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Al-Ghazali's Compatibility with the Philosophers and the Influence of Sufism

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Abstract

Sufism greatly influenced the ethical beliefs and values of al-Ghazali. Had it not been for that influence, his works would have lacked their special spiritual value. In this paper, I will examine the role that Sufi philosophy played in giving spiritual depth to the ethics of al-Ghazali and how he was ultimately drawn to Sufism. Al-Ghazali moved away from his focus on the law and realized the value of spirituality. I will also argue why Socrates and Plato's beliefs are not at odds with Sufism and thus with al-Ghazali's views. In his *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, al-Ghazali attacks the philosophers including Ibn Sina and al-Farabi, but these two men laid the groundwork for Sufi philosophy. So, in reality, al-Ghazali should have sided with Ibn Sina and al-Farabi rather than opposing them. Neo-Platonism influenced Sufi philosophy, he must not have been at odds with the Muslim Neo-Platonists.

Keywords: Sufism, al-Ghazali, Neo-Platonism, compatibility.

Introduction

Despite the surface disagreement between al-Ghazali and the Muslim Neo-Platonists in the former's The Incoherence of the Philosophers, a closer look reveals that there is not much of a divide. Perhaps, it is time for us to look deeper into these supposed differences and change the general understanding that al-Ghazali was against the Muslim Neo-Platonists. By doing so, we will shine light upon the reality of their relationship, thereby ending misconceptions of antagonism between the two groups. This opens up the possibility that the dedicated followers of al-Ghazali, including a significant group of Sunni scholars, may become more open to the process of philosophical reasoning. In this paper, I demonstrate that Neo-Platonism influenced Sufi philosophy. In turn, because Sufism shaped the ethical beliefs and values of al-Ghazali, he was not in reality at odds with Islamic Neo-Platonism. To this end, I first examine the compatibility of Islamic Neo-Platonism with al-Ghazali's thought. In so doing, I briefly describe some of the teachings of al-Farabi and Ibn-Sina, and explain the influence of Sufism on their works. Then, using Ibn-Rushd's arguments, I show how there was no major disagreement between al-Ghazali and Islamic Neo-Platonism. In fact, it was the political demands on al-Ghazali which made him write so harshly against the Neo-Platonists in his Incoherence, not his actual views regarding God and creation. His true beliefs are seen most clearly not as they are presented in the Incoherence, but rather as they are expressed by his spiritual journey, which draws a more complex picture of his understanding of Neo-Platonism.

Secondly, I will show how Sufism directly influenced al-Ghazali's positions, ethics, and values as seen in his later works, after the *Incoherence*, and transformed him from purely a Sunni jurists and philosopher to an individual whose primary intellectual identity is Sufism and thus who accepts the Islamic Neo-Platonist views. I will

also examine the role that Sufism played in giving spiritual depth to the ethics of al-Ghazali, and why he was drawn to Sufism. Had it not been for Sufism's influence on the writings of al-Ghazali, his work would have lacked spiritual value and relevance. It would have been devoid of instructions about how to guide oneself toward self-realization and union with the divine beloved, and would have stayed in the realm of mundane ethical mandates and religious rituals, without any emphasis on the ultimate goal of such mandates, which is purifying and thus reaching the Truth within one's being and hence getting prepared for the afterlife.

The Compatibility of Neo-Platonism with the Works of al-Ghazali

There exists a connection between the works of al-Ghazali and Neo-Platonism. The founder of Neo-Platonism is Plotinus who considered himself simply a Platonist, and the distinction between Platonism and Neo-Platonism is a modern one, due to the belief that Plotinus's philosophy contains enough unique interpretations of Plato to make it different from Plato's philosophical system (Allen 2012). Further, it is a school of mystical philosophy based on the teachings of Plato and earlier Platonists; its focus is on the spiritual and cosmological aspects of Platonic thought (Netton 1998). In Islamic Neo-Platonism, the transcendent aspect of the Quranic God is stressed versus the creative aspect and all things are seen as emanating from God. Islamic Neo-Platonism's most important figures were al-Farabi and Ibn Sina (Rahman 1970). These two Islamic Neo-Platonists in turn greatly influenced Sufi philosophy, and since al-Ghazali was influenced by Sufi Philosophy and had an affinity with it, he must not have been at odds with the Neo-Platonists, and he really was not upon a closer look. The respected modern-day scholar Fazlur Rahman stated that "al-Ghazali, while he

