The Concept of Prophecy and Allegorical Interpretation (*taʾwīl*) within Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī's and Maimonides' Oeuvres

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March 2018

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (1055-1111) and Rabai Mosheh ben Maimun (1138-1204), better known in English as Maimonides, share the same religiously motivated concern towards scriptural exegesis: How one ought to interpret the divine (or divinely inspired) texts when a literal reading of the passages is at odds with one's reasoning. Since they consider the intellect (*al-ʿaql*) to be divinely endowed as well, al-Ghazzālī and Maimonides take it upon themselves to reconcile the belief in the authority of the revealed text(s) with what each author understands by independent intellectual reasoning. Their goal is to balance the limits of faithful belief in the prophets' veracity and their commitment to the reliability of the intellect. To this end, they argue for the presence of (at least) two layers of meaning in the revealed tradition: outward (*ẓāhir*) vs. inward (*bāṭin*) and endeavour to prove that the conflict exists only at the superficial level due to the reader's inability to comprehend the depth of inward message the text conveys. They both consider the issue important enough to dedicate a major part of their works to it, and hence the topic of allegorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) plays, directly or indirectly, a central role in their intellectual projects. In this study, I explore the two authors' approach to the question of *taʾwīl* and try to demonstrate its dependence on the notions of prophecy and revelation (*waḥy*).

Résumé

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī (1055-1111) et Rabai Mosheh ben Maimun (1138-1204), plus connu sous le nom de Maïmonide, partagent la même problématique à propos de l'exégèse du texte sacré : comment devrait-on interpréter les textes révélés (ou d'inspiration divine) lorsqu'une lecture littérale du texte va à l'encontre de la raison pure ? Puisqu'ils considèrent la raison pure (*al-ʿaql*) comme étant également divinement dotée aux êtres humains par Dieu, al-Ghazzālī et Maïmonide se décident de réconcilier la croyance en l'autorité des textes divins avec leur conception du raisonnement pur et indépendant. Leur but est de trouver le point d'équilibre entre une foi fidèle en la véracité des prophètes et la conviction que la raison est un outil fiable. Pour cela, ils soutiennent la présence de (au moins) deux niveaux de signification dans la tradition révélée : ce qui relève de la signification extérieure (*ẓāhir*), et ce qui relève de la signification intérieure (*bāṭin*). Ils cherchent ainsi à prouver que la tension entre foi et raison existe seulement au niveau superficiel, du fait de l'incapacité du lecteur à saisir la profondeur du message intérieur du texte. Tous deux considèrent que la problématique est assez importante pour y dédier une majeure partie dans leur œuvre. Par conséquent, le sujet de l'interprétation allégorique (*taʾwīl*) joue, directement ou indirectement, un rôle central dans leurs projets intellectuels. Cette étude examine l'approche des deux auteurs à la question du *taʾwīl* et tente d'établir la dépendence de ce dernier sur les notions de prophétie et de révélation (*waḥy*).

Acknowledgments

Introduction

Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad bin Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī's (1055[1]-1111) and Rabai Mosheh ben Maimun (1138[2]-1204), better known in English as Maimonides, shared the same religiously motivated concern towards arbitrary conflicts found between the intellect (*al-ʿaql*) and the sacred revealed tradition (*al-naql*). They faced the same question many other (preceding or succeeding) religious philosophers as well as theologians had come up with: What one ought to do when the demonstrative proof (*burhān*) comes into conflict with the text of Scripture (or in that matter, the divinely inspired Talmud/ḥadith curpos)?[3] If what the intellect dictates, which was perceived by the two sages as divinely endowed, contradicts messages the Scripture conveys, then what can be done to uphold the authority of both these two disagreeing sources? For al-Ghazzālī and Maimonides, the answer lies in scriptural exegesis. Central to their concern was the pressing need to engender a genuine balance between the sincere belief in prophets' veracity (*ṣidq al-nabī*) and the rational commitment to the reliability of the intellect. In their pursue to overcome this struggle, they reached to a specific interpretive method, namely allegorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*[4]) as the solution which could remedy the rift between the two fundamental components of an intellectual religiosity.

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[1] See Appendix A for a detailed debate on al-Ghazzālī's birth date; Cf. Frank Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 23-25; and Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, 116, note 2.

[2] Several figures have been recorded for Maimonides' birth year; among them 1135 had generally been accepted until late 1980s when the accuracy of those reports was challenged. More reliable source, Maimonides' note at the end of his Commentary on Mishnah, outweighs other second-hand reports and suggests, as Herbert Davidson concludes, his birth date to fall between September 1136 to September 1138. For more details See Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 6-9. Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides*, and Sara Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, have both accepted 1138 as his year of birth; albeit without providing any explanations for their choice.

[3] Ibn Rushd's *Decisive Treatise* stands as a paramount work in this regard.

