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THE SECRETS OF THE SOUL, DEATH AND THE AFTERLIFE
IN AL-GHAZALI'S IHYA' 'ULUM AL-DIN

by

Timothy J. Gianotti

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Graduate Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations
University of Toronto

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Abstract
THE SECRETS OF THE SOUL, DEATH & THE AFTERLIFE
IN AL-GHAZALI'S IHYA' 'ULUM AL-DIN
(Ph.D., 1998)
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This thesis marks a radical rethinking of the hereafter in the thought of al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), with a special focus on his magnum opus, the Revival of the Religious Sciences. Heavily textual and highly contextual in its approach, it attempts to resolve some of the major ambiguities that have vexed al-Ghazālī's readers for nearly nine hundred years. The basic problem is easily identified: (i) al-Ghazālī’s varied treatments of death and the afterlife seem to conflict in places; (ii) he frequently refers to an esoteric knowledge concerning the reality of death, the content of which he refuses to divulge; and (iii) although he concedes to the reader that the missing piece to this puzzle can be found within the soul’s true nature, he knowingly leads the reader into an impasse, for the soul’s reality is a “secret” so sublime in the Islamic tradition that not even the Prophet (عليه الصلاة والسلام) was permitted to disclose it. This unspeakable knowledge of the soul, then, is arguably the single most elusive and tantalizing region of al-Ghazālī’s mind.

The pious prohibition concerning the disclosure of the soul’s secret does not seem to extend to intimation, however, and our analysis of al-Ghazālī’s “doctrine of discourse” (ch. 1) strongly suggests that al-Ghazālī wove much esoteric content, including an esoteric psychology, into the fabric of the Iḥyā’ for reasons discussed in the course of the study. Such content,
enticing yet never explicit enough to be considered outright disclosure, characteristically comes in the form of fragments or brief flashes scattered throughout the many books of the *Ihyā’*. When collected and pieced together these intimations reveal much of al-Ghazālī’s understanding of the soul’s true nature, the secret which in turn promises to unlock the mysteries of his esoteric eschatology — the secrets waiting beyond the doors of death.

This study, then, systematically formulates a series of interrelated questions. The first of these concerns al-Ghazālī’s position on the nature and role of written instruction (ch. 1), where we try to make sense of the characteristically varied and sometimes conflicting content one finds in al-Ghazālī’s writings as a whole. This forms an essential foundation for our analyses of his varied statements concerning the soul in the subsequent chapters. Next comes the complex question of the soul’s true nature (ch. 2-5), an investigation that takes us from mainstream doctrine to his more intimate mystical insights concerning the “heart” and the “worlds” through which it journeys on its way “home” to the world of the Unseen. The final questions concern the true meaning of death (ch. 5-6) and the realities of the afterlife (ch. 6), age-old puzzles that seem to fall into place once some new light is shed on the soul’s reality.

All this yields a fresh yet close reading of al-Ghazālī’s thoughts on life and death.
For Professor Michael E. Marmura
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Many more individuals deserve to be recognized and heartily thanked for their help, assistance, and support along the way, even though they go unmentioned here. I can only hope that God will grant me time and opportunity to thank each one in turn.
It is impossible to remove the covering from the true nature of the reality of death, since death cannot be known by one who does not understand life, and the true knowledge of life is [attained] through the knowledge of the true nature of the spirit in its essence and through grasping the quiddity (MAHI') of its essence. It was not [even] permitted for the Emissary of God (may God bless him and grant him salvation) to speak of this, nor to say more than "the spirit is my Lord's affair." Thus it is not for any of the doctors of religion to reveal the secret of the spirit, even if one were to come to know it. Indeed, all that is permitted is the mentioning of the state of the spirit after death...

from the Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife (كتاب ذكر الموت وما بعده),

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1 Qur'ān: al-Isrā' (17): 85. Alternatively, this is often translated as "the spirit is by the command of my Lord" due to the fact that the noun, amr (أمر), is equivocal and thus leaves room for divergent renderings. Al-Ghazāli's interpretation of this āya is the less common of the two renderings and will be given some attention in the course of the study.
Since the time of Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 1185) and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), al-Ghazālī’s true position on many topics has been suspect. This is especially true of his eschatology, which has been taken by some to be a strict and literal adherence to the descriptions found in the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Traditions and by others (such as Ibn Ṭufayl) as a pious facade behind which lay a doctrine that rejects all corporeality and relegates the literal meanings to metaphors – allegories useful for the instruction of the weak-minded masses but ultimately untrue. Whatever the case may be, al-Ghazālī’s numerous and highly varied treatments of such key questions as the nature of the human soul and the realities of the afterlife leave in his wake some profound ambiguities that continue right up to the present day. Commenting upon al-Ghazālī’s somewhat perplexing habit of speaking differently to different audiences, Ibn Rushd says that he was everything to everyone: “...he adhered to no one doctrine in his books but was an Ash’arite with the Ash’arites, a Sufi with the Sufis and a philosopher with the philosophers...” This, says Ibn Rushd, was because he wanted to arouse the minds of the religious to philosophy and the minds of the philosophers to religion.

While Ibn Rushd’s accusation of adhering to no single doctrine may or may not be accurate, he did put his finger on a basic problem that every student of al-Ghazālī must ultimately face: the characteristically varied and sometimes conflicting content one finds in al-Ghazālī’s writings. This is further complicated by al-Ghazālī’s employment of a wide variety of genres and techniques, from dogmatic explications and allegorical representations (intended for

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the generality of believers) to brief flashings of mystical disclosure (intended for a more restricted, more advanced audience). This problem was perhaps first identified by Ibn Rushd's fellow Andalusian and forebear, Ibn Ṭufayl, who clearly took the unwieldy nature of al-Ghazālī’s corpus to be intentional:

As for the books of the shaykh Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, [the matter] depends on [whether or not] he is addressing the generality: for in one place he holds back, while in another he lets go; he [in one place] declares [people] infidels because of things that he [himself] adopts [in other places]. Furthermore, in light of everything by which he condemned the philosophers in the book Taḥāfut, such as their denial of the Gathering of the Bodies and their affirmation of reward and punishment exclusively for the souls, he then said in the beginning of the book Mizān, “This is definitively the doctrine of the Sufi shaykhs...” [On top of this] he then said in the book, al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl wa 'l-mu'sīh bi 'l-ahwāl, that his [personal] doctrine is in accord with the doctrine of the Sufis and that his personal position came to rest on that doctrine after long research. Whoever carefully examines his books of this kind and scrutinizes their speculative content [will find that] there is a great deal to be seen. But he makes excuses for doing this at the end of the book Mizān al-ʿamal, where he describes that there are three kinds of views [belonging to a master]: a view that he can share with the generality while they are around him; a view that is [adjusted] in accordance with the way he addresses each [individual] person asking questions or seeking guidance; a view that he keeps to himself and that does not go forth [from him] except to those who share his doctrine.

Then, after that, he said “In [the course of] these expressions, even if there only had been [material] that cast doubt upon your inherited belief, that would have been enough of a benefit. For if one does not doubt, he does not look; and the one who does not look does not see; and the one who does not see remains [lost] in blindness and perplexity.” Then he quotes this line of poetry:

"Take what you see and forget about what you've heard; The appearance of the sun wipes Saturn away."

This is the character (صفة) of his [method of] teaching: most of it is symbols and an indications² from which no benefit can be derived except for the one who first grasps them himself through an inner vision and then, secondly, hears them from him [i.e. al-Ghazālī], or for one who is [already] prepared for their understanding, one of a superior innate disposition, for whom the slightest indication suffices.

He said in the book, Jawāhir [al-Qurʾān], that he has books that are

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² Literally, “a symbol and an indication” (رمز وإشارة).
restricted from all but their intended audience and that he has placed in them the pure truth. To our knowledge, nothing of these has reached al-Andalus. Rather, books have reached [us] which some claim are those restricted [books], but the matter is not so. Those books [that have been mistaken for esoteric disclosures] are the book al-Ma‘rīf al-‘aqī‘a, the book al-Nafkh wa’l-taswī‘a, masā‘il majmū‘a, and others. These books, even if they do contain indications, do not contain much more esoteric disclosure than what is established in his popular books. Perhaps there is, in his book al-Maqsad al-asnā [fī sharḥ asmā’ Allāh al-ḥusnā] material that is more ambiguous that the material in those [supposedly esoteric books], but he himself has stated that al-Maqsad al-asnā is not a restricted work. From that it necessarily follows that these books which have reached [us] are not the restricted ones. Some contemporary [readers] have imagined, based on his statement occurring in the latter part of the book Mishkāt [al-anwār], an outrageous thing that has cast him into an abyss from which [there remains] for him no salvation. It is his statement following the mentioning of the [various] classes of those veiled by veils of light, and then his movement into the mentioning of “those who have arrived [at the ultimate goal]”, [who he says] come to believe that this Great Being is described by an attribute that negates pure unicity. [These contemporary accusers] wanted, on the basis of that [statement], to pin on him the belief that the Truth — be He glorified — in His Essence has some kind of plurality. Be He greatly exalted above what the transgressors say!

We harbor absolutely no doubt that the shaykh Abū Ḥāmid is among those who won the highest felicity and reached those noble, sanctified stations. However, his restricted works that contain the [knowledge of the] Unveiling have not reached us.3

There is much that warrants our attention in this passage. From the context, it is clear that there was a great deal of controversy surrounding the writings of al-Ghazālī in Ibn Ṭufayl’s day. While Ibn Ṭufayl seems unwilling to go along with those accusing al-Ghazālī of a belief in some kind of multiplicity within the Godhead, he does acknowledge that al-Ghazālī’s corpus is loaded with tension and ambiguity, and he seems confident that this tension was intentional, i.e. part of al-Ghazālī’s method. Specifically regarding al-Ghazālī’s eschatological doctrine, Ibn Ṭufayl’s twinning of statements from the Mizān and the Munqidh is both accurate and pointed.

for al-Ghazālī does indeed disclose in the *Mizān al-'amal* that the Sufis and the "believing monotheists among the philosophers" (اللَّهَيْنِ من الفلاسفة) believe in an afterlife which is utterly suprasensible. And he says much more than this. In the section "elucidating that the slacking off from the quest of faith is also stupidity", he explains that

regarding the matter of the hereafter, people are of four [general] divisions: one group believes in the Gathering and the Resurrection [of bodies] and in Paradise and Hellfire, just as the religious teachings have articulated and as the Qur’ān has clearly described. They affirm the sensual pleasures, [all of] which reduce to [the pleasures of] marital relations, taste, smell, touch, clothing, and visual delights. They confess that there are kinds of happiness and types of pleasures in addition to these, pleasures that elude the description of those [wishing to] describe them. These are "that which no eye has seen, no ear heard, that which has not occurred to the heart of a human." [They acknowledge] that [all] that continues forever without interruption. [And they also avow] that it can only be attained through knowledge and works. These are the Muslims essentially; indeed, [all of] those who follow the prophets, mostly among the Jews and Christians.

The second group -- some of the Islamic monotheists among the philosophers -- acknowledge a kind of joy whose modality has not occurred to the human heart, and they call it "intellectual bliss". As for the sensible [pleasures and torments], they deny their [ontological] existence from the external [perspective], yet they affirm them along the lines of the imagination in the dream state. But sleep becomes cloudy and obscure by reason of [our] awakening. And that [state in the hereafter] knows no bemuddlement; rather it is made permanent. They claim that [this perpetual dream state] is fixed for a group of people who are enamored of sensible things, for those whose inclination is restricted to [such sensible pleasures and punishments], who do not rise to [the level of] intellectual joys. Now this [doctrine] does not lead to a state which necessitates a slacking off in the [religious] quest. For being delighted [by something] is rather what occurs within the soul as a result of being influenced or effectuated by [the sensible experience] of something touched or seen or tasted, etc. The external

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4 First printing, with limited commentary from Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmīya, 1989).

5 While Shams al-Dīn is inclined to interpret اللَّهَيْنِ من الفلاسفة as metaphysicians, we take the term to be a less technical reference to the religious philosophers, most notably -- although not exclusively -- the Islamic philosophers, such as al-Fārábī and Ibn Sinā, who upheld the doctrines of God's unity, prophecy, afterlife, etc. For Shams al-Dīn's reading, see his Arabic commentary to the *Mizān*, 12 (n. 1).
thing thus is the cause of occurrence of the effect. Now if it is possible for the
effect to occur within the soul without the exterior thing [to trigger it] — just as in
the state of sleep — then there is no need of the external thing.

[As for] the third group, they go [even] to the absolute denial of sensory
pleasure, [concluded] by way of [their doctrines of] reality (الحقيقة) and
imagination (الخیال). They claim that the imaginative faculty obtains [its
images] exclusively through the bodily tools and that death severs the relationship
between the soul (النفس) and the body, which is its tool in [serving] the
imaginative faculty and in all things of a sensory nature. After it is cleft from the
body, [the soul] never returns to its management of the body. Thus, the only
things remaining are torments and pleasures that are not of a sensible nature but
are greater than the sensible ones.

For, in this world as well, the human tendency is toward the intellectual
pleasures, and his aversion is likewise to intellectual forms of suffering. In light
of that, [humans] despise being humiliated, preferring to guard [their misdoings]
rather than allowing their shame to come to light: [hence the man's] concealing
of [his] desire for intercourse and undergoing the [physical] pains and difficulties
[that result]. Indeed, one might well prefer to go without food for one or two
days if he could, by doing this, attain the delight of victory in chess in light of his
strong desire. So the joy of victory is an intellectual joy. One might well rush
upon a large number of [enemy] soldiers in order to slay [them], taking for his
compensation whatever is decreed for his soul of the delight of praise and the joy
of being credited with valor. [This group] claims that the sensations, when
compared to the joys [truly] existent in the hereafter, are grossly inadequate.
Their relation to [the true joys] is almost like the relation between grasping the
aroma of delicious food and its [actual] taste, or the relation between gazing upon
the one who is the object of desire and actually having intercourse with him/her —
no, [the difference between the corporeal pleasures and the true joys] is even
more distant than [these examples].

They claim that all this is remote from the understanding of the masses, to
whom these pleasures have been presented in [the guise] of things they know
from sensible experience. It is just like the youth who is occupied with his
studies and to whom is promised a judgeship or a ministerial post. In his youth,
he does not comprehend the [particular] joy of either position, and so he is
promised things from which he takes great delight, such as a curved staff with
which he can play or a small bird with which he can play around, as well as
[other] things of this nature.

So where does the joy of playing with a little bird stand in relation to the
joy of kingship or of a ministerial post? However, since his understanding is
incapable of grasping the higher thing, he is presented with the baser thing in
order to incite his desire, [by which] he is amiably and pedagogically led to the
thing wherein resides his [true] happiness. This [view] too, if it is correct, does
not necessitate any slacking off in [regard to] the quest [of religion]. On the
contrary, it requires even more seriousness.

It is to this [degree] that the Sufis venture, as well as the believing monotheists from among the philosophers in their turn, to the extent that the Sufi shaykhs have explained without having been guarded [in their speech]. They have said that whosoever worships God in order to seek Paradise or in order to take precaution against the Hellfire is base. However, the quest of those [whose hearts are] intent upon God is a more noble thing than this. Whoever sees [first hand] their masters and seeks out their beliefs and studies the books of the writers among them will understand that this credal belief [flows] definitively from the gushing courses of their experiential states.\(^6\)

Thus, while these views differ greatly in their interpretation of the afterlife, al-Ghazālī seems to be saying that all of them are acceptable, for each encourages its particular proponent to take the faith and the practice very seriously. None of them, according to his sympathetic explication, encourages or even tolerates a "slacking off" from the religious life, which is the real thrust behind the entire passage. We may thus infer from the context that all are salvifically valid, even though they may differ in their respective definitions of the felicity and torment awaiting each individual. But how do we reconcile this with his harsh and detailed condemnation of the philosophical eschatology in the Tahāfut? It is a difficult question, made even more difficult by this text when coupled with al-Ghazālī’s self-identification with the Sufis found all throughout the Ḥiyā’ and later in the Munqidh. Textually, Ibn Ṭufayl’s reading is justifiable, but it is somewhat difficult to digest when al-Ghazālī himself affirms just the opposite in the vast majority of his works, even those of a distinctly esoteric nature. So what does it really mean?

In spite of Ibn Ṭufayl’s reading, many scholars, both medieval and contemporary, have taken al-Ghazālī on the whole to be a staunch and consistent upholder of the corporeal afterlife.

\(^6\) Mizān, 10-12.
This is in keeping with al-Ghāzālī’s staunch promotion of Sunni orthodoxy, which is touched upon in the first chapter of this study. In recent scholarship, Professor W. M. Watt stands out as one of the strongest proponents of this view. On the grounds that this “philosophical” eschatology is too remote from al-Ghāzālī’s usual stance, he first discounted the Mizān statement, and indeed the entire book, as a spurious attribution\(^7\) and later seems to have shifted his view to regard it as an early work abrogated by his later, more mature thought.\(^8\)

It is possible that Ibn Ṭufayl, who does not complicate his reading with the question of chronology, is being unfair when comparing statements in the Mizān, which by all evidence was written prior to al-Ghāzālī’s departure from Baghdad\(^9\), i.e., before he actually took up the Sufi “way”, with statements made after he had been initiated into the experiential way of the Sufis. In other words, what al-Ghāzālī means by “Sufi” in the Mizān may be quite different from what he means by the term in the context of the Munqidh, which was written much later than the Mizān and well after he had come to know Sufism in an altogether different way.

Whatever the case may be, there is certainly ample textual evidence for taking Ibn Ṭufayl’s reading with a degree of gravity and for exercising caution when determining al-Ghāzālī’s “mature” position on the true nature of the afterlife explicitly promised and abundantly described in the Qur’ān and the Prophetic Traditions. This thesis, then, seeks first to explain why there is a problem when it comes to the interpretation of al-Ghāzālī’s writings in

\(^7\) See his “The Authenticity of the Works Attributed to al-Ghāzālī” in JRAS 1952, 24-45.


general and to the interpretation of his afterlife discourse in particular. In its efforts to show precisely where the ambiguities lie and to explain what they might mean, it presents a radical rethinking of al-Ghazâlî’s “real” position on the afterlife, the secrets of which all hinge upon his psychology, which is perhaps the single most difficult and complicated question in the vast corpus of his writings.

Beginning with the question of the soul, then, any student will quickly find that his terminology is highly self-conscious, at times plainly evasive, often equivocal and ambiguous, sometimes even contradictory. The reader is thus frequently put in the position of a tracker, trying to pursue terms and intentions of terms and intended audiences all within the flow of unfolding time, shifting genres, and changing contexts. The present study, in its effort to pin down and clarify al-Ghazâlî’s position on the real nature or quiddity of the human being, qua human being, commences with all the caution of a complex experiment, which must begin by isolating and separating the variables which so complicate the equation at hand.

The first and most fundamental of these variables is the nature and role of written discourse itself, a question that the flummoxing variety of al-Ghazâlî’s styles and statements makes unavoidable. Indeed, his characteristic “unreadability” on many crucial topics is so apparent that his thoughtful reader gradually gets the impression, as Ibn Ṭufayl did, that the problem can hardly be without some intention on his part. In some ways, Ibn Ṭufayl hit the mark: al-Ghazâlî certainly wrote for different audiences and, in the case of his written esoteric teachings, his preferred style of instruction is as mystifying as the content itself.

When it comes to treating the topic of written discourse itself, however, al-Ghazâlî leaves little room for ambiguity; in several places, he carefully delineates the various types of discourse
that he employs and he clearly identifies the respective ends for which each is suited. Thus, when faced with the familiar puzzle of different and often divergent treatments of the very same subjects, the reader's first hope lies in stepping back and studying the types of discourse in which the various statements occur. Once the type of discourse is identified and the reader becomes aware of its uses and misuses, its legitimate functions and the functions for which it is in no way intended or suited, a clearer understanding of what is really being said in each of the various contexts can be won. The first chapter is thus devoted to the study of al-Ghazâli's "doctrine of discourse" — his theory of the nature and role of every kind of religious writing.

Although many texts are consulted in the course of this chapter, his Book of Knowledge (Kitâb al-`ilm) and his the Bases of Belief (Kitâb qawâ'id al-`aqâ'id) — being respectively the first and second books of the Ilhyâ'¹⁰ — stand forth as crucial works in this chapter, where special attention is also given to al-Ghazâli's position on the related issues of concealment, disclosure, and the utilization of multilevel writing in achieving multiple ends. Once his multipurpose and multigenre approach to written instruction has been identified and understood, we are enabled to tackle the more substantive challenges by paying close attention to the context(s) and to the very clear terminological trends identifiable in the various genres he espouses when treating the subject of the soul.

All this does not answer in a complete and definitive way the lingering question of motive, i.e. his motivation for writing in such a multivalent and perplexing style, an extremely important question that must inevitably take us beyond his writings and into the streets of

¹⁰ Ilhyâ' `ulûm al-dîn with commentary by al-Imâm al-Ḥâfiẓ al-`Iraqî (Beirut: Dâr al-khayr, 1993), 11-116 and 117-166 respectively.
Baghdad, Damascus, Nishapur, and the rest of the Islamic Near East during his lifetime. This ultimately falls outside of the focus of this study. Nevertheless, based on many telling features within the corpus of his writings, we might glean much about the larger religio-political factors with which he was concerned and to which his career was closely tied. Some of these issues are noted in the course of the first chapter. Admittedly limited in scope, our present consideration of such issues will be restricted to the context of al-Ghazâli’s writings rather than to his writings considered in the larger context of these issues, i.e. in the larger context of the social malaise of the Seljuq state. A more thorough historical/contextual investigation would bring into sharper focus just what was at stake as he unflinchingly promoted and protected the basic Sunni belief, which seems to have become — at least in his eyes — one of the most precious and most endangered treasures entrusted to the community at large. All this would bring further nuance and context to our consideration of the ways in which he wielded the written word, admittedly a tool of some power and influence in his day.

We then return to our main question — the question of the human soul — and, for reasons both chronological and pedagogical, the study commences with an analytical exposition of al-Ghazâli’s well-known “refutation” of Ibn Sînâ’s doctrines of the soul and the afterlife as found in Tahâfut al-falāsifa\textsuperscript{11}, written in Baghdad well before his lengthy departure from public life.

\textit{Tahâfut al-falāsifa: Al-Ghazali’s “Refutation” of Ibn Sînâ’s Psychology & Eschatology}

In chapters eighteen, nineteen and twenty of his Tahâfut, al-Ghazâli explicates and refutes three inter-related Avicennean doctrines crucial to our investigation: (i) the immateriality

\textsuperscript{11} Maurice Bouyges, ed. (Beirut: Dâr el-Mashreq, 1927), reformatted by Majid Fakhry (third printing, 1982).
of the soul, (ii) the impossibility of the soul’s extinction; and (iii) the symbolic nature of all corporeal imagery pertaining to the afterlife. In a way, al-Ghazālī’s treatments of Ibn Sīnā’s positions on these points set the stage for our entire study, for they masterfully explicate some of the doctrines that Ibn Ṭufayl claims al-Ghazālī himself adopts in other places. While our tendency might be to regard all of these treatments as outright refutations, a careful reading of the text reveals that many never attack the truth of the Avicennean premises; rather, some focus on the presence of other viable possibilities while others focus solely on the validity of the “demonstrations” by which “the philosophers” claim to know these things.

In other words, his famous and often brilliant refutations of Ibn Sīnā’s psychological and eschatological doctrines turn out to be meticulous expositions of the fact that such beliefs are not the direct outcomes of demonstrative necessity. Thus, the Tahāfut does not always directly attack the philosophical doctrines per se or even entertain questions of truth, for it was never written to affirm or establish belief; rather it was designed to shake the proud foundations of the Avicennean positions on these crucial topics. This is not to say that these discussions are irrelevant to the rest our investigation; on the contrary, they are very relevant indeed. But al-Ghazālī’s arguments in the Tahāfut cannot be followed blindly when we raise the question of truth, the question of what al-Ghazālī himself believed to be real and true. For that we must look to other works of other natures, works that are concerned more about ontological truth and less about logical premises and their valid conclusions.

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Drawing on the findings of the first and second chapters, the third and fourth chapters naturally continue this investigation by grouping works according to genre, groups of works in
which a similar idiom and approach can be identified in his various treatments of the nature of
the human spirit or soul. The study identifies these groupings or genres respectively as the
theological and the mystical, both being particular forms of discourse that are characterized by
their own unique forms of parlance. Their different ends thus find vivid expression in the
different terminological trends which predominate in each.

THE JAWHAR AND AL-GHAZALI'S ASH'ARI APPROACH
TO THE BODY-SOUL PROBLEM

Although it is certain that al-Ghazālī was formally trained as an Ash'arī mutakallim and
theologically adhered to many of the doctrines common to the Ash'arī school, the extent to
which his kalāmī doctrine of the human soul followed that of his Ash'arī forebears and
contemporaries has been subject to dispute. As is suggested in the title of this chapter, his use
and definition of the technical term jawhar ("substance" or "atom") is crucial to this question.
The texts most central to this investigation are the Qawā'id al-'aqā'id and al-Iqtiṣād fi 'l-
i'tiqād12, the latter being a non-Ihya’i text that is nevertheless included here due to the fact that it
is essentially a more in-depth version of the dogmatic texts that constitute the Qawā'id.

According to most medieval and contemporary interpreters, these works contain explicit
repudiations of the theory of the soul’s immateriality and argue for a somewhat standard Ash‘arī
document of the soul’s materiality.13 This is brought into question by some, however, who speak
of fine, subtle departures, of both omission and commission in al-Ghazālī’s use and application

12 (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ḥusayn al-tijārīya, 1950).

13 See especially Michael E. Marmura, “Al-Ghazālī on Bodily Resurrection and Causality in
of the *jawhar* in comparison with its employment by his Ashʿarī colleagues and predecessors. Whichever interpretation one espouses, all would agree that al-Ghazālī's position is problematic at points, both philosophically and exegetically, and so we need no further justification for probing more deeply the language of the *Iḥtīṣād* and the *Qawā'id* to find out for ourselves what his dogmatic position really is. And, as we do so, we will address the main trends in recent secondary scholarship surrounding his relationship to the Ashʿarī “school” and his use of the *jawhar* idiom in dogmatic contexts.

In our final evaluation of what these texts can provide in terms of uncovering al-Ghazālī's real thoughts on the nature of the soul, we cannot help but recall his own clear and decisive disclaimers about the limits of theological discourse (ch. 1). He is uncompromising throughout the entire corpus of his works on the point that the sole utility of the *kalām* lies in explicating the creed for the common believers and in destroying, through dialectical argumentation, heretical innovations to the creed. Its real and only utility is of a protective nature, and so its practitioners are regarded as intellectual bodyguards or dogmatic policemen rather than as explicators of the truth, delving into the realities of things. Indeed, as a “science” or “craft”, it is entirely unsuited and thoroughly inappropriate for any kind of speculative investigation into the verities, he says, and is forever restricted to the level of common belief. Thus, if we seek his candid view on the true natures of things, in his *Iḥyāʾ* and elsewhere, he tells us in no uncertain terms to fish in other waters.

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THE HEART (قلب) AND AL-GHAZALI'S MYSTICAL FORMULATION OF THE BODY-SOUL PROBLEM

Here we shift to an utterly different idiom, that of the heart and its journey in life, sleep, and death into the realm of the unseen (al-ghayb or al-malakūt). And this shift of idiom signals a shift of genre, from the craft of al-kalām to the contemplative/speculative dimension of the science of the Way of the Afterlife. Although the works highlighted in the previous chapters, particularly the Kitāb al-‘ilm, will continue to serve our study, the primary texts in this category are the Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart (Kitāb sharḥ ‘ajā‘ib al-qalb) and the Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife (Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa-mā ba’dahu). Because it has an unusual pertinence to our investigation of the heart, the disputed “Treatise of [Divine] Presence” (al-Risāla al-ladunīya), though not part of the Iḥyā’, is given special attention in an appendix to the study. Although the language itself in these works is more enigmatic than the tight, technical idiom of the dogmatic texts, we encounter explicit passages that affirm the self-subsistence of the human soul and more ambiguous statements that seem to suggest its immateriality.

While he does not in these texts object to the belief in an immaterial soul per se, nor to its complete separability from the body, he still seems to take objection to the coupling of this belief in an immaterial soul with a flat denial of an eventual return to an embodied state for judgement and eternity, an afterlife that includes (but is not restricted to) bodily pleasures and/or

17 From Majmū‘at rasā‘il al-imām al-Ghazālī (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmīya), 87-111.
torments. So, although separability is no longer a problem, still problems, questions, remain: namely, just what is this “spirit” or “heart”, and what is its nature? What is the nature of its connection to the body? Is it some kind of subtle or ethereal material atom or substance or is it immaterial and immortal, subsisting entirely on its own? Also, what is the nature of the pleasures and pains that the heart can experience in total separation and independence from the body and its members? Are they the same kind of next worldly “pleasures superior to the sensible” whose reality he seems to affirm in Tahāfut al-falāsifa\(^\text{18}\) and the Mizān? And, if the spirit can experience these more vivid “feelings” without the mediation of corporeal “tools” or “instruments”, then why the scriptural necessity of an embodied afterlife?

In the the Kitāb sharḥ ‘ajā‘īb al-qalb, he answers some but not all of our questions. The answers which he provides us, however, beget still more questions, and it is clear that there are things that al-Ghazālī will not discuss regarding the true nature of the heart, this being due to restrictions of appropriateness and pious reserve more than to a lack of knowledge it seems. Having seen much of this revealing/concealing dynamic in chapter one, we should not be surprised or discouraged by his characteristic enigmaticism; rather, we should pay extra attention, recognizing that its presence alerts the reader to the proximity of esoteric substance. Indeed, through the veil of his highly self-conscious restraint, what we may call his “spiritual psychology” gradually begins to take shape, an esoteric understanding of the soul that seems to have more in common with the psychology of Ibn Sīnā than with his own kalāmī psychology examined in the third chapter.

In the Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa-mā ba‘dahu, al-Ghazālī is somewhat more guarded than

\(^{18}\) See Marmura, “Bodily Resurrection,” 54. More will be said of this below.
he was in the *Kitāb sharḥ ʿajāʾib al-qalb*, but still he repeats much of what we have seen in the other texts. He explains that by “heart” he means “spirit” and that by “spirit” he means “that meaning (*al-maʿnā*) of [the term] man that apprehends the sciences and [feels] the pangs of grief, and the delights of joys.” This, he says, is the real nature of the human being, that which “does not die” and “is not extinguished.” Further, he says that, by “death”, he means “no more than the cessation of its [i.e. the spirit’s] direction of the body and the body’s departure from [its status of] being its [i.e. the spirit’s] tool.”

This explanation, he admits, is not exhaustive, and he does not intend it to be, for he goes on to say that

It is impossible to remove the covering from the true nature of the reality of death, since death cannot be known by one who does not understand life, and the true knowledge of life is [attained] through the knowledge of the true nature of the spirit in its essence and through grasping the quiddity (ماهية) of its essence. It was not [even] permitted for the Emmissary of God (may God bless him and grant him salvation) to speak of this, nor to say more than “the spirit is my Lord’s affair.”¹⁹ Thus it is not for any of the doctors of religion to reveal the secret of the spirit, even if one were to come to know it. Indeed, all that is permitted is the mentioning of the state of the spirit after death.²⁰

Thus, he leaves us with questions, unanswered and seemingly unanswerable. But he also leaves us tantalized: what exactly does he mean by the rather enigmatic “even if one were to come to know it [i.e., the secret of the spirit]”? The statement affirms the possibility of discovering the secret, an affirmation echoed in many other works²¹, and yet it also recalls the prohibition

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¹⁹ Qurʾān: *al-Isrāʾ* (17): 85. As we noted above, this has often been translated as “the spirit is by the command of my Lord” due to the fact that the noun, *amr* (أمر), is equivocal and thus leaves room for divergent renderings. Al-Ghazālī’s reading will be discussed more fully below.


against sharing the discovery. More, al-Ghazālī seems to suggest that he himself has attained this restricted knowledge and thus leaves the reader somewhat tantalized, anxious for more. He also here admits that death has a "true nature" which is not and cannot be known until the secret of the soul is known, and so, although he names the key to this puzzle, he discloses neither its nature nor its whereabouts.

This chapter, then, while bringing us closer to unveiling the mysterious nature of the heart in the thought of al-Ghazālī, does not bring us to the end of our search. For example, the soul's immateriality — so central to Ibn Sīnā's psychology and eschatology — has nowhere been affirmed or denied within the context of al-Ghazālī's esoteric formulations. It thus stands out as a huge gap in our understanding of al-Ghazālī's spiritual psychology. Also, the nature of the spiritual heart's localization within the body remains something of a mystery. Our one and perhaps only remaining chance for clarification on these and other questions is to venture into the malakūt, the world of the Unseen, which is the home "world" of the heart and the theatre in which the heart witnesses the Unveiling. If we are able to win some clear understanding of the true nature of this aspect of al-Ghazālī's cosmology, it may well shed some light on the true nature of the heart, which belongs to this "realm" and ultimately "returns" to it after death. It is finally to the world of the Unseen, then, that we go for answers.

THROUGH A LOOKING GLASS:
THE HEART CONSIDERED IN THE CONTEXT OF AL-GHAZALI'S COSMOLOGY

The fifth chapter, then, continues to pursue al-Ghazālī's mystical treatments of the heart, this time in the context of his cosmology, the most important element of which is the malakūt, the psycho-spiritual "world" with which the heart has a special connection and to which it
ultimately belongs. In determining the true nature of the *malakūt* and identifying the precise relation that exists between it and the heart, the study attempts to tie the true nature of this "realm" to the true nature of the heart, thus addressing his spiritual psychology through his mystical cosmology. This approach, given al-Ghazālī's explicit linkage of the cosmological worlds with the Divine attributes and the psycho-spiritual stations of the wayfarer, is very much in keeping with the internal integrity of al-Ghazālī's mystical thought. And a thorough grasp of this connection, we venture, has the potential to yield some of the final pieces for solving the puzzle of the soul.

Some tentative conclusions are then drawn regarding al-Ghazālī's "real" doctrine of human nature, an apparently "unspeakable" doctrine whose ramifications are both profound and problematic. In addition to the texts already introduced to the study, especially the *Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart*, the *Book of Affirming [Divine] Unity and Relying [Upon God] (Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul)*\(^{22}\) and the *Book of Love (Kitāb al-mahhabba)*\(^{23}\) play crucial roles in this chapter.

**THE WAYFARER'S FINAL JOURNEY: AL-GHAZALI'S ESOTERIC ESCHATOLOGY**

These doctrines surrounding the nature of discourse, the structure and substance of the cosmos, and the reality of the soul will, in turn, directly influence our reading of al-Ghazālī's eschatological utterances — his discussions and descriptions of death and the afterlife. Thus, after carefully reviewing some of his more substantive treatments of the afterlife in the *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*, the *Kitāb dhikr al-mawt*, and other works, both within and without the *Ihya*, this

\(^{22}\) *Ihya*, vol. V, 114-178.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 180-262.
final chapter offers some fresh thinking on al-Ghazâlî's esoteric doctrine of death and the afterlife, a puzzle that seems to fall into place once some light has been shed on the soul's true nature.

In short, our reading suggests that al-Ghazâlî's personal position on the true nature of the next world cannot include corporeality, at least in an ontological or extramental sense. At the same time, however, it does indicate a psycho-spiritual "realm" that is experientially multilevel, including corporeal torments and pleasures. This is intimated by his frequent recourse to the intramental corporeality of the dream experience, an experiential reality that he invariably points out in the middle of his eschatological commentaries. This is further corroborated by a close analysis of the language he uses to describe the phenomena waiting beyond the threshold of death, discussions that are almost always framed in the language of the individual's perception, which is for him far more important than the ontological status of these things in a theoretical vacuum. One might also take as corroborating evidence al-Ghazâlî's theory of the universal (discussed in ch. 2), which differs from that of Ibn Sînâ in that al-Ghazâlî's "universal" is never divorced from the phantasm, and so it comes closer to an archetype than to a universal in the Avicennean sense. Even the very pinnacle of the mystical experience is, for him, tantamount to a shift in perception rather than an ontological transformation; in other words, the moth is thus never really consumed by the flame, even though that may be the moth's experience of its encounter.

Having said all this, it might be argued that he is, in reality, subscribing to the very same philosophical eschatology that he condemns in the Tahâfut and other works, such as the
Munqidh and Fayṣal al-tafriqa\textsuperscript{24}, and that he is somewhat deceitfully subscribing to more than one truth: one for the masses (religious/exoteric) and one for the elite (philosophical/esoteric). We argue differently. What is most crucial to unlocking al-Ghazālī’s eschatology vis-a-vis the philosophical eschatology, which he condemns with fair consistency and (we argue) in good faith, is that, while the philosophical treatments of psychology and eschatology are all ontologically oriented, al-Ghazālī’s almost exclusive focus is on the individual’s experience of these realities. Ontological speculation about such matters is, to him, both irrelevant and distracting, a waste of valuable time, time that would be better spent preparing for the inevitable ordeals of death, reckoning, and eternity. In light of our reading, his unflinching insistence upon the belief in an afterlife that includes corporeal torments and pleasures is extremely consistent with his esoteric thought, for he believes it to be both true to the servant’s experience (which only in the rarest of cases can be completely devoid of the mind’s material imagery) and expedient in focusing the reader’s efforts and attention on the true task-at-hand, which is the immediate challenge of reforming one’s character and living life in preparation for the eternal journey.

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As has become clear, the thrust of this thesis is that al-Ghazālī does indeed deem himself to be in possession of the keys to the spiritual puzzles of the soul, death and the afterlife and that he does reveal these keys to his readers, but not directly, never fully, and certainly not to everyone. Our goal is to pursue the “symbols and indications” of which Ibn Ṭufayl spoke and, in

\textsuperscript{24} Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-islām wa l-zanādiqa, S. Dunya, ed. (Cairo: Ḫāliṣ al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1961).
doing so, to uncover what we can of al-Ghazālī’s unspeakable doctrines of life and death, all of which hinge upon the question of the true nature of the heart.

Ultimately, however, it must be granted that these speculative or theoretical points were never intended to be ends in themselves; it becomes clear from the outset of the study that, for al-Ghazālī, even the highest and most perfect theoretical knowledge is of no avail without practical knowledge and its fulfillment in practice. And so the conclusion brings us full circle back to the primacy of practice, the imperative task of actually walking the path. The gradual enticement of the careful reader to embark upon the path of discipline, purification, and experience is more important to al-Ghazālī than unveiling the theoretical realities, which the wayfarer will eventually come to know and see for himself in due time.

Thus, although this study shows that we can, to a large extent, piece together his carefully guarded secrets of the soul, death, and the afterlife through a close and synthetic reading of his works, we must admit that we are, in doing so, plundering treasures that were never meant to be the focus or the end of our reading. Rather, the innumerable and always partial unveilings are intended to tantalize us just enough to take a step and then to guide us on the way, which is an experiential journey into the realities of things and not just an intellectual grasping of their natures. In the end, for al-Ghazālī, nothing can take the place of walking the path in person and witnessing the Unveilings first hand. Any academic attempt to expose his well-guarded mystical teachings while failing to mention this crucial point would belie the legacy left by this prodigious Muslim master.
CHAPTER ONE

THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE RELIGIOUS SCIENCES:
The Science of Right Practice,
The Bases and Branches of the Religious (shar'ī) Sciences
Scholastic/Speculative Theology
The Science of the Unveiling
& al-Ghazālī’s Doctrine of Discourse

“I seek refuge from knowledge that has no benefit.”¹

As was mentioned in the Prologue, the characteristically varied and sometimes even conflicting content one encounters in the vast corpus of al-Ghazālī’s writings makes the question of discourse — his understanding of the nature and role of the various types or genres of religious writing — unavoidable. Certainly, in the case of the human spirit or soul, the entire investigation depends upon the successful resolution of this question, for, without a framework in which to contextualize his extremely varied statements about the soul, our journey would ultimately lead to a heightened state of bewilderment and frustration. On the other hand, if we can identify the type of discourse in which each statement occurs and understand clearly what the scope and limits of that genre are, then we stand a much better chance of winning some clarity about what is actually being said in each instance. Thus, before we can embark upon a substantive investigation of any aspect of his vast writings, we must become acquainted with his overall scheme and the various kinds of discourse he employs in the service of his multifaceted agenda.

When examined all together, al-Ghazālī’s works fall into several discernible categories:

¹ Prophetic Tradition cited in his introduction to the Ḥyā’ (8). This study will not be focusing on the strength or veracity (صحت) of the Prophetic Traditions employed by al-Ghazālī as much as it focuses on the points in the service of which he uses them. Thus, in the pursuit of al-Ghazālī’s thought, we will often skip over the process of ḥadīth extraction (التدريج), which would be significant were our focus al-Ghazālī’s somewhat utilitarian use of such Traditions.
(i) works written to elucidate and refute the thought of the chief Muslim philosophers, especially Ibn Sina; (ii) works of dogmatic theology \( (al-kalām) \) written to explicate and defend the traditional creed of Islam \( (l'tiqād al-salaf) \), mostly in the face of heretical ideas and beliefs; (iii) works of a legal nature; (iv) works whose primary aim is to motivate and assist the believer in living the Islamic way of life, both externally and internally, thus preparing him/her for death and the afterlife. This fourth group treats the practical dimension of what he calls “the science of the Way of the Afterlife \( (il'm țarīq al-ākhira) \),” and — of all these groups or types of writings — it is the one with which he concerned himself the most. Indeed, the entire \( lhīyā \) can be seen as a single, seamless work of this category even though it incorporates most of the other genres in various places.

The vast majority of the discussions belonging to this fourth group are designed to be both inspirational and practicable, composed to motivate and guide the reader to a particular course of action, and this practical side of the science of the Way of the Afterlife is called the

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\( ^2 \) Both speculative and scholastic, \( kalām \) is a very difficult phenomenon/movement to translate. “Dogmatic theology” strikes us as the most appropriate rendering due to the fact that, generally speaking, these “theologians” \( (mutakallimûn) \) took the Revelation as their starting point and used reason to explain and defend it, thus constructing a world-view to accommodate it. In spite of this, “dogmatic theology” has not been very common as an English rendering. Some (following the lead of the Muslim philosophers) have opted for “dialectical theology” due to the characteristically argumentative (dialectical) nature of a great many \( kalām \) texts. More technically, the philosophers argued that many or most of the views shared by the theologians were based on commonly accepted notions (المشورات \( al-mushura \)) that are not necessarily true. Hence their conclusions, not based on necessary premises, yielded dialectical conclusions rather than demonstrative ones. Still others have opted for “speculative theology” because of the preoccupation that many of the \( mutakallimûn \) had with speculative or theoretical reflection. Lacking a perfect equivalent in English, I will simply use the Arabic term \( al-kalām \) and its “nisba” adjective \( kalāmi \) throughout the rest of the study.
science of Right Practice\(^3\) (‘ilm al-mu‘āmala), about which much more will be said below.

Strewn throughout all of the texts in this fourth category, one finds flashings of another kind of discourse, a parlance specific to another kind of knowledge — the gnosis of the spiritual verities, the knowledge that comes through the seeker’s first-hand eye witnessing or experience of the higher realities. This is what he terms “the knowledge of the Unveiling (‘ilm al-mukāshafa)”, the experiential mode of knowing bestowed upon the prophets and saints. Although this is, properly speaking, the theoretical or contemplative dimension of the science of the Way of the Afterlife, we may consider this a fifth type of discourse, albeit one that appears and disappears with a characteristic suddenness, like a leviathan in the ocean of his writings.

As intriguing as this fifth category may be, such flashings cannot be a starting point when it comes to our investigation of his classification of the religious sciences; indeed, we should first attend to the other, more straightforward types of “scientific” discourse in which he engaged and to which he devoted much more time, effort, and ink. And so it is to these more predominant genres and to al-Ghazâlî’s classification of them that we must turn.

As was stated above, the genre of religious writing to which he devoted the vast majority of his time and ink is the practical side of the science of the Way of the Afterlife, and so this is the first genre to which we shall turn. Next come the legal/jurisprudential writings, which are second in volume and are quite closely related to the writings on Right Practice. After these

\(^3\) “Right Practice” is an admittedly imperfect rendering of mu‘āmala, which implies one’s conduct within a social context (indicated by the third form of the Arabic verb) as well as one’s active practice of the religion. For al-Ghazâlî, of course, both dimensions — i.e. the social and the personal — cannot be separated from a righteous intention within the heart, which is also included within his somewhat broad use of this term. The terms “spiritual formation” and “social virtue” might also capture some of the nuances of his usage.
come his theological works, much fewer in number than the previous genres. Next in this quantitative regression should come the works of philosophical explication and refutation, but, as these lie beyond the scope of the present chapter (not being religious in nature) and as the next chapter is devoted exclusively to the chief work in this category, we shall not be discussing them here. Finally, we will return to al-Ghazālī’s explanations of the mysterious knowledge of the Unveiling and try to make sense of its role in the light of the entire corpus of his works.

When it comes to spiritual and religious direction, al-Ghazālī is a most practical man. This is nowhere more clearly seen than in the Ḥiyā’ itself, which is designed to be a step-by-step manual for religious and spiritual formation. In his introduction to the multivolume opus, he gives a general overview in which he describes the nature of the entire work and the situation that prompted him to write it:

As for the science of the Way of the Afterlife and for that which is in keeping with our righteous forebears (السِّلَفُ الصَّالِحُونَ), [being] part of what Allah — be He exalted — calls in His book understanding (فقه), wisdom (حكمة), knowledge (علم), luminescence (ضياء), light (نور), guidance (هدى), and right direction (رشد), [over time] it became a thing folded up [and forgotten] among people, became a “thing utterly forgotten”.\(^5\) Inasmuch as this constituted a disastrous fissure in [the bedrock of] the religion and an [utterly] dark affair, I came to view the publication of this book as a [very] important thing, as [a way of] bringing back to life the [true] sciences of religion, revealing the ways of the spiritual leaders (الأئمة) who came before, and elucidating for the readers the

\(^1\) The temporal lapse is indicated here by the particle ف (“fa”).

\(^5\) Literally, “became a thing utterly lost, forgotten.” His Qur’ānic tone here is worthy of note; the Muslim reader cannot help but notice a powerful idiom borrowed from Sirat Maryam (19): 23.