bitterly attacked the philosophers, nevertheless wrote certain esoteric works incorporating much of the same philosophy. Esotericism has, indeed, infected Sunni Islam quite strongly via Sufism" (Jackson 2002).

With this connection in mind, it is important to seek a basic understanding of the works of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina in order to be able to evaluate them later in terms of what was written by al-Ghazali in his *Incoherence*. Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, who were influenced by the Mu[°]tazilite school of thought in Islam, recognized the authority of the Aristotelian Neo-Platonist tradition, which included the appropriateness of using the concept of *taqlid* (Dhanani 2007). Comparatively, Ash[°]arites such as al-Ghazali do "use reason, even aspects of Aristotelian reason, but they do not recognize the tradition of Aristotelian reason as an ultimate authority (Allen 2012).

The development of Islamic philosophy was a result of the translation of Greek philosophical works into Arabic from the eighth to the early tenth centuries (Azadpur 2011). The Muslim Neo-Platonists understood the works of Aristotle in Neo-Platonist terms (Azadpur 2011). One can see the greatest impact of Greek philosophy on Islamic philosophy in the works of al-Farabi (Allen 2012). Al-Farabi embraced Neo-Platonism in a limited sense, and it was his work that paved the way for Sufism to enter Islamic philosophy (Nasr 2006).

Neo-Platonism is one of the salient features of Islamic philosophy; it answers most major theological questions in Islam, such as how an incorporeal God created corporal beings, how multiplicity originated from unity, and why there is an ascending and descending order of beings. The ancient Greeks understood philosophy as being the practice of spiritual exercises. Accordingly, al-Farabi's notion of the ethical cultivation of the self was in tune with that (Moris 2012).

One can witness both philosophical and practical influence of Sufism in al-Farabi's works. In his The Treatise Concerning the Intellect, he interprets the concept of the four intellects in a mysticalphilosophical way. In so doing, he paves the road for Ibn Sina, who fully incorporated Neo-Platonism into his own system of thought (Hourani 1976). Al-Farabi "reconciled the opinions of Plato and Aristotle, with Plato seen as somewhat of a mystical figure, but also, in his discussions of political philosophy, he replaced Plato's philosopherking with an Imam whose understanding of truth is intuitive, who knows not only theoretical virtues but also the practical ones" (Allen 2012). Al-Farabi was also influenced by Sufism, as seen in his book Bezels of Wisdom (Rafiabadi 2006), which deals with both philosophy and gnosis. One of the mystical concepts he presents in this book is that "everything that exists possesses essence (mahiyya) and existence (huwiyya)" (Azadpur 2011). Additionally, according to Hossein Nasr, al-Farabi was a practicing Sufi and his poems can still be heard today in the repertoire of Sufi music in India and Anatolia (Nasr 2006, 138).

However, Sufism can be more clearly witnessed in the works of Ibn Sina. Ibn Sina offered comprehensive explanations of God and His unity, of how prophets receive their knowledge and perform miracles, and of their central position among humans (Hourani 1976). Even though he was not a practicing Sufi, he was a strong proponent of Sufism (Azadpur 2011). The chapter "The Spiritual Stages of the Gnostics" in his book *al-Isharat wa al-tanbihat* (Remarks and Admonitions) "is one of the most powerful defences of Sufism ever undertaken by a philosopher, and his *Hikmat al-Mashriqiyyah (The Oriental Philosophy)* is more inclined towards the Sufi perspective" (Rahman 1970). Further, "Avicenna takes the question has both

philosophical and mystical implications. By relying on Neo-Platonist scheme of emanation, Avicenna provides Sufism with an intellectual framework within which the question, how can the spiritual journey towards God take place, is answered... [Further] the presence of Sufi and mystical elements in some of his works are undeniable" (Islamic Centre of Education and Development 2012).

