

The Contention of Sufism: The *Falasifa's* Fruitless Attempt at Certainty

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The moment thou to this low world wast given
A ladder stood whereby thou mightest aspire...
The Caravan of the Unseen enters the visible world,
But it remains hidden from all these ugly people.

Mawlana Jal al-Din Rumi

THE ANCIENT MASTERS Aristotle and Plato had a profound influence (whether for better or for worse is a question) on both the medieval Islamic and Christian philosophers. The *falasifa*¹ adopted the Platonic and Aristotelian notion of the world, human beings, and their relationship to the Divine or that which was beyond this world. What came about from this influence was, to use Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali's words, a "heresy" of Islam, or in my own view, a philosophy which unsuccessfully tried to incorporate both Aristotle and Plato into Islam. Such a move ultimately led the *falasifa* away from an Islamic God. In Ghazali's view, the philosophers, who claimed to be Muslims, tried to utilize reason in the realm of that which was beyond reason (i.e., the Divine). Consequently, their search for the Divine and its role in the world through reason was ill-founded and heretical.

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¹The Arabic term *falasifa* refers to the Islamicate philosophers.

In this paper, I will argue that the Sufis,² the mystical³ sect with whom Ghazali associates himself (Watt 55), differ in their concept of God's role in the world from the *falasifa* because the Greek philosophers play an extremely influential role in forming the *falasifa*'s view. I will first present a very brief historical overview describing the ancients' idea of God, the Divine, or that which is beyond the visible realm, and show how certain aspects of this view percolate into the Islamic observation of God and His role in the world of the *falasifa*. I will then present the ramifications of such an ideology. Finally, I will show how the Sufis, particularly Ghazali, disassociate themselves from such a perspective in order to find the Divine. In order to analyze the difference between the *falasifa* and the Sufis I will show how Greek influence presents itself in the language the *falasifa* use; I will then show how and why the Sufis differ in their perspective.

In ancient post-Eleatic philosophy, reason was the *modus operandi* for life. The art of dialectic, more commonly known as the Socratic method, began to display the usefulness of reason. The famous Delphic injunction "know thyself" was the spark of this emergence of reason. "It [was] a call to being full of thought about what is real; to know one's place in the world. For to know oneself and to know the world and to know the divine [were] one project" (Faulconer 23). In other words, through reason human beings could accomplish that which they thought to be impossible: they could begin to comprehend the Divine. Since the Divine created the cosmic order, if human beings understood the Divine, then they not only understood themselves, but the world. Thus, understanding the Divine meant being in harmony with the

²The Sufis referred throughout this essay are the sect that affiliate themselves with al-Hallaj, who boldly asserted that "I am God." In other words, the Sufis I refer to are the mystics of Islam, those who sought salvation in becoming lost in God (and thereby becoming God). Let me also make it clear at the outset that Ghazali never explicitly says that he is a Sufi. However, he does say that he finds their way to be the true way (Watt 54–57).

³In the clutter of modern thought, the word "mystical" has been used to mean anything from a parapsychological phenomenon to the African art of voodoo. Here, and throughout the paper, I will use the word in its original sense, referring to the "mysteries" of God.

world, for now individuals could fathom the whole of which they were a part. In this manner, the art of dialectic became the art of learning to look for the whole (21). Therefore, "for the ancients the truth is the ultimate order of the world, and rationality is being-in-accordance with that order....[F]or the Greeks and medievals, persons are more fully themselves as they come to reflect the cosmic order, and they come to reflect it more as they come to touch with it in the way most suited to it as order—namely, through reason"(23).

This approach of utilizing reason to know oneself leads to the *falasifa's* ideas on God. Using Aristotle and Plato as their inspiration, the *falasifa* begin to talk about God. Aristotle argues that God is a being which does not concern Himself with this world because He only cares about the highest of all possible beings, Himself. Aristotle's God becomes unrelated to the world, for He is contemplating Himself, the greatest of all possible beings. There is no need for Him to concern Himself with the trivial needs and deeds of this world. Rather, the people of this world have an obligation to understand the Ultimate Reality Himself. The only way one can achieve this is through reason, thinking about that which is essentially good. For Plato, this essential good is the form of things, while for Aristotle it is the world. However, for both, the task of reasoning or thinking becomes the ultimate form of service to God—philosophy paves the way to God.

