecting a man from the punishment of God, by guiding him to the path of God-great and glorious- and directing him on the path of salvation. Now this is the vocation of prophets and scholars, and to that effect the messenger of God-may God's blessings and peace be upon him-said : ' Indeed you are rushing into the fire as moths flock to it, and I am pulling you back.'¹

The message of revelation is concerned with man's eternal happiness and the next life. Al-Ghazālī says:

One is 'eminent' among people when God's people have need of him in matters most important to them, like the next life and eternal happiness. That is exceedingly rare and difficult to attain, except by those who hold the rank of prophet-may God's blessings be on all of them.²

The task and mission of prophecy and the message of revelation is clearly aimed at man and for the benefit of man. Thus the message of revelation must be able to be understood by man. However, al-Ghazālī does not elaborate on the types of knowledge that revelation provides us except with a vague and broad category that it is the knowledge necessary for the man's eternal happiness and the next life.

¹al-Maqṣad 76. David Burrell.63-4.

²al-Maqṣad 78. David Burrell. 66.

CHAPTER FOUR

Al-Ghazālī's Theological Positions and Their Implications on Revelation : An Indirect Method Analysis

Introduction.

The issues surrounding the concept of revelation are essential questions to ask in any religion. They are an important questions even for religions which reject the very existence of revelation or are not based on it.¹ However, they become fundamental questions for a religion whose *raison d'être* is based upon and justified by revelation to answer, above all the three great monotheistic Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Due to the limit of this scope of study, we will restrict our comments henceforth to the last of the Abrahamic faiths, Islam.

¹An example of a religion that rejects outright prophecy and thus revelation is Hinduism. Other examples of religions that are not based on revelation are Buddhism and Confucianism. For an interesting viewpoint on religion without revelation, see, Julian Huxley, Religion Without Revelation, (New York: Harper & Brothers Press, 1957). For a rejection of revelation in the history of Islamic, see, Abū Bakr Muhammad b. Zakariyyā al-Razi (the Rhazes of Latin sources), Opera Philosophica: Fragmentaque Quae Supersunt, ed. Paul Kraus, (Beirut, 1982) 295. See also the Muslim debates against the Brahmans for their rejection of revelation in Fazlur Rahman, "Barāhima", Encyclopaedia of Islam (2nd Edition) and Sarah Stroumsa, The Barahima in Early Kalam, in Journal of Semitic Studies, vol. 6, 1985. 229-241.

Islam is a religion whose *raison d'être* is not only based upon its own revelation, i.e. the Qur'ān revealed to its own prophet, Muhammad, but it also proclaims the truth of all previous revelations revealed to all previous prophets. The Qur'ān proudly proclaims that God has sent prophets and revelations to all peoples. The Qur'ān says, " For We assuredly sent amongst every people an apostle (*rasūl*), (with the command) Serve God and eschew evil."¹ Thus, the Qur'ān not only accepted that God has sent messengers with revelations to all peoples but also for the same purpose and with a similar message telling them to serve God and to abstain from evil.

The Qur'ān places great importance on the mission of the prophets and their messages, i.e. revelation. In the voluminous writings of the Muslim religious thinkers (*ulamā'*), we find pages and pages dedicated to the history of the prophets. A whole genre of literature evolved solely dedicated to telling the stories about the prophet Muhammad and previous prophets utilising materials from the Qur'ān and materials outside the Islamic tradition, the *Isrā'iliyyāt* material.² This genre came to be called *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*. However, even in this great Islamic intellectual tradition, little is discussed on the issues surrounding the concept of revelation. Rather, they focus on the bringer of the message, the messenger, i.e. the prophets³. Pages and pages

¹Qur'an 16:36. See also, similar verse 10:47.

²*Isrā'iliyyāt* material is drawn from Jewish religious and mythical tradition and incorporated into the Islamic tradition. Newby explains the use of the *Isrā'iliyyāt* material as follows:

"Tradition of the type called *isrā'iliyyāt* have had little acceptance among Muslim scholars since the second Islamic century except in restricted genres like *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (stories of the prophets), but during the first century, material from the haggadic and midrashic sources of Judaism and the hagiologic writings of the Eastern Christianity were assiduously collected for commenting on the Qur'ān and for constructing histories of the pre-Islamic world.....In addition, *Isrā'iliyyāt* traditions contributed to the development of techniques of commentary on the Qur'ān as well as helping develop a proper Islamic way of reading Jewish and Christian Scripture and para-scriptural material." Gordon Newby, "The Development of Qur'ān Commentary in early Islam in Its Relationship to Judeo-Christian Traditions of Scriptural Commentary", in Journal of the American Academy of Religion. vol. 47 (1985). 685.

³This focus on the messenger, rather than the message is indeed very significant because they considered proof of the truth of the message does not lie in the message itself but in the verification of the messenger.

of scholarly writings have been devoted to recording every minute detail of the messenger to Islam, the prophet Muhammad's life, both words and actions even to the extent of recording his likes and dislikes. None of his actions were too minor nor tedious to take note of. Everything that the prophet Muhammad said and did was recorded, examined, analysed and was held up as the ideal for every Muslim, man, woman and child.

Turning our attention away from the messenger to the message i.e. revelation itself, we find some important questions left unanswered by the *ulamā'* on issues surrounding revelation. This is not to say that the *ulamā'* did not go through each and every verse of the message with a fine tooth comb. However, the *ulamā'* accepted revelation as a given source of knowledge needing neither further examination nor analysis as a source of knowledge. They saw revelation as building blocks to build up a whole structure and framework of knowledge to explain everything. Thus, they did not see it as their task to examine and analyse this source of knowledge but rather, they saw their duty only as preservers and transmitters of revelation. They saw their role as explainers and elaborators of the content of revelation and how to apply it in practice.

It is in their explanation and elaboration of the content of revelation from which we can deduce indirectly their concept of revelation and the issues surrounding revelation for which we are seeking answers here. From their explanation and elaboration of the content of revelation, we can deduce how they perceived revelation as a source of knowledge and what kinds of knowledge they derived from it. Did they perceive revelation as an absolute unquestioned source of knowledge? Or did they perceived revelation as an absolute unquestioned source of knowledge which needed human intervention in order to understand it correctly? If revelation required human intervention through human interpretation, to what extent and how should this interpretation be done? If revelation required human interpretation in order

to be understood, it is the human mind through the application of reason which has to be utilised.

Al-Ghazālīan Ethics: Theological Perceptions and their Implications on Ethical Concepts

Introduction :Ethics and Revelation

The ethical system of any religion speaks volumes about how it perceives itself and its concept of God if it has one and if so, God's relationship to His creation. The ethical traditions of the three great Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam not only reflect their *weltanschauung* but can be utilised to investigate how they perceived their relationship and responsibilities to their Creator and vice-versa. Ivry points out the importance and the role of the ethical traditions which pervade and reflect the essential nature of these three great Abrahamic faiths. He says:

The ethical traditions of Judaism and Islam--as of Christianity--are the adornment of faiths, or rather part of their essential natures, for these are religions characterised as representatives of ethical monotheism. God's concern for the welfare of His creatures is reflected in the commandments urging them towards ethical behaviour. This behaviour is "ethical" in that it conforms, to standards to be such, standards which are implicit in the Bible and the Qur'ān. There is, after all, no formal or explicit investigation of the nature of the good in these sacred writings. When Cain asks God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" the Lord does not deign to answer the question directly.¹

It is this very idea raised by Ivry that 'God's concern for the "welfare" of His creation is reflected in His commandments to man' which we will put to the test against al-Ghazālī. In this terse statement, Ivry speaks volumes about

¹Alfred L. Ivry, *The Toleration of Ethics and the Ethics of Tolerance in Judaism and Islam*, in Studies in Islamic and Judaic Tradition, eds. William Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks (Atlanta:1986). 167.

the relationship of God and His creation. Ivry simply assumes that God imposes commandments on His creation out of His concern for their welfare. Ivry makes no attempt to justify this assumption because it seems obvious to him and in no need for any justification. We will pose the same question whether it is God's concern for man's welfare which results in God sending prophets with revelation to inform man of God's commandments to al-Ghazālī. The answer to this question will uncover not only how al-Ghazālī perceives how God sees His creation but also unveil the content and subject matter of revelation which is none other than God's commandments telling His creation what to believe and how to act. Ivry also aptly points out that "there is, after all, no formal or explicit investigation of the nature of the good in these sacred writings."¹ It is of no great surprise that these sacred writings make no great efforts to explicate a systematic exposition of ethical theory, for their main concern are providing right reasons, i.e. right intentions for right action. These sacred writings were never meant to be systematic philosophical expositions of theoretical ethics. But one cannot help but wonder if there is one underlying reason which seemingly connect these different acts as right acts, thus uncovering the nature of the good. Therefore, we will also investigate what al-Ghazālī considers as good acts to discover al-Ghazālī's concept of the nature of the good. We will examine and scrutinise al-Ghazālī concept of ethics in hope that it will shed light on how revelational commandments unfolds in ethical practice and thus, enlightens us on al-Ghazālī's ethical rationale.

¹Ivry, "The Toleration of Ethics and the Ethics of Tolerance in Judaism and Islam". 167.

The Significance of Ethics

In all of al-Ghazālī's works, ethics appears as an important , if not the central issue. MacDonald argues , " He [al-Ghazālī] was emphatically ethical in his attitude; he lays great stress on the value for us of a piece of knowledge."¹ The importance of ethics to al-Ghazālī is not because of ethical action *per se* but it is a means for achieving another purpose, man's supreme end, eternal happiness in the hereafter and that acts are good if they produce an effect in the soul that helps towards that end and evil if they thwart it.²

Al-Ghazālī calls his ethics the science of the path of the hereafter(*'ilm tariq al-ākhirah*)³. He also calls ethics the science of practical religion/science of conduct (*'ilm al-mu'āmalah*)⁴. These two terms he uses for ethics correspond to their usage in Sufism⁵. Abul Quasem points out that " in the [al-Ghazālī's] works composed during the mystical period, he does not seem to have used the phrase *'ilm al-akhlāq* (the science of character) for ethics"⁶

¹Duncan MacDonald, Life of al-Ghazali with Special Reference to His Religious Experiences and Opinions, Journal of the American Oriental Society, 20, (1899). 120

²Ihyā., 32, Nabih Amin Faris, 49.

³Ihyā. .31-2, Nabih Amin Faris 48.

⁴Ihyā., 32, Nabih Amin Faris, 49.

⁵al-Hujwiri, Kashf al-Mahjūb, translated by R. A. Nicholson, (Leiden, 1911). 86, 115.

⁶ Muhammad Abul Quasem, The Ethics of Al-Ghazālī: A Composite Ethics in Islam, (Malaysia: 1975), 37. He says:

" In the M.A. [*Mizān al-'Amal*, (Cairo, 1910) p. 54, al-Ghazālī used *'ilm al-akhlāq* for ethics. Here he seems to have followed Avicenna, since the classification of the practical sciences given here agrees with the division of the practical sciences in *his ash-Shifā'*: Introduction, ed. by Ibrāhīm Madkūr, 1952, pp. 12-14, and in his *Fī Aqşam al-'Ulūm al-'Aqliyya in Tis' Rasāil fī l-Hikma wa t-Tabi'iyāt*. (Cairo, 1326/1908). 105 and 107-108.

Ethics for al-Ghazālī is the study of religious beliefs(‘*itiqād. pl. ‘itiqādat’*), works(*fi’l pl. af’āl, fi’āl*), and prohibitions(*tark pl. turūk*)¹ for the purpose of actions and not just mere knowledge. Al-Ghazālī defines his ethics as follows:

By ‘*ilm al-mukāshafa* I mean knowledge and only knowledge. By the science of practical religion (‘*ilm al-mu’āmala*) I mean knowledge as well as action in accordance with that knowledge.....the science of practical religion (‘*ilm al-mu’āmala*) is divided into outward science (‘*ilm al-zāhir*), by which is meant that of the function of the senses, and the inward science (‘*ilm al-bātin*]), by which is meant the function of the heart. The bodily organs perform either acts of worship or usages of life, while the heart, because it is removed from the senses and belongs to the world of dominion (‘*ālam al-malakūt*), is subject to either praiseworthy (*mahmūd*) or blameworthy (*madhmūm*) (influences). Inevitably, therefore, this science divides itself into two parts-outward and inward. The outward, which pertains to the senses, is subdivided into acts of worship and usages of life; the inward, which relates to the condition of the heart and the qualities of the soul, is subdivided into things which is praiseworthy (*mahmūd*) and things which is objectionable (*madhmūm*).²

For al-Ghazālī, ethics consist of discharging the outward acts prescribed by the law (*sharī’a*) which impacts on the inward condition of man, the condition of his heart and the qualities of his soul. Thus, al-Ghazālī seeks the underlying meaning of the acts prescribed by the law and how it influences, shapes and cultivates the inward soul of man.

We will not examine one by one the actions put forward by al-Ghazālī in his ethics, but we will rather focus our attention on examining and analysing the underlying foundation that creates and makes up al-Ghazālī's ethics.

In his introduction to his exposition on Islamic ethics, *Ethical Theories in Islam*³, Fakhry defines ethical theory and its rationale by saying:

¹*Ihyā*. 25. Nabih Amin Faris 31.

²*Ihyā*. 12. Nabih Amin Faris. 6

³Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill: 1991)

An ethical theory is a reasoned account of the nature and grounds of right actions and decisions and the principles underlying the claim that they are morally commendable or reprehensible. Ethical enquiry has therefore always placed a special stress on the definition of ethical concepts or the justification or appraisal of moral judgements, as well as the discrimination between right and wrong actions or decisions. To be complete, an ethical system must deal adequately with these aspects of moral enquiry in an articulate and coherent manner.¹

Utilising this definition of ethical theory and its rationale provided to us by Fakhry and applying it in order to analyse al-Ghazālī's ethics, our task is to seek out the grounds of right action for al-Ghazālī providing his justification of moral judgements enabling him to discriminate between right and wrong actions or decisions.

However, where do we find answers to these theoretical ethical questions from al-Ghazālī's writings? We find that al-Ghazālī has written no book dedicated to ethical theory, but instead he wrote a number of books on how to act ethically. This is, however, not surprising. In the classical Islamic intellectual tradition, with the exceptions of some Mutazilites and the philosophers, there have been few books dedicated to the elucidation of theoretical ethical inquiry.² Fazlur Rahman laments this sad lack of a theoretical ethical inquiry in the Islamic tradition by saying:

The effective link between theology and law could be supplied by a moral philosophy. It is, indeed, remarkable that a rational system of "right" and "wrong" or "good" and "bad", that is a moral philosophy, was never worked out in the religious history of Islam. Not only did such a system not emerge among the orthodox who declared "good" and "bad" to be *shar'ī* not *'aqlī*; neither do the Mu'tazila appear to have made

¹Ethical Theories in Islam. 1.

²Watt also complains even up to present times there is still a lack of study on Islamic ethics. In the Introduction of Abul Quasem's The Ethics of al-Ghazālī, Watt says:

" There is yet no comprehensive history of Islamic ethics, as was noted by Richard Walzer in the article on *Ahlak*, in the new Encyclopaedia of Islam. Much of the field was covered, but in an uneven fashion, by Dwight M. Donaldson in his Studies in Muslim Ethics (1953), and subsequent works have dealt with various aspects of the theme". Abul Quasem, The Ethics of al-Ghazālī, i.

such an attempt. Indeed, even the pure philosophers failed to produce a moral philosophy. Whereas the religious circles stop at theology and leave the practical field to law, the philosophers are content with pure metaphysics and equally leave the practical field to law. The *Sufis* imposed on the law an elaborate scheme of spiritual purification in order to render it genuinely "good", and developed a substitute for moral philosophy called *'ilm asrār al-dīn* which by its very nature could not take the place of a proper moral philosophy.¹

Fazlur Rahman argues that the study of moral philosophy or ethics was underdeveloped in the religious history of Islam. Instead the study of ethics was subsumed under the study of theology and law. The study of the traditional Islamic sciences is divided into the study of the Qur'ān and Hadith, theology (*kalām*) and jurisprudence (*sharī'a*).² If the traditional Islamic sciences do not have a category for ethics (*'ilm al-akhlāq*), this does not mean that ethics is not discussed or studied in Islam. Ethics is studied but its study is subsumed under theology for the ethical component of belief and jurisprudence for the ethical component of implementation. Thus, instead of trying to find a straight forward discussion solely dedicated in the elucidation of ethical theory i.e. the grounds and justification of why an action is right or wrong, we will have to work backwards and derive al-Ghazālī ethical theory from his theological and jurisprudential positions.

¹Fazlur Rahman, "Functional Interdependence Of Law and Theology" in *Theology and Law*, ed. von Grunebaum, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1971). 94. Fazlur Rahman laments that a systematic moral philosophy was never seriously pursued and developed and envisages what might have happen if it had been. He says:

" Yet the orthodox theologians not merely allowed but demanded - in the teeth of the Hanbalite opposition - a rational investigation into the true and the false (*al-nazar fī ma'rifat Allah*) on the basis of the Koran. Why could not the same procedure be adopted with regard to the good and bad (*al-nazar fī 'amr Allah*)? Had such a body of thought emerged through a systematic rational search for morals in the Koranic teachings, not only would the law have received a new life and become law in the proper sense, but it would have rebounded on theology itself with major consequences. " *ibid.* 94.

²It may be argued that the Islamic sciences are only two instead of three. Al-Ghazālī places the study of Qur'ān and Hadith under the study of theology and jurisprudence. The rationale is that the Qur'ān and Hadith are utilised in order to derive belief for theology and the laws for jurisprudence.

Theology and Ethics

In his quest to place God's power and will above everything else, al-Ghazālī paints a picture of a God that is absolute and acts out of His will without any consideration for anyone or anything else. However, instead of ending up with a God who is compassionate and concerned with the welfare of those He created, this results in a God that is cold and aloof. In *al-Iqtisād*, a book which he wrote before his public declaration in favour of *Sufism*, al-Ghazālī describes the relationship of God to his servant, man and clearly exhibits his own quest to place God's power and will above everything else. This causes him to argue that there is absolutely nothing necessary for God to do. The implications that he draws out from this initial premise, are difficult to reconcile with the view of God in the Qur'ānic revelations; He is compassionate but stern, and makes promises to reward and punish his servants¹. Al-Ghazālī says:

We claim that it is possible that God, the Most High does not impose at all obligations upon His servants. And that it is possible that He imposes obligations on them (His servants) which are beyond their ability to bear. It is possible that (God) inflicts pain on the servant without recompense or crime. It is not necessary for Him to consider the best for them (His servants). It is not necessary for Him to reward the obedient nor punish the disobedient. As for the servant, it is not necessary for him to have any obligations because of reason (*bi al-'aql*) but [because of the impositions] of the revelation (*bi al-shar'*). It is not necessary for God to send messengers.²

¹For further elaboration of the Qur'ānic concept of God, see, Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*, Chapter 1, God.

²*al-Iqtisād*, 160. See also *Ihyā*, 133-4.

There emerges from the above passage, that first and foremost, al-Ghazālī seeks to establish clearly and decisively that there is absolutely nothing necessary (*al-wājib*) for, or incumbent upon, God. God does not have to do anything or act in a certain manner. There can be no constraints on God's actions.

Al-Ghazālī is even willing to concede the concept of a God willing to act towards His servants in what seems to be in an arbitrary manner, even to the point of what seems to be cruel. Al-Ghazālī's God may impose obligations or not on His servants as He pleases. God may even go as far as imposing upon his servants obligations which are beyond their ability which He Himself has created in them. Al-Ghazālī's God even may seem to act cruelly and inflict pain on His servants for no cause or reason, neither has He to recompense His servants.

Al-Ghazālī appears to almost deny the caring and compassion from God towards His servants when he asserts that God does not have to act in the best consideration of His servants. However, if God's actions are not for benefit of His servant, then who are they for? Is it possible that these actions can be for the benefit of God? But that is also impossible since God is perfect and perfection entails that He is in need of nothing and cannot be benefited or improved upon one iota. Are these action for no purpose, arbitrary, random and therefore ultimately futile? It is inconceivable that God's actions are futile. Then what are these actions for? Al-Ghazālī's formulations aimed at making God's power and will absolute only seem to lead to more unanswered questions.

God's imposition of obligations on man can be ascertained not through reason which is also a gift of God to man, but only through revelation. Al-Ghazālī, therefore, reduces the obligations imposed by God upon man to obligations which are incomprehensible for man to arrive at by

his own reason. Why are men unable by themselves to arrive at these same obligations and impose them upon themselves for their own benefit? Al-Ghazālī's answer is painfully simple. It is because these obligations may or may not be imposed for the benefit of man.

Even the proof of the truth of the prophets that God has sent to man is not judged by soundness or truthfulness of their message because there is no absolute standard of truth¹ to judge it against. Thus, the proof of the truth of the prophets is reduced to the prophets merely being able to prove themselves by means unrelated to what makes them a prophet, their message, but instead reduced to proving their prophecy by being able to produce miracles².

One cannot but fail to wonder whether this rather detached view of God's relationship to man is a sombre response of a detached theologian, but we find al-Ghazālī making similar comments after his public declaration in favour of Sufism in the *Iḥyā* in the section on theology which forms Book Two of the *Iḥyā* under the title of *Kitab Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*. He says:

....it is His [God's] prerogative to impose duties (*taklīf*) beyond the capacity of [His servants], and to cause pain (*ilām*) to the innocent; that it is not incumbent upon Him to do the most favourable [to His servants]; that [man's] obligations are all laid down in the divine law (*shar'*); that His sending of prophets is not impossible (*jā'iz*); and that the prophethood of our prophet (God bless and save him) is proved and confirmed by miracles.³

There emerges from the above passage of al-Ghazālī written after his public declaration in favour of Sufism that he still has a very similar perception of God's relationship to man, at least as far as his theological formulations are

¹For al-Ghazālī, there is no objective standard of truth. Things are true because God says so. Everything is subjective to God's standards. For further elaboration, see below, section on Al-Ghazālī's Definition of Necessary (*al-wājib*), Good (*al-hasan*) and Evil (*al-qabīh*).