[4] The term *taʾwīl* is from the trilateral root *ʾ.w.l* (*ʾawwala*) derivatives of which denote a range of meanings from "the first" and "the beginning of something" to, in its verbal form, "return something to its source of origin." In its Qurʾānic context, *taʾwīl* conveys, among other meanings, the ability to interpret dreams and to decipher the hidden messages behind images one sees in visions. Several references to this meaning have been made in the twelfth chapter, *Yūsuf*. It is related that God taught Joseph the interpretation of dreams (*taʾwīl al-aḥadith*) (12:6) and for that he interpreted his fellow prisons' dreams (12:36-37), and ultimately, in despite of all courtier interpreters, Joseph was the only one who is able to foretell future events based on the king's vision (12:44-49). In this context, *taʾwīl* is very much regarded as an equivalent for the technical term for dream interpretation: *taʿbīr*. In another famous verse (3:7), it is said regarding the ones "whose hearts are given to swerving" that they seek dissension among Muslims by seeking *taʾwīl* (interpretation) of ambiguous/symbolic passages in the Qurʾān. Yet it is only God, the same verse continuous, who truly knows *taʾwīl* of those ambiguous/symbolic passages. Here, *taʾwīl* resonates the concept of *tafsīr*, the science of Islamic scriptural exegesis.

They hence argued for the presence of (at least) two layers of inward (*bāṭin*) vs. outward (*ẓāhir*) meanings in some passages within the sacred revealed literature. Therefore, the two sages claimed that what one may perceive as contradictions between the sacred text and the reason stems from one's inability to comprehend the hidden meaning beneath the outward sense of passages in question—any such seemingly paradoxes resides merely at the superficial level. In other words, they viewed the issue a matter of hermeneutics which could be resolved if a cultivated mind would disclose the real inward (*bāṭin*) message of the text by the use of allegorical interpretation. They both see the topic worthwhile to dedicate a significant part of their works to elaborate on their perspectives and hence the theme of *taʾwil* occupies, directly or indirectly, a considerable portion of their intellectual writings.

Given the depth and complexity of the topic in question, this thesis functions as a preliminary study which will pave the way for a more comprehensive treatment of the question of *taʾwīl* in the works of these two medieval thinkers; hence a stepping stone towards my doctorate dissertation. A detailed comparative study between the two thinkers' methods and approaches to the theme of *taʾwīl* demands a thorough philological as well as philosophical analysis of their works which goes beyond the scope and limits of this thesis. At this stage, my intention is to posit each of them in his appropriate religious/philosophical context and to bring into light each thinker's perspective within his intellectual framework, religious concerns, and, to some extent, his social background.

Since any effort to survey the two sages' treatment of the subject requires a prior extensive exploration into such concepts as prophecy and revelation (*waḥy*), and would also entail probing their respective loci within the two sages' cosmology, I have devoted a relatively large chunk of this study to

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Nonetheless, the majority of Islamic exegetes do not regard *taʾwīl* and *tafsīr* synonymous. While *tafsīr* constitutes, by and large, a literary endeavour and is aimed to explain the literal, outward (*ẓāhir*) meaning of a given passage, *taʾwīl* represents a sort of discovering process which goes beyond the plain, lexical meaning of words seeking to unveil the truth of matters (*ḥaghi^him*). The truth which may be either in conformity with the outward meaning or in its opposition— there is no consensus on this matter among Islamic schools of thought. See Wāʿizzādi-y Khorāsānī, *Al-muʿjam*, pp. 207-291 (in particular pp. 222-238). Al-Ghazzālī talks about differences between *tafsīr* and *taʾwīl* in the light of "religious sciences" in *Jewles of Qurʾān*, 37-8, See notes 135&136 below.

these subjects (i.e., prophecy and its ontological/cosmological notions). To that end, I have first explored the notion of prophecy from al-Ghazzālī's and Maimonides' standpoints and then have examined the ways in which their theories of prophecy have shaped their hermeneutical framework.

The first chapter covers a summary of the philosophical background to the notion of prophecy and revelation in the works of Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī (d. 951) and Abū ʿAlī Ḥusayn ibn Sīnā (d. 1037). Given al-Ghazzālī's implicit appropriation of Avicennian psychology and his heavy reliance on his theoretical framework regarding the quiddity of the revelation, and also Maimonides' pronounced favour for al-Fārābī's philosophy, my goal in the first chapter is to put the following discussions on the prophecy into their proper philosophical context. In the first chapter, therefore, I ground and elaborate the main philosophical key terms that I shall be discussing in the two subsequent chapters.