Thus far, we have done a very cursory demonstration of the role of Sufism in the philosophical teachings of al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, and their relation to the teachings of the ancient Greek philosophers. Now, by way of the arguments of Ibn Rushd, we will look into the criticisms raised by al-Ghazali in his *Incoherence*, and show how they are not really at odds with Neo-Platonist philosophy upon deeper analysis.

In his *Incoherence*, al-Ghazali discusses twenty key teachings, regarding God and the universe, of the Muslim Neo-Platonists, and rejects their claim that these teachings are capable of being proven by the high epistemological means of demonstration (*burhan*) (Ceylan 1995). Al-Ghazali adds that most of the twenty teachings are wrong but pose no threats against religion. However, three of them are not only wrong but also challenge religious teachings. These three are taken from Ibn Sina's philosophy: (1) the world's pre-eternity and, by extension, the pre-eternity of all substances, (2) that God's knowledge does not encompass temporal particulars, and (3) the denial of bodily resurrection on the Day of Judgment.

Al-Ghazali states that these three positions are contrary to the teachings the Quran (Abul Quasem 1975), because the Quran states that God created the world in seven days, that He is Omniscient, and that mankind will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment. Further, he notes that these three positions are dangerous for society as they can mislead the public into ignoring *sharia* (Jackson 2002). Accordingly, he issues

a religious ruling at the end of the book that anybody who teaches these three positions is an unbeliever and a heretic, who can be executed (Ghazali 2002).

So, his disputes with the philosophers are only in regard to these three points. Ibn Rushd, the Andalusian Muslim Peripatetic philosopher, demonstrated the connection between al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, and al-Farabi in his two books *The Decisive Treatise* and *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*. Ibn Rushd "refutes al-Ghazali's case against the Islamic Peripatetics by rejecting al-Ghazali's understanding of philosophy as the production of rational knowledge beholden to the beliefs of its Greek funders. Averroes maintains that philosophy as appropriated by Muslims should rather be understood as a legitimate practice within the constraints of Islam" (Jackson 2002, 88). As such, Ibn Rushd tries to lessen the controversy surrounding the practice of philosophy and demonstrate that the philosophers accurately deal with Islamic revelation, albeit differently from the jurists (Abul Quasem 2005, 29).

But al-Ghazali's charge of unbelief against al-Farabi and Ibn Sina is only tentative. Ibn Rushd notes, "It is apparent from what he [i.e., al-Ghazali] said on the subject that his calling them both unbelievers on these counts was not definite, since he made it clear in *The book of the distinction* that calling people unbelievers for violating unanimity on theoretical matters (specifically in this case the interpretation of the Quran) can only be tentative" (Wensinck 1941). Another reason al-Ghazali's charges are not definite, Ibn Rushd argues, is because there has never existed in Islam a consensus against allegorical interpretation. This is because Quran 3:7 states that some verses have obvious meanings while others are ambiguous; only those with understanding

can distinguish between the two (Azadpur 2011, 39). Therefore, no one can say definitively which verse is or is not allegorical, except for a small few.

Additionally, Ibn Rushd explains, it is not true that the Muslim Neo-Platonists believed that God did not know particulars. Instead, they believed that God's "knowledge of both particulars and universals differs from ours, in being the cause, not an effect, of the object known. They even hold that God sends premonitions in dreams of particular events" (Hourani 1976, 86). Therefore, al-Ghazali was mistaken in excommunicating the Islamic Neo-Platonists, as they believed that God's knowledge is the reason for creation and, by extension, that He has knowledge of particulars. Ibn Sina asserts that God's knowledge of particulars is through his eternal intellectual perception of created beings, not a moment-to-moment sensory experience. Further, Ibn Sina adds to the Aristotelean notion that God has only self-knowledge the idea that His self-knowledge includes knowledge of all things in existence, since He is the ultimate source of them all (Allan 2012). "There is not a single existent particular which does not proceed from Him directly or indirectly and the existence of which does not become in some way necessary through Him" (Allan 2012).