²This is why miracles are so important to the prophets according to al-Ghazālī. I will elaborate on this point when discussing the later section on the proof of prophecy.

³*Iḥyā* 125; Nabih Amin Faris, 56.

concerned. In *Kitab Qawā'id al-Aqā'id*, again we see al-Ghazālī regurgitating the standard Ash'arite theological positions. In both of these texts, *al-Iqtisād* and the *Iḥyā*, al-Ghazālī only reaffirms his position that God acts in any manner He wishes. There is nothing, absolutely nothing which is necessary (*al-wājib*) or incumbent upon God. It is true that the Mu'tazilite fundamental premise that God is just¹ results in a God that must act in a certain manner in the best interest of His servants' and seems to lead to God's hands being tied and thus poses some problems against God's power and will². However, al-Ghazālī's and the Ash'arites' position of placing God's power and will above all other considerations leads to at least as many problems also left unresolved.

Al-Ghazālī's Definition of Necessary (*al-wājib*), Good (*al-hasan*) and Evil (*al-qabīh*)

Before we can pass such a harsh judgement on al-Ghazālī's perception of God's relationship to man as cold and arbitrary, we must pay closer attention to al-Ghazālī's use of the term necessary (*al-wājib*). It is essential to

¹Abu al-Husayn ibn 'Uthmān Al-Khayyāt(d 902), *Kitāb al-Intisār*, (Beirut, 1957). 30. The five basic tenets of the Mutazilites are, unity and justice, the inevitability of God's threat and promises, the intermediary position, the injunction of right and the prohibition of wrong.

²For example the Mutazilites carried the fundamental premise of God's threat to the extreme conclusion that God cannot pardon the evil doer. Fazlur Rahman elaborates the Mutazilites conclusion by saying:

" From among the various constituents of the Quranic concept of God, power, mercy, will and justice, they isolated this last one and carried it to its logical conclusions that God cannot do the unreasonable and unjust. In this connection they developed their doctrine of the 'Promise and Threat" according to which God can neither pardon the evil doer (and therefore violate His Threat) nor punish the good-doer (and therefore violate His Promise)". *Islam*, 89.

comprehend al-Ghazālī's understanding of the term in order to understand the crucial role it plays in his concept of God and how it directly affects his definition of good (*ḥasan*) and evil (*qabīḥ*). Al-Ghazālī points out that the misconceptions about God's actions is because of the misunderstanding of the term necessary (*al-wājib*). He explains the results of misunderstanding of these terms as follows:

All these assertions we based on the examination of the meaning of necessary (*al-wājib*), good (*al-ḥasan*) and evil (*al-qabīḥ*). People have plunged into it (this subject) and engaged in lengthy discussion on whether the intellect (*al-'aql*) finds things good, evil or necessary. Much of the uproar is only because they have not comprehended the meaning of these terms and their technical differences.¹

Al-Ghazālī then proceeds to give us his own definition of the term necessary (*al-wājib*). Necessary (*al-wājib*) has two generic meanings. The first meaning is subdivided into two; logical necessity and necessity resulting from being prudent. Instead of using the explicit Arabic terminology *al-wājib al-ma'qūl*, al-Ghazālī still uses the term *al-wājib* but the term is used in such a manner as to clearly mean logical necessity. Logical necessity is conceived of as that which requires the existence of anything whose non-existence is impossible. Thus, al-Ghazālī refers to God, the eternal being or to the existence of an object of knowledge where there is knowledge of it, as necessary existence because he argues as follows:

It (the necessary) is that whose non-existence leads to an impossible matter, like saying that what is known to have happened (*wuqū'uhū*), then its happening is necessary, (since) it means that if it did not happen, (then it) knowledge would have become ignorance and that is impossible.²

¹*al-Iqtisād*, 160.

²*al-Iqtisād*, 162. In the *Iḥyā*, al-Ghazālī makes a similar argument. He says: "Anything [the assumption of] the non-existence of which would lead to what is impossible - such as the statement that [recognition of] the existence of what is known is obligatory, since its non-existence would lead to an impossibility which is the conversion of knowledge into ignorance" *Iḥyā*, 133, Tibawi, 112.

The argument that al-Ghazālī is putting forward here is basically an argument based upon being able to deduce from the effect, its cause. The effect implies that there must be a cause. Therefore, from the above example, from the effect which is the knowledge of something, one deduces that the object of knowledge must necessarily exist. It must be borne in mind that while al-Ghazālī does not deny cause and effect outright, he strictly rejects the necessity of causal relationships. Thus, one cannot help but wonder why al-Ghazālī seems to put forth this definition of necessity so easily.

The other meaning of necessary (*al-wājib*) is necessity resulting from being prudent¹ or as Hourani coined the phrase prudential necessity². Here, again this meaning is implied from al-Ghazālī's usage of the term, necessary (*al-wājib*). Necessity as a result of being prudent refers to actions which are performed from the stand point of self interest. This is because the agent expects certain harm to himself/herself as a result of the omission of these acts. Thus, he/she performs these acts out of the self interest of avoiding harm. Therefore, an act is necessary (*al-wājib*) when it is necessary for the agent to perform it in order to avoid harm. The performance of this act are not for the sake of the act itself. The act itself only serves as a means towards another end, the avoidance of harm. Al-Ghazālī says:

It is well known that an action whose performance or neglect are neutral cannot be called necessary (*al-wājib*). If it was preferable and more deserving, it is (still) not called necessary (*al-wājib*) in every case, but it is inevitable in regard to the preference to the act. It is known that (the result) of the act in so far as neglecting it will result in harm or it is believed (that it will result in harm) whether that harm is in this world or the next-either immediately endurable (in this world) or unbearable (in the next life) ³

¹*al-Iqtisād*, 161-2. See also, *Ihyā*, 133, Tibawi, 112

²George Hourani, Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). 138.

³*al-Iqtisād*, 161-2.

The key to understanding what makes an act necessary (*al-wājib*) is harm or more accurately avoidance of harm. Al-Ghazālī does not seem to give any value to the act itself. The only value or worth of an act is that it will result in the avoidance of harm. It results in a subjective instead of an objective interpretation of necessity of an act. The necessity of an act is predicated on other than the act itself. In this case, it is predicated on the opinion of the actor that it will result in harm to himself/herself. Thus right action or wrong action is predicated on the opinion of the actor of the result of the act upon himself/herself.

However, for al-Ghazālī, not all acts which avoid harm are to be called necessary (*al-wājib*). Human reasoning, however, seems to lump together all these acts done to avoid harm as necessary (*al-wājib*). Al-Ghazālī limits this term and specifies the term necessary (*al-wājib*) to delineate only those acts which are related to the unbearable harm in the next life. Thus, for al-Ghazālī, only those acts which affect the next life can properly be called necessary (*al-wājib*). This distinction which al-Ghazālī makes between acts that affect this life and those that affect the next life is indeed very significant. As I will explain below, for al-Ghazālī those acts which affect the next life becomes the predominant consideration for how we judge and weigh all our actions.

The second meaning of necessary (*al-wājib*) is in relationship to where the harm is expected from this world or the next world. Al-Ghazālī argues that actions that may result in harm in this world may be known by reason. How does he reach this conclusion? Al-Ghazālī argues that reason is able to do so because it can foresee the harm in neglecting such acts either through personal experience or by others telling of their past experiences and extrapolating from these experiences a prediction of future events concerning this predictable harm. Therefore, reason will consider it necessary (*al-wājib*)

out of self interest for one to perform the acts which will avoid these foreseeable harms. Al-Ghazālī says:

We say that it is known that the likely immediate harm is not called necessary (*al-wājib*), since the thirsty, if he does not hurry to drink water, the harm is immediate (to that man). But it cannot be said that drinking for him is necessary (*al-wājib*). (It is because) there is no intrinsic harm (to be avoided) by not drinking originally. Even though, in the act (of drinking), there is benefit, but it cannot be called necessary (*al-wājib*). In trade and in the acquisition of wealth and booty there is a benefit and these are not called necessary (*al-wājib*). The designation of calling it (an act) necessary (*al-wājib*) is that in neglecting it, there is an obvious harm..... (However) that (harm that occurs) in this world can be known by reason. It (reason) also calls that (avoidance of that harm) necessity (*wājib*). The non-believers say that it is necessary (*wājib*) for the hungry man who will die from hunger that he eats when he finds food. We mean by the necessity of eating that it is a preferable act contrary to neglecting it because of the harm from neglecting it. The use of this technical term (in this manner) is not precluded by the revelation (*sharī'a*). This technical term (used in this manner) is permitted (*mubāhah*) and not precluded by the revelation (*sharī'a*) and reason. ¹

For al-Ghazālī, reason's assessments of an action is solely based on its outcome and not because of the value of the act itself. Reason considers these acts as necessary (*al-wājib*) because it is able to foresee the harm in neglecting them. However, al-Ghazālī does not clearly spell out how reason is able to foresee this harm. From the example given above, we can probably deduce that the predicted results of such acts are known either through personal experiences, observations and deductions or in believing others who inform you of this predicted result of harm based on their own past experiences, observation and deductions. Again here, the predicting of the outcome of these actions must be predicated on the assumption of cause and effect. Again here, we must question al-Ghazālī's commitment to his stand against the necessity of causal relationship.

¹al-Iqtisād, ,162.

Al-Ghazālī turns to the real task at hand of defining necessary (*al-wājib*) and relegating it to its proper realm, that of those acts which affect the after life, those actions that affect one for eternity. It is only in relationship to those acts which affect the next life that, according to al-Ghazālī, can be accurately called necessary (*al-wājib*). Therefore, it is what occurs in the next life that al-Ghazālī is most concerned with.

However, how does one know what will occur in the next life? Al-Ghazālī answers decisively that one can only know what will happen in the next life not through the use of one's reason but by listening to revelation. Thus, all events in the next life are known only through revelation. Since this is so, therefore, the expected harm in the next life which is the real harm, the eternal harm, the harm one must be most concerned with, can only be known through revelation. Al-Ghazālī says, " By that(harm) which results, I mean (that harm) in the next life, it(that harm) is known through revelation. We called it(these acts) necessary(*wājib*).¹ He reiterates this position in the *Ihyā* by saying :

Obligation here has two meanings: (a) either [the performance of] an act the neglect of which will result in the future or immediate injury- future as in the statement 'It is the duty of the servant to obey God so that He will not torture Him in hell-fire in the next world', and immediately as in the statement 'He who is thirsty must drink lest he dies'; (b) or anything [the assumption of] the non-existence of which would lead to what is impossible - such as the statement that [recognition of] the existence of what is known is obligatory, since its non-existence would lead to an impossibility which is the conversion of knowledge into ignorance.²

Again , even in relationship to the next life, al-Ghazālī carries over his explanation of the term necessary (*al-wājib*) in relationship to harm. Thus, in order for one to know what is necessary (*al-wājib*) for oneself, one must

¹*al-Iqtisād* , ,162.

²*Ihyā* 133, Tibawi, 112.

know what will result in harm to oneself in the next life. What will result in harm in the next life can only be known through the means of revelation.

Even in relationship to the hereafter, man acts or should act above all for his/her own self interest, i. e. the avoidance of harm. Al-Ghazālī does not elaborate on whether these acts are carried out solely for the purpose of man's self interest, but he provides us with no other explanation. One cannot help but wonder why these acts could not be done for other than the reason of self interest but for a nobler, higher, altruistic purpose. These acts could have been done because God tells one to do so even without the threat of punishment nor the promise of reward for their obedience but out of their love for God and/or gratitude to Him, their Creator and Sustainer¹. Would not this seem a more appropriate relationship between God and His creation? Would this not seem just as valid a reason for doing such acts?

Defining Good and Evil

From al-Ghazālī's understanding of what makes an action necessary (*al-wājib*), we proceed to see how this concept then influences, shapes and defines two foundational concepts in ethics; good and evil. However, before we delve directly into discussing these two concepts in ethics, let us first

¹One can only wonder why he did not put forth here the *sufis'* explanation for obedience to God. For the *Sufis'* obedience to God is due out of love for Him and not one's own self interest. For example, the famous Rabi'a al-'Adawiya (d. 801) who is among the earliest Sufi expounds this doctrine of obedience out of love to God by saying:

" I am going to light a fire in Paradise and to pour water to Hell, so that both veils may be taken away from those who journey towards God, and their purpose may be sure and they may look towards their Sustainer without object of hope or motive of fear. What if the hope of Paradise and the fear of Hell did not exist? No one would worship his Sustainer or obey Him". Margaret Smith, Rabi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam, (Cambridge, 1928). 102-3.

contextualize ethics in a religious framework. In the introduction of a recent book discussing contemporary ethical issues in religion, entitled Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions, the editors Peggy Morgan and Clive Lawton set out the framework on how to discuss the question of right and wrong, good and evil in a religious context.

The law of the land in most countries is a secular legal system enforced by police, judges and a penal system. Because religions are a way of life as well as belief-systems, they too have ideas about how people should behave and what should be done when they behave badly. They also have their own teachings about justice and a way for people to show that they are sorry for what they have done. But one of the main characteristics of religion is its sense that order, truth and justice are ultimate cosmic values and realities, not just human ideas. They are part of the way God wants things to be, to put in theistic terms, not just the creations of human societies..... Teaching about what is right and wrong is also related to beliefs about life after death and how a people's present life affects their future state.¹

What emerges from this statement on religious ethics is the strong dependence of ethics on God. What is ethical is defined not just by human ideas, but, rather by the ultimate cosmic values and realities determined by God. Therefore, right and wrong, good and evil, are defined by God and put in the way God wants things to be and not just the creation of human societies.

Another essential determining characteristic of religious ethics is how it defines ethical concepts in terms of its relationship to its beliefs about life after death and how the people's present life affects their future state in the hereafter. It is this belief about the afterlife and how one's present actions affect it that dominates and shapes how to define what is ethical.

Both these characteristics of religious ethics as described by Peggy Morgan and Clive Lawton that religious ethics are defined by God and dominated by the idea of life after death and how present actions affect one's

¹Peggy Morgan and Clive Lawton eds., Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996). xxii

future state in the afterlife are clearly evident in al-Ghazālī discussion on the two foundational ethical concepts, good and evil. However, before al-Ghazālī provides his own definition of good and evil, it is best to study the other possible meanings of good and evil he provides us with, in order to best understand how he finally arrives at his own definition.

Al-Ghazālī begins his discussion of good and evil not as abstract concepts but in their relationship to concrete actions. It is in analysing how he defines an action as good or as evil, that we will hopefully be able to extrapolate his definition of the concept of good or evil. It is hoped that once we can extrapolate a definition of good and evil, we can then use it to apply it to any actions and deduce whether for al-Ghazālī that particular act is good or evil.

Al-Ghazālī begins his discussion on good and evil by evaluating action. He argues that an act can be viewed in three ways. He lists them as follows:

Part of the meaning (of an act is) that the act in the perspective of the actor is divided into three divisions. One of these (acts) is favourable to his aim. The second is that (an act) contradicts his aim. The third is (an act) which there is neither in doing it nor neglecting it anything (which affects) to (his) aim. This (third) division is futile according to reason.¹

From the above list of how al-Ghazālī divides each act from the perspective of the actor, it emerges that the aim is the determining factor on how an action is viewed upon. It is the aim and not the act *per se* which determines how the act should be viewed. Thus, the aim is not only the determining factor for how an act is to be viewed, but it becomes the only factor of any consideration in calculating whether an act is good or evil.

¹al-Iqtisād , 163

Al-Ghazālī carries forward this idea of the aim as being the determining factor on how one views an act and applies it to determining whether an action is good or evil. He says:

For those acts which the doer agrees with, he calls (them) good from his perspective. There is no meaning to good except that it is in agreement with his aim. Those acts which contradict his aim, he names evil. There is no meaning to evil except that it contradicts with his aim. Those acts which neither contradict nor agree (with his aim), he names as futile which have no benefit, not in the least. The doer of the useless act is called frivolous ('*abath*) Possibly, he is called stupid. The doer of evil, I mean the action which he suffers harm because of it, is (also) called stupid. (However) Naming him stupid is more accurate for the frivolous doer ('*abath*).¹

It emerges from the above passage that firstly, the attribution of good and evil is an addition to the act. Good and evil are not intrinsic to the action. But, rather, a later attribution, an appendage added on to the action. Not only are good and evil reduced to only an appendage added on to an act, the attribution of good and evil is added on by the individual from his/her own perspective. Good and evil are reduced here, to the individual's attribution of these values on to the act in accordance to his/her perspective with regard to his/her own aims. Al-Ghazālī asserts that good as it applies to an act is only good when it is in agreement with one's individual's personalised aims and it means absolutely nothing else. Evil is simply the opposite of good, those acts which contradict one individual personalised aims and it means absolutely nothing else. Any act which neither promotes nor hinders one's own personalised aim is simply futile and thus, worthless. Therefore, the goodness or evilness of an act is to be viewed from the individual's perspective.

However, few, if any acts only affect one individual. Most actions, if not all, have some effect either immediately or in the future on other than the doer of the action. Al-Ghazālī is well aware that most actions affect more than

¹al-Iqtisād, 163.

one individual. However, since al-Ghazālī asserts that the attribution of good and evil upon an act is done by the individual in accordance to his/her own perspective, how then does al-Ghazālī modify his theory of good and evil to include the different perspectives by different individuals on the very same act? Al-Ghazālī's answer is very simple. He argues that the very same act can be viewed differently by different individuals. The same act can be viewed by one individual from his/her perspective as good and for another individual as evil. The determining factor of how to view an act remains the same, the aim. He says:

All of these (actions) then are not related to another actor or the action is not ranked in accordance with the aim of another actor. For if it (the action) was ranked in accordance with another actor and it (the action) had agreed with his aim, (then) he would name it good in his perspective because of its agreement (with his aim). And if it (the action) contradicted (his aim), he would name it an evil (act). If it (the action) was in agreement to one individual instead of the other individual, (then) one of them would name it good from his perspective while in the perspective of the other, it would be evil. Therefore, the naming of the good and the evil is (based) upon agreement or disagreement.¹

Al-Ghazālī sees neither problems nor contradictions in arguing that the same act can be seen by one to be good and by another as evil. All acts are seen from the eyes of the beholder and interpreted in accordance with his/her aims. Similar to the popular adage which subjects beauty to the eyes of the beholder, al-Ghazālī has subjected ethics to the eyes of the beholder and has reduced ethics to total subjectivity.

Al-Ghazālī even proceeds to provide us with an example of how the very same act can be viewed differently by different individuals. He says,

¹al-Iqtisād , 163

For (example), in the killing of a king. The action of the killer is considered good by his enemies, but is considered evil by all his supporters.¹

The example given by al-Ghazālī above demonstrates his unwavering insistence that the categories of good and evil are simply imposed on acts from the perspective of the individual. Even the extreme case of killing a human being is still only seen from the perspective of the aim of the individual. Thus, killing a king from the perspective of his enemies is a good act. But, from the perspective of the king's friends, it is an evil act. If even the taking of human life is not condemned objectively as an evil act, there can be no act that even comes close to be considered as either objectively good or objectively evil. The above example of the taking of human life clearly demonstrates that al-Ghazālī rejects any notion of the objective value in an act. For al-Ghazālī, there can be and there is absolutely no intrinsic value in an act. Therefore, for al-Ghazālī, all acts are subjective. The value of all actions are subject to the perspective of individuals.

Al-Ghazālī reiterates his position that all actions are subject to the perspective of the individual and that there is nothing in the act itself that is objective or in its essence that makes it good or evil. However, while reiterating this position that these attributions of good and evil to an act are only latter attributions placed on these acts by an individual from his/her perspective and thus, reducing all ethics to subjectivity, he does recognise some form of objective knowledge. He says

By this (definition) it becomes absolutely clear that good and evil are interpretations of the creation. They differ on these two additional attributions because of these attributions, and not on the nature of the essence which is not differentiated by the attribution. ? Certainly.

It is possible that the thing is good in the perspective of Zayd and evil in the perspective of 'Amr. But it is impossible that the

¹al-Iqtisād, 164

thing is black in Zayd's perspective but white in the perspective of 'Amr because the colours are not the additional property.¹

Since al-Ghazālī's ethics are subjective ethics, at first glance one would have thought that he would have carried this subjectivity over to everything else and made all knowledge subjective. However, despite this statement made above that Zayd and 'Amr may come up with different judgements on ethical judgements on the status of an act, they would never disagree on the status of the colour of an object. This leads one to conclude that there must be different judgements used in ethical questions than in seemingly factual questions. This may lead one to conclude that al-Ghazālī accepts also some kind of objective knowledge since the colour of the object is agreed upon irrespective of the observer's perspective. However, with only this example given here, one is reluctant to generalise and further speculate on al-Ghazālī's understanding of objective knowledge. One can safely say that al-Ghazālī accepts some type of objective knowledge, but that all of ethics is subjective.

For al-Ghazālī, the entire assessment as to whether an act is good or evil is subject to the perspective of the individual with regard to the outcome of the act. If the act is in agreement with one's aim, it is good. If it contradicts one's aim, it is evil. The outcome remains the deciding factor.