In the second chapter, I look into some of al-Ghazzālī's major works, in specific the ones deal primarily with the topic of prophecy and *taʾwīl*. Accordingly, I divided his treatise into four, according to Ebramim Moosa, "narratives of religion"[5] or what I assume to be al-Ghazzālī's levels of intellectual progress/persona; each of which brings to light one dimension of al-Ghazzālī's elaborate theological rationale. The author of *The Moderation in Belief* (*al-Iqtiṣād fī l-iʿtiqād*) cannot but be an orthodox propagator of Ash'arism whose primary goal was to compose a "what-to-believe-in" handout for the general public. Read together with his ardent refutation of the *falāsifa* (Muslim philosophers) in *Precipitance of the Philosophers* (*tahāfut al-falāsifa*) or his zealous repudiation of Ismāʿīlites' esoteric doctrine in *The Scandals of the Esoterics and the Virtues of the Followers of Caliph al-Mustaẓhir* (*Faḍāʾiḥ al-bāṭiniyya wa faḍāʾil al-Mustaẓhiriyya*), al-Ghazzālī portrays himself as an ideal theologian (*mutakallim*), a master of dialectics, and a prudent teacher at Niẓāmiyya who closely follows the political/ideological agenda dictated by Seljuk sultans. Nonetheless, *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*), *The Niche of Lights* (*Mishkāt al-anwār*), and *The Deliverer from Error* (al-*Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*) display

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[5] *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination*, 27.

another al-Ghazzālī whose urgent concern to "revive" his distorted religious doctrine pushes him beyond the rigid boundaries of Ash'arite theology into the world of Sufism in his pursuit of the truth. The Truth which, he believes, may only be cognized through mystical vision (*mushāhida*) and illuminated by the taste (*dhawq*).

To this end, al-Ghazzālī, the mystic, does not hesitate to reach out to theological or even philosophical means, including cosmological schemes the *falāsifa* mapped, as long as they can provide him with a better language (or theoretical framework) to convey his mystical message. Yet, the presence of philosophical contents in his writings ought to be viewed with this in mind that al-Ghazzālī does not abide fully by the *falāsifa*'s metaphysics neither to their notion of causal necessity in nature.[6] He never seems yielding to the God of *falāsifa* who, he might have thought, could not come to terms with volitional, omnipresent, and omnipotent Allah depicted in the Qurʾān. The four levels of his journey cast four lights on the subject of prophecy as well as the rule allegorical interpretation plays in his hermeneutical discourse. My objective in this chapter was to cover these four in detail.

In the third chapter, I deal with only two works among the Maimonidean corpus: 1- two introductory passages in his *Commentary on the Mishnah* (*Mishnah ʿim perush*), and 2- *The Guide of the Perplexed* (*dilālat al-ḥāʾrīn/ mure ha-nevukim*). His esoteric approach to the two themes, namely the prophecy and allegorical interpretation, have been addressed. Maimonides, very much like al-Ghazzālī, adopts his tone

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[6] Al-Ghazzālī's controversial position on causality and his allegedly refutation of that have been subject to many studies. I could not, however, find any of the studies I came across successful in explaining his rather contradictory statements (in particular in his seventeenth discussion of the *Precipitance*). I would like to argue that his so-called rejection of causal connection is limited to natural phenomena and that is why he categorized the discussion as the first one in the "Natural Sciences" section of the *Precipitance* not in the metaphysics. His main intention, as he writes in his introduction to the Natural Sciences section, is to refute the impossibility of miracles (as he views the *falāsifa* reject them drawing on the deterministic nature of causality in their cosmology). Al-Ghazzālī's very first sentence at the beginning of the seventeenth discussion contains the key to the issue where he limits his refutation of necessary causal connection to 'what is *habitually* believed to be a cause and what is *habitually* believed to be an effect.' His analysis is limited to the realm of natural concomitances within a cosmological framework while he never denies the ontological dimension of the causality (that is, if the contingents can come into exist arbitrarily without any ultimate existential dependency on God, the Necessary Existent). Al-Ghazzālī's view on causality needed to be read against his mystical background, best explained and elaborated in the second portion of *Niche of Light*. Cf. Hans Daiber, "God versus Causality: Al-Ghazālī's Solution."

and language according to the implied audience he has in mind. In other words, he follows the basic law of esotericism in all his passages: hide your sincere intention from the eye of uneducated masses and hint to the selected few by means of allusions or passing subtle references.

In the conclusion, I summarized very briefly the expected result of future comparative analysis of the texts in question. The summary outlines the path for any further study of the two thinkers in a comparative inquiry. I also address the topic of possible "influence" al-Ghazzālī might have had on Maimonides and suggest the likelihood of such a reading.

Chapter One: What is the Revelation?&Who is a Prophet? A Philosophical Background

Whoever combines theoretical wisdom with justice is indeed the happy man. And whoever, in addition to this, wins the prophetic qualities becomes almost a human god [$rabb^{an}\ ins\bar{a}nyy^{an}$]. Worship of him, after the worship of God, exalted be He, becomes almost allowed. He is indeed the world's earthly king and God's deputy in it.