On the position regarding the eternity of the world, Ibn Rushd notes that "the philosophers agree with al-Ghazali that there is a God, that God created the existent things, and that the world (containing the existent things) extends infinitely into the future. What the dispute concerns is merely the past of the world. Philosophers argue that the world is without beginning in time, whereas al-Ghazali disagrees" (Netton 1998). Ibn Rushd argues, this disagreement is too insignificant to validate a charge of unbelief (Rahman 1970, 324), and he also introduces Quranic verses to defend the Muslim Neo-Platonists' view

(Jackson 2002). Accordingly, Ibn Rushd says that there is no verse in the Quran which unambiguously states that the creation of the world takes place in time (Jackson 2002). There is no doubt that al-Ghazali was aware of that, but nevertheless he believed that the world was created in time, because this was a belief established through the consensus (*ijma*') of Muslim theologians (Allan 2012). Further, Ibn Rushd argues that "the apparent meaning of Scripture is that there was a being and time before God created the present being and time. Thus the theologians' interpretation is allegorical and does not command unanimous agreement, because, as previously stated, there is no consensus against allegorical interpretation.

Lastly, regarding al-Ghazali's third criticism regarding bodily resurrection,

Averroes argues that Peripatetic philosophers agree with al-Ghazali that the soul is immortal and that bodies are resurrected on the judgment day. The dispute rather turns on the issue whether the bodies that will be resurrected will be the same material bodies that had perished. Islamic Peripatetics argue that "existence comes back only to a likeness of what has perished" ... More precisely, the resurrected body is identical in its attributes to the perished body but it is not composed of the same material. Again the point is that the difference in the position of the philosophers and that of Ghazali is insignificant and does not constitute grounds for the condemnation of the former as heretics. (Allan, 2012)

On this note, Fazlur Rahman states, "Avicenna, while accepting the doctrine of the resurrection of the body in all his major philosophical works, wrote a special treatise for his inner circle seeking to prove that physical resurrection was impossible and was intended only as a measure of 'inducement and warning' for the masses, so that they would be virtuous" (Allan 2012). This fact, however, does not change

the notion that the difference is an insignificant one. Regardless of Ibn Sina's real views, he agrees with al-Ghazali on the surface—at least in his works and public statements—even though he may think otherwise in private.

Therefore, it is evident that there is no major disagreement between the Islamic Neo-Platonists and al-Ghazali. Their disagreements are minor and do not warrant the charge of unbelief, as al-Ghazali himself came to understand a few years after writing the *Incoherence*, which we will discuss in the next section. The three main issues highlighted by al-Ghazali are not major issues because allegorical interpretation is allowed in Islam. Further, in terms of the notion that God does not know particulars, that can be categorized as only a misunderstanding on the part of al-Ghazali regarding the belief of the Muslim Neo-Platonists, because they did believe that God knows particulars-they only thought that He knows them differently, as He is the creator. In terms of the eternity of the world, there is no Quranic verse which states that the creation of the world happened in time; the only basis of al-Ghazali's belief in the creation of the world in time was the consensus; he knew that the Quran did not unambiguously state it. Therefore, this was a weak position on al-Ghazali's part, and he undoubtedly knew that after writing the Incoherence, as he no longer mentioned it as an issue. Lastly, in terms of the criticism regarding the resurrection of the bodies, the difference is only regarding the composition of the resurrected body versus the perished body. Al-Ghazali believed that it would be the same exact body, but the Muslim Neo-Platonists believed that the resurrected bodies would not be made of the same material though they would have identical attributes. This is too technical and insignificant of a distinction to warrant any major disagreement.