This dominance of reason and its power in understanding God becomes apparent in the *falasifa's* arguments about God and His characteristics. For the *falasifa*, the truth lies in God, and therefore to understand the truth one needs to understand the nature of truth, which requires understanding the nature of God. The only possibility of comprehending the nature of God comes from utilizing reason.

This is precisely where Ghazali feels the *falasifa* have gone wrong. They wish to describe God solely through reason, which immediately rules out the dependence on the Qu'ran as a starting point. For Ghazali, this lack of Qu'ranic authority leads to heresy. Ghazali claims that the task of talking about God solely through reason is nearly impossible, for reason has its limits. Throughout his *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Ghazali endeavors to show on their own grounds how the *falasifa* cannot provide certainty, which they so boldly claim to have done. This is where one observes Ghazali's Sufism in play, for he realizes that there is something about being drunk which cannot be fathomed by

contemplating what it means to be drunk (Watt 55); there is something different about *being* rather than *thinking* about being. Ghazali argues that by making reason the sole method of inquiry about God, and not giving the experiential aspect much emphasis, the *falasifa* have gone wrong and are led astray by their own thinking.

Ghazali holds that the *falasifa* have gone against the Qu'ran (and thereby Islam) on three main points: they believe that the world is eternal rather than created, they argue that God does not know particulars, and they deny the resurrection of the body (Watt 37). So let me begin here by analyzing what the *falasifa* believe regarding each one of these "heresies." In so doing, I will highlight the ancient philosophies as seen in their arguments and then outline the Sufi position—Ghazali's attack—on each of the "heresies" and show why the Sufis hold the beliefs they do.

The Eternity of the World

The *falasifa* hold that the world coexists with God, for His effect is always concurrent with Him in time. God is only prior to the world logically, not chronologically. The world is thus coexistent with God in time. The three arguments which the *falasifa* raise in order to prove this are interesting in themselves. First of all, the *falasifa* assert that the "procession of a temporal (being) from an eternal (being) is absolutely impossible" (*Incoherence* 14). The implicit assumption upon which the *falasifa* base their assertion, here and throughout their theorizing, is that God is unchanging, for change means a difference and God obviously does not have any difference. He is without change and there is no other like Him. In this argument, the *falasifa* claim that since the Eternal is always the same in all its states, either nothing originates from Him or that which originates does so infinitely. Why? Because it is impossible for God that the "state of leaving off should differ from the state of taking up" (14).

In the second argument, the *falasifa* argue that in the case of God being prior to the world and time, He is prior neither in essence nor in time. Therefore, He coexists with time. For, if He were prior in essence, then the world and God would both be either eternal or temporal—leading to the conclusion that the world could not have proceeded from something eternal. But if He were prior in time, then it would follow

that "before the existence of the world and time, there was a time when the world did not exist" (*Incoherence* 36). However, this would mean that there was an infinite time before time which is, in itself, self-contradictory. So, the eternity of time must exist and if this is the case then the eternity of motion must also exist. In other words, by employing a *reductio ad absurdum*, the *falasifa* come to the conclusion of the perpetuity of the world.

In their third and final argument for the eternity of the world, the *falasifa* advance that the existence of the world must have been possible before it came into being, for something that is impossible, by its very nature, cannot come into being. Since the world exists, its possibility must have existed without a beginning—"that is, it never lacked being." Furthermore, since the possibility could never have ceased to be, that which is possible—namely, the world—could never cease to be (*Incoherence* 45). So the world did not have a beginning.