-Ibs Sīnā's concluding words in the Metaphysics of *The Healing*.[7]

Who is a (true) prophet? What is the nature or quiddity of his prophecy? And how can we, if at all, comprehend the nature of revelation (*waḥy*)? These questions, and the like, have been central to the Jewish and Islamic intellectual theology (*kalām*) and its adherents, *mutakallimūn*. As one of the most essential tenets of faith after the belief in the unity of God, the prophecy of Moses/Muḥammad gives meaning and authority to the sanctity of the two Abrahamic religions which, in turn, upholds the holiness of the Hebrew Bible/Qurʾān. Similar questions regarding the nature and possibility of prophecy were raised by medieval Muslim and Jewish philosophers (*falāsifa*) who, despite methodological differences with *mutakallimūn*, had the same religious concerns vis-à-vis the accountability of the prophets' words.

When it comes to the question of prophecy, all the disparities among the *falāsifa* and theologians can be boiled down to one fundamental question: is the revelation dependent on and conditioned to a specific person's merits and his intellectual abilities, or God appoints whoever He wills regardless of the individual's merits and moral traits? In other words, whether it is the prophet who brings down the divine message by "climbing up" to the World of Divine Sovereign (*al-ʿālam al-malakūt*) and then conveys the revealed law to the multitude, or it is God who volitionally chooses His deputy and "casts down" His message to the prophet by His angels? While Fārābīan and, to a certain extent, Avicennian view favour the former, the

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[7] *The Metaphysics of* The Healing, 378; Michael Marmura's translation. Henceforth, unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own (with the exception of Qurʾānic passages which are from Nasr, *The Study Qurʾān*).

Ash'ariate theology, at least before al-Ghazzālī, promoted the latter. Maimonides, on the other hand, while acclaims the philosophical teachings of the Second Teacher, i.e., al-Fārābī, and follows the lead of his Muslim counterpart in most parts, exhibits his own (esoterically?) theological manoeuvres.

In the following pages, I summarize the philosophical background to the question of prophecy within the limits of selected works of two foremost Medieval Muslim philosophers, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.[8] It is not the objective of this chapter to make an argument regarding the noetics in works of the two thinkers; it serves as an introductory chapter to the following chapters. Since al-Ghazzālī's theory of prophecy was formulated as a theological response to, in specific, these two *falāsifa*, and also because of Maimonides' heavy reliance on their theoretical framework (in particular his favour for al-Fārābī), I have explored the doctrine of Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī prophetology in more details in the first chapter.[9]

According to Aristotle, the intellectual faculty, similar to other natural beings, requires an active agent outside itself to move it, as it were, from the state of pure potentiality to actuality.[10] While Aristotle's commentators diverge on his position regarding the nature of the potential intellect (it being a bodily substance or an inherited incorporeal disposition), they concur on his fundamental principle of the intellect's

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[8] On al-Fārābī's definition of prophecy, see Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, 45-62. Cf. Walzer, "Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy and Divination." & Macy,"Prophecy in al-Farabi and Maimonides." Macy makes a case and argues for al-Fārābī's two distinct notions of prophecy (*nubuwwah*) vis-à-vis revelation (*waḥy*). Cf. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 36-45. Kreisel, *Prophecy*, does not have a separate chapter on the topic, but he has discussed at various points the the subject within the medieval Jewish context; see in specific his third chapter in which he addresses the influence of the "second teacher" on Maimonides' theory of prophecy, 148 ff. On the same topic from Ibn Sīnā's perspective see Marmura, "Avicenna's Psychological Proof of Prophecy." & idem, *Probing in Islamic Philosophy*, 197-215 & Griffel, "Muslim Philosophers' rationalist explanation of Muḥammad's prophecy" & Morris, "The Philosopher-Prophet in Avicenna's Political Philosophy."

[9] Al-Fārābī and the school of "Aristotelian" Islamic philosophy founded by him had no influence on the Jewish theologians up to the second half of the twelfth century—their works were simply ignored by most of Jewish theologians and we cannot find any substantial references to al-Farabi or Avicennian philosophy up to the works of Maimonides. It was Maimonides who, as the most prominent Jewish philosopher in the Medieval Ages, not only embraced Islamic *falsifa* as a tool to reconcile philosophy with Jewish doctrine, but recommend his student, Ibn Tibbon, the works of al- Fārābī, Ibn Bajja, and Averroes to be read and contemplated on. See Steven Harvey, "Islamic Philosophy and Jewish Philosophy," 352-353.