\(^6\) This word is somewhat tentative. Literally, it seems to read “for those who are reached [by the book]...” I take it to be a broken plural of the rather rare active participle from the passive voice verb muḥiya, which is synonymous with balagha (to come to s.o., to reach s.o., to come to the knowledge of s.o.).
beneficial sciences [that have been handed down] from the prophets and the righteous forbears.

I have set up [the work] in four quarters — acts of worship (العبادات), habitual acts (المهالك), mortal vices (العنجيات) — and I begin the whole thing with the *Book of Knowledge* because it is of the utmost importance. First of all I do this in order that I make known the knowledge that is devoted to the service of God according to the words of His Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation), the [kinds of knowledge that are] required to be sought. [To this effect] the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) said, “the pursuit of knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim.” [Secondly, I begin with this book] in order that I may distinguish the beneficial knowledge from the harmful, since the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) said, “I seek refuge in God from knowledge that has no benefit.” [All this is] in order that I correct the present generation in their inclination away from the way of what is right, in their willingness to be duped by glimmering phantoms, and in their [total] contentment with sciences [that treat] the outer husk [rather than] the essential core.

The quarter [treating] the acts of worship contains ten books: The Book of Knowledge; the Fundamentals of Belief; the Secrets of Purification; the Secrets of Prayer; the Secrets of Almsgiving; the Secrets of Fasting; the Secrets of Making Pilgrimage; the Etiquette of Reciting the Qur’ān; the Book of Invocations and Supplications; and the Book of Ordering the Superogatory Devotions According to the [proper] times.

As for the quarter [devoted to] the etiquette of habitual actions, it is comprised of ten books: the Etiquette of Eating; the Proper Manners of Marriage; the Legal Rulings (concerning) the Acquisition [of Wealth]; the Book of the Permissible and the Prohibited; the Etiquette of Friendship and Social Interaction with the [various] Kinds of People; the Book of Private Retreat; the Etiquette of Travel; the Book of Audition and Ecstacy; the Commanding of the Good and the Prohibiting of the Bad; and the Etiquette of Living and the [Moral] Character Traits of Prophecy.

As for the quarter [treating] the mortal vices, it [also] contains ten books: the Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart; the Disciplining of the Soul; the

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* Such *awrād* are often observed after night prayers (*al-‘ishā*) and following the predawn (first daylight) prayers (*al-fajr*), although — as is explained in this book — some are meant to be performed after prayers in the course of the day as well.

* Or “seclusion/withdrawal”.

* Here the translation corrects a printing error in the edition: the second consonant, َ (‘yn) is missing in *ma‘ṣḥa*, the word for “way of living”. As this is printed properly in the context of the book itself (vol. III), it is easily corrected here.
Book of the Harmful Effects of the Two Desires ([that of] the belly and that of the genitals); the Harmful effects of the Tongue; the Harmful Effects of Anger, Harboring Resentment, and Envy; the Book Reproving the World; the Book Reproving Wealth and Miserliness; the Book Reproving High Social Standing and Hypocrisy; the Book Reproving Arrogance and Conceit; and the Book Reproving Delusion.

As for the quarter on the saving virtues, it [likewise] consists of ten books: the Book of Penitence; the Book of Forbearance and Thanksgiving; the Book of Fear and Hope; the Book of Poverty and Asceticism; the Book of Affirming Divine Unity and Relying [upon God]; the Book of Love, Yearning, Intimate Friendship, and Contentment; the Book of [Right] Intention, Truthfulness and Sincerity; the Book of Attentive Observation and Self Examination; the Book of Contemplation; and the Book of the Remembrance of Death.

In the Acts of Worship quarter, I mention some of the hidden secrets of their proper performance, the fine points of their customary practices, as well as the secrets of their meanings — whatever the practicing scholar feels obliged to perform. Indeed, there is not a single one among those steeped in the knowledge of the afterlife who is not apprised of [these things]. Most of these [points] are among the things neglected by the art of the jurisprudential disciplines (فَنُّ الفقهاء).

In the section on the habitual practices, I mention the hidden aspects of the forms of social interaction that naturally take place among human beings, the depths [of these interactions] and the fine points of their customary practices and the hidden aspects of the sacred nature of their courses [of occurrence]. And [these guidelines for habitual interaction] are among the things that no religious person can do without.

In the [books discussing] the mortal vices, I discuss every blameworthy character trait whose avoidance is mentioned in the Qur'ān, [along with] the soul’s cleansing from it and the heart’s purification from it. And for every one of these character traits I mention its reality and its limit. Then I mention the cause by which it was generated; then the harmful effects that result from [each of] them; then the signs by which they are recognized; then the various treatments by which one can deliver himself [from] them. All of this is tied to the testaments of [Qur'ānic] verses, [Prophetic] Reports, and Traditions [relating to the Prophet and the Companions].

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10 This points to the wayfarer’s station of “contentment with the decree of God — be He exalted” and is “one of the highest stations of those [saints] who have been brought nigh.” See Ihyā’, vol. V, 240.

11 Literally, “most of that (أكثر ذلك)…”

12 Here, “limit” might suggest parameter or even definition.
In the [final] quarter [dealing with] the saving virtues, I mention every praiseworthy character trait and desirable quality among the qualities of those [saints] who have been brought nigh [unto God] and of those who are truthful, the qualities by which the servant is able to draw nigh unto the Lord of the Worlds. In the discussion of each and every quality, I mention its reality and its limit and the reason for which it is [sought after and] appropriated, as well as its fruit through which it benefits [people], the [distinctive] signs by which it is known and its virtue for the sake of which it is desired. [And all this is] in the context of what is related about each [virtue] from the testaments of the religious law and the intellect. 

Thus, the entire Ḩiyā′ is designed to be a detailed handbook for human perfection, beginning with the outer, action-oriented perfection of the person’s worship and social dealings and culminating in the inner, disposition-oriented perfection of the mind or heart. This, al-Ghazālī explains, entails the outer and inner aspects of the science of Right Practice.

Thus the science of Right Practice divides into an exterior science, by which I mean the knowledge of the bodily actions, and an interior science, by which I mean the knowledge of the actions of hearts. That which is in accordance with the bodily extremities is either an act of worship or a habitual act. That which is received by the hearts — which are, by virtue of their concealment from the senses, from the realm of the malakūt — is either praiseworthy or blameworthy. It is thus necessary that this science divide into two halves: an outer and an inner. The outer half, [which is] connected with the [movements of the] limbs, divides into a habitual act and an act of worship. The inner half, connected with the states of the heart and the character traits of the soul (أخلاق النفس), divides into a blameworthy [state] and a praiseworthy [state]. Thus all of them together [form] four divisions, and any theoretical investigation into the science of Right Practice must not go outside of these divisions.

These, then, are the outer and inner dimensions of the knowledge of Right Practice, the

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Supra

From his introduction to the Ḩiyā′, vol. 1, 8-9.

A detailed discussion of this psycho-spiritual “realm” to which the true nature of the heart belongs is given in chapter five of this study.

Introduction, 10.
practical wisdom of how to shape and direct one's life toward the afterlife. As an exterior science, it deals with human actions within a social context, and this essentially takes up the first half of the *Ihyāʿ*. As an interior science, it deals with the states and orientations of the human heart, the topics treated in the latter half of the *Ihyāʿ*. Whether inner or outer, however, it is crucial to remember that this knowledge is both designed and presented to be immediately applicable and practicable, even though at times it is imbued with tremendous mystery, the substance of which lies beyond the scope of the praxis-oriented *muʾāmalāt*.

In the *Book of Knowledge* — written as the opening book of the voluminous *Ihyāʿ* — he lays out a very clear classification of the intellectual disciplines essential to the religious life, and at the heart of all of it runs the very same spiritual utilitarianism — a shrewd separation of the necessary and the useful from the ornamental and superfluous. Quite in keeping with our expectations, then, he begins with the knowledge that is required for every individual Muslim (*fard ʿayn*), regardless of rank or capacity:

People differ [in their opinions] concerning the knowledge that is a requirement for each and every Muslim; indeed, they have split up [on this issue] into more than twenty camps. We shall not prolong [the discussion] by conveying [all] the finepoints [of each]; however, the upshot of all of this is that every group brings down the [charge of] necessity upon [the science] that is in front of them. To this effect, the Theologians say that [the knowledge required of every Muslim] is the science of *al-kalām*, since by means of it *al-tawḥīd* is grasped and the essence and attributes of God — be He exalted — are known. [As for] the scholars of the religious Law, they say that it is the science of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), since the acts of worship, the permissible and prohibited [things], and the permitted and prohibited actions are [all] known [by means of this science] and because through it they concern themselves with [the things] that individuals require, apart from

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While often translated as "Divine unity” this verbal noun is more appropriately rendered “the affirmation of Divine unity.” In light of the fact that it is such a crucial, fundamental aspect of Islamic faith, I prefer to leave it in its original rather than to opt for the more convenient but less accurate translation.
rare occurrences [requiring special, case-specific rulings]. And the Qur’anic exegetes, along with the scholars of Hadith methodology, say that it is the knowledge of the Book and the Prophetic Custom (السنة), since through these two one gains access to all of the [religious] sciences. The Sufis say [that] what is intended by [the universal obligation] is this science. Others of them say, “it is the servant’s knowledge of his state and station in reference to Allah, be He magnified and greatly exalted,” while others say, “it is the knowledge of true sincerity (الإخلاص), the harmful effects of the [lower] souls, and the distinction between the angelic visitation and the demonic visitation.” Still other Sufis say that it is the knowledge of the inner [dimension], and that [knowledge] is required for special peoples – namely, those who are qualified [or suited] for that [knowledge] and they put aside the literal meaning of the expression [in favour of its metaphorical signification]. Abû Ţālib al-Makkî says, “[the knowledge that is required for every Muslim] is the knowledge covered by the [Prophetic] report wherein lie the foundations of Islam; it consists of his [may God bless him and grant him salvation] utterance, “Islam is built upon five [things]: a bearing witness that there is no god except the God...” to the end of the report. This is because what is required are these five, and thus the knowledge of how they are [properly] performed is required as well as [the knowledge of] the nature of the obligation.

This final opinion is the one al-Ghazâlî embraces and explains in greater detail.

Although seemingly separate from the Sufi opinions mentioned above him, Abû Ţālib al-Makkî

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Here, “this science” might indicate the mystical path of knowledge walked by the Sufis, or it could refer to the science of the Qur’ân and the sunna, mentioned immediately before. The Arabic, like the English, is ambiguous.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{19}}\] Literally, “some of them...”.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{20}}\] Literally, “the visit of the angel (lammat al-malak) and the visit of the devil (lammat al-shayṭān)”.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{21}}\] Literally, “its folk (ahl dhālika)”.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{22}}\] Although this sahîh tradition comes in a few slightly different versions, the basic text runs, “Islam is built upon five [things]: a bearing witness that there is no god except the God and that Muhammad is the emissary of God; the establishment of [the daily] prayer; the giving of alms; pilgrimage to the house [i.e. the Ka’ba in Mecca]; and fasting the month of Ramadan.” See Bukhārî, Sahîh: Kitâb al-imān, ch. 2; Muslim, Sahîh: Kitâb al-imān, ch. 5.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{23}}\] Al-`îlm, 23.
is (and was) widely known as a master of the esoteric dimensions, and he will make frequent appearances throughout this and other texts. It is also worthy of noting here that, while the source of this opinion is best known for his mystical teachings, this quotation is extremely down-to-earth, practical, non-controversial, applicable to all Muslims of all persuasions and capacities. This is a foreshadowing of the nature of al-Ghazālī's own style, which is consistently and characteristically oriented toward the practical side of the spiritual life. Immediately following the quotation above, he continues:

We will mention that which ought to be declared with certainty and cannot be doubted: namely, as we introduced in the prologue, that knowledge [of the Way...] divides into the knowledge of Right Practice and the knowledge of the Unveiling, and the only aim in this [use of the term] knowledge is the knowledge of Right Practice. And Right Practice, to which the mature, rationally awakened servant assigns the notion of works, is threefold: [right] conviction, [right] action, and [right] renunciation. For, if a rationally awakened man reaches puberty or old age sometime in the morning before noon, for instance, the first thing required of him is to learn the two phrases of the testimony of faith and to understand them both. [This testimony consists of] saying, “There is no god save the God; Muhammad is the emissary of God.” It is not required of him to win for himself some disclosure of [the mysteries] of that [testimony] through speculative reason, research or through the employment of proofs; rather it suffices for him to assent to it and believe in it with absolute certainty, without any quivering of doubt or disturbance of soul. That [belief] is obtained through sheer acceptance [of tradition] and from oral instruction without any research or demonstration. Thus the prophet of God (may God grant him peace and salvation) was content with the [simple] assent and affirmation of the uncivilized among the Arabs without [their] learning any [corroborating] evidence.

If [one of these] did that, then he fulfilled the immediate obligation. The knowledge which is immediately required of everyone is the learning and understanding of the two phrases [of the testimony]. Nothing beyond this is immediately incumbent upon him, evidenced by the fact that, were he to die thereafter, he would die in obeiscance to God -- be He powerful, sublime --

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24 From the context, it is quite clear that “this [...] knowledge” refers to Prophet’s use of the term in the ḥadīth quoted above.

25 Literally, “what was necessary [at] the time (wājib al-waqt)”. 

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without [having been] disobedient to Him. However, other things are binding upon him by way of nonessential [duties] that appear. These\textsuperscript{26} are not absolutely required of every individual in the strictest sense; indeed, the unbinding of these is conceivable [in certain situations and circumstances]. These "nonessential" [duties] lie either in action, in renunciation, or in conviction.\textsuperscript{27}

Al-Ghazālī then goes on to explain the additional duties of purification, ritual prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and pilgrimage: the actions required of Muslims in most circumstances. After these, he briefly addresses the required renunciation of prohibited acts and substances, some of which are considered within the particular Sitz im Leben of the individual in question. He says, for example, "it is not obligatory for a blind man to learn what is prohibited [in relation to] vision."\textsuperscript{28} Others are universally relevant to all Muslims everywhere and thus necessary for everyone to know and follow. He then devotes the last three paragraphs in this chapter to the ordinary requirements of belief.

Worthy of note in these final paragraphs is the emphasis he places on belief as a safeguard against the intellectual perils of heretical ideas and practices. Explaining that the right convictions and actions of the heart have to do with the notions and inclinations of the individual, he says,

\begin{quote}
if some doubt concerning the two phrases of the Testimony of Faith occurs to him then he must learn that which will bring him to the cessation of the doubt. If that does not occur to him and he dies before believing that the Speech of God is eternal, that He is [in the hereafter] visible, and that He is not a receptacle [for] created events, then he still dies a Muslim according to the unanimous consensus [of the learned]. Yet some of these notions required for the [correct] beliefs
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{26} Literally, "That (dhālika) is not absolutely..."

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Al-'ilm}, 23-4.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 24.
occur naturally and others occur [when one] hears them from the people of [his] town. For, if the [craft of] kalām has become widespread in the town and the people are discussing heretical ideas with one another, then he ought — from his very first encounter with them [i.e. the heretical ideas] — to be protected from it through the [authoritative] instruction of the truth. For, if falsehood is thrown at him then its elimination from his heart becomes necessary, and that may be difficult [to accomplish].

This touches on several points that will prove significant in the ensuing discussion. The first of these is an illustration of the dangers of kalām, which he will argue here and in many other places is extremely harmful to the public at large. At the same time, however, we have an illustration of the benefit that very same science can bring to the community: namely, the eradication of such heretical ideas that infect individuals and communities. Such “medicinal” uses of kalām should be administered on a need-to-know basis, he explains, and depend entirely upon the situation at hand. Much more will be said about this in the ensuing discussion.

Unlike the somewhat volatile science of kalām, not all of the basic convictions are on a need to know basis, however, for al-Ghazālī makes it quite clear that there are some beliefs that are absolutely necessary for everyone.

If the rule is that the human being does not [easily] detach himself from the incitements [to] evil, hypocrisy, and envy, then it is incumbent upon him to learn whatever he has need for from the quarter [of this work devoted to] the mortal vices. How would it not be binding upon him when the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) said, “[there are] three mortal vices: greed that is obeyed; desirous inclinations that are followed; and conceit.” And from these no human being is exempt. The rest of what we shall say regarding the blameworthy aspects of the heart’s stations, such as haughtiness, conceit and their sisters, follow from these three mortal vices [mentioned in the hadīth]. Their extermination is an obligation for everyone, and this can only happen through an understanding of their definitions and causes, [as well as] a knowledge of their limits.

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29 Ibid., 24-5.

30 Literally, “their limits (حدود)”, referring to the parameters by which each is defined.
characteristic symptoms and cures. For he who does not know evil will fall into it, and the remedy lies in encountering the cause [that gives rise to] its opposite. So how is [this] possible without the knowledge of the cause and the effect? The majority of what we say in the section [on] mortal vices [in this work] is a binding obligation for everyone.31

He ends this section by recapping and explaining that what “he [the Prophet] (may God bless him and grant him salvation) meant by (the) knowledge, made definite by the [letters] alif (א) and lām (Ł) in his statement, ‘the pursuit of (the) knowledge is an obligation for every Muslim,’ is none other than the [practicable] knowledge of the action[s] widely known to be binding upon Muslims.”32 Thus, al-Ghazâlî’s position on this question incorporates Abû Țâlib al-Makki’s view (the knowledge relating to the performance of the five pillars) and expands the scope of right praxis to include some aspects of renunciation, doctrinal conviction, and spiritual formation. Taken all together, these are called by him “the knowledge of works (علم العمل).”

The remainder of the religious sciences fall into the category of fârîd kifâya, i.e. essential for the health and welfare of the wider community but in no way binding upon the individual, whose obligatory duties are discussed above. This is where we find al-Ghazâlî’s classification of the religious sciences, for he says,

know that the only way for the binding obligation to be distinguished from all else is through the mentioning of the classification34 of the sciences. And, in addition to the obligatory [knowledge] that we have before us, the sciences divide into the religious (الشريعة) and the non-religious [sciences]. By the religious [sciences] I mean whatever benefit is derived from the prophets (may God’s

31 Ibid., 25.

32 When taken together in this order, these two letters form the Arabic definite article.

33 Ibid.

34 Literally, “the divisions of the sciences (أقسام العلوم).”
prayers and salvation be upon them). The intellect [alone] does not guide [one] to it, as it does in the case of [the science of] mathematics, nor does practical experience [guide one to it], as it does in the case of medicine; nor does [knowledge of] accepted usage (السامع) [point to it] as it does [in the case of] language.

The non religious sciences divide into what is praiseworthy, what is blameworthy, and what is permissible. The praiseworthy is that which is tied to the betterment of worldly matters, such as medicine and mathematics, and these then further divide into that which is a requirement for [the welfare of] the community and into that which, though not being required, is still a virtue.\(^{35}\)

Al-Ghazālī continues to explain how many non-religious sciences, such as medicine, mathematics, [medicinal] cupping, farming, weaving, sewing, politics, etc., can still be considered to be absolutely necessary to the health and welfare of the community: “For if the polity were ever without a cupper, then destruction would rush upon them, and their souls would suffer anguish at the allusion of [impending] destruction...” Such is the case with all of the \(fard\) \(kifāya\) sciences, without which a society cannot survive.

According to al-Ghazālī, the religious sciences in this category divide into five categories: the Foundations, the Branches, the Preliminaries, and the Composite [sciences]. Each will be discussed in turn. Although all of these are considered to be religious (\(shar\)ī) in some way, most nevertheless have to do with the betterment of the health and welfare of worldly matters, as is the case with jurisprudence. On this al-Ghazālī is clear. He is also clear about the fact that the general awareness of what is religious \(vis a vis\) what is not religious has eroded to such an extent that many have been duped into believing that some blameworthy sciences actually belong within the camp of the true and praiseworthy religious sciences. “As for the religious sciences [in this category],” he writes, “they are all pointed toward explication and are

\(^{35}\) \(Al\text{-}'ilm\), 25-6.
all praiseworthy.” However, he interjects, because something that deemed itself religious when it was actually blameworthy took on the garb of the religious sciences\(^\text{36}\), people came to view non religious sciences in a religious light. Thus he continues his analysis with qualified caution: the disciplines that are commonly regarded as the religious sciences divide into the praiseworthy and the blameworthy.\(^\text{37}\)

The praiseworthy religious sciences are presented in four divisions: the Foundations (\textit{al-\textus{"}til}), the Branches (\textit{al-fur\text{"}i}), the Preliminaries (\textit{al-muqaddim\text{"}i}), and the composite sciences (\textit{al-mutammam\text{"}i})\(^\text{38}\). The Foundations include four main areas of knowledge:

- the Book of God (be He mighty, sublime); the \textit{sunna} of His Prophet (peace be upon him); the Consensus of the Community; and the Traditions of the Companions. The Consensus [of the community] is a foundation inasmuch as it points [back] to the \textit{sunna}, and so it is a fundamental of the third order; so too is the Tradition [of the Companions], for it points [back] to the \textit{sunna}. [This is] because the Companions (may God be pleased with them) witnessed the revelation and the [actual] sending down [of the Qur\"an] and because, through [their first-hand witnessing of] the factual evidence\(^\text{39}\), they comprehended the

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\(^{32}\) He clarifies this in reference to five distinct terms that have suffered equivocal usage (see \textit{al-\text{"}ilm}, 45 - 53). It may also apply to essentially blameworthy sciences that have come to play a religious role and are notorious for overstepping their bounds, as is the case of \textit{kal\‘am}, to which we will turn once we have examined the sciences that are authentically “religious” and thus essentially praiseworthy.


\(^{38}\) Literally, this final division reads “the complete [sciences]” — \textit{mutammam} being the passive participle of the second form of the transitive verb \textit{tammama}, which means to make (s.th.) whole, complete, or perfect. When we see the disciplines he includes in this category, it becomes evident that what is meant here is “composite” as these “sciences” are actually comprised of many disciplines or subsiences found in the preceeding division.

\(^{39}\) Literally, “by reason of the concatenation of circumstances” or “by reason of the connections [existing between] the circumstances...”.
things' whose eyewitness [experience] had eluded everyone else. Perhaps [these Qur'anic] expressions do not [by themselves] encompass what is comprehended by way of [circumstantial] connections, and so it is from this perspective that the learned view the [virtues of] emulating them and adhering to their traditions and that [the learned] bear themselves humbly when in the presence of one who [actually] saw [the circumstances], [all this being] in accordance with a qualified condition and a particular perspective.41

As for the Branches, al-Ghazālī explains that they are basically

whatever is understood from these Foundations, not on the basis of their [literal] expressions, but rather by way of the [signified] meanings to which the intellects point and by reason of which the understanding expands to the extent that it understands from the expression [that] what is being uttered is [actually] something else. [This is] just like what is understood from the statement of [the Prophet] (peace be upon him), “the judge should not judge when he is angry,” [in other words] that he should not judge when he is under stress42 or hungry or suffering an illness.

This [second division]43 is of two kinds. The first [kind] is connected to the affairs of the world (مصالح الدنيا) and is treated in the books of jurisprudence. The scholars specializing in jurisprudence, who are the “learned of the world”, are [thus] responsible for it. The second [kind] is connected to the affairs of the afterlife; it is the science of the states of the heart, of the praiseworthy and blameworthy character traits, of [all] that is pleasing from God’s vantage point, be He exalted, and of whatever is repugnant [in His sight]. It is that which the latter part of this book -- I mean [the whole] ḥā'itam al-dīn -- contains. And part of it is the knowledge of what the heart appoints for the limbs by way of their acts of worship and their habitual actions. It is that which the first half of this book contains.44

The Preliminaries, he then explains, are not religious sciences per se; rather they are tools necessary for unlocking the meanings of the Qur'ān and the sunna. Such is the case with

41 Literally, “whenever...”.
42 Al-‘ilm, 26.
43 Literally, “when he is holding back, repressing (s.th.)”.
44 i.e. the second division of the religious sciences: the Branches.
45 Al-‘ilm, 26-7.
the disciplines of language and grammar, about which he says,

language and grammar in themselves are not [properly counted] among the religious sciences, but [one's] immersion in them is made necessary by reason of the Revelation (الشورع, the شريعة), since this Religious Law (الشريعة) came [to humanity] in the language of the Arabs. Besides, each and every religious law only became manifest through language, and so the learning of that language became a tool [for each religious community].

The arts of composition and calligraphy, he says, were not originally required in the early days of the faith, when all instruction relied upon a perfectly preserved oral tradition, but later became necessary due to human weakness and deficiency. In this way, he shows some flexibility in his categorization of the religious sciences: as the needs of the community change, things that were once unnecessary become essential to the health of the community, and so they must be added to the ranks of essential religious sciences.

As was mentioned earlier, the Composite Sciences are religious “supersciences” that bring many other disciplines into their service. One such superscience that he discusses is the Science of the Qur’ān,

for it divides into whatever is connected to [linguistic] expression (such as learning the [various] readings and phonetics) and into whatever is connected to meaning (such as exegesis), and it even relies upon [oral] transmission as well, since language alone does not possess it [i.e., the Science of the Qur’ān]. [It also divides] into whatever is connected to its [own internal] governing rules (بأخكاره), such as the science of abrogation (al-nāsikh wa ‘l-mansūkh) of the general and the particular, of the literal text and the manifest [meaning], and the manner of using part of it [to interpret another] part. [The knowledge of the

15 Ibid., 27.
16 Ibid.
17 Literally, the “pronunciation of the letters”.
18 Literally, “that which abrogates and that which is abrogated”.

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Qur'ān's internal governing rules] is the knowledge that is called "the Foundations of Jurisprudence" (أصول الفقه), and it treats the sunna as well.⁴⁹

A second superscience that he mentions is the knowledge about the Traditions and the Reports, which is also a composite of many disciplines, some of which break down even further into subdisciplines.

These then are the true religious sciences, he says, all of which are praiseworthy and all of which are considered fard kifāya. This does not mean, however, that all of these sciences can be considered otherworldly; on the contrary, he says, Islam — as a religion — deals with both this world and the next, and thus a great part of its religious sciences is exclusively oriented toward the sphere of the mundane. Likewise, the masters of such sciences, although engaged in religious scholarship, are masters of the mundane. In strong terms but without haughty airs, al-Ghazali explains this simply and clearly as he continues:

If you were to ask, "for what reason do you tie [the science of] jurisprudence (الفقه) to the knowledge of the world and the jurists [themselves] to the learned of the world?" [I answer] then know that Allāh — be He mighty, sublime — brought Adam forth from the earth (من التراب) and brought forth his progeny from a line [fashioned] out of clay and gushing water. He then extracted them from the loins [of men] and [put them] into the wombs [of women], and from there into the world, then into the grave, then into the Day of Judgement (العرض), and then into [either] Paradise or the Fire. So this is their beginning place and that⁵⁰ is their ultimate [destination]. And these are their stopping places.

[God] created the world as a provision for the Return, so that from it one might take whatever would be appropriate for getting equipped. If they had used [their provisions] justly, then the quarrels would have ceased and the jurists would have become unemployed. However, they took them with lustful desires from which the quarrels came into being. Thus the circumstances require a

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⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Literally, "this...".

39
sultān to govern them, and the sultān stands in need of a law by which to govern them.

And so the jurisprudent is the one learned in the law of [political] management and in the way of mediation between people since they are [always] struggling against one another by virtue of [their] greedy desires. Thus the jurist is the teacher of the sultān and his guide in the way of the [political] management of people and [in the way of] controlling them, so that he might order their affairs in the world through [steering] them in the correct way.

By my life! [the jurist] is also connected with religion, but not directly; rather, [he is connected with religion] through the medium of the world. For [this] world is the seed-ground of the next world and religion cannot be perfected until [it is made perfect] in the world.

Again, on the very next page, he makes it very clear that the authority of the jurist extends only to the borders of this world and no further.

Know then that the closest the jurist comes to discussing the acts which are the acts of the afterlife is [his discussion of] three [things]: Islam, [ritual] prayer, [obligatory] almsgiving, and the permitted and prohibited [things]. If you consider [the] highest degree investigated [by] the jurist, then you will know that he does not go beyond the limits of the world into the hereafter. And if you know this about these three [aspects of the religion], then it is, in other [aspects], [even]

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51 While this can denote “authority” in a general sense, it can also signify the individual who wields the political authority in a community. It is in this latter sense, I think, that al-Ghazali is using the term here, and for that reason I leave it in the transliterated original.

52 Literally, “not by himself...”.

53 Literally, “the afterlife/hereafter”.

54 Al-‘ilm, 27.

55 Here the italicized text indicates my somewhat loose paraphrasing of the original text, which literally reads, “the closest [thing] about which the jurist speaks to the acts which are the acts of the afterlife...” or, more idiomatically, “[regarding] that about which the jurist speaks, the closest to the acts which are the acts of the afterlife is...”.

56 It is curious to note that there are actually four things listed here and treated in the ensuing text. Perhaps this is a scriptorial error in the manuscript.
clearer.\textsuperscript{57}

The jurist then is clearly one of the "learned of the world," but this in no way means that the
science of which he is a master is not one of the essential religious sciences. On the contrary, al-
Ghazali argues that jurisprudence is crucial to the spiritual formation of individuals and
communities, albeit in a this-worldly, action-oriented way. And, because one's present life in
this world is so intimately tied to one's future life in the next world, there are moments when the
work of the jurist bears on or even overlaps the work of masters whose expertise is the
knowledge of the Way of the Afterlife.

The science of jurisprudence borders on the science of the Way of the Afterlife
because it investigates bodily actions, whose source and founding principle
[reside in] the attributes of the hearts [from which they spring]. So the
praiseworthy acts originate from the praiseworthy character traits [that] save
[one] in the afterlife, and the blameworthy [acts] originate from the blameworthy
[character traits]. The connection of the [outer] bodily extremities to the heart is
not hidden.\textsuperscript{58}

This, however, does not award the jurist a place among the doctors of the afterlife, for
the domain of his authority is clearly demarcated by al-Ghazālī and his expounding on topics
outside of his expertise is regarded as something of a breach of both good sense and good
manners.

All of the speculation of the jurist is tied to the world, [the arena] in which the
piety of the Way of the Afterlife [is lived out]. If he speaks about anything
concerning the attributes of the heart and the judgements of the next world, then
in his discourse he involves himself in something along the lines of [an impolite] intrussion, just as if something of [the sciences of] Medicine or Mathematics or

\textsuperscript{57} Al- 'ilm, 28.

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 30.
Astronomy or the science of kalām had entered into his discourse...

If the jurist’s authority is confined to this world, then what of the theologian’s? Much to the surprise of many readers, both medieval and modern, al-Ghazālī is even more heavy handed when dealing with the science of kalām, much of which he regards as being extraneous to religion.

Know that the sum total of what [the science of] kalām covers by way of the proofs from which one can derive benefit is [already] covered by the Qur’ān and the Reports [concerning the Prophetic Custom]. Whatever [proofs] go beyond these two [sources] are either [i] blameworthy argumentation (which [belongs] among the [heretical] innovations, as its explication will show) or [ii] quarrel[s] connected to [one of] the mutually conflicting [doctrines] of the sects or [iii] long-windedness [in] conveying the statements (مقارنات) [of the sects] (Most of which are shams and senseless ravings disdained by [peoples’ good] natures and spat out upon [peoples’] hearing [them]). Some of it is a plunging into [topics] that are in no way connected to the religion; none of it was familiar during the first era [of Islam], and the [very act of] immersing [oneself] in it was, in its entirety, [understood to be something] of a [heretical] innovation.

Thus, from a purely traditional point of view, much of what is called the science of kalām has no business calling itself a religious science or deeming itself beneficial or praiseworthy, and even the aspects that are authentically religious in character are borrowed from the sciences of the Book and the sunna. In short, he seems to suggest that there effectively is no religious science of kalām, in spite of the prevailing attitudes of his time.

However, al-Ghazālī goes on to explain that, over time, the emergence of new socio-

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59 Ibid., 29.

60 It seems that he has in mind here the lengthy and detailed heresiographical texts, such as al-Ash’arī’s famous Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyān.

61 Ibid., 33. For more detailed criticism of kalām gone wrong, see Kitāb dhāmm al-ghurūr (Iḥyāʾ, vol. IV), 208.
religious problems cleared a legitimate place for the argumentative craft of kalām in the religious life of the community. He continues,

Now, however, its status (حکم) has changed since innovations have sprung up which turn away from the requirements\(^\text{62}\) imposed by the Qur‘an and the sunna. And there has come to the fore a group [of innovators] who have fabricated something in the likeness [of the Qur‘an and the sunna], in which they have arranged a [well] composed discourse. Thus that [science formerly] warranting caution became a permissible thing by virtue of necessity; indeed, it became one of the communal obligations,\(^\text{63}\) and [the obligation] is the extent to which the innovator is confronted when he is set on inciting [others] to the [heretical] innovation. And that is to a fixed limit which we shall mention in the section following this one, God willing...

So let the theologian know his limit [imposed] from the religion, and [let him know] that his place is the place of a guard on the pilgrims’ road (طريق الحج). If the guard confines himself to [the responsibility of] standing guard, then he does not [properly] belong among the pilgrims. [Similarly] the theologian, if he confines himself to [the tasks of] disputing and defending and does not follow the way of the afterlife nor occupy himself with the maintainance of the heart and its righteousness, then he essentially has no place among the learned of the religion.\(^\text{64}\)

The theologian’s parameters, then, are very narrowly defined, and al-Ghazālī makes it very clear that kalām is utterly inappropriate for anything other than this single purpose — disputing heretical innovations and defending the creed of the religion. And this is nothing to be overly proud of, he says, at least not in terms of intellectual or religious pride, for theology never raises its practitioners beyond the level of the masses.

Of religion, the theologian has nothing save the creed that he shares with the rest of the common people, [the] creed which belongs to the actions external to the heart and the tongue. He only is distinguished from the common person through the craft of argumentation and protection.

\(^{62}\) Literally, “the requisite of...” or “that which is required [by]...”.

\(^{63}\) This is corroborated in the Kitāb qawā'id al-‘aqā'id (Ihya‘, vol I), 129.

\(^{64}\) Al-‘ilm, 33-4.
As for the [servant’s] gnosis (معرفة) of God — be He exalted — and His attributes and acts and all to which we point in the knowledge of the Unveiling, it is not attainable through the science of kalām. On the contrary, al-kalām is almost a veil [draped] over it and a barrier [keeping one] away from it. Rather its attainment is by way of concerted striving [in the way of God] which God — be He magnified — has made a preliminary to guidance inasmuch as He — be He exalted — said, “and those who strive for Us, We will surely guide them in Our ways. Surely God is with those who work righteousness” [29:69].

Now, while these statements seem to relegate the science or craft of kalām to the lowest common denominator when it comes to religious understanding, other texts are a little less harsh. For example, in the Kitāb sharḥ ‘ajā‘ib al-qalb (the Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart), he grants a slightly more estimable rank to the mutakallim, who is placed between the level of the common person and the mystic knower when it comes to their respective levels of faith. Even in this most favorable of contexts, however, the practitioner of kalām must still accept a rank that is considerably inferior to that of one endowed with real understanding.

As is becoming clear, for al-Ghazālī every science has its scope and its limit, and the demarcation of these limits is nowhere more crucial than in the field of religion. From his introduction to the Iḥyā’ and from the tone of these texts taken from the Book of Knowledge, the reader senses his grave concern regarding the popular confusion over the types of religious and spiritual authority wielded by the various kinds of religious intelligentsia. It should be emphasized that al-Ghazālī is not down on the jurisprudential sciences and the kalām; he is rather seeking to put each in its proper place. However, the common conceptions of these sciences has become so muddled and has strayed so far from where they should be (in his view)

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65 Ibid., 34.

that his “restoration” of the proper ranking of the religious sciences seems to be doing dishonor to the practitioners of these sciences, namely the jurists and the theologians.

When faced with the objection that the jurists and the theologians are the most widely renowned of religious scholars and when asked how he can relegate them and their sciences to such humble ranks among the religious sciences, he cuts to the very heart of these misconceptions by challenging the criteria by which such scholars are judged to be great.

Know that whosoever comes to know the Truth by way of men has become perplexed in the labynths of error. Know the Truth, and then you will know its folk if you [yourself] are walking the way of Truth. If it is enough for you to accept [faith] on [the] authority [of your forbears] and to investigate whatever has become well-known concerning the degrees of virtue among the people, then do not neglect the Companions and the sublimity of their rank. Those to whom I have [already] called attention\textsuperscript{67} unanimously agree on their [the Companions’] precedence\textsuperscript{68} and [they agree] that their supreme position in the religion cannot be grasped, nor can they be surpassed [by anyone]. And their precedence is not in kalām nor in Jurisprudence; rather, [it is] in the knowledge of the afterlife and the manner of walking its path.\textsuperscript{69}

One of the blameworthy ways in which the science of kalām has overstepped its bounds is in its investigation of the divine mysteries (الأسرار الإلهية), a task for which it is entirely unsuited. He speaks of this in many texts, both within and without the Iḥyā’, and, in the Book of Knowledge, the discussion falls under the section, “explicating the reason [for] the reproach of the blameworthy science (بيان علة ذم العلم المذموم)”. Here, he explains that “knowledge is not blamed for itself; rather it is blamed in reference to the servants\textsuperscript{70} في حق في حق

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[67] Literally, “those whose mentioning I have [already] indicated” (alladhīn ‘arraqtuhi bikhikrihim). This seems to refer to all of the various kinds of religious scholars mentioned thus far in the text, including the jurists and theologians.
\item[68] This precedence or priority (taqaddum) carries both a temporal and a moral nuance.
\item[69] Al-‘ilm, 34.
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for one of three reasons.” The first of these is that “it leads to some [kind of] harm, either to its patron or to someone else, as [is the case with] what is blameworthy for magic and fortune telling (الطمعات).” He takes this very seriously, saying that such magic can, among other things, break up marriages. The second reason is “that the greater part of it could be harmful to its patron,” such as is the case with astrology (علم النجوم), which can lead to star worship. In the third of the three reasons given, he explains:

plunging into a science from which the seeker cannot derive the [proper] benefit of a science. So it is blameworthy in its own right (عنه حقه), just like studying the fine point[s] of the sciences before [learning] their main point[s] and [seeking] their hidden [natures] before their manifest [natures], or like searching for the divine mysteries, as the philosophers and theologians look for them without having [truly] mastered them. Indeed, only the prophets and the saints have acquired [the knowledge of the divine mysteries]. Hence, it is necessary to keep people from searching for them and to return them to that which the religious law utters, for that is sufficient for the the fortunate [person]. How many an individual who plunged into the sciences was injured by them? Had he not plunged into [these sciences] his spiritual condition would have been better than that which it became.

The clear implication here is that the philosophers and theologians have done harm to themselves and possibly to others by failing to recognize the limits of their respective sciences.

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77 Ibid., 41.
78 Ibid., 42.
79 Literally, “plunging into a science from which the one plunging into it does not derive the benefit of a science...” For the sake of readability, I have slightly abridged the Arabic.
80 Literally, “and...”. I have inserted the disjunction for English readability.
81 Literally, “without having possessed them” (lam yastaqillu bihi). Here, I suggest “mastered” in the sense of appropriation.
82 Al-‘ilm, 43. See also Kitāb qawā’id al-‘aqā’id, 127-8.
And there is an implicit warning to these and other scholars: leave the divine mysteries to the saints and the prophets, who alone are capable and qualified to master this dangerous sphere of knowledge.

All other sciences having been ruled out, then, the single science by which these mysteries may be known is that belonging to the saints and the prophets: namely, the science of the Way of the Afterlife. This time, however, we look not to its practical, praxis-oriented side (the science of Right Practice) but rather to its theoretical or speculative side, which is called the science of the Unveiling. He refers to this noetic side of the science of the Way of the Afterlife in many places throughout the Book of Knowledge.

The divisions of that by which [the servant] draws nigh unto God — be He exalted — are three: sheer knowledge, which is the knowledge of the Unveiling; sheer action, such as the justice of the šulţān, for example, and his controlling [his subjects] for [the welfare of] the people; and the composite of knowledge and action, which is the science of the Way of the Afterlife.76

Near the end of his introduction to the Ḥiyā', he provides us with some additional detail regarding this mystical way of knowing, again in the context of its praxis-oriented sister, the science of Right Practice.

...the science by which one is turned toward the afterlife divides into the science of Right Practice and the science of the Unveiling. By the science of the Unveiling I mean whatever is sought exclusively [for the purpose of] baring (kashf) the object of knowledge, and by the science of Right Practice I mean whatever is sought with [reference to] works77 in the accompaniment of kashf.78

76 Ibid., 35.

77 Literally, "the act" or "acting" (العمل).

78 As will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter, the science of Right Practice and the science of the Unveiling coexist in an interdependent fashion; here, he makes reference to the fact that some aspects of practice cannot be fully understood and properly performed
The goal of this book [i.e. the entire Ihyā’] is the science of Right Practice only, without the science of the Unveiling, for which there is no licence [giving permission] for putting it [in] books, even though it is the ultimate goal of seekers, the [ultimate] desire of the eyes of the trustworthy. And the science of Right Practice is the way to it.

However, the prophets (may the prayers of God be upon them) have only spoken with humanity about the knowledge of the way and the [right] guidance to it. As for the knowledge of the Unveiling, they never spoke of it save through symbol79 and [indicative] gesture[s] by way of example and [brief] summarization: a [kind of] knowledge on their part80 of the inability of people’s understandings to bear [the Unveiling]. But the learned are the heirs of the prophets, and [so] they do not have any means of turning away from the path of consolation and emulation [of the prophets].81

So, even though he touches on the knowledge of the Unveiling in this and many other parts of the Ihyā’, he tells us in no uncertain terms that the work itself is about the knowledge of Right Practice — which is for everyone — and not about the disclosure of the contents of mystical noesis -- which is beyond most people’s ability to bear and is in no way a requirement for salvation. Indeed, it is enough for al-Ghazālī that people grasp and believe in the symbols and summaries provided by the prophets, who are uniquely equipped to clothe this higher knowledge in a symbolic garb that is lifegiving and useful for the whole of humankind. Much more will be said about this below.

The place of “the learned” in this two-tiered hierarchy seems ambiguous, however. The term itself is highly equivocal, but, in the context of the passage cited above, it seems to refer to

without some limited knowledge of the Unveiling. This is a point that he makes more explicitly in the Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa’l-tawakkul. See below.

79 The word ramz, translated here as “symbol”, carries the nuance of “puzzle” and “ruse” in addition to indirect signification.

80 Literally, “a knowledge from them” (علم منهم).

81 From the Introduction (al-Muqaddima), 10.
that group referred to elsewhere as “the learned of the afterlife”, who are initiated both in the way of mystical noesis and in the practical path of getting there. Such are the learned who together make up the legacy left behind by the prophets. As will become increasingly clear in the course of this chapter, such individuals, while having access to the higher meanings of the prophetic symbols, are forever bound to uphold the prophetic restraint concerning the disclosure of the raw content of the Unveiling. This is due to the unchanging fact that most people’s understandings simply cannot bear such content. This theme will surface and resurface again and again in the course of the Ihya’ and will be examined in greater detail in the following pages.

So what exactly is this noesis of the Unveiling about which the gnostic is bound to keep silent? In the Book of Knowledge, al-Ghazālī writes,

...it is the knowledge of the inner [truth], and that is the apex of the sciences. Some of the gnostics⁵² have said, “[as for] him who does not have a share of this knowledge, I fear for him the evil of the end (خاتمة). And [the] least share of it is believing in it and leaving it to its [own] folk (أهل).” Another said, “if one has within him [either of] two traits — innovation or haughtiness — then nothing of this science will be opened to him.” And it is said, “whoever is enamoured with the world or persistent in [following] lustful desire will not ascertain [this science], although he can ascertain the rest of the sciences. The least punishment for the one who denies it is that he will experience⁵³ nothing of [the Unveiling].” In accordance with [this] statement, it is recited, “Be content with the one whose absence escaped you, for that is the punishment built-in to the sin.”⁵⁴

It is the knowledge of the truthful and those who are near [to God]: I mean the knowledge of the Unveiling, which is an expression for a light that appears in

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⁵² I use “gnostic” in the general sense denoting a master of mystical knowledge. The Arabic term is ‘ārifīn, literally “knowers” in the esoteric sense.

⁵³ Literally, “he will not taste (يذوق)...”.

⁵⁴ More literally, “that is a sin wherein is the punishment.” The origin of this line is uncertain.
the heart upon its purification and cleansing from its blameworthy characteristics. From that light many things are unveiled, things whose names have been heard before and for which many general meanings are imagined, meanings which are not clear. They then become clear so that the true gnosis is attained regarding the true essence of God, be He exalted, His enduring and perfect attributes, His acts and His wisdom in creating this world and the hereafter, and the mode (الوجبة) of His assigning a priority to the hereafter over this world. [Also attained is] the gnosis of the meaning of prophecy and the prophet, the meaning of revelation and the meaning of Satan, the meaning of the expression “angels” and “devils”, the manner of the hostility harbored by the devils for the human being, the manner of the angel’s appearance to the prophets, the manner in which revelation comes to them, the gnosis of the [realm of] the malakūt of the heavens and the earth, the gnosis of the heart, the manner in which the hosts of angels and the devils clash against one another in the heart, the difference between the visit of the angel and the visit of Satan, the gnosis of the hereafter, the garden and the fire, the torture of the grave, the bridge, the balance and the reckoning, and the meaning of the statement of [God], be He exalted, “Read your book; today your own soul is sufficient as an account against you” [al-Isrā’ (17): 14] and the meaning of His saying, be He exalted, “Surely the abode of the hereafter is life indeed, if they but knew” [al-‘ Ankabūt (29): 64]. [Also attained is] the meaning of the meeting with God, be He mighty, sublime, and the glancing upon His gracious face, the meaning of proximity unto Him and coming to dwell in His vicinity, the meaning of attaining felicity in the company of the highest concourse and in association with the angels and the prophets, the meaning of the different degrees [of rank] of the people of the [various] gardens [of Paradise] to the extent that some of them see others just as the pearly star is seen in the middle of the heaven, and [this goes] on to other things whose elaboration would go long due to the fact that, in relation to the meanings of these things, people have — beyond [their] belief in the foundations [of these things] — various stations. Some of them think that all of these are similitudes and that what God has prepared for His righteous servants is “that which no eye has seen nor ear heard nor has it occurred to any human heart.” [They believe] that [the knowledge] concerning paradise is not in the possession of people save [in the form of] attributes and names. Others think that some of [the afterlife teachings] are similitudes and [that] some of them correspond with their realities [as] understood from their [linguistic] expressions; in this way some

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55 Concourse is used here in the Middle English sense of assembly or throng. This is also true to the earlier Latin form, concursus, the past participle of concurrere, “to assemble”.