In the preceding three arguments one observes the Greek influence. Let me concentrate on the second argument to highlight some of these influences:

But if God's priority means (b) that He is prior to the world and time in time, not in essence, then it follows that, before the existence of the world and time, there was a time when the world did not exist. For in that (pre-existing) time, the world must have been non-existent, as its non-existence preceded its existence. And, therefore, God must have preceded the world during a period which came to an end, but which had never begun. On this view, accordingly, there must be an infinite time before time. But that is self-contradictory. And for this reason it is impossible to believe in the origination of time. Finally, the eternity of time—i.e., the measure of motion—being necessary, it follows that the eternity of motion is also necessary. And hence the eternity of that which is in motion, and the perpetuity of whose motion makes time itself perpetual. (*Incoherence* 36)

This passage is taken from the second argument, where the *falasifa* show the absurdity of the second notion of God being prior to the world and time in time. Here they attack such a notion, for if such a possibility were true, then, according to the *falasifa*, time would exist prior to its

own creation. This, obviously, is a self-contradictory conclusion which annihilates the possibility. The *falasifa* then further their stance in the latter half of the passage, saying that since we have shown this and the previous possibility to be impossible, time necessarily must be eternal and, if time is eternal, then the eternity of the world is also necessary.

This notion of the eternity of motion is borrowed from Aristotle. Relying on the theory of the atomist Democritus, Aristotle believes that motion is everlasting. (Interestingly enough, Democritus had proved the eternity of the world by arguing from the eternality of time [Buckley 51].) Though Democritus argued for the motion of many universes, Aristotle argues for a motion within a single universe.

In his book *Motion and Motion's God*, Michael J. Buckley lays out Aristotle's view on the eternality of motion and time. Aristotle holds that motion presupposes a subject and that this subject can either have an antecedent motion or can be eternal. If the subject is eternal, then it can either be moving—and thus motion would be eternal—or the subject can be inert. But if the subject is inert, then some motion must have caused it to be released from rest. So in this case, the motion would also presuppose some other motion. "Thus any motion would be followed by a subsequent motion. The subject of motion, then, demands both a prior and a posterior motion—and through this demand motion is seen to be necessarily eternal" (Buckley 53). In this way, one can also argue for the eternality of motion from time, for now a "before" and "after" are only possible in motion; and "just as time measures and presupposes motion, so 'now' measures and presupposes existence" (53–54). In other words, it does not matter how far one goes back in time, any "now" in time already includes a before and after.

The *falasifa* take up this notion of time and existence in their argument for the eternity of the world as well. In the passage quoted above, the *falasifa* argue that it is impossible to say that something or someone is prior to time, for in this very act one presupposes time. It makes no sense to talk about time's creation because time necessarily exists. One cannot make the claim, then, that God is prior to the world and time in time, for the word "prior" already implies a notion of time. Here one observes the Aristotelian notion of time, for "now" necessarily implies a before and after in motion. Thus, when one says that God is prior, one is immediately referring to a "now" in time which, by its very

(Aristotelian) nature, has a before and after. Therefore, one sees how the *falasifa* use the ancient notion of time and motion to justify their own view.

How does Ghazali respond to this line of argument? His answer is very simple: God created the world and time. "Time did have a beginning; and it was created. And before time, there was no time whatsoever" (*Incoherence* 36). Though the *falasifa* wish to attack Ghazali on the word "prior," he simply states that when we say God is "prior" we simply mean that God was and the world was not; this "is limited to the presence of the Creator's being and the absence of the world's being" (36). For Ghazali, the Aristotelian definition of eternal time does not exist, because for him God created time. There is motion and God set that motion in place because of His will. God is all-powerful for Ghazali and He can do what He wishes. This surrender to God encompasses the Sufi notion of God and creation.

"Creation—or the universe and the infinite forms that fill it—is another name for God's Acts, and His Acts are the manifestation of His Attributes" (Chittick, *Love* 47). For the Sufi, in other words, there is no question as to whether the world was created in time or not, for God created the world in order to manifest His own Names and Attributes (47). The Sufis argue that to say that God is the Creator, which the *falasifa* do not deny, means that there is a creation which that Creator created. Otherwise, it makes no sense to say that God is the Creator. If the world has coexisted with God, then why and how is God the Creator? Of course the *falasifa* argue that God is prior to the world and time logically and in this way there would be no world without His existence. Yet, this still does not affirm God as the Creator. For Sufis like Ghazali, there is no purpose in arguing about the eternity of the world because it is like asking the mice and insects, who have taken birth in a house, whether they think the house is eternal. They might think the house is eternal, but you, who have seen the house come into existence, know that the house is not eternal. Similarly, the *falasifa* may argue that the world is eternal, but the prophets and saints (the mouthpieces of God) saw the world come into existence, and what they see is what God shows them. Therefore the world cannot be eternal, despite what the *falasifa* claim (see Chittick, *Love* 65–68).