[10] The Christian Latin tradition, in particular Thomas Aquinas, does not agree with the Arabic tradition on this interpretation. Aquinas, rejecting Ibn Sīnā's formula, maintains that the Active Intellect does indeed exist but not as a transcendent construction separate and external to the passive mind; rather, it is a power within the soul itself. See John Haldane, "Aquinas and the Active Intellect," & Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes*, 217.

passage from potentiality to the actual status by an active agent "without" it (an intelligence which must be itself always in actuality: the Active Intellect). The same disagreement occurs among them on names, description of stages during which the intellect progresses to actualization, the ways Active Intellect is connected to each individual potential intellect, the nature of Active Intellect, etc. The details of those debates are out of the scope of this study.[11] Relevant to my discussion in this chapter is al-Fārābī's and Ibn Sīnā's deliberation on the subject and their reading of Greek philosophers' (i.e., Aristotle's and his commentators') arguments on the intellect insofar as it is concerned with their explanation of the prophecy. In particular, I shall briefly explore the two Muslim philosophers' appropriation of Aristotle's idea and the religious light they shed on it to reconcile this foreign notion with prophecy in the Islamic tradition. That can provide us with a better context in our study of al-Ghazzālī's critique of the *falāsifa* on the notion of prophecy.

Al-Fārābī, and Ibn Sīnā following him, added two critical careers to the function of Active Intellect; probably to fit it better into their Islamic framework. First, besides leading human intellect to actuality, the Active Intellect, as the tenth and last intellect in the hierarchy of celestial beings, was regarded as the emanating agent that brings forth the *existence* to the sublunar world. That is to say, in addition to the "soul" and "intellect" of the sublunar world, the Active Intellect stands at the end of the chain of Intellects that emanates the material body of the terrestrial realm from God (the ultimate efficient cause[12] of the cosmos' existence; Ibn Sīnā's Necessary Existent).[13] Secondly, by definition, they justified prophecy as a potential crowning status, very rare nonetheless, for human being regarding his relationship with the Active Intellect. Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā not only introduced an original function for the Active Intellect, a task which had no precedent in Aristotle's philosophy, but they also justified prophecy as a "natural" result of the intellectual

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[11] For details see, Herbert Davidson, *Al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*, 7 ff.
[12] Ibn Sīnā, however, would not consider God as the formal cause of the universe, rather the ultimate efficient cause. See, Stephen Menn, "Avicenna's metaphysics," 167-169.
[13] See Herbert Davidson, *Al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*, 29 ff. & McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 154-163.

development of man's lower soul. Although the idea of prophecy had not been entirely absent from Aristotelian corpus,[14] the new dimension al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā added to the question of man's ability to conjoin with the Active Intellect opened a new chapter in Islamicization of philosophy. Prophets came into conjunction with the Active Intellect, the connection by virtue of which they were able to talk to/for God and lead the community towards its ultimate happiness.

Al-Fārābī

The intellect (*al-ʿaql*), according to al-Fārābī, is of four types/stages: the potential intellect, the actual intellect, the acquired intellect, and the Active Intellect.[15] Human intellect begins in pure materiality (i) (and hence pure potentiality); it remains in the matter form (i.e. potentiality) as long as it is not receptive of any forms. Analogous to a formless wax, it lingers in pure materiality until extracted forms from outside objects (actual intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt bi-l-fiʿl*)) "become" forms for its essence—hence the actual intellect (ii). By the presence of these forms within the intellect, it is now able to intellect in itself and by itself. The acquired intellect (iii) thus refers to this stage when intellect intellects its own forms. It is at this stage of perfection in which all the followings come to be identical: the subject of intellection ("intelligent" *al-ʿāqil*), the means of intellection ("the intellect" *al-ʿaql*), and the object of intellection ("intelligible" *al-maʿqūl*).[16] Acquired intellect constitutes the highest degree of perfection for the human intellect according to al-Fārābī. The man

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[14] See W. Craig Streetman, "'If it were God who sent them'" in which he demonstrates the presence of the notion of prophecy in Aristotle's work and also argues for the possibility of reading al-Fārābī's discussion of intellectual prophecy as providing us with a reliable interpretation of Aristotle's theory of authentic prophetic vision.

[15] *Treatise on the Intellect* (*Risālah fi al-ʿaql*), ed. Maurice Bouyges, 12. This four-type-doctrine is what al-Fārābī attributes to Aristotle in *De anima*. In the *Perfect State* (*al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*), 124, however, al-Fārābī talks about three, not four, separate types of intellect: the potential intellect, the acquired intellect, and the Active intellect. He does not count the actual intellect as a separate intellectual stage by itself. Actual intellect refers to in the *Perfect State* as a subdivision of the potential intellect. The acquired intellect constitutes for him the closest thing to the Active Intellect insomuch as there exists nothing between the two; al-Fārābī defines the acquired intellect as occupying the middle position between the potential intellect and the Active Intellect.

[16] *Risalat fi'l-ʿaql*, 16.