The Influence of Politics on al-Ghazali's Incoherence

When one looks at the political context in which al-Ghazali wrote the *Incoherence*, it becomes evident that he was looking for some excuses to label the Muslim Neo-Platonists as heretics, not because he truly believed that, but because he had to do so for the good of the state.

During al-Ghazali's time, Sunni theology was facing intense challenges from the Ismaili Shiites and the Muslim Neo-Platonists (Azadpur 2011, 40). During the time period in which he wrote the *Incoherence*, he was a professor at the Nizamiyya of Baghdad—a position he was appointed to in 1091 (some years before the writing of the *Incoherence*) by the Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk. In this capacity, al-Ghazali held a very influential position and became closely tied to the caliphal court in Baghdad (Allan 2012).

He was concerned that those who embraced the Neo-Platonist beliefs would ignore Islamic law (*sharia*) (Allan 2012). This was problematic for him, because it coincided with the start of the downfall of the Muslim empire. The empire was beginning to break up into separate independent states, the most powerful of which was the one ruled by the Seljuk Turks (Allan 2012). The Seljuks were originally a nomadic people, primarily interested in territorial expansion. As such, it was up to the ulama, such as al-Ghazali, to hold together what was left of the fragmented empire (Allan 2012). The Nizamiyya schools were established throughout the Seljuk territories as a way to unify the people under the Ash arite creed (Netton 1998, 110).

It is thus self-evident why al-Ghazali was so harsh against the Muslim Neo-Platonists. He had to answer the Seljuk rulers, who had appointed him to a powerful position. As such, he had to ensure that the people did not follow the Neo-Platonists instead of the Ash⁶ arite ulama;

otherwise, the Seljuk dominion would be weakened. However, when he left the Nizamiyya, and thus loosened his ties with the political leaders, he began to write freely. Indeed, it was during this latter period that he wrote *The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Islam from Clandestine Unbelief* and then the *Revival (Ihya')* and *Mishkat*. He also vowed never to teach in a Nizamiyya again, so that he could be free from their influence (although it must be noted that he returned to one at the end of his life, reasoning that he needed to teach the people about what he had experienced).

Al-Ghazali's Transformation by Sufism and How That Influenced His Attitude to the Islamic Neo-Platonists

Al-Ghazali moved away from his harsh rhetoric against the philosophers and came closer to them in theory due to the influence of Sufism. Al-Ghazali was attracted to Sufism, because purifying the soul and ethical cleansing were requirements of that path (Nasr 2006, 138). Al-Ghazali stated that he did not see such results of refinement of action and behavior in jurists or philosophers, because they, unlike Sufis, are mostly engaged in rhetoric and not action (Ghazali 2002). Only in Sufism is this cleansing a requirement, which leads a person to become annihilated in and one with the Beloved, or to become a perfect person (Moris 1994). He strongly believed that theoretical knowledge alone could not lead one to such an elevated state, because it did not strongly emphasize a practical component that required experiencing the teachings (Moris 1994). Further, he stated that one's intellect is limited and cannot comprehend mystical experiences (Allan 2012). Al-Ghazali realized that the mystics were not men of words, but of real experience (Ghazali 2002).

In The Decisive Criterion for Distinguishing Islam from Clandestine Unbelief (Faysal al-afriqa bayn al-Islam wa-l-zandaqa), a systematic

work on the boundaries of Islam, we witness a more toned-down al-Ghazali—one who is much more accepting of others' opinions and not quick to label them as unbelievers. By the time he composed this text, he had studied theology, dialectics, natural sciences, philosophy, and logic, and had become one of the most respected Ash'arite theologians and jurists of his time. But then he started to doubt these sciences and the intellect and became a skeptic for two months; subsequently, he claimed that God had restored his trust in the necessary principles of the intellect as he experienced internally, at a spiritual level, that the principles were true (Ghazali 2002). After this experience, he started studying Sufism, amongst other groups, and found the Sufi path to be the only one which led to the Truth (Ghazali 2002). Upon this realization, he felt that he must leave his position at the Nizamiyya, and thus he abandoned his career as a jurist and theologian, along with his other worldly attachments, and set out to live a life completely devoted to God, as a Sufi would (Azadpur 2011, 89), and he did so for ten years.