86 As also indicates temporal priority here, it could also be rendered “after”.

87 Literally, “all of that”.

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of them believe that the furthest of the [servant's] gnosis of God is the confession of [the human] inability to [fully] comprehend\textsuperscript{88} Him. Some of them claim enormities regarding [their] gnosis of God, be He mighty, sublime, and some of them say, the limit [governing] the [servant's] gnosis of God, be He mighty, sublime, is the terminus of the dogmatic belief of all the common people: namely, that He is existent, knowing, [all] powerful, hearing, seeing, and speaking.

By the knowledge of the Unveiling, we mean that the covering is lifted so that the plain truth becomes clear in reference to these things. [This] coming of clarity is in the manner of the eyewitness experience about which there is no doubt.\textsuperscript{89} This would be possible in the innermost part (\textit{jawhar})\textsuperscript{90} of the human person were it not for the accumulation of the rust and scum of worldly defilements on the mirror of the heart. And so, by the science of the Way of the Afterlife, we mean the knowledge of how to polish this mirror [thus cleansing it] of these [various kinds of] filth, which are a veil [keeping one] from God — be He praised and exalted — and from the gnosis of His attributes and acts.

Its purification and cleansing is [accomplished] by means of abstaining from the lustful desires and [by means of] emulating the prophets in all of their states, may the prayers of God be upon them. For, to the extent that [these things] can be purged from the heart and to the extent that the heart comes close to the threshold of the Truth, His verities will glimmer within it. But there is no way to [get to this station] save through the [spiritual] discipline whose explication comes in its [own, rightful] place and through knowledge and instruction.\textsuperscript{91} These are the sciences which cannot be written down in books and

\textsuperscript{85} This is a verbal rendering of the term usually translated as “gnosis” in this study. In Arabic, sometimes the verbal noun carries verbal force, as it does here, and must be rendered in English as a verb. In either case, it refers to mystical noesis, which is both theoretical and experiential for al-Ghazâlî.

\textsuperscript{89} In the original, this second sentence is actually an adverbial clause (\textit{hāl}), modifying the manner in which “the plain truth becomes clear”. I have altered the structure for readability.

\textsuperscript{90} In the context of his \textit{kalām} writings, al-Ghazâlî — like all of the Mu'tazilî and Ash'arî \textit{mutakallimûn} of his day and before — uses this term to denote “atom”. This may or may not be his intention here, however, where the nature of the discussion is esoteric Unveiling rather than exoteric \textit{kalām}, about which more is said in chapter three. Still, it is well worth noting here that he seems to equate the “heart” with this “\textit{jawhar}” here. The profound significance of this equivalence will become clear as the study unfolds.

\textsuperscript{91} It is worth commenting that he does not mean education in the everyday sense of the term. Rather, he means formation, which is both moral and intellectual and can only come through a master who is both teacher and spiritual director. As is becoming clear, we must be wary of the ways in which ordinary lexical items are employed in this extraordinary context.
of which nothing is spoken by the one upon whom God — be He exalted — has bestowed His blessings, except with his [own] folk, who are those who have a share in it. [The communication of these sciences can occur both] by way of oral teaching and by the way of secrets. That is the hidden knowledge, which [the Prophet] (may God bless him and grant him salvation) meant by his statement, "verily of knowledge there is [something] akin to the outer shape of the hidden thing; only the folk [possessing] the gnosis of God — be He exalted — know it. If they utter of it, only those who are deluded about God — be He exalted — will [remain] ignorant of it. So do not scorn a learned man to whom God — be He exalted — has given [some] knowledge of it, for God — be He mighty, sublime — has not scorned him since to him He gave [the knowledge]."94

In the whole of the *Ihya*, this is one of the most candid and detailed passages regarding the nature and contents of this secret knowledge about which al-Ghazālī is constantly telling his reader he cannot speak. We have already witnessed one example of this in his introduction to the *Ihya*, specifically where he tells the reader that the knowledge of the Unveiling will not be found in the book: “there is no licence [giving permission] for putting it [in] books, even though it is the ultimate goal of the seekers, the [ultimate] desire of the eyes of the trustworthy...”95

However, while seemingly careful to divulge none of the secrets of this hidden and well-guarded knowledge, he provides his reader with a tremendous amount of information — mostly in bits and pieces scattered throughout the books of the *Ihya*, and here in a large lump. Crucial to our investigation in the coming chapters is the outline of the contents of the *mukāshafā*, which

93 This could also be rendered “its [own] folk”, i.e. the people who are naturally suited for and initiated in the ways of mysticism, which seems to be al-Ghazālī’s usual usage of *ahl* in conjunction with a possessive pronominal suffix.

95 Literally, “he is the one who shares in it.” I render it in the plural because the pronoun “*huwa*” here refers to *ahl*, which is grammatically masculine and singular although its meaning is clearly plural.

94 *Al-‘ilm*, 30-1.

95 Ibid., 10.
includes the knowledge of the true nature of both the human heart and the hereafter; more pertinent to our present discussion is his tantalizing disclosure of the ways in which this information is conveyed from one gnostic to another: either by means of private oral teaching (mudhakara) or by means of secret communication — by the way of secrets (بطريق الأسرار). Since an examination of private oral teaching from the twelfth century is obviously beyond our reach, it is to this latter mode that we must turn our attention.

If this concealed knowledge cannot be grasped by “those who are deluded about God — be He exalted” and can only be known by “the folk [possessing] the gnosis of God — be He exalted”, then it may be possible for this “secret communication” to occur within the public domain, for no one would be able to identify or decode the esoteric content save “its [own] folk”, i.e. the initiated gnostics and wayfarers walking the Way of the Afterlife. While seeming somewhat stretched and hypothetical at this point in the discussion, this possibility becomes more probable as we probe his writings more thoroughly in what remains of this chapter and in the course of the subsequent chapters. For now it is both accurate and safe to state that, although we find no explicit treatments of the substantive content of this hidden knowledge in the books of the Ihyā', we find descriptions of it and allusions to it everywhere.

One such place is in the Kitāb dhamm al-ghurūr (the Book Reproving [Self] Delusion).96 Here, following his four-part treatment of the various kinds of self delusion found among the various classes of people, he explains that intellect, knowledge, and gnosis are the three things by means of which the servant can be delivered from the various kinds of self-deception. After discussing the meaning of intellect, he writes,
by gnosis (المعرفة) I mean that [one] knows four things: he knows himself (نفسه); he knows his Lord; he knows this world; and he knows the hereafter. He knows himself through worship and abasement and through his being a stranger in this world and a foreigner to the animal desires. Indeed, the only thing[s] concordant with him in terms of [his] nature are the gnosis of God — be He exalted — and gazing upon His face. And it is inconceivable for one to know this without [first] knowing himself and his Lord.97 Let him be aided in this by what we have mentioned in the Book of the Love [of God], the Book of the Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart, the Book of Contemplation, and the Book of Thanksgiving, since there are in them allusions to the description of the soul and to the description of God's sublimity, [descriptions] by which he would be alerted to the general [meanings].98 But the perfection of the gnosis [lies] beyond them.99 For truly this is [part] of the sciences of the Unveiling, and we shall not go to great length [about] anything in this book except for the knowledge of Right Practice.

As for the gnosis of [the true nature of] this world and the hereafter, regarding them one may seek assistance in what we have mentioned in the Book Reproving the World and the Book of the Remembrance of Death, so that it will become clear that the world has no comparable affinity100 to the hereafter. Thus, if he knows [the true natures of] himself, his Lord, this world and the next, there will arise from his heart the love of God by virtue of [his] gnosis of God; [and there will arise] a strong desire for [the hereafter] by virtue of [his] gnosis of [the true nature of] the hereafter; and, by virtue of [his] gnosis of the world, [there will arise] the revulsion for it; and whatever will deliver him to God — be He exalted - - and will benefit him in the hereafter, [these] become his most important concerns.

97 This is elaborated upon in his Alchemy of Happiness, where he devotes an entire chapter to the knowledge of self and another to the knowledge of God. The former opens with his statement that "knowledge of the self is the key to the knowledge of God, according to the saying: 'he who knows himself knows God,' and, as it is written in the Koran, "We will show them Our signs in the world and in themselves, that the truth may be manifest to them." See Claud Field trans. & Elton Daniel ed. and ann. (NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), 5 ff.

98 Literally, "by [reason of] it, the alert (al-tanabbuh) arises, [calling attention] to the sum (al-jumla)...."

99 Literally, "beyond it". The pronominal suffix seems to be referring to the description (wasi') of these things.

100 Here I use two terms to cover the intention of nisba, which carries the interrelated ideas of relation, kinship/affinity, and comparison. "Comparable affinity" is the fullest and most apt English rendering in this context.
When this desire overwhelms his heart, his intention is set aright in reference to each and every thing. Thus, when he eats, for example, or when he is occupied with the call of nature, his purpose in [doing] it is to gain assistance in following the way of the afterlife. His intention is set aright, and every deception whose basis lies in the mutual attraction of [selfish] inclinations and [in] the desire for the world, honor and wealth flies from him, for these are the corrupting agent[s] of the intention. And, as long as the world is dearer to him than the hereafter and the lustful desires of his [lower] soul are dearer to him than God's satisfaction, be He exalted, then it is impossible for him to [find] deliverance from the [various kinds of] delusion.

When, by virtue of [his] gnosis of God and of himself, [the gnosis which] issues from the perfection of his intellect, the love of God overwhelms his heart, he stands in need of the third meaning, which is knowledge - I mean the knowledge of the gnosis of how to follow the way to God and the knowledge of that which will bring him nigh unto God and that which will distance him from Him; the knowledge of the dangers of the way, [along with] its hinderances and calamities.

There are many significant elements in this passage. Very important is his clear affirmation that, while never divulging the contents of mystical gnosis to his reader, he has loaded the Ihyā' with descriptions and allusions designed to assist the seeker in his quest to attain it. He even tells the reader where to look: The Book of the Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart, the Book of Contemplation, the Book of [Forbearance and] Thanksgiving, the Book of Reproving the World, and the Book of the Remembrance of Death. Most of these books

1. This, of course is an idiomatic rendering of the Arabic, which reads, "the compliance with" or "carrying out of the [bodily] necessity (qadī' al-ḥāja)."

2. Literally, "that (dhālika)".

3. Literally, "the manner (kayfiyya) of following the way..."

4. Dhāmm al-ghurūr, 228.

5. Sometimes, when referring to his own writings, al-Ghazālī uses a short form of their full titles, perhaps showing that the official titles -- as recorded in his introduction to the Ihyā' -- were finalized after the entire project was finished. These "short-form" titles thus may have been working titles in his mind while he was still composing the multivolume work.
will be given further attention as this study unfolds. If we look to works outside of the *Ihyā‘*, such as his *al-Araba‘īn fī usūl al-dīn* and his *al-Maqṣad al-asnāf fī sharh asmā‘ Allāh al-ḥusnā*, we find that he refers the esoterically-oriented reader to these and other books within the *Ihyā‘* for more detailed treatments of esoteric topics. Other *Ihyā‘* texts mentioned in these two works include the *Kitāb dhamm al-ghurur*, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa‘l-tawakkul* (the Book of Affirming Divine Unity and Relying [upon God]), the *Kitāb al-maḥabbat wa‘l-shawq wa‘l-uns wa‘l-ridā* (the Book of Love, Yearning, [Intimate Friendship,] and Contentment). Most of these will also have a place in our substantitive investigation of the human heart.

Returning to our commentary on the passage cited above, he explains that this secret knowledge will reveal to the wayfarer his own true nature, the true nature of God, the reality of this world and the true nature of the next, topics whose true natures are apparently unknown to the ordinary person through the ordinary religious teachings. But he also makes it quite clear that this knowledge comes by way of a holistic and systematic formation rather than by way of the simple disclosure of information, and the fountainhead of the entire process is “that the love of God overwhelms the heart and the love of the world falls away from it, so that, through [this], the will becomes strong and the intention is set aright. And that is only attainable through the gnosis [of the self, of God, of this world and the next] that we have mentioned.”

Earlier in the same chapter, specifically in the section treating the various kinds of self-

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106 See Lazarus Yafeh's collation of these texts in her *Studies in al-Ghazzālī* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975), 370-373. While we do not always agree with her interpretations, much of her work is extremely well-researched and insightful. Our disagreements with her interpretations will be treated as the chapter and the study unfold.

107 *Dhamm al-ghurur*, 229.
delusion rampant among the Sufis (*al-muṭṣawwīfīa*), he also explains

the [various] types of delusion [encountered] in the path of wayfaring toward God, be He exalted, cannot be contained in volumes and cannot be examined save after commenting on all of the sciences of the Unveiling, and that is among the things for which there is no licence [permitting] their mentioning. Also, perhaps the amount which we have [already] mentioned would have been better left [unwritten], since the wayfarer belonging to this path does not need to hear it from someone else. And the one who is not following [this path] does not benefit from hearing it; indeed, maybe he would sustain some injury because of [hearing] it, since that would bequeath bewilderment [to him] inasmuch as he would hear something that he does not understand.

However, there is a benefit in [such an experience]: namely, his being liberated from the deception in which he is [submerged]. Indeed, maybe he would come to believe that the matter is [far] greater than he had supposed it [to be] and had imagined it [to be] by reason of his short-sighted mind, his limited imagination, and his embellished argumentation. [And maybe] he would also come to believe what was told to him of the Unveilings, about which the saints of God report.\textsuperscript{112}

In other words, he says that there are two basic types of people: the self-deluded, whose various delusions in relation to truth are too many to be counted and who, rather than drawing benefit from an exposure to unveiled discourse, might actually be harmed by it, and the mystic wayfarer (*al-sālik*), who has no need to hear the about the Unveilings from someone else. From this first

\textsuperscript{112} *Dhamm al-ghurūr*, 223-4.
group, however, there might be some who can be shocked out of their deluded certitude and complacency by hearing something which is beyond their understanding, something persuading them to consider that the path to God might actually be much greater than anything they have hitherto conceived or imagined. This latter type might find themselves enhanced by what they have heard and might also come to take stock in what the saints have shared with them of the Unveilings. Thus, being ignorant and deluded but still potentially receptive of the truth, they may — as a result of some exposure to the unveilings — wake up and embark upon the path of mysteries, the path of those wayfaring to God.

Al-Ghazālī’s own discovery of Sufism, according to his account in the Munqiddh, occurred in a manner similar to this: first by learning from the writings and traditions of masters such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, al-Junayd, and Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī, and then by gradually entering into the experience about which he had been studying and for which he had been hungering.

I came to know the core of their theoretical aims and I learned all that could be learned of their way by study and hearing.

Then it became clear to me that their most distinctive characteristic is something that can be attained, not by study, but rather by fruiotional experience and the state of ecstasy and “the exchange of qualities [tabaddul al-ṣifār].”113

In the Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa’l-tawakkul (the Book of Affirming [Divine] Unity and of Relying [upon God]), al-Ghazālī admits again that he has included some of the secrets of the Unveilings in his composition of the ḥiyā’, but this he says was for a very practical reason. In reference to the multiple levels of meaning carried by the term al-tawḥīd, he explains,

it is [part] of the knowledge of the Unveiling. However, some of the sciences of

113 from McCarthy’s translation in Freedom and Fulfillment, 90.
the Unveiling are connected to works (الأعمال) through the intermediacy of the states (الحالات), and the knowledge of Right Practice cannot be complete save through them. Hence, we will only go into [it] to the extent that [it] bears on [the knowledge of] Right Practice. Otherwise, al-tawhîl is the vast ocean that has no shore... 114

In other words, just as he is compelled to speak of the Unveilings in the service of his explication of Right Practice, so too he is bound to exercise tremendous restraint in order to shield the uninitiated from disclosures that might prove too perplexing and overwhelming. Still, however, especially in this and a few other books of the Iḥyā', he goes far enough into the mysterious waters that the reader is often left with the feeling that there is another agenda at work, an agenda that calls to mind his earlier statement that sometimes exposing the Unveilings is worth the risk, i.e. when a sleeping or heedless person of capacity is roused from his or her slumber by the flashing of a text that inspires a sense of wonder. We are thus led toward a hypothesis suggesting a secondary intention in his frequent and sometimes detailed dipping into the ocean of the Unveilings. It seems that, while the Iḥyā’ was written to be both readable and practicable for the literate commoner, it was also written as an esoteric primer for those possessing both a latent capacity and a degree of receptivity to esoteric content. 115 This hypothesis does not preclude the possible existence of multilevel writing in parts of the text.

Certainly this is in harmony with al-Ghazâlî’s thrust when he quotes Jesus’ command in the Book of Knowledge, specifically in the middle of a discussion on ecstatic utterances

114 Iḥyā’, vol. 5, 118.
115 This is a hypothesis shared by Lazarus-Yafeh, who argues that the Iḥyā’ is among the most esoteric of al-Ghazâlî’s opera. She fails, however, to take al-Ghazâlî’s own Practice-oriented explanation into account as she posits her own. See her chapter on “the Esoteric Aspect of al-Ghazzâlî’s Writings,” pp. 357-411, esp. 363-373.
"Do not lay out wisdom among those [who are] not its folk lest you do it injustice; neither withhold it from its folk lest you do them injustice. Be like the gentle physician who puts the medicine on the place of the malady." And, in another expression, [he says] "whosoever lays out wisdom to those [who are] other than its [own] folk has done an ignorant thing, and whosoever bars it from its [own] folk has done injustice. Verily wisdom has a right, and it has a folk, so give to each its right." 

And it would also be in harmony with the intention behind his quoting the Prophet's having said, "If any of you pass on to a people a hadith that they cannot understand, then strife will fall upon them." Thus, like the Qur'an itself, religious teachings and texts and should increase the certitude of the common person while arousing a sense of mystery that will touch upon the innate inquisitiveness in the heart of the sleeping or potential wayfarer.

That al-Ghazâlî was preoccupied with the protection of simple belief need not be stressed, for many of the texts we have already seen are replete with statements to this effect.

Another example comes immediately after the passage cited above. As he continues to treat the topic of heresies, which for him equally include the public airing of ecstatic utterances and the dissemination of heretical interpretations of the scriptures, he writes,

the turning of religious expressions away from their understood literal [meanings] and toward inner matters from which [a clear] benefit is never left for the understandings [of average people], as is the custom of the Batiniyya in [their] esoteric interpretations. For this is also forbidden and its harm is grievous.

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116 Literally, "has been ignorant".

117 i.e. "to each possessor of a right".

118 al-‘ilm, 51.

119 Ibid.
For, if the expressions are turned from the requirement[s] of their literal meanings without any kind of adherence to them by way of a transmission from the religious scholar (صاحب الشرع), and without any necessity calling for it based on rational justification (من دليل المعقل), then that [turning of the expressions] claims for itself [the status of] invalidity of confidence (بطلان الثقة) in [reference to] the expressions. And by [reason of] it, the avail of God’s speech and that of His Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) falls away. For that which is left from it for the understanding is not trustworthy. The [esoteric] inner [interpretation] has no precision (-ل); rather, the inclinations of the mind contradict it. Its "revelation" can [come] in various forms (على وجه شكلي)، and this is also among the widespread, grievous and harmful heresies.

Both the ecstatic utterances and the heretical interpretations he considers travesties (al-tammâr) and reproves for the same reason: they shake the faith of the common person, who is vulnerable to losing faith in the plain meanings of religious expressions while the esoteric meanings elude and bewilder him. Thus, if there were to be any secret sewing of esoteric doctrine in exoteric texts, it would have to have been done in such a way as to leave the literal meanings untouched by ambiguity or excessive mystery.

This is further corroborated by statements in Qawâ'id al-'aqâ'id to the effect that the learned are the guardians of the common people, who are regarded as children, their faith being based on sheer instruction (al-talqîn al-mujarrad) and their pure acceptance of tradition (al-

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120 Here, it should be noted that he is using the term bâtin (inner/esoteric) in conjunction with the heretical Bâtinîya movement. When he uses it in other contexts, it is not perjorative in the least; indeed, it is often affiliated with the higher truths encountered on the Way.

121 The quotation marks are mine. I insert them to show that he is using one of the technical Islamic terms for revelation — tanzîl — in order to mimic their claim. He obviously is not awarding their usage the same reverence it carries in the orthodox, Sunni lexicon.

122 Al-ilm, 51.
They must be shielded from argumentation and speculation until their faith becomes strong, “like a towering mountain (al-tawd al-shāmikh) in its fixity, immovable by storm or lightning.” Indeed, trying to strengthen the faith of a child through argumentation, he says, is like trying to strengthen a tree by hitting it and breaking its limbs with an iron mallet.124 This hearkens back to his warnings about the craft of kalām in the Book of Knowledge, a warning he repeats in many places throughout the Ihyā’.

Now, while the statement immediately above is clearly directed against the ways of “the practitioners of kalām and those argumentative types” rather than against the ways of the Sufis, it is clear that, in relation to the common people, the danger of overexposure to anything which might cause a disturbance in their simple faith poses the same problem, for it is the ambiguity and doubt which leaves them exposed to the grave dangers. Indeed, perplexity itself, which can be seen as a condition resulting from overexposure to ambiguity and doubt, is likened to a sickness.125 “For surely the common man is weak; the argumentation of the innovator [can easily] agitate and excite him even if it is totally false.” Thus,

the learned [must] devote themselves to the protection of the creed from the obfuscations of innovation for the sake of the masses, just as the authorities [must] devote themselves to the safeguarding of their property from the attacks of the wicked and the usurpers.126

This “trust” between the learned and the common necessitates great restraint on the part

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123 Qawā’id, 123.
124 Ibid.
125 al-Munqidh: see McCarthy’s translation in Freedom and Fulfillment, 87-88.
126 Qawā’id, 127-8.
of the learned, for, as al-Ghazâlî explains in *al-Maqṣad al-asnâfī sharḥ asmâ‘ Allâh al-ḥusnâ*,

"speaking clearly about the essence of the Truth one must almost directly contradict the apriori notions of the masses..." Similarly, in the *Qawâ‘id*, he alludes to the grave danger of this seeming contradiction when he writes,

True unveiling (الكشف الحقيقي) is an attribute of the secret of the heart and its inner [meaning]. However, if the discourse drifts so as to move the imagination [to conceive] that the literal, exoteric is contradicted by the inner, esoteric, then a brief word is necessary to clear it up. Whoever says that the truth (الحقيقة) is at variance with the *sharī‘a* or that the esoteric contradicts the exoteric is closer to *kufr* than he is to *Imān*.

Thus, while finding no direct fault with great mystics such as al-Ḥallâj and Abû Yazîd al-Bistâmî, he does admit that their public, unveiled utterances caused great harm among the common people, who could not help but misunderstand the true intentions behind such utterances. For this reason, al-Ghazâlî says that "to kill [the person, namely al-Ḥallâj, who makes such public exclamations] is, according to the religion of God, preferable to bringing ten back to life." Such a statement can only be understood in light of the gravity of the trust invested in the learned, which is his main thrust here. In other contexts, both within and without the *Iḥyâ‘*, he is much milder, apologetic, and even very laudatory in the case of al-Ḥallâj. Curiously, he is more consistent in his defense of Abû Yazîd, whose statements must have been

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127 See McCarthy's translations of selections in *Freedom and Fulfillment*, 333-361.

128 Ibid., 334.

129 *Qawâ‘id*, 131.

130 *al-‘Ilm*, 50.

131 See *Kitâb al-tawhîd wa’l-tawakkul (Iḥyâ‘* vol. V), 120.
mistaken or misunderstood, he says following his condemnation of al-Hallāj in the *Book of Knowledge.*

As is abundantly clear, all this assumes a rather sharply drawn categorization of humanity into various levels or capacities, a hierarchical classification that asserts itself again and again throughout the *Iḥyā* and in many other works. Although this has already shown itself, it will be treated more fully below. In light of our present discussion, it is useful to note that this frank division of humanity into a non-arbitrary elite and common makes multivalent discourse not only possible but necessary if one posits the transmission of esoteric content in written form.

It is necessary because, according to al-Ghazālī, in exoteric religion, including its laws, practices and articles of faith, there are secrets and subtle mysteries whose comprehension is not within the capacity or power of the intellect, just as in [the case of] the special [properties] of stones there are matters and wonders whose knowledge escapes the masters of [that] craft to the extent that no one is able to know the reason by which the magnet attracts iron. And the wonders and marvels [contained] within the articles of belief and their benefit to the purity of the hearts, [along with] their cleansing, [formal] purification, chastening, and betterment for [the sake of their] ascension to the proximity of God, be He exalted, and their exposure to the breezes of His favor, [all these are] more numerous and more momentous than anything related to medicines and medicinal remedies.

The single exception to this is the case of God’s prophets and saints. For everyone else, knowledge of the mysteries promises serious spiritual injury and possibly even ruin in extreme...

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132 *Al-‘ilm*, 50.

133 For a preliminary briefing, see al-Ghazālī’s accounts in the *Qawā‘id*, 130-1.

134 Literally, “the folk (ahl) of that craft...”

135 *al-‘ilm*, 44.
circumstances.\textsuperscript{136}

...only the prophets and the saints have acquired them [i.e. the mysteries]. Hence, it is necessary to keep people from searching for them and to return them to that which the Revealed Law utters, for that is sufficient for the fortunate [person]. How many an individual who plunged into the sciences was injured by them? Had he not plunged into [these sciences] his spiritual condition would have been better than that which it became. It is not denied, then, that [such] knowledge is injurious to some people, just as bird meat and [certain] kinds of fine sweets harm the suckling infant. Indeed, it may be that ignorance about some things is beneficial to an individual.\textsuperscript{137}

In connection with this final point, al-Ghazālī narrates a story in which a physician deliberately lies to a patient in order to compel her (through fear and mortification) to change her living and eating habits so that she may become fit for conception. Believing that she is on the verge of death, her extreme anxiety keeps her from eating or drinking for forty days, which results in the weight loss needed to unblock the fatty obstacle that had been preventing conception. “I knew that she would not lose weight except by reason of the fear of death, and so I frightened her with that until she lost weight and the impediment to her conceiving was no more,” explains the doctor.\textsuperscript{138} In the same way, people must be compelled along the path to the next world, for “the minds are unable to grasp that which will benefit the life of the hereafter, since life experience does not penetrate [these things].”\textsuperscript{139}

Thus, al-Ghazālī argues, prophets must adopt methods the knowledge of which would cause injury to the faith of the layman.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 43.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid., 44.
Know that, just as the proficient physician is acquainted with secrets in the [area of] remedies from which one who who is ignorant of them should keep away, so too are the prophets, who are the physicians of the hearts and the learned in the causes [affecting] life in the hereafter. Hence do not, with your [limited] knowledge, make yourself the judge of their custom[s] lest you perish. ¹⁴⁰

In light of this grave danger, he advises a little earlier,

Don’t be one who searches after sciences that the Religious Law declares blameworthy and from which it restrains [people]. Stick to [your] adherence to the [ways of the] Companions, may God be pleased with them, and restrict [yourself] to following the sunna [of the Prophet], for [your] well-being lies in the compliance [with it], but danger lies in searching after [such sciences] and in independence [from the tradition].”¹⁴¹

The distinction between the veiled, action-oriented (exoteric — ẓāhir ‘mu’ānala) and the unveiled, gnosis-oriented (esoteric — bāṭin ‘mukāshafa) is not unique to al-Ghazālī. Indeed, even in the Qawā‘id, he provides us with a brief history of Islamic esotericism and its masters, whose ranks include the Prophet himself, ‘Alī bn Abī Ṭālib, Abū Bakr, Ibn ‘Abbās, Abū Hurayrah, and Sahl al-Tustarī, whom al-Ghazālī quotes as having said,

Belonging to the learned man are three [types] of knowledge: exoteric (ẓāhir) knowledge which he presents to the literal-minded people (ahl al-ẓāhir); the esoteric whose explication is restricted to its own folk; and a knowledge that he keeps to himself, [a knowledge] between him and God...¹⁴²

Of course, the Qur’ān itself frequently employs parables and metaphorical utterances¹⁴³ and often admits to having signs (āyāt) and meanings that are only grasped by “those possessing

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.
¹⁴¹ Ibid.
¹⁴² Qawā‘id, 131.
¹⁴³ The Book itself testifies to this. See sūrat al-Nūr (24): 35; Yūnus (10): 24

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understandings” \(^{144}\) and “a people who are cognizant” \(^{145}\) and allegorical meanings that are known only to God and “the well-grounded in knowledge” \(^{146}\). The Qur'ān also provides very clear examples of how esoteric content can appear to clash with and even contradict the exoteric teachings, as in the case of Moses and Khidr in ārat al-Kahf. \(^{147}\)

According to our reading of al-Ghazālī, just as sacred scripture contains both exoteric and esoteric levels of meaning, so must religion itself along with religious discourse, which — for the vast majority of humankind — must needs be praxis-oriented rather than gnosis-oriented. This explains his conspicuously Qur'ānic tone whenever he is entering into potentially volatile areas: “So let us mention now [something] of the exposition of the heart’s marvels — by way of the striking of similitudes — [mentioning] something that will come within the range of people’s understandings...” \(^{148}\) Thus, for the common, their religious devotion and religiously-oriented intellectual pursuits should be untroubled by unveiled esoteric utterances, which could easily damage or even destroy their simple belief and thus their chance for some kind of felicity in the next world.

\(^{144}\) For example, ārat Șād (38): 29.

\(^{145}\) Yūnus (10): 5.

\(^{146}\) Ārat Āl Imrān (3): 7. It must be noted here that the majority of classical exegetes, incl. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, do not read “the well-grounded in knowledge” as being in apposition (ma’īf) to “God”, thus taking some of the impact out of this particular āya. However, the ambiguity in the text has led other highly respected exegetes, incl. Mujāhid, to take God and “the well-grounded in knowledge” together.

\(^{147}\) (18): 60 ff. Although he does not mention this particular Qur'ānic text in the Kitāb al-īlm or the Qawā'id al-‘aqā'id, he does mention it elsewhere, such as in the Mishkāt al-anwār.

It is in this spirit and for this reason, we argue, that the $lhyā'$ veils its esoteric content, which is at times almost entirely absent and at times is almost entirely unveiled. This unique and admittedly uneven style of composition is what will afford us the opportunity of uncovering a significant part of his "unspeakable" doctrines of the soul and the afterlife. And, with careful attention to context, the subsequent chapters will also attempt to piece together the "stratified" layers of religious truth, each of which he will defend in its own context and according to its own objectives.
CHAPTER TWO
AL-GHAZALI'S REFUTATION OF IBN SINA'S
PSYCHOLOGY & ESCHATOLOGY IN

Our investigation naturally commences with the first work in which al-Ghazālī treats the question of the human soul: *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, a work composed not to formulate a particular position but rather written to refute the philosophical views challenging the traditional Islamic teachings concerning many topics central to the Islamic creed. Among these are the doctrines associated with death and the afterlife, teachings that bring the true nature of the human spirit to center stage. He introduces the work with a Preface and four Introductions which provide valuable keys for the proper reading of the text. Most importantly, these reveal al-Ghazālī’s primary motivation for writing the text, the nature of the text itself, and the carefully delineated scope of the author’s agenda. A clear understanding of these points will prove essential as we work through his main arguments about the soul later in this chapter.

In the Preface he gives the reader a clear impression that his primary motivation in composing the work springs from both a personal outrage over the haughtiness of a group of Muslim intellectuals and a resulting social concern:

I have seen a sect who believe themselves to be distinguished from their contemporaries and colleagues by reason of a superabundance of cleverness and intelligence; they have rejected the [daily] worship duties of Islam and have looked down upon the religious rites of the [prescribed] prayers and the guarding against the forbidden things; they have made light of the devotions [prescribed by] the Religious Law, as well as its limits, and they have not desisted at its prescribed limits and restrictions. On the contrary, they have thoroughly repudiated the noose of religion through some of the arts of [their] opinions, in which they take after a group that turns away from the cause of God and seeks a
twisted deviation, “and in the afterlife they are the unbelievers.”

Thus this highbrow attitude, while annoying and ill-conceived in his view, poses less of a menace than does their attitude toward religion, which attacks the very fabric of society and affronts all those who submit to the religious laws and doctrines. He restates this in the following paragraph:

The source of their infidelity is [in] their hearing stupendous names such as Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, and their likes, and [in the] exaggeration of [certain] groups from among their followers. And their [moral] deviance lies in their description of the intellects [of these ancients], in [their belief] in the soundness of their fundamental principles, in the precision/accuracy of their astronomical, logical, natural, and metaphysical sciences, and in their monopoly on superlative intelligence and astuteness through the extraction of these hidden things. And it is through their appropriation [of this knowledge] from them that they are, [in accord] with the calm self-possession of their intellects and with the copious abundance of their merit, deniers of the legal proscriptions and the creeds (al-nihal) and rejectors of the details of the religions and confessional communities, for they believe that [all these details] are composed laws and embellished devices. When that struck their hearing and their natural disposition concurred with what had been reported of the doctrines [of the ancients], they became enamoured with the belief in infidelity. [And this was by way of their] inclining toward the floods of the erudite (according to their claim) and joining their way, deeming themselves above the support of the masses and the common people, and scorning [their state] of satisfaction with the religions of their forefathers, and supposing that showing the apparent cleverness in desisting from an uncritical acceptance (taqlid) of the Truth by engaging in the uncritical acceptance of something futile is a noble thing, while being unaware that the movement from one form of uncritical acceptance to another is [mere] stupidity and confusion.

1 *Tahāfut*, 37.

2 Literally, “their intellects.” Hereafter in the quotation, I give boldface type to the possessive pronoun (Arabic pronominal suffix) denoting the ancients and not the misguided intellectuals targeted by the author. Obviously, an unembellished translation of the original text would be, in this case, dizzying to a reader unfamiliar with the larger context of the argument.

3 *Tahāfut*, 38.
This deep concern over the intellectual vulnerability of the generality of believing Muslims is further emphasized in the concluding passage of the introduction:

[All] this is concomitant with the narration of their school of thought from its own perspective, so that these heretics will come to see [how] an uncritical acceptance [of religion] is really in agreement — on every significant point, from start to finish — with the faith in God and the Last Day and [how] the differences of opinion [all] go back to details that are external to these two [primary] axes, for the sake of which the prophets were sent, [being] those who confirm [the truth] with miracles. No one ever entered into the denial of these two [fundamentals] save a small and insignificant group possessing backward intellects and inverted opinions, people to whom no attention should be paid nor any importance given in matters [discussed] among the [real intellectuals] engaged in speculative thought (النظر). And [these insignificant deniers] are not counted except among the host of demons and the corrupt, and among the torrents of the foolish and the gullible. [This is said] in order to protect from his [own propensity toward] excess the person who supposes that to adorn oneself with infidelity in an uncritical way indicates the soundness of his view... 4

In other words, al-Ghazālī is worried about the individual who will be dazzled by ancient names and duped by the elitist attitude of the philosophers, a view which turns out to be just another form of uncritical belief that smacks of self-aggrandizing and self delusion. This evidences his primary motivation behind the writing of the work: to prevent vulnerable minds from adopting such a haughty and, in al-Ghazālī’s view, ignorant attitude toward themselves, others, and especially toward the Islamic religion and its duties.

All of these sentiments — and particularly the pastoral concern for the weak-minded majority — run throughout the entire corpus of his works and are very clearly echoed even toward the end of his career, specifically in his autobiography, where he returns to his discussion of philosophy in the context of the various classes of seekers.

It is customary with weaker intellects thus to take the men as the criterion of the

4 Ibid., 39.
truth and not the truth as the criterion of the men. The intelligent man follows 'Alī (may God be pleased with him) when he said, "Do not know the truth by the men, but know the truth, and then you will know who are the truthful." The intelligent man knows the truth; then he examines the particular assertion. If it is true, he accepts it, whether the speaker is a truthful person or not... It is only the simple villager, not the experienced money-changer, who is made to abstain from dealings with the counterfeiter. It is not the strong swimmer who is kept back from the shore, but the clumsy tiro; not the accomplished snake charmer who is barred from touching the snake, but the ignorant boy... It is therefore necessary, I maintain, to shut the gate so as to keep the general public from reading the books of the misguided as far as possible...

Wherever one ascribes a statement to an author of whom they approve, they [i.e. the majority of mankind] accept it, even though it is false; wherever one ascribes it to an author of whom they disapprove, they reject it even though it is true. They always make the man the criterion of the truth and not truth the criterion of the man, and that is erroneous in the extreme. This is the wrong tendency towards the rejection of the ethics of the philosophers.

But there is also a wrong tendency toward accepting it. When a man looks into their books, such as the Brethren of Purity and others, and sees how, mingled with their teaching, are maxims of the prophets and utterances of the mystics, he often approves of these, and accepts them and forms a high opinion of them. Next, however, he readily accepts the falsehood they mix with that, because of the good opinion resulting from what he noticed and approved. That is a way of gradually slipping into falsehood.

Because of this tendency it is necessary to abstain from reading their books on account of the deception and danger in them. Just as the poor swimmer must be kept from the slippery banks...just as the boy must be kept from touching the snake... Indeed, just as the snake charmer must be kept from touching the snake in front of his small boy, ...and must caution the boy by showing caution [when treating the snake] in front of him, so the first-rate scholar must act in a similar fashion...

Thus, in his effort to salvage what good there might be in the method and ethics of the philosophers, he cautions the average reader possessing an anti-philosophical sentiment against reading the works of the philosophers; and, in his effort to keep the weak mind that is well-disposed toward things and personages connected with philosophy, he cautions against giving general access to philosophical books. Later in the same work he says that many have been

\[5\] Al-Munqidh min al-dalāl (translation from Watt, Faith and Practice, 40-44).
deceived by the philosophers who publicly profess the faith and show up for Friday prayers but take, at the same time, the Revealed Law (الشرع) into their own hands, rationalizing the ways in which it does not really apply to them (them not being of the common ilk for whom the Law is meant to be binding).\(^6\) All this is in keeping with what we may call the paternalistic or even pastoral tone we find in the introductions to the *Tahāfut*, a tone that reveals one of his primary motivations in composing the work.

In the famous (and brief) third introduction, al-Ghazālī carefully delineates the aims and the limits of the project at hand:

> Let it be known that the aim [of this work] is to caution anyone whose belief is well-disposed toward the philosophers and who deems their methods to be free of any contradiction, [and this will be done] by showing the many aspects of their [internal] breakdown. Thus, for that [end], I only oppose them in the way of one seeking to dispute, not as one claiming to establish [counter claims].\(^7\)

Thus the work never claims to be about asserting the truth; rather, it is about validity and possibility — i.e. the validity of conclusions claimed by the philosophers to be demonstrable and their pretense that there exist no competing possibilities, a pretense that presupposes the unassailable truth of their premises. This is what al-Ghazālī is setting out to refute, and he will do this, he goes on to say, in a purely eclectic, utilitarian manner.

> I stir up and make muddy what they believe [to be true] absolutely, [and I do this] by means of several methods of making [certain conclusions] stick; sometimes I force upon them the arguments\(^8\) of the *Muʿtazila*, and other times the arguments of the *Karamiya*, and at times the arguments of the *Waqifya*. I do not set out to defend any particular school of thought; rather I fashion all of the sectarian

\(^6\) Ibid., 78-79.

\(^7\) *Tahāfut*, 43.

\(^8\) Literally, the “doctrine (madhhab) of the *Muʿtazila*”.

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schools (al-firāq) into a single band against them. And it could be that the rest of the firāq differ with us in detail, while these [philosophers] are opposing the foundations of faith; and so let us come together against them, for, in times of adversity, enmity goes [away].

Thus, he tells us, he is willing to adopt any position that achieves his end, and he claims to lean in no way toward any theological or doctrinal school. Whether or not he succeeds in maintaining a stance free of any doctrinal bias may be called into question in the course of our study, but still his introductory remarks are clear: this work is not about anything of a constructive or affirming nature; it is about tearing down. And the tools that he employs in the process -- at least theoretically -- are chosen with the sole criterion of utility.

Not an anti-rationalist by any stretch of the imagination, al-Ghazālī is obviously not setting out to refute all of the philosophical doctrines embraced by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. Indeed, much of their intellectual tradition, including logic and the natural sciences, is not only in harmony with religion, but is shared with the religious scholars, such as the fuqahā’ and the mutakallimūn. He makes this clear in the second introduction.

Here, he explains that there are three types of intellectual differences between the philosophers and their counterparts. Of these, al-Ghazālī says, it is only the third type that pushes the philosophers outside the parameters of the believing community. The first type of difference results from equivocal terms, such as jawhar. The philosophers, he says, call the Fashioner of the Universe a jawhar, but this can hardly be found blameworthy since, “according

9 Ibid.

to their interpretation, the jawhar is an existent not in a substrate (mawdū'): the self-subsisting [entity] that does not stand in need of a formative agent which would give it being.” Thus, he says, “they do not mean by it something occupying space, as their enemies do.”11 Thus, when their terminology is considered from their own perspective, it does not in any way oppose the religious beliefs of the community. The question over whose definition is the right one requires linguistic research, he says, and, ultimately, all questions concerning the religiously appropriate use of particular terms fall upon those specializing in the exoteric application of the Religious Law: i.e., the fuqahā’. This is because “a research concerning the permissibility of calling [s.th.] by a true expression whose meaning is in accord with that which is signified by it is similar to the research concerning the permissibility of some certain action.”

The second type of disagreement concerns “that which does not clash in principle with the foundational principles of religion,” such as the philosophers’ scientific understanding of solar and lunar eclipses. “Opposing them in [these matters] is not,” he says, “required by the belief in the prophets and the messengers (God’s blessings be upon them).”12 Indeed, there is no point in demonstrating the futility of this. Whoever supposes that arguing to prove the futility of this is [a duty resulting] from religion has committed a crime against religion and has weakened its case, for astronomical, mathematical demonstrations, in which there remains no doubt, are based upon these phenomena. If it were said to one who has carefully studied these things and verified their [natural] indicators — by which he is able to predict the time of the two eclipses, their [respective] degrees [of totality], and their [respective] periods of duration up to their passing away — that [all] this was in opposition to the Revealed Law, he would not be skeptical about it; rather, he would be

11 Tahāfut, 41–43. This anticipates the theological perspectives highlighted in the next chapter. He seems to be referring here to the Ash'arī doctrine of the soul as jawhar (atom/substance), a doctrine dealt with in some detail in chapter three.

12 Ibid., 41.
skeptical about the Revealed Law. Indeed, the damage [done] to the Revealed Law by the one who seeks to assist it in an improper way (لا يبطريه) is greater than that done by one who attacks it in its proper way. Just as it is said, "an intelligent enemy is better than an ignorant friend."13

A few paragraphs later he concludes, "the greatest thing from which the heretic takes pleasure is when a patron of the Religious Law declares that [all] this and its like are in opposition to the Religious Law."14 Thus, with science al-Ghazālī has no quarrel.

However, he says that there are philosophical doctrines that do indeed come into irreconcilable conflict with the fundamental principles of religion; specifically, he singles out their rejection of the belief in the world’s creation in time, their denial of God’s knowledge of particulars, and their refutation of the belief in bodily resurrection. So these are the specific doctrines that he sets out to refute in the Tahāfut. Although each of these philosophical positions warrants a full consideration in its own right, only the last of them concerns us now, for it is intimately tied to our investigation of his understanding of the nature of the human soul, a nature which must necessarily be the same in this world and the next. Thus, our treatment of the Tahāfut skips ahead from the introductions to the last three discussions, especially the eighteenth in which he refutes their "doctrine that the human soul is a self-subsisting substance (jawhar qā‘im binafshihi) that neither has body nor accident."15

It is worth noting that most of this chapter does not in fact set out to disprove the existence of an immaterial, self-subsisting soul; rather, it sets out to prove that such a position

13 Ibid., 42.
14 Ibid., 43. See these sentiments echoed in the Munqidh (Watt, trans.), 79.
15 Tahāfut, 46.
cannot be reached by reason alone. This gives rise to a profound ambiguity detectable in the discussion, an ambiguity that we will try to clear up later in the study.

The eighteenth discussion opens with a concise but accurate explication of Ibn Sīnā’s psychology, a summary that quickly focuses upon the internal perceptive faculties shared by all animals: namely, the “imaginative faculty” (al-quwwa al-khayālīya), the “estimative faculty” (al-quwwa al-wahmiya)\(^\text{16}\), and the “active imagination” (al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila), which in humans is called the “cogitative faculty” (al-quwwa al-mufakkira). In both animals and humans, this last faculty “arranges the sensed images, one with another, and aligns the [various] images with the [corresponding] forms/images. It is in the intermediate cavity (al-tajwīf al-awsat) between that which preserves the images and that which preserves the meanings [associated with them]…”\(^\text{17}\)

Al-Ghazālī goes on to explain that, according to this philosophical psychology, the power that receives the impressions from the senses and the power that preserves them (after they are no longer being perceived by the senses) cannot be one and the same. Thus, the imaginative faculty is comprised of two subfaculties — the receiving and the preserving. This also holds for the estimative faculty, which also must receive and preserve, not images but the intentions associated with the images. Thus, when all of the internal perceptive senses are identified, they correspond perfectly with the number of external senses, five for five.

\(^{16}\) For a brief but insightful summary of al-Ghazālī’s somewhat unidimensional reading of Ibn Sīnā’s theory of “estimation”, see D. Black, “Estimation (wahm) in Avicenna: The Logical and Psychological Dimensions” in Dialogue, vol. XXXII, No. 2 (Spring, 1993), 219-258, esp. 220-223. We will revisit this article with greater attention in the course of this chapter.