However, the outcome of the act is ultimately decided by God. It is God who decides whether an act is good or evil by informing His servants through revelation. What is good is what the revelation imposes on him to do and promises him reward for these actions. What is evil is what the revelation imposes him not to do and promises punishment for these actions. Al-Ghazālī says:

When you understand (this) the meaning, you will know that the terminology in the expression of good is also three. A speaker applies it (good) to every (thing) which he agrees with the aim, immediately or in the future. The speaker distinguishes what he agrees with in regard to aims in the

¹al-Iqtisād , 164-5.

hereafter. The good is what the revelation (*al-shar'*) imposes on him and he is promised reward. This is the terminology of our companions. Evil is difference which contradicts the good.¹

The individual judges the value of an act based on its outcome. However, since the outcome of an act is ultimately decided by God, al-Ghazālī is able to do away with the multiple subjective judgements on an act carried out by each individual in accordance to his/her own perspective. The aim of the individual must ultimately conform and be equivalent to the aim set out by God, because it is God who decides the outcome of the action. Thus, the subjective assessment of an act now is finally reduced to one, the subjective perspective of God.

From Theology to Law: Legal Definitions of Good and Evil

We now turn our attention away from theological text which many wrongly² consider today to be only ivory tower discussions in books with little or no bearing on the application of religion to daily life. Instead, we will focus on a more down to earth subject affecting every aspect of a Muslim's life, Islamic law, to look for how al-Ghazālī defines these same terms, good and evil, there.

By his own admission, al-Ghazālī wrote many books on law but *al-Mustaṣfā fī 'ilm al-uṣūl* (The Quintessence of the Science of the Principles of Jurisprudence) is his major work on Islamic law. He says:

¹*al-Iqtisād*, 165.

²This is clearly a wrong attitude to have. However, this attitude which relegates theology to a secondary role has been adopted by many in both the Islamic world and also by adherents of other faiths.

In the prime of my youth... I had composed many books on law and jurisprudence, then I turned to the science of the afterlife and learned the inner secrets of religion.¹

However, *al-Mustaṣfā*, his penultimate work serves as clear proof that he returned to write again on law and jurisprudence after he had turned to *Sufism*. His last work is a short treatise on *kalām* entitled *Iljām al-'Awāmm 'an 'Ilm al-Kalām*.

However, since *al-Mustaṣfā* is his last major work, it must be the product of a culmination of his mature intellectual thoughts and thus, probably reflective of the opinions he had come to hold after his long turbulent intellectual journey. Al-Ghazālī wrote his famous intellectual autobiography the *Munqidh* either before or simultaneously with the *Mustaṣfā* as pointed out by Hourani, "the writings of these two works (*al-Mustaṣfā* and *al-Munqidh*) may well overlap"². It must remain somewhat of a mystery, however, why a man who criticised law in a number of his previous works and came to attribute to it little importance would at the end of his life write a major work on law. Again this conundrum must be left aside for another day. The authenticity of this book, however, is beyond question.

As has been pointed out earlier, there is no specific discipline of ethics in Islamic sciences³. This does not signify that ethics is irrelevant or unimportant in Islam but that the study of ethics is subsumed under the discipline of law. Thus, all ethical concepts can be found in legal texts. Therefore, we will ask his legal text the very same questions on these ethical concepts, good and evil as previously posed to al-Ghazālī's theological text. After all, is not the law only a logical expression and implementation of ethics?

¹*al-Mustaṣfā fī 'ilm al-usūl* (Cairo: Dar al-fikr, no date). 4. Further, referred to simply as *al-Mustaṣfā*.

²George Hourani, "A Revised Chronology of Ghazālī's Writings" *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 104 (1984). 302.

³See above, Chapter Five: The Significance of Ethics.

In this legal text, we find al-Ghazālī is consistent in his definition of these ethical terminologies with those in his theological texts¹. In fact, in many places, he repeats himself using the same language or similar phraseology, providing at times the same examples in order to illustrate his point as he has done in his theological texts. This demonstrates that although al-Ghazālī had encountered and discussed these questions very early in his intellectual career², there has been little change of his position on these issues.

Defining Good and Evil

Al-Ghazālī begins his discussion of good and evil by putting reason in what he considers to be its proper place by relegating it to a secondary position in his exposition. He says:

The assessment (of an act) for us expresses the judgement (*khiṭāb*) of the revelation (*shar'*) when [the judgement] is connected to the acts of those under obligation. Thus the forbidden is the declaration [of an act] in it (*shar'*): Shun it and do not do it. The obligatory is a declaration in it (*shar'*): Do it and do not neglect it. The permitted is the declaration in it (*shar'*): If you wish, do it and if you wish, do not do it. For if this judgement is not from the Legislator, then, there is no assessment. Therefore, we say, the 'aql neither commends nor detests, and [the 'aql] does not make the thanking of the benefactor obligatory, and there is no assessment on an action before the arrival of the revelation (*shar'*).³

¹The theological texts being referred to here are, al-Iqtisād and Kitāb Qawā'id al-'aḳā'id

²As mentioned earlier, al-Iqtisād was written very early in his career.

³al-Mustafā, 55.

Thus, for al-Ghazālī what is forbidden and what is obligatory and even what is permitted are known only through the vehicle of the *shar'*. Reason, '*aql*', plays absolutely no role in discovering these matters. Why is this so? This is because all these matters are decided by the proclamation of revelation. Al-Ghazālī states clearly and decisively that before the arrival of revelation, there is not and cannot be any assessment of the ethical value of an act. Thus, were it not for the coming down of revelation to man, man could not, and would never have known any of these matters. Man's own reason, '*aql*', cannot make any assessment of an action. For these matters are dicta imposed from on high, from God unto His creation, man.

After stating his own position on the place of reason *vis à vis* revelation in discovering ethical truths, he proceeds to provide us with a summary of his opponent's position, the Mu'tazilites, on these matters, along with his own counter-arguments. He summarises the Mu'tazilites' position as follows:

The Mu'tazilites hold the view that acts are divided into (two) good (*ḥasana*) and evil (*qabīḥa*). Some of these (acts), the mind perceives by necessity¹ (*bi-darūri*) (are good), like the goodness of rescuing drowning (*gharqā*) persons or perishing (*al-halakā*) persons, and the (goodness of) thanking the benefactor (*mun'im*), and the goodness (of telling) the truth (*ṣidq*); and (some of these acts are evil like) the detestability of ingratitude (*al-kufrān*) and inflicting pain on the innocent and lying when there is no purpose behind it. There are some of these (acts) which reason perceives (only) through rational inquiry (*bi-naẓar al-'aql*) like the goodness of telling the truth even though it is harmful, and the detestability of lying even though useful. There are some of these (acts) whose (goodness and evilness) are perceived through revelation (*bi al-sam'*), like the goodness of worship (*al-ṣalāh*), the pilgrimage (*al-hajj*) and the rest of the devotional acts. (The Mu'tazilites) claim that (these revelational acts) are distinguished from others (acts) by the attribute of their essence which is the benevolence (*luṭf*) which prevents corrupt acts (*al-fahshā'*) and invites (man) to obedience. Thus, reason, '*aql*', is not (absolutely) self-sufficient in perceiving (*bi-darakihi*) these (actions).²

¹*darūri* here must be understood in context. Here it refers to knowledge that imposes itself immediately on reason, '*aql*'.

²al-Mustasfā, 55-6.

This above passage tells us a great deal about how al-Ghazālī perceived and understood the Mu'tazilites. According to al-Ghazālī, the Mu'tazilites divided acts into two categories, good or evil. These acts are divided into these categories by the attribute of their essence. Thus, these acts are by themselves, *per se*, good or evil. Reason, '*aql*', is capable of discovering whether these acts are good or evil. Reason, '*aql*', is able to judge either immediately or after some process of ratiocination whether these acts are good or evil. Reason is able to judge the value of some acts immediately without the need for ratiocination. This take place because the value of these acts immediately occurs to reason by necessity (*bi-ḍarūri*). The act imposes itself immediately on reason as a good act or an evil act. Some examples of such acts are helping a drowning man, being grateful and telling the truth.

The judgement of other than the above category of acts requires undergoing the process of rational inquiry before final judgement can be made on an act. Some examples of these acts are that one must always tell the truth even when it is harmful and must not lie even when there is a benefit in doing so.

Al-Ghazālī attempts to undermine the Mu'tazilites' position by arguing that if all acts can be evaluated by reason, '*aql*', how is it that the Mu'tazilites recognise the value of revelational acts? Al-Ghazālī gives a fair representation of the Mu'tazilites' position on revelational acts by saying that; " (The Mu'tazilites) claim that (these revelational acts) are distinguished from others (acts) by the attribute of its essence, the benevolence (*luṭf*) which prevents corrupt acts (*al-fahshā'*) and invites (man) to obedience". This statement concerning the Mu'tazilites' position on the difference and value of revelational acts is a reasonable, although, oversimplified interpretation. However, it is the conclusion al-Ghazālī draws from this which is dreadfully

incorrect and misrepresents the Mu'tazilites' views. Al-Ghazālī draws the conclusion that "Thus, reason, 'aql, is not (totally) self-sufficient in perceiving (*bi-darakihī*) these (acts). Therefore, al-Ghazālī's objective here is to endeavour to show that the Mu'tazilites were inconsistent in their analysis of the capacity and ability of reason to uncover truths.

Granted that for the Mu'tazilites, revelational acts possess great value. However, the value of revelational acts is not that it gives man knowledge that he could not have discovered by himself/herself. But, its value is in revelation's ability to transform general truths into specific action with the power of its language and symbols that impel and motivate man to right action. These devotional acts train him/her to choose and do the right action and prevents him/her from doing evil. 'Abd al-Jabbār (d.1024), one of the most renowned of the Mu'tazilite theologians, explains the Mu'tazilites' position on the value of revelation as follows:

The doctrine is refuted of those who say that if these messengers have taught what is according to reason, reason is sufficient without them, but if they have taught something else then their doctrine must be rejected and not accepted from them. For, in view of the situation we have stated, the teaching of the messengers is nothing but a detailed specification (*tafṣil*) of what is determined in its generality (*jumlātuhu*) by reason. We have previously mentioned that the obligation of [promoting] advantage and the evilness of [promoting] mischief are determined by reason.¹

Thus, it is clear that the Mu'tazilites place great value on revelation. Its value however, is not that it gives new knowledge but that it is able to transform general truths into particular actions. Therefore, al-Ghazālī's accusation against them that they were inconsistent and had conceded that reason, 'aql, was insufficient to evaluate an act is unfounded and rests upon

¹'Abd al-Jabbār, Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa, ed. 'Abd al-Karim 'Uthman, (Cairo, 1965). 564-5. I have used here a translation of this passage from George Hourani, in Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of 'Abd al-Jabbār, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). 135. For an enlightening view of the Mu'tazilites' understanding of the relationship of revelation and reason, refer to Hourani, Islamic Rationalism: The Ethics of 'Abd al-Jabbār, chapter six, Revelation.

either a misunderstanding of the Mu'tazilites' views on revelation or an attempt to misrepresent them.

Al-Ghazālī counters the Mu'tazilites' argument that reason, 'aql, can inevitably discover whether an act is good or evil by tearing down the very foundation on which the Mu'tazilites had built their argument. The Mu'tazilites' argument basically comes down to the fact that all acts are either good or evil because it is inherent in their essence, acts are good or evil *per se*. Being grateful is good because it is good in its essence. Therefore, the act is good *per se* regardless of the outcome or of one's perspective. Lying is evil because it is evil in its essence. Therefore, lying is evil *per se* regardless of the outcome or of one's perspective. The assessment of an act is objective, regardless of either the outcome or one's perspective.

It is this very assessment that an act is evaluated objectively that al-Ghazālī denies and rejects outright. Al-Ghazālī rejects the Mu'tazilites' foundational premise that an act is good or evil because of the attribute of their essence. Because of this, al-Ghazālī denies that there can any objective assessment of an act. Instead, al-Ghazālī argues that every assessment of an act is subjective.

If for al-Ghazālī, every assessment of an act is subjective, the obvious question that follows is: Subject to what? Al-Ghazālī answers in *al-Mustaṣfā*¹ as he had done in *al-Iqtisād*² that the assessment of an act is subject to the individual from his/her perspective based on his/her objective. In clear contrast to the Mu'tazilites who argued that the assessment of an act is objective and thus regardless of one's perspective, al-Ghazālī places the

¹Al-Ghazālī says:

"Acts are divided into what is in agreement with the objective (*gharaḍ*) of the agent and into what is contrary to it (his objective), and to what is neither in agreement nor contrary to it (his objective). (Those acts) in agreement (with his objective) are called good (*ḥasan*). (Those acts) contrary (to his objective) are called evil (*qabīh*); the third (category are those acts which are neither in agreement nor contrary to the objective) are called futile." *al-Mustafā*, 56.

²*al-Iqtisād*, 163.

assessment of the act solely on the agent. Al-Ghazālī has turned on its head the Mu'tazilites' basic assumption that the assessment of an act is in the act itself. Instead, al-Ghazālī has begun with the opposite basic assumption that the assessment of the act is made by the agent of the act.

Al-Ghazālī then proceeds to deal with the question of the basis on which the agent make his/her assessment? Al-Ghazālī argues that the agent makes these assessments out of self-interest. Thus, an act is considered good when it is in agreement with the agent's objective and evil when it goes contrary to the agent's objective. Any acts which fall into neither category is simply considered futile (*'abath*).

Al-Ghazālī sees neither problems nor contradictions in arguing that the same act can be seen by one to be good and by another as evil. All acts are seen from the eyes of the beholder and interpreted in accordance with his/her aims.

If all acts are seen only from the eyes of the beholder and interpreted only in accordance with his/her aim at that particular time, may not this same individual's aim change and the very same act that he/she had judged earlier as good may now become evil. This is possible since the aim of the individual may have changed. G. E. Moore concludes that subjectivist ethical theory will lead to the paradoxical conclusions that the same action could be both right and wrong, and that the same action could change from being right to being wrong. Harrison summarises Moore's argument which cites coincidentally the same example of the killing of a king as al-Ghazālī had given above as his explanation of how this subjective ethical theory will inevitable lead to paradoxical conclusions. He says:

If Jones approves of Brutus' assassination of Caesar and says Brutus was right, it follows from the theory that Brutus was right. Similarly, if Smith disapproves of Brutus' assassination of Caesar and says Brutus was wrong, then Brutus was wrong. Hence Brutus was both right and wrong to assassinate Caesar. Second to show that Brutus' assassination of Caesar can change from being right to being wrong, all Moore thought

he needed to do was to point out that if Jones says (at the time when he approves of Brutus's action) that Brutus was right, then according to this theory Brutus was right; if he later had come to disapprove of Brutus' action, then, if he says Brutus was wrong, according to the theory, Brutus was wrong. If Jones can truly judge that at one time that Brutus was right and at a later time that Brutus was wrong, it must follow that Brutus' action has changed from being right to being wrong.¹

Leaving all ethical judgement to the individual leads to a great number of problems. From the above example, Moore points out the dilemmas one would have to face and accept if we were to argue for all ethical judgements to be subjective, subject only to the whims and fancies of the particular individual at particular moment in time. Moore points out the dilemma that the same individual may have to face. He may at one time think that his action was right and later with changed circumstances rethink his position and the very same action which was right before has become wrong without the act itself changing one iota. Thus, the ethical judgement of an act does not only depend entirely on the individual but entirely on the individual at a particular moment in time.

However, al-Ghazālī's subjectivist ethical theory is not as subjective as the one Moore is disparaging above. Al-Ghazālī qualifies his subjectivist ethical theory by removing the subjectivity of judgement of an act from the individual's hands and places it in the hands of God. However, before we explain how al-Ghazālī qualifies his subjective ethical theory, it is important to point out that since al-Ghazālī considers ethical judgements to be subjective in the eyes of the beholder, one might jump to the wrong conclusion that for al-Ghazālī, all knowledge is subjective. Al-Ghazālī does in fact accept some types of knowledge as objective knowledge, knowledge which is agreed upon by all regardless of their objective or perspective. He repeats the same example given in *al-Iqtisād* to argue this point. He says:

¹Jonathan Harrison, "Ethical Subjectivism", in Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, vol. 3, 79.

For them (good and evil) represent agreement or disagreement. These two matters (good and evil) are relational (*'idāfiyāni*) not like (the colour) black and white since it would be inconceivable that a thing is black in the perspective of Zayd and white in the perspective of 'Amr.¹

This clearly demonstrates that al-Ghazālī distinguishes this kind of knowledge from ethical judgements. It is not, however, altogether clear what types of knowledge fall exclusively into this category of objective knowledge.

All this talk of ethical judgement being in the hands of each individual may lead one to the absurd conclusion that for al-Ghazālī the evaluation of all acts is subjective to the whims and fancies of each individual. Al-Ghazālī removes the subjectivity of judgement of an act from the individual's hands and places it in the hands of God, so to speak. For al-Ghazālī, it is God who decides the outcome of every act. Therefore, it is God who decides the value of every act. He says:

The application of good is on what the revelation (*shar'*) (considers) good by commending it to its doer. (Thus) the action of God is good in every circumstance (regardless of whether) contrary to (a person's) objective or in agreement with it. The matter which the revelation (*shar'*) assigns, will necessarily be good.²

In *al-Iqtisād*, al-Ghazālī prefaced this discussion of removing the subjectivity of judgement from the individual's hands and placing it in the hands of God by pointing out that this occurs because it is the outcome of the expected harm or reward in the next life that one must be most concerned with. This is because the harm or reward in the next life is the real harm or reward, the eternal harm or reward. These harms or rewards are decided by God and can be known only from revelation.³ Therefore, without repeating this assumption again in *al-Mustasfā*, al-Ghazālī draws out and therefore, repeats the same conclusions.

¹*al-Mustasfā*, 56.

²*al-Mustasfā*, 56.

³*al-Iqtisād*, 162.

Since the outcome of an act is ultimately decided by God, al-Ghazālī is able to do away with the multiple subjectivity in perceiving an act. The aim of the individual must ultimately be equivalent to the aim set out by God because it is God who decides the outcome of the action, the reward or harm incurred from each action. Thus, the subjective assessment of an act now is finally reduced to one, the subjective perspective of God.

Some Problems in Subjective Ethics

Even after arguing that ethical judgements are subjective and ultimately reducing the subjectivity to one perspective, God's perspective, al-Ghazālī is still left with some nagging problems raised by the Mu'tazilites' objective ethics. Al-Ghazālī rises to the defence of his position that all ethics is subjective and provides some very interesting answers in his reply to the Mu'tazilites' challenges.

For example the Mu'tazilites point to the fact that even men who have no religion and therefore are not bounded by religious stipulations of punishment or rewards, seem to share similar values of good and evil. They consider it good to help people in need even when they do not expect to receive any benefit either in terms of reward or even gratitude. In fact, these actions may even prove detrimental to themselves. But they still consider it good to do such acts. This must be because these acts are good in themselves. Al-Ghazālī cites the Mu'tazilites' example for these acts here:

(The Mu'tazilites) argue that we know absolutely that one to whom the telling of the truth and lying are equal (to his self-interest), prefers the telling of the truth and he is inclined (*māla*) to it if he is a person in full possession of his mental faculties (*'āqilan*). There is nothing to this (preference) except

[because] of its [the act's innate] goodness. A great king who rules over a region, if he sees a weak person (who is) near destruction, he (the king) is inclined to save him, even if he (the king) does not believe in religion, and therefore, (does not) anticipate a (religious) reward (from God) and also he does not seek from him (the person being rescued) repayment (*mujāzā*) nor gratitude. Also (perhaps) this (rescue may) not be in agreement with his (the king's) objective, indeed, he (the king) may be made difficult by it. However, the person in full possession of his mental faculties (*'āqilan*) judges it good to endure against the sword when he is forced to a declaration of unbelief or to reveal a secret, or to violate an agreement. (Although) These are contrary to the objective of the one (being) compelled. On the whole, the considering as good (these) noble characteristics and open-handedness are among them (the things) no person in full possession of his mental faculties (*'āqilan*) would deny, except from obstinacy.¹

This example given by the Mu'tazilites seems to be fairly convincing in proving the existence of at least some form of universal values held by all reasonable men. The Mu'tazilites' explanation of how men obtain these same values is because they are able by themselves to discover that these acts are good or evil. They are able to do so because these acts are good or evil in themselves, because their essence is good or evil.

Al-Ghazālī accepts part of the Mu'tazilites' claim. He accepts that there exists widespread acceptance that certain things are good or evil. To deny this would be sheer stupidity. However, al-Ghazālī gives his own explanation of how these judgements became widespread and accepted. He attributes that as being due to religious commitment to revelational stipulations or in agreement with one's objectives. He says in reply to the Mu'tazilites:

Answer. We do not deny the widespread (acceptance) of these judgements among men and they are praiseworthy and well known. But their basis is either commitment to religious prescriptions (*al-tadayyun bi al-sharā'i'*) or (one's own) objective.²

¹al-Mustasfā 58.

²al-Mustasfā 58.

Al-Ghazālī does not explain further here how these judgements became widespread and accepted by all reasonable men nor, more importantly, how religious stipulations became the basis of these judgements. One may speculate that since God had been sending prophets since the creation of man, and to all peoples, with basically the same message, it is possible that the same religious stipulations became widespread and accepted by all reasonable men because of the different prophets spreading the same message to all peoples. However, without al-Ghazālī explaining his reasons further on this matter, this speculation must remain only a possible explanation.