One can strongly assume that his spiritual transformation led him to reflect deeper on the concept of pre-eternity and change his strong stance against those who did not hold his views, and that is why he no longer deemed it significant enough to be a determinative factor in assessing one's belief. Therefore, even though in his *Incoherence* he condemns the concept of the pre-eternity of the world, he does not mention it in *The Decisive Criterion* (Azadpur 2011, 89). Instead, he states in the latter work that only concepts that go against "fundamental doctrines" (*usul al-aqaid*) should be deemed unbelief and apostasy (Azadpur 2011, 89). The fundamental doctrines are the oneness of God, the Prophethood of Muhammad, and the Quranic descriptions of the afterlife (Hourani 1976, 86). All other teachings, he states, even those considered religious innovations, should be tolerated and even accepted

if they are in accordance with revelation (Rafiabadi and Amin Kak 2003). Accordingly, he contends that no one is to be labeled an unbeliever for disagreement over anything other than the fundamental doctrines (Hourani 1976, 93). This change in attitude led to the extensive use of Aristotelian ideas in al-Ghazali's works (Shirazi 1963). Therefore, one can clearly see that had it not been for the influence of Sufism and its teachings on al-Ghazali, he would not have changed his harsh views and would not have found such an open mind towards those who disagreed with his views. In fact, because of his Sufi enlightenment, he made fun of the Muslim jurists, who were his colleagues. This is because he saw them as being preoccupied with trivial and mundane matters, such as ritual purity, which have no crucial bearing on purifying one's heart (Shirazi 1963). He further states that one should not waste one's precious time paying any attention to them; rather, one should focus on oneself and one's spiritual development. Clearly, this is a drastic change from his words in the *Incoherence*.

His major work *Revival of the Religious Sciences (Ihya' 'ulum aldin)* was also written after he left the Nizamiyya and started pursuing the Sufi path. The book is a complete ethical guide for the everyday behavior of Muslims (Shirazi 1963). It is made up of the following four sections: (1) ritual practice (*'ibadat*), (2) social customs (*'adat*), (3) things that lead to perdition (*muhlikat*) and hence should be avoided, and (4) things that lead to salvation (*munjiyat*) and should be pursued (Azadpur 2011, 90). In this book, he speaks out against being consumed with worldly concerns, and teaches that the only thing which really matters is the preparation of oneself for the Day of Judgment. This life, as compared to the hereafter, is insignificant; as such, we must strive during this life to purify our souls so that we may attain salvation in the next life (Hourani 1976, 99). This is the definition of good action. Further, in *Revival*, he states that any person can know the difference

between a good or evil action if he strives towards the path to the Truth by purifying himself of vices, and replacing them with virtues (Azadpur 2011, 90). Additionally, he states, one can have knowledge of good and evil through direct vision, like the Prophets, if one follows their path and does what they did, which was obtaining self-knowledge by purifying themselves of everything other than God. Moreover, al-Ghazali believes that our thoughts and intentions do not count for gaining redemption in the afterlife, and thus theological beliefs without action are useless; we must put those beliefs into actual practice in order to gain redemption. This is the advantage which Sufism offers.

As one can see in *Revival*, al-Ghazali combines the ethics of the philosophers with the Sufi teachings on the pure and righteous lifestyle, as he believed a close link existed between the two (Hourani 1976, 99). Further, al-Ghazali states in his autobiography that the ethics of the Sufis and philosophers are the same, and that the philosophers took their ethics from the Sufis (Azadpur 2011, 90).