"by virtues of what constitutes his substance is [therefore] the closest thing to the Active Intellect, and this is the ultimate felicity and [that is] the afterlife."[17]

The Active Intellect (iv), on the other hand, belongs to a different species as of the potential (or actual) intellect. As an absolute incorporeal form, and as the Tenth Intellect, it resides in total separation from any sorts of matter or materiality. It "contains" all the forms in their simple, indivisible, and perfect status. Exactly contrary to the potential intellect, the forms within the Active Intellect never "cease being actual,"[18] and that is why It can "make the [human] potential intellect actual intellect by making potential intelligibles actual ones." It does so in the same manner in which Sun makes it able for the eye to see (by providing it with the light and by illuminating the dark objects).[19] In other words, similar to the eye in the darkness, which has the potentiality for vision yet cannot perceive anything until the enlightening power of the Sun (luminous by and in itself) shines upon it, human intellect remains in its initial stage of potentiality up until the Active Intellect brings the primary intelligibles in it from potentiality to actuality by making it contemplate on those intelligibles.

Although al-Fārābī does not explicitly address the issue of prophecy in the *Treatise on the Intellect*, as shown above, he appreciates the highest possible status of the man in his relationship with the Active Intellect. The true and ultimate felicity/happiness (*saʿāda*) either in this life or in the world-to-come is therefore conditioned to the individual's "quality" of connection with the Active Intellect.[20] It is in *The Perfect State* (*al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*) whereby al-Fārābī explicitly accounts for prophecy as the ultimate

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[17] *Risalat fi'l-ʿaql*, 31. On the meaning of "happiness" in al-Fārābī's view see Majid Fakhry, *Al-Fārābi*, 92-99.
[18] Ibid, 29.
[19] Ibid, 25-26. The same idea and analogue are presented in the *Perfect State*, pp. 101-103: The intellect and intellectual faculty within man cannot become actual by virtue of itself, as anything in matter or of matter is incapable of. They are in need of an incorporeal intellect substance of which is intellect in actuality, the Active Intellect, to bring man's potential intellect to actuality. Also in *The Political Regime* (*al-Sīyāsa al-madanīyya*), 35, 78, 82.
[20] See the first chapter of *Aphorisms of the Statesman* (*Fuṣūl al-Madanī*) for his detailed discussion of different types of felicity, pp. 103-116; and for the social happiness in the ideal city see, ibid pp. 120-121. Also in *The Perfect State,* he elaborates on the ways in which voluntary actions and theoretical wisdom can lead one to the felicity, pp.105-107; *The Political Regime* (*al-Sīyāsa al-madanīyya*), 32.

form of knowledge acquisition. He writes on those individuals whose intellects have risen to the level of the acquired intellect that, they are the ones "with whom the Active Intellect conjoins."[21] And upon this "union," if his faculties of intellection and imagination are sharpened to their ultimate perfections, this man receives Divine revelation (*yūḥā ʿalayh*) from God through the mediation of the Active Intellect. It mediates God's emanation down to the acquired intellect and through that to the potential intellect, and, finally, to the faculty of imagination.

The individual whose acquired intellect has received the "intellectual" emanation from God, then, can be called an entirely wise man or a philosopher by virtue of receiving the emanation to his potential intellect. And, by receiving the emanation to his faculty of imagination, he is rendered a prophet who warns of what will happen in the future and informs about the present happenings. This man, i.e., the philosopher-prophet, stands at the highest rank of human's perfection and enjoys the utmost degree of felicity. His soul is *united* with the Active Intellect and by that he knows every action which can lead an individual to the felicity or the collective happiness of society. Hence, besides being a philosopher-prophet, he is also qualified to rule the perfect state.[22] Drawing on this, and similar, passages the argument has been made that al-Fārābī distinguishes between the (king-)prophet and philosopher: the former as the recipient of the Divine emanation through his faculty of imagination, and the latter as the one whose faculty of intellection receives the emanation. That distinction is not made here and I do not see any reasons to read it that way. Al-Fārābī's language is very clear in this passage. Throughout this paragraph, he is talking about *one* individual. The same individual whose acquired intellect receives the Divine knowledge, he also receives the emanation in his faculty of imagination. Couple of pages before that, in another passage in which he summarizes the characteristics of the noble head of the perfect state, he writes of him:

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[21] *The Perfect State* (*al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*), ed. Nadir, 125. Walzer's translation, 245, reads: "this man is the man on whom the Active Intellect has descended." The original Arabic reads: "*huwā al-insān alladhī ḥalla fihi al-ʿaql al-faʿʿāl*."

[22] The *Perfect State*, 125-126. Cf. *The Political Regime* (*al-Sīyāsa al-madanīyya*), 78-80.