In another similar example given by the Mu'tazilites, al-Ghazālī gives a different very interesting counter argument, the psychological argument. Al-Ghazālī had accepted as fact that most people would rather help others in dire need than be indifferent to their distress. Al-Ghazālī first sets up the problem by saying:

We say: One prefers the rescuing (of a man) against indifference (even) in the perspective of one who does not believe in the religious laws (*sharā'i'*) in order to defend against the harm which befalls the man. This is because of the affections of the same(species of) creature (*riqqa al-jinsiyya*)¹. It (this feeling) is a natural characteristic (*ṭab'*).²

It emerges from the above statement that even a man who does not believe in the *sharā'i'* (divine laws) would prefer to help others in dire need rather than display indifference to them because of some feeling of amiability among the same human species. However, al-Ghazālī, instead of following this line of thought, that man's concern for other men is natural, turns the argument around and places this concern to help as not being for other men but for himself, his own self interest. Al-Ghazālī continues the argument:

¹This amiability of the same species of creatures towards each other is based upon the notion that members of the same species are naturally inclined to help each other. This sympathy of man inclined to help other men must be contrasted with men not having the same sympathy for animals, especially those he consumes as food.

²al-Mustasfā, 59.

He imagines (himself) in (that same) distress. It causes him to envision himself in that (same) distress and he envisions someone else abandoning him and his rescue. He considers evil (the act of abandoning him and his rescue because it) being contrary to his objective. He re-assesses (his own situation) and this evil, the destruction of a man. He appraises it from his own perspective (as if he was the one in that distress situation) and he scolds for himself this imagined evil.¹

Al-Ghazālī provides a psychological answer as to why one man would want help another. One man would want to help another because he can imagine himself some day being in that situation and he would want someone to help him. He would despise anyone who could help him were he in that situation but would not. Thus, he would not want to be that man he would himself come to despise. Therefore, out of his own interest of wanting others to help him, he would help others in dire situations. Again al-Ghazālī here stands firm on his position that there is no objective value in an act.

Theological Conclusions and Their Implications: Ethics

Al-Ghazālī's ethical theory is based on the consequence of the action. According to al-Ghazālī, man evaluates all acts in terms of whether it is in agreement with one's aim or not. If it is in agreement with one's aim, the act is considered good and the act is considered the opposite, evil, if the act is not in agreement with one's aim. If these acts are neither in agreement nor disagreement with one's objective, they are just worthless or futile. Therefore, all acts have no intrinsic moral value. Thus, all acts are evaluated solely on the basis of the result of the consequence of the action in accordance to the personalised individual's perspective. All acts are evaluated based upon one's own self interest.

¹Al-Mustafā, 59-60.

If one were to stop short and terminate the analysis of al-Ghazālī's ethics at this point, one would be misled into concluding that for al-Ghazālī all acts are evaluated differently by different individuals according to their judgement of the situation at that particular moment in time. This conclusion would be a grave error and a serious misrepresentation of al-Ghazālī's ethics. Such a conclusion would be impossible for a religious scholar to make for it would result in each individual creating his own way of life, resulting in his own religion, worshipping himself.

After al-Ghazālī has vigorously argued that all actions are evaluated subjectively, subject to the result of the consequence of the action, he pulls in the reins and turns the focus of the analysis to who decides the results of the consequence of the act. In the final analysis for al-Ghazālī, it is God who ultimately decides the result of the consequence of each and every action. Therefore, al-Ghazālī is able to remove the subjectivity of judgement from the individual's hands and place it in the hands of God.

Man, al-Ghazālī argues, evaluates the consequences of an act based either on personal experience or by others telling from their past experiences and extrapolating from these experiences a prediction of future events concerning this predictable harm or benefit. Therefore, man's reason will consider it necessary (*al-wājib*) out of self interest for one to perform the act that will avoid this foreseeable harm. However, man's reason is unable to know the outcome of the expected harm or reward in the next life with which he must ultimately be most concerned. This is because the harm or reward in the next life is the real harm or reward, the eternal harm or reward. These harms or rewards are decided by God and can be known only from revelation.¹ The result of the consequence of the act is taken away from each individual and decided solely by God. Since the outcome of those acts is ultimately decided by God, al-Ghazālī is able to do away with the multiple

¹al-Iqtisād , 162.

subjectivity in perceiving an act. The aim of the individual must ultimately be equivalent to the aim set out by God because it is God who decides the outcome of the action, the reward or harm incurred from each action.. Thus, the subjective assessment of an act now is finally reduced to one, the subjective perspective of God.

Acts are evaluated on the basis of an objective end, the happiness of man in the next world decided by God. Men attain this goal of happiness in the next world by obeying all the dicta expressed in the revelation. How to act and what to do and not to do is known solely through the means of the revelation.

What is forbidden and what is obligatory and even what is permitted are known only through the vehicle of the *shar'*. Reason, '*aql*', plays absolutely no role in these matters since all these matters are given their value by the proclamation of revelation. Therefore, before the arrival of revelation, there is and cannot be any assessment of the ethical value of an act. Thus, were it not for the coming down of revelation to man, man could not and would never have known any of these matters, for there would not exist any value of an act to evaluate. Man's own reason, '*aql*', cannot make any assessment on an act because there is no intrinsic value in an act itself except what God imposes on the act, about which He informs man through the means of revelation. Every evaluation of an act is therefore subject to the subjectivity of the divine will of God.

Since all acts have no intrinsic moral value and are morally neutral before God had imposed upon these acts a value through His commands and prohibitions in the revelation, al-Ghazālī must presume that the revelation itself with its commands and prohibitions has no intrinsic value. Its only worth is that it informs us of what God commands or prohibits. Thus, as for the first question we had raised concerning revelation, what is revelation: what kinds of knowledge does it actually give us?, we can conclude that since

there is no objective intrinsic moral value al-Ghazālī must presume that everything about which the revelation informs us is totally new to us since we have no way to arrive at objectively at this knowledge by ourselves since it is not objective knowledge. Thus, the knowledge that revelation provides us is not only totally new to us but we would have never been able to obtain it by ourselves. The purpose of this revelation revealed to man is to tell man what God commands and prohibits him to do. Without this revelation, man could not and would not be able to know what God expects from him.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Proof of the Truth of Revelation: The Miracles of Its Messengers.

Introduction.

Since al-Ghazālī rejects any objective evaluation of good and evil leading inevitably to a rejection of any objective evaluation of the truth of revelation, he posits that it is revelation that tells us what is good and what is evil. Revelation's designation of an act makes it good or vice-versa, evil. It is revelation that determines good and evil and nothing else. The role of reason is simply to submit and accept the decrees of revelation without question. This is because there need not be any reasoning¹ behind these decrees. These decrees are solely within the purview of God, His subjective judgement..

On the surface, without going into greater depth into the problems of the limitations of human understanding, interpretations and language, it seems simple enough that once one is told what is good and evil as stated in the revelation, this should determine how one should act. However, if we were to take a step back, without being able to judge using this God given

¹The only modus operandi that al-Ghazālī accepts reason utilising is that reason judges on the basis of benefit. Since these dictates of revelation are neither necessarily intended for the benefit of man nor certainly for the benefit of the all perfect God who is in need of nothing, reason has no basis to make a judgement and therefore cannot be utilised here.

instrument of reason which all men possesses, how do we know this revelation is actually revealed by God to man? Taking away rational justification from the commands of revelation results in removing reason's ability to evaluate the truth of revelation. Al-Ghazālī is well aware of this consequence. Thus, al-Ghazālī posits another means by which we can evaluate the truth of revelation. Since we cannot objectively evaluate the message of revelation, since the message is totally subjective to the will of God, al-Ghazālī posits that we must evaluate the bringer of the message, the Prophet. If the bringer of the message is proven to be a messenger from God, then the message he brings must be true. Thus, we will focus our attention on how al-Ghazālī seeks to prove not only the existence of messengers of God, but also how to identify one. The method and means al-Ghazālī utilises to prove the existence of messengers of God and ultimately, how to identify one, will have implications on how he, al-Ghazālī, perceives how God acts. Therefore, we hope, as suggested earlier in the introduction of chapter four, *Al-Ghazālī's Theological Positions and Their Implications on Revelation: An Indirect Method Analysis*, that by using an indirect method of understanding al-Ghazālī's positions on certain theological issues, we will ultimately arrive at his concept of revelation itself. Since al-Ghazālī's position on how to prove the existence and how to identify a Prophet demonstrates how al-Ghazālī understood one aspect of how God acts, and since the sending of revelation is also an action of God, we hope by examining his understanding of how God differentiated His messengers from others will shed some light on our attempt to extrapolate al-Ghazālī's understanding of another of God's actions, revelation.

Before even attempting to answer the question of trying to prove individual persons as messengers of God, we first have to establish that God has even sent messengers to mankind? If the answer is yes, only then, can we move on to the next question, how does one determine if that particular man

who claims to be the bringer of the message is actually sent by God to man? What are the criteria in determining this? Even up to the present time, there are many who claim to be prophets representing God¹. How do we determine one claim to prophecy is true while another is false? How do we decide?

Al-Ghazālī is well aware of all these questions raised concerning prophecy. As to the first question concerning the possibility of prophecy, al-Ghazālī answers simply by reminding us again of his quest to place God's power and will above everything else. Al-Ghazālī argues that since God is All Powerful, He is able to do anything. Therefore, since God can do anything, it is possible that He may send messengers. He says, "that His sending of prophets is possible (*jā'iz*)".²

However, since there is absolutely nothing necessary for God to do, God's sending prophets remains a possibility among infinite possibilities. How then do we know that He has actually chose this possibility? It is one thing to prove the possibility of prophecy and quite another to conclude the existence of prophecy.

Al-Ghazālī had begun the discussion of God's actions with the supposition that there is absolutely nothing incumbent upon God. Superficially, this supposition does not seem to be controversial but the conclusions that al-Ghazālī draws from it with regard to God's relationship to man are difficult to accept. Al-Ghazālī begins his argument by pointing out that neither creation nor the imposition of duties upon His creation are incumbent upon God. He says:

(God created) creation from nothing and the imposition of duties (*taklīf*) upon His servants are by His Grace and Favour,

¹For example, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908), the founder of the Ahmadiyya sect, rejected by most Muslims, regarded himself as a *nabī* or prophet

²*Ihyā*. 125, Tibawi, 96. See also *al-Iqtisād* 160.

It is not necessary for man to carry out a thing (obligation imposed) because of his reason but because of the *sharī'a* (law). It is not necessary for God to send prophets. If He does send them (prophets), then it is not evil or absurd.

the Most High. Neither creation nor such imposition was ever an obligation (*wājib*) upon Him.¹

Next, he challenges any notion that these impositions of obligations which the Prophet tells man through revelation necessarily have any reasoning behind them. He rejects that these imposition of obligations brought by the means of revelation were for the interest of man. He says:

The [Mu'tazilites'] assertion that [creation and imposition of duties are] obligatory in the interest of His servants is fallacious. For if no injury befalls Him through neglecting what is in the interest of the servants then such obligations would be meaningless. Further, the interest for the servant is for Him to create them in Paradise, and thus those endowed with intelligence find no comfort in [the fact] that He created the servants in the abode of calamities and exposed them in it to sin, and later He subjects them to the dangers of punishment and the awe of resurrection and judgement².

There emerges from the above passage two very telling ideas on al-Ghazālī's understanding of these impositions of obligations brought by revelation and thus, ultimately the revelation itself emerges from the above passage. The first is that the obligations imposed by the revelation are not necessarily meant to be in the best interest of man. However, the second is a more problematic and damaging implication which emerges from the above passage, that if God were really concerned with man, God would have created man to live in Paradise to enjoy life without exposing man to sin and punishment. It seems that al-Ghazālī sees little value in the trial and tribulation man is forced to face in this world and concludes that there is little or no benefit in it.

I have not raised these issues here to question al-Ghazālī's conviction of the existence of prophecy. However, in the light of these statements of God's relationship to man here, one cannot help but feel that al-Ghazālī needs to make an attempt to provide us with some possible explanation as to why God had chosen this possibility of sending prophets instead of choosing another possibility.

¹*Ihyā* 133, Tibawi, 112-3. See also *al-Iqtisād*, 86.

²*Ihyā*. 133, Tibawi, 113. See also *al-Iqtisād*, 86.

In *al-Iqtisād*, which is one of his early works, al-Ghazālī does not dwell further on this issue of God's choice among infinite possibilities, instead he simply states that God had sent down prophets and the proof of prophecy is miracles. He says:

.....that His sending of prophets is possible (*jā'iz*); and that the prophethood of our prophet Muhammad (God bless and save him) is proved and confirmed by miracles¹

However, in the *Munqidh*, he provides us with a proof that God had chosen to actualise this possibility of sending prophets by pointing out the existence in this world of the product of revelation, knowledge. This knowledge refers to knowledge which al-Ghazālī argues could not conceivably be obtained by man's reason alone such as the knowledge of medicine and of astronomy. Since the knowledge of medicine and of astronomy exists in this world, and as al-Ghazālī argues this knowledge obtained through revelation cannot be conceived by reason alone, thus this knowledge can only be obtained from a source other than reason. Al-Ghazālī attributes the source of this knowledge to divine inspiration.

Doubt about prophecy touches either its possibility, or its actual existence, or its belonging to a specific individual. The proof of its possibility is its existence. And the proof of its existence is the existence in the world of knowledge which could not conceivably be obtained by the intellect alone such as the knowledge of medicine (*al-ṭibb*) and of astronomy (*al-nujūm*). For whoever examines such knowledge knows of necessity that it can be obtained only by a divine inspiration (*bi-ilhām ilahī*) and a special help from God Most High, and that there is no empirical (*bi al-tajriba*) way to it. Thus, among astronomical phenomena there is a phenomenon which occurs only once every thousand years. How, then, could knowledge of that be obtained empirically? The same is true of the properties of medicaments. From this proof, it is clearly within the bounds of possibility that a way exists to grasp these things which the intellect does not normally grasp. This

¹*Ihyā* 125, Tibawi, 96. See also *al-Iqtisād*, 160

It is not necessary for God to send prophets. If He does send them (prophets), then it is not evil or absurd. It is possible to show their truth by miracles. All of these claims are based upon the discussions of the meaning of the necessary (*wajīb*), the good (*al-hasan*) and the evil (*al-qabīḥ*)

is what is meant by prophecy. Not that prophecy signifies such knowledge only.¹

Although the argument presented above as proof for the existence of prophecy may not seem very convincing, in fact even somewhat strange and surprising especially for us in present times², however, more importantly for our purpose here is that al-Ghazālī felt that it was necessary for him to provide some form of explanation for the proving from the possibility of prophecy its actual existence, for without such an explanation, we would have been forced to work from the supposition that God is capable of sending prophets to the next supposition that God had actualised this potential and had sent prophets.

Miracles

It is not self-evident how the performance of miracles serves as proof of prophecy. It does not logically follow that a man who seems to be able to defy nature, such as transforming a stick into a snake, is providing proof that he must be telling the truth. However, the performance of miracles is certainly a great way at gaining someone's attention and serves as a convincing instrument to one's argument that one has been touched by the all powerful God. It does give one a preponderance (*tarajjih*) of evidence to prove that

¹al-Munqidh 89. Richard McCarthy. 98.

²McCarthy points out that; "the argument from the knowledge found in medicine and astronomy may seem strange. A similar argument with regard to nutriment and medicaments is developed by al-Bāqillānī in his Tamhid,it is also used by Ibn Ḥazm." McCarthy, Freedom and Fulfillment, note 204, page 138.

one has been touched by the God. However, before we evaluate the use of miracles as proof of prophecy, we must first examine what really constitutes a miracle. Only then can we turn to next question, evaluating the effectiveness of miracles as a proof of prophecy.

Before we focus our attention on al-Ghazālī's explanation of miracles (*mu'jiza*, pl. *at*), let us first look at the Qur'ān itself. This will help us to try to comprehend what constitutes a miracle. The attitude of the Qur'ān towards miracles is complex. Gätje explains the term *mu'jiza*:

The word *mu'jiza* has come to designate the 'verification of the miracles' of the prophets. It does not appear in the Qur'ān: however, the idea that the people could produce nothing equivalent to the Qur'ān is clearly expressed (*Sūra* 17:88/90) The individual segments of the revelation in the Qur'ān are called 'signs' (*āyāt*, sing. *āya*). This term then came to be used in the sense of 'verse (of the Qur'ān)'.¹

The Qur'ān does not use the term *mu'jiza* for miracles. Instead the term used is *āyāt*, sing. *āya* which means signs of God. Here the term 'signs' is used in the sense that the sign points beyond itself to its author, the Creator, God. Thus, the Qur'ān points to natural and supernatural events as signs of God². An example of a natural event as a sign of God in the Qur'ān:

Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the succession of day and night are signs for people of wisdom.....and those who ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth(exclaiming): Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain.³

Thus, the Qur'ān clearly points to the natural events occurring on earth, for example the passing of day into night and so forth as signs or miracles of God that point beyond the event itself to the creator of the event, God.

¹Helmut Gätje, The Qur'ān and Its Exegesis, (translated and edited by Alford T. Welch), (London, 1976). 264

²For further elaboration on the Qur'ān's concept of nature, see Fazlur Rahman, Major Themes of the Qur'ān, chapter 4.

³Qur'ān 3:190-1.

The Qur'ān also recognises supernatural events as signs from God, i.e. miracles. The Qur'ān acknowledges miracles of past prophets¹. The common denominator between these miracles of past prophets is that the miracles physically violate the laws of nature. Thus, another way of defining what a miracle is that it violates the laws of nature.

However, with the prophet Muhammad, the Qur'ān is the only miracle accorded to him. The Qur'ān says:

Say: If all mankind and *Jinns* were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'ān, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support. For, indeed, many facets have We given in this Qur'ān to every kind of lesson (designed) for (the benefit) of man.²

And nothing has prevented Us (God) from sending (this message, the Qur'ān, like earlier ones) with miraculous signs, save that people of olden times gave the lie to them.³

These two verses show that the Qur'ān is considered a miracle and it is the only miracle given to Muhammad. However, the prophet Muhammad himself seems a little uneasy that he was not given any miracles other than the Qur'ān in light of the challenges and criticisms thrown at him by his Meccan opponents to produce miracles as proof of his prophecy as the previous prophets had done in order to vindicate their claim. The Qur'ān alludes to this situation faced by the prophet Muhammad and reminds him of the ineffectiveness of physical miracles to convince and convert people by saying as follows:

We know indeed the grief which their words do cause thee [Muhammad]. It is not thee that they reject. It is the signs (*āyāt*) of God which the wicked contemn. Rejected were the

¹For example when the fire became cool and safe for Abraham when he was thrown into the fire (Q21:69) or when Moses's rod turned into a serpent. (Q7:117).

²Quran 17:88-9.

³Quran 17:59

Apostles (*rusul*) before thee [Muhammad]: with patience they bore their rejection and their wrongs until Our aid did reach them....If their spurning is hard on thy [Muhammad's] mind, yet thou wert able to seek a tunnel in the ground or a ladder to the skies and bring them a sign-(what good?).....Those who listen [in truth], be sure will accept.¹

The Qur'ān is considered a miracle because of its unique message. It is the only miracle accorded to Muhammad because the Qur'ān considers the physical miracles unable to convince and convert people to the truth of the prophet. The Qur'ān points to the low success rate of the miracles of previous prophet in convincing people of their message².

Swinburne summarises and evaluates the Qur'ān's argument on miracles. He says:

The appeal of Judaism, like the appeal of other great religions, must turn on the intrinsic plausibility of its doctrine. If that doctrine is in fact revealed, its intrinsic plausibility is the evidence thereof, and not vice-versa. (Of course, in so far as Christianity incorporates Judaism any miraculous evidence in its favour will count in favour of it with Judaism as a component.) This point applies even more strongly to Islam. Islam claims very firmly that the Quran is God's revelation to Muhammad and through him to the world. But Muhammad explicitly denied any claim to have wrought a miracle other than the Quran. The Meccans asked, 'if he really was a prophet of God, why did he bring no sign to confirm his statements. Muhammad's answer was that the Quran with its inimitable language was itself the sign he brought'. The claim that the Quran is 'inimitable' has been based on three different grounds: (1) its success, (2) its content, including information which could not by normal processes have become available to Muhammad, an illiterate prophet, (3) its artistic style. The trouble is that we have no plausible cases of natural laws which the success of the Quran, things known to an illiterate, or the production of a new style of writing might seem to violate. We have no reason to suspect that illiterate creative genius cannot guess at truths normally accessible to the literate, or create a new style or a successful movement. So there is no strong reason to suppose that the natural law has been violated. We do not know what are the natural possibilities in this area. With Christ's resurrection it is different; if it happened in anything like the form recorded, it clearly violated natural laws.

¹Qur'ān 6:33-36.

²See Muhammad Asad's psychological explanation concerning why the prophet Muhammad was not given physical miracles in The Message of the Qur'ān, (Gibraltar, Spain, 1980). 427.

Islam may well be revealed, it has slender basis for appealing to us on those grounds; for it the truth and depth of its message are grounds for believing it to be revealed.¹

Swinburne's criticisms on the Qur'ānic failure to convince him that it is a miracle are based upon the assumption that a miracle must violate the natural laws. However, as shown above, the Qur'ān recognises both natural and supranatural events as miracles pointing to God. A more serious flaw in his argument here is his pointing out the resurrection of Christ as a miracle because it violates the natural laws. One is left with no doubt if that happened in anything like the form recorded, it constitutes a miracle. However, this miracle convinced very few to follow the teachings of Christ because in his lifetime he had very few followers compared to the millions of followers Christ has today who have never witnessed any of these miracles although they heard of them and believe in these miracles and his message. This seems to demonstrate that miracles which violate the laws of nature are ineffective in convincing people but the message of the prophets live on and convince and convert many more.