\(^{17}\) Tahāfut, 207.
After discussing the internal senses, al-Ghazālī takes a little time to explain the motive faculties,\(^\text{18}\) which divide into two main categories: that which induces desire, also called "the faculty of desire and yearning" (\(al-quwwa\ al-muzū’īya\ wa’l-shawqīya\)), and that which is the actual physical cause of motion, also called "the active motive faculty" (\(al-quwwa\ al-muharrika\ al-fā’ilīya\)). That which induces desire, he says, branches in turn into two: the appetitive (\(al-shahuwnīya\)) and the irascible (\(al-ghadabīya\)). For, when a desirable or a repulsive image is imprinted upon the imaginative faculty, the faculty of desire and yearning induces the active motive faculty to effect some kind of motion. If the imagined object is perceived as being necessary or beneficial, then the appetitive faculty desires it and induces the active faculty to approach it; if the imagined object is perceived as being injurious or ruinous (\(mufsīd\)) the irascible faculty seeks to overpower or defeat it. This somewhat complex coordination of the subfaculties belonging to the faculty of desire and yearning results in the function or activity (الفعل) called "will".

As for the faculty [that is] motive in the sense that it effects [action], it is a faculty that is triggered in the nerves and muscles. Its business\(^\text{19}\) is to cause the muscles to contract, and so it either pulls the sinews and the ligaments connected with the limbs toward the locus in which resides the faculty [so as to draw the desired object closer] or it causes them to slacken, extending them lengthwise so that the sinews and ligaments go away from the direction [of the faculty’s locus].\(^\text{20}\)

With this explanation, he concludes his summary of Ibn Sīnā’s animal psychology. What remains to be explained is that segment of the philosophical psychology that pertains exclusively

\(^{\text{18}}\) The following is a paraphrase of p. 208.

\(^{\text{19}}\) Or "function" (شأنه).

\(^{\text{20}}\) Ibid.
to humans. This is, of course, Ibn Sīnā’s understanding of the rational soul. Al-Ghazālī writes,

As for the human rational soul -- called “al-nātiqa”\(^{21}\) by them, for intended by this term is “the intellectual” (العقل) because the choicest outward fruit of the intellect is articulate speech (al-nuṣq) and thus [the one] is tied to [the other] -- it has two faculties: a [theoretical] noetic faculty and a [practical] operative faculty. Each of these is called “intellect” through an equivocal use of the term. The [practical] operative is a faculty which is the principle of movement for the human body, [moving it] toward [the performance] of the ordered occupations [characteristic of] the human, occupations whose order is derived through the discursive thought that is unique to the human. And, as for the [theoretical] noetic, it is [also] called “the speculative” and is a faculty whose function includes grasping the realities of the intelligibles, stripped of [all] matter, spatiality, and direction. [These realities] are the universal judgements, sometimes called by the theologians “states” (أحوال) and other times “modes” (وجوه) and are called “pure universals” by the philosophers.\(^{22}\)

Thus, the soul has two faculties, in relation to two sides [of reality]. The speculative [exists] in relation with the side of the angels, since it takes from them the true sciences, and this faculty ought always to be ready to receive [the intelligibles] from above. The operative faculty has a relation to a lower [plane], which is the side of the body, with its management, and the improvement of moral [behaviour]. This faculty ought to reign supreme over the remaining bodily faculties, which [in turn] ought to be guided by its disciplining [of them], subdued beneath it so that it is neither influenced nor affected by them; rather those [lesser] faculties are influenced by it. [This subjugation of the lesser faculties] is so that, from the [side of the] bodily qualities, there do not emerge enslaving dispositions (هيات إقليدية) called “vices” in the soul; rather, [the operative faculty] should be supreme so that, by reason of it, there emerge in the soul dispositions called virtues.\(^{23}\)

Al-Ghazālī goes on to say that

\(^{21}\) I keep the Arabic here so as to avoid redundancy in the English. Literally, this term should be translated as “rational” in the sense that the human being is endowed with speech and discursive thought. Thus “mantiq” is the term employed in Arabic for the grammar of thought, just as “logic” is derived from logos, a term similarly charged with the nuance of language, speech, order, as well as discursive thought.

\(^{22}\) Al-Ghazālī rejects this philosophical doctrine of the universal in the tenth proof of the eighteenth discussion (225-227), which we shall treat in due course.

\(^{23}\) Tahāfut, 209.
There is nothing in what [the philosophers] have mentioned that must be denied in terms of the religious law. For these are observed matters which God, exalted be He, has ordained to run in a habitual course.

We only want now to object to their claim of knowing the soul to be a self-subsisting substance through rational demonstration. We do not offer against their claim the objection of one who deems this to be remote from the power of God, the exalted, or perceives that the religious law has brought forth that which is contrary to it.

Indeed, we will perhaps show in detailing the explanations of the resurrection and the afterlife that the law gives credence to it. We deny, however, their claim that reason alone indicates this and that there is no need in it for the religious law.

Thus, he leaves open the possibility of upholding a belief in the rational, immaterial soul within the Islamic legal framework. As he summarizes Ibn Sīnā’s psychology, he explains the theoretical/practical division of the rational soul without ever telling his reader that this rational soul is held by the philosophers to be immaterial. This openness to the possible truth of their belief (yet not of their methods) comes up more than once in the work.

In the course of his refutation of their claim to have come to these beliefs by pure demonstration and logical necessity, al-Ghazālī treats ten consecutive philosophical “proofs”

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24 This phrase serves as a clear indication that, although al-Ghazālī’s explicitly stated intention in the Tahāfut is to obfuscate and and refute Ibn Sīnā’s doctrines while putting forward none of his own, his Ashʿarī positions punctuate the discussion at various points. In this case, it is his Ashʿarī “occasionalist” theory of causality, the possibility of which he defends in the seventeenth discussion. It also shows its face in other parts of the work, such as in the final part of the Twentieth Discussion (p. 249). For a thorough explication of al-Ghazālī’s use of this phrase, see Michael E. Marmura’s “Ghazalian Causes and Intermediaries”, 91 ff.


26 Ruling out the possibility that al-Ghazālī’s intention behind “rational soul” in this specific passage is really an Ashʿarī material rational soul, Marmura goes on to explain, “A doctrine of an immaterial soul he proclaims, in effect, is possible and within God’s power to enact. Furthermore, it is not denied by the religious law. In fact, one can find support for it in the law. At the same time, there is a note of tentativeness when he suggests that he ‘will perhaps’ indicate this support.” Ibid.
(adilla) or “demonstrations” (barāḥīn)\textsuperscript{27} of the soul’s immaterial nature. Each one he explicates and refutes in turn, showing that their proofs and demonstrations yield, in reality, only possibilities and probabilities rather than demonstrative conclusions. With a single exception (the tenth proof), he does not deny the truth of their conclusions; rather, he strives to show that, even though they may be true, their truth is not demonstrable by logical premises and methods alone.

It is not germane to our discussion to defend Ibn Sīnā against these “refutations”, for it is only al-Ghazālī’s explanation of these philosophical points that we are after; nor is it germane to examine each of these ten proofs/refutations in detail, for this would go long and would add little to our main discussion in this chapter. However, a close look at a few of them will prove beneficial by way of further illustrating his explicit agenda in composing the work. More specifically, we will examine the first and the last of these ten, both chosen for their clarity and probing insights into Ibn Sīnā’s psychology and theory of knowledge.

The first of their proofs\textsuperscript{28} states that, since the cognitions of the mind are limited but consist of units (ahād) that are themselves indivisible, the receptical of these units must itself be indivisible. Further, since each and every body is, by definition, divisible, then this receptical cannot be a body. The argument, al-Ghazālī says, is a sound syllogism — a modus tollens — that reduces to the following: If A is divisible, and B is in A, then B is divisible; not B; then not A.

To this, al-Ghazālī presents two objections. The first is simply to ask,

with what would you dispute one saying, “the receptacle of knowledge is a single

\textsuperscript{27} Tahāfu, 210.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
substance that occupies space and [yet] is indivisible”? [That theory] was known from the Muslim scholastic theologians. After [this objection] nothing remains except for them to deem it unlikely... and thinking it unlikely [does them] no good since it could turn upon their position too: namely “how could the soul be a discrete thing that does not occupy space, cannot be pointed to, that is neither inside nor outside the body and is neither connected to nor separated from it?”

The second objection is tied quite directly to Ibn Sinā’s psychology, specifically to the estimative faculty, which, as we have seen, is equally present in animals as in human beings (although its function is not the same in both). Al-Ghazālī writes,

What you have mentioned to the effect that everything indwelling in a body ought to be divisible is [rendered] absurd for you because of what the ewe’s [estimative] faculty grasps of the wolf’s hostile intention. [You attribute to the ewe] judging a discrete thing, whose division is inconceivable since enmity does not have a part such that one could [simultaneously] cognize it as well as the cessation of [the other] part. According to you, its cognition occurred in a bodily faculty, even though the animal soul is imprinted upon the bodies and [thus] does not abide after death. Upon this [the philosophers] have agreed.

Because the animal’s estimative cognition cannot be shown to be divisible or tied to any single sensual observation, al-Ghazālī forces his opponent(s) to concede the indivisiblility of the animal soul that contains such a cognition. In other words, for their psychological theory of the estimative faculty to work, the animal soul would have to be indivisible. This, he says, is an inherent contradiction that the philosophers did not detect in their simultaneous affirmation of

29 Particularly the Ash‘arī mutakallimūn, about whom more will be said in chapter three.

30 Ibid., 210-11.

31 According to Black, al-Ghazālī’s critique envisages the estimative faculty “primarily as an animal power, or at least, pertaining only to the practical activities shared by both humans and animals...its epistemological applications are ignored altogether.” See her “Estimation...”, 221 ff.

32 Tahāfut, 211-12.
the indivisibility of knowledge and the materiality/divisibility of the animal soul. There is no way out of this.

Even if one were to offer the objection that the ewe's apprehension of the wolf's enmity is really nothing more than a cognition resulting from specific sense (visual) data and not an abstract, rational cognition, "purified of material forms and individuals", al-Ghazālī says that one could counter with the question, "with what does it apprehend [the enmity]?" If the hostile intention of the wolf were recognized by a bodily faculty, he says, then it should be divisible, which does not make sense:

what is the state of that cognition if it is divided? How could there be "part" of it? Is it a cognition of "part" of the hostile intention [harbored by the wolf for the ewe]? How then could [the hostile intention] have a part? Or does each division of the cognition [partake] in the whole of the hostile intention so that the hostile intention is known multiple times through the anchoring of its cognition in each and every division of the receptacle?33

This, he says, remains an inherent problem in their "demonstration", for "either what they have mentioned concerning the rational soul or what they have mentioned concerning the estimative faculty" must give. Further, he says, "this contradiction reveals that they were unaware of the place of the confusion in the syllogism," which perhaps lies in their assertion that "knowledge is imprinted upon the body in the [same] manner that color is [imprinted] upon its object."

Perhaps, he suggests, the relation between the knower and the thing known is of a different nature, and the philosophers just made use of an inappropriate parallel. Although it appears that al-Ghazālī is giving them the benefit of the doubt, it becomes clear in his refutation of the next

33 Ibid., 212.
“proof” that the problem is inescapable.\textsuperscript{34}

As he ties up his counterarguments to this first philosophical proof, he reminds the reader that his objection is not with the philosophers’ doctrine of the soul \textit{per se}; rather it is with their assertion of how their knowledge is won. He writes,

\begin{quote}
In short, it is not denied that what they have mentioned is among the things\textsuperscript{35} which give weight [to the view] and strengthen [one’s] belief [in it]\textsuperscript{36} \(يَقُوِيَ الْطَّنَّ)\). What is [here] denied is its being known with a certain knowledge without possibility of error and without recourse to doubt. This extent [of their claim] is what is doubted.\textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

Leaving the questions surrounding the estimative faculty and raising new questions concerning the philosophers’ theory of knowledge, the tenth and final philosophical proof in this discussion rejects outright the philosophical definition of universals, more specifically the “general noetic universals \(الكليات العقلية\) which are called ‘states’ [by] the scholastic theologians.”\textsuperscript{38} Such universals include “the intelligible, absolute human being” -- abstracted beyond any and all particularities of color, shape, locus, dimension, etc -- which the philosophers understand to be “the reality of the human being”, a form utterly unrelated to the particular individual from which it was first abstracted. Rather, the philosophers argue that,

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} Literally, “among that which gives...”

\textsuperscript{36} For sheer readability, I have reversed the verbal order in my translation. Also, in reference to al-Ghazālī’s use of the term فن (\textit{zann}) in this passage, it is uncertain here whether he is using the term in a technical or idiomatic way here. Our sense of his usage in this context is idiomatic, but it is ambiguous enough to warrant some consideration.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Tahāfut}, 213.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 225.
once abstracted, its only relation is to "that which abstracts" \(^{39}\) [it], which is the rational soul (\textit{al-nafs al-āqila}).\(^{40}\) And, since the abstracted universal is entirely free of all particularity or materiality, so too must the rational soul, its receptacle, be entirely free of all material, spatial contraints.

\begin{quote}
Al-Ghazālī, however, while not denying the representational universality of the image in the mind, refuses to deny the connection between the intellectual form and the particular from which it was first abstracted. Thus, the mind's representative "universal" is, for him, not to be confused with the "universal meaning" (\textit{al-ma'na al-kullī}) posited by the philosophers.
\end{quote}

Only that which inheres in the \{faculty of\} sense can inhere in the intellect. However, \{the particular\} inheres as a collective thing in the \{faculty of\} sense, the \{faculty of\} sense being unable to differentiate \{its parts\}. But the intellect is capable of differentiating \{its parts\}.

Then, once it has been differentiated \{according to parts\}, the differentiated \{particular\}, detached in the mind from the connections \{to its various components\}, exists, in its being something particular\(^{41}\), like something connected through its connections \{to the particular individual from which it was abstracted\}. However, that which is established in the intellect corresponds equally\(^{42}\) to the intelligible thing (\textit{al-ma'qūl}) and to \{other\} things similar to it.\(^{43}\)

Thus the connection is not severed, it is rather generalized to include all members of the same species. This is the only sense in which the intellectually abstracted form can be called a universal, he says. Simply put, the mind keeps a particular image as a kind of archetype that,  

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \(^{39}\) Literally, "that which takes \{it\} (\textit{al-ākhidh})..."
\item \(^{40}\) \textit{Tahāfut}, 225.
\item \(^{41}\) Literally, "in its being a particular thing".
\item \(^{42}\) Literally, "corresponds in \{the manner of\} a singular correspondence to...".
\item \(^{43}\) \textit{Tahāfut}, 226.
\end{itemize}
while not perfectly resembling all particulars in its class, can still serve as a standard and thus represent all of the particulars in its class.

This is more than a mere subtle departure from the philosophical definition of the universal, and it is enough to refute the philosophical statement that the universal in the mind is a separate reality totally independent of the material particularities from which it was initially abstracted, a statement that makes a case for the immateriality of the soul in which it resides. By countering their position with an equally plausible theory of intellectual abstraction, a theory which does not deny the continuing particularity of the mental archetype, al-Ghazālī shows that their theory is not the only viable explanation of the nature of the “universal” that comes to dwell in the rational soul.

Moving forward now, the Nineteenth Discussion refutes the philosophical doctrine “that nonexistence is impossible once human souls have existed and that they are everlasting, their annihilation being unthinkable.”

It consists of two philosophical “proofs”, the first of which is assailed by four objections and the second of which is refuted with a single objection.

The first proof states that, in order for a soul to be annihilated, one of three things must logically happen: (i) the body dies and causes the death of the soul; (ii) a contrary or opposite entity nullifies the soul; or (iii) the soul is annihilated through the power of the One Possessing Power (biqudrati l-qādir).” In the idiom of Ibn Sīnā, he refutes each possibility in turn, thus

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44 Ibid., 228.

45 While this form of the active participle is rendered in the literal sense, it is saturated with Qur’ānic nuance, for it is the standard attribute referring to God as “the Omnipotent”. In this context, al-Ghazālī seems to be using it in both the technical, grammatical sense and the religious sense; hence the literal rendering coupled with the use of capital letters.
showing — from the philosophical vantage point — that the human soul cannot suffer annihilation.

The first of these would only hold, he says, if the souls were imprinted upon the bodies. Such is the case with “the bestial souls and bodily faculties,” as we saw in the previous discussion. This, however, cannot pertain to the human soul, say the philosophers, for it enjoys an act in which the body has no share whatsoever:

grasping the intelligibles abstracted from material things. In its being a perceiver of the intelligibles, it has no need of the body; on the contrary, its preoccupation with the body impedes it from [apprehending] the intelligibles. As long as it has an act independent of the body and an existence independent of the body, it does not need the body for its subsistence.”

In other words, its self-subistence is verified by the fact that its highest function does not in any way depend upon the body and its faculties.

To this, al-Ghazālī poses a familiar objection. As we saw in the last discussion, their psychological “proof” for the independence of the rational soul is problematic, for it would have to include certain estimative functions of the animal soul as well, such as the ewe’s estimative perception of the wolf’s harmful intention. And the self-subistence of the souls of sheep is something they categorically deny. Therefore, having already shown this, al-Ghazālī refuses to allow this argument here.

The second of these three possibilities for the annihilation of the soul is likewise impossible, according to the philosophers, for the human soul is a Substance (jawhar), a single atomic unit, and it is absurd to posit contrariety for indivisible substances, since the phenomena of generation and corruption apply only to

\[46\] Tahāfut, 228.
accidents and [composite] forms that are successively coming over things. Thus the form of liquid is wiped out by its contrary, [i.e.] the form of gas, while the material that is the receptacle [e.g. the cooking pot or jar] is not annihilated at all. [Regarding] any jawhar that is not in a receptacle, its being wiped out by means of a contrary is unthinkable, since there can be no contrary for something that does not inhere within a receptacle. This is because the contraries are successively overcoming [one another] on [the locus of] a single receptacle.  

Al-Ghazālī objects to this as well, for

even if it does not, according to them, indwell in a body, it nonetheless has a connection with the body whereby it only comes into existence when the body comes into existence. This is what Avicenna and the exacting among [the philosophers] have chosen.

The relation between each soul and its respective body then is “a particular relation between the particular soul and that particular body.” Although the specifying cause of this relation, as well as its modality, are unknown, the exclusive connection between the two is certain. If the modality is such that the soul is imprinted upon the body, then it would follow that the soul must necessarily die with the death of the body. If the connection is other than that, such that this relation is [still] a condition for its [i.e. the soul’s] coming to be, then what would make it improbable for [this relation] to be a condition for [the soul’s] continuance in existence? Thus, were the relation to be cut, the soul would cease to be. Thereafter its existence would not return to it except through


49 There is a slight problem with the original text here. Where I place “[the soul’s]” in both the first and second lines, the Arabic expresses this possession by means of a masculine pronominal suffix, whereas the grammatically feminine word “soul”, whether singular or plural, warrants a feminine pronominal suffix. Syntactically, then, one is tempted to read “[the body’s]” rather than my rendering. This, however, goes against the sense of the passage.
the restoring act of God — be He praised and exalted — by way of resurrection\(^50\), just as it has been related in the Revelation concerning the ultimate return (al-
ma 'ād).\(^51\)

In short, al-Ghazālī is again arguing for the admission of a possibility, thereby showing that the philosophical “proof” is not air tight. As long as the specific modality of this connection between the particular soul and the particular body remains unknown,

it is not improbable that this unknown relation is of a mode that renders the soul in need of a body for its existence such that, if [the body] is corrupted, [the soul] is corrupted. For with what is unknown, one cannot judge whether or not there is a requirement of concomitance [between this relation and the soul]. For it may well be that this relation is necessary for the existence of the soul, so that, if [the relation] ceases to exist, [the soul] ceases to exist. Hence, one cannot rely upon the proof they have mentioned.\(^52\)

The third possible mode of annihilation, say the philosophers, is likewise impossible, for nonexistence cannot be considered the fruit of a power. As was explained in the Second Discussion, which treats their doctrine of the world’s post-eternity (abadīyat al-‘ālam), there are two philosophical reasons supporting this: (i) for God to create and then to destroy a thing implies some change within the Divine, which is impossible; (ii) power is, by definition, generative and creative, while degeneration and annihilation result from a lack or absence of power. The latter argument, he says, is far stronger than the former. So, speaking on behalf of the philosophers in the Second Discussion, al-Ghazālī writes,

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\text{[i] It is unthinkable that there could be a cause to which a nonexistent thing belongs. Yet there must be a cause [responsible] for a thing that was once in a }
\]

\(^{50}\) Where I translate “resurrection”, the Arabic text gives both al-ba’th (البعث) and al-
nushūr (النشور), for which we do not have separate English terms.

\(^{51}\) Tahāfut, 230.

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 231 (again, translation from Marmura, 208).
state of existence and then became nonexistent. And that cause can only be the will of the Eternal. But this is impossible, because, if He had not been wishing its nonexistence and then began wishing it, he must have undergone some change...

[ii] Nonexistence is not a thing, so how can it be [considered] an act [of God]? If He wiped away the universe, thus renewing the act of “it was not”, what would that “act” be? Is it the existence of the universe? [This] is impossible, since existence has been severed. Or is His act the nonexistence of the universe? But the nonexistence of the universe is not a thing — having nothing to speak of — so that it may be considered an act. Indeed, the least, most miniscule grade of action is that it be existent, and the nonexistence of the universe is not an existent thing so that it may be said of [it], “it is that which the [Divine] Agent enacted and which the Originator brought into being.”

He goes on to give objections from the various schools of kalām, including two different Ashʿarī perspectives, one of which is worthy of special note. According to this group (تايفع),

The accidents pass into nonexistence by themselves while the atoms (jawāhir) pass into nonexistence because God does not create in them movement or rest or adjunction [to other jawāhir] or separation. It is impossible for a body to remain [in existence] when it is neither still nor moving; hence, it becomes nonexistent. It is as if the two Ashʿarī groups both incline toward [the view] that becoming extinct is not [brought about] by reason of an action [of God]. Rather, it is by reason of [God’s] refraining from action, since they cannot conceive of nonexistence as an act.

If these ways [of explaining the extinction of the world] come to nothing, then no possibility remains for the [truth of] the statement that the annihilation of the world is a possibility.

Al-Ghazālī explains that, while agreeing with the philosophical insistence that nonexistence cannot be considered an act, the Ashʿarīs can still explain how the annihilation of the world is possible. This is rooted in the Ashʿarī occasionalism, which attributes the the moment-to-moment continuation of all existence to the moment-to-moment free choice and act of God. If

53 Literally, “that which had not been an annihilated thing”, i.e. that which had been an existent thing.

54 Tahāfūt, 83-4.

55 Ibid., 86.
at any point He freely chose to refrain from all or part of this action, nonexistence would necessarily ensue.

Al-Ghazâlî then turns toward the related question of the soul. Speaking now about the philosophers, he says,

[All] this [stands] if it were posited that the universe is created (hadîth). Moreover, in light of their conceding [the point regarding] the creation of the human soul, they argue [for] the possibility of its extinction by way of an argument56 that comes close to what we have mentioned.

In essence, according to them, every self-subsistent thing cannot be [considered to reside] within a receptacle. Once it exists, its extinction is inconceivable regardless of whether it is pre-eternal (qudîm) or created. If is is said to them, “whenever fire burns beneath water, the water passes into nonexistence,” they say, “it was not annihilated; it was [rather] transformed into vapor and later [back into] water. Matter, which is prime matter, continues to exist in the atmosphere, and it was the matter which was in the form of the water; then it discarded the liquid form and took on the form of gas. Then, were cold to come into contact with the atmosphere, it would become dense and would be transformed [again] into water. Nothing of matter is renewed; rather materials are shared by the various elements. Indeed, the forms [temporarily taken by matter] are [all] that is exchanged.57

Then al-Ghazâlî goes on to give a somewhat abbreviated refutation of these arguments:

What you have said [divides into] divisions. If it were possible for us to defend every one of them and show each one’s futility according to your own principle, it would not be enough to include [all] your principles according to what [is entailed in] each one’s category. However, we will not prolong [the discussion] and will thus confine ourselves to [the refutation of] one.

We say: with what [argument] would you deny one who says, “creation (al-jâd) and annihilation (al-i’dâm) are [both realized] through the will of the One Possessing Power (al-qâdir)”? Thus, if God so wills, He brings into being, and, if He wills, He annihilates; that is the meaning of His being endowed with power (qadir) over everything. And, in all of that, He does not undergo any change within Himself. Rather, it is the act that undergoes change.

As for your statement, “some kind of act must issue forth from the Agent,

56 Literally, “by way of a route (bi-ṭarâf)....”

57 Tahâfut, 86.
so what is issuing from Him [in the case of His rendering something nonexistent]?” We say: that which is [being] reinstated is issuing from Him, and that is [the state of] nonexistence. For nonexistence was not, and then nonexistence was reinstated, and thus it issued from Him.

If you say, “but ‘it’ isn’t anything, so how can ‘it’ issue from Him?” We say: “it” isn’t anything, so how can “it” occur [in the first place]? The meaning of “its issuing from Him” is only that whatever occurs must be ascribed to His power. Thus, if its occurrence is thinkable, then why is its ascription to [His] power unthinkable? What is the difference between you and the one who, from the outset, denies the fresh reinstatement of [the state of] nonexistence in the case of accidents and forms and says, “nonexistence is nothing, so how can it become fresh [again] and how can it be described by [the terms] ‘becoming new’ and ‘renewal’?” We do not doubt that the fresh becoming of nonexistence is conceivable with regard to accidents. For, in the case by what is described by [the term] “fresh becoming”, its occurrence is thinkable regardless of whether it is called a thing or not. Thus the ascription of that thinkable occurrence to the power of the One Possessing Power is also thinkable.

He goes on to raise a final objection that puts forward a two-fold refutation, all pointing to the conclusion that, “no matter how one conceives the occurrence of a created thing (ḥādīth) through an eternal will, the modality (ḥāl) [of the occurrence] does not divide between [the ontological considerations of] whether the occurring thing is existent or nonexistent.”

Returning now to the question concerning the possibility of the soul’s passing away in the Nineteenth Discussion, al-Ghāzalī’s argument can be summed up as follows: any occurrence, regardless of whether it brings forth existence or nonexistence, can occur by means of a power, and so it is with the creation and annihilation of the soul. Thus, the passing of a soul from existence into nonexistence is conceivable and possible, in spite of what the philosophers argue.

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58 This is an unusual usage. The form طريان seems to be serving as the verbal noun for the verb طري (tariya), which is synonymous with كجد (tajaddada) in this context. Such is our reading.

59 Tahāfut, 86-7.

60 Ibid., 88.
And its very possibility shows that their demonstration is not logically binding. This is all he needs and wants to clarify.

His fourth and final objection to the initial argument of the philosophers is extremely straightforward and needs no explication. He writes,

The fourth objection is to say: you have mentioned that these three [possible] ways [of bringing about] the soul’s nonexistence are exhaustive, for it is conceded [by your own argument]. What proves that these are the only three ways of conceiving the thing’s nonexistence? Indeed, regarding the enumeration [of possible causes], if it does not [merely] revolve between [the thing’s] denial and affirmation, it is not improbable that it would exceed three and [even] four [alternatives]. Perhaps there is a fourth and a fifth way for [bringing about] nonexistence in addition to what you have mentioned. For the limitation of [possible] ways to these three is not something [that you] arrived at by demonstration.61

Al-Ghazālī then presents a second “proof” on their behalf, and this, he says, is the one “on which they rely.”62 Briefly, the philosophical argument here branches into two arguments, both of which stand upon premises that al-Ghazālī rejects. The first of these is the premise that “the soul is simple (bawqāṭa), a form purified of matter, having no composition within it [whatsoever].”63 And, since nonexistence can only be posited in reference to some material form for whom nonexistence is a possibility, it follows that the soul cannot tolerate even the potentiality for nonexistence. The second, conceding the materiality of the jawhar of the soul, is the premise that the fundamental atom, being indivisible as well as both pre and post eternal, cannot ever suffer annihilation or pass away into nonexistence.

61 Ibid., 231-232.
62 Ibid., 232.
63 Ibid.
For [matter] is sempiternal (azalāya) and everlasting (abaddāya). However, forms come over it and pass away from it, and within it [there] is the capacity (quwwa) [for] the fresh generation of forms [coming] over it and the capacity for the passing away of forms from it, for it is equally receptive of both contraries. It is evident, then, from [all] this that, for each and every existent that is singular in nature64 (ahadi l-dhā), nonexistence is impossible.65

And thus the soul, being singular, must be eternal. Having already refuted the philosophers’ insistence upon the eternal nature of matter in the first and second discussions, he rejects their premise outright, without having to explain again his reasons for doing so.

The Twentieth Discussion opens with a lengthy and disarmingly sympathetic explication of the philosophical position on the afterlife. He goes to some length in his explanation of their reasons for exalting the intellectual pleasures above all other forms of pleasure66 and their association of worship and Lawful living with the purification of the soul and the weakening of the soul’s attachment to the world67. In these areas, his tone is positive, even supportive. For example, when speaking of the superiority of the intellectual pleasures, here on behalf of the philosophers, he writes in such a way that the reader might easily take him to be speaking for their opponents. He writes,

Thus the intellectual, otherworldly pleasures are preferable to the sensual, this-worldly pleasures. If that were not [the case], for what reason did God’s Apostle - - may God bless him and grant him salvation – say, “I have prepared for My righteous servants that which no eye has seen, nor ear heard, [that which] has not [ever] occurred to the heart of any human.” And [for what reason did] He – be He exalted – say: “No soul knows what is hidden from them of [the things

64 Literally, “singular in [its] essence…”

65 Tahāfut, 233.

66 Ibid., 235-38.

67 Ibid., 240.
which] are a delight for [the] eyes.” This then raises the need for knowledge, the most beneficial [aspects] of which are the pure intellectual sciences: i.e. the knowledge of God and His attributes and His angels and books; the manner of the [coming into] existence of everything from Him; and anything else that [serves as] a means to [such knowledge].

Indeed, with the exception of the one doctrine to which he takes great objection, namely their denial of all sensible imagery pertaining to the pleasures and torments of the hereafter, he seems to agree with most of what the philosophers say about the nature of true felicity and about the role of religious piety in liberating of the soul.

We say: most of these things are not in contradiction to the Revealed Law, for we certainly do not deny that there are in the next world [various] kinds of pleasures [that are] greater than those perceived by the senses (al-mahsūsat), nor do we deny the continuation of the soul once [it has] quit the body. On the contrary, we know this through the Revealed Law, since it has related [information] concerning the Return, which can only be understood in terms of the soul’s continuation. However, we have previously disputed with them their claims of knowing that by sheer reason.

But, from among [these things], that which contradicts the Revealed Law is the denial of the resurrection of bodies, the denial of bodily pleasures in Paradise and of bodily torments in Hell, and the denial of the [real] existence of

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68 Here I paraphrase slightly, cutting out the redundant construction, “min jumlatih” (of its entirety”, thus converting a second sentence into a relative clause.

69 Literally, “the things” (الأشياء).

70 Literally, “whatever is beyond [all] that”.

71 Tahāfut, 237-8.

72 “Certainly” here is intended to reflect the emphatic tone of fa-innanā.

73 In the English, I give the disjunction greater punch. Literally, it simply reads “but we know this...” I think the context pushes the simple disjunction beyond its ordinary usage here.

74 Normally, we render “ma' rifā” as “gnosis”. Here, however, as in a few other places, he uses it in a verbal sense, meaning “knowing” or “grasping”.
Paradise and Hell as is described in the Qurʾān.\textsuperscript{75}

Thus, al-Ghazālī agrees with most of what they assert about the next world but cannot accept what they deny in reference to the rewards and punishments described in the Qurʾān. He continues, arguing for something of a middle ground between the extremely literal/textual belief and the extremely rational/philosophical belief.

What is preventing [us] from affirming a union between both [kinds] of happiness, the spiritual and the bodily, and likewise with [both kinds of] misery...? Just so, the existence of these noble things does not [necessarily] point toward the negation of other [things]; on the contrary, the coming together between the two is more perfect, and that which was promised [by God] is the most perfect of things. Now it [i.e. the combination of both] is [logically] possible, and so believing in it is required in accordance with the Revealed Law.\textsuperscript{76}

While it may be argued that such statements are conceded just for the sake of argument in the \textit{Tahāfut}, we will come to appreciate the candor of this final statement as the study unfolds. In addition, when he speaks here about the continuation of the soul after death -- we must remind ourselves here that he is speaking on behalf of the philosophers -- he neglects to mention that this, in the philosophical context, is an immaterial soul that we are talking about, a point that he apparently doesn’t deem to be problematic. All of these points taken together leave the careful reader with questions: does he then himself believe in an immaterial soul that reunites with the body for an eternal afterlife? If so, what is the nature of the connection between the immaterial soul and the material body? And what about the ontology of the bodily pleasures and torments in the afterlife? Are they ontologically real, in which case the hereafter must needs be

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Tahāfut}, 240-1.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 241.
a physical “place”? or are they just experientially real, having no basis but in the mind? These ambiguities and questions are never fully resolved in the Tahāfut and remain with us as we look elsewhere for answers.

Returning to his refutation of their proofs denying the resurrection of bodies, which he says above is possible, he explains that they understand such a thing to be conceivable in only three ways:

[Regarding the first] it is said: “human being” is an expression for the body and life, which is an accident subsisting therein, as some of the theologians have taken it [to mean]. [And it is said] that the soul, which is self-subsisting and is the manager of the body, has no existence [whatsoever], and the meaning of death is the severing of life [from the body], i.e. the Creator’s refraining from His own [act] creating [life]. In this way, [life] ceases to exist and so too the body. The meaning of the return [in this case] is God’s restoration of the body, which had ceased to be, and His returning it to the [state of] existence, and the restoration of the life which had ceased to be. Alternatively, it is said, the matter of the body remains as earth, and the meaning of the return is that [God] collects [it] and assembles [it] in human form and creates life in it anew. This is one type [of explanation].

[Regarding the second way] it is said that the soul is existent and abides after death; however, the original body is returned with all of those very same [atomic] parts. This is [another] type [of explanation].

[Regarding the third way] it is said, the soul is returned to the body just the same regardless of whether [it] is from those parts or from others, and the one returning is that [particular] person by virtue of [the fact] that the soul is that [particular] soul. Thus, as for the matter [in question], no consideration is [given] to it, since the human being is not a human being by reason of it; on the contrary, [he is a human being] by reason of the soul.

These three types [of explanation] are false [they argue].

77 These questions are implicit in Marmura’s reading: “The soul, hence, must survive the body if resurrection is to take place. But what kind of soul is this? Is it material or immaterial? Al-Ghazālī does not specify. In what follows, however, he chooses to defend a theory of bodily resurrection that also upholds a doctrine of an immortal soul. This fortifies the impression that he is subscribing to a doctrine of the soul’s immateriality in conjunction with material resurrection.” See “On Bodily Resurrection”, 54.

78 Tahāfut, 242-3.
Although al-Ghazâlî lays out the philosophical refutations of each of these three, we will examine only the case of the third type here. We do this because it is the only one for which al-Ghazâlî gives a detailed counter-refutation and also because it is the most relevant to our investigation.

In his explication of the philosophical objections to this understanding of the “Return”, al-Ghazâlî writes,

this is impossible on two sides. The first is that the matter receptive to generation and corruption is limited to the region below the sphere of the Moon; and any excess [beyond this limit] is impossible for it. For it is finite while the [number of] souls that have been separated for eternity is unlimited. Thus, [the matter] cannot [adequately] meet the need.

The second is that earth does not receive the management of the soul as long as it remains [common] earth; rather, there must be [some] blending of elements in such a way so as to resemble the blending of the embryo. Indeed, wood and iron do not accept such management, and so it is impossible for the person to be restored while his body is [formed] out of wood or iron. Nay, he would not [even] be a person unless his bodily members divide into flesh and bone and the [four] humors. Whenever the body and the temperament are ready to receive a soul, it necessitates [the creation of the soul] through the principles [that] grant to the souls the creation (hudûth) of [another] soul. Hence, two souls would successively come upon one body [one by natural necessity and the other by God's restoration of a pre-existing soul to a fresh body].

By this [argument] the [doctrine of] transmigration is proved false. And this [third] position is the very essence of [the doctrine of] transmigration, for it reduces to the soul’s occupation with the management of another body after it has rid itself of the [first] body. The course that indicates the falsification of the [doctrine of] transmigration [then] indicates the falsification of this course [of

79 Literally, “the hollow of the Sphere of the Moon”.

80 Literally, “this management”.

81 Usually consisting of blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile.

82 Literally, “another body other than the original body”. I abridged the original to avoid redundancy in the English.
explaining the return.\textsuperscript{83}

This then is his account of the philosophical “proofs” attacking the belief in the return of the immaterial soul to a body of some kind after death. He now goes on to give a very interesting counter-refutation of their objections. He writes,

with what [argument] do you deny one who chooses the final [i.e. third] type [of explanation], who regards the soul [as] remaining after death, [as] a self-subsisting jawhar, and [who sees all] that as being in harmony with\textsuperscript{84} the Revealed Law, in light of His statement, “Do not count those who have been killed in the way of God for dead; nay, they are living in the presence of their Lord,” and in [light of] his statement (upon him be peace), “the spirits of the righteous are in the crops of green birds that perch [on boughs] beneath the throne”? [Also evidenced] by what has been related of the reports regarding the sensations of the spirits, [sensations] of acts of almsgiving and charity, the questioning of Munkar and Nakir, the torment of the grave, and other [things], all of which point to the remaining [of the soul after death]?

Yea, nevertheless, it has been indicated that the Resurrection and the Gathering thereafter is the Resurrection of the body. And that is possible by virtue of [the soul’s] return to some kind of body, regardless of whether it is [composed] from the matter of the original body or from other [matter] or from matter whose [initial] creation has been resumed\textsuperscript{85}. For he [i.e. the human being] is he by virtue of his soul, not by virtue of his body...

As for your second claim [of this being] impossible by virtue of the fact that this is transmigration, then [we argue], there is no [point in] wrangling about terms. For one must assent to what the Revealed Law has conveyed. So let it be transmigration; moreover, we [only] deny transmigration in this world. As for the Resurrection, we do not deny it, regardless of whether it is termed “transmigration” or not.\textsuperscript{86}

Thus, here he demonstrates a very open posture to the possibility of both the soul’s immateriality

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\textsuperscript{83} Tahā'īfūt, 245-6.

\textsuperscript{84} Literally, “as not opposing the Revealed Law.” While true to the the intention of the original, my rendering has reoriented the statement for the sake of readability and clarity.

\textsuperscript{85} Apparently suggesting the possibility of a second chapter of creation ex nihilo, a possibility to which he refers again just a few lines below (in a passage not included here).

\textsuperscript{86} Tahā'īfūt, 246-7.
and self-subsistency. Neither, he claims is contrary to the Revealed Law, for neither precludes the possibility of the soul’s return to the body for an eternal, embodied afterlife, as is promised in the Qur’ān and in the teachings of the Prophet.

The final philosophical objection in this discussion centers not on the theory of the soul but rather on the question of causality, more precisely the possibility of God’s bringing into existence the body of a human being a second time and not via the normal channels and conditions that we observe to be prerequisites for the formation of a human body. Such a “restoration”, they argue, would go against the laws of nature, laws or “habits” eternally set in place by God. Al-Ghazālī’s refutation of this draws on his Ash’ārī position on Divine power and causality, a position which surfaces time and again throughout the work and which he fully explicates in his refutation of their belief in the eternity of the world in the first part of the book.

Returning to the question of the soul, while these somewhat open-ended statements regarding the immateriality and the self-subsistency of the soul seem to be advanced in good faith, the reader must take them with a grain of salt, for (as we have already seen) al-Ghazālī explicitly states that he is writing the Tahāfut as “one seeking and disputing [the positions of the philosophers], not as one making claims [or] one seeking to substantiate [his own beliefs].” On the other hand, however, we do see his own positions and biases (such as the Ash’ārī occasionalist understanding of causality) surfacing repeatedly throughout the work, and so we do know that some of the Tahāfut at least is truly reflective of his own thinking. Thus, while none of these psychological statements can be taken automatically as a sincere affirmation of any

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87 From al-Ghazālī’s third preface to the Tahāfut, p. 43. We have already seen, however, that he sometimes indulges himself by putting forward an Ash’ārī position when describing or explicating “the Revealed Law”. See also Marmura, “Bodily Resurrection,” 46, 50.
dogmatic position regarding the true nature of the human soul, they do generate a palpable ambiguity regarding his position on the materiality and self-subsistency of the human soul. Is his openness to the philosophical psychology in the Tahāfut purely dialectical, for the sake of argument? For a doctrine to which he can be more reliably tied, we must look to other works, works written with the intention of affirming and explaining proper doctrine. Indeed, such a work is even promised in the Tahāfut, which names the anticipated treatise Qawā'id al-'aqā'id.

As for the affirmation of the doctrine of the Truth, we will compose a book about it after a period of rest from this [current work], if God wills that success [be granted] to assist [us]. We will name it Qawā'id al-'aqā'id, and in it we will concern ourselves with the establishment [of right doctrine], just as we have concerned ourselves in this book with the demolition [of heretical doctrine]. And God knows best.⁸⁸

Now, while this work takes us into the realm of the kalām, whose limitations and uses we have already seen in the first chapter, and not into the realm of the mukāshafa, it still may raise some questions or reveal some positions that will serve our search for some self-disclosure concerning the true nature of the human soul. In addition, a thorough exposure to his theological discussions of the soul and the afterlife will assist us in piecing together the "stratified" layers of truth in reference to these subjects, layers of meaning that correspond to the stratified layers of religious discourse that we examined in the first chapter. For these reasons, then, we turn to the Qawā'id al-'aqā'id, being the second book of the Ihyā', and to al-Iqtiṣād fī 'l-ī'tiqād, which in many ways is an earlier and more detailed version of the Qawā'id.⁹⁹ Due to the similarity and

⁸⁸ Tahāfut, 80.

⁹⁹ Although book two of the Ihyā' bears the exact title promised in the Tahāfut, some see this promise better fulfilled by al-Iqtiṣād fī 'l-ī'tiqād, which seems to have been composed as a companion to the Tahāfut while Abū Ḥāmid was still teaching at the Niẓāmīya in Baghdad. To corroborate this theory, Marmura points out that al-Ghazālī states in the Iqtiṣād that the aim of
overlapping of the two works, we will consider them together in the third chapter.

the work is precisely "qawā'id al-‘aqā'id" – thus fulfilling the spirit of the promise rather than the letter. See Marmura, "Bodily Resurrection," 50-1.
CHAPTER THREE

AL-GHAZALI'S ASH'ARI APPROACH TO THE BODY-SOUL PROBLEM

At the beginning of his second preface to the Tahāfut, al-Ghazālī writes that one of the ways in which the Philosophers differ from their counterparts is in “sheer terminology” (لفظ مجرد).

Such as their calling the Fashioner of the universe (be He exalted) — according to their discourse — a jawhar. [This is done] in light of their understanding that that the jawhar is the existent not inhering in a substrate (لا في موضوع), that is, the self-sufficient [existent] having no need of a formative agent (موضوع يقوم) to establish it (قومه). They do not intend by “jawhar” that which occupies space (المتحيز), as is intended by their opponents. ¹

This statement is useful to us for two reasons: first, it shows that there is a general problem of equivocity surrounding the term jawhar (“substance” or “atom”) in the medieval Islamic milieu;² second, it reveals that al-Ghazālī’s own understanding of the term, insofar as he can be counted among the opponents of the philosophers, explicitly ties spatiality (and thus materiality) to the term. And this proves to be an essential yet problematic point as we proceed to examine his dogmatic theological treatments of the nature of the human soul.

In order for us to examine his kalāmī psychology, we must turn to his speculative

¹ Tahāfut, 41.

² “Substance” reflects the usage of the Islamic philosophical tradition, about which al-Ghazālī is speaking in the passage cited above, while “atom” reflects the signification common within the kalām circles. See A. Dhanani, The Physical Theory of Kalām (Leiden/ NY: EJ Brill, 1994), 55ff. Equivocity can be found even among the mutakallimūn, however, one example being the Mu'tazili theologian Mu'ammar (d.c. 835), an atomist who apparently held that the soul was a jawhar, but of a purely spiritual, non-material nature. See al-Ash'arī, Maqālāt al-Islāmīyīn, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul: 1930), 331-2; see also Marmura, “Bodily Resurrection,” 51-2.
explication of the created world, which must include the human soul and everything else that is other than God. Simply put, in the idiom of the Ash'arī mutakallimūn (among others), the created world reduces to atoms, bodies, and accidents. In the first of the four main points (الكتاب) of the Iqtisād, he writes,

We say: belonging to the creation of every created thing is a cause, and the [entire] universe (العالم) is a created thing. Hence, it necessarily follows from [this] that it must have a cause. Now by “universe” we mean each and every existent other than God, and by “each and every existent other than God” — be he exalted — we mean all of the bodies and their accidents. A detailed explanation of this is that we do not doubt the principle of existence; then we know that every existent either does or does not occupy space, and we call each space-occupying thing a “singular jawhar” when it contains no combination [to other jawhīr]. When it combines with another [atom], we call it a “body”. If [the existent] does not occupy space, either its existence requires a body in which to subsist, and we call [such existents] “accidents”, or [its existence] does not require [a body], and [this] is God — be He praised and exalted.  

In order to ensure clarity, he carefully defines his terms in the ensuing pages, and here he makes it plain that, when saying that the universe is created, “all we intend through [our use of the term] ‘the universe’ now is the bodies and the jawāhir (atoms) only.” Also, to avoid any misunderstanding about the spatiality of the jawāhir, he explains a few pages later that the jawhar, by necessity, is subject to motion and rest, which are observable, spatial events. Thus, while the spatial specificity is not part of the essence of the jawhar, spatiality is.

3 “Jawāhir” is the Arabic “broken” plural of jawhar.


5 Ibid., 59.

6 Ibid., 61.

7 Ibid., 64.
Thus, if one were to try to posit an immaterial soul in this theoretical context, it would have to fall under the category of accident; alternatively, were one to argue that the soul is a single jawhar, it would have to be spatial and therefore material in some respect, for all jawāhir are space-occupying. Indeed, from this passage and the ensuing pages, he leaves no room for a third alternative, namely an immaterial soul that is separate from God and yet is, at the same time, neither a jawhar (occupying space) nor an accident.