This is exactly what Ghazali seems to be implying when he clarifies his definition of God being prior to the world and time in time. He

wants to make it clear that the *falasifa* play with words to prove their case; they do not use the words the way Muslims use them. Rather, they confuse the audience with a different definition than the one commonly employed by Muslims so that they may provide a justification for their own argument. In fact, as a response to their third argument Ghazali begins by saying, "seizing upon the word 'possibility'" (*Incoherence* 45). Ghazali wants to emphasize the fact that to provide certainty through reason alone, the *falasifa* introduce terms in a very obscure fashion. In doing so, they equivocate on words to suit their audience. So when the time comes to talk about the issue in general to the masses, they use the word in its normal sense, but when they need to justify their position they use a different definition of the same word.

The consequence of adopting the *falasifa's* view, as the Sufi might retort, is that if there is a God, then He serves no purpose. The Sufis take this line of argument because for them God resides in His creation: "God create[s] the world to display His Attributes" (Chittick, *Love* 47). As Muhyi al-Din Muhammad ibn Ali Ibn al-Arabi argues, God's thoughts reside in each one of His creative acts. So the rock, the stone, each entity on this living planet is a thought of God (Chittick, *Knowledge* 11). For the Sufis, the outer world is a manifestation of the inner spirituality. This provides man a chance to realize his own true self, for if the outer world is a reflection of the inner spirituality, then the outer and inner worlds are essentially one. In other words, if God created the world and the world is a reflection of man's inner spirituality, then man essentially is a spiritual being. Thus, there is some purpose for existence—i.e., to realize that inner spirituality which manifests itself in the outer creation. However, if one adopts the *falasifa's* view of the world then the purpose of life comes into question—what is the reason for living? Though the Sufi has an answer, the *falasifa* would have to deem it necessary that the world was created before they could formulate a cogent response to that question.

God Knows No Particulars

Ghazali points out another heretical move committed by the *falasifa* when he calls into question the belief of those *falasifa* who hold that God knows only through universals. The problem that Ghazali is dealing with has two parts: He is trying to see the coherence of the

falasifa's belief that the world is eternal and that God knows this world. On the one hand, the *falasifa* claim that the world is eternal. Yet on the other hand, they claim that God has knowledge of the world. These two claims produce a contradiction because, as Ghazali explains, when Muslims think about eternity they think of nothing else but God and His Attributes. From this eternal perspective on God the *falasifa* go on to argue that what follows from this is that God has knowledge of his creation because He knows that which He has caused—"for the object of will is of necessity known to the willer" (*Incoherence* 143). Since He willed the universe, He knows it because it originated from His will. "Thus, the Universe becomes—in the Muslims' view—object of God's knowledge" (143). However, in the *falasifa's* view God did not create the universe; it coexists with Him. The question then arises: How do the *falasifa* justify God's knowledge of the world?

Ghazali outlines the view held by Abu Ali al-Husayn Ibn Abdullah Ibn Sina (Averroës), one of the great Islamic commentators on Aristotle. Ibn Sina holds that God knows no particulars, for to know any number of particulars would mean that He lacks knowledge of something. To take an example, if God knew particulars, then He would know John stumbling on a rock. John begins to bleed and *now* God knows this as well. However, this means that God did not previously have knowledge that John would bleed. This was something unknown to Him. In other words, whatever can be thought of in time cannot be related to God, for that means that God did not know that particular incident, event, thing, etc. prior to its happening. Whenever one speaks of God and His knowledge of particulars, one talks about it in relation to time, which necessarily implies that God lacks some sort of knowledge of the consequences. Even more so, if God knows particulars, then that means that there is change in God because He might know one instance, yet the knowledge of the next instance may mean a change of knowledge. Therefore, argues Ibn Sina, God knows the world through universals. To take the above-mentioned example, since God knows humans in general, He knows that John will fall (after all, John is a human) and that John will bleed. "[A]ll is known to Him—i.e., is laid bare to Him—in a single discovery which is homogenous, and uninfluenced by Time" (*Incoherence* 155). In this way God still retains His supremacy and omniscience over His creation.