Al-Ghazālī on Miracles

The Qur'ān states that it gave no miracles to the prophet Muhammad other than the Qur'ān and points out that the ineffectiveness of miracles at convincing people to follow the message of the prophets did not deter many

¹Richard Swinburne, Revelation: From Metaphor to Analogy, (Oxford, 1992). 96-7

'*ulamā*' from attributing numerous miraculous deeds to Muhammad.¹ As has been pointed out above, the term *mu'jiza* which has become synonymous with the Qur'ānic term *āya* does not appear in the Qur'ān. Wensinck points out the development of this term, *mu'jiza*. He says:

Mu'djiza and *āya* have become synonyms; they denote the miracles performed by Allah in order to prove the sincerity of His apostles. The term *karāma* is used in connection with the saints; it differs from *mu'djiza* in so far as it denotes nothing but a personal distinction granted by God to a saint. Miracles of Apostles and Prophets, especially those of Muhammad, occur in the *sīra* and *ḥadīth*. Yet in this literature the term *mu'djiza* is still lacking, as it is in the oldest form of the creed. The *Fīkh Akbar*, ii, art. 16, mentions the *ayāt* of the prophets and the *karāma* of the saints. *Mu'djiza* occurs in the creed of Abū Hafṣ 'Umar al-Nasafī " And He has fortified them (sc. the apostles) by the miracles contradicting the usual course of events.²

This term *mu'jiza* has not only become synonymous with the term *āya* in the Qur'ān but has become the term to designate the 'verification of miracles' of the prophets.

What types of miracles the '*ulamā*' attributed to Muhammad and how they justified these attributions of miracle to the prophet in clear contrast to the Qur'ānic statements is however outside the scope of our discussion here. Instead we will restrict our comments here to al-Ghazālī's understanding of miracles and why miracles play such a crucial role in his proof of prophecy.

The discussion on miracles is closely related to the concept of nature. However, we will only gloss over the discussion of nature here since we will discuss it in detail in the following section. Instead, we focus on the how and why miracles become the crucial proof of prophecy.

¹For a long list of the numerous miracles attributed to the prophet Muhammad, see Annemarie Schimmel, And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety, (London, 1985), Chapter 4, Legend and Miracles.

²Wensinck, "Mu'djiza" Encyclopaedia of Islam, 2nd edition.

Al-Ghazālī's begins his discussion of miracles by placing the concept of miracle in the context of his framework of establishing God's power above everything else. He says:

Therefore this question [natural causality] necessitates an inquiry for two reasons. Firstly, in order to prove the miracles. Secondly, in order to uphold a doctrine on which all the Muslims are agreed-namely, that God has power over everything.¹

From the above passage, there emerges al-Ghazālī's recurring theme of trying to establish God power above everything else. Proving the occurrence of miracles is just another means of arguing that God can do whatever He wishes. However, because al-Ghazālī had also argued against any rational justification for the commands of revelation, resulting in removing reason's ability to evaluate the truth of revelation, one must be left with another means by which we can evaluate the truth of revelation. This means is the bringer of the message, the messenger, i.e. the prophet. If the bringer of the message is proven to be a messenger from God, then the message he brings must be true. With the message of the prophet sidelined, thus, the miracles play a crucial role in proving the truth of the prophet. These miracles do not prove necessarily that the prophet is telling the truth but provide a preponderance of evidence to believe him.

What are these miracles that provide a preponderance of evidence to prove the truth of the prophet? Al-Ghazālī defines miracles as events which depart from the usual course of events. He says:

....the affirmation of miracles which mark the departure from the usual course of events-e.g...., the rod turning into serpent; the revivification of the dead; and the splitting of the moon. He who thinks that the natural course of events is necessary and unchangeable calls all these miracles impossible.²

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa 238, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 184

²Tahāfut al-falāsifa , 236 Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 181-2.

Thus, al-Ghazālī does not consider those events that occur naturally as miracles. A miracle is only those events that are supernatural. Those events that mark a departure from the natural course of events. From this definition of miracles, we should be able to deduce that since al-Ghazālī recognises miracles as a mark of departure from the natural cause of events, that he must then recognise that there exists a natural course of events to depart from. If there was no natural course of events then how do we know that we have departed from it? It seems that al-Ghazālī must concede that there is a natural course of events but he rejects that this natural course of events are necessary (*lāzima*) and unchangeable (*ḍāruriyyan*). Kogan examines al-Ghazālī's position on the natural course of events and says:

Al-Ghazālī of course affirms omnipotence and denies necessary connections between causes and effects. In view of his treatment of agency this commits him either to the view that every existent is miraculous, since it is created [*ibdā'*] *ex nihilo* and with an instantaneous temporal beginning or to the view that the miracles are only extraordinary moments-creation of God, not His ordinary, recurrent creations. Whichever it may be, al-Ghazālī's intention is to lend support to a source of knowledge he already has, namely, Scripture, which affirms the omnipotence of God. His project in the final analysis, is theological.¹

Kogan's statement points out that if al-Ghazālī accepts the first position that all existents are existents are created with an instantaneous temporal beginning, then pushing this supposition to its logical conclusion, all existents would be miraculous since everything would come out of nothing and thus could not be a natural course of events. If al-Ghazālī accepts the other supposition, that miracles are extraordinary moments, then God's interference in the course of nature is only occasional and intermittent. If so, what then is God's contribution to events that He does not interfere with?

¹Barry Kogan, "The Philosopher Al-Ghazālī and Averroes on Necessary Connection and the Problem of the Miraculous", in Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism, ed. Parwiz Morewedge, (New York, 1981). 114.

What al-Ghazālī means by rejecting the natural course of events as necessary and unchangeable is indeed very complex and complicated by al-Ghazālī himself in his own various elaborations of nature.¹ Since this question centres on his concept of nature, we will relegate it to the next section. However, he ends this brief discussion on the relationship of nature and miracles with a damning conclusion that those who accept that nature is necessary and unchangeable must conclude that miracles are impossible².

However, in the very same chapter where he had began his discussion on miracles, chapter sixteen of *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, al-Ghazālī seems either to qualify this damning judgement or he contradicts himself. He continues his discussion on miracles interestingly enough at first giving a qualified agreement to the philosophers' concept of miracles.³ However, this agreement is not to how the philosophers conceived that miracles occur but rather because they conceded that miracles can and do occur. Al-Ghazālī says:

So this is their[the philosophers] opinion about the miracles. We do not deny anything mentioned by them here; for such things do belong to the prophets. But we must criticise them for stopping just where they do, and for denying the transformation of the rod into a serpent, or the revivification of the dead, etc. ⁴

It emerges from the above passage that al-Ghazālī's only agreement with the philosophers on the issue of miracles is that miracles can and do occur. If al-

¹His apparent acceptance of certain propositions in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* as suppositions of argument convolute his own position. It becomes difficult to distinguish his own position from the position he uses and accepts only for the purpose of argument. See Michael Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī's Second Causal theory in the 17th discussion of the *Tahāfut*", in *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, ed. Parwiz Morewedge, (New York, 1981). 85-112. See also Michael Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī on Bodily Resurrection and Causality in the *Tahāfut* and the *Iqtisad*", *Aligarh Journal of Islamic Thought*, 1989. 46-75.

²*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 236, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 181-2.

³For a discussion on the philosophers' concept of miracles with their Greek influences and underpinning, see *Prophecy in Islam*, section on Miracle, Prayers and Theurgy. 45-52.

⁴*Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 238, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 184.

Ghazālī had concluded that the philosophers had accepted the occurrence of miracle, then, he must reconsider his previous conclusion that "he who thinks that the natural course of events is necessary and unchangeable calls all these miracles impossible"¹ because this damning conclusion was directed at the philosophers who upheld the notion that the natural course of events are necessary and unchangeable.

However, al-Ghazālī may not be much concerned with these technical details² of how these miracles occur, rather what preoccupies him here is that a miracle is used to prove a more important idea, the idea that God is all powerful and therefore, He can do anything, at any time without any need for intermediaries, causation, or having to wait to undergo the natural preceding steps before attaining His desire.

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa , 236, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 181-2.

²His willingness to concede that the philosophers' concept of miracles may be right but seriously does not go far enough, seems to show that he is not too interested in the technical details of how miracles occur. However, this concession here is more likely done only for the sake of argument and does not prove that he accepts the philosophers' contention but rather to demonstrate that even if one accepts the philosophers' contention at face value, it is still deficient.

CHAPTER SIX

Nature and Causation

God's Acting on Nature: Volition or Necessity

Proceeding from our above discussion on miracles, we now turn our focus to al-Ghazālī's concept of nature to which we alluded previously in that discussion. It was felt that due to the complexity of the subject that it deserved to be discussed separately. The concept of nature in Islamic thought is a very complex and complicated subject which has been debated throughout the ages in the various schools of theology with wide implications on how one views God and His creation, the world, man's obligations and responsibility.

However, al-Ghazālī's position on nature is far from clear. His position is complicated by him, himself. This is because of many factors. One of the factors is his style of writing. He writes presenting the ideas of others as he understands them, providing their assumptions and arguments and only then does he make an assessment of these ideas. At times, all he does is try to show that these ideas are flawed even if one were to accept all the assumptions on which the argument were based. When this occurs it becomes very difficult to conclude whether he actually accepts these assumptions or whether they are only utilised for the sake of the argument. This is further complicated since, at times, all he does is try to tear down

other peoples' positions without providing his own alternative position. Thus, one may know what his position on a given topic is not, rather than what it is. Other factors that add to these complexities are the difficulty of the subject matter, the discussion of this subject in many different works with varying lengths of discussion and with different degrees of complexity due to the different audience he is addressing, compounded by his mixing and utilising the vocabulary of both theology and philosophy which was still fluid with its meanings not yet crystallised. All these factors compound the difficulty in getting a clear picture of al-Ghazālī's understanding of nature. However, a more significant factor that must be kept in mind is the implications of these discussions of nature on theology. Al-Ghazālī's discussions of nature continually seek to uphold the power of God and to reject any notion that impinges on the limits of God's power. Thus, all his discussions of the subject must be seen within the context of this aim.

However, due to the complexity of the subject compounded by al-Ghazālī's style of writing, there emerges a rift of opposing views among contemporary scholarship about al-Ghazālī's position on theology which inevitably includes al-Ghazālī's position on nature. It has previously been accepted that al-Ghazālī was an Ash'arite and that all his writing should be seen in light of the Ash'arite school. In fact, Fazlur Rahman argues that al-Ghazālī played a crucial role in the spread and ultimately the dominance of Ash'arism in the Sunni world. He says:

The main elaborator of Ash'arite doctrine, al-Bāqillānī (tenth century c.e.) even recommended that belief in the atomism of time and space, that is, the rejection of causality, should be "officially" required for Muslims! All this happened long before the destruction of the caliphate. It is true that Ash'arism succeeded only gradually in establishing its hold over the Muslim world and that the support of a Sufi like al-Ghazālī was crucial for its spread and ultimate dominance as the creed of a vast majority of Sunni Islam. Nevertheless, it is not an unfair indicator of the onset of rigidity in Islamic spiritual and intellectual life that the theological system of al-Ash'arī's contemporary the Hanāfī al-Māturīdī (born in Māturīd, a village near Tashkent), which held more reasonable

views than Ash'arite theology on all the issues just mentioned, was eventually drowned by Ash'arism in medieval Islam.¹

Thus, the established view as represented for example by D. B. MacDonald, Watt² and many others had accepted that al-Ghazālī's views were broadly in line with the Ash'arite approach to theology and thus, his writings should be seen as arguing for and promoting Ash'arite theology.

However, recently there have been some scholars who have argued that this perception that al-Ghazālī is an Ash'arite is a misconception. These revisionists point to many instances where al-Ghazālī produces arguments and opinions which do not seem compatible with Ash'arism and that these significant divergences from Ash'arism should lead to a reassessment of his thoughts as a whole which have previously been seen only in the light of expounding Ash'arite theology. Some examples of these scholars who held these revisionist views are Frank³, Abrahamov⁴, and Nakamura.⁵

¹Fazlur Rahman, Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition, (Chicago, 1982). 27. Hourani also explain the rise of Ash'arism by saying:

"The Ash'arite system of *kalām* did not become a dominant orthodoxy till after the establishment of the Great Seljūq Empire (after 1040), and especially after the foundation of the Nizāmīyya College in Baghdad (c. 1065) as a school of Sunnite theology. Before that, Shi'ite princes-Buwayhid, Fatimid, Hamdanid-had ruled Western Asia and Egypt, and had allowed more latitude for speculation for their subjects".

George Hourani, Averroes on Harmony of Religion and Philosophy (London, 1961). 3-4. Makdisi informs us that al-Ghazālī taught at the Nizāmīyya College in Baghdad from 1091 to 1095. George Makdisi, The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West (Edinburgh, 1981). 20.

²In fact Watt felt so strongly that al-Ghazālī was an Ash'arite that he proposed it as one of the three criteria for determining whether a work was written by al-Ghazālī. Watt says:

"Hence we can say that any work where the author is not aiming at orthodoxy or where he criticises Ash'ariyah, cannot belong to al-Ghazālī's latest period". W. M. Watt, "Authenticity of Works Attributed to al-Ghazālī", Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, 1952, 121.

³Frank, Richard, Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī and Avicenna, (Heidelberg, 1982), and his, Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School, (Durham, 1994)

⁴Benjamin Abrahamov, Al-Ghazālī's theory of causality, Studia Islamica, 67, 75-98, and "Ibn Sina's influence on al-Ghazālī's non-philosophical works", Abr-Nahrain, 29, 1-17.

⁵Kojiro Nakamura, "Was al-Ghazālī an Ash'arite? The Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko, vol. 51, 1993. 1-24.

Fascinating as these discussions on whether al-Ghazālī is an Ash'arite or not, may be, I will mostly refrain from engaging in them¹. First and foremost, I remain unconvinced by the revisionist arguments that al-Ghazālī is not an Ash'arite even though it is obvious that he did not adhere strictly to the letter of Ash'arism and that he demanded some flexibility in theological formulations². However, more importantly, he had generally accepted Ash'arism. Thus, I cannot concur with this call to reassess all al-Ghazālī's writings again from the new perspective that al-Ghazālī was not an Ash'arite for I believe that this method would result in al-Ghazālī being incomprehensible³.

¹For a review of this controversy, see Oliver Leaman, "Ghazālī and the Ash'arites", Asian Philosophy, vol. 6. 1996. 17-27.

²Al-Ghazālī demanded this flexibility to differ from Ash'arī in some matters in the Faysal:

"These people pretend that these books [of al-Ghazālī's] contain matter contrary to the teachings of the master of old and the leading *mutakallimun* [polemic theologians]. They also claim that deviating from the doctrine of al-Ash'arī by even so much as a palm's width is unbelief (*kufr*), and that differing from him in even trivial matters is error and perdition (or error leading to perdition). Compose yourself, O sympathetic and ardently devoted brother, and be not distressed by that. Dampen your impetuosity a little and bear calmly what they say and disassociate yourself from them courteously.....If he claims that the definition of unbelief is: That which is contrary to the doctrine of the Ash'arite, or that of the Mu'tazilite, or that of the Hanbalite, or that of others- then know that he is gullible [or inexperienced] and a stupid man fettered by servile conformism (*taqlid*) and one of the blind: so don't waste any time in trying to set him right.Perhaps this fellow has a leaning, from among all the systems, towards the Ash'arites and alleges that opposition to it in any detail at all [lit. in any coming and return from water] is flagrant unbelief. Ask him then, whence comes his unshakeable conviction that the truth is so much his special endowment that he judges al-Bāqillanī guilty of unbelief because he opposes al-Ash'arī on God Most High's attribute of duration (*al-baqā'*) and claimed that it is not a quality of God Most High superadded to His Essence. And why is al-Bāqillanī more deserving of being charged with unbelief by reason of his opposition to al-Ash'arī than al-Ash'arī is by reason of his opposition to al-Bāqillanī? And why is the truth the special endowment of one of them rather than the other? Was that because of the precedence in time? But al-Ash'arī was preceded by the Mu'tazilites-so let the truth belong to him who preceded him".

Faysal, 131-2. McCarthy, 146-8.

³Frank makes a tenable argument in his book Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School, that al-Ghazālī had undermined the importance of *kalām* and saw it only as a defensive tool. Frank says:

" It is for this reason that in a number of important contexts in which al-Ghazālī discusses *kalām* explicitly he speaks of it primarily as apologetic". 12.

More importantly, these debates although they have some effect on our current discussion, are largely peripheral. As I see it, even if one were to adopt either position, one would be hard pressed to deny that al-Ghazālī is seeking in all his arguments to uphold the ultimate power of God. This premise would be much clearer and more obvious if one were to adopt the more established position that al-Ghazālī was basically following Ash'arite theology whose very *raison d'être* is to establish the power and will of God over everything else.

The revisionist's position on causation¹ and that God could have not created no other universe² seems to undermine this premise. Marmura points

Frank proceeds to say:

"*Kalām*, that is, the common theology as taught in the schools, is essentially dialectic in its reasoning, and its arguments are founded on the Koran, which are directed towards simple people, while the "balance" of the demonstrative reasoning, which " gives genuine insight into the realities of things," is for the intellectual elite (*Qistās*, pp79ff) who are capable of a higher theology which he refers to consistently as "*ilm al-mukāshafah*," i.e., that in which true insight into the essential nature of things and the universe and into God's being as creator of every contingent entity and event, i.e. true *tawhīd*, is attained". 21-2.

Frank's pointing out that al-Ghazālī undermines the usage of *kalām* and considers it as a apologetic tool is neither unsettling nor problematic. However, Frank's contention is that al-Ghazālī wants to replace *kalām* with a higher theology, the Sufis' insight; *mukashafa*, first of all it remains undemonstrated that Sufis have their own theology. Or it is possible that the Sufi theology is the same as the Ash'arite or Mu'tazilite theology but its method of reaching its conclusion is not dialectic but rather the Sufis' method of *kashf*. Thus, instead of producing a new theology, all it does, significant though it is, is to introduce a new method of arriving at the same conclusion.

¹ Benjamin Abrahamov, "Al-Ghazālī' theory of causality", *Studia Islamica*, 67, 75-98.

² Frank argues unconvincingly that all of al-Ghazālī's arguments against the Mu'tazilite claim that God must act in a certain manner are all done for a dialectic purpose rather than a substantive difference. Frank says:

"Al-Ghazālī uses the same conception of the nature and the grounds of ethical necessity to refute the Mu'tazilites' thesis that God is morally obligated to benefit His creatures by sending prophets, etc., if not to do what is absolutely best for them, on the principle that it is impossible that God suffer harm or benefit from the existence or non-existence of any creature. The argument is essentially dialectic, however, since al-Ghazālī in fact holds that God necessarily creates what He creates and can have created no other universe. This is indicated in the statement "al-qadīm" [the eternal, a description unique to God] is an expression for that which exists necessarily in all its aspects" (*mā huwa wājibu al-wujūdi fī jamī'i jihātihī*). 36.

out that if one were to take this position of necessary causation to its ultimate logical conclusion, it would result in a serious restriction on God's power.

He says:

A proper understanding of al-Ghazālī's rejection of the theory of essential efficient cause must take into account his theological motive. This motive pervades the *Tahāfut*. If God, as Avicenna holds, is the supreme essential efficient cause, then the world is the necessitated product of His Essence. As such God cannot be a free agent; He cannot but create the world. It also suggests for al-Ghazālī a more serious restriction on divine power. It denies God the attribute of life since it is only inanimate objects that are said to act by the necessity of their essence.¹

It emerges from the above passage that Marmura firstly frames al-Ghazālī's discussion on causation in the context of a theological debate. How one views this question of causation has implications on how one perceives how God acts or does not act in nature, and thus ultimately how one perceives God Himself. Marmura concludes that if one were to accept the position that God is the supreme essential efficient cause, then one must accept that the world is the necessitated product of His Essence. Accepting this premise results in seriously restricting God's power since it reduces God's actions to Him acting out of the necessity of His essence. In contrast to Frank's notion pointing to the attribute of God as "*qadīm*", the eternal and therefore "God necessarily creates what He creates and can have created no other universe. This is indicated in the statement "*al-qadīm*" [the eternal, a description unique to God], Marmura instead points out that this position would be in conflict with another attribute of God, *ḥayy*, the attribute of life², because only

Frank seems to have made a mistake in translating the above Arabic phrase. The *huwa* in this phrase refers to God and not to creation. Thus, the phrase should be translated as "God is the necessary existence in all His aspects".

¹Michael Marmura, "Ghazali and Demonstrative Science", Journal of the History of Philosophy, vol. 3, 1965. 186.

²Al-Ghazālī in his work on the ninety nine names of God of which Frank is so fond of, comments on this attribute of God. He says:

al-Hayy-the Living is both agent and perceiver, so much so that one that does not act or perceive at all is dead.....But the perfect and absolute living thing [God] is one under whose

inanimate natural objects act by the necessity of their essence¹. Thus, this position reduces God to the equivalent of an inanimate object in His ability to choose to act. Therefore, it is difficult to conceive that al-Ghazālī could have upheld the notion of necessary causation because its logical implication would be detrimental to one who wishes to uphold the power of God.