> That man is indeed such a human being over whom nobody can rule. He truly has reached the state of perfection so much so that he has become [both] the intellect and intellection *in actu* [*ʿaqlan wa maʿqūlan bi-lfiʿl*]. His faculty of imagination has reached its ultimate perfection in its nature, in the way we have already discussed. And since this faculty of his had been prepared by its innate nature to receive the particulars, either in the state of wakefulness or during the sleep, from the Active Intellect, [it does so] either as they are or by representing them [*yuḥākkīhā*], and the intelligibles are [received] by representing them.[23]

Given the above, therefore, I believe the philosopher, the prophet, and the ruler (king/*Imam*) are, in what al-Fārābī's expresses in this text, all the same individual. Having said that, I could not figure out his final position on the role the faculty of imagination plays in the occurrence of prophetic visions. In some discussions[24] he emphasizes that in prophetic visions, the faculty of imagination plays *the central* role. It is this faculty wherein prophets receive the emanation from the Active Intellect either in their sleeps or, more often, while awake. Intelligibles of two sorts, theoretical and practical wisdom, overflow from the Active Intellect into the imaginative faculty of the prophet wherein their shapeless forms are translated into sensible images by the prophet's faculty of imagination. In this context, al-Fārābī does not explicitly discuss what distinguishes a prophetic revelation from a non-prophetic veracious dream. He only mentions in passing that prophetic visions occur when the faculty of imagination reaches its highest degree of perfection and that its power enables prophets to "see" heavenly beings, God's angels, and the future events not only in dreams but also during his wakefulness.[25]

Ibn Sīnā

Although Ibn Sīnā's doctrines of intellectual perfection and prophecy are not in total accord with al-Fārābī's, the basic concepts of the former's theory are drawn mainly on the second teacher's cosmology.[26] As Afifi al-Kiti maintains, it is due to Avicenna's philosophical formulation that the notion of

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[23] ibid,123.

[24] The *Perfect State* , pp. 112-115 & 123.

[25] Davidson, *al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect*, 59, argues for al-Fārābī's two-level notion of prophecy: one in which the faculty of imagination carries out the representation (lower prophecy), and the higher prophet whose faculty of intellection receives the emanation. Macy, "Prophecy in al-Farabi and Maimonides" also argues for two notions of prophecy (*nubuwwah*) and revelation (*waḥy*) and argues for four treatment of the latter concept in al-Fārābī's works. See also Dunlop, *Aphorisms of the Statesman*, 94.

[26] Al-Fārābī has been known famously as the "second teacher" (*al-muʿallim al-thānī*); Aristotle considered as the first.

prophethethood in Islam "has become most of all an intellectual phenomenon, an idea that none of his predecessors, including the Greeks, had thought of and from which nearly all of his successors benefited, including those who were not traditional students of Greek philosophy [e.g. al-Ghazzālī and Fahkhr ad-Din Razi]."[27] Three main principles underlie Ibn Sīnā's theory of prophecy: 1- the intellect's immaterial substance, 2- the faculty of "quick wit" [ḥads], and 3- the divine intellect [al-ʿaql al-qudsī]. In what follows, I shall try to, though very briefly, sketch the basics of the Avicennian doctrine of prophecy and the main differentiating elements of that from the al-Fārābīan model.

The sixth chapter in the Book of Salvation (kitāb al-nijāt) begins with Ibn Sīnā's account of the origin of the human soul. The soul, he describes, comes into existence when the power of the heavenly bodies cause a balanced mixture of material elements into a body.[28] The soul is generated simultaneously/together with (maʿa) the creation of this body to regulate the body.[29] The human soul in its totality, Ibn Sīnā states, has three realms of functionality. Thus, he names three souls in the order of their attachment to and dependency on its material body: vegetative soul, animal soul, and the rational soul.[30]

In the Avicennian psychology, the rational soul and "intellect" are synonymous. The rational soul (or the intellect) governs all other faculties and their internal relationships in the other two souls. It also performs the duty of the intermediator between the man's twofold entity. In other words, the rational soul itself has

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[27] "The Three Properties of Prophethood in Certain Works of Avicenna and al-Ghazāli," 195.

[28] Kitāb al-nijāt, 196. Elsewhere, he tells us that the soul is bestowed by the Giver of the forms (i.e. the Active Intellect). It is an occurrent [ḥādith] which had not existed before the body; the soul came into beig "when a body predisposed to its specific temperament is created. Then, the Giver of the forms attaches, as it were, the soul to that body as to govern it." Risāli-y Nafs, pp. 51-54. Although the soul is an abstract entity, it is generated in time (a problematic statement in terms of his philosophy).

[29] Al-nafs min kitāb al-Shifāʾ, 308. Nonetheless, Ibn Sīnā holds that the soul does not perish by the death of the body because the former is neither caused by nor is dependent on the latter. See ibid, 312-314, for more details.