The underlying theory of Ibn Sina, once again, is Aristotelian with an Islamic twist. For Aristotle, as has been illustrated earlier, time and the motion therein are eternal. However, the question that still needs an answer is what caused the motion in the first place? The answer to this question is the catalyst for Aristotelian metaphysics. Aristotle comes to the conclusion that the cause of motion has to be another motion, yet this process could not carry on infinitely because then there would be no causality qua causality. If there isn't a cause which begins the sequence of cause-and-effect (if nothing causes everything), then there is no point to calling such a process "cause-and-effect" (Buckley 60). There has to be an "autonomous cause," as Buckley calls it, in order for causality to work. "This autonomous cause is thus a 'first cause' for its causal activity is initiated within itself, is not due to some further or higher influence" (60). This "first cause" then stops and limits any infinite series. This "first cause" becomes not only the source of motion but the limit of any "simultaneous and ordered series of dependent and independent causes" (61).

Aristotle then asks the question which later gives medieval theologians and Islamicate philosophers like Ibn Sina further material to incorporate into their philosophy. Aristotle questions whether the "first cause" should be one or plural, from which he concludes that "one mover would be sufficient to explain the eternity" of motion (Buckley 67). Aristotle goes on to argue that such a mover must be one, for if the first cause were plural, then one of the many problems that arise is whether any one of the plural causes causes another. If so, then obviously that which is caused cannot be the first cause. Even if one maintains that they do not cause each other, Aristotle argues that there would still be something that would have to understand the plurality:

It is clear that though there may be countless instances of the perishing of some principles that are unmoved but impart motion, and though many things that move themselves perish and are succeeded by others that come into being, and though one thing that is unmoved move one thing and another move another, nevertheless there is something apart from each of them, and this it is that is the cause. (*Physics* 258b28–259a6, qtd. in Buckley 66)

In other words, the only motion which could be eternal would be a continuous one (Buckley 67).

If it is sufficient to have one mover to explain eternity, then Aristotle raises the question of whether the first mover must itself be moved or unmoved. If it is moved, then there is something which causes it to move and thus the series does not stop with the first mover. So, the first mover must be one and unmoved (Buckley 63–67).

As previously stated, this is the cherry for the pie of Ibn Sina: All he needs to do now is to substitute the word “God” for the “first cause” and thus emerges a God which is the cause of all continuous motion—not because He wills it, but because He has knowledge of Himself. Such a knowledge, by its very nature, precludes a knowledge of all other things in a universal fashion, for He cannot know particulars. The knowledge which He possesses cannot change because, by being the “first cause,” He already had knowledge of all that He has caused. There is nothing left for Him to know; He knows everything as the creator.

At the time of an eclipse, it cannot be said that He knows that it exists *now*. Nor, after the eclipse, can it be said that He knows that *now* it has cleared away. For nothing which is necessarily defined in relation to Time can conceivably be known to Him, for such knowledge would necessitate a change in the knower. (*Incoherence* 155)

The passage above indicates the justification for why the *falasifa* believe that God cannot know particulars. Sufis find this view troublesome, because if God does not and cannot know the world in relation to time, then He has no personal relation with His creation. Ghazali gives the example of a man who, under this theory of universals, has the freedom to commit all sorts of infidelities because God does not know any one of those acts; He only knows them in general as He only knows “man-in-general.” To follow on the dreadful path of the *falasifa* means a justification for all sins. Man can commit all those things prohibited in the Qu’ran and yet still gain salvation, for God never knows any one of them in particular. Thus, all disobedience to God is justified and possible.