The view that God could have not created any other universe is also detrimental to anyone who wishes to uphold the power of God. Ormsby frames this question on creation and the Creator by saying:

This is a hidden problem of theodicy; to affirm the necessary rightness of things without simultaneously subjecting God to necessity. Leibniz faced the difficulty in affirming, against the necessitarianism of Spinoza, that God acts *sub ratione boni*, and not *sub ratione perfecti*. The problem is to assert the necessary rightness of things as they are, but to do so in a way that they are seen as proceeding from God's will, wisdom, and power, and not from a necessity of His nature.²

Ormsby frames the question in a general context to include in his discussion on theodicy not only that of al-Ghazālī whom we are scrutinising here, but also the theodicy of other contemporary authors, thus demonstrating that this issue is very much alive and people are even today still grappling to answer it. Ormsby continues his analysis of al-Ghazālī's discussion of this question by framing it in the context of Ash'arite theology. He says:

Al-Ghazālī borrowed from a variety of sources in shaping his thought, but his peculiar version of theodicy was ultimately a logical outgrowth of orthodox Ash'arite theology.³

perception all perceived things are arranged, as are all existing things under its activity, so that no perceived thing escapes its knowledge and no action its activity, and that is God-great and glorious, for He is the absolutely living one. As for every living thing other than He, its life is commensurate with its perception and its activity, and all of that is circumscribed within narrow limits".

al-Maqṣad 143, David Burrell, 129.

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa, 135, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 64.

²Eric L. Ormsby, Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over al-Ghazālī's Best of All Possible Worlds, (New Jersey: 1984). 264.

³Eric L. Ormsby, Theodicy in Islamic Thought 259.

Thus, Ormsby places any discussion on al-Ghazālī's theology in the wider perspective of Ash'arite theology.

He concludes al-Ghazālī's discussion on this matter by providing us with a summary of the conclusion of the debate. He says:

First, the actual world, at each instance of its continuance, is unsurpassable right and just; it has been determined by divine decree, specified by divine will, and effected by divine power. The world, at this precise instant, cannot be better. Nevertheless, it can change. The perfect rightness of the actual entails no unchanging and inviolate order of things. (That would imply that things possessed some intrinsic necessity, which they do not have.) Rather, God can, and does, change the "most wonderful" order of the world, and He does so incessantly. However, each change, each new configuration of things, is right and just; each new configuration is "most wonderful." The world is a succession of equally perfect and most wonderful states of affairs. ¹

It emerges from the above passage that clearly even if one were to argue that God has created the best possible world², it is still possible that God could have created a different world, in fact an infinite number of different worlds just as wonderful as this world. Nonetheless, with God being able to create an infinite number of different possible worlds just as wonderful may arguably show that God may act in an infinite number of ways. Thus, it is not necessary for God to act in only one way, and therefore, restrict His power.

Although I cannot agree with the revisionist views on al-Ghazālī, one cannot help but consider their contribution a welcome commentary and analysis which adds considerably to our understanding of al-Ghazālī and the influences of others on him especially Avicenna. It is exactly the revisionists' insistence on putting al-Ghazālī's thoughts in a wider philosophical

¹Eric L. Ormsby, Theodicy in Islamic Thought 259.

²Al-Ghazālī in this section of the *Iḥyāʾ* (*Iḥyāʾ iv*, 222-3) seems to argue that God had created the best of all possible worlds and gave some value to suffering as an enhancement for pleasure. However, this may seem to cause problems for his previous counter-argument against the Mu'tazilites' claims that God must act in the best interest of his servants which we had alluded to earlier and al-Ghazālī had argued vehemently against making it necessary for God to act in any such a manner. For further discussion on the matter see, Eric L. Ormsby, Theodicy in Islamic Thought.

perspective that is probably their greatest contribution and sadly their own undoing. As I asserted above, I cannot concur with this call to reassess all al-Ghazālī's writings again from the new perspective that al-Ghazālī was not an Ash'arite for I believe that this method would result, as already mentioned, in al-Ghazālī being incomprehensible. Thus, the revisionists' greatest contribution of placing al-Ghazālī's thought in a wider perspective only undermines their conclusion since al-Ghazālī's writings taken as a whole, although there are some tensions clearly exhibit a desire to promote the Ash'arite theology of seeking to place the power and will of God above everything else. The more significant factor that must be kept in mind is the implications of these discussions on nature in theology. Al-Ghazālī's discussions of nature continually seek to uphold the power of God and to reject any notion that impinges on the limits of God's power. Thus, all his discussions on the subject must be seen within the context of this aim.

Al-Ghazālī on Nature and Causation

Our discussion of al-Ghazālī's concept of nature and causation will try not to dwell too much on the technical details¹, but rather will focus on the purpose and consequence of adopting a certain position on nature and causation. Thus, we will concentrate on why al-Ghazālī chose such a position on nature and causation and what are its implications for al-Ghazālī's perception of how God acts. Therefore, we hope, as suggested earlier in the introduction of Chapter Four, *Al-Ghazālī's Theological Positions and Their*

¹There are many works which provide the details of the question of nature and causation in Islam. They are too numerous to list here. For a bibliographical list, see M. Marmura, "Causation in Islamic Thought", in Dictionary of the History of Ideas, edited by Philip P. Weiner. vol. 1, (New York, 1968)

Implications on Revelation: An Indirect Method Analysis, that by using an indirect method of understanding al-Ghazālī's positions on certain theological issues, we will ultimately arrive at his concept of revelation itself. Since al-Ghazālī's position on nature and causation demonstrates how al-Ghazālī understands one aspect of how God acts, and since the sending of revelation is also an action of God, we hope that an examination of how he understands how God acts in nature will shed some light on our attempt to extrapolate al-Ghazālī's understanding of another of God's actions, revelation.

Al-Ghazālī on God's Acting on Nature: Volition or Necessity.

As we argued earlier, all of al-Ghazālī's discussion on nature and causality must be evaluated in the context of a theological debate. Al-Ghazālī seeks to uphold the power of God and to expel and reject any notion that impinges on the limits of God's power. Thus, all his discussions on the subject must be seen with this aim as their goal.

Al-Ghazālī's discussions on nature must be seen in the context of him entering into an already raging debate which al-Ash'arī had initiated against the Mu'tazilites which has serious repercussions on how one perceives everything, even oneself. The Ash'arites' discussions of nature and causality were formulated and expounded in clear opposition to the earlier major school of *kalām*, the Mu'tazilites. The founding father of Ash'arism, Abu al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 935) was previously a Mu'tazilite who broke from his Mu'tazilite master al-Jubbā'ī (d. 915) and instead argued that God's divine

Justice could not be defined in human terms.¹ Fakhry alludes to this debate that al-Ash'arī had with al-Jubbā'ī and summarises the conclusions that al-Ash'arī had drawn from it. He says:

We are told that al-Jubbā'ī was unable to say what God's possible answer to such protestations² might be, on the Mu'tazilite assumption of the unqualified justice of God. The corollaries drawn by al-Ash'arī constitute the substance of his view of God's absolute omnipotence and sovereignty in the world and the finality of His moral and religious decrees....In their desire to stress man's moral freedom and responsibility, the Mu'tazilah had described him somewhat extravagantly, as "the creator of his deeds." To al-Ash'arī, such blasphemous language was tantamount to the denial of God's uniqueness as the sole Creator and Sovereign of the world, and consequently implied the recognition of two creators, in the manner of Manichaens (Majūs).³

However, al-Ash'arī's conclusions on God's omnipotence and sovereignty were neither totally new nor foreign but he had rather formulated and expressed in a systematic manner the current unformulated thoughts of his time. Fazlur Rahman points this out:

Al-Ash'arī's formulation of the dogma essentially represented an attempt at a synthesis of the hitherto largely unformulated orthodox position and that of the Mu'tazila..... But his actual formulations unmistakably show a character of a reaction of orthodoxy to the Mu'tazilite doctrine, a reaction from which he

¹ Majid Fakhry, History of Islamic Philosophy (London, 1983). 204-5.

² These protestations are in reference to a debate in which al-Ash'arī raised questions challenging his teacher, al-Jubbā'ī, on the Mu'tazilite assessment of God's Justice evaluated in human terms. Fakhry summarises the story:

"The pupil asks his master: What will be the fate in the after-life of three brothers, one of whom dies in the state of grace, one in the state of sin, one in the state of innocence (i.e. before he comes of age)? The righteous brother, answers al-Jubbā'ī, will be consigned to Paradise, the sinner to hell, and the third to an intermediate position. Al-Ash'arī then asks: What if the third brother were to ask to be allowed to join his more fortunate brother? This privilege, replies al-Jubbā'ī, would be denied to him on the ground that the first brother was admitted to Paradise on the strength of his good works. If the third brother were to protest that if he had been given a long life he would have lived righteously, God would have replied: I foresaw that you would not and therefore chose to spare you eternal damnation in hell. At this, the brother who died in sin exclaims: Surely Lord, You foresaw my own flight, as well. Why, then, did You not deal with me as mercifully as you had dealt with my other brother?" Majid Fakhry, History of Islamic Philosophy (London, 1983). 204.

³ Majid Fakhry, History of Islamic Philosophy, 204-5.

was unable to escape completely. The result is therefore a partial synthesis and a partial reaction.¹

Thus, al-Ash'arī's conclusions seek to uphold God's absolute omnipotence and sovereignty in the world and the finality of His moral and religious decrees. Therefore, all Ash'arite formulations must be seen with the aim of achieving this objective.

Marmura places this Ash'arite debate on nature and causality also in this context. He says:

In an endeavour to safeguard what is regarded as the Qur'ānic concept of divine omnipotence the dominant school of Islamic theology (*kalām*), founded by al-Ash'arī (d. 935), adopted the occasionalist doctrine that causal efficacy resides exclusively with the divine will. The Ash'arites denied the concept of "natural" causation, that is, that action proceeds from an existent's very nature or essence. They thus rejected the Aristotelian concept of natural efficient causality, subjecting it to criticism on logical and empirical grounds. They also rejected Aristotle's theory of eternal matter advocating a metaphysics of contingent atoms and accidents that are created *ex nihilo*, combined to form bodies, and sustained in temporally finite spans of existence by direct divine action. Accordingly, the orderly flow of these events has no inherent necessity, being more a habit (*'āda*), decreed arbitrarily by the divine will. Hence when God creates a miracle, that is, when He disrupts the habitual course of nature, no contradiction obtains. As for human volition, act, and cognitions, the Ash'arites regard these also as temporal events (*ḥawādith*), the direct creation of God.²

I have quoted this lengthy summary of the main positions of the Ash'arite school of theology here in order to identify its main principles and then utilise them to analyse al-Ghazālī's position on these same issues. From the above passage, it emerges firstly, that al-Ash'arī was concerned with establishing God's power and will above everything else. With this objective in mind, al-Ash'arī rejects natural causation as necessary because for him that would mean that all the actions of God would necessarily proceed from Him due to His

¹Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 91-2.

²M. Marmura, "Causation in Islamic Thought", in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 286.

very nature or essence and that God could not choose to do otherwise. Instead, al-Ash'arī argues vehemently that all of God's actions are voluntary. Al-Ash'arī is not satisfied with making all God's actions voluntary, he then proceeds to strip away all voluntary action from both inanimate and animate objects and places these powers and will to act in the hands of God. Thus, all events are the direct creation of God, decreed arbitrarily by direct divine action, therefore stripping everything, both animate and inanimate objects, of any power and will and placing it all in the hands of God.

Al-Ash'arī formulated his theology against the challenges he saw to God's power and will posed by the Mu'tazilites. Al-Ghazālī not only promotes these Ash'arite ideals, with, of course, his own individual preferred modifications but he also takes it a step further. Al-Ash'arī was primarily concerned with doctrinal questions within *kalām*. Al-Ghazālī initiates and takes this argument outside *kalām*, against the philosophers¹ explicitly for their necessitarian metaphysics. Thus, as al-Ash'arī challenged his main contemporary rivals, al-Ghazālī sees himself as continuing this task.

Al-Ghazālī, like his predecessor al-Ash'arī, seeks in this challenge to the philosophers to uphold the absolute power and will of God. In order to achieve this objective, he rejects any idea that objects, either animate or inanimate, have intrinsic value. As previously concluded from our discussion of al-Ghazālī's concept of ethics, for him all acts have no intrinsic moral value. The only value that these acts have are those values that are imposed by God upon them. These acts become good or evil subject to God's commanding or prohibiting their performance. Before this act of God of imposing commands or prohibitions on an act, all acts in themselves are morally neutral.

¹Philosophers here refer mainly to al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.

Al-Ghazālī applies this same logic that all acts have no intrinsic natural value by virtue of the act *per se* but acquire a value imposed upon them by God, to all objects having no intrinsic natural powers by virtue of their being objects but only acquiring the power to act by the direct creation of God. Thus, as al-Ghazālī has rejected the Mu'tazilite contention of intrinsic value in an act that makes it good or evil, because he had argued that it is God that gives these acts value and nothing else, al-Ghazālī rejects the philosophers' concept of necessary causation because once again it is God's actions that create these acts and not any intrinsic power of the object itself.

Out of his desire to uphold God's absolute power and will, al-Ghazālī seeks to establish that there is no necessary causal relationship between the occurrence of two events, and once that is established, then to proceed to show that actually all events of animate and inanimate objects are the direct creation of God. Once we have realised that this was al-Ghazālī's objective, we can proceed to evaluate the means he utilises in order to achieve this goal.

Theological Objectives and the Means Employed to Achieve Them: Al-Ghazālī's Rejection of Causation.

Al-Ghazālī's discussions of nature are basically executed on two fronts. The first front is directed at actively attacking necessary causation as presented by the Islamic philosophers, particularly Ibn Sīnā, while the second

front seeks to establish the Ash'arite explanation of causality. Thus, he does not only seek to challenge the philosophers' view on the subject but to present his own alternative view.

In *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, his attacks on the philosophers seek to show that the philosophers' contention that there is a necessary causal relationship between the occurrence of two events cannot be proven either by logic or on empirical grounds. We cannot fully evaluate al-Ghazālī's arguments against the philosophers without first presenting the philosophers' views. Marmura presents a summary of the philosophers' position. He says:

For Avicenna, when certain causal conditions obtain, the efficient cause and its effect are coextensive, the inferential relationship between them, reciprocal. Some of these conditions may be summarised as follows:

(1) The efficient cause (*al-'illa al-fā'iliyya*)¹ must be the proximate cause. (2) It must be actual, and the effect (*al-ma'lul*) in itself possible. (3) It must be a natural cause, and for the effect to follow necessarily, the recipient of the action must exist. When the cause is not a natural cause, as for example when it is a deliberate human faculty, the effect need not follow, even though the recipient of the action also exists. (4) The efficient cause must be a free cause, i.e. there must be no impediment. (5) It must be the sole efficient cause. The same effect may be produced by any number of proximate causes, but in this case the relationship is not reciprocal. From the existence of any one of these proximate efficient causes (other causal conditions obtaining) we can infer the existence of the effect. The relationship becomes reciprocal when the common element shared by these causes is ascertained and established by the one cause.²

Therefore, for Ibn Sīnā, necessary causation means that the connection between the cause and the effect is that if the cause exists, then its characteristic effect must necessarily occur. Not only must the effect occur,

¹These causes refer to the four Aristotelian causes. These are; 1. Efficient cause (*al-'illa al-fā'iliyya*)--that by which some change is wrought, 2. Final cause (*al-'illa al-ghā'iyya*)--end or purpose for which a change is produced, 3. Material cause (*al-'illa al-māddiyya*)-- that in which change is wrought, 4. formal cause (*al-'illa al-ṣūrriyya*)-- that into which something is changed. See Jamil Saliba, *Mu'jam al Falsafā'*, (Beirut, 1982). vol. 2, 95-6. See also, *A Dictionary of Muslim Philosophy*, M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore, 1970). 77-8. An example of these four causes is, a chair which may be defined as wood (material cause) of such shape (formal cause) made by the carpenter (efficient cause) for sitting (final cause).

²Michael Marmura, "Ghazali and Demonstrative Science" 184-5.

but it cannot fail to occur . This effect is necessitated to occur as a result of the very nature and power of the cause. Thus, from the existence of the efficient cause, we can infer the effect.

However, when the cause is not a natural cause, for example a human being who possesses choice and will, the effect need not follow as such. Human actions are characterised by volition and choice. Human actions are preceded by will which is a result of human deliberation accompanied by human desire. However, even a man's choice is limited. It is limited by his own disposition or physical environment and thus there is also a causal relationship but not in a mechanistic form. Due to a man's disposition at a certain moment in time, he would react in a certain manner and may react differently if his disposition to the very same stimuli changes at another time. Thus, since the disposition of man continuously changes because it is a cumulation of his personality and experiences, his reaction to stimuli continuously changes unlike a natural object which never changes its disposition.

In Ibn Sīnā's theory of necessary causation, the efficient cause not only causes change but when in relationship to God produces existence. Marmura says:

.....Avicenna's emanative philosophy, the efficient cause is not confined to the production of motion, but-- as with God in creating the universe--it also produces existence as such. Avicenna refers to the efficient cause as an essential attribute (*'araḍ dhātiyya*). It is thus necessarily related to the agent's essential nature and is a specific kind of act determined by this nature. The action is also determined, however, by the essential nature of the recipient of the action. Thus when both the agent and the recipient exist and the other causal conditions obtain, the effect proceeds by necessity.¹

It is exactly this intrinsic nature of the cause that produces the effect. It is this inherent power or capacity of the cause that produces this effect. Because it is

¹Michael Marmura, "Ghazali and Demonstrative Science" 185

the inherent nature of the cause to produce the effect, the cause could not withhold producing the effect, nor produce a different effect, but necessarily produce this very effect.

It is this very idea of the intrinsic nature of each and every thing which forms the basis for necessary causal relationship which al-Ghazālī rejects. If one held this view that each and everything has its own intrinsic nature and it acts on the basis of its intrinsic nature, then anything and everything which acts could not act otherwise. As such, God, Himself, would be constrained to act in accordance with His nature and could not act otherwise. Thus, God cannot be a free agent.

Al-Ghazālī directs his vehement attacks against necessary causation because it would result in all action proceeding as a necessary consequence of a thing's very essence or nature. Instead, al-Ghazālī argues that only living, knowing and willing beings can act and that they act out of their own will and are not determined by any intrinsic nature. Al-Ghazālī says:

An agent is he from whom an action proceeds because of the will for action; by way of free choice, and alongside of the knowledge of what is willed. But in your [the philosophers'] view, the world bears the same relation to God as an effect to its cause. So it follows (*yulzamu*) from Him by way of necessary causation. And, therefore, it is not conceivable that God should have been able to avoid His action, even as the shadow is unavoidable to a person or light to the Sun..... But the agent is not called the agent merely because of his being a cause, but he is a cause in a special manner, viz., in the manner of will and free choice. Thus, it is when one says that the wall is no agent: the stone is no agent: the inorganic matter is no agent, for an action exclusively belongs to an animal, then this statement will not be disputed, and his word would not be untrue. But in their view, the stone does have an action -- namely, the inclination, or the gravitation, or the tending towards the Centre--and so does fire have an action--viz., production of heat. And they believe that which proceeds from God is like all these things. But this is absurd.¹

Thus, God's actions are not conditioned by anything intrinsic to His essence nor to anything external to Him. He is a free agent.

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa 135, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 64.

The means al-Ghazālī utilises to reject necessary causation is to show that necessary causal connection can neither be proven logically nor empirically. Both Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī agree that cause and effect are not identical. If cause and effect are not identical, then what is their relationship? This is where the two of them part company. Al-Ghazālī says:

In our view, the connection to what are believed the cause and the effect is not necessary. Take any two things. This is not That; nor can That be This. The affirmation of one does not imply the affirmation of the other; nor does its denial imply the denial of the other. The existence of one is not necessitated by the existence of the other; nor its non-existence by the non-existence of the other. Take for instance any two things, such as the quenching of thirst and drinking, satisfaction of hunger and eating; burning and contact with fire; light and the rise of the Sun; death and the severance of the head from the trunk; healing and the use of medicine.....¹

Thus, al-Ghazālī seeks to undermine the idea of necessary causation by firstly questioning whether there is a logically necessary connection between the occurrence of two individual events. What is the logical relationship of one event to another? If two events are individual events and are not identical events, how then does the affirmation of one event affirm or deny the other event? Does the affirmation of one event logically necessarily affirm the other event or vice-versa? Logically necessary is defined as:

Used of a proposition whose denial is self contradictory. Such a proposition is true by virtue of its logical form alone (in which case it is called a logical truth or logically necessary) or by virtue of its logical form and the meaning of its constituent term. An instance of logical truth is "It is raining or it is not raining"; an example of an analytical truth that is not a logical truth is that " All bachelors are unmarried."²

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa 239, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 185.

² Boruch A. Brody, "Logical Terms, Glossary", Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, vol. 5-6., 58.

Utilising the above definition of logically necessary, it is clear that the examples al-Ghazālī cites such as the quenching of thirst and drinking, satisfaction of hunger and eating, burning and contact with fire do not satisfy the requirements of logical necessity. Thus, from a logical standpoint, the occurrence of, for example, the quenching of thirst does not logically necessarily imply the occurrence of drinking. Therefore, when the quenching of thirst occurs, we should not and cannot immediately infer that drinking has occurred.

However, al-Ghazālī while rejecting the occurrence of logical necessity in the occurrence of actual events in the physical realm, is willing to accept the notion of logical necessity in the sphere of mere logical relations. He accepts the logical categories of identity, implications and disjunction. He says:

No one has power over the Impossible. What the Impossible means is the affirmation of something together with its denial; or the affirmation of a particular together with the denial of the general, or the affirmation of two together with the denial of one . That which does not fall under these heads is not impossible. And that is not impossible is within power. The combination of blackness and whiteness is impossible, for by the affirmation of the forms of blackness in a subject we understand the negation of whiteness, and the existence of blackness.It is not possible for one person to be in two places at the same time. For by being in the house, we understand his not being in the not-house. Therefore, it is impossible to suppose his being in the not-house together with his being in the house which only means the denial of his being in the not-house. ¹

Thus, al-Ghazālī accepts the notion of necessity in the sphere of logical relationship but what lies outside the scope of purely logical relationship is where he raises questions against and ultimately rejects this necessary connection.