As al-Ghazali developed along the Sufi path, one can see an even greater influence of Sufism in his works, such as in *The Niche of Lights* (*Mishkat al-anwar*) (Rahman 1970, 324). These works also demonstrate a great philosophical influence, since al-Ghazali's ethics is based on the development of character traits, which lead to noteworthy deeds that allow for one's salvation in the afterlife. Accordingly, he finds faults with traditional Sunni ethics, which, he thinks, is solely concerned with following the tenets of sharia and only concerned with jurisprudence; thus, he considers the jurists merely "scholars of this world" and not equipped to guide people to salvation in the afterlife.

Further, in the *Mishkat*, one is exposed to an account of light and sight based on their spiritual and also natural meanings, which is highly

influenced by Neo-Platonism, as the question of light and sight was a Neo-Platonist issue. The entire treatise could even be seen as a Neo-Platonist work in terms of its ideas on light and sight. "The first part treats the theory of light and sight in nature and in man, and their source, Allah. The second contains an exposition of the theory of ideas, based on the Platonic one, and illustrated by specifically Mohammadan examples. The third gives a classification of men according to the degrees of their partaking of the divine light especially with a view to their knowledge of God" (Ceylan 1995, 584). It can even be said that the beginning of the *Mishkat* is basically a paraphrase of the fifth book of the fourth Ennead by Plotinus (Ceylan 1995, 585). This should not be of any surprise, because Sufism is in accordance with Neo-Platonist views, and so is al-Ghazali, albeit with an Islamic tendency (Ceylan 1995, 586).

Another important topic raised in the *Mishkat*, which is entirely a Sufi concept, is the classification of heavenly beings from the angels of the spheres onwards. This classification refines the distinction regarding the relation between God's unity and the world, which, al-Ghazali acknowledges, deviates from the Ash'rite perspective, as it places between the spheres and God two additional spheres: the mover of the spheres and the Obeyed One (Ceylan 1995, 586). This view has a clear resemblance with Ibn Sina's theory, which supports Ibn Rushd's view that, in the *Mishkat*, al-Ghazali has taken up philosophical views and made them mystical (Ceylan 1995, 587).

Lastly, al-Ghazali's interpretation of the light verse, although unique in certain respects, owes much to the writings of Ibn Sina (Abul Quasem 1975, 20). Al-Ghazali's and Ibn Sina's interpretations of the light verse both seek to improve the soul of the seeker through spiritual exercises (Abul Quasem 1975, 20). Where they differ is the fact that Ibn Sina

places great value on intellectualism, and believes that what the Prophet depicts can be accessed symbolically, through the intellect (Abul Quasem 1975, 21). "They both considered 'intellect' as a self-manifesting thing that brings other things to manifestation. Al-Ghazali ... subsumed the light of intellect under that of prophecy, but the Peripatetic conception of intellection went beyond its delimitation by al-Ghazali. For the Peripatetics, intellect was essential to prophecy" (Abul Quasem 1975, 21).

Conclusion

Examining the evidence, it becomes clear that there are many similarities and no major disagreements between al-Ghazali, al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina. This is especially the case when one understands how Sufism transformed al-Ghazali. Therefore, philosophical reasoning does have a place in the teachings of al-Ghazali, and they can co-exist. Further, one can see the profound impact of Sufism on Islamic philosophy in the work of thinkers such as al-Farabi and Ibn-Sina as well. Al-Ghazali attempted to teach the philosophers and theologians that the basis of all religious certainty is lived experience. In so doing, he tried to vitalize Islamic law, and for those who listened, his views were positively transformative. But unfortunately we had and continue to have jurists who are unaffected by such teachings and continue to solely stick to the letter of the law, without emphasizing lived experience. Nevertheless, recognizing the compatibility of al-Ghazali's thought with the teachings of Neo-Platonism is important for the advancement of the Sunni acceptance of philosophy.

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