At the heart of the Sufis’ contention with the *falasifa* is their view on God’s love for His creation. The Sufis believe that the creation of the world is a symbol of God’s love for mankind. Love is one of the many attributes of God. This love of God is the living emblem of man’s per-

sonal relation to God. If God loves His creation because He created it to "manifest His Hidden Treasure" (Chittick, *Love* 197), then He must be related to each one of His beings or "thoughts," as al-Arabi calls them. However, in the *falasifa's* view such a relation cannot exist, for that would mean that there is a contradiction in God. For example, since two men hate each other, this means that God hates and does not hate. After all, He is related to both of them. Now if God just knows man-in-general, then it is plausible to conclude that He knows both hatred and love. The Sufis respond to such an objection by saying that the *falasifa* wish to talk about love and hate without realizing that, in its most fundamental level, love cannot be talked about. "Because Love pertains to the experiential dimensions of Sufism, not the theoretical, it must be experienced to be understood....[T]he Sufi's Beloved [God] transcends not only this world, but the next world as well as everything we can possibly conceive or imagine" (194). In other words, the Sufis reject the *falasifa* because the *falasifa* fail to take into account the true nature of God's reason for creation (that being Love for His creation) and thereby the knowledge of His creation. In this way, both God's knowledge and reason for creation are encompassed in His love for the creation, in His love for each one of His beings. Hence, not only does He Love each one of His beings but knows each one because He loves them.

In short, the Sufis argue against the idea that God knows the world only through universals for two reasons. First of all, as Ghazali argues, this most "obnoxious" and "infamous" doctrine destroys the basic Islamic belief in living a pure life. Such a view is an annihilation of all the revelatory experience of the Prophet and is also an obliteration of the inspired words of all the saints throughout the history of the world. Secondly, according to the Sufis, the *falasifa* fail to recognize God's Love for His creation. If there is no love for His creation, then, as Mawlana Jal al-Din Rumi explains it, there would be no use in "making oneself worthy of His regard and favor" (Chittick, *Love* 206).

The Resurrection of the Body

The *falasifa* deny that in the resurrection the spirit will return to the body. Their argument for such a belief lies in their belief about the body in relation to the spirit. For the *falasifa*, the body is transient; it is

operated by the spirit and the spirit gives it life (Tufail 6). Abu Bakr Muhammad bin Tufail calls the spirit the animating principle of the body (7). The spirit is thus the driving force for the body. However, the spirit also gets entangled in the web of temptations and carnal desires because it is attached to a body. "The soul is prevented from cognizing the realities of things, not because it is impressed upon body, but because it is preoccupied with the body, inclining towards carnal desires, and having affection for the requirements of the body" (*Incoherence* 232). This preoccupation with the body leads to a psychological proclivity towards carnal desires which even after the death of the body the soul cannot abolish. It always leans towards the bodily desires. In this manner, even after the death of the body the soul is prevented from attaining more nobler truths of the angels and their realm. But if there is a resurrection in which the spirit returns to a body, then the whole notion of contemplating a higher reality is lost. It makes no sense for the spirit to return to the body when, in the first place, its goal was to depart from the body. In the body, the spirit cannot understand the angels, for they themselves are not embodied. Therefore, to attain some progress, which for the *falasifa* is to understand the un-embodied, the spirit too must have no body.

This is one of the many arguments that the *falasifa* employ in justifying that there is no physical resurrection. The assumption that they are working with is the ancient Platonic notion that the spirit (intellect) is superior to matter. The *falasifa* at one point argue that "intellectual pleasures are worthier than physical pleasure" (*Incoherence* 231). They argue that the angels do not experience "sensuous pleasures." Rather, their pleasures consist in "the consciousness of the perfection and beauty which characterize them because of their insight into the realities of things and their approximation to the Lord of the Universe" (231). So, since the angels are closer to God in a hierarchy of being, their pleasures are ones that humans should emulate. Further, since angels like to contemplate intellectual rather than physical pleasure, humans should also seek the intellectual. However, this can only be sought when the physical does not interfere—namely, when the body does not exist to distract the spirit.