However, because al-Ghazālī accepts the notion of necessity in the sphere of logical relationship, he has to accept that God cannot do things which contradict logical relationships. This is the first time that al-Ghazālī has

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa 249, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 194.

admitted that there are things which are not only impossible but even God cannot do the impossible. Instead of seeing this limitation as a constriction of God's power, he boldly declares that no one has power over the impossible¹. Therefore, since no one has power over the impossible, thus al-Ghazālī argues that this then should not be construed as a weakness or constriction of God's power.

Al-Ghazālī's acceptance of the notion of necessity in the sphere of logical relationships does cause a number of problems left unconvincingly answered. His bold declaration that no one has power over the impossible as the solution to this problem is lacking any sophistication to counter this problem. One has to wonder why one who is so bold in arguing for no necessary relationship in the physical realm would not only qualify his conclusions in the purely mental realm but in fact adopt the totally opposite position. One has to wonder why it is possible for a book to turn into a boy and not a square circle. Is it possible then that al-Ghazālī accepts logical axioms? It would have proved extremely enlightening if al-Ghazālī had elaborated his position on this issue. However, with his silence on this issue since he did not elaborate on it, we are again left wanting.

Even though al-Ghazālī accepts the notion of necessity in the purely mental realm, he rejects this necessary connection in the physical realm. After he challenges the contention that there is a logically necessary connection between the occurrence of two individual events, he then proceeds to try to show that this contention of necessary connection of cause and effect is not proven empirically either. Al-Ghazālī illustrates this claim by pointing out the above example of cotton coming into contact with fire. He says:

Firstly, the opponent may claim that fire alone is the agent of burning, and that being an agent by nature (not by choice), it cannot refrain from doing what is its nature to do--after it comes into contact with the subject which is receptive to it.

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa 249, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 194.

This is what we deny. We say that it is God who--through the intermediacy of angels, or directly-- is the agent of the creation of blackness in the cotton....Fire, which is an inanimate thing, has no action. How can one prove that it is an agent? The only argument is from observation of the fact of burning at the time of contact with fire. But observation only shows that one is with (*ma*) the other, not that it is by (*bi*) it (the fire) and has no other cause than it.¹

Thus, al-Ghazālī attempts to prove here that the necessary causal connection between cause and effect between the occurrence of two events is not observable in nature. What we actually observe is cotton coming into contact with fire and the cotton burning but we cannot and do not observe the burning of cotton by the fire. These are arguably each separate events.

After rejecting necessary causality by utilising the evidence that such contention can neither be proven either logically or empirically, al-Ghazālī then poses his own argument of how things occur. All things occur as a result of divine decree and not because these events are necessary. He says:

They are connected as a result of the Decree of God (holy be His name), which preceded their existence. If one follows the other, it is because He has created them in that fashion, not because the connection in itself is necessary and indissoluble. He has the power to create the satisfaction of hunger without eating, or death without the severance of the head, or even the survival of life when the head has been cut off²

Therefore, al-Ghazālī argues that the occurrence of each and every event is the creation of the decree of God. Thus, al-Ghazālī affirms both the two major contentions of al-Ash'arī, the rejection of necessary causal relationship and stripping away all voluntary action from both inanimate and animate objects and placing these powers and the will to act in the hands of God. Thus, all events are the direct creation of God, decreed arbitrarily by direct divine action, thereby stripping everything, both animate and inanimate objects, of any power and will and placing it all in the hands of God.

¹Tahāfut al-falāsifa 239-40, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 186.

²Tahāfut al-falāsifa 239 Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 185.

Theological Conclusions and Their Implications: Nature and Causation

We will, as promised at the beginning of this section, not go any further in discussing the technical details of al-Ghazālī's exposition on nature and the causal connect¹. The above conclusions on al-Ghazālī's position on nature as discussed above are sufficient for our purpose here. Our main aim in discussing al-Ghazālī's concept of nature and necessary causality is not for the details of how he explains the inner workings of nature and causality but, rather, to understand why al-Ghazālī chooses such a position on nature and causation and what are its implications with regard to how he perceives how God acts.

We anticipated that by using an indirect method of understanding al-Ghazālī's positions on certain theological issues, we would inevitably be able to shed some light on his concept of revelation itself. Since al-Ghazālī's position on nature and causation demonstrates how al-Ghazālī understands one aspect of how God acts, and since the sending of revelation is also an action of God, we hope that an examination of how he understood God's acts in nature will shed some light on our attempt to extrapolate al-Ghazālī's understanding of another of God's actions, revelation.

After a careful scrutiny of al-Ghazālī's position on nature and causation, we can conclude that its conclusions helps to explain how al-Ghazālī understands how God acts in nature in particular. This understanding

¹There are numerous modern works which go into details of the debate on nature and causality. Some examples are: Barry Kogan, Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation(New York, 1985); Michael Marmura, Al-Ghazālī's Second Causal Theory in the 17th Discussion of His *Tahāfut* in Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism (New York, 1981); Majid Fakhry, Islamic Occasionalism and Its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas (London, 1958); W. M. Watt, Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam (London , 1948)

has implications for how he understands another act of God, revelation. On nature and causation, we have concluded that al-Ghazālī rejects necessary causation and he upholds that everything, all existence and actions is a result of the creation of God, decreed arbitrarily by divine action. Al-Ghazālī rejects necessary causation because necessary causation would necessarily entail that objects, both animate and inanimate, would have to possess intrinsic natural powers by virtue of them being objects. Each and every object must, then, have its own intrinsic natural powers. It would be these intrinsic natural powers that would cause the object to act in a particular manner determined by its intrinsic nature and the object could not act in any other manner. Its action would be determined by its nature or essence. If one were to accept this view and apply it to everything, al-Ghazālī concludes that God Himself would be constrained to act in accordance to His own nature. All of God's actions would proceed automatically because of His nature or essence. God could not choose to act in any other way. Thus, everything which has occurred could not have occurred differently or otherwise. Therefore, al-Ghazālī concludes that God can not then be considered a free agent.

In place of this supposition of necessary causation, al-Ghazālī replaces it with its antithesis, the subjective divine decrees of God. Al-Ghazālī bases this supposition on the premise that there is no intrinsic nature in anything. There is nothing intrinsic in anything which causes it to act or react in a certain predictable manner. Instead, all events are the direct creation of God. If one were to accept this view instead and apply it to everything, al-Ghazālī concludes that God Himself would be free to act as He pleases. God does not act because of anything intrinsic to His nature or essence nor to anything external to Him. God's actions are neither determined by His essence nor imposed upon Him by any external force. God acts out of His own free will. Thus, all events are the direct creation of God, decreed arbitrarily by divine action and effectively stripping everything, both animate

and inanimate objects, of any power and will and placing it all in the hands of God.

Since al-Ghazālī concludes that there is no intrinsic nature in anything, then, we can infer that he presumes that there is no intrinsic nature in revelation itself. After rejecting any intrinsic nature in everything, he then proceeds to argue that all events are the direct creation of God. God does not act because of anything intrinsic to His nature or essence. God's actions are neither determined by His essence nor imposed upon Him by any external force. God acts out of His own free will. Thus, all events are the direct creation of God, decreed arbitrarily by divine action. Since all events are the direct creation of God, we can infer that he must then presume that revelation is not only created by God but that God has created revelation out of His own free will and that revelation is a creation subject to arbitrary decrees of divine action. Thus, like all of God's creation, revelation is also subject to none other than the subjective decree of the divine will.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AI-GHAZALI'S CONCEPT OF REASON

Reason as a Source of Knowledge

We had begun our study of revelation in order to understand how al-Ghazālī conceives of revelation as a source of knowledge. It would seem wanting, if we do not at least contrast how al-Ghazālī perceives revelation as a source of knowledge with the other source of knowledge, reason ('*aql*). We had raised basically four questions to revelation. These questions are: 1. what is revelation? what kinds of knowledge does it actually give us?; 2. how is this knowledge ultimately transmitted to us?; 3. to whom is it transmitted in order to ensure its purity and originality?; 4. and most importantly, what is the ultimate purpose of this revelation revealed to man? However, we cannot pose all four of these same questions to reason. We would have to modify question one and combine it with question two, and then pose it to reason and therefore attempt to discover what reason is in order to ultimately arrive at what kinds of knowledge reason actually gives us. For obvious reasons, we cannot pose question three to reason, since the conclusions of reason are not transmitted to us by someone or through someone. However, one may make a defence for this in the case of the acceptance of knowledge based on the authority of others or in the religious jargon *taqlīd*. Nevertheless, even if one were to accept knowledge based on the authority of others, reason still makes the choice of from whom and whose version it accepts this or that knowledge and thus in a way, this choosing indicates arguably a rational choice, choosing among the various choices. Question four is the most difficult to answer. What is ultimately the role of reason in gaining knowledge? What is the role of reason *vis à vis*

revelation in gaining knowledge? What is the kind of knowledge that we can obtain from reason and not from any other source? Can reason be utilised to confirm what we know from revelation? If so then is reason used to judge the validity or correctness of revelation?

It must be borne in mind that it is not our contention here that we will be able to resolve all these above questions posed to reason. We cannot even say whether al-Ghazālī even conceived of these problems as such. However, as I concluded above, it would seem incomplete in our exploration of how al-Ghazālī perceives revelation as a source of knowledge if we did not at least attempt to contrast it with how al-Ghazālī perceives the other source of knowledge, reason (*'aql*).

Harking back to the insightful words of Arberry when he attempted to grapple with this problem of revelation and reason in the Islamic tradition, he says in his introduction of his brief, thought provoking work entitled *Revelation and Reason in Islam*:

The problem of the relationship between revelation and reason is indeed one of the most famous and profound topics in the history of human thought. It is a topic which, though debated without intermission now for some two thousand years, appears not to lose anything of its fascination and freshness, for all the dust overspreading the countless volumes of dead and seemingly dead metaphysics and theology.....If it were possible to institute a full review of this sublime dilemma as it affected and was affected by the Mohammedan faith, that would undoubtedly take us some considerable distance towards understanding and stating the problem as a whole. The problem has never yet, so far as I am aware, been anywhere stated; and until the whole problem has been correctly stated, it is obviously vain to look for anything approaching a satisfactory solution, assuming a satisfactory solution is in any case discoverable.¹

This attempt here to study al-Ghazālī's understanding of the role of reason as a source of knowledge, therefore, should be seen in the same vein, as a study of how al-Ghazālī understands the relationship of revelation and reason. However, this

¹A. J. Arberry, Reason and Revelation in Islam, (London, 1957). 7.

work should be seen as a preliminary attempt to understand how al-Ghazālī perceives reason as a source of knowledge.

The Constraints on Reason

We have argued above that al-Ghazālī desires to place God's will and power above everything and thus, as he understood it that this concept requires that everything and every event must be subject to the subjective divine will. Hence, he concludes in the ethical arena that all acts have no intrinsic moral value and are morally neutral before God had imposed upon these acts a value through His commands and prohibitions revealed in the revelation. Therefore, al-Ghazālī must presume that the revelation itself with its commands and prohibitions has no intrinsic value except that it is the will of God. The revelation's only worth is that it informs us of what God wants us to know and what actions He wants us to do or not do.

Since as we have seen, al-Ghazālī rejects both the intrinsic nature of objects and intrinsic moral value, thus, what is left is an all-powerful God impregnating on these acts a value by His commands and prohibition and with His free will and power causing each and every event to occur as He pleases. In a world where there are neither intrinsic moral value nor intrinsic nature of objects, how does reason function? Is reason able to derive under such conditions any axiomatic principles to build upon? Or does reason now play a secondary role and accept the precepts given by revelation as analogous to axiomatic principles and utilise them to build

a whole *Weltanschauung*? These questions have two basic themes: What can reason know by itself? ; and, what is the relationship of reason *vis à vis* revelation?

The Nature of the Intellect

Before we proceed to attempt to deal with these issues on the role of reason, let us first discuss how al-Ghazālī conceives of the nature of reason itself. What is this thing called reason/intellect?

We will study reason, using *Kitāb al-'Ilm* which forms the first book of *Ihyā* since it presents his mature thoughts. However, *Kitāb al-'Ilm* only provides us with general statements on reason. Thus, we will also refer to his earlier works on the subject to obtain more specific information, resorting especially to his works on logic.

Al-Ghazālī devoted the final chapter in his *Kitāb al-'Ilm* to a short treatise on the exposition of reason which we will rely greatly upon but not exclusively in discussing al-Ghazālī's concept of reason. In this brief exposition of reason, al-Ghazālī conceives of reason as noble in nature because it is the source, fountainhead and foundation of knowledge and the means by which man attains happiness in this world and the next. He says:

The noble (*sharaf*) nature of the intellect (*al-'aql*): It would be superfluous to show the noble nature of the intellect (*al-'aql*), especially because through it the noble nature of knowledge has been revealed. Intellect is the source (*manba'*) and fountainhead (*matla'*) of knowledge as well as its foundation (*asās*). Knowledge springs from it as the fruit from the tree and light from the sun and vision from the eye. How then could that which is the means of happiness

(*wasīla al-sa'āda*) in this world and the next not be noble or how could it ever be doubted?²

Thus, al-Ghazālī calls the nature of reason noble. Reason is noble because it is the source, the fountainhead and the foundation of knowledge. Knowledge springs from the use of reason. Reason is the means to happiness not only in this world but also in the next. All this high praise for reason is indeed very fascinating *vis à vis* al-Ghazālī's previous discussions of the role of reason in discovering truths, but he does not give an adequate explanation for this. When al-Ghazālī says that reason is the source, fountainhead and foundations of knowledge, what does this actually mean? Does al-Ghazālī distinguish reason as an instrument of knowledge from reason as a source of knowledge or is reason both of these? Is reason only an instrument of knowledge or does it actually create knowledge and thus become a source of knowledge? It is one thing to discover that A had killed B and quite another to say that A has committed a right or wrong action which is a value judgement. Is it possible that when reason describes an action it is acting as an instrument and when it gives or discovers value judgements it is creating knowledge? It is unlikely that al-Ghazālī had made this distinction between reason as an instrument and reason as a source of knowledge. However, his loose usage of these terms, source and foundation do create problems. It is more likely that al-Ghazālī meant that reason is to be utilised as an instrument to attain knowledge rather than actually creating knowledge. Even if one were to accept this view that reason is an instrument to attain knowledge, there is still the question of how reason does this and how we know whether reason has reached the right conclusions or not.

He concludes the above passage with a rather ringing endorsement of the role of reason in obtaining happiness for man. Not only is reason capable of obtaining what is good for man in this temporal world, but more importantly, reason is capable of obtaining what is good for man in the next world, where he will abide

²*Ihyā* , 99, Nabih Amin Faris. 221.

forever. Al-Ghazālī cites a prophetic *hadith* to point to the importance of reason not only for the purposes of this world but also for the next world. He quotes the Prophet Muhammad as saying:

Again, it was reported on the authority of 'Āishah that she once said, O Apostle of God! Wherein do people excel one another in this world? He replied, "In intellect," And in the hereafter?" she added. "In intellect." he again replied. Then 'Āishah said, "But are they not rewarded according to their works?" To which the Apostle replied: "O 'Āishah! Have they ever achieved anything except in proportion to what God has given them of intellect? Their works will always be in proportion to their intellect which God has given them, and their reward will be in proportion to their works."³

Therefore, it is clear that for al-Ghazālī reason is the means for attaining happiness not only in this world but also in the next. In fact, al-Ghazālī is making a very strong relationship between knowledge and action and arguing that the good works men achieve are only proportionate to their intellect.

Al-Ghazālī also says that reason is also the first thing God had created and its noble nature is known instinctively (*bi al-ḍarūrī*). He also calls the knowledge derived from reason a spirit (*rūḥ*), an inspiration (*waḥy*), and a life (*ḥayya*). He says:

The Prophet also said, "The first thing which God created was the intellect. On creating it, God ordered it saying, "Return, and it returned". Thereupon God said, "By My power and glory I have created nothing more reverent to Me than thee. Through thee I take, and through thee I give and through thee I punish".⁴

...the noble nature of the intellect is perceived instinctively (*bi al-ḍarūrī*). It is our purpose, however, to relate what the tradition and the Qur'ān say concerning its [reason's] noble nature. Thus, we find in the Qur'ān that God called it light when He said "God is the Light of the Heavens and the Earth. His light is like a niche [in which is a lamp-the lamp encased in glass-the glass, as it were a glistening star] "The knowledge derived therefrom was called a spirit (*rūḥ*), a revelation (*waḥy*) and a life (*ḥayya*). Said God, "Thus have We sent the Spirit to thee with a revelation....Furthermore, whenever God mentions light And darkness He means thereby knowledge and

³*Ihyā*. 100. Nabih Amin Faris. 224-5.

⁴*Ihyā*. 9. Nabih Amin Faris. 222

ignorance respectively, as evident in His words, "And He will bring them out of the darkness to the light."⁵

It emerges from the above passages that the noble nature of reason is known instinctively. Al-Ghazālī, however, does not provide any further explanation concerning this statement. However, more importantly, he calls the knowledge derived from reason a spirit, a revelation/inspiration, and a life. It remains unclear how exactly these terms apply to the knowledge derived from reason since al-Ghazālī neglects to provide us with further explanation other than to say that it means knowledge .

The Role of Reason.

In this section, we hope to examine why al-Ghazālī considers that reason deserves his very high praise. What is it that reason does that makes it deserving of such high praise?

Al-Ghazālī cites a Prophetic hadith to show that men should know God and be governed by their intellects. He says:

The Prophet said, O ye men! Know God and be ruled (*tawaṣu*) by intellect, then ye will know what ye have been enjoined and what ye have been forbidden. Know ye that intellect is your glory before God.⁶

The next sentence, however, which says that "then ye will know what is enjoined and what ye have been forbidden" is vague. Does he mean here that if one knows

⁵Ihyā, 99. Nabih Amin Faris. 222.

⁶Ihyā, 99. Nabih Amin Faris. 222.

God and is ruled by the intellect, then, one discovers by the use of reason what is enjoined and forbidden upon man? Or is it more likely that he means that once one knows God, then, through the use of reason, one will be able to recognise and accept the revealed message sent by God through His messenger to man?

He cites another Prophetic hadith to show the use of reason as an instrument for the believer. He says:

It is also related on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas that the Apostle of God said, " For everything there is an instrument (*āla*) and a tool (*'udda*), and the instrument of the believer is the intellect: for everything there is a mainstay, and the mainstay of man is his intellect; for everything there is a support (*di'āma*) and the support of religion (*di'āma al-dīn*) is the intellect; for every group of men there is a goal, and the goal of the worshippers is the intellect; for every people there is a missionary (who calls them to true faith), the missionary of the devout is the intellect.⁷

After pointing out that the use of reason is an instrument for the believer, al-Ghazālī then proceeds to tell us what reason can do:

The truth, however, is that the word intellect (*'aql*) is a term used interchangeably for four distinct meanings in the same way as the term for eye has been used for several meanings.

First, it is the quality which distinguishes man from the other animals and prepares him to understand and grasp the theoretical sciences (*al-'ulūm al-naẓariyya*), and master the abstract (*fikriyya*) disciplines..... Hence he who denies this and limits the intellect to axiomatic knowledge (*al-'ulūm al-ḍarūriyya*) only is wrong ... Hence, the relation of that instinct (namely the intellect), to the sciences is similar to that of an eye to vision; while the relation of the Qur'ān and the law to that of instinct is like that of the light of the sun to seeing....

Secondly, the word *'aql* is applied to that knowledge which makes its appearance even in the child who discerns the possibility of possible things (*jā'izāt*) and the impossibility of impossible things (*mustahilāt*), such as the knowledge that the two are greater than the one and that the one individual cannot be in two different places at the same time. It is what one of the scholastics meant when he defined the word *'aql* as some axiomatic knowledge (*al-'ulūm al-ḍarūriyya*).

In the third place, the word *'aql* has been applied to that knowledge which is acquired through experience (*tajārib*) (empirical knowledge) in the course of events.....

In the fourth place, the word *'aql* is used when the power of the instinct develops to such an extent that its owner will be able to tell what the end (*'awāqib al-'umūr*) will be, and consequently he will

⁷Ihyā, 101. Nabih Amin Faris. 225.

conquer and subdue his appetite which hankers for immediate pleasures. Whenever such a power obtains (sic), its owner, in view of the fact that he embarks upon an undertaking, or refrains from it only after a thorough consideration of its end rather than in answer to the urge of a carnal appetite, is called intelligent....

The fourth is the final fruit and the ultimate aim (*al-ghāya al-quṣwā*). The first two are natural (*bi al-ṭab'*), while the last two are acquired (*bi al-iktisāb*)⁸

From the four definitions of reason given above, it seems that, for al-Ghazālī, reason is the means by which man attains theoretical knowledge, knows axiomatic knowledge, gains acquired knowledge and the means by which he considers what the consequences of his actions will be and thus, through the use of reason, is enabled to control his appetites.

From the above definitions of reason, we can deduce that al-Ghazālī recognises at least two categories of knowledge, axiomatic (*al-'ulūm al-ḍarūriyya*) and acquired (*al-'ulūm bi al-iktisāb*). He defines axiomatic knowledge as that knowledge which is inherent in all men and that all men know instinctively without either prior effort or learning since even a child has this knowledge. From the examples he provides, al-Ghazālī seems to confine the category of axiomatic knowledge to the sphere of purely logical relationships, the logical categories of identification, implication and disjunction.⁹ Thus, we should keep in mind that this acceptance of axiomatic knowledge does not necessarily go beyond the purely logical realm into the physical realm. For this to occur, al-Ghazālī would have to accept the necessity of causation as an axiomatic fact and al-Ghazālī has gone to great lengths to challenge this idea. Therefore, his acceptance of axiomatic knowledge as confined to the purely logical realm does not contradict his rejection of causality.