This preliminary consideration of the soul in the context of what we may call his "Ash'arī atomism" begets many questions: what about the angels? Are they material and spatial? Also, what about the spirit that continues to survive and remains conscious to suffer the torment of the grave and to be questioned by Munkar and Nakīr? What about the souls of the martyrs, which are said to be "living"—"and do not say of those who are slain in the way of Allah [that they are] dead; nay, they are alive, but ye perceive not." One also is left with the puzzle of the enigmatic āya (42) from sūrat al-Zumar (39),

Allah takes the souls (bin fai al-nafs) at the time of their death (hīn muta), and those that have not died [He takes] during their sleep, He holds on to those upon whom death has been decreed, and He sends the others [back] until an appointed time. Surely in that are signs for people who reflect.

If the soul is an accident, subsisting in and contingent upon the living body, how can it be taken separately each night and how can it "live" to experience the post-mortem events prior to the

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8 This is one of the theological positions mentioned in the Twentieth Discussion of the Tahāfut. See p. 242 and following. It is also the primary position advanced in the Iqtisād, as we will see shortly.

9 This will be explained below.

resurrection? Likewise, if the soul is material, how can these events be possible once the matter of the person is dead and decomposing?

Thus, if this is the true position espoused by al-Ghazālī in the Iqtisād, it is not a position free of problems, both philosophical and exegetical. There is also the inarguable fact that a change in the variable of time between the respective moments of death and resurrection poses a problem concerning the perfect and total identification of the living person (now deceased) with the resurrected person (yet to be). How can a belief in the “material soul” (which is subject to annihilation) or the identification of the soul with an accident inhering in the body accommodate these logical and exegetical difficulties?11

He does, toward the end of the Iqtisād, specifically in the discussion “Showing the Necessity of Believing in the Articles Conveyed by the Revealed Law” (الباب الثاني), make an effort to clear up these concerns. Here, the respective definitions of jawhār, body, and accident are applied in very significant and concrete ways. For example, al-Ghazālī dialectically poses to himself a question concerning the true nature of death and God’s resurrecting (تحميل) of that which has died.

If it were said, “so what do you say, do [both] the jawāhir and the accidents become annihilated and are then both restored together? Or are the accidents annihilated without the jawāhir [being destroyed] in which case only the accidents are then restored?” [To this] we say, “anything12 is possible. In the Revealed Law there is no conclusive indication (دليل قاطع) specifying one of

11 This is not to say that the belief in an immaterial soul makes all of these difficulties any more workable. For example, how can an immaterial soul “return” to the body in the grave and experience the torture promised there? Certainly this tradition assumes some kind of spatiality and materiality in connection with the human spirit or soul. See Marmura, “Bodily Resurrection,” 52.

12 The translation is literal, but the implication here is that “either alternative” is possible.
these two possibilities. The first of the two modes (وحدة الوجوهين) is that the accidents are annihilated while the body of the person remains preserved, in the form of earth ( بصورة التراب), for example. It would be [the case], then, that life, color, moisture, composition, shape (الهيئة), and the collectivity of [its] accidents would cease to exist, and the meaning of their "restoration" would thus be that all these very same accidents\(^1\) are returned to them [i.e. the bodies]. Or\(^2\) [it could be that] replicas of them are returned to [the bodies], for, according to us, the accident does not remain.\(^3\) And "life" is an accident; likewise, the existent (الوجود) is, according to us, a different accident in every moment (في كل ساعة). And the human being is that particular human being by virtue of his body, and he is one thing not by virtue of his accidents (for each accident that is renewed is other than the one before -- غير الآخر). Hence, positing [God’s] restoration of the accidents is not one of the conditions for the restoration [of the individual body]. We have only mentioned this because some of the friends have been led to believe that it is impossible [for God] to restore [the exact] accidents, which is false; however, the discourse [required] for the demonstration of its futility is long, and there is no need for it in light of our purpose [in writing] this.\(^4\)

Al-Ghazālī goes on to say that the second perspective on this issue of God’s restoration of the person is that “the bodies also become annihilated and are then restored through undergoing a second creation [ex nihilo].” When raising the related question as to how one would explain then how this “resurrected” being could be identified as the very same existent that had been and not merely a semblance of the former existent, al-Ghazālī explains that the essence of the annihilated existent remains in God’s knowledge and there is kept in two separate

\(^1\) All of the aforementioned accidents are individually repeated in the Arabic text. To avoid redundancy and to foster readability, then, I have slightly abridged the Arabic.

\(^2\) Following the Ankara edition, we read “or” (أو) instead of “and” (و).

\(^3\) According to the Ash’arite occasionalism, accidents must be recreated in every successive moment in order for there to be any semblence of continuity in their existence. See Majid Fakhri’s Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), esp. 56-82.

parts: that which had been proper to it in terms of its existence and that which had not belonged to it in terms of its existence.

In the same way, al-Ghazālī explains, nonexistence (العدم) is eternally divided into that which will have existence and into that which God knows will not exist. Thus, [God’s] restoration here means the putting of existence in the place of the [state of] “nonexistence” which had itself been preceded by existence.

Although there are many salient points to be highlighted in the passage cited above, both exegetical and philosophical, the first is al-Ghazālī’s reluctance to go into too much speculative detail, a clear indication that his kalām is determined to remain within its proper confines -- the consolidation and clear articulation of basic belief. Next, we might note a somewhat curious change of terminology in the very middle of the passage. In the beginning, the discussion is about accidents and jawāhīr, and, as we follow him through the paragraph, the discussion turns to one of accidents and bodies: with no further mentioning of the jawāhīr. This could mean a couple of things: 1) that al-Ghazālī is using the terms jism and jawhar synonymously, and thus the discussion never strays from the initial question of jawāhīr (which we must take to be contiguous) and accidents; or 2) that he naturally and unconsciously slips into discussing the jawāhīr as they are universally found in the natural world, i.e. in various states of bodily conjunction; or 3) that he has shifted the discussion to bodies so as to avoid dealing with the more complicated and admittedly more speculative question of the fate of the jawāhīr during and after death.

Given what we have seen earlier in the Iqtisād, it seems highly unlikely that al-Ghazālī would use two such formally distinct concepts in an equivocal way. So let us rule that out for
the time being. The second alternative is quite possible, especially in light of the fact that this is clearly written to be a popular work. If we were to follow the third possibility, we would find little alternative but to say that he is being evasive about the jawāhir. Why? Is it possible that al-Ghazālī equates the essence of the human being with a single, non-corporeal jawhar and does not wish to elaborate given what he has said about the falāsifa and their doctrine of the immaterial rational soul? Some scholars have argued along similar lines.

These questions are puzzling, but he seems to have anticipated many of them, and so, when one takes the ensuing discussion into account, there seems to be very little room for such speculation about an immaterial jawhar. Reminding us that the Tahāfut was about the demolition of certain doctrines rather than the construction or putting forth of his own doctrines, al-Ghazālī briefly recalls his lengthy refutation of the philosophical doctrines:

For the sake of showing the futility of their doctrine, we went along with the presumption [that] the soul remains [after death], a soul deemed by them to be utterly non-spatial, and the presumption that the returning of [the soul’s] management of the body is the same regardless of whether it is the very same body or a different body. But that is [just] a [way of] forcing upon them [something] that does not concur with what we believe.

Further, he mentions their belief that the human being is a particular human being by virtue of his soul (نفسه), that his occupation of space [in a body] is to be considered as an accident belonging to him, and that the person’s body is an instrument (الل) of the soul.

He writes,

after their belief in the remaining of the soul [after death], we forced upon them

\[17\] In contemporary studies on al-Ghazālī, this question has been largely raised by Richard Frank. More will be said about his interpretation of al-Ghazālī below.

the necessity of believing in [God's] restoration, i.e. the return of the soul to the management of some body. But [such] theorizing now in the analysis of this chapter [would entail] researching the spirit, the soul, life and its verities, and [our treatment of] basic dogma (الاعتقادات) will not bear plunging into these extreme heights concerning the intelligibles... 19

Thus, there is no need in this work, he says, to delve into such theoretical issues -- the very issues that his shifting away from the jawhar seems to raise in the passage cited above.

"What we have mentioned is sufficient for the showing of the middle road in belief, for the sake of [affirming] belief in what has been conveyed by the Revealed Law." 20 Our questions, however, not yet fully dispelled, dangle and wait for some fuller treatment.

A bit further in the discussion, specifically in his explanation of the interrogation of the soul by Munkar and Nakīr, he explains,

As for the questioning [of the soul] by Munkar and Nakīr, it is a truth, and believing in it is obligatory according to what has been conveyed by the Revealed Law concerning it and [because of] its being possible. For that [interrogation] requires nothing from them [Munkar and Nakīr] except that they make [the dead person] understand, [either] via sound or via something other than sound, for the only thing that is required from him [i.e. the deceased] is comprehension. And the understanding necessitates only [some kind of] life. But the human being does not understand with all of his body; rather, [he comprehends their questioning through] a part (جزء) of the inner aspect of his heart. 21 And the reviving of a part that can understand the interrogation and respond is [logically]

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

21 Much more will be said about this "part of the inner aspect" of the heart in the following chapter. It is worthy of note here that the term "part" (جزء) was a technical term synonymous with "atom" (jawhar) among the Muʿtazīlī and Ashʿarī mutakallimūn. See A. Dhanani's The Physical Theory of Kalām, 55-62.
possible, doable.\textsuperscript{23} Acknowledging that we neither see nor hear Munkar and Nakır, al-Ghazālī argues that no one was able to see or hear Gabriel when he appeared and spoke to the Prophet, and yet “one believing in the Revealed Law cannot deny that.”\textsuperscript{24} Still, this does not really answer our fundamental question: what exactly is this “part of the interior aspect of the heart”? Is it material? And what exactly is the “interior aspect” ($bātin$) of the heart? Is it material and (thus) spatial? Even though these questions come naturally and we must assume that he knew they were there, he does not tell us any more in the Iqṭīṣād.\textsuperscript{25} Given what he has told us prior to this, we must assume that this “part” ($juc$) is material and space-occupying in some way,\textsuperscript{26} for he does not treat it as an accident inhering in the body; rather, he treats it as part of the “heart” — the psycho-spiritual core to which the very next chapter is exclusively dedicated.

In al-Risāla al-qudsīya, which was written several years after al-Ghazālī’s departure from Baghdad,\textsuperscript{27} and yet was considered by al-Ghazālī himself to be simpler and more popular

\textsuperscript{22} “Able to be done” is a more formal rendering, but I think the colloquial Americanism suits the Arabic phrase perfectly, and thus I opt for this vernacular rendering.

\textsuperscript{23} Al-Iqṭīṣād, 236-7 (Ankara edition, 217).

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{25} He does, however, tell us more in other books, such as in his account of Munkar and Nakır in the final book of the Iḥyā’; the Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa mā ba‘dahu (vol. 6, esp. p. 143). We do not count this, however, as part of his kalam discourse, and so we treat it in the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{26} Indeed, his usage of this particular term, when viewed in the light of standard kalām usage, gives weight to a material, atomic interpretation of his kalāmi psycholgy. Again, see A. Dhanani’s The Physical Theory of Kalām, op. cit.

than the *Iqtiṣād*, there is little indication that al-Ghazālī made any significant departures from what we have already seen. As this work is woven into fabric of the *Qawā'id*, there is no need to treat it separately, and so we proceed now to the second book of the *Iḥyā*.

In the *Kitāb Qawā'id al-aqā'id*, which was written well after both of the dogmatic texts under discussion, we find al-Ghazālī’s treatment of the *jawhar* to lack little in terms of specificity and univocity. Indeed, there seems to be nothing left to fuel any lingering suspicions of an immaterial soul – at least as far as his *kalām* is concerned. Here, as in the *Tahāfut* and the *Iqtiṣād*, an explicit and necessary connection between the *jawhar* and spatiality is struck, and this point is made in several places.

For example, in the third chapter, specifically in his commentary on the ten principles entailed in the knowledge of God’s essence, he says that

The fourth principle is the knowledge that He – be He exalted – is in no way a *jawhar* [thus] occupying space; on the contrary, exalted and sanctified is He above any connection with spatiality. The demonstration/proof of this is that every *jawhar* occupies space and is characterized by its spatial limits (*biḥayyīzīhi*), in which it must be either resting or from which it must be moving; thus it is never free of some movement or rest, both of which are created [states]. And that which is not free of created phenomena must itself be a created phenomenon. Were a *jawhar* [thus] occupying space to be conceived as an eternal thing, the eternity of the universe’s *jawāhir* would be thinkable. If one called Him by the term "*jawhar*" without intending by it "something occupying space" he would be mistaken as far as his terminology goes but not in his meaning.\(^{29}\)

\(^{28}\) See his ranking of the dogmatic works in *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfaq al-Jādīda, 1988), 21. The *Iqtiṣād* seems to be the most sophisticated of these works in his eyes; however, although the *Qawā'id* contains the contents of the simpler *Risāla*, it stands as being second only to the *Iqtiṣād* in complexity and detail.

\(^{29}\) *Qawā'id*, 139. This accords with the *Tahāfut* passage with which we opened the chapter. See *supra*.  

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He continues to explain the necessary conclusion of this principle: that God can in no way be a body, because bodies are composed (mu'allaf)\textsuperscript{30} of atoms (jawāhir), which we have seen already to be bound by spatiality. In addition, he explains that

it is impossible for the jawhar to be free of separation [from one another], combination, motion, rest, shape, and measure; and [each] of these is called a created occurrence (al-hudūh). Were it permissible to believe that the Fashioner of the universe was a body, it would be permissible to believe [that] divinity belongs to the sun and the moon or something else from among the categories of bodies. So if some insolent fellow had the audacity to call Him -- be He exalted -- a body without intending by that the composition of jawāhir, that would be wrong [usage] of the name, in spite of his hitting upon [the mark in] negating the meaning of "body".\textsuperscript{31}

There can be no doubt that materiality and the occupation of space are necessarily attributed to the jawhar in his kalāmī terminology. The first line of this selection seems to be in accord with one of the doctrines of al-Ash'arī: namely, that the jawhar never exist in isolation from one another, for they are always in the process of adjoining themselves with one another and separating from one another. Such is the jawhar as we find it in nature. The import of this particular Ash'arī doctrine will make itself clear as the study unfolds.

In light of some of the theories we have perused earlier in this chapter, we might ask another question: does this atomic materiality apply to all creation? What of the angels and the heavens? Certainly these were the cases involving ambiguity earlier on.

In his exposition of the true creed at the beginning of the Qawâ'id, which is not taken from the Risāla, specifically in his discussion of the nature of the created universe, he leaves little room for doubt:

\textsuperscript{30} This is the classic Ash'arī definition of "body". See A. Dhanani, Physical Theory, 136.

\textsuperscript{31} Qawâ'id, 139-40.
Everything besides Him — human, jinn, angel, devil, heaven, earth, animal, plant, mineral, atom, accident, that which is perceived by the intellect and that which is sensed — is created, absolutely originated by His Power (biqudratihi) following a state of nonexistence. He established it in the way something that had not been anything at all is established. This is because He was, in eternity, an existent alone; none other than Him existed with Him. After that [state] He generated the creation as a manifestation of His power...

In the structure of the first half of this paragraph, there is a movement from specific created beings to increasingly general categories, culminating in “atom (jawhar) and accident, that which is perceived [by the intellect] and that which is sensed ...” In our interpretation of the passage, then, we understand these final categories to be all-embracing, thus summing up and magnifying the divine qudra, which is the real focus of the passage. Certainly, were we to read this passage in the light of what we have seen in the Iqtiṣād, it would be taken for granted that “atoms and accidents” sum up the entirety of creation. The question there, i.e. in the Iqtiṣād, had pertained to the exact definition of the jawhar, a question that the Qawā‘id seems not to tolerate.

Thus, in his somewhat poetic explication of the divine transcendence (tanzīh), al-Ghazālī writes

Surely He is in no way [associated] with a body thus having form, nor with an atom thus being delineated, measured. He does not resemble the bodies — not in measurability, nor in divisibility. And surely He is not [associated] with any atom — they do not inhere in Him — nor with any accident — they do not inhere in Him [either]. No, He does not resemble any existent, and no existent resembles Him. “There is nothing like unto Him.” Nor is He like unto anything, for He is not delineated by [any] scale, and He is not encompassed by the quarters of space...

In his explication of the post-mortem interrogation by Munkar and Nakīr, he really repeats what

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32 Ibid., 117.

33 Ibid, 118.
he has already said in the *Iqtisād*, explaining that "one of the parts" of the individual is revived for the tasks of hearing and responding.\(^{34}\)

Some scholars, after having examined his psychological statements in the *Iqtisād* and other *kalām* works, have recently raised the question as to whether he was truly Ash'arī in his *kalāmī* views concerning the soul.\(^{35}\) As an attempt to clear up this question, let us briefly review just what the basic Ash'arī view of the soul entails, and then, by comparing the Ash'arī doctrine to what we have seen of his statements in both the *Iqtisād* and the *Qawā'id*, we can perhaps shed some light on this question.

According to the traditional Ash'arī understanding, the term "jawhar" denotes "atom", which is a single, indivisible existent having volume and thus occupying space.\(^{36}\) "Bodies," by contrast, are those things which are composite, meaning either individual atoms in a state of conjunction with/adjunction to other atoms or, alternatively, two (and only two) atoms "that are immediately adjacent or contiguous to one another."\(^{37}\) This simple distinction, then, was somewhat complicated by a standing disagreement among the early Ash'arī masters, some (such as al-Juwaynī and his student al-Anṣārī) claiming that a single atom conjoined to another

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\(^{34}\) Ibid., 152.

\(^{35}\) Namely Richard Frank and Kojiro Nakamura, both of whom will be considered in the course of this chapter.

\(^{36}\) For example, al-Juwaynī's *Irshād* qualifies the term atom as "that which occupies space". See Richard Frank's "Bodies and Atoms: the Ash'arite Analysis" in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy* (Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani), ed. Michael E. Marmura (Albany: SUNY, 1984), 40. Similarly, his *Shāmil* defines the *jawhar* as a volume (*ḥajm*). See Frank, *al-Ghazālī*, 53 (bottom) - 54.

\(^{37}\) Frank, "Bodies," p. 53.
became a single body, the conjunction thus being between two atom bodies, while others (such as Ibn Furak and al-Qushayrī) claimed that two such conjoined atoms formed together a single composite body.

In any case, in spite of this difference of opinion over the lines of demarcation between the technical terms "body" and "atom", the Ash'arī masters generally agreed that the two terms were formally distinct, that the term "body" properly denoted the presence of conjunction or combination, whereas "atom" implied the discrete, uncontiguous existent. Further, they agreed that all atoms were "equal to one another in corporeity and in occupying space..." and thus belonged to a single class, each member being "essentially similar (mumā thil) to every other." 38

Turning to the more general question of "the world" (al-ālām) and its composition, the Ashʿarī masters agreed that by "the world" was meant all that was not God, namely atoms and accidents. Some (such as al-Juwaynī and al-Anṣārī) added "bodies" to this formal definition, though this is certainly implicit in the earlier definitions of al-Baghdādī, al-Qushayrī and others, 39 since "bodies" are nothing other than atoms in a particular state or modality, as we have seen above. Between the bi and tripartite definitions, then, no substantial difference is noted among them.

Thus, according to this Ashʿarī theory, the soul must needs be a jawhar or atom; and life is an accident that falls into a reified "state of nonexistence" (as-hall) upon the body's death, which is itself an annihilation or a "falling into a state of nonexistence" for the body. This total annihilation, however, does not denote a loss of individual identity, for this is preserved in the

38 Ibid., 44.

39 For the attribution of these doctrines to the individuals named, see Frank, "Bodies," 39-41.
divine knowledge, even while the individual - life and limb - is utterly annihilated. Hence, “resurrection” is God’s recreation of the very same individual with the very same identity, i.e. the very same body with the very same or similar accidents, one of which is its very “life”.\footnote{See ibid., 57-9. For a more detailed exposition of this Ash’ārī doctrine, see Gimaret’s chapter on “life” in his \textit{La doctrine d’al-Ash’ārī} (Paris: Le Cerf, 1990).}

From the passages we have examined, it can be seen quite clearly that al-Ghazālī is employing theological terminology very much in accordance with the traditional Ash’ārī usage. This is particularly true in the case of the \textit{jawhar}.

Another view is that, although it is not disputed that al-Ghazālī was trained and was widely regarded as an Ash’ārī,\footnote{And proclaimed thus by later philosophers and theologians, such as Ibn Rushd. See his \textit{Tahāfut al-tahāfut}, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut, 1930), esp. “Ash’ariyya” in Index A.} the extent to which his personal doctrine of created beings followed that of the Ash’ārī school is troubled with ambiguity and begs investigation.\footnote{See Frank, \textit{Al-Ghazālī}, 48 and following, as well as his “Bodies,” 39-53.}

Statements in the \textit{Iqtisād} affirm that, in using the term \textit{al-‘ālam}, he likewise intends all that is not God, i.e. \textit{jawāhīr}, bodies, and accidents.\footnote{This itself is a synthesis of closely placed statements within the \textit{Iqtisād}. See Frank, \textit{Al-Ghazālī}, 51-2.} This is reiterated in the \textit{Qawā’id}, where he says that “the world is made up of atoms (\textit{jawāhīr}), accidents, and bodies...” and that God neither resembles nor is resembled by them. This is hardly striking, since here he clearly is following the idiom of his Ash’ārī forebears and colleagues. What is argued to be less clear and more difficult to identify are the intentions underlying these technical terms shared by al-Ghazālī and the rest of his Ash’ārī \textit{confrères}.

\begin{footnotesize}  
\begin{enumerate}
\item And proclaimed thus by later philosophers and theologians, such as Ibn Rushd. See his \textit{Tahāfut al-tahāfut}, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut, 1930), esp. “Ash’ariyya” in Index A.
\item See Frank, \textit{Al-Ghazālī}, 48 and following, as well as his “Bodies,” 39-53.
\item This itself is a synthesis of closely placed statements within the \textit{Iqtisād}. See Frank, \textit{Al-Ghazālī}, 51-2.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Most critical of these is the meaning of the *jawhar*. Indeed, quite surprising in light of what we have seen from the *Tahāfut*, this scholarly view raises the question of equivocity in al-Ghazālī's own use of this term. For example, it is argued that nowhere in the *Iqtisād* or any other of the dogmatic works does he attribute volume (الحجم) to the *jawhar*, this deletion being a departure from the definition of al-Juwaynī. And, although he does affirm that the *jawāhir* “form a single class...” and that “occupying space” may properly be attributed to *jawāhir*, it is argued that he suggests the possibility of *jawāhir* inhering in noncorporeal substrates: that is, or must be, *jawāhir* subsisting in themselves. This would account for existents that do not occupy space — presumably existents such as angels, whose nature he refrains from elaborating upon in the *Iqtisād*.

According to Frank's reading,

al-Ghazālī conspicuously avoids asserting the traditional thesis that created beings must either occupy space or reside in subjects that occupy space (*imma mutaḥayyizun aw-ḥallun fihī*), as does al-Juwaynī, who argues against the notion of the rational soul and the separated intelligences as beings that are not located in space (*Ikhtiṣār*, fol. 206r). On the contrary...in *Iqtisād*... he makes a point of eliminating “occupies space” (*mutaḥayyiz*) from the definition of *jawhar*, though he avoids any discussion of immaterial beings.

Thus, while generally holding to the traditional Ash'arī terms and positions in the

44 See Frank, *Al-Ghazālī*, 53. The possibility that al-Ghazālī might deem *haym* redundant and thus unnecessary (given his use of *mutaḥayyiz*) is not considered in this analysis.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., 55.
aforementioned works, Frank argues that al-Ghazālī makes some subtle departures — typically not conspicuous departures of commission but rather the more subtle departures of omission. In these passages, while he clearly affirms that a jawhar can occupy space, he does not explicitly deny that a jawhar may also belong to that class of existents that do not occupy space, a class which would presumably include the angelic ranks. In short, Frank argues that al-Ghazālī seems here to leave the door open to at least two classes or modalities of jawāhir, the material and the immaterial.49

Reading other non-kalām texts into this ambiguity or intentional equivocation, Frank is tempted to associate this inferred “immaterial atom” with the rational soul or heart treated more extensively by al-Ghazālī in other, later texts which espouse the “heart” as the predominant psychological idiom. Having carefully examined in the first chapter the various genres employed by al-Ghazālī and the respective ends for which each is suited, we are somewhat more cautious and reluctant to cross the boundaries that al-Ghazālī has set and to tie genre-specific statements in one group of texts to genre-specific statements in another group. This does not wholly discount Frank’s hypothesis, but it does slow it down, cautioning against a non-contextual reading. Even if we were to step out of our carefully drawn parameters for a moment and follow Frank to consider this possibility, it would raise questions rather than resolve them. For example, what would be the nature of the conjunction (الإفتراض) between such a single,

49 This hypothesis would link al-Ghazālī with earlier figures, such as the Mu’tazili Mu’ammar, whom we mentioned above. As a corroboration to his theory, Frank sees al-Ghazālī’s comments in the Mi’yar on the use of the term “accident” by his mutakallimūn colleagues as possible indicators of his belief in more than one class of jawhar. See al-Ghazālī, 53 (top). More will be said of this below.
immaterial, self-subsisting atom and the human body? And, in light of this conjunction, would we then be forced to call it a body (atombody) by virtue of this conjunction? And, if so, would it then go from being a body to being a self-subsisting immaterial substance upon its separation from the body at death and/or sleep?

We must remember that al-Ghazālī admittedly wrote the *kalām* works to consolidate, strengthen, and protect standard Sunni beliefs.\(^\text{50}\) They were not written to explore in minute detail points of speculative interest or controversy, an abuse of *kalām* that he criticizes in the *Book of Knowledge* and other works; indeed, he often cuts potentially complicated discussions short, saying that his purpose is not to indulge in extensive speculation or research. Our reading strongly suggests that these texts leave little room for ambiguity and reveal that, at least as far as his *kalāmi* psychology is concerned, al-Ghazālī may well be regarded as an Ashʿarī, using standard Ashʿarī atomism to explicate the creed. The question of the soul's true nature he will not entertain, but he does make it plain that right belief dictates that one believe in a soul that is bound by material constraints, as indeed are all created things.

Frank's reading and resulting speculation thus seem to miss the mark, to make too much of the negative space of what al-Ghazālī does *not* say. We might suggest that the absence of any attribution of volume to the *jawhar* may just be due to the fact that al-Ghazālī thought it redundant to posit both space-occupying (*mutaḥayyīz*) and volume (*ḥajm*) in the same text, for authors often refrain from explicitly stating what is taken for granted. In any case, such an "omission" can hardly be considered a significant departure from his teacher, al-Juwaynī. Also, drawing conclusions based on what an author does not say is precarious at best.

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\(^{50}\) For example, see *Qawā'id*, 136.
Turning to the position of Professor Nakamura, we encounter a similar tendency to overlook context when examining aspects of al-Ghazâlî’s thought, and here we will pay particular attention to his evaluation of al-Ghazâlî’s theory of the soul. Conceding that the \textit{lqtis\={a}d} is a perfect representative of “the atomism of traditional Ash’arism”, he invokes passages from the \textit{Tah\={a}fut} to cast doubt on the extent to which al-Ghazâlî actually believed in the Ash’arî atomic psychology. The texts he selects from the \textit{Tah\={a}fut}, however, simply show that a full consideration of the (Ash’arî) atomic psychology vis-a-vis the philosophical psychology would take long and intricate argumentation, too long and too intricate for al-Ghazâlî’s purpose in writing the book. Nakamura himself is forced to admit that the selected texts cannot be taken “as clear evidence that Ghazâlî was critical of atomism itself and forsook that dogma, but” he continues, “he might have felt that the theory of traditional atomism was going bankrupt.” This disjunction is more an anticipation of other, non-\textit{kal\={a}mî} texts than it is a reflection upon the \textit{Tah\={a}fut}. And that is well, for — even if we found \textit{Tah\={a}fut} passages that were far more compelling than the rather unpointed ones he presents — we have already shown how unreliable the \textit{Tah\={a}fut} is as an example of al-Ghazâlî’s true position on anything.

This final point holds for the one statement in the \textit{Tah\={a}fut} that expresses an openness to the philosophers’ belief in “the soul’s being a self-subsistent substance”, a statement that Nakamura rightly notes is ruled out by a subsequent statement in the \textit{lqtis\={a}d}. Nakamura goes on

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item See his “Was Ghazâlî an Ash’arite?”, esp. 12-21.
  \item Ibid., 12.
  \item Ibid., 14.
  \item Ibid., 15-16.
\end{itemize}

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to raise one of the very questions that strike to the heart of our own study: namely, whether or not the *Iqtiṣād* truly reflects al-Ghazālī’s personal position on the nature of the soul. He is right to note the tension between the *kalāmī* and non-*kalāmī* texts within al-Ghazālī’s corpus, but whether or not he resolves it correctly is a question that we cannot answer in this chapter, for it will depend upon a careful weighing of several texts from a different genre, texts that will be considered in the subsequent chapters. Still, it seems both timely and apt to summarize his hypothesis, so that we may bear it in mind as we journey forward.

In short, Nakamura follows Ibn Ṭufayl’s lead and accuses al-Ghazālī of upholding a double or two-faced confession in the case of the soul’s true nature: one official (Ashʿarī) atomic confession for the general public and a private (philosophical) confession that he saved exclusively for the elite. Comparing al-Ghazālī’s psychological stance to his theory of “optimism” in this respect, Nakamura writes,

> The teachings expressed in the *Iqtiṣād* seem to be his official viewpoint as an orthodox theologian on behalf of the common people and the theologians... we may conclude that Ghazālī had two standpoints from a fairly early period: one was the official view of Ashʿarism and the other was the teachings for the elite (for example, physical and sensuous pleasures and pains in the Hereafter belong to the former, and intellectual and spiritual joys and griefs to the latter, in contrast to the philosophers who deny bodily resurrection). That is to say, Ghazālī officially supports the traditional Ashʿarite view of the soul, while he is inclined privately or unofficially to the philosophical view of the soul (though not in philosophical terms)...  

He seals his argument with the suggestion that this second, elite, unofficial, philosophical psychology is none other than that of Ibn Sīnā, as articulated in his “Risāla fi maʿrifat al-nafs al-

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55 Ibid., 16.
nātiqa wa-ahwālī-hā⁵⁶ among other places. Nakamura thus suggests that the only real
difference between the two, on a private level, is a difference of terms.⁵⁷ Although a detailed
consideration of Ibn Sīnā’s psychology and eschatology is outside the scope of this study, some
attention will be devoted to this question in the final chapter. For the time being, we can neither
affirm nor dispute Nakamura’s reading, and so we must bear it in mind as we proceed.

At least as far as his kalāmī formulation of the soul is concerned, we seem to have won
some clarity: al-Ghazālī upholds the traditional Ash’arī atomic model — not just for the soul, but
for the entire created universe, including the soul.⁵⁸ On this, even Nakamura agrees. One might
think, then, that our riddle is on its way to being solved. Our investigation of these dogmatic
theological texts, however, has really done little more than return us to the beginning, for we
must remember that al-Ghazālī himself cautions his reader against overstepping the limits of any
science. And the science of kalām, he says, while being useful for disputing heretics and for
confirming basic belief, has nothing to do with the investigation of the true natures of things.

⁵⁶ Taken from his Alhwāl al-nafs (Cairo: ‘Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1952), p. 183.
⁵⁷ Nakamura, 19-20.
⁵⁸ Indeed, there are many other areas in which his “Ash’arism” can be seen, if by Ash’arism
we mean a theological (kalām-based) adherence to the doctrines of occasionalist causality, kasb,
the creation of the universe (in time) ex-nihilo, the reality of “seeing” God, and the belief that
the Divine attributes are additional to the Divine Essence. These, in addition to his unwavering
advocacy for the other traditional articles of faith and the requirements of the Revealed Law,
suggest a general yet strong affiliation with the “school” of the Ash’arīya, especially in relation
to his kalām writings. Such an affiliation would never preclude the presence of unique insights,
formulations, and other novel non-kalāmī features present within his corpus, particularly in
works of a non-kalāmī nature. This holds for many of the Ash’arīya, both before and after him,
who were theologians and thinkers in their own right and not merely uncritical vessels of al-
Ash’arī’s teachings. If, however, we were to define the term more narrowly as a kalām “school”
committed to the speculative explication and development of the creed, a project that al-Ghazālī
censures as an abuse and misuse of al-kalām, then we would have to count him out.
Again, in the Book of Knowledge, he writes

As for al-kalām, its purpose is the protection of the articles of faith, which the people of the Sunna from among the righteous forebears — and no others — have transmitted. Anything beyond that (in kalām) is seeking to unveil the true natures of things (kashf haqāʿiq al-ashyāʿ) in an improper way (من غير طريكتها). The purpose of safeguarding the Sunna is to attain, through a concise belief, a limited degree of [the kashf], which is the extent to which we have laid it out in the Kitāb qawāʾid al-ʿaqāʾid from the entirety of this book [i.e. from the entire Iḥyāʿ].

Similarly, as we saw in the first chapter, he can be even more stern when it comes to putting the practitioners of the kalām in their place:

Of religion, the theologian has nothing save the creed that he shares with the rest of the common people, [the] creed which belongs to the actions external to the heart and the tongue. He only is distinguished from the common person through the craft of argumentation and protection.

As for the [servant’s] gnosis (معرفة) of God — be He exalted — and His attributes and acts and all to which we point in the knowledge of the Unveiling, it is not attainable through the science of kalām. On the contrary, al-kalām is almost a veil [draped] over it and a barrier [keeping one] away from it. Rather its attainment is by way of concerted striving [in the way of God] which God — be He magnified — has made a preliminary to guidance inasmuch as He — be He exalted — said, “and those who strive for Us, We will surely guide them in Our ways. Surely God is with those who work righteousness” [29:69].

Thus, from his own admission it would follow that searching the dogmatic works for esoteric truth is a futile exercise, for al-kalām is a totally inappropriate forum for such investigations.

Indeed, we must begin our investigation again on more fertile soil, where the true natures of things may be discussed, albeit in a way that-withholds more than it reveals. We shift then to works that employ the “heart” as their primary psychological idiom, a shift of terms that signals a shift of genre, from common belief to the experiential knowledge of the Unveiling.

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59 al-ʿilm, 55.

60 Ibid., 34.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE HEART (القلب): AL-GHAZALI’S MYSTICAL APPROACH TO THE BODY-SOUL PROBLEM

We now move into al-Ghazālī’s more speculative, theoretical discussions on human nature, and the majority of these are found scattered throughout the voluminous Iḥyāʾ, beginning with the very first book and concluding with the very last. More specifically, we will be looking closely at three Iḥyāʾ texts in the course of this discussion: namely, the Book of Knowledge (Kitāb al-ʿilm), the Commentary on the Wonders of the Heart (Kitāb sharḥ ‘ajāʾib al-qalb), and the Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife (Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa mā baʿdahu). And, no sooner do we enter into the first of these than one of the core verities asserts itself: whatever else this true human nature may be, it is and must be rational. Al-Ghazālī’s numerous statements in the Book of Knowledge are very clear on this point. Early on in the book, in the discussion about the “Virtue of Teaching”, he tells us that

It is not hidden that the religious sciences, i.e. the fiqh of the next world², are grasped through the perfection of the intellect and the purity of the intelligence. Now the intellect is the noblest of the human being’s attributes, as its [forthcoming] explication will bring [forth], since through it the trust (الثقة) of God is accepted and through it one can attain [the station of] proximity to God, be He praised.

And as for the all-pervasiveness of [its] benefit, it is not subject to doubt: for its benefit and fruit is the felicity of the next world.

As for the nobility of [its] receptacle (المحل), how can it be hidden when

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¹ This, of course, does not mean that our discussion will be limited to these texts, for other relevant texts, such as the Book of Forbearance and Thanksgiving, the Book of Love, Yearning, Intimate Friendship, and Contentment and the Book of Contemplation, will also emerge in the course of this chapter.

² It should be noted how careful he is here to clarify that, by the “religious sciences”, he intends an inner jurisprudence, a science of formation that is one of the sciences of the next world, and not the sciences more commonly represented by the term.

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the teacher treats the hearts and the souls of people? [This] class of humanity [form] the noblest existent on earth, and the noblest part (ٖ٧) from among the jawāhir of the human being is his heart. The teacher is the one occupied with its perfection, its [complete] exposure, its purification, and its direction toward the [ultimate] proximity to God — be He mighty, sublime.  

In the course of this passage, he shifts without hesitation or transition from “intellect” (عَلَم) to the term “heart” (قَلْب) in such a way as to give his reader the impression that the two terms are being used interchangeably. He seems to take no notice of this himself, however, and leaves the reader at this point with a dangling question about their equivalence, a question that will resurface many times and will ultimately be answered later in the Book of Knowledge and its sister books of the Ḥiyā'. However, as we will see in the unfolding of this chapter, al-Ghazālī’s answers typically leave us with questions, and this equivalence he strikes between the intellect and the heart still leaves us in the dark concerning precise nature of the heart (or intellect). Here, for example, the heart is referred to as a “part” (juz') of the jawāhir that make up the person: a reference that, while consistent with the kalāmī categories examined in the previous chapter, will prove somewhat puzzling as we explore more thoroughly his position on the heart’s true nature.

Earlier in the same book, in the section expounding upon “the Virtue of Knowledge”, he recalls the words of Faṭḥ al-Mawṣili: “does not the sick man die when food and drink are withheld from him for three days?... So too the heart, if wisdom and knowledge are withheld from it for three days, it will die.” Al-Ghazālī then adds,

..he spoke truly. Wisdom and knowledge are the nourishment of the heart, and through them [it takes] its life, just as food is the nourishment of the body. The

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3 al-‘ilm, 22.
heart of the one who has lost knowledge is sick and its death is certain. However, he will not sense [the heart’s sickness and imminent death], since love of the world and his occupation with it paralyze his [inner] sensations.

In these and countless other passages, the heart is not treated in a bodily way, and knowledge – its “food” – is depicted as the means to eternal life and the stuff of eternal happiness. Early on in the Book of Knowledge, he corroborates this further by saying,

if you look into knowledge, you will see it as something enjoyable in itself, and you will find it [to be] a means to the abode of the next world and [to] its felicity and [also] a means to the [station of] proximity to God – be He exalted. One cannot attain [this proximity] save through [knowledge]. Now eternal felicity is the greatest thing properly belonging to the human being (في حق الإدّم), and the most excellent thing is that which is the means to it. And one shall not attain [such felicity] save through knowledge and works (العمل); and [yet] one can only get to works through the knowledge of how [they are to be performed].

The term “knowledge” here is used to mean both the practical and theoretical dimensions of the mind’s highest and most fecund activity. These two kinds of knowledge stand in a hierarchical relationship to one another: the theoretical is clearly superior to the practical but is, at the same time, dependent on it. This is a crucial point that he makes again and again throughout the Iḥyāʿ. This provides for us a model in which to cast and better understand the relationship between the respective sciences of Right Practice and of the Unveiling. The latter, being the more theoretical, is certainly deemed superior to its praxis-oriented sister, and yet it is, at the

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4 More literally, “necessary” (لازيم).
5 Al-ʿilm, 15.
6 Ibid., 21.
7 And it is an observation shared by many scholars of al-Ghazālī. For example, see Umaruddin’s Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazālī (Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf, 1962, 1970), esp. 102-111 and 260-end. In a way, the entire book is a detailed explication of this single point. Also, see Lazarus-Yafeh, 359-363.
same time, absolutely dependent upon it. This dependence is not completely one-sided, however, as there are also key points in the science of Right Practice, he says, that cannot be grasped save through a measured dose of the Unveiling, but such areas are relatively few and far between. We will touch upon the relation between these two interdependent ways of knowing again as the study unfolds.

Returning to the nature of the heart or intellect, which is or must be the seat of both the practical and theoretical sciences, he provides some further elaboration near the end of the book, specifically in the seventh chapter, “On the Intellect: Its Nobility and Reality and Divisions”:

Know that this is among the things which do not require one to take pains in bringing it to light, especially in light of the fact that the nobility of knowledge was made clear in respect to the [noble nature of the] intellect. The intellect is the spring and starting point of knowledge [as well as] its foundation, and knowledge flows from it as the fruit comes from the tree and light from the sun and vision from the eye. How then can that which is the means for felicity in [both] this world and the next not be honored? Or how can it be doubted when [even] the beast, with [all] its shortcoming in discernment, becomes timid [before] the intellect, to the extent that even the greatest of beasts in terms of size and the most severe in terms of [inflicting] harm and the most powerful in terms of attack will, when it sees the image of a human being, become timid [before] it and be afraid of it...9

He continues in this vein, mentioning how the primitive nomads among the Turks, Kurds, and Arabs will naturally respect their leaders (mashāyikh) by virtue of their vast experience, which al-Ghazālī calls the “fruit” of the intellect. And so he comes to the rebellious Arabs (المعاندين), who initially came to the Prophet with the intention of killing him:

8 See, for example, his statement in Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa l-tawakkul (vol. 5), 118, where he explains that “some of the sciences of the Unveiling have a direct bearing on works, through the mediation of the [knowledge of] the states, and only through them can the science of Right Practice be made perfect.”

9 Al-‘ilm, 108.
When their eyes fell upon him and they rejoiced\(^1\) at [the sight of] his gracious countenance, they were in awe of him, and there appeared to them that which was glimmering on the ornament of his face of the light of prophecy, even though that was an inner thing (بُطُول) within himself\(^2\), hidden within [him] in the same way the intellect [is hidden within the self].\(^3\)

Very striking here is the close comparison made between the prophetic light and the intellect. Does this suggest that prophecy is an *intellectual* phenomenon? Were this the case, then his theory of prophecy would have an undeniable resonance with that of Ibn Sīnā. As we will see in the course of this chapter, such parallels or points of resonance abound. For now, we will hold this question, along with the others still outstanding, in mind as we journey further into the *Iḥyā‘*. Also, his identification of the intellect with the sun and knowledge with light is highly suggestive given his frequent employment of light as a symbol for mystical truth.\(^4\) The rest of the above passage serves to corroborate what we have already seen regarding the exclusive role played by the intellect in the attainment of true felicity, both in this world and the hereafter.

As the discussion on the nobility and true nature of the intellect continues to unfold, al-Ghazālī seems to be drawn increasingly away from his previous definition of “intellect” and

\(^1\) More literally, “their eyes were beautified with *kuhl*...” In this context, the usage is idiomatic, vividly expressing the joy on the faces (esp. in the eyes) of these Arabs.

\(^2\) This could easily be rendered more technically as “his soul” as يَعْفَر is equivocal and can be taken in either way. The context here, however, is narrative and does not seem to warrant the more technical, psychological rendering. I thus opt for “self” over “soul” here.

\(^3\) *Al-‘ilm*, 108.

\(^4\) See Lazarus-Yaféh’s chapter on the “Symbolism of Light in al-Ghazzālī’s Writings”, 264-348, where she argues for the Neoplatonic character of this motif in his writings. Of course, as we have already seen, the metaphor is also easily traced to the Qur‘ān and the Prophetic traditions.
toward a more mysterious and less definable thing. Coming immediately on the heels of the passage quoted above, he writes,

The nobility of the intellect is grasped by necessity. However, our purpose is to relate what has been conveyed by the Reports and the Qur’anic āyāt concerning the mentioning of its nobility. God — be He exalted — called it “light” (نور) in His utterance, “God is the light of the heavens and the earth; a semblance of His light is as a niche...”14 And the knowledge that is acquired from [this intellect] is called a spirit (روح), a revelation (حکاية), and a life (حياة), for He — be He exalted - said, “And just so did we reveal to you a spirit from Our command...”15 and He - be He praised - said, “or is the one who was dead, whom We revived and for whom We fashioned a light by which he would walk among the people...”16 Wherever He mentions light and darkness, He intends [by these expressions] knowledge and ignorance [respectively]. [This is] exemplified in His statement, “He brings them out of the [various kinds of] darkness and into the light...”17 And [the Prophet], may God bless him and grant him salvation, said...”18

14 Of course, al-Ghazâlî’s intended audience needed little more than the first few words of any given āya to know the fuller reference, and so, for readers unfamiliar with the passage to which he refers, I provide that “fuller” reference here: “...in which there is a lamp, the lamp encased in glass; the glass as if it were a pearly star, lit from a blessed tree, an olive, neither of the east nor of the west, [a tree] whose oil is just about to burst into light, though no fire has touched it. Light upon light, God guides whomsoever He wills to His light. And God strikes resemblances for the people, and of all things God is knowing.” Al-Nūr (24): 35.

15 To finish the āya, in which two distinct voices can be detected and in which the primary voice calls the Qur’ān itself a “light”, “…you did not know [before] what the Book was, nor what Belief [was], but we made the Qur’ān a light by which to guide whomsoever We will from among Our servants.’ ‘Surely You guide [us along] the straight way.’” Al-Shûrâ (42): 52.

16 “…[is he] like unto the one whose kind is in the [various kinds of] darkness, never emerging from them? Such is the pleasure of the ungrateful; they were not in the know.” Al-An’âm (6): 122.

17 His citation is actually taken from the middle of the āya, and so we will cite it here in its entirety: “God is the Guardian of those who believe; He brings them out of the [various kinds of] darkness and into the light. And [as for] those who are ungrateful [to God], their patrons are evil; [for] they lead them from light into the [various kinds of] darkness; those are the companions of the fire, in which they [remain] forever.” Al-Baqara (2): 257.

18 Al-’ilm, 108. Many of these same āyāt are used in his explication of the highest meaning of “guidance” (الهداية) in the Book of Forbearance and Thanksgiving (Kitâb al-şabr wa’l-shukr),
For the sake of brevity and concision, we will skip over his citation of this next Tradition; however, even as we do so, we must stress the prominence of such citations in his writings. Indeed, al-Ghazālī goes to considerable length in his enumeration of relevant Qur'ānic and Prophetic texts, and this is very much in keeping with his insistence upon the traditional Islamic creed and way of life. A few lines down, then, he continues:

And he [i.e. the Prophet], may God bless him and grant him salvation, said, “the Intellect is the very first [thing] created by God. He said to it, “approach”, and it drew nigh; he then said to it, “turn away”, and it turned away; then God, be He mighty, sublime, said, “by My might and My majesty, I did not create [anything] more noble [in my sight] than you. Through you I take, and through you I give; through you I reward, and through you I punish.”

If you were to say, “if this intellect is an accident, then how could it have been created prior to the bodies? And, if it were a jawhar, how could there be a jawhar that is self-subsisting and does not occupy space?”