As mentioned above, the ancients, Plato in particular, initiated the distinction between the spirit and matter in philosophy. Plato believed that there was a world beyond our comprehension which we

could never completely grasp—the world of the forms/ideas.⁴ In other words, each thing had its form from which it arose. One held a vision of the forms at a time before coming to this earth. For this reason, one has access to those forms/ideas in this life. Plato acknowledges that only few have beheld the beatific vision of the forms; only those that wanted and chose to look at the forms beheld their nature. In the state of matter or physical existence, one forgets the form, for the soul drops to earth because it has lost the vision of the forms. After losing the sight of floating in the world of forms, dropping to the earth and becoming embodied, one must strive again to find the forms through the one faculty which will allow one to do so, the faculty of reason. The intellect is the only thing which can access what it had once beheld. Since this world is a myriad of manifestations of the forms, if one takes a single thing and begins to contemplate the form of which it is a manifestation, then one will begin to see that form in each one of the other manifestations of that form. Eventually, this will lead one back to the realization of the form which one had once beheld. Now, of course, the body will help in this—i.e., the sight, sound, and other senses will aid him in recognizing the form which any particular thing partakes of—yet the intellect is the guide and necessarily predominates in the process.

Ghazali, on the other hand, holds a slightly different view. He agrees with the *falasifa* that the “pleasures in the Hereafter are superior to sensible pleasures” (*Incoherence* 234–35). However, Ghazali points out the difference between himself and the *falasifa*. “We know these things on the authority of religion” while “mere reason gives them [the *falasifa*] final knowledge of these things” (235). By using reason as the sole authority on finding out the truth of things (in this case the resurrection) Ghazali attacks the *falasifa* for not giving precedence to the Qu’ran. The *falasifa* reply by saying that the Qu’ran’s vivid description of paradise and hell are only an allegory “proportioned to the limitations of common understanding” (235). So, the Quranic illustration of the anthropomorphic revivification of the bodies is nothing more than an allegory. However, Ghazali takes up an issue with this as well. He argues that the *falasifa*, again through reason, take the text out of its context and do not look upon it *prima facie* (236).

⁴This discussion is an amalgam of Plato’s *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, and *Ion*.

In accordance with the Qu'ran, then, the Sufis believe that there is a physical resurrection. Rumi provides a beautiful analogy: "Each person's spirit will return to his body, in the same way that awareness returns to the body in the morning..." (Chittick, *Love* 103). For the Sufis, through death and resurrection "man [receives] full consciousness and awareness of the nature of his own spirit" (101). The spirit therefore can only realize itself fully in the presence of a body. Furthermore, by realizing itself, the spirit realizes the inner spirituality. In effect, this inner realization reflects itself in the world,⁵ for now man understands the world, His creation. From this understanding comes the realization of God.

The question that arises then is: How does one come about this realization? Is it solely through reason? If not, then is there something else? Even more so, is there room for reason in the Sufis' approach to understanding God?

Ghazali and the Sufis do not believe that reason is an evil. Rather, knowledge (which encompasses reason in its domain) is one of the many attributes of God. Obviously, to understand God, one must understand His attributes. This means that reason must be included in the Sufis' quest for God. However, one must not limit oneself to reason, for eventually it is the experiential and existential experience with the Divine, in which He provides a glimpse of Himself, that provides human beings with the ultimate knowledge of God vis-a-vis their own selves. So there is definitely room for reason, yet only with the understanding that it has its limits. For Ghazali, reason must stop where religious authority dictates something as true. In the case of the resurrection, though one may not be able to come up with a rational argument for why and how the resurrection is possible, one must accept it solely on the authority of the Qu'ran. The authority of the prophets and saints dominates human reasoning. Therefore, reason has a definite place in Sufism with the realization that it has its boundaries.

As we have observed, the ancient Greeks had a strong influence in Islamicate philosophy. This influence led the *falasifa* to an intricate

⁵This was explained during the discussion of how the Love of the creation is manifest in the world, which, for the Sufis, is an manifestation of the inner world (inner spirituality).

system in which they incorporated Islamic beliefs about God's knowledge, His power to create the world, and the resurrection of bodies into the Greek view on God and humans. Ghazali and the Sufis disagree with the *falasifa* for the very reason that the *falasifa* tried to provide certainty without taking into account the experiential nature of Islam; they wanted to prove all that was true through rationality, for if anything was true, then reason or theoretical speculation had an answer for it. However, this is not to imply that the Sufis did not value reason. Rather, they went beyond reason and understood that the reality beyond this world, the Unseen, was beyond their comprehension, and that they must take it on the authority of experience and religion.

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