The other category of knowledge that reason can obtain is acquired knowledge. From the above explanation, he says "that this kind of knowledge is

⁸*Ihyā*, 101-2. Nabih Amin Faris. 226-8.

⁹In his *Tahafut al-falasifa*, al-Ghazālī accepts axiomatic knowledge but only in the sphere of purely logical relations. See, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* 249, Sabih Ahmad Kamali, 194.

acquired through experience in the course of events." Thus, he accepts knowledge which is obtained through experience, but, however, he neglects to elaborate what exactly he meant by experience. Is this experience gained through the physical senses, the process of ratiocination, or through other ways, for example, the experience of the heart (*qalb*) or is it gained through all of the above? It is most likely that he meant all of the above, but without further explanation, one is left to speculate.

Another complication that al-Ghazālī adds into his discussion of these categories of knowledge is when he turns away from these two categories and starts discussing remembrance (*tadhakkur*) as a means of obtaining knowledge which all men once had but have forgotten. He says:

Consequently God said, "If you ask them who created them, they will be sure to say, God." This meant that if they would only consider their conditions, their souls and hearts would subscribe to the fact that God has created them (in accordance with) "the nature (*fitra*) which God has given them." In other words every human being is created and born a believer; still more every human being is born with (an inherent) knowledge of reality; inherent since it is readily disposed to perceive reality. With belief installed by nature in the human soul, men have split into two groups: the one who has turned away from that belief and has forgotten all about it-it comprises the unbelievers; the others have pondered and remembered, resembling therein one who has a witness, and, in his oversight, has forgotten all about it, but finally has remembered it. For this reason God said, "Happily they may remember; and "that those imbued with understanding may recall and remember;" and again, "And remember the favour of God upon you, and His covenant which He had covenanted with you;" and again, "And We have rendered the Qur'ān available as a sign to be remembered - but is there anyone who will remember?" It is not, therefore, far-fetched to call this kind of remembrance (*tadhakkur*). Thus, remembrance is of two kinds: the one is to recall a picture which once existed in one's mind but has since disappeared, while the other is to recall a picture which is inherent in one's mind by nature (*fitra*)....In short, he whose insight is not keen will grasp nothing of religion except its husks and outward forms rather than its pith and truth.¹⁰

¹⁰Ihyā 103 Nabih Amin Faris. 230-1.

This method, remembrance, seems to correspond with the idea of recollection (*anamnesis*)¹¹ in Plato. I do not intend here to elaborate on the similarities or differences between these two ideas, for although that would certainly be interesting, in fact arguably demonstrating philosophy's influence on and contribution to mysticism which are rarely acknowledged, such a discussion must be left for another day, for it is outside of our scope of discussion. Instead, I have highlighted al-Ghazālī's remembrance because although we are discussing al-Ghazālī's idea of reason, he seems to recognise another means of obtaining knowledge besides reason and revelation and from the above passage demonstrates its importance. In al-Ghazālī's scheme of knowledge, the importance of remembrance must not be underestimated.

Reason vis à vis Revelation

At the end of *Kitāb al-'ilm*, al-Ghazālī attempts to reply to why some *Sufis* have mistakenly disparaged reason and from this reply he explains the importance of reason vis a vis revelation. It is through reason that men know God. It is through reason that men recognise the truth of the Apostles of God. It is also through the use of reason that the law (*al-sharī'a*) is understood. He gives the following explanation why the role of reason has been misconstrued and disparaged:

You may say, "Why then do some groups among the *Sufis* disparage the intellect (*al-'aql*) and reason (*al-ma'qūl*) (as well as rational and the reasonable)?" You should know, then, that the reason for it is that men have transferred the term intellect or reason (*'aql*) and the term rational or reasonable (*ma'qūl*) [from their real and original meaning to another and false meaning], namely argumentation (*al-mujadāla*) and debate (*al-munāzara*) over contradictions and

¹¹For the Platonic theory of recollection, see G.M. A. Grube, Plato's Thought (Indiana, 1980). Refer to Chapter on Theory of Ideas. 1-50. See also, Francis Conford, Plato's theory of Knowledge (Indiana, 1957)

requisites which is scholastic theology (*ṣan'a al-kalām*).... As a result they disparaged reason and rationalism.¹²

If reason is disparaged for its products, argumentations and debates, then, what is it praised for by al-Ghazālī. Reason is praised because only through reason man initially knows about God, then the truth of the Apostles of God and ultimately, even the law that they bring with them is understood through the means of reason.

Al-Ghazālī says:

Could it be imagined, however, that the light of insight (*nūr al-baṣīra*), through which God is known and the truthfulness of His Apostles is recognised, will ever be disparaged or belittled when God Himself praised it? And if it were ever disparaged what other thing could be praised? But if the praiseworthy knowledge be the law, by what is the truth known. If it were known through the blame worthy and unreliable intellect, then the law itself is blameworthy. No attention, however, is paid to him who says that the law is known through certainty itself (*'ayn al-yaqīn*) and the light of belief (*nūr al-īmān*) rather than through the intellect, because we mean by intellect what he means by certain sight (*'ayn al-yaqīn*) and the light of belief, namely the inner characteristics (*al-ṣifa al-bāṭina*) by which man is distinguished from the animal and through which he comprehends reality (*ḥaqā'iq al-'ūmūr*).¹³

It emerges from the above passage that al-Ghazālī considers that it is reason that establishes the knowledge of the existence of God, through reason, the truthfulness of His Apostles is recognised and also reason is the means by which the revealed law is understood. However, since these remarks which he made at the very end of *Kitāb al-'ilm*, we have to turn elsewhere for further explanation of what are the implications of these remarks.

In our previous discussion of the *Iqtisād*, we have explained how al-Ghazālī sought the use of reason to establish the existence of God.¹⁴ After establishing the existence of God, al-Ghazālī used reason to prove at least three attributes of God,

¹²*Ihyā.*, 105 Nabih Amin Faris. 235.

¹³*Ihyā.* .105 Nabih Amin Faris. 235-6.

¹⁴See above, Chapter Three: *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād*: Revelation Defined.

power, knowing and will.¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī produces a similar argument to prove that reason can deduce the existence of God and at least some of His attributes in his logical text, *al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm* (The Correct Balance).

We also say regarding speculative matters: "If the workmanship [*ṣan'a*: fabrication, making] of the world and the structure [*tarkīb*: composition] of man are well ordered (*martabān*), marvellous (*'ajayibān*), and well done (*muḥakamān*), then the maker of that is knowing-and this is [something] primary (*awwaliya*) in the intellect but it is known that it is marvellous and well ordered-and this is perceived by ocular vision (*al-'iyān*); hence it follows from this that its Maker is knowing." Then, we ascend [progress] and say: If its Maker is knowing, He is living. But it is known that He is knowing by the preceding balance; hence it follows that He is living." Then we say: "If He is living and knowing, He is subsisting in Himself and is not an accident; but it is known by the preceding two balances that He is living and knowing; hence it follows from this that He is subsisting in Himself." Thus, when we ascend from the quality of composition of man to the attribute of his Maker, viz. knowledge; then we ascend from knowledge to life, then from it to the essence. This is the spiritual ascension, and these balances are the steps[stairs, ladders] of the ascension to heaven, or rather to the Creator of heaven, and these principles are the steps [rung] of the stairs [ladders]. As for bodily ascension, no power can effect it, but that is peculiar to the power of prophethood [or: the prophetic mission]¹⁶

Unlike the argument given in *al-Iqtisād*, the above argument provided in *al-Qistās* provides us with step by step details on how the reasoning process works to deduce the existence of the Creator, God and some of His attributes.

After reason establishes the existence of God, and some of His attributes, al-Ghazālī then proceeds to deal with how reason is able to recognise the truthfulness of the Apostles. Al-Ghazālī attempts to achieve this by utilising this principle that "every perfection [which can] exist in man necessarily exist in the Creator"¹⁷, and since speech is an attribute for the perfection of man, the capability of speech must necessarily exist with God. Once we have affirmed the ability of divine speech, we must be able to accept the possibility that God may send messengers to man, since

¹⁵See above, Chapter Three: *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād*: Revelation Defined.

¹⁶*al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm*, edited by Victor Chelhot, (Beirut, 1991), 3rd edition. 63. Translated into English by Richard McCarthy in *Freedom and Fulfilment*, 303. In future, referred to as, *al-Qistās* (Arabic text page), McCarthy (translation page).

¹⁷*al-Iqtisād* 115.

being a messenger means transmitting the message of the sender, which in this example means the Apostles transmitting the message of God to man. However, proving by reason that it is possible for God to send messengers is far from establishing that God had sent messengers, the difference between a possibility and proving the possibility becoming an actuality. To prove this next step, from God being able to send messengers to His sending messengers, al-Ghazālī resorts to arguing the existence of certain knowledge in the world such as the knowledge of medicine and of medicaments which could not have come from reason nor through empirical means and therefore, this knowledge must have come from another source. He argues that this source is a divine inspiration, the revelation brought by the Apostles of God to man. He says,

And the proof of its [prophecy's] existence is the existence in the world of knowledge which could not conceivably be obtained by the intellect alone. -such as the knowledge of medicine and of astronomy. For whoever examines such knowledge knows of necessity that it can be obtained only by a divine inspiration and a special help from God Most High, and that there is no empirical way to it. From this proof, it is clearly within the bounds of the possibility that a way exists to grasp these things which the intellect does not normally grasp. This is what is meant by prophecy.¹⁸

Although the argument presented above as proof for the existence of prophecy may not seem very convincing. What is more important for our purpose here is that al-Ghazālī felt that it was necessary for him to provide an explanation based upon reason as a proof, because he realised that one cannot establish the truthfulness of the Apostles by basing it on the authority of the consensus (*al-ijmā'*). This is because the authority of the consensus relied upon the strength of the tradition of the prophet which depends upon the existence and truth of the revelation. Thus, it would be a fallacy to try to prove the truthfulness of the Apostles by basing it upon revelation. Therefore, the truthfulness of the Apostles had to be proven by another mean, reason.

¹⁸al-Munqidh 89. Richard McCarthy. 98.

However, once reason had established the existence of God and some of His attributes, the truthfulness of the Apostles, al-Ghazālī curbs the role of reason, limiting it to judging revelation only in terms of considering what revelation brings as possible among possibilities. Yet in *al-Qistās*, he seems to give reason a greater role in judging revelation. He explains the role of reason as follows:

Similarly I have believed in the veracity of Muhammad-Peace be upon him!-and the veracity of Moses-Peace be upon him!-not by reason of the splitting of the moon and the changing of the staff into a serpent: for that way is open to ambiguity, and one may not rely on it; nay, one who believes in the changing of the staff into a serpent may disbelieve in the lowing of the calf with the disbelief of the Samaritans (*al-sāmari*) because there is a great deal of mutual contradiction regarding the sensible, visible world. But I learned the balances (*al-muwāzīn*) from the Qur'ān, then weighed (*wazantu*) with them all cognitions about God (*al-ma'arif al-'ilahiyya*), and even the circumstances of the afterlife and the punishment of the iniquitous and the reward of the obedient, as I have mentioned in my book *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* (The Jewels of the Qur'ān). And I have found they all conformed (*muwāfaqa*) to what is in the Qur'ān and what is in the Traditions (*al-akhbār*). Thus, I knew for sure that Muhammad-Peace be upon him!-was veracious and that the Qur'ān is true. I did as 'Ali-God be pleased with him!- said, when he declared: Do not know [measure] the truth by men: know the truth and you will know its possessors [adherents]. Then he said: I also desire to know the Prophet as you have known him. But you have mentioned that can be known only by weighing of all the cognitions of God with this balance, and it is not clear to me that all the religious cognitions (*al-ma'arifa al-'ilahiyya*) can be weighed with these balances. So by what can I know that? I said: Far from it! I do not claim to weigh the religious cognitions (*al-ma'arifa al-dīniyya*) only, but I also weigh with them arithmetical and geometrical and medical and legal and kalām cognitions, and every science[cognition] which is true and not positive [conventional, based on authority]-for by these balances I distinguish its true from its false.¹⁹

I have quoted this lengthy passage to demonstrate al-Ghazālī's seemingly great trust in the powers of reason. Here he seems to give a far greater role to reason to judge not only the truthfulness of the Apostles, but also the product that they bring with them, the revelation. Al-Ghazālī wants to use reason to weigh these religious cognitions, even such circumstances of the afterlife, as one weighs the cognitions

¹⁹ *al-Qistās*. 81-2. McCarthy. 316-7.

of every science. However, it is most likely that what he meant by that is that reason can judge the religious cognitions to be possible for God to create; such as the circumstances of the afterlife and the punishment of the iniquitous and the reward of the obedient. Thus, it is highly improbable that reason can arrive at the details of these occurrences in the afterlife, but is able to accept that such a scenario falls within the realm of possibility. Therefore, reason is able to accept the authority and truthfulness of the revelation.

Concluding Remarks

Al-Ghazālī's quest to try to understand the role of reason by itself must be understood within the context of how he perceives the world, therefore, must be framed within the confines of these assumptions that there are neither intrinsic moral values nor intrinsic natures of objects. Trying to understand the role of reason within these restrictions, he arrives at the conclusions that human knowledge is basically divisible into two broad categories, axiomatic knowledge (*al-'ulūm al-darūriyya*) and acquired knowledge (*al-'ulūm bi-al-iktisāb*). He defines axiomatic knowledge as that knowledge which is inherent in all men and that all men know instinctively without either prior effort or learning, since even a child has this knowledge. However, al-Ghazālī confines the category of axiomatic knowledge to the sphere of purely logical relationships, the logical categories of identification, implication and disjunction. Al-Ghazālī rejects any necessary axiomatic principles in the realm of the physical world, therefore, rejecting necessary causation. At least by al-Ghazālī rejecting any axiomatic principles in nature, he is consistent with his main thesis that there is no intrinsic nature of objects. However, by claiming that man possesses inherent in his nature axiomatic knowledge, though limited and confined only to realm of the pure logical relationships, he seems to allow man some leeway and provide him with some form of intrinsic nature. However, whether this leeway would break the back of his claim that there is no intrinsic nature in anything is debatable. He gives far more leeway to this idea of intrinsic nature when discussing the Sufi concept of knowledge through the means of remembrance. Gaining knowledge through the means of remembrance would totally depend on the intrinsic nature of man. If al-Ghazālī is serious about such an idea, then, he would have to make man an exception against his basic assumption denying any intrinsic nature, since the means of remembrance totally relied upon

man remembering from his pre-existing intrinsic nature something which he had somehow forgotten.

Since al-Ghazālī has divided human knowledge into two broad categories, axiomatic knowledge and acquired knowledge (*al-'ulūm bi-al-iktisāb*), all that knowledge which is not gained from axioms must be acquired knowledge. Acquired knowledge is any and all knowledge other than axiomatic knowledge. For man to acquire knowledge he has to exercise all the means at his disposal. Thus, acquired knowledge can be gained for example through the physical senses, the process of ratiocination, or others, for example the experiences of the heart (*qalb*), revelation and *ilham*. Therefore, acquired knowledge not only includes knowledge which reason can acquire by itself through the process of ratiocination in which reason deliberates on the axioms within itself but also when reason acts in conjunction with other means at its disposal.

Through the process of ratiocination, reason is able to establish the existence of God and some of His attributes. Through the same process, reason is able to rationalise the possibility of God sending His Apostles to man and weigh the validity of the message of the messengers in order to attest to the truthfulness of the messenger, the Apostle. Thus, al-Ghazālī points out that he uses reason to weigh all the cognitions about God, all religious cognitions such as the circumstances of the afterlife and the punishment of the iniquitous and the reward of the obedient. However, reason is limited. Reason is not able to arrive at the conclusion of the details of what will occur for example in the afterlife. Thus, reason's judgement is useful and utilised only in so far as to judge/weigh whether these events can occur. Thus, reason's role is primary in so far as establishing the existence of God, some of His attributes and the possibility of God sending messengers and al-Ghazālī even gives arguments for reason actually deducing not only the possibility of Apostles but their existence. However, in judging/weighing the revelation, reason plays only a secondary role. Reason's role is to judge/weigh whether whatever

revelation brings is within the realm of possibility. This is what al-Ghazālī meant when he says:

But I learned the balance (*al-muwāzīn*) from the Qur'ān, then weighed (*wazantu*) with them all cognitions about God (*al-ma'arif al-'ilahiyya*), and even as I have mentioned in my book *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* (The Jewels of the Qur'ān). And I have found they all conformed (*muwāfaqa*) to what is in the Qur'ān and what is in the Traditions (*al-akhbār*). Thus, I knew for sure that Muhammad-Peace be upon him!-was veracious and that the Qur'ān is true.²⁰

Once reason judges that the declaration in the revelation falls within the realm of possibility, reason has to accept the judgement of revelation. However, reason is also utilised in understanding this revelation. Therefore, for al-Ghazālī, although reason's role is very important *vis à vis* revelation, nonetheless, it is to establish the existence of revelation, and henceforth, to remain subservient to revelation

²⁰al-Qistās. 81. McCarthy. 316.

CONCLUSION

In this work, we have narrowed the scope of its study to the epistemology of revelation in a specific religion, i. e. Islam. In order to best be able to study the epistemology of revelation in this youngest of the three Abrahamic faiths, we have chosen to examine two prominent scholars in the Islamic tradition, al-Fārābī and al-Ghazālī.

In order to understand the concept of revelation, we posed these four questions to both these scholars: 1. what is revelation?; 2. how is revelation received?; 3. who receives revelation, i.e. prophets?; and 4. finally and most importantly, what is the purpose of revelation? Although both of these scholars believe in the same revelation, the Qur'ān, the way they perceive the revelation differs greatly. Beginning from very different starting points, beginning with different perceptions of God and His creation, they reached very different conclusions. These different conclusions arising out of the same text should not be seen as an unprecedented event in the Islamic tradition. Much earlier, in the theological realm, raged the debates between the Jabrites and the Qadarites on the issue of free will in the Qur'ān reaching totally opposite conclusions because they emphasised different aspects of the same revelation and pushed them to their extreme logical conclusions. The debates between the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites are in the same vein. Both emphasising different aspects of revelation reached very different perceptions of the revelation.

Al-Fārābī and the philosophers begin from the starting point that the Creator God is a rational God, who manifests His rationality in all creation. Since the God that created the world and man created the world and man in a rational manner, thus man utilising his reason will be able to understand the creations and actions of God. Revelation is a creation and action of God. Thus, man utilising his reason is able to understand revelation.

All human knowledge for al-Fārābī is in a way 'revealed' to man. God indirectly via the Active Intelligence is responsible for giving man knowledge through the actions of the Active Intelligence acting upon man's intellect. Revelation is seen as just another means by which God conveys knowledge to man. The relationship between revelation and reason is certainly not antagonistic, contradictory nor competing against each other. Rather, revelation is the transformation of reason and therefore revelation and reason complement each other in conveying the same truths to all men.

The unique ability of revelation to transform the highest intellectual truths so they can be comprehended by everyone is for al-Fārābī not only an important aspect but an essential factor for the fulfilment of the purpose of philosophy. The importance of philosophy is to benefit not just the individual but society. Thus, in order for philosophy to benefit not just the individual, it must pass from the theoretical to the practical. This means of transforming theoretical truths to practical actions best occurs through the means of revelation. Although, at the intellectual level, the knowledge that revelation brings can be derived through reason by itself, reason's ability to convey its message is limited. Because of reason's difficult, dry and abstract intellectual method, it is only able to educate in a limited manner. Revelation, on the other hand, can reach a mass audience from the educated to the layman and thus fulfils an essential purpose of philosophy.

The role of revelation should be never underrated in the al-Fārābī philosophical system. For al-Fārābī, the greater the philosopher has the power to exploit his theoretical knowledge for the benefit of others, the more perfect is his philosophy. Since, through the prophets, theoretical knowledge is transformed into revelation which is the best form of persuasion benefiting the greatest number of people, the prophets are the ones who must be seen as possessing the most perfect philosophy. Thus, for al-Fārābī, the role of the prophet and the revelation is central to his philosophical system.

Al-Ghazālī begins from the starting point that the Creator God is an all powerful God and acts out of His own will and is subject to nothing but His own will who manifests His will in all creation. Al-Ghazālī desires to place God's will and power above everything and thus, as he understood it, this concept requires that everything and every event must be subject to the subjective divine will.

In the arena of nature and causation, al-Ghazālī rejects necessary causation and he upholds that everything, all existence and every action are a result of the creation of God, decreed arbitrarily by divine action. Al-Ghazālī rejects necessary causation because necessary causation would necessarily entail that objects, both animate and inanimate, would have to possess intrinsic natural powers by virtue of their being objects. Objects and actions would be determined by their nature or essence. If one were to accept this view and apply it to everything, al-Ghazālī concludes that God Himself would be constrained to act in accordance with His own nature. All of God's actions would proceed automatically because of His nature or essence. God could not choose to act in any other way. Therefore, al-Ghazālī concluded that God could not then be considered a free agent.

Carrying forward this idea that objects do not possess intrinsic power and applying it to the ethical realm, al-Ghazālī concluded that all acts have no intrinsic moral value and are morally neutral before God had imposed upon these acts a value through His commands and prohibitions revealed in the revelation. We would have never been able to derive this knowledge that revelation gives us by ourselves because it is the subjective will of God. The revelation itself with its commands and prohibitions has no intrinsic value except that it is the wishes of God. The revelation's only worth is that it informs us of what God wants us to know and what actions He wants us to do or not do.

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