Know that this [question] is [part] of the knowledge of the Unveiling. Its mentioning is not appropriate for [our explication of] the science of Right Practice, and we purpose now [in writing this work] to discuss the sciences of Right Practice...

He thus leads himself right into the heart of the trouble and deals with it by avoiding it; given his explicit intention in writing the Ihyā’, it is well within his rights to do this, but it is both frustrating and tantalizing all the same. As we will see, this is not the last time he will do this; however, each time he brings us to the threshold, he will give us something before he turns us away. Here, he gives us the knowledge that he is very well aware of our question and knows that

vol. IV, 368. We may understand, then, that “guidance”, in its most exalted sense, is synonymous with the intellect, again in its most exalted sense.

19 Literally, “to me”.

20 We note here a printing error: the ل and final م of معاملة have been inverted.

21 Al-‘ilm, 109.
there is a tension between what he has already explicitly stated in his kalāmī texts and what hides within the Unveiling.

Later in the same section, he explains that there is a problem of equivocation in people’s usage of the term.\(^22\)

Know that people differ in the definition (هد) of “intellect” and its true nature, and the majority overlook [the fact that] this term is used for various meanings, and that has become the reason for their disagreement.

The truth is the remover of the veil in [this]: [namely] that “intellect” is a term used equivocally for four meanings, just as the term, “\(al-\text{'}\text{ayn}\) (العين)”, for example, is used for numerous meanings, along with [other terms] of this sort\(^23\). One ought not to seek a single definition for all of its divisions; rather, each division should be singled out by uncovering its [unique meaning].

The first is [that] description by which the human being is distinguished from the rest of the animals, i.e. that by which [the individual] becomes prepared to receive the theoretical sciences and to manage those crafts that are not self-evident and are rationally-based (الصناعات الخفية الفكرية). It is that which al-Ḥārith bn Asad al-Muḥāsibī [d. 243/857] intended where he said about the definition of the intellect, “it is an instinct by which one becomes prepared to grasp the theoretical sciences; it is as if it were a light that is cast into the heart, [a light] by which one becomes prepared to [rationally] grasp everything.”...\(^24\)

The second [constitutes] the sciences which arise, joining to the existence of the essence of a child [who can] distinguish [between] the possibility of the possible thing and the impossibility of the impossible thing: such as the

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\(^22\) Indeed, his own usage of the term is not free of equivocation; in various works, we see him using the term to signify very different meanings, all of which he enumerates in the passage rendered here. Contrast his usage of “intellect” and “rational” in the \(Munqidh\), for example, with that of the \(Kitāb sharḥ ʿajāʾib al-qalb\).

\(^23\) Literally, “[other terms] that run in this course”.

\(^24\) In the section deleted from the paragraph (for reasons of concision), al-Ghazālī clarifies two issues regarding this “instinct”: (i) that it cannot be identified exclusively with the necessary truths, as “the instinct” remains present in the sleeper as well as in the person who is ignorant of the necessary truths; and (ii) that this instinct is unique to the human being \(qua\) human being and is thus nontransferable to other species. Thus it is not just a case of God’s “habit” (إجراء العامة) in creating the sciences in the human mind while not creating them in the mind of the donkey; rather, by “intellect” here he intends something peculiar to the human being.
knowledge that two are [numerically] greater than one and that a single individual cannot be in two places at the same time. It is that [definition] which some of the theologians have meant about the definition of “intellect” where [they] said, “it is some of the necessary [self-evident] sciences...” It [i.e. this usage] is also correct in its own right, because these sciences are present [in the soul] and are called “an exterior intelleeting”...

The third [constitutes] sciences that benefit from [worldly] experience with the [natural] outcomes of situations. Hence, whosoever becomes seasoned [by his] experiences and polished [by various] ways of thinking, it is said that he is intelligent in habit...

The fourth is that the faculty (العقل) of that instinct [see #1] reaches [the point] where one knows the outcomes of things and subdues and [ultimately] conquers the lustful desire that incites [the soul] to temporal pleasure. Thus, when this faculty is attained, the one possessing it is called “intelligent” (عاقلا)... 25

He thus identifies four distinct meanings: (1) an innate predisposition, capacity or instinct to understand and grasp the theoretical sciences; (2) what might be called the primary intelligibles, or necessary knowledge that exists in the infant without learning, such as the possibility and impossibility of basic things and the knowledge that two are greater than one; (3) the knowledge that comes as the result of learning and experience; (4) the thoughtful and disciplined disposition of one who has become far-seeing and circumspect in his dealings, one in whom the intellect has won absolute mastery over the passions.

These then are the proper common usages of “intellect”, the first being the most fundamental or basic meaning and others being more extended or applied usages. 26 However, while all of these are valid meanings and usages, they are not necessarily what al-Ghazālī himself always intends when he uses the term. As we will see, his usage is very context-specific.

For example, here in context of these final sections of the Book of Knowledge, where he

25 Al-‘ilm, 111-12.

26 Ibid., 112.
discusses "inner vision" (بصيرة الباطن), addresses the various kinds of intellectual disparity among people, and begins treating the loftier levels of inspiration and revelation, his highest definition — not included in the four meanings enumerated above — begins to shine through:

the obvious truth about [the disparity of people's intellects] is to say, truly the disparity occurs [within] the four categories, save for the second category, which is the necessary knowledge... As for the three [remaining] categories, disparity occurs [within] them...

As for the first [category], which is the foundation (الأصل), i.e. the "instinct", there is no way to deny the disparity within it, for it is like a light that dawns upon the soul and brings its morning. The [main] principles of its dawning [come] at the age of discernment; then it continues to grow and increase, gradually progressing in an imperceptible manner, until he comes into maturity near [the age of] forty years. Its semblance is the light of the morning, for its beginning is hidden in such a way that its detection is very difficult. It then gradually increases to the point that the emergence of the [entire] disk of the sun is complete.

The light of inner vision (تور البصرة) varies [in people], just as the light of vision [is itself] varies, and the difference [between the various levels] is grasped [more tangibly] between the one afflicted with an eye infection and the one [who is] keen-sighted. Indeed, the customary practice of God — be He mighty, sublime — flows gradually upon all of His creation in reference to [His] bringing [them] into existence, to the extent that [even] the instinct of sexual desire is not manifested suddenly, all at once upon the boy's coming of age; rather, it becomes manifested little by little, [increasing] gradually. So too with all of the faculties and attributes. Whoever denies the disparity of people in regard to this instinct is like one who has lost control of his mind. And whoever believes that the intellect of the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) is similar to the intellect of any one of the common peasants and desert roughnecks is himself more base than any one of [these] peasants.

How [then] can one deny the disparity of the [intellectual] instinct when, without it, people would not differ in [their] understanding of the sciences, nor would they divide into [the following categories:] a dull-wit who can only understand what is taught to him after the long labor of the teacher; a bright one who understands through [even] the slightest symbol and indication; a perfect [mind] in whose soul arise the realities of things without instruction, just as [God] — be He exalted — says, "...whose oil is about to burst into light, though no fire

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27 Ibid., 113.
has touched it; light upon light...” That [last description] is like unto the prophets, may peace be upon them, since obscure things became clear to them [from] within their inmost reaches (الدلائل)، [and this was] without any learning or instruction. 28 That [phenomenon] is expressed by [the term] “inspiration” (الإلهام). The Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) gave expression to its like where he said, “verily, the Holy Spirit blew [this] into my mind: ‘love whom you will, for surely you will soon be parting from him; live how you [wish to] live, for surely you will soon be dead; do what you will, for surely you will be rewarded with it.” This mode [called inspiration by which] the angels make [things] known to the prophets differs from pure revelation (الوحي)، which is the hearing of the voice through the sensation of the ear and the eyewitnessing of the angel through the sensation of vision. To that [effect], [the Prophet] informed [them] about this [inspiration of the Holy Spirit] by “the blowing into the mind”. Now many are the degrees of revelation, but plunging into them does not bear on the knowledge of Right Practice; indeed, it is [part] of the knowledge of the Unveiling... 

From the side of [what has been] relayed [to us] 29 indicating the disparity of intellect is what was narrated [to the effect] that ‘Abd Allāh bn Salām (may God be pleased with him) asked the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him salvation) in a long hadith, the last part of which is a description of the greatness of the Throne (الرشد). [According to this narration, the Prophet said] that the angels said, “O Lord! Hast thou created anything greater than the Throne?” He said, “Yes: the Intellect.” They said, “and how far does its capacity reach?” He said, “What a question! Its knowledge cannot be circumscribed. Do you have any knowledge of the number of [the grains of] sand?” They said, “Nay.” God be mighty, sublime – said, “Verily I have created the intellect in various kinds that are like the number of sand [grains]. Among the people [there are] those to whom is given a grain, and those to whom two grains are given, and those to whom three or four are given, and those to whom is given a portion, and those to

28 This comes very close to Ibn Sīnā’s theory of intuitive prophetic cognition, an understanding of the prophetic noetic process that seems to have its roots in al-Kindī’s description of prophetic knowing vis-a-vis philosophical knowing, with additional nuance taken from Aristotle’s Posterior Analytics. For Ibn Sīnā’s formulation, see his De Anima, 248-50, summed up in Fazlur Rahman’s translation, Avicenna’s Psychology (London: Oxford, 1952), 35ff.; for al-Kindī’s earlier and somewhat rougher formulation, see his “Risāla fi kammīyat kutub Aristūṭīs wa mà yuhtāju ilayhi fi tāhšil al-falsāfa” in Rasā’il al-Kindī al-falsāfiya, ed. Abū Rida’ (Cairo: 1950/1369), esp. 372-3. Al-Ghazālī’s Avicennean leanings in his explication of prophecy show themselves again in the Kitāb sharḥ ‘ajā’ib al-qalb, 119.

29 Here he is referring to the body of knowledge received via the oral and written tradition (النقل)، which is the counterpart of the knowledge derived via the intellect (العقل).
whom a load is given, and those to whom [even] more than that is given."\(^{30}\)

He immediately goes on to explain that some of the Sufis have scorned the terms “intellect” and “intelligible” (المعقل) due to the adoption of these terms by the scholastic theologians, who popularized a particular signification for these terms and used them in the context of their arguments and debates. The Sufis in question were thus confused as to the true meaning of these terms.

[But] as for the light of inner vision by which God — be He exalted — and the truth of His emissaries are known, how could its disparagement be conceivable when God — be He exalted — [Himself] commends it? If it is reproved, then what after it would be praiseworthy? If that which is praiseworthy is the Revealed Law, then by what [faculty] does one come to know the truth of the Revealed Law? If one comes to know it through the blameworthy intellect, which cannot be trusted, then the Revealed Law [itself] must also be blameworthy. One must not pay attention to the one who says, “Surely it is grasped through the eye of certitude (معين اليقين) and through the light of faith, not through the intellect,” for by “intellect” we mean [precisely] what he intends by the “eye of certitude” and the “light of faith”, which is the internal attribute by which the human being is distinguished from the beasts so that through it he may grasp the realities of things.

Most of these [verbal] bashings have arisen, however, from the ignorance of people seeking verities from [linguistic] expressions. And so they clash [against one another] over them due to the reckless usages of the people in reference to [such] expressions. This amount then is sufficient in [our] explication of the intellect. And God knows better.\(^{31}\)

It need not be argued that this final section of the Book of Knowledge is extremely rich.

Although most of it speaks for itself, we will highlight a few points and raise a few questions.

For example, we may well ask: is this “light of inner vision”, this “light of faith”, this “inner attribute by which the human is distinguished from the beasts so that through it he may grasp the

\(^{30}\) Al-`ilm, 114-5.

\(^{31}\) Ibid., 116.
realities of things” the very same bodily “accident” for which he argues in the \textit{Iqtisād} and the \textit{Qawā'id}? Even at the beginning of the \textit{Book of Knowledge} he still refers to the intellect as a “part from among the \textit{jawāhir}” that make up the human being. Certainly a tension is growing between his \textit{kalāmī} treatments of the rational soul and these more mystically-oriented descriptions, but we must be careful when comparing genre-specific treatments of one kind with another. Besides, knowing that he is well aware of our questions, we have already seen that he quite simply refuses to entertain them, for their answers reside in the hidden realm of the Unveiling, which is not his focus here. Having raised them, he seems quite content here to leave them as questions lingering in our minds, tantalizing ambiguities that pine for clarification.

Some clarification does come, but not immediately and never all at once. Further into the vast \textit{Iḥyā‘}, specifically in the \textit{Kitāb sharh 'ajā'ib al-qalb},\footnote{\textit{Iḥyā‘}, vol. III, 111-169.} which serves as the threshold for his exposition of the inner vices and virtues, we find a much more detailed description of the heart. Here we find some of the most explicitly esoteric material to be found within the entire \textit{Iḥyā‘}, and he himself gives witness to this. For example, as he concludes his “Exposition of the Soldiers of the Heart” early in the book, he writes,

\begin{quote}
These, then, are the divisions of the heart’s soldiers. To comment [upon] that so that the understanding[s] of the weak-minded \textit{(الضعفاء)} would be able to grasp it would take long, while the purpose of the likes of this book is that the strong-minded \textit{(القوياء)} and the luminaries among the religious intelligentsia \textit{(التحول من العلماء)} would derive benefit by means of it. However, we will strive to make the weak-minded understand by [proceeding with] the striking of semblences in order that this may bring them closer to their own understandings.\footnote{Ibid., 117.}
\end{quote}
Thus, regarding the esoteric nature and intended audience of the *Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*, al-Ghazālī makes the case for us. Although he admittedly makes an effort to render the text accessible to several levels of engagement, the intended audience is clear.

As we saw above, al-Ghazālī seems to have equated the heart with the intellect in the *Book of Knowledge*. Among the other things we find here is the explicit corroboration of that equivalence. Immediately following the initial magnification and invocation, he seems to pick up right where he left off in the *Book of knowledge*:

The human being’s nobility and virtue, by which he completely surpasses the [various] classes of creation, is [won] through his preparation for the gnosis of God, be He praised, [that mystical knowledge] which is, in this world, his beauty and perfection and pride, and is, in [relation to] the hereafter, his equipment (دَخْرُتُهُ) and provision (عِدَّة) Indeed, he prepares [himself] for the gnosis [of God] through his heart and not through any one of his [bodily] extremities. For the heart is that which perceives God, that which draws nigh unto God, that which works for [the sake of] God, that which rushes toward God, and that which unveils what is in God’s [proximity and possession (الْعَرَبَة)]. The [bodily] extremities, on the other hand, follow [the heart] and serve [it]. [They are] the tools which are used by the heart, [which makes use of them] in the way the king makes use of the slave, the way the shepherd utilizes the flock, and the artisan (الصانع) [utilizes] the tool. For the heart is that which is accepted in the presence of God if it is delivered from [all] else besides God; and it is veiled from God whenever it has become immersed in anything other than God. It is that of which [an account is] demanded, the one addressed [by God or perhaps by Munkar and Nakir], and the one who is reproached. It is that which has the good fortune of sharing in the [blessed station of] proximity to God, for he [the individual] prospers when he purifies it, and he fails and becomes wretched when he defies it and corrupts it.\[35\] It [i.e. the heart] is that which, in reality, is in

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\[34\] Literally, “that which is knowing of God” (العالم بالله).

\[35\] Although there is no indication of a doubled second radical (د) in this verb (أَكَبَّرَ), I nevertheless infer one, as this is in accordance with the Qur’ānic usage (see 91:9 and 24:21) and best suits the sense of this passage. See the following note.

\[36\] This passage is actually a very slight but deft reshaping of 91 (*al-Shams*): 9-10, which reads, “Truly he succeeds who purifies it [i.e. his own soul], and he fails who corrupts it.”

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obeisance to God, while those things which become widespread\textsuperscript{37}, [flowing out] through the [bodily] extremities by way of the acts of worship, are its lights. And it is [also] that which is disobedient, rebelling against God, be He exalted, while the [actions] that flow through the [bodily] members\textsuperscript{38}, by way of vile deeds, are its effects. Through its darkening and its illumination, the good qualities and their counterparts become manifest on the exterior, since every vessel exudes with whatever [liquid] it contains.\textsuperscript{39}

It [i.e. the heart] is that which, if the human being comes to know it, he knows himself, and, if he comes to know himself, he has come to know his Lord. And it is that which, if the human being is ignorant of it, he is ignorant of himself, and, if he is ignorant of himself, then he is ignorant of his Lord. And whoever is ignorant of his [own] heart, is even more ignorant about other things, since most of the people are ignorant of their hearts and themselves. They have been obstructed from [knowing] themselves, for surely God places an obstruction between man and his heart, and His [act of] obstructing [man] is that He prevents [man] from witnessing it and [from] overseeing it and [from] the gnosis of its attributes. [And He prevents man from the gnosis of] the manner in which [the heart] is turned between two of the fingers of the Merciful. And [God’s act of obstruction lies in] how it [i.e. the heart] falls in one moment to [the level of] the lowest of the low and sinks to the horizon of the devils and how it rises in another [moment] to the highest of the high and ascends to the realm of the angels, those who are brought nigh [unto God].

Whosoever does not know his [own] heart, so that he might oversee it and guide it, and [yet] observes [the stars] from among the storehouses of the \textit{Malakūt} that gleam upon him and within him is one of those about whom God — be He exalted — said, “they forget God, and so he causes them to forget themselves. Those are the iniquitous ones (الفاسقون).”\textsuperscript{40} The gnosis of the heart, then, and of the reality of its characteristics (الوصاية) is the [very] fundament of religion, and the basis of the [mystical] path of the wayfarers.\textsuperscript{41}

He gradually then ventures further into the characteristics of the heart, eventually touching upon

\textsuperscript{37} Literally, “that which spreads out along the [bodily] extremities...”

\textsuperscript{38} Literally, “that which flows to the [bodily] members...”

\textsuperscript{39} The paragraph break is my own insertion.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Al-Ḥasr} (59): 19. Again, al-Ghazālī is only citing part of the \textit{āya}. In full, it reads, “Do not be like those who forgot God, for God caused them to forget themselves; surely those are the iniquitous ones.”

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Sharḥ `ajāʾib al-qalb}, 112.
its true nature. After explaining the meaning of the physical heart, he writes:

the second meaning [of “heart”] is a divine, spiritual subtlety (َّلبطّي) that has a connection [or relation] to this bodily heart. That “subtlety” is the reality (َّبَطَيَّة) of the human being, i.e. [the aspect] of the person that comprehends (المدرك), [intellectually] perceives (عالم) [experientially] knows (عرف), [the part] addressed (المخاطب) punished (المعاقب), reproached (مطالب)، and of which [an accounting] is demanded (طالب). [This subtlety] has a connection with the bodily heart, but the intellects of most people have been bewildered over the meaning of its connection. This is because its connection resembles the connection [between] accidents and bodies, [between] the descriptions [of things] and the things described, or the connection [between] the user of a tool and the tool [itself], or the relation [between] the person residing [in a place] and the place [itself] (المكان). Commenting upon that [relation] is among the [things] of which we are wary, [and this is] for two reasons: the first of which is that it has to do with the sciences of the Unveiling (المكاثفة), while our only aim in this work is [to treat] the sciences of Right Practice; and the second is that its verification would necessitate a dissemination of the secret of the spirit (روح). and that was among the things about which the Emissary of God (May God bless him and grant him salvation) would not speak. Thus it is not [appropriate] for someone other than him to speak of it.

Hence, when we use the expression, “heart”, in this book, we mean by it this [divine, spiritual] subtlety, and we intend to treat its descriptions and states rather than its reality in its essence. [This is because] the knowledge [pertaining to] conduct makes necessary the cognizance of its descriptions and its states but does not necessitate the mentioning of its reality.42

While it is becoming increasingly clear that there are things of which al-Ghazālī will not speak regarding the nature of the heart, due to pious prohibition rather than to a lack of knowledge it seems, he still gives us a great deal here.

One thing he clarifies here is that, although the relationship between the “subtlety” and the material/physical heart is somewhat akin to the relationship of an accident to the body in which it inheres, the two relations are not the same. Indeed, he intimates that equating the two (as many of his mutakallimūn confrères do) is a form of bewilderment. Thus, his kalāmī

42 Ibid., 113.
formulations, which sometimes espouse this model for the soul-body relation, are ruled out as real explanations — at least at this level of instruction. How then are they connected? He clearly intends a mode of connection that is different from anything he has previously laid out, but just what that mode is he will not say. He is not yet finished with this connection, however, as we will see shortly.

Soon after the above passage, al-Ghazâlî goes on to resolve definitively one of our lingering questions: the essential relationship between the heart and the intellect. Indeed, he exceeds the scope of our query and resolves for us the questions caused by equivocal usage of the terms al-rûh, al-nafs, al-qalb, and al-‘aql. Each one of these, he says, has two meanings: one corporeal and the other “subtle”. The spirit, for example, can denote a “subtle body” (jism laṭîf) or “subtle vapor” (bukhâr laṭîf) originating in the corporeal heart and spreading throughout the body so as to radiate life in the same way that a lamp radiates light. This is the corporeal spirit (al-rûh al-jismânî). The second meaning, he says, is

the subtlety (al-laṭîfa) that is the knowing, understanding [faculty] in the human being. It is what we have commented on regarding one of the meanings of the heart, which God — be He exalted — intended by His utterance, “Say: the spirit is my Lord’s affair.” And it is a wondrous, divine thing\(^\text{43}\) (أماَّر عَجِيبٍ رَبَّيِّي), the grasping of whose reality is beyond the power of most intellects and understandings...\(^\text{44}\)

It is worth noting here that this subtlety is here called divine (rabbânî), a significant addition to his unfolding definition of the heart. This will be revisited below. It is also worth noting that he

\(^{43}\) He will use this “licit” (and wonderfully elusive) description of the spirit over and over again throughout his psychological discussions; for a few more examples, see Kitâb sharh ‘ajâ’îb al-qalb, 122, 127.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 114.
refrains from saying that its understanding is beyond *all* intellects and understandings...just most.

In other words, this “wondrous, divine thing” is *intellectually* understandable, although he does not say how and by whom.

As for *al-nafs*, he says that the corporeal meaning intended by this term is “that meaning which brings together the irascible faculty and the concupiscent faculty in the human being,” or “the principle (الأصل) which brings together the blameworthy attributes of the human being.” This latter definition, he admits, is the common usage of the Sufis (*ahl al-taṣawwuf*). The spiritual or essential meaning, however, is

> the subtlety (*al-latīfā*) that we have mentioned, which is the human being in reality and is the soul of the person and his essence (*ذاته*), but it is described in various ways, according to its varying states (بيهاشبي إختياف اَلحَرَائِيَّه)...45

And so with the intellect, whose meanings we have already examined. Here, however, he adds somewhat to his former definitions. He says that it is sometimes used to mean the “knowledge of the true natures of things — being an expression for the attribute of the knowledge whose receptacle is the heart.” This is the mundane meaning which is appropriate here, he says; on a higher level, however, it can denote

> that which grasps the sciences, being itself the heart, i.e. that [same] subtlety.

Now we know that belonging to every knower is an existence in his soul (*في نفسه وجود اصل قائم بنفسه*), an existence that is a self-subsisting principle (*محل*) in which knowledge resides as an attribute. The attribute is something other than that which is described, and the “intellect” may be used to denote the attribute of the knower, or it may be used to denote the receptacle (*محل*) of the apprehension, by which I mean the knower itself. [This latter definition] is what was intended by his [the Prophet’s] statement (may God bless him and grant him salvation): “the first thing God created was the Intellect...” Knowledge is an accident, [and so] it is inconceivable that it could be the first creation; rather, it must be that the receptacle is created prior to it or with it. Otherwise, speaking to it would be

45 Ibid.
impossible. And it is in the report that God -- be He exalted -- spoke to it "approach!" and it drew nigh. Then he said to it, "Be gone!" and it turned away.46

This highest definition of intellect is thus equated with the heart, i.e. with the very essence of the being who is [actually] knowing. To avoid any possible equivocation here, he again makes clear that this "subtlety" is by no means an accident, the possibility of which he left open in the Book of Knowledge. Further, he equates it with "a self-subsisting principle in which knowledge resides as an attribute." This is a highly revealing step that he refuses to take in the other texts we have examined. "Self-subsisting" is a quality not mentioned elsewhere; indeed, we have seen him purposefully avoid such a qualification because it belongs to the knowledge of the Unveiling. Here, however, he commits himself to its status as a self-subsisting thing.

But what is it? What exactly does he mean here by "principle"? What is its nature? Is it material or immaterial? He has revealed much, but still the puzzle is not yet solved, for our growing picture of his understanding of the heart/intellect/spirit/soul is still troubled by a fundamental, essential ambiguity: on the one hand, he does not explicitly affirm its immateriality; on the other hand, he has not said that it is material. Rejecting one of the standard Ash'ari explanations (i.e. that of the soul's being an accident inhering in the body), he is careful not to replace it with anything too definite: nowhere does he refer to this higher entity -- i.e. the non-bodily heart -- as a "subtle body" or "vapor", nor does he use any term giving the slightest hint of corporeality. The terms he employs -- latifa (subtlety) and asl (principle) -- seem intentionally ambiguous, and give no hint of commitment on either side.

One thing is certainly clear, however: the heart and the intellect -- in their most elevated,

46 Ibid., 114-5.
subtle, essential forms — are absolutely synonymous for al-Ghazālī, and the single secret of their true nature, still a mystery, is contained within the realm of al-mukāshafa, the knowledge of the Unveiling, which belongs in the realm of the malakūt.

Returning to the mysterious and bewildering connection between the bodily heart and the “subtlety”, he ventures a bit further into this restricted topic at the very end of this first explication (بيان). Following his discussion of the meanings ascribed to the terms “heart”, “spirit” and “soul”, he writes,

If it has been unveiled to you that the meanings of these terms — i.e. the bodily heart, the bodily spirit, the impassioned soul, and the sciences — are real⁴⁷, then these are four meanings for which the four expressions are used. And [there is] a fifth meaning, which is the subtlety, that [part] of the person which knows and grasps [the realities of things]. [All] four expressions come to it in turn. Hence, the meanings are five, while the expressions are four. Each expression is used for two meanings. The variance of these expressions, along with their successive [significations ], have bewildered most of the learned, and thus you will see them talking about [their] notions, saying “this is the notion of the intellect, and this is the notion of the spirit, and this is the notion of the heart, and this is the notion of the soul,” while the speculator [really] has no comprehension of the meanings of these terms. In order to remove the covering from that, we have presented [in this book] a commentary⁴⁸ on these terms, since the expression, “heart”, has been mentioned in the Qur‘ān and the sunna. That which is intended by it [in the sources] is the meaning from among [the various meanings of] the human being that comprehends and comes to know the the reality of [all] things, and it has been metonymically expressed by the heart that is in the breast. [This is] because there is a special relation (علاقة) between that subtlety and the body of the heart. Even if it is connected to the rest of the body and is of use to it, still it is connected to it through the mediation of the [bodily] heart, for its first connection is with the heart. [It is] as if [the bodily heart] is its receptacle (محل) and its domain (ملكة), its world and its riding mount. For that [reason], Sahl al-Tustarī likened the heart to the Throne (العرش), and the breast to the Footstool (الكرسي)... It is not [to be] believed that he regarded [the heart and the breast] as the [actual] Throne and Footstool of God, for that is impossible. Rather, he

⁴⁷ Literally, “are present” (موجودة).

⁴⁸ Literally, “the commentary...”
meant by it that [the bodily heart] is its domain. And the first course [of comparison] is due to [the subtlety's] management and administration [of the body through the heart]. For the two of them [i.e. the heart and the breast] in relation to it [i.e. the subtlety] are as the Throne and the Footstool in relation to God, be He exalted. This comparison is also only correct from some perspectives (بعض الوجوه), and commenting upon that is also inappropriate for our purpose, and so let us pass over it.\textsuperscript{49}

In order for us to exploit more fully the meaning of this passage, we would have to know precisely which “perspectives” he has in mind. Also, we would need to identify what exactly constitutes the relation between God and the Throne and the Footstool in his esoteric cosmology. These are very challenging, if not impossible, tasks, but we have no alternative but to try.

In his explanation of the Throne and God’s “mounting” of it in the \textit{Qawā'id al-'aqā'id}, al-Ghazālī tells us that its meaning can only be

that which does not deny the [Divine] description of Grandeur (الكبرياء) and that which the characteristics of creation and extinction do not touch... And that can only be by way of subjugation (الإستيلاء) and appropriation (appropriation), just as the poet said: “a man mounted Iraq without a sword or blood spilled.”\textsuperscript{50}

This, he tells the reader, is the interpretation (تأويل) of the “folk of the Truth”, and so we may rely upon it with a degree of confidence, even though the discussion is framed within a very mainstream \textit{kalāmī} context.

Much later in the \textit{Iḥyā’}, indeed almost at the very end of the very last volume, he again touches upon the topic of the Throne. This comes in the \textit{Book of Contemplation (Kitāb al-tafakkur)}\textsuperscript{51}, more specifically in his “explication of how to contemplate the creation of God, be

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb}, 115.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Qawā'id al-'aqā'id}, 141.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Iḥyā’}, vol VI, 43-72.
He exalted”, which marks the final section of the book. Here, as he explains how the furthest and most sublime goals can only be attained after one has traversed the nearest, most immediate things, he writes:

and the closest thing to you is your soul; then [comes] the earth, which is your dwelling place; then [comes] the air that is sufficient for you [to breathe]; then [come] the plants and the animals and all that is on the face of the earth; then [come] the wonders of the atmosphere, which is between heaven and earth; then [comes] the seven heavens and their spheres; then [comes] the Footstool; then [comes] the Throne; then the angels who are themselves the bearers of the Throne and the Reservoir (خزائن) of the heavens; then, from [the Throne] you go further to [the point of] looking upon the Lord of the Throne and the Footstool and the heavens and the earth and all that is between the two. Between you and these [existents] are the enormous deserts, the vast distances and the towering mountain passes. And you, after [all this], have not rid [yourself] of the [most] proximate, sloping mountain road, which is the gnosis of the external aspect of yourself. Then you begin to unloosen your tongue with your impudence, claiming [that you have won] the gnosis of your Lord and saying that you have come to know Him and His creation. And [then you ask] so what should I contemplate? And whence should I turn my gaze?52

What follows is an extremely eloquent and beautiful guide to the contemplation of the universe, but it goes wide of our mark just now. For our present purposes, which have to do only with the nature of the Throne and of the relation between it and God, we focus on a single aspect of the passage cited above. Here, it suffices to note that al-Ghazâlî depicts the Throne as the closest created existent to God. While shedding no new light on the true nature of the Throne itself, the passage serves to corroborate what we have already seen from the Qawā'id.

So what can we make of al-Ghazâlî’s comparison between the two relations: namely, God and the Throne, on the one hand, and the “subtlety” and the bodily heart, on the other? The Throne, it seems, is the most sublime existent in the highest created realm, just as the bodily

52 Ibid., 69.
heart is the most exalted organ within the human body. The throne manifests God's power through being "mounted" — i.e. through God's subjugation of it and absolute mastery over it. So too the human heart, we might venture, manifests the attributes of power and mastery that originate in the "subtlety", which exercises its power and mastery over the bodily heart. Such "mastery" apparently entails ruling the rest of the body through the mediation of the bodily heart, just as God rules the created universe through the mediation of the Throne and through the angels who uphold it. All this would seem to concur with what we have gleaned from the Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb. The question of the precise nature of the connection itself still remains something of an enigma, however. Does this analogy imply that the "subtlety" is totally separate from the bodily heart, just as God is from the whole of creation? Does it imply that the bodily heart is just a tool through which the subtlety acts while it is occupied with the material domain? Al-Ghazālī's comparison thus gives rise to many questions but few answers, and these questions will have to wait until we investigate his cosmology in chapter five. For the "subtlety" that is the spiritual heart properly belongs in the realm of the malakūt, he says, whereas the bodily heart belongs to this world of mulk, and so the relation between the spirit and the body is identical to the relation between al-malakūt and al-mulk.53 Thus, a full understanding of his psychology can only be won through unlocking the mysteries of his cosmology.

Before we leave the Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb in this chapter, it may prove useful to note some of the parallels and contrasts that are emerging between al-Ghazālī's psychological discussions and those of Ibn Sīnā, for nowhere do we find the parallels more pronounced than

53 Among other places, this is quite explicitly stated in his al-Arbaʾīn fī usūl al-dīn, where he speaks of a third, intermediary world that joins the two. Much more will be said of this in chapter five. See Lazarus-Yafeh, 514-15.
here, in the *Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*. Indeed, in places al-Ghazālī reads as an Avicennean, but without Ibn Sīnā’s technical terms. One parallel that we have already noted occurs in the course of his description of prophetic cognition. Another extremely clear, although somewhat less profound, parallel comes here in the course of his explanation of animal psychology. Here, Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of the estimative faculty (*al-quwwa al-wahmya*) is clearly appropriated and reformulated in al-Ghazālī’s own terms, namely, in the idiom of the heart. In the very beginning of his “Explication of the Special Characteristic (خاصية) of the Human Being,” he writes:

> Know that God has blessed all of the animals (in addition to the human being) with the entirety of what we have mentioned [in the section on the “Soldiers of the Heart”], since the animal[s] have concupiscence, irascibility, the external senses, and the internal [senses] as well, such that, if a ewe sees a wolf with its eye, it knows [the wolf’s] enmity through [the faculties of] its heart. Hence, it flees from [the wolf]. That is the inner apprehension (الإدراك الباطن). Let us then mention that by [reason of] which the human heart is set apart...⁵⁴

The discussion continues, of course, to explain the unique features of human knowledge and will, which together form the distinguishing characteristics of the human heart vis-a-vis the animal heart. What is most interesting to note here, however, is the fact that most of the quotation cited immediately above is lifted right out of Ibn Sīnā’s *De Anima*,⁵⁵ with a few slight modifications to make it less technical (and thus less Avicennean). Al-Ghazālī has thus essentially co-opted Ibn Sīnā’s animal psychology, with slight terminological alterations that make it more malleable in this context. Any reader, having seen this for what it really is, cannot help but wonder whether he has done something similar in the case of Ibn Sīnā’s human psychology. More will be said of this once we have a better grasp of al-Ghazālī’s “true” position.

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⁵⁴ *Kitāb sharḥ ‘ajā’ib al-qalb*, 119.

⁵⁵ See Avicenna’s *De Anima* (Arabic Text), 166-9.
on the nature of the spiritual heart or "subtlety". Although we do not have sufficient evidence to start hurling accusations of Avicenneanism at al-Ghazālī, we do have more than enough evidence to state that, whatever his esoteric position is on the soul, it is not identical with the kalāmī formulations we found in the Iqtiṣād and the Qawā'id.

In the Book of Forbearance and Thanksgiving (Kitāb al-ṣabr wa'il-shukr)\textsuperscript{56}, which is the second book in the final quarter (devoted to the saving virtues), al-Ghazālī makes this difference even more evident. Here, in his explication of the "graces of God in [reference to] the creation of the power [of motion] and the moving instruments [of the body]," al-Ghazālī clears up a question about the spirit (الروح). This question comes immediately after his description of the corporeal spirit, the nature of which he also treated in the Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'īb al-qalb.

If you were to say: you have then described and exemplified the spirit when the Emissary of God (may God bless him and grant him salvation) did not go beyond saying "Say: the spirit is my Lord's Affair" when he was asked about the spirit. Thus he did not describe it for them along these lines\textsuperscript{57}.

Know then that [all] this is a foolishness that [comes] from the commonly occuring equivocation in [the use of] the expression "spirit". For "spirit" is used for numerous meanings that would not take long to mention. However, of all of them, we described a "subtle body" that is called a "spirit" by the physicians...

As for the spirit that is the [self-substituting] principle, [the spirit] which, if it becomes corrupted, the rest of the body becomes corrupt because of it, that is among the secrets of God, be He exalted. We did not describe it. Nor is there a license [given] for describing it save to say, "it is a Divine thing" (أمور رياضية), just as [God], be he exalted, said, "Say: the spirit is my Lord's affair."

Describing [such] Divine things (الآمور الربانية) would be unbearable for [people's] intellects. Indeed, most people's intellects are bewildered by them. And, as for the estimations and imaginations [produced by their interior faculties of estimation and imagination], they are necessarily incapable of [grasping] them in the way [one's faculty of] sight is incapable of grasping sounds. The knots of [their] intellects, [which are] confined to the jawhar and the accident and [are]

\textsuperscript{56} Iḥyā’ IV, 309-410.

\textsuperscript{57} Literally, "according to this mode" (علي هذا الوجه).
imprisoned within the narrow confines [of these categories], waver in mentioning the principles of its description. For nothing of its description can be grasped by the intellect; rather, [only] through another light that is higher and more noble than the intellect [can it be grasped]. And that light dawns in the world of prophecy and sainthood (عالم النبوة والولاية), and its relation to the intellect is as the relation between the intellect and the [faculties of] estimation and imagination.\textsuperscript{58}

He seems to dispel here any lingering suspicions we may have had concerning the continuing relevance of his atomism in these more esoteric contexts. The standard atomic formulations, he says, are tantamount to rational trappings that cannot but fail in their attempts to capture the essence of the spirit.

It must be noted here that his use of the term “intellect” in this passage raises another problem of equivocation. He speaks of it here in the context of the kalāmī formulations of the soul, and so it evokes the very meaning that he tells us was disparaged by the Sufis due to their confusion over the true meaning of “intellect”.\textsuperscript{59} His usage here can hardly be taken to mean the intellect in its most exalted sense, the sense that is nothing other than the “[self-subsisting] principle” and the very “Divine thing” about which he is talking in this passage. Were that his intention here, it would have to be equated with the “other light” that “dawns in the World of Prophecy and Sainthood”, for we have already seen al-Ghazālī equate the intellect — in its most sublime sense — with the Qur’ānic references to light, such as sūrat al-Nūr (24): 35.

All this having been said, it is becoming increasingly clear that the Ash’arī or kalāmī atomic formulation falls short of the mark in the context of his esoteric psychology. In spite of this growing clarity, we must admit that he does, in several seemingly esoteric places, use

\textsuperscript{58} Kitāb al-ṣabr wa l-shukr, 377.

\textsuperscript{59} See supra.
language that is highly evocative of the kalāmī formulations, such as his reference to the heart as a “part from among the jawāhir of the human being” in the Kitāb al-‘ilm. We will see similar language again as we continue our investigation through to the very end of the Iḥyā’. His precise intention in using such kalām-like language is not clear, but the passage cited above makes it very clear that his esoteric position is definitely not the position of his kalām.

Still seeking answers, then, we turn to the final book of the Iḥyā’, Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa mā ba’dahu, where al-Ghazālī treats the soul’s experience of death, the separation of the spirit/soul/intellect, and the phenomena of the next world. His tone here seems slightly less esoteric and more closely aligned with the literal eschatological teachings, but still the text is saturated with subtleties. In chapter seven, he objects to three main views concerning the afterlife: (i) that of the unbelievers (al-mulḥidūn) and “everyone who does not believe in God or the last day”, who hold that death means extinction pure and simple, an end after which there is no resurrection or reckoning or anything; (ii) the view that the individual “becomes utterly extinct upon dying,” experiences neither reward nor punishment “for as long as he is in the grave, until he is restored [to the body] at the time of the Gathering”; and (iii) the view of those

60 Vol. VI, 73-202.

61 In the context of this chapter, we will exploit these discussions for their psychological relevance, saving a more focused treatment of their eschatological content for the sixth and final chapter.

62 Specifically pp. 130-1.

63 Winter takes this to be a reference to the Dāhriya, the Mašūrīya, the Mu‘ammariya, and the Khaṭṭābiya sects, as well as the pre-Islamic Arabs. See his note “A” on p. 121.

64 This is, of course, one of the kalāmī doctrines mentioned in the Iqtisād, specifically that formulation which equates the soul with an accident. Winter includes some of the Mu‘tazili
who hold “that the spirit remains and does not fall into nonexistence with death; rather [they believe] the rewards and punishments are [for] the spirits without the bodies, which are neither resurrected nor gathered in any way.”

As we will see more clearly below, he does not object here to the belief in the immaterial soul per se, nor to its complete separability from the body, as he does earlier in the Iqtisâd, where he tells his reader that such a doctrine was only granted in the Tahâfut for the sake of argument; rather he seems to find objection exclusively with the coupling of a belief in the immaterial soul with a flat denial of an eventual return to an embodied state for judgement and eternity, which must include (but is in no way restricted to) bodily pleasures and/or torments. In the paragraph that immediately follows, he affirms that

all of these are false beliefs (ظلون فاسدة), slanting away from the truth. However, that which is witnessed by the [various] avenues of expression and pronounced by the [Qur'anic] ðyût and the [Prophetic] reports is that the meaning of death is just a change of state (حال) and that the spirit remains after taking leave of the body [at death], either [to be] tormented or blessed. The meaning of [the spirit’s] taking leave of the body is the severing of its administration (تصرفها) from the body, [this occurring] through the body’s forsaking [its role of] being obedient to it. For the [bodily] members are tools for the spirit to use, so that it may strike [a blow] with the hand, hear with the ear, see with the eye, and know the reality of things with the heart. The “heart” here is an expression

theologians, together with the Jahmî and Khârijî sects in this group. See his note “B” on p. 121.

65 Dhîkr al-mawt, 130-1. This is, of course, the philosophical doctrine he refutes in the Tahâfut and condemns in other places. Curiously, it is also the very doctrine attributed to the Sufis in the Mizân al-’amal, to which we referred in the Prologue and to which we will return later in the study. Although not completely accurate in his reading of al-Ñarabî and Ibn Ñinâ, Winter includes some useful comments on p. 122 of his translation.

66 While this is obviously not a direct allusion to the philosophical psychology earlier refuted, his language here shows some degree of affinity with the earlier, more philosophical descriptions of the soul’s relationship to the body. Specifically, the reader is reminded of Abû
for the “spirit”, which comes to know things on its own (بَيْنِ السُّبْحَانَاتِ) without [using] any tool. For that [reason], it is possible that it suffers on its own in from various kinds of sadness, misery, and sorrow; [alternatively,] it can experience pleasure from the various kinds of joy and happiness. And all of that has nothing to do with its [bodily] members. Hence, everything that is a description for the spirit in itself remains with it after it has taken leave of the body, while that which is [a description] for it by way of the mediation of the [bodily] becomes idle with the death of the body until the spirit is restored to the body. And it is not unlikely that the spirit is restored to the body in the grave; nor is it unlikely that it is held off until the Day of Resurrection. God knows best about that which He has ruled for each one of His servants.\(^6^8\)

Separability is no longer a problem, but problems and questions still remain: namely, although we know that the spirit and the heart and the intellect and the soul are one, still we do not know exactly what it is. What is its nature? Is it some kind of subtle or ethereal material substance or is it immaterial and immortal, subsisting entirely on its own? Also, what exactly are the emotional or intellectual pleasures and pains that the heart can experience in total separation from the body and its members? Are they the same kind of next-worldly “pleasures superior to the sensible” whose reality he concedes in the Tahāфut?\(^6^9\) And if the spirit can experience these more poignant rewards and punishments without the mediation of corporeal “tools”, then why the necessity of upholding an embodied afterlife? The answers to these and other questions remain locked within the secret of the spirit, which is the key to the true reality of the heart, and

Naṣr al-Fārābī’s explanation of the intellect’s gradual liberation from the need to employ the “corporeal instruments” of the body. See his “Letter Regarding the Intellect” (Risāla fī Ḳl-‘Aql) in Philosophy of the Middle Ages, ed. A. Hyman and J. Walsh (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1973), esp. p. 220, where he discusses the true meaning of afterlife and the final perfection/felicity of the human being.

\(^6^7\) Literally, “is not connected with...”

\(^6^8\) Dhikr al-mawt, 131.

\(^6^9\) See Marmura, “Bodily Resurrection,” 54. More will be said of this below.
so we have no choice but to keep searching for clues.

Al-Ghazālī continues here to explain that by “heart” he means “spirit” and that by “spirit” he means “that meaning (المعنى) of the ‘human being’ that apprehends the sciences and [feels] the pangs of grief, and the delights of joys.” This, he says, is the real nature of the human being, that which “does not die” and “does not pass away”. Furthermore, he says again that by “death” here he means “the severance of [the spirit’s] administration of the body and the body’s departure from [its status] of being [the spirit’s] tool”. He then affirms that “the reality (حقيقة) of the human being is his soul (نفسه) and spirit (روحه), and it is remaining [after death]...”

This explanation, he admits, is hardly exhaustive, nor does he intend it to be, for he goes on to say a few paragraphs below that

It is impossible to remove the covering from the true nature of the reality of death, since death cannot be known by one who does not understand life, and the true knowledge of life is [attained] through the knowledge of the true nature of the spirit in its essence and through the grasping the quiddity (ماهية) of its essence. It was not permitted for [even] the Emissary of God (may God bless him and grant him salvation) to speak of this, nor to say more than “the spirit is my Lord’s affair.” Thus it is not for any of the doctors of religion to reveal the secret of the spirit, even if one were to come to know it. Indeed, all that is permitted is the mentioning of the state of the spirit after death...

Thus he leaves us with questions, unanswered and seemingly unanswerable. But he also leaves us tantalized: what exactly does he mean by the rather enigmatic “even if one were to come to know it [i.e. the secret of the spirit]”? He clearly affirms the possibility of its discovery but is equally clear about the impropriety of revealing anything more, at least in this context.

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70 Dhikr al-mawt, 131.

71 Qurʾān: al-Isrāʾ (17): 85.

72 Dhikr al-mawt, 132.
Moving forward to the end of the seventh chapter, we find a very important clue in the context of his discussion of Munkar, Nakîr, and their interrogation of the soul in the grave.

Following his full citation of a lengthy tradition related by Abû Hurayra, al-Ghazâlî expounds upon the state of the dead person in the grave:

This is a text that clarifies [the fact] that the intellect does not change because of death. The body, however, and the limbs change. Thus the dead person is [still] thinking, understanding, conscious of the torments and the pleasures, whichever it may be. Nothing of his intellect changes. The intellect that is grasping [these things] is not [part of] these limbs; on the contrary, it is something [hidden] within, without length or breadth; indeed, that which does not subdivide in itself is that which grasps the things. [Even] if all the limbs of the human being were to be dispersed and the only [thing] remaining were the “part” (جزء) that does not break up into parts nor divide, the thinking person in his entirety would still be extent, abiding. And it is just so after death, for death does not undo that part, nor does nonexistence overtake it.73

Thus, while still referring to it as a “part” — just as he did early on in the Book of Knowledge — he grants that it has no length or breadth. In short, it is dimensionless, i.e. utterly non-spatial, even though it seems to be localized somehow in the body. Is it then material or immaterial? He does not explicitly say, and, based on the evidence he has given us, we cannot conclude anything for certain in this regard. His terminology, however, is highly evocative:

“part” (جزء) — a term synonymous with jawhar for the Ash‘arîs and the Mu‘tazilîs — certainly smacks of kalâmî definitions of the atom74, even though his context here does not seem to be explicitly theological. It gives us cause to wonder whether he has not really abandoned his atomism, in spite of the fact that he refrains from using the jawhar idiom in this context. This

73 Ibid., 143.

74 See A. Dhanani’s section on “the equivalence of jawhar (substance) and jiwa (atom)”, 55-62, esp. p. 58 (n. 12), where he cites from al-Juwayni’s al-Shâmil.
suspicion is made more weighty by the fact that he couches the term here in traditional kalāmī phraseology: “the part that does not break into parts nor divide” is a standard formula used in defining the atom. Even its status as being “without length or breadth” is consistent with the traditional Ashʿarī understanding (dating back to al-Jubbāʾī, al-Ashʿarī’s Muʿtazilī teacher), insofar as the individual atom, as a discrete “minimal part”, has no dimension.\(^{75}\) Still, al-Ashʿarī himself seems to have left no room in his definition for the isolated existence of a single atom in total separation from all other atoms\(^{76}\) as al-Ghazālī seems to affirm in the case of the “part” described above.

Might this “part” then be a single, separated material atom that is spatial and yet without dimension? Such an explanation would constitute a somewhat unique psychological application of a commonly held Ashʿarī atomic position. Alternatively, the heart might be explained as an immaterial atom, thus taking after the Muʿtazilī Muʿammad (d. 835), whom we mentioned briefly in the third chapter. Although his continual references to the “heart” as the receptacle (مَعَالِجَة) of knowledge\(^{77}\) evoke kalāmī definitions of the atom as the receptacle of accidents, it seems forced and rather out of context to apply such kalāmī theories to his esoteric discussions. Indeed, the passage cited above from the Kitāb al-ṣabr waʾl-shukr seems to rule out any such atomic formulation. Still, al-Ghazālī does, in other places, use atomic language when referring

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 134.

\(^{76}\) See Kojiro Nakamura, “Was Ghazālī an Ashʿarite?”, 18-19. This is one of the key reasons Nakamura cites for rejecting an atomic explanation of al-Ghazālī’s psychology. He does not seem to have factored in the possibility that al-Ghazālī might have dared to modify slightly the atomic formulation of al-Ashʿarī.

\(^{77}\) This is a frequent occurrence even in the most esoteric of books, such as the Kitāb sharḥ ʿajāʾib al-qalb (see, for example, p. 125).
to the “subtlety” in non-\textit{kālāmī} contexts, and so these \textit{kālāmī} scenarios cannot be completely discounted without a great deal of explaining. Continuing along this line of \textit{kālāmī} speculation, then, the heart might be considered some kind of “subtle body” (جسم لطيف), such as that postulated by the Mu’tazili al-Nazzām (d. 845), who conceived of the soul as a subtle body diffused equally throughout the physical body\textsuperscript{78}; al-Ghazālī, however, identifies this as one of the common understandings of the corporeal “spirit” that originates in the corporeal heart and spreads throughout the body.\textsuperscript{79} Hence it cannot be equated with the “spiritual, divine” heart which is never described in such corporeal terms, no matter how subtle.

All we really know about al-Ghazālī’s understanding of the heart, then, is (i) that he calls it a “subtlety”, a “principle” and a “part”; (ii) that he describes it as being rational, divine, spiritual, self-subsisting, dimensionless, and indivisible; and (iii) that it remains quite conscious after the death and corruption of the body, although it seems to remain localized within the body throughout life (with the possible exception of sleep) and immediately after death. But what is its nature? Still we cannot say.

While we can, with certainty, rule out some of the possibilities, the true nature of the heart remains veiled to us. Some of the missing pieces of the puzzle might come together, and quickly, were we to examine a key section of the \textit{Risāla al-Ladunīya}, where the human soul and spirit are treated in considerable detail and with astonishing candor. However, as the authenticity of this work is still disputed (and we argue rightly so), we cannot rely upon it as


\textsuperscript{79} See \textit{Sharḥ ḥā‘īb al-qalb}, 113, paraphrased supra. See also \textit{Kitāb al-ṣabr wa‘l-shukr}, 377.
hard evidence. We are thus faced with what seems to be an impasse, a dead end, with few avenues left open to us.

This chapter has thus brought us closer to unveiling the mysterious nature of the heart in the thought of al-Ghazālī, but it does not bring us to the end of our search. For that, our one and only remaining chance is to venture into the malakūt, the world of the Unseen, which is the home “world” of the heart and the “world” in which the Unveiling is witnessed. If we are able to come to some clear understanding of the true nature of this aspect of al-Ghazālī’s cosmology, it may well shed some light on the true nature of the heart, which belongs to this “realm” and ultimately “returns” to it in the hereafter. It is finally to the world of the Unseen, then, that we go for answers.

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80 Nevertheless, in light of its extreme relevance to our investigation, we have included a large portion of this work (translation and commentary) as an appendix to this study. There, we also take up and try to solve the question of its authenticity.
CHAPTER FIVE
THROUGH A LOOKING GLASS:
THE HEART CONSIDERED IN THE CONTEXT OF AL-GHAZALI'S COSMOLOGY

As we have seen repeatedly in the previous chapters, the secret of this "subtlety" that is the heart for al-Ghazālī properly belongs in the unseen world of the malakūt rather than in this world of "[material] Dominion and [sensual] Perception" (al-mulk wa'l-shahāda),¹ to which the physical heart belongs and where the spiritual heart is a stranger². His psychology is thus inextricably woven into the fabric of his cosmology. While this explicit connection between al-Ghazālī's psychology and cosmology has been noted many times before,³ the full import of what we may call his psycho-cosmolgy remains unexcavated. For only when we have understood the true nature of the malakūt and its relation to the world of mulk can we attempt to solve in a definitive way the puzzles of the spiritual heart and its relation to the body in the writings of al-Ghazālī. This chapter, then, tries to answer the following questions: what exactly is the "world" of the malakūt? What is the heart's relation to it? What is the relation between al-malakūt and al-mulk? Can we come to know something more about the spiritual heart's relation to the body by understanding the the relation between these two cosmological worlds?

¹ Examples abound, both within and without the Ihyā'. For additional references see his introduction to Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb, where he mentions "...its marvels and inner secrets [which] are entirely within the world of al-malakūt..." (113); see also Alchemy, 6-7; Jawāhir, 11; and al-‘Arba‘īn fi ‘uṣūl al-dīn (Cairo: 1328), 104.

² This is one of the crucial realizations in the process of self-knowledge for al-Ghazālī. See his Kitāb dhimm al-ghurrār, 192, 228.

In order to gain a balanced and well-rounded sense of his cosmological discussions of the “worlds” and the relation(s) between them, we will sample several poignant passages, beginning with a very detailed passage from the Mishkât.

Know that “the universe” (عالم) is [actually] two worlds (عالمان): a spiritual and a bodily, [or], if you like, a sensible and an intellectual, [or], if you like, a lofty and a base. All [of these pairings] are similar, but they differ in the manner of expressions. If you give expression to the two [worlds] in reference to themselves⁴, then you would say “bodily” and “spiritual” [respectively]. In addition, if you expressed them in terms of the eye that perceives each one, you would say “sensible” and “rational” [respectively]. If you expressed them in a way that [compared] one to the other, you would say “lofty” and “base” [respectively]. Perhaps you would call one of them the “world of Dominion (الملك) and [sensual] Perception” and the other the “world of the Unseen and Sovereignty (الملكوت)”⁵. Whoever looks at the realities through [linguistic] expressions may perhaps suffer confusion in the face of the multitude of expressions, [thereby] imagining a multitude of meanings. For the one to whom the realities have been revealed, [however], he makes the meanings primary and to the expressions secondary. The case of the weak-[minded] is just the opposite, since he seeks the verities through the expressions.⁶

A little further on, al-Ghazâlî explains that the “sensible” plane serves as a kind of stairway to the rational, “for, were there no connection and no correspondence between the two, we would not be able to traverse the way of [gradual] ascendence to [the rational plane]. And if that [bridging of the gap] were not feasible, then the journey unto the Divine Presence and to [a state of] proximity to God — be He exalted — would be impossible.”⁷

Still further on he writes,

⁴ That is, plainly, directly.

⁵ Although the translation is our own, the Arabic passage is borrowed from Lazarus-Yafeh, Studies, 507.

⁶ Ibid. This is even more fully treated in the Jawâhir, 28-9.
The Divine Mercy fashioned the world of [sensual] Perception as a parallel\(^7\) [world] to the world of the *malakūt*. For there is nothing in this world that is not a metaphor (مَصالِح) for something in that world. It may be that one thing [in this world] is a metaphor for [several] things in the world of the *malakūt*, and it may be that a single thing in the *malakūt* has numerous metaphorical semblences in the world of [sensual] Perception. However, [a thing] would only be a semblence if it corresponded [to the other] in one of the ways of resemblance and correlated [to it] in one of the ways of correlation...\(^8\)

Hence, every single thing in the world of generation and corruption bears some kind of relation or likeness to something in the *malakūt*, and this is by way of metaphor, semblance, or signification, rather than by way of a direct, one-to-one correspondence. The material plane is thus a kind of material image modeled after the spiritual plane, wherein the real substantive “things” reside. The relation between the two is thus tantamount to the relation between a word and the meaning to which it points, a signifier and the thing signified. Is it thus with the physical heart and the “subtlety” to which it corresponds? We will attempt to resolve this question in the course of this chapter.

As Lazarus-Yefeh rightly notes, this correspondence between the worlds applies to everything within the realm of *al-mulk*, including sacred texts, such as the Arabic Qurʾān, which, as a linguistic (and thus metaphorical) “book”, must correspond in a significative or allegorical way to the corresponding intelligible verities within the realm of the *malakūt*. Again, she rightly recognizes that this does not mean that the literal meanings of the Qurʾān can be disregarded as mere metaphors or symbolic utterances which, of themselves, have no power or authority; on the contrary, al-Ghazālī is extremely consistent in his insistence upon the integrity of both the

\(^7\) More literally, an “equivalent” or “counterbalanced [world]” (*mwaṣṣa‘a*).

\(^8\) Arabic text taken from Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies*, 508.
internal and the external dimensions of the text; hence, the literal meanings cannot be compromised for the sake of the inner, esoteric meanings, just as one’s everyday performance of the obligatory duties of Islam cannot be neglected in the name of an inner life that no longer “needs” the external forms of worship. Indeed, in places, his treatment of the external forms of worship is imbued with an almost occult sense of mystery and awe connected to each posture and every act passed down from the Sunna of the Prophet. This is an extremely crucial aspect of his thought and one that deserves more attention than we can give it here.

Returning to the question of his cosmology, as we have already seen in the Mishkāt and can be seen in the majority of al-Ghazālī’s cosmological discussions, the created universe generally divides into two worlds: al-mulk and al-malakūt, the former standing for the created material universe (including the heavens) and the latter expression representing the invisible world of “spirit” and intelligible meaning, a world that finds metaphorical and allegorical representation in the world of Sensual Perception. Sometimes, however, he adds a third world that bridges the two, and this is the world of al-jabarūt, the world of [Divine] “Almightiness”.

9 Lazarus-Yafeh writes, “The content of the Qur‘ān is of the higher Ālam al-malakūt, but it was presented to man by the prophets in parables, images and language belonging to this terrestrial world... The Qur‘ān resembles a dream in this respect, and the exploration of the Qur‘ān’s true meaning (ta‘wīl) resembles the deciphering of a dream and the uncovering of its true meaning (ta‘bīr). Al-Ghazzālī, however, makes great efforts to stress the fact that, in spite of this, one should never ignore (as does the Bāṭiniyya) the simple outward meaning of the Qur‘ān (zāhir) while trying to understand its internal meaning (bāṭin), as one must always consider each as complementing the other as a guide towards a correct comprehension of the Holy Book” (508). The connection she draws between al-ta‘wīl and al-ta‘bīr can be witnessed in many places, such as in the Jawāhir, 30-31.

10 Although Burrell translates this as “power” and Lazarus-Yafeh refers to it as the “world of divine powers”, I opt for “almightiness” in an attempt to convey the all-compelling Divine power or might that is manifested in this “realm”. As we march ahead in this chapter and witness in the following passage how this “world” is ultimately equated with the Divine attribute
which seems to overlap slightly the corresponding shores of both worlds, thus bridging and binding together the otherwise irreconcilable worlds of spirit and matter. This three-part scheme can be glimpsed in a few places, one of the most vivid illustrations coming in the second part of the Kitāb al-tawhīd wa'l-tawakkul, specifically in the section on the true nature of al-tawhīd. Here al-Ghazālī explains in considerable detail how the heart’s journey traverses the first two “worlds” on its way to the malakūt, which is its ultimate destination. Choosing the allegorical format of a parable — the tale of the pilgrim and the Pen — he relays how, in the course of his confusing journey, the wayfarer receives counsel from the human intellect (personified):

You should know that there are many dangers on the path [of enquiry into the reality of agency], so the right thing for you would be to give up [the search] and cease what you are doing. This is not your nest, so leave it; yet everything is easy for those who are fashioned for it. But if you really want to follow the path to its goal, what you will see and hear will be brilliant. You should know that there are three worlds on your path. The earthly world of visible things is the first, containing paper, ink, pens, and hands; and you will easily pass beyond this station. The second world is the intelligible world (al-malākūt), and that lies beyond me. If you pass beyond me you will reach its station, and there lie wide deserts, towering mountains, and teeming seas; and I do not know how you will fare there. The third is the world of Almightyness (al-jabarūt), which lies between the earthly world and the intelligible world. [When] you have crossed [over] them, [you will have passed through] three stations, the first of which is the station of power, [then] will, and [finally] knowledge.12

of will for al-Ghazālī, we might even be tempted to think of this plane as the psycho-spiritual “realm” of Divine compulsion, where the seeker realizes that all willing is ultimately engulfed by the inscrutable Divine will.

11 Kitāb al-tawhīd wa'l-tawakkul, 118 and following. The lion’s share of the parable below (pp. 124ff) is borrowed from David Burrell’s forthcoming translation of the book (Islamic Texts Society). Where my own reading of the text makes significant departures from his rendering, I overlay my own translation. This is indicated by boldface type. The translation may thus be viewed as something of a collaborative effort.

12 This sentence is somewhat difficult to decipher. Burrell’s rendering leads the reader to regard these three stations as belonging to the world of al-jabarūt rather than to all of the worlds.
This world [of the jabarūt] is midway between the world of [material] Dominion and [sensual] Perception and the world of al-malakūt, since the world of [material] Dominion is easier to traverse\textsuperscript{13}, while the intelligible world is more difficult to traverse. Standing between the earthly and intelligible worlds, the world of Almightiness resembles a ship moving between water and land: it is not as turbulent as being in the water and yet not as secure as being on land. Whoever walks on the earth walks in the earthly and visible world, but if one can surpass one’s power to the point of being able to sail on a ship, that will be like moving into the world of Almightiness. And if one comes to the point of walking on water without a ship then he walks in the intelligible world without any hesitation. So, if you are incapable of walking on water, leave. For you have gone beyond the land and have left the ship so that all that remains before you is pure water. The first [step into] the world of malakūt entails an eyewitnessing of the pen with which knowledge is inscribed upon the tablet of the heart, and [it entails] the attainment of the certitude by which one is able to walk on water. You have [no doubt] heard the statement of Allah’s Apostle — may God grant him peace and salvation — about Jesus — peace be upon him — “if he had attained a higher degree of certitude, he would have walked on air.”\textsuperscript{14}

We cannot help but notice here the relation between the worlds and the attributes, a relation that approaches complete identification. In effect, the pilgrim’s journey through the worlds is a journey through the Divine attributes which the worlds they represent. Thus, the successful voyage through the material, visible plane is the mystic’s psycho-spiritual journey through the Divine attribute of power. For al-Ghazālī, this seems to entail his total acceptance of God as the only agent, a realization that acts as the gateway to the third and highest level of al-tawhīd, the level of those possessing mystical insight.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Literally, “is easier in terms of [making one’s] way.”

\textsuperscript{14} Burrell, trans., 19-20; Arabic text, 124-5.

\textsuperscript{15} See Burrell, 12. This recognition of God as the only Agent echoes throughout the entire book. See, for example, pp. 132, 134 (Arabic text).
The Pilgrim's voyage through the world of "Almightiness" (al-jabarūt) is in effect his psycho-spiritual journey through the attribute of will. This, closely related to the previous journey, seems to hinge upon the pilgrim's total acceptance of the inscrutability of the Divine will.

The pilgrim continued on from there to the "right hand" where he saw it and regarded its marvels, even greater than the knowledge of the pen. He was not able to describe or explain any of them; indeed, many volumes could not even include one hundredth of its description. In sum, however, [one can say that] it is not like other right hands, as the hand is not like other hands, nor the finger like other fingers. As he saw the pen moving in His grip and so realized who was responsible for the pen, he asked the right hand about its role as the one who sets the pen in motion. He responded: "My answer will be like the one you heard from the right hand which you saw in the visible world. It is a screen for the power; since the hand has no authority in itself, there can be no doubt that the power moves it."  

The pilgrim journeyed on to the world of power (ālam al-qudra) and saw there wonders which made him disdain those he had seen before, and when he asked regarding the movement of the right hand, he was told, "I am only an attribute; go ask the Omnipotent One (al-Qādir), for authority belongs to the One possessing the attribute rather than to the attribute itself." At this point he was about to turn away and forsake any further questioning, when he was held fast by a "firm saying" (14:27) proclaimed from behind the veil of the pavilions of the Divine Presence: "He is not to be questioned as to what He does; it is they who are questioned" (21:23). Dread of the Divine Presence enveloped him and he fell thunderstruck, shaken by the fact of being so overwhelmed. 

The final voyage is through the intelligible world of the malakūt. In effect, it is the wayfarer's journey through the Divine attribute of knowledge, understood here to be far beyond conventional, intellectual understanding. Indeed, here the pious recognition of one's eternal inability to "know" the Divine is the crown of one's knowledge.

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16 The paragraph break is my insertion; it is in accord with the Arabic text and seems to be in accord with the natural transition here in the narrative.

17 Ibid., 24; Arabic text, 126.
When he recovered, he said: “Praise be to You! How great is Your circumstance (sha’n)! I have turned to You, placed [all] my trust in You, and I have come to believe that You are the King, the [All-]Compelling, the Singular, the Overwhelmer. I fear only You. I hope in You only. I seek refuge only in Your pardon from Your punishment, in your good pleasure from your displeasure. What can I do but beseech You and beg You and supplicate before You? So I say: ‘Open for me my [own] breast (sadri)’ (20:25) that I may know You, and loosen my tongue that I may praise You.” Then it was announced to him from behind the veil: “Take care not to aspire to praise greater than the Master of the Prophets. Rather turn to him, take what he gives you and renounce what he forbids you, saying what he says to you. For there is nothing more [to be said] at this level than his saying: ‘Praise to You! I do not know how to praise You; You are as You praise Yourself.’” To which the pilgrim said: “My God! If the tongue is unable to praise You, how can the heart aspire to know You?” Then it was called out: Take care in overstepping the necks of the righteous ones. Rather return to the greatest of the righteous ones [Abu Bakr] and emulate him, for the Companions of the Master of the Prophets ‘are like the stars: follow them and you will be rightly guided.’ Have you not heard it said: ‘The very inability to attain understanding is itself understanding.’ It is sufficient for you to share in Our Presence [enough] to know that you are excluded from Our Presence, incapable of glancing at Our Beauty and Our Glory.”

The parable is included here to shed light on the underlying unity of the worlds and the stations while delineating the ascending psycho-cosmological degrees experienced by the mystic wayfarer as he/she ascends from the material plane, through the jabarūt, and into the intelligible world. As we noted above, this passage suggests that these degrees or “stations” are tantamount to the pilgrim’s experiential journey through the Divine attributes, beginning with power, progressing to will, and culminating in knowledge. While it thus clarifies some questions about mystical ascent and the natures of the psycho-spiritual “worlds” through which the seeker must journey, the structure of the parable still sheds little additional light on our psychological question regarding the precise relation between the physical heart and the spiritual “subtlety” to

18 D. Burrell, trans., 24; Arabic text, 126.

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which it corresponds, apart from suggesting some kind of possible intermediary that might link the two.

In other places, however, the relevance of the intermediary world to the spirit-body problem is much more pointed. In the *Kitāb al-arba‘īn fī usūl al-dīn*, which is full of fecund psycho-cosmological content, he explicitly treats the connection between the physical person in the world of Sensual Perception and the spiritual heart in the world of the malakūt. This comes in the context of the profound and mysterious *spiritual* effects of physical purification and Qur’ānic recitation, both of which originate with the body on the material plane but nevertheless reverberate through all of the worlds and effect the soul at every level. In reference to the recitation of the Qur’ān, then, al-Ghazālī writes,

> The effect of that [i.e. the recitation] manifests itself in your [bodily] members through [your] weeping out of grief, [your] breaking into a sweat on the brow out of shame, [your] skin shivering [and] getting goosebumps and [your] back muscles quivering out of dread... If you have done that, then all of your [bodily] limbs have participated in attaining the [blessed] portion (haḍīr) of the Qur’ān, and the effects of the Qur’ān have emanated over your three worlds, by which I mean the world of the malakūt, the world of the jabrūt, and the world of [sensual] Perception. Know that you consist of the three worlds, for within you is a part of each world. And know that the pure, unadulterated lights of gnosis emanate from the world of the malakūt unto the secret of the heart, for it too is of the malakūt. As for the effects [of these lights] by way of dread, fear, happiness, awe and the rest of the states, they descend from the world of al-jabarūt, and their resting place is the breast (al-sadr), just as we alluded to the first [receptor] with the [term] heart. [This is] because the world of the jabrūt is between the world of the malakūt and the world of [sensual] Perception, just as the breast is between the [spiritual] heart and the [bodily] limbs. As for the weeping and sobbing and shivering with goosebumps and the quivering of muscles, they descend from the world of [sensual] Perception and come to rest upon the [bodily] limbs, for they are [also] of the world of [sensual] perception. But I do not see you understanding anything of the heart but the pine-shaped organ, [nor] anything of the breast other than the bone [that] envelops [the physical heart]. For you only grasp the outermost cover and husk of each thing; how far you are from grasping the verities! Surely even the beasts and the dead are in possession of this.
[material organ], while nothing of the lights of gnosio and the sciences descend upon it, nor [any of] the effects of [such lights], by way of fear and dread and happiness. If you would like to get a whiff of something of the scents of these secrets (and [by the way] I do not see you [really] wanting [such an experience], for Satan has taken hold of your throat with the cord of lustful desires), then there is something for you in the chapter on al-tawhîd from the Kitâb al-tawhîd [wa'l-tawakkul], if you want it.¹⁹

Many salient points are raised here, the first of which is the explicit acknowledgement that the cosmological “worlds” are as much inside the seeker as he/she is within the worlds. Thus, while the lights of mystical gnosis seem to originate from somewhere outside of the individual psyche, they are only and always experienced within the theatre of the spiritual heart, which both belongs to and contains the malakût. All of this seems to constitute the rational plane. Below this is what we may call the emotional plane — the theatre of the “states” (al-âhwa‘î) — which is equivalent to the “breast”, by which he clearly means something other than the physical cavity wherein resides the physical heart. Below this is the physical, material plane, to which the body, along with its concupiscent desires, belongs. While he does not explicitly say here that the malakût, i.e. the heart, is utterly immaterial, all of the indications seem to be pointing that way. If we want more information, he steers us to the very passage from the Kitâb al-tawhîd wa'l-tawakkul that we examined above, the passage that imparted the crucial clue that the world of the malakût is in effect the Divine attribute of knowledge.

This final point helps us to make sense of other statements, such as one very intriguing passage from the Kitâb sharh ‘ajâ‘ib al-qalb, specifically following a discussion of the main reasons why the “mirror” of the spiritual heart may fail to fulfill its destiny of becoming a perfect reflection of the verities that reside in the realm of the malakût. He writes,

¹⁹ Again, the Arabic text is borrowed from Lazarus-Yafeh, Studies, 515.
...every heart is, by [virtue of] its innate nature, equipped and ready for the gnosist of the verities because it is a noble, divine thing, separate from the rest of the jawāḥir of the world by virtue of this unique characteristic and nobility... The one [for] whom the veil between himself and God has been lifted [experiences] a manifestation of the image of [the worlds of] al-mulk and al-malakūt in his heart, and so he sees [the paradise] of the last day, beyond which are the heavens and the earth. As for the whole of [creation], the greatest compass is [that] of “the heavens and the earth”, for “the heavens and the earth” is an expression for the [whole] world of al-mulk and [sensual] Perception, which is, on the whole, finite, even though it is expansive from end to end, its flanks far apart from each other. As for the world of the malakūt, which [consists of] the secrets invisible to the [physical] eye and is [grasped] exclusively by the apprehension of [those endowed with] inner vision, it has no end. Yes, that which becomes in part visible to the heart is [of] a finite scope, but in itself and in relation to the knowledge of God it is infinite. And the whole of the world[s] of al-mulk and al-malakūt, if a single utterance were to be taken [for everything], would be called “the Divine presence”, for the Divine Presence encompasses all of the existents, since there is nothing in existence save God — be He exalted — and His acts. And His kingdom and [His] servants are from His acts. That which manifests itself of [all of] that to the heart is paradise itself according to a people, and that is the reason [why] the Folks of the Truth insist upon the reality of paradise. And the extent of [a person’s] domain in Paradise is contingent upon the extent of his gnosis, and so — to a certain measure — God and His attributes and acts will be revealed to him. But then the intention [underlying] all of the forms of obeiscance and the bodily acts [of worship] is the purification, chastening, and emptying out of the heart. The one who purifies it will find success. And the intention [underlying] its purification is the attainment of the lights of faith within [the heart], by which I mean the dawning of the light of gnosis. That is what [God] — be He exalted — intended by saying, “as for] the one whom God wills to guide, He opens his breast to al-islām”23 and “the one whose breast has been opened by God to al-islām is following a light from His...
He thus explains here that the world of the malakūṭ is infinite and limitless from God's perspective. The heart's apprehension of it, however, is limited by its own level of purification, emptiness [of ego and attachment], and capacity. When we recognize that for him this "world" is, in effect, the world of God's mind — the Divine attribute of knowledge — such a description comes within reach of the understanding.

Having walked through this important feature of al-Ghazâlî's mystical cosmology, we are better able to make sense of many passages, some of which we will examine here for purposes of review and corroboration and others for reasons of continued exploration.

In the Kitâb qawâ'id al-'aqâ'id, to which we have already turned many times in this study, al-Ghazâlî equates this world of al-malakūṭ with the Qur'anic realm of the unseen ('ūlam al-ghayb), which is to this world as the esoteric (bātin) is to the exoteric (zâhir) in matters scriptural and religious. From the Kitâb al-`ilm, the Mishkât, Kitâb sharh `ajâ`ib al-qalb, and many other texts, we know that the malakūṭ is a realm into which the physical senses cannot penetrate and would be of no use anyway, for the only mode of perception in that realm is through "the light of inner vision" (nûr al-baṣîra and sometimes al-baṣîra al-bâtîna25), a mode of perception explicitly tied to the intellect, in its most sublime sense, and to the "other eye" — the "eye of the [spiritual] heart".

Al-Ghazâlî speaks of this mode of perception mostly in connection to three things, all of...
which belong to and originate in the realm of the malakūt: dream visions, waking visions, and death. This is not surprising, since he explicitly equates the hereafter (al-ākhira) with the world of the unseen (al-ghayb) or the malakūt. One clear example comes in the Persian Kimyā', specifically in the chapter on self knowledge.

His five senses are like five doors opening to the external world; but, more wonderful than this, his heart has a window which open on the unseen world of spirits. In the state of sleep, when the avenues of the senses are closed, this window is opened and man receives impressions from the unseen world and sometimes foreshadowings of the future. His heart is then like a mirror which reflects what is pictured in the Tablet of Fate. But, even in sleep, thoughts of worldly things dull this mirror, so that the impression[s] it receives are not clear. After death, however, such thoughts vanish and things are seen in their naked reality, and the saying of the Koran is fulfilled: "We have stripped the veil from off thee and thy sight today is keen."27

The opening of a window in the heart towards the unseen also takes place in conditions approaching those of prophetic inspiration, when intuitions spring up in the mind unconveyed through any sense channel. The more a man purifies himself from fleshly lusts and concentrates his mind on God, the more conscious will he be of such intuitions. Those who are not conscious of them have no right to deny their reality.

Nor are such intuitions confined only to those of prophetic rank. Just as iron, by sufficient polishing, can be made into a mirror, so any mind by due discipline can be rendered receptive of such impressions...

In his description of these psycho-spiritual phenomena that are experienced by the initiated mystic, al-Ghazālī says in the Munqidh,

from the very start of the Way revelations and visions begin, so that, even when awake, the Sufis see the angels and the spirits of the prophets and hear voices

26 This is Field's somewhat free translation of the Qur'ānic al-lawḥ al-mahfūz. See E. Daniel's footnotes # 7 and 8, p. 9.

27 Sūrat Qāf (50): 22.

28 See also Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul, 127 (Arabic text).

29 Alchemy, 9-10.
coming from them and learn useful things from them. Then their state ascends from the vision of forms and likenesses to stages beyond the narrow range of words...speaking in general, the matter comes ultimately to a closeness to God...30

Returning to the Ihya', more specifically to the Book of Penitence (Kitab al-tawba), we find more psycho-spiritual content in the subsection on “the Way the [Ascending] Degrees (al-darajāt) and [Decending] Levels (al-daraka't) in the Hereafter are laid out According to the Good and Evil Deeds of this World”. He writes,

Know that this world is of the realm of al-mulk and [sensual] Perception (al-shahāda) and [that] the hereafter is of the realm of al-ghayb and al-malakūt. By “al-dunyā” I mean your state prior to death, and by “al-ākhirā” I mean your state after death. Your “here” and your “hereafter” are [thus] your attributes and states... now we are speaking from this world (al-dunyā) about the hereafter, for we are speaking now within the dunyā, which is the realm of al-mulk. Our intention is to comment upon the hereafter, which is the realm of the malakūt, but it is inconceivable to comment upon the world of the malakūt in this world except through the striking of semblances (al-amthāl). To this effect, [God] — be He exalted — said, “And these semblances we strike for humankind, but only the gnostics (al-‘ālimūn) understand them.” This is because the realm of al-mulk is a dream (nawm) in relation to the realm of al-malakūt. To this effect, [the Prophet] — God grant him peace and salvation — said, “people are sleeping [in this life], and they awaken when they die.”

And that which will be in [your] waking life does not become intelligible to you in [your] sleep except through the striking of similitudes, which stand in need of interpretation (al-ta'būr); likewise, that which will be in the waking of the hereafter only becomes intelligible in [our] sleep through a great many similitudes, by which I mean that which you know of the science of [dream] interpretation.31

Al-Ghazālī proceeds to give three examples of the kind of interpretation he intends, and then he continues:

[Dream] interpretation (al-ta'būr) is [when] someone turns it [the similitude or metaphor] to its ultimate [meaning] (awwalahu ilā ākhirihi), similitudes made

30 al-Munqidh: see McCarthy’s translation in Freedom and Fulfillment, 94-5.

31 Ihya', vol. IV, 260 ff.
known to you by way of the striking of semblances. By “semblance” we mean the channelling of the meaning into an image (ṣūra); if one were to look at its meaning, he would find it true, and if one were to look at its image, he would find it false [i.e. indicating other than the true intention]...

It is not befitting for the prophets to speak to the people (al-khalq) other than through the striking of similitudes, for they are charged to speak to humankind according to the capacities of their [i.e. the people’s] intellects, whose capacity is [limited by the fact] that they are asleep. And nothing is revealed to the sleeper except by way of a semblance (bimithi). Thus, when they die they wake up and realize that the metaphor was true [in its signification]. To that effect, [the Prophet] — God bless him and grant him salvation — said, “the heart of the believer is between two of the fingers of the Merciful.” It is [an example] of the [kind of] metaphor that only the gnostics understand; as for the ignoramus, the capacity of his intellect will not go beyond the external [literal meaning] of the metaphor due to his ignorance in exegesis (tafsīr), which is [properly] called ta‘wil, just as the exegesis (tafsīr) of that which is seen of the similitudes in sleep is called ta‘bīr. Is God — be He exalted — then attributed with a hand and fingers? Be He exalted above the [figurative] statement with a great exaltation! 

He continues with several more examples, the specifics of which do not concern us here. A bit further on, however, he adds something that is extremely relevant for our investigation. “And, in the same way,” he writes,

it could be that there appears the [same] striking of similitudes regarding the matter of the next world, similitudes by which the unbeliever (al-mulhid) embraces falsehood due to the inflexibility of his gaze upon the metaphor’s external [literal] meaning and its [seeming] contradiction [by the inner, true intention].

This final suggestion that the verities of the next world might be dramatically different from the literal images in most people’s minds is strengthened by a relevant passage taken from the Jawāhir, in the section placed just after his comparison of dream interpretation and Qur’ānic exegesis. He writes,

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., 261.
Understand from this that, as long as you are in this life of al-dunyā, you are sleeping. Indeed, your awakening is after death. At that time you become fit for the witnessing of the pure truth face to face. Before that, [however,] you are unable to bear the verities save through the casting of imaginative semblences in the heart. Therupon, due to the fixation of your gaze upon the sense[s], you believe that the thing has no meaning save for the imaginative [symbolic meaning], and [so] you become heedless of the spirit [of the image], just as you are heedless of your own spirit. [Hence] you grasp only the form.  

This line of investigation is still further corroborated and explicated by statements in the Alchemy, particularly in the section on “Knowledge of the Next World”. He writes:

The pains which souls suffer after death all have their source in the excessive love of the world. The Prophet said that every believer, after death, will be tormented by ninety-nine snakes, each having nine heads. Some simple-minded people have examined the graves of unbelievers and wondered at failing to see these snakes. They do not understand that these snakes have their abode within the unbeliever’s spirit, and they existed in him even before he died, for they were his own evil qualities symbolized, such as jealousy, hatred, hypocrisy, pride, deceit, etc., every one of which springs, directly or remotely, from love of the world. Such is the doom of those who, in the words of the Koran, “set their hearts on this world rather than on the next.” If those snakes were merely external they might hope to escape their torment, if it were but for a moment; but being in their own inherent attributes, how can they escape?

...Every sinner thus carries with him into the world beyond death the instruments of his own punishment; and the Koran says truly, “Verily you shall see hell; you shall see it with the eyes of certainty,” and “hell surrounds the unbelievers.”

He continues to describe how the species of Hell, such as separation from the beloved things of

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34 His image here is that of a lead casting, and so this should be read as such rather than in the sense of “throwing”.

35 Jawāhir, 32.


37 Sūrat al-Takāḥur (102): 6-7.

38 Sūrat al-Tawba (9): 49. This entire section is taken from Alchemy, 37-8.
the world, shame, disappointment and failure, can be symbolized, thus suggesting that the
outward forms of the punishments are really just symbols representing the psycho-spiritual
afflictions within the hearts of those attached to the world. This is echoed by what he says
earlier in the same work, specifically in the section on self-knowledge. Here, he writes:

A soul which allows its lower faculties to dominate the higher is as one who
should hand over an angel to the power of a dog or a Muslim to the tyranny of an
unbeliever. The cultivation of demonic, animal, or angelic qualities results in the
production of corresponding characters, which in the Day of Judgement will be
manifested in visible shapes, the sensual appearing as swine, the ferocious as
dogs and wolves, and the pure as angels.  

Turning to the joys and pleasures of the next world, he presents a similar explication in
the Book of Love (Kitāb al-maḥabba), specifically in his “explication that the most sublime of
pleasures and that which is higher than them [all] is the gnosis of God – be He exalted – and the
gazing upon His gracious face, and that it is inconceivable that any other pleasure could
influence [these pleasures] except [in the case of] one who has been barred from this pleasure.”

Here, he explains that the pleasures which people seek are in accordance with their capacities
for apprehension. Each faculty and instinct, he says, has a pleasure that is proper to it,

and just so in the heart there is an instinct which is called “the divine light”...
And it may [also] be called “the inner vision” and “the light of faith and
certitude”, and there is no purpose in getting caught up in naming...

For the heart is apart from the rest of the parts (ajzāʾ) of the body. As [one
of] its attribute[s], it apprehends the meanings that are neither imaginative nor
sensible, such as its apprehension of the creation of the universe or [the
universe’s] need for a pre-eternal Creator, an all-wise [being] who gives order [to
everything], [a being] qualified by Divine attributes. Let us call that instinct an
“intellect” on the condition that one does not understand from the term “intellect”
in this context] that which the ways of argumentation and disputation grasp by

39 Ibid., 8.
He goes on to explain that knowledge, more specifically the gnosis of God, together with His attributes and acts, is the chief pleasure of this instinct. “And one ought to know,” he adds, “that the pleasure of gnosia is the mightiest of all the remaining pleasures, by which I mean the pleasure[s] of desire, anger, and the rest of the five senses.” As the passage progresses, al-Ghazâlî becomes both more detailed and more emphatic. He explains that the highest forms of knowledge concerning the Divine mysteries can only be won by “tasting”, a form of mystical cognition which stands above discursive reasoning and about which speaking comes to little avail. [But discussing it to] this extent steers you to [the realization] that the gnosia of God is the most pleasurable of things and that there is no pleasure above it. To [illustrate] this Abû Sulaymân al-Darâni said, “belonging to God there are some servants who are not distracted from God by the fear of Hell and the hope of Heaven, and so how could the world distract them from God?”

The true servants of God thus do not get caught up in the hope of Heaven and the fear of Hell, for all these pale in comparison to the pleasure of gnosia.

For the goal of all of the gnostics is reaching Him and meeting Him only. It is the delight of the eye of which no soul knows what is hidden from them. If it is attained, then all cares and desires are wiped away, and the heart becomes immersed in its blessedness. Were one to be thrown into the fire, he would not feel it by virtue of his immersion [in the tranquil, blessed state]. And, were the amenities of Paradise spread out before him, he would not take heed of them by reason of the perfection of his [state of] tranquility and [by reason of] his having

41 Ibid., 198.
42 Ibid., 200.
43 Ibid.
reached the [highest] degree above which there is no degree. By my life! How can one who only understands the love of sensible things believe in the pleasure of gazing into the face of God — be He exalted — when He has no image nor shape? Which meaning would [God's] servants reckon to be Him — be He exalted — mentioning it to be the greatest of the graces? No way! He who knows God knows that the pleasures [that are] separated from all of the imagined desires are included beneath this [one] pleasure... And they only intend by this the preference [for] the pleasure of the heart in knowing God — be He exalted — over the pleasure[s] of food and drink and marriage. Paradise is a treasure-trove that gratifies the senses, but, as for the heart, its only delight is in meeting God.44

These various quotations from various works, when taken all together, form a very revealing, fecund, and potentially problematic collection. One might be tempted to suggest, based on such passages, a foundation for a philosophy of religion that would share significant features with that of the philosophers, particularly al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. So too with his “Qur'ānicized” philosophical psychology, which we touched upon in the previous chapter. Most important for our current investigation is what this passage tells us about the realm of the hereafter and its relation to the material universe. The next world, it suggests, is exclusively about intelligible meaning — God's knowledge — and this can only be talked about and made accessible to others in our world through the employment of metaphorical or symbolic representations of these meanings: “semblances” or “similitudes” which are not true in themselves but are true in reference to the meanings they represent. Indeed, an overzealous clinging to their literal meanings can be, at times, tantamount to heresy, he says.

Thus, can corporeality or materiality or anything this-worldly properly be attributed to the hereafter? The answer would appear to be no, even though material imagery is attributed to it for the purpose of communicating something of these intelligible realities to the feeble, 

44 Ibid., 201.
sleeping minds of the inhabitants of this mundane material world. In addition, it would seem that, in the light of al-Ghazālī's understanding of the process of cognition, the material image or phantasm is essential for our intellectual apprehension at all levels save the very highest, which is the ultimate goal of the gnostics. The "realm" from which the lights of the Unveiling dawn, the source "world" of prophetic knowledge, and the true home of the "noble, divine thing" that is the heart appears to be nothing other than the mind of God for al-Ghazālī, an infinite "world" which is both the end and the true beginning of the wayfarer's eternal journey.

If this is the case, then what is the heart? The heart, he explains in many places, is "the receptacle of knowledge"45 and thus contains the malakūt, just as it is itself contained by the infinite "world" of God's knowledge. Although he never goes so far as to say that it ultimately must be above all essential association with the material world, this examination of his mystical cosmology in connection with his esoteric psychology seems to leave no room for any other possibility. We are thus compelled to argue that the heart, for al-Ghazālī, is immaterial, in addition to its being a self-subsisting, rational principle that both contains and is engulfed by the mind of God.

Yet still questions remain. How and why is it localized within the body, even after death? What exactly is the mode of connection facilitated by the sadr or al-jabarūt, such that the movements and behavior of the bodily parts have such a profound effect upon it? Does this mean then that the temporal events of the material universe have a simultaneous and equally profound effect within the timeless world of the malakūt? Also, is the imaginative faculty, the power that retains and associates the phantasms within the soul, part of the heart? How can this

45 Sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb, 125.
be if the heart is a pure intellect? There is yet a great deal to be asked and understood, if indeed these questions have answers. It seems that al-Ghazâlî was much more concerned about moral and spiritual formation than he was about laying out a system, and so there may be no answers, at least not to these kinds of questions.

One place where we might look for answers is the disputed Mishkât al-anwâr, (reportedly) his mystical commentary on the “light verse” (24: 35). However, this unique and somewhat enigmatic work, while seeming to incorporate additional elements from Ibn Sînâ’s cosmological system, is still riddled with ambiguity and deserves a much fuller consideration than we are able to give it here. We thus set it aside, noting its potential relevance to our study while ruling it outside of our present parameters.

\[46\] See Davidson’s consideration of the Mishkât, the attribution of which to al-Ghazâlî he considers to be “virtually certain”, in Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect (NY: Oxford, 1992), esp. 130-144. While many of the “unexpected” insights he draws, such as the use of “light” to symbolize the intellect, are already apparent from a cursory perusal of the Ihyâ', we are uneasy with his tendency to cast al-Ghazâlî into the role of a fox, hiding behind a “cloud of [Qur’ânîc] verbiage”, and with his seeming eagerness to read Ibn Sînâ into every such cloud.
CHAPTER SIX
conclusion

THE WAYFARER'S FINAL JOURNEY:
AL-GHAZALI'S ESOTERIC ESCHATOLOGY

So what can or should we say about the true nature of the afterlife, which takes place in this mysterious realm of infinite, intelligible meaning? Al-Ghazālī, even if he affirms the divine and totally separate nature of the soul, seems to be consistent in his affirmation of the reunion of the soul with its body for judgement and afterlife. He also speaks of the soul as being somehow localized within the body, but the exact nature of this “connection” or localization remains something of an enigma. Insofar as these psychological questions bear on his personal view of the afterlife, it would seem that we are left with a paradox: on the one hand, he clearly and consistently speaks of the afterlife in both bodily and spiritual terms, so it must be mixed; on the other hand, when pushed he seems to regard this “other world” as purely spiritual, having no relation to matter, and so the “life” awaiting us within this realm, it would seem, must likewise be pure and unadulterated. The tension between these two seemingly divergent directions of his writing is so easily identified that we must assume he was well aware of it. We know that this is precisely what compelled writers such as Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Rushd to read him as one of the philosophers, albeit in the orthodox garb of a jurist, a mutakallim, and finally a Sufi. Far from feeling able to draw any sharp conclusions at this point, we look again into the Ḥyāʾ for an answer to this question, if indeed there is any to be found.

One possible solution lies in his treatment of the Divine attributes and the other malakūtī verities, such as the Pen and the Tablet. Returning to the parable in the Kitāb al-tawḥīd waʾl-
tawakkul. Knowledge (personified) both advises and explains:

Open your eye[s]; bring together the light of your two eyes, and fix it in my direction. If there appears to you the pen with which I write upon the tablet of your heart, then it appears that you are ready for this way. For the Pen is revealed [to] everyone who [successfully] traverses the world of the jabarūt and knocks on one of the doors of the malakūt. Indeed, you see that the Prophet (May God bless him and grant him salvation) was shown the Pen in the very beginning of his ordeal [i.e. his prophetic experience], when it was revealed to him, “Recite! And your Lord is Most Gracious, who teaches by the Pen, teaches man that which he [wrote].”¹

And so the wayfarer said, “I have opened my sight and fixed [my gaze], and — by God! — I see neither reed nor wood. And I do not know of any pen save one such as that.” Thereupon Knowledge said, “You have rendered the search impossible [by looking thus]. Have you not heard that the furniture of the house ‘resembles’ the Lord of the house? Do you not know that God’s essence — be He exalted — does not resemble the rest of the essences [in the created realms]? Just so, [do you not know that] His hand does not resemble hands, nor does His pen resemble pens; nor does His speech [resemble] the rest of the [types of] speech; nor His handwriting the rest of [the types of] handwriting? These Divine things are [all] of the world of the malakūt. God is not in Himself (fī dhātihi) a body, nor is He in a space, in contrast with [all things] other than Him. His hand is not [made of] flesh and bone and blood, in contrast to the hands [of all things other than Him]. His Pen is not of reed; nor is His Tablet of wood. Nor is His speech of sound and letter... If you were unable to witness this [fact] in this way, then I can only regard you as one impotent [to choose] between the excellence of stripping all anthropomorphic imagery away from [your concept of] God and the womanliness of ascribing anthropomorphic imagery to God, wavering between this and that...²

Knowledge later gives the wayfarer another chance, and this time the mystic is able to “see” the Pen that is unlike all other pens. “Upon [his having seen] this, he said farewell to Knowledge and thanked him, saying, ‘I have prolonged my stay with you and my purpose for [being with] you. [Now] I intend to journey [on] to the Presence of the Pen and ask Him about His

¹ Here the entire translation is our own (Arabic text, 125-6).

² Al-Qalam (96): 3-5.

³ Kitāb al-tawhīd..., 125.
Thus, the material and anthropomorphic imagery applied to God and the Divine "things" in the *malakūt* are only true when seen with the eyes of mystical insight. When seen in literal terms, they lead to the "effeminate" excess of anthropomorphism (*tashbīḥ*), which is an obstacle for further ascent into the intelligible world. The proper way of regarding these verities symbolized by material "likenesses", such as the Pen and the Tablet, the Footstool and the Throne, is to see them as inner forms that can only be grasped by the inner, intuitive eye and not as literal, material attributes perceived by our materially-conditioned minds. So too with the many graphic images associated with the afterlife, it could be argued.

Ever anticipating such questions, al-Ghazālī refutes this temptation to interpret away all afterlife imagery in the *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*, where he presents a very sensible explanation for adhering to the literal descriptions of the corporeal afterlife while applying allegorical interpretations to the anthropomorphic descriptions of God and the other spiritual realities mentioned above. With regard to the "Gathering and the Resurrection (al-ḥasr wa'l-nashr)," he writes,

> The Revealed Law has related both of these, and it is true. Believing in them is required, for [they]\(^5\) are possible according to the intellect. Its meaning is [God's] restoring [the individual] after having annihilated [him]. For God that is doable, just as [in the case of] the origination of everything...\(^6\)

Similarly, in the case the interrogation of Munkar and Nakīr, he writes, "believing in it is

\(^4\) Ibid., 125-6.

\(^5\) Literally, "it". Although al-Ghazālī uses a masculine singular pronominal suffix here, it is clear that his intention is the two worlds together.

\(^6\) *Iḥyā’*, vol. 1, 151.
required, because it is possible..." So too in the case of the torment of the grave, the weighing of deeds, the traversing of the bridge, and the rest of the eschatological events. Believing in them is required because they are conceivable, possible.8 Anthropomorphic and spatial descriptions of God, however, cannot be conceived as possible, and so the meaning of their outward form must take precedence over the form itself. In this way, he realizes his explicitly stated goal of showing the harmony between the inner and the outer, the ultimate agreement and complementarity between allegorical interpretation and literal acceptance.9

It could be argued that these texts, being kalāmī in nature, and hence written at the level of the common people and the mutakallimūn, do not apply to the higher forms of discourse — such as the Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa l-tawakkul, the Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb, the Kitāb dhamm al-ghurūr, etc. — and their intended audiences. Given all that we have seen in the course of this study, especially in the first, fourth, and fifth chapters, this seems a weighty suggestion. However, it would be somewhat reckless to take the suggestion as a conclusion before other texts and factors are weighed.

In an effort to clarify al-Ghazālī’s eschatology, then, we naturally return to the work solely devoted to the subject, a work often taken to be a prime example of his literal and uncompromising adherence to the traditional Islamic teachings about death and the afterlife: the Kitāb dhikr al-mawt wa mā ba‘dahu. Here, specifically in the seventh chapter, he revisits the discussion about the various ways Muslims have interpreted the phenomena promised in the next

7 Ibid., 152.
8 Ibid., 152ff.
9 Ibid., see esp. 136.
world. After citing some traditions dealing with the psychologically-generated serpents and scorpions that are a part of the torment of the grave, al-Ghazālī poses a question and provides a lengthy answer:

Were you to ask, “But one time we saw the infidel in his grave, and we watched him, but we did not witness anything of that. So what is the mode of believing [when it is] contrary to the eyewitness [observation]?”

Then know that you have three stations in reference to the belief in the semblences of this torment. The first of them is the most evident, most correct, and the most beneficial, [namely] that you believe that they [truly] exist and [that] they bite the dead person. But you will not see that, for this eye does not help to see the things pertaining to the realm of malakūt. Everything connected with the afterlife is of the world of the malakūt. Why, you see the Companions (may God be pleased with them), how they used to believe in the descending of Gabriel when they would not see him, and [how] they believed that [the Prophet] (may God bless him and grant him salvation) saw him...

The second station is that you recall the matter of one who sleeps, [namely] that he sees in his sleep a snake biting him and he [actually] feels the pain of that to the extent that you see him cry out in his sleep, his brow breaking into a sweat, and him showing [signs of] discomfort in his place. All that is grasped from [within] himself, and [still] he suffers from it just as a conscious person suffers. Or he witnesses [all this] while you see him quiet on the outside and do not see any snake around him. [Still] the snake is there in truth, and the torment is occurring, but it — from your position — goes unwitnessed. If the torment is in the pain of the bite, then there is no difference between a snake that you imagine and a snake that you [actually] see.

The third station is that you know that the snake itself does not cause the pain; on the contrary, that which hits you is the venom. But then the venom is not the pain [itself]; rather your torment lies in the effect that has occurred within you by reason of the venom. Were something like that to occur without the venom, then the torment would [still] be sufficient. It is impossible to make that kind of torment known to people save through attributing it to the [natural] cause through which it normally comes... And these mortal attributes [of the soul] are transformed upon death into things that cause torment and pain in the soul. Hence their [inflicted] pains become like the pains of snakebites without there being any snakes...10

As his his custom, he reduces this somewhat theoretical discussion to a very practical and

10 Dhikr al-mawt, 140.
matter-of-fact conclusion, which comes just a page further down. He says,

If you ask, “of these three stations, what is the true one?” Know that there are those among the people who affirm the first and reject all else. And there are those who reject the first and affirm the second. And there are those who only affirm the third. However, the truth which was revealed to us by way of reflection is that all of that is within the realm of the possible and that whoever denies some of that [suffers from] a constriction of the gall bladder and is ignorant of the expanse of God’s power, be He praised, and of the wonders of His arrangement [of things]... Indeed, these three ways of torment are [all] possible, and believing in [all of] them is required. Perhaps a servant is punished through one type of these, and perhaps all three merge upon a servant. We seek refuge in God from His torment, be it little or much.

This is the truth, so believe in it on authority, for the one who knows that by verification is rare on this simple earth. That which I advise is that you do not speculate overmuch in [trying to] figure that out. And do not occupy yourself in [seeking] the complete understanding of it. Rather, occupy yourself with [how to] manage preventing the torment in whatever way. For, if you neglect [your pious] works and worship and busy yourself [instead] with researching that, you would be like a person who had been taken by some authority, which imprisoned him in order to cut off his hand and amputate his ear. And so [the prisoner] spends the entire night wondering [whether the authority] will cut it with a knife or a sword or a razor, and he neglects [to think about] the way of contriving [a way] to rid himself of the source of the punishment. This is the pinnacle of ignorance. It is known for certain that, after death, either great punishment or eternal bliss [awaits] the servant, and so he ought to be prepared for it. As for searching after the details of the punishment and reward, it [amounts to] meddling and a waste of time.\footnote{Ibid., 142.}

This passage reminds us that al-Ghazālī’s primary purpose in writing the \textit{Ihya‘} is spiritual formation — the practical business of preparing such theoretically-inclined souls for the inevitable ordeal of death — and he has been saying this all along, from the very first book to the very last. While some may argue that this is just a façade behind which he hides his Avicennean leanings, it seems too heavily emphasized and too consistent to be written off as a diversion technique designed to keep the common people and the theologians at bay. We are thus
compelled to take him at his word, that is, to read him as a sincere advocate for the primacy of practice and character-reform. It seems that the formulation of a comprehensive theoretical "system" was a much lower priority — if a priority at all — than was serving in this practical capacity.

Having said this, we must grant that he does, even here, seem to leave open the door of truth, and this is where some reflections and suggestions may be warranted.

**Conclusion**

In short, given what we have seen of al-Ghazālī's esoteric cosmology and psychology, our reading suggests that his personal position on the true nature of the next world cannot include corporeality, at least in an ontological or extramental sense. At the same time, however, his many statements in the more esoteric corners of the Ḩiyā ṭ seem to indicate a psycho-spiritual "realm" that is *experientially* multilevel, including corporeal torments and pleasures. This is intimated by his frequent recourse to the intramental corporeality of the dream experience, an experiential reality that he invariably brings up in the middle of his eschatological commentaries. This is further corroborated by a close analysis of the language he uses to describe the phenomena waiting beyond the threshold of death: almost always framed in the language of the individual's perception, which is for him far more important than the ontological status of these things in a theoretical vacuum. One might also take as corroborating evidence al-Ghazālī's theory of the universal, which differs from that of Ibn Sīnā in that al-Ghazālī's "universal" is never divorced from the phantasm, and so it comes closer to an archetype than to a universal in the Avicennean sense. Even the very pinnacle of the mystical experience is, for
him, tantamount to a shift in perception rather than an ontological transformation\textsuperscript{12}; in other words, the moth is thus never \textit{really} consumed by the flame, even though that may be the moth’s \textit{experience} of its encounter.

In the light of all this, one might still argue that al-Ghazâlî is, in reality, subscribing to the very same philosophical eschatology that he condemns in the \textit{Tahâfut} and other, much-later works, such as the \textit{Munqidh} and \textit{Fayşal al-tafriqa}, and that he is somewhat deceitfully subscribing to more than one truth: one for the masses (religious/exoteric) and one for the elite (philosophical/esoteric). Such has been the basic argument of al-Ghazâlî’s critics for nearly nine hundred years, from Ibn Ţufayl and Ibn Rushd to Richard Frank and Kojiro Nakamura. We argue differently. What seems most crucial to unlocking al-Ghazâlî’s eschatology vis-à-vis the philosophical eschatology, which he condemns with fair consistency and (we argue) in good faith, is that, while the philosophical treatments of psychology and eschatology are all theoretically and ontologically oriented, al-Ghazâlî’s consistent and almost exclusive focus is on the individual’s \textit{experience} of these realities, an experience which promises to be imbued with material associations for the vast majority of humankind. Ontological speculation about such matters is, to him, both irrelevant and distracting, a waste of valuable time, time that would be better spent preparing for the inevitable ordeals of death, reckoning, and eternity.

In light of our reading, then, his unflinching insistence upon the belief in an afterlife that includes corporeal torments and pleasures is extremely consistent with his esoteric thought, for he believes it to be both true to the servant’s experience and expedient in focusing the reader’s efforts and attention on the true task-at-hand, which is the immediate challenge of reforming

\textsuperscript{12} See his \textit{Kitâb al-tawhîd wa’l-tawakkul}, esp. 118-121.
one's character and living one's life in preparation for the eternal journey.

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APPENDIX ONE

As this chapter of the disputed treatise, "the Epistle of Presence", is replete with valuable and pertinent points, I have rendered the entire section into English. In the course of the translation and commentary, some brief remarks will be made concerning the authenticity of this work attributed to al-Ghazālī.

Chapter on the Commentary Concerning the Human Soul and Spirit

Know that Allāh — be He exalted — created the human person from two different things. The first of these is the murky, dense body, within [and] below generation and corruption, composed, put together, earthen. Its state is not perfected except by another, which is the substantive, singular, luminescent, cognizant, activating, motive soul which is the perfecting agent for [its] instruments and bodies. Allāh — be He exalted — put the body together from [various] bits of ash and caused it to grow by means of [various] bits of foodstuff. He made its foundation smooth, even, and made its pillars level, balanced. He particularized its limbs, and then He manifested the jawhar of the soul, from His command, [which is] single and perfect, perfecting and benificent. By "soul" I do not mean the faculty that seeks nutrition, nor do I mean the faculty that moves [the body] by reason of desire and anger. Nor do I mean the faculty residing within the heart that seeks to procreate for the purpose of [sustaining] life and is exposed to the senses. Nor do I mean the movement [emanating] from the heart to all of the extremities, for this faculty [being all of the above] is called the animal "spirit". Sense and movement and appetite and anger are among its soldiers. That faculty seeking nourishment and residing freely within the center of the body is said to be a "natural spirit", and among its...
attributes are digestion and evacuation [of the bladder and bowels]. And so with the imaginative faculty, the reproductive faculty, the growth faculty and the remaining natural faculties, all of them are servants for the body. And the body is the servant of the animal spirit, for it accepts the faculties from the body and makes use [of them] in accordance with its direction and movement [of the body].

DEFINING THE SOUL & ITS STATES

Rather by “soul” I mean that jawhar, perfect and singular, whose only concern is remembrance (al-tadhakkur), mindful wariness (al-tahaffuz), contemplation (al-tafakkur), discrimination (al-tamyīz), and deliberative reasoning (al-rāwīya). It accepts/receives the [various kinds of] knowledge in their entirety, and it never wearies of receiving the pure forms stripped of matter. This jawhar is the captain of the souls and the commander of the faculties, all [of which] serve it and obey its order. Every group has a special name for the rational soul (al-nafs al-nātiqa), by which I mean this jawhar, for the Muslim philosophers (al-ḥukamā?) call this jawhar the “rational soul” (al-nafs al-nātiqa) while the Qur’ān calls it the “soul at rest” (al-nafs al-mutma’inna) and the “spirit of the [Divine] command” (al-rūḥ al-amrī), and the Sufis [use] the nomenclature of the “heart”. The difference lies in the names, for the meaning is one, concerning which there is no difference [between them]. For the heart and the spirit, according to us, as well as the [soul] at rest, all of them are names for the rational soul, and the rational soul is the living, acting, cognizing jawhar. And wherever we say the “absolute soul” or the “heart” we mean by it the jawhar.

THE ANIMAL SOUL

Now the Sufis call the animal spirit a “soul” (nafs), and the religious law concurs with that, for it says, “your worst enemy is your [own] soul.” [In addition] the Lawgiver used the noun “soul” — and indeed confirmed it [when] he said. “Your soul is that which is within you.” This expression points to the appetitive and irascible faculties, for they originate in the [material] heart which

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4 Literally, “pushing out”/ “pushing back” or “dispelling”.

5 Literally, “according to each people” (‘inda kullī qawm).

6 Sūrat al-Fajr (89): 27-8. According to the Qur’ānic classifications of the human soul, this is the highest form or state of soul. Al-Ghazālī (?) will discuss and explain the other two (Qur’ānic) states of soul in due course.

7 This is actually a Prophetic ḥadīth, but one of unknown extraction.
is situated within [the body].

Once you have come to know the difference in names, know that the people researching [this subject] give expression to this precious jawhar with various expressions. The scholastic theologians, who are versed in the knowledge of dialectic, consider this soul a body, saying that it is a "subtle body" as opposed to this heavy, crude body. They do not see the difference between the spirit and the body except by way of subtlety and density. Some of them deem the spirit to be an accident, and some of the physicians incline toward this doctrine; some of them see the blood as a spirit. All of them are satisfied with the limitation of their suppositions to their imaginations, and they have not sought the third part [of the soul's reality]. Know, then, that the three parts are the body and the accident and the singular jawhar.

The animal spirit, then, is a subtle body, as if it were an ignited lamp placed within the glass of the heart, by which I mean that pine-cone-like shape suspended in the breast. Life is the shining luminescence of this lamp, and the blood is its oil. Sensation and motion are its light, while [carnal] appetite is its heat and anger its smoke. The faculty seeking nourishment which exists in the interior [of the body] is its servant and guard and deputy. This spirit is found in all animals.

The human being is a body, and his effects are accidents, but this [animal] spirit does not find its way to knowledge, nor does know the manner of [its own] making or the right of [its] maker. Indeed, it [i.e. the animal soul] is a servant, a prisoner that dies with the death of the body. Were the blood to increase, that lamp would go out due to excessive heat. Were the blood to decrease, it would go out due to excessive cold. For its extinction is the cause of the death of the body.

Neither the speech of the Creator — glory be to Him — nor the injunction of the Lawgiver [pertains] to this spirit, because the wild beasts and the rest of the animals are not held accountable and the judgements of the religious law are not addressed to them. The human being, however, is made accountable and is addressed [by the religious law] by virtue of another, additional meaning that is found to belong to him and is singled out for him. That [additional] meaning is the rational soul and the soul at rest, for this spirit is neither a body nor an accident due to the fact that it is from the command of Allāh — be He exalted — just as He said: "Say: the spirit is from the command of my Lord"\(^9\) and "O, soul at rest, return to your Lord well pleased and well-

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\(^8\) Another obvious printing error is detected here, where the š of "oil" (dihm) is mistakenly printed as a ʃ thus making "security" or "deposit" (rahn).

\(^9\) Sūrat al-İsrāʾ (17): 85.
THE TRUE NATURE OF THE SPIRIT

Now the command of the Creator — be He exalted — is not a body nor is it an accident; rather, it is a divine faculty (quwwa ilāhiyya), like the primordial Intellect, the Tablet, and the Pen, all of which are singular jawāhir, [totally] separate from matter. Indeed, they are pure, intelligible lights (aḍwā’ mujarrada ma’qūla) that cannot be perceived by the senses. The [terms] “spirit” and “heart” in our previous usage are these jawāhir. They do not admit corruption, do not diminish, are not extinguished, and do not die; on the contrary, they separate from the body and await the return to it on the day of resurrection, just as it is related in the religious law. It was rightly stated in the philosophical sciences (al-ʿulūm al-ḥikmīya), by way of decisive demonstrations and clear proofs, that the rational spirit is neither a body or accident. Rather, it is a permanent, everlasting jawhār that does not decay. But we can do without the reiteration of the demonstrations and the enumeration of the proofs because they are [already well] established and mentioned. Whoever wishes to verify them can refer to the appropriate books [dealing] with that art.

As for our way [of knowing these things], it does not result by means of demonstrations; rather we rely on eyewitnessing and depend upon the vision of faith. When Allāh — be He exalted — added the spirit to His command and sometimes to His might, He said, “And I breathed into him of my spirit” and “say: the spirit is from the command of my Lord.” He [also]

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11 Within the same treatise, immediately before this chapter, he says that the soul is “the tablet of the [various] kinds of knowledge, as well as their place of residence and their receptacle.” The body cannot receive or contain knowledge, he says, because it is finite. But the soul, he says, “receives all of the [different] kinds of knowledge without resistance, crowding/jostling, weariness, or cessation.” (90)

12 As we mentioned in the introduction, this simultaneous affirmation of theosophical metaphysics and orthodox eschatological doctrine is characteristic of his mystical writings.

13 It is interesting to note here that he does not refer to specific titles as he does in many of his other books and treatises.

14 Sūrat al-Ḥijr (15): 29; also ʿSād (38): 72.
said, "And we breathed into him of our spirit." And Allāh — be He exalted— hastened to add a body or “accident” to his spirit for the purpose of their mutual diminishing and alteration and for the speed of their passing away and [physical] corruption.

The Lawgiver, may Allāh bless him and grant him salvation, said, “the spirits are recruited soldiers” and “the spirits of the martyrs are in the crops (ḥawāsil) of green birds.” The accident does not remain after the distinction of the jawhar, because it is not self-subsisting, and the body admits decomposition, just as it is said, composition is from matter, and the form (al-ṣūra) is as it is related in the books. Once we have found these āyā and Prophetic Traditions (akhbār) and rational demonstrations, we know that the spirit is a singular, perfect, and self-subsisting jawhar from which both the uprightness of religion and its corruption proceed.

THE EYES OF THE HEART

The “natural spirit”, the “animal spirit” and all of the bodily faculties are among its servants even though this jawhar receives the forms of things known [to it] and the realities of existents [by means] other than through their eyes and through their individual [occurrences]. For the [human] soul is capable of knowing the reality of human nature by [a way of knowing] other than seeing an [individual] person, just as it comes to know the angels and the shayātīn. It does not need to have a vision of [all] the individual angels or devils, and thus the senses of the majority of people are not granted [a sensual perception] of either. A group of the Sufis have said that the heart has an eye, in the same way that the body has an eye. So he sees external phenomena by means of his external eye, and he sees the realities by means of the eye of the intellect. The Prophet of God — May God bless him and grant him salvation — said, “every single person’s heart has two eyes,” and they are the eyes by means of which he sees the unseen (al-ghayb). If Allāh wills [something] good for a servant, He opens the two eyes of his heart so that he may see what is invisible.

15 Sūrat al-Tahrīm (66): 12. This āya describes how Allāh caused the virginal conception of Jesus by breathing His spirit into Jesus, whose physical form was seemingly created in her womb at the same moment. The creation of Adam, the first human, is described in a strikingly similar way. See Sūrat al-Ḥijr (15): 28-9.

16 Literally, “soldiers” (junūd).

17 Although this is often conventionally translated as “devils”, the English term carries connotations that really do not suit the Arabic term. Thus, I leave the Arabic here.
THE SPIRIT & THE BODY

And this spirit does not die upon the death of the body, because Allah - - be He exalted - summons it to His threshold, saying “return to thy Lord.” Indeed, [this spirit] separates from the body and [then] abandons it. As a result of its separation, the states of the animal and natural faculties, for the [physical] mover becomes still. That stillness is called death. The people of the way, i.e. the Sufis, rely upon the spirit and the heart more than they rely upon the individual [embodied] person.

If the spirit is [indeed] from the command of the Creator — be He exalted — then it is like a stranger in the body and its countenance is [turned] toward its place of origin and return. If it is strong and unsullied with the pollution of nature, it is granted more benefits from the direction of its origin than it is given from the side of the [embodied] individual. Thus, if you have realized that the spirit is a singular jawhar, that the body must occupy space, and that the accident only remains by [reason of the presence of] the jawhar, then know that this jawhar does not inhere in a receptacle, nor does it reside in a location. And [know that] the body is not the place of the spirit, nor the receptacle of the heart. Rather, the body is the tool of the spirit, the instrument of the heart, and the mount of the soul. The spirit, in its essence, is not conjoined to the parts of the body, nor is it [spacially] separate from the body; rather, it is closely concerned (muqbil) with the body, helping it and flowing through it.

THE SPIRIT’S RELATION TO THE BRAIN & THE BODY

When it first revealed its light upon the brain, because the brain is its special [material] manifestation, the spirit made a guard out of the foremost part of it, and from its central area it made a minister and organizer, and out of its rear portion it made a treasurer and a treasure house. Out of the [various] parts, it made men and riders; it made a servant out of the animal spirit, and out of the natural spirit it produced a representative; it made a mount out of the body, and it made the world a sphere of activity. From life it produced commodities and wealth, and it brought forth commerce out of movement; it turned knowledge into profit and the hereafter into a goal and a homecoming. From the religious law it brought forth a [mystical] way and a method. It turned the soul inclined [toward

18 Literally, “a place of returning”.

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evil] into a guard and a captain, and it made the self-reproaching soul an agent of awakening. Out of the senses it produced spies and eyes. From religion it fashioned armour. It made a teacher of the [practical] intellect and students out of sense perception. And behind all of this was the Lord — magnified be He — as a close observer.

THE REASON BEHIND THE SOUL’S EMBODIMENT

The soul did not, by means of this attribute and with this instrument, give itself to this [materially] dense individual [existence], nor did it join [the body] with its essence. Rather, utility debased it while its countenance was turned toward its Creator, who commanded that [the soul] benefit [from its attachment to the body] for a specified time. For the spirit is only occupied with the material [stuff] of the journey so that it may seek knowledge because knowledge will be its ornament in the Abode of the Hereafter: “For the ornament(s) of wealth and children are the adornment(s) of the life of this world.”

Just as the [bodily] eye is occupied with seeing the visible things; the hearing constantly perseveres in hearing the audible sounds; the tongue is ever ready to compose statements; the animal soul is [constantly] seeking the concupiscible pleasures, and the natural soul is in love with the pleasures of food and drink, so too the spirit at rest, by which I mean the heart, seeks only knowledge and derives pleasure from it alone. All of its existence is spent in learning, and all of it days, until the moment of its separation [from the body], it adorns itself with knowledge. Were it to concern itself with something other than knowledge, the spirit would only devote itself to it for the purpose of the body’s

19 See Sūrat Yūsuf (12): 53. This is the state of the soul in which it is prone toward mischief/evil. Like the black horse of the soul in Plato’s Phaedrus, its tendency is to rush toward any object of desire.

20 See Sūrat al-Qiyāma (75): 2. This is the soul’s state between ammāra and mutma’inna, the state in which it feels the pangs of regret, repents, and struggles to ammend its ways.

21 He is making an allusion here to Sūrat al-An‘ām (6): 2 and 60, which read, “He it is who created you from clay; then He decreed a term, and a stated term is with Him...” and “It is He who takes you at night, who knows what you have done in the day; then He raises you [to life again] in [the new day], so that a preordained term may be fulfilled; then to him is your homecoming...” See also Sūrat al-Zumar (39): 42.

22 Another Qur’ānic allusion: Sūrat al-Kahf (18): 46, which reads, “Wealth and sons are the adornments of the life of this world, but the abiding things, good deeds, are are better in your Lord’s [estimation], better in terms of rewards and in terms of hope.”

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welfare, not for the sake of its own desired object nor for the love of its [own] origin.

So, once you have come to know the states of the spirit, the duration of its remaining, [the nature of] its strong love for knowledge and its passion for it, then you must learn the [different] categories of knowledge, for they are many. We will enumerate them in an abridged form.

Given all that we have seen in the previous chapters, this salient discussion needs little explication. So let us just call attention to some of the main items of interest. Most of these concern the soul as a jawhar. It is crucial that we recognize here that the author is using the term in an explicitly non-kalâmî way, which would be most unusual for al-Ghazâlî if one were to argue for the authenticity of the work. Indeed, this treatise would have no place among the kalâm works treated in the third chapter, and thus his employment of the term jawhar would seem strange indeed. As far as his kalâm is concerned, the jawhar is and must be material; this is even verified by what the author says here about the “theologians” who are, in effect, Ashʿarî atomists (al-Ghazâlî included, we presume).

However, moving into a more “unveiled” form of discourse, i.e., his mystical explication of the true natures of things, the author uses jawhar to signify a non-spatial, immaterial, self-subsisting, intelligible, and divine thing. In short, as he himself says, it is the rational soul described by the philosophers. While the content of this declaration may not be far from the findings of chapters four and five of this study, the attribution of these qualities to the jawhar is. We thus are inclined to suspect the authenticity of this discussion, for nowhere else in the corpus of al-Ghazâlî’s writings, be they kalâmî or esoteric, do we find the jawhar qualified in such a way. And the brief allusion to an embodied afterlife seems too abrupt to be anything but a token attempt to weave this more philosophical position into a Ghazâlîan framework.
The Ways of Knowing

Another extremely important feature is the author's discussion of the various ways in which knowledge can be acquired. He intimates that a knowledge of the true natures of things can be obtained either through "decisive demonstrations and clear proofs" or through the more experiential path of "eyewitnessing" and "the vision of faith", this latter path being his way, i.e., the way of the Sufis. He revisits this topic a bit later within the very same treatise.23 Here, speaking of knowledge in a non-mystical vein, he divides knowledge into two distinct types: the religious/legal (șar'ī) and the intellectual (ʿaqlī). For the people who have grasped these ways of knowing, he says, "most of the religious/legal sciences are intellectual" and "most of the intellectual sciences are religious/legal." Still, however, he separates them into distinct categories and goes on to break them down still further.

The religious/legal sciences divide into the knowledge of the foundational principles and the knowledge of the branches. Knowing the foundational principles, he says, is more particularly called the "science of affirming of Divine unity" (ʿilm al-tawḥīd), which "looks into the nature of the essence of God — be He exalted — His pre-eternal attributes and his active attributes." It also investigates "the states of the Prophets and the imams and companions after them. And it looks into the states of death and life and into the states of the raising and the resurrection and the gathering and the account," as well as the "vision of Allāh — be He exalted.

Those who undertake speculative investigation in this [field of] knowledge first take hold of the ʿāyāt of Allāh — be He exalted — in the Qurʾān. Then [they cling to] the [orally] related Traditions of the Apostle — may God bless him and grant him salvation. Then [they rely upon] intellectual proofs and demonstrative syllogisms, for they have appropriated the basics of both general and dialectic

23 96-100.
syllogistic argumentation, with all their accessories, from the patrons of philosophical logic, and they have situated most of the [technical] expressions in incorrect contexts. They give expression [to their arguments] in the idiom of the jawhar and the “accident” and the “proof” (al-dalīl) and “speculative reasoning” (al-naẓar) and “inferential reasoning” (al-īstidlāl) and “proof” (al-ḥujja).

The meaning of all of these expressions differs according to each group... but it is not the desired goal of this treatise to critique the meanings of the expressions according to the opinions of the group [under discussion], so we will not rush into it. Now these [intellectuals] of the group [under discussion] are specialists in [the science of] the kalām concerning the foundational principles and the science of tawḥīḍ, and they are called the mutakallīmūn. Thus the science of kalām has become famous for the science of tawḥīḍ. And part of the knowledge of the foundational principles is the [science of] exegesis...²⁴

Thus, kalām — including the more foundational sciences of tafsīr, hadīth, and the knowledge of [Arabic] language²⁵ — is the main representative of this first division of religious/legal knowledge.

The second type of religious/legal knowledge is the knowledge of the branches, which he distinguishes from the first type as being the practical science as opposed to the theoretical science.²⁶ This praxis-oriented knowledge includes the sciences of jurisprudence and ethics.

As for intellectual science or knowledge, he identifies three grades: the mathematical and logical; the natural (observational/experimental); and the speculative. We will focus on his explication of the third and highest grade of intellectual knowing. According to al-Ghazālī, the knowers of this category look into

the necessary and the possible, and then the investigation of the Maker [of the Universe] and His essence and all of His attributes and actions and commands

²⁴ Ibid., 96-7.

²⁵ Ibid., 98, where he gives a lengthy discourse — almost a sermon — on the crucial importance of mastering the Arabic language.

²⁶ Ibid., 99.
and judgements and decrees, and the ordering of the appearance of the existents from Him. [Then there is] the investigation of the states of the angels and shayāāین. It ends with the science of prophecy, with the matter of the miracles [of the prophets] and the states of the miracles [of the saints], the investigation of the states of the sanctified souls, the state(s) of sleep and waking, and with the stations of visions. Among its branches are the knowledge of talismans (al-tilasmāt) and astrological fortune telling (al-tabarrujār) and whatever is related to them...

This highest level or grade of intellectual knowledge is rather obviously the grade of the philosophers, whose writings treat all of these topics.

Knowledge, he says, can be won either naturally or supernaturally, and these intellectual sciences, even in their highest form, are obtained naturally. Natural attainment, however, can be further divided into two general categories: the attainment of knowledge through “human learning”, and their attainment through something called “divine learning”. The former is experienced by all humans and is the path of knowing through observation, sense perception, and [following] a method of some kind. The latter, however, is not known to everyone. He says it can occur from both without and within: when it comes from outside, the author simply calls it “attainment through learning”, and when it comes from within, he calls it “being occupied with contemplation” (al-tafakkur).

And, on the interior, contemplation occupies the same place as learning does in the phenomenal world (fi l-zāhir), for learning [from without] is the individual’s benefitting from the particular individual [teacher or instance], whereas contemplation is the [individual] soul’s benefitting from the Universal Soul, and the Universal Soul is more potent in its impact and more powerful in its educating than all of the learned and intellectuals [combined]. The [forms of] knowledge

\[\text{\footnote{Here, the text has another printing error, for the second dot of the initial ٰ is missing, leading the reader to believe it is a ٰ. This, however, would be nonsensical.}}\]

\[\text{\footnote{Ibid., 100-101.}}\]
(al-'ulûm)\textsuperscript{29} are embedded in the principle of the souls by way of potentiality (bi 'l-\textit{quwwa}), like the seed in the earth and the jewel (\textit{jawhar}) in the depth of the ocean or in the heart of the mine,\textsuperscript{30} and "learning" is seeking that thing's emergence out of potentiality and into actuality (\textit{min al-\textit{quwwa} ilâ 'l-fi 'l}). Teaching [on the other hand] is extracting it out of potentiality and into actuality. The learning soul resembles the soul of the teacher and approaches it by way of a [special] relation, for the knower who benefits [others] is like the farmer while the learner who benefits [from the teacher] is like the soil. The knowledge that is \textit{in potentia} is like the seed, while the knowledge that is in actuality is like the plant. Thus, if the learner's soul becomes perfect, it becomes like the fruit-bearing tree or like the jewel [that has been] removed from the depth of the ocean.\textsuperscript{31}

This is the first and most common road of natural knowledge. While it is worthy of esteem in its own right, the second road, the way of contemplation, is superior in every way. He continues,

If the bodily faculties overpower the soul, then the learner stands in need of more learning all the time and needs to undergo hardship and fatigue and needs to seek the benefit, but if the light of the intellect overtakes the descriptions [provided by] sense, then the seeker can, with a little contemplation, do without a great deal of learning. Indeed, through an hour's contemplation the soul of the soft-minded [student] finds more benefit than what the soul of the hard-headed [student] finds in a whole year of learning. Thus, some people attain the sciences through learning and others through contemplation.

[Of course] learning needs contemplation, for the human being cannot learn all of the particulars and universals and every knowable thing. On the contrary, he learns something, and through his contemplation of the sciences he deduces something. The majority of the speculative sciences and practical crafts were [thus] deduced by the souls of the wise, [who were able to do this] by virtue of the purity of their minds and the power of their thought and the sharpness of their intuition without any extra learning or attainment...the soul cannot all of the

\textsuperscript{29} Another printing error corrected: the ل of علم was missing, thus giving علم, which means "swimming" and obviously is not appropriate here. The feminine singular noun adjective, which is functioning here as the predicate of the nominal sentence, also rules out the possibility of the latter and corroborates our correction to the text.

\textsuperscript{30} His equivocal use of terms like \textit{jawhar} and heart (\textit{qalb}) is worth noting.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 102.
particular and universal things that are important to it through learning; rather, some of them [are acquired] through learning and others [are won] through speculation\(^{32}\), as is seen in the customary ways of people, and some of them are deduced from his own mind by virtue of the purity of his thought...

And so, for all of the practical arts of the soul and the body, their preliminaries are obtained through learning and the rest are deduced from contemplation. When the gate of thought has been opened to the soul it comes to know how [to follow] the way of contemplation and how, through intuition, [to take] recourse to what it seeks. Then his heart is opened and his inner vision is opened, and he is able to actualize all that is potential in his heart without any extra seeking or additional fatigue.\(^{33}\)

This intellectual knowledge, he says in the previous section\(^{34}\), is singular in itself, and it gives rise to a composite science, a supernatural way of knowing that brings together all of the states of the two distinct ways of natural knowing (i.e. religious and intellectual). This is the Sufi way of knowing.

That composite science is the knowledge of the Sufis and the way of their states, for they have a special knowledge of a clear way that brings together the two [kinds] of knowledge. Their knowing includes [the knowledge of] the [spiritual] state (al-hāl), of time (al-waqīt) and audition (al-samā‘), of ecstasy (al-wājd) and longing (al-shawq), of intoxication (al-sukr) and sobriety (al-sāhu), of permanence (al-iḥbār) and obliteration (al-mahīw), of poverty (al-fāqr) and extinction (al-fānsī), of friendship (al-wwālīya) and will (al-irādā), of the master and the novice and all that relates to their states in reference to the supererogatory spiritual exercises (al-zawā‘id) and the descriptions (al-awṣāf) and the stations (al-maqāmāt). We will speak about these three [kinds of] knowledge in a special

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\(^{32}\) Here he seems to introduce a middle way, the way of speculation, a mode of deliberative reasoning that makes use of analogy and extrapolation from the known to the unknown. From the ensuing context (not included in the translated passage), this “middle way” seems much closer to contemplation than it does to learning. Indeed, the line between speculation and contemplation is not clearly drawn in the passage. The two do seem, however, to be mutually distinct, at least theoretically.

\(^{33}\) Al-Risāla, 102-3.

\(^{34}\) See p. 101.
book, if Allāh — be He exalted — wills.\textsuperscript{35}

He explains that the mode of apprehension by which the Sufis come to know this composite science is inspiration (\textit{al-ilhām}), an experiential way of knowing that can only be understood in distinction to revelation (\textit{al-waḥī}). While both kinds of apprehension are classified by the author under the single heading, "Divine education" (\textit{al-ta‘līm al-rabbānī}), they are technically separate. As for revelation, he explains it as a process of direct instruction between the Universal Intellect and the sanctified soul.

when the soul, in its very essence, is perfected, [then] the impurity of the natural [material] world, the filth of desire and the ephemeral, evanescent aspirations\textsuperscript{36} all leave it. [Then] its countenance becomes [totally] occupied with its creator and establisher; it holds fast to the generosity of its Producer, and it relies upon His beneficence and upon the emanation of His light. And Allāh — be He exalted — by the goodness of His grace, draws near to that soul and totally envelops it. He looks upon it with a Divine gaze and makes of it a Tablet (\textit{lāwḥ}). And of the Universal Soul he fashions a Pen (\textit{qalam}). Then, He imparts all of His knowledge upon the soul.\textsuperscript{37} [Thus] the Universal Intellect becomes like the teacher while the sanctified soul [becomes] like the learner. Then all of the sciences arise for that soul, and all of the forms (\textit{ṣuwar}) become engraved upon it, [all this being] without any learning or contemplation. The verification of this is His utterance — be He exalted — to His Prophet, "and He taught you that which you did not know."\textsuperscript{38} Thus the knowledge of the prophets is more noble in rank than all of the sciences known to creatures because it is obtained from Allāh — be He exalted

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} Although this is literally printed in the masculine singular, "hope/aspiration," its accompanying adjective is feminine singular, thus suggesting that the proper form is the plural, which must be grammatically treated as feminine singular.

\textsuperscript{37} In keeping with his deliberate use of a quasi-material metaphor here (i.e. that of a tablet and pen), he makes use of a very material image here; literally, it reads, "He engraves all of His knowledge upon the soul."

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Sūrat al-Nisā'} (4): 113.

\end{footnotesize}
— without intermediary or device.\(^{39}\)

He illustrates this by recounting the Qur‘ānic story of Adam and the angels from \textit{Sūrat al-Baqara}, which he wraps up with the following statement: “thus, among those possessing intellects, the matter has been established that the knowledge of the unseen engendered by revelation is more potent and more complete than the acquired sciences.”\(^{40}\)

As for inspiration, it proceeds not from the Universal Intellect, but from the Universal Soul (\textit{al-nafs al-kullīy}).

Inspiration is [when] the Universal Soul gives indication to the particular, human soul by virtue of the degree of its purity and receptivity and by virtue of the potency\(^{41}\) of its predisposition (\textit{quwwat istī’dāhi}). It is a touch of revelation, for revelation is the declaration of the Command \textit{from} the Unseen, while inspiration is its exposition. The knowledge resulting from revelation is called “prophetic knowledge” (\textit{‘ilm nabawī}) while that which results from inspiration is called “the knowledge of Presence” (\textit{‘ilm ladhuni}), which occurs without any intermediary between the soul and the Creator. Indeed, it is like the light \textit{from} the lamp of the Unseen, falling upon a heart that is pure, spacious\(^{42}\), and soft. And that is due to the fact that all of the sciences are occurring [thoroughly] known in the \textit{jawhar} of the First, Universal Soul, that \textit{jawhar} which is among the first, separate, and pure \textit{jawāhir}. [Its] relation to the First Intellect like the relation of air to Adam. It has been made clear that the Universal Intellect is more noble, more perfect, more powerful, and closer to the Creator than the Universal Soul, which is itself more powerful, more refined and more noble than the rest of creation\(^{43}\). Thus, from the overflowing of the Universal

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 103-5.

\(^{40}\) Ibid., 105.

\(^{41}\) Although it is farther from the literal meaning of the text, I am tempted to read “intensity” here, for neither “faculty” nor “power” seem to fit the particular context.

\(^{42}\) Literally, “vacant” (\textit{fārīgh}).

\(^{43}\) Literally, “creatures” (\textit{makhlūqāt}).

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Intellect, revelation\textsuperscript{44} is engendered; and, from the overshadowing of the Universal Soul, inspiration is engendered. Thus revelation is the raiment of the prophets while inspiration is the adornment of the saints. As for the knowledge [imparted via] revelation, just as the soul [is unimaginable] without the intellect, so too the saint without the Prophet, and the same goes for inspiration without revelation, for it is weak compared to\textsuperscript{45} revelation [and] powerful [when] adding visionary experience and knowledge [to] the knowledge of the prophets and the saints... The knowledge of Presence is [thus] for the people of prophecy (al-nubūwā) and friendship (al-walāya), just like that which was [given] to al-Khidr, where Allāh — be He exalted — tells [the believers] about him: "We instructed him in knowledge from Our Presence."

The Commander of the Believers, ‘Alī bn Abī Tālib— may God ennobles his face — said, "I held my tongue in my mouth, and then a thousand gates of knowledge opened in my heart, and within each gate were a thousand gates" and "If a pillow were placed [before] me and I were to sit myself down upon it, I would give judgements for the people of the Torah according to their Torah and for the people of the Gospel according to their Gospel and for the people of the Qur’ān according to their Furqān." Now this is a station that is unattainable by sheer human learning; rather one is adorned with this station by virtue of the power of the knowledge of Presence...

If Allāh — be He exalted — wishes to do something good with a servant, He raises the veil between his soul and the Soul which is the Tablet, in which He manifests the secrets of some of the hidden things and upon which are engraved the meanings of those hidden things. Then the Soul gives expression to them as it wishes to whom it wishes among His servants. The reality of wisdom is obtained from the knowledge of Presence, and if a human being does not reach this station, he is not a wise man, for wisdom is one of the gifts of Allāh — be He exalted. "He grants wisdom to whomever He wills, and [as for] the one who is given wisdom, much good has been given him, and only the possessors of intellects..."

\textsuperscript{44} The text erroneously puts "inspiration" both here and in the second position. When considered in the light of all that proceeds and follows this sentence, however, this is clearly another misprint. Indeed, this parallel, contrasting construction (between revelation and inspiration) is continued in the very next sentence.

\textsuperscript{45} Here I translate "compared to" (nisbatān li) in place of "in relation [to]" (bi ’l-nisbatī ilā). This better suits the flow of the context, which is clear, and is also closer to what is printed here. The printing error lies in the careless inclusion of the prefix \textsuperscript{46}with the indefinite noun nisba and in the equally careless mistaking of the prefix \textsuperscript{47}for the alef of the definite article. Corroborating this is the conspicuous lack of the preposition \textsuperscript{48}which is a necessary element in the second expression noted above.

\textsuperscript{46} Sūrat al-Kahf (18): 65.
bear [this] in mind."47 That is because the attainers of this station of the knowledge of Presence have no need for a great deal of [systematic] attaining and exertion of learning, for they learn little but know much; they weary just a little and they rest a lot.48

Finally, after explaining that the need for prophecy has ended with the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad, he closes the chapter by stressing the continuing need for inspiration.

As for the gate of inspiration, it is not blocked; the light of the Universal Soul has stretched out and is not cut off due to the continuing necessity and need of the souls for reassurance, renewal and reminding. In the same way that the people no longer need revealed texts and the [prophetic] summons, they still stand in need of reminding and direction49 due to their total immersion in this temptation and to their tendency to fall into these base desires. Thus Allāh — be He exalted — locked the door of revelation, [this] being a sign for the servants, and opened the gate of inspiration in [His] mercy and put [all] things in order. And He arranged the ranks so that they would know that Allāh is gentle with His servants, providing [means] to whomever He wills without any accounting.50

This then is the author's fullest explanation of the nature and function of the knowledge of Presence, a way of knowing dependent upon the inspiration of the Universal soul without any mediation. This cannot be won through human endeavor, for it is contingent upon the free predilection of God. Nevertheless, a sincere seeker can prepare himself for the high station of divine election, even though he — theoretically — may not be granted it. In the final chapter of the treatise he says that there are three aspects or steps (awjūh) that can prepare one to receive this mystical knowledge of the Sufis. The first of these is

47 Sūrat al-Baqara (2): 269.

48 Al-Risāla, 105-7.

49 Literally, this is "indication" (al-tanbīh) in the sense of calling someone’s attention to something, i.e. directing their attention to something.

50 Ibid., 107.
attaining all of the sciences and taking the lion's share of most of them. The second is the sincere disciplining [of the soul] and true god-wariness...and the third is contemplation, for, if the soul comes to know and trains itself in [the ways of] knowledge and then meditates upon what it knows according to the stipulations of contemplation, the gate of the Unseen will open itself to it... If the contemplative person makes his way along the path of righteousness, he will become one of those possessing intellects [of whom the Qur'ān speaks] and a window 31 will open between his heart and the world of the Unseen. He will become knowing, perfect, intelligizing, a recipient of inspiration and a confirmer [of the truth]. Just as he [the Prophet] -- may God grant him peace and salvation - - said, “an hour’s meditation is better than sixty years of worship.” By God...We will enumerate the conditions/stipulations of meditation in another treatise, since the elucidation of contemplation along with its method and verity is an obscure matter that necessitates additional commentary and interpretation.

Although this text warrants a full and detailed analysis in its own right, we will be able to make only a few brief observations here. These comments are admittedly insufficient, but we feel that they are nevertheless called for by virtue of the fact that the content of the Epistle is extremely relevant to our study and by virtue of its attribution to al-Ghazālī.

While it is extremely clear that the author of this text was extremely well-versed in the thought of both Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī and was intent on anchoring his arguments in the Qur’ān and the Prophetic traditions, we deem it unlikely that this treatise can be authentically attributed to al-Ghazālī. One reason for this is the author’s employment of “jawhar”, which for al-Ghazālī is a conventional idiom strictly associated with the kalām, as we saw in the third chapter. Another reason is the explicit philosophical content of much of the treatise. Nowhere do we see such a complete and explicit incorporation of philosophical terminology and content in the works of al-Ghazālī, even those of a distinctly esoteric nature. In addition to these two

31 Literally, “an overhead aperture [as in a ceiling or roof] (rawzima) from the world of the Unseen in his heart.” Interestingly, this is not the term used in the Kitāb al-tawhīd wa’l-tawakkul (127) for the very same “window”.

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observations, even a casual reader will be struck by the lack of references to al-Ghazālī's other works, a clue that runs counter to al-Ghazālī's characteristic habit of cross referencing (some may say self-promotion). We thus suggest that this treatise may have been written by a post-Ghazālian Sufi with strong Avicennean leanings, a Muslim mystic wishing to "bridge" a perceived dichotomy between the philosophical mysticism of Ibn Sīnā and the more traditional mysticism of al-Ghazālī. For the moment, this will have to stand as a suggestion, awaiting fuller consideration and analysis.
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