[30] Soul, according to Ibn Sīnā, is an indivisible entity. But in so far as it functions in respect to different needs of its body, he gives its various "segments" different names corresponding to their functions: the vegetative soul is called so because it merely takes care of bodily needs (nourishment, etc.); the anima soul called as such for it represents parts of the soul which govern the senses, emotions, etc.; and the (human) rational soul constitutes the faculty whose power separates humans from other animals, namely, our ability to think. Upon the demise of the body, only the last function of the soul continues to operate due to its abstract nature and independence from the bodily constraints. Ibn Sīnā provides eight demonstrative proofs for the abstraction of the rational soul. See for details Al-nafs min kitāb al-Shifāʾ, 288-311.

two "faces" (or faculties): practical and theoretical. While its practical faculty of the rational soul acts upon and manages the "lower" realm of the man (i.e., the body and its needs, and also the five senses), the theoretical faculty of the rational soul pays to heed only to the "higher" sphere "from which it passively receives and acquires [the intelligibles]."[31] The rational soul, therefore, has two sides to it: an actively governing side which operates over the material body, and the *passive*, recipient plane which functions as the recipient of the knowledge from the High above.[32] As an abstract genus, the rational soul can receive the abstract universals from the Active Intellect and the celestial intelligences, and, at the same time, as the governor of the imaginative faculty (an occurrent [*ḥādith*][33]), it has the material predisposition to perceive the particular intelligibles from the souls of the heavens. This twofold feature of the rational soul leads to two types of prophecies: intellectual and imaginative respectively.[34]

To account for the intellectual prophecy, Ibn Sīnā introduces a new concept to his psychology which is absent from Fārābīan corpus: the power or faculty of "quick wit" (*ḥads*). This notion constitutes the backbone of Avicennian prophetology and is drawn on the presupposition that the rational soul is from the same genus that of the Active Intellect, namely, an abstract intellect. The quick wit, Ibn Sīnā explains, is an innate disposition to the potential intellect of some people. Unlike the conventional way of learning, in

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[31] *Kitāb al-nijāt*, 202-203.
[32] In terms of the intellect's passage from potentiality to actuality, Ibn Sīnā's psychology does not show significant signs of divergence from Al- al-Fārābī's model. For Ibn Sīnā, the potential intellect passes through three or four stages and, lastly, reaches the level of absolute actuality. In order for the theoretical faculty to receive the abstract forms, it needs to proceeds from pure potentiality (material intelligence(i)) to actuality. The first step is taken upon giving assent to the primary intelligibles (i.e. logical axioms: the whole is bigger than the part, two things equal to one thing are themselves equal, etc.) It is then called the intellect in *habitu* (ii) (or actual intellect in comparison with its former status). But the intellect at this stage solely "conserved" the primary intelligibles and has not contemplate them as forms yet. When it obtains the ability to think on the secondary intelligibles as it wills, it reaches the level of the actual intellect (iii). For it finds the freedom to contemplate without any needs from the outside-- it can, however, be called potential intellect in comparison to what comes next. And finally, it can reach the level of acquired intellect (iv) upon its absolute actuality in terms of thinking: it can intellect the secondary intelligibles presents in itself and, at the same time, be aware of its very contemplation. It is "acquired" in the sense that the intellect has acquired, from without, this level of absolute actuality from an intelligence which is always actual. *Kitāb al-nijāt*, 203-205.
[33] I use Aladdin M. Yaqub's English equivalent for *ḥādith* in this study.
[34] Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 30-45; Marmura, *Probing in the Islamic Philosophy*, 203-210; Cf. *aḥwāl al-nafs*, 68. This is one of Ibn Sīnā's basic principles: abstract intelligibles (and universal forms) can *only* be perceived by an entity which has an abstract substance and, by the same token, the knowledge of divisible particulars requires a material receiver. See, *Risāli-y Nafs,* 34-45; *aḥwāl al-nafs*, 74-79. On the "imaginative prophecy" see also *al-ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt*, pp. 880-882 (=*Remarks and Admonitions*, *Part Four,* 100).

which the middle term of a syllogism is obtained through instruction, the individual bestowed with the quick

wit perceives the middle term very quickly, without any needs to contemplate. He can do so because his

potential intellect is endowed with that gift which enables him to receive the middle terms from the Active

Intellect without any great effort or needs for instruction.

Among the ones who possess the quick wit are those whose quick wit qualifies their material

intelligence to be called "Divine Spirit," and their intellect in habitu (*al-ʿaql bi'l-malakah*),[35] the "Divine

Intelligence."[36] Such a man receives abstract intelligibles and universal forms (through his theoretical

faculty of the rational soul) from the Active Intellect instantaneously (*dafʿat*^{an})—this constitutes what

Rahman termed as the intellectual prophecy according to Ibn Sīnā's theory.[37] The object of intellectual

prophecy, then, is inconceivable for the masses due to the abstract form of received intelligibles and also

because of the absence of imaginative faculty.

Drawing on his premise that "the particular is perceived only by the material and the universal only by

the abstract recipient,"[38] Ibn Sīnā holds that for the prophet to receive the foreknowledge of *particular*

events, he necessarily has to obtain the knowledge of these bits of information from the *souls* of the bodily

heavens to his practical faculty of rational soul through the intercession of his faculty of imagination—

hence, the imaginative prophecy.[39] Analogous to veracious dreams, these prophetic inspirations which

contain particular data are made perceivable by the aid of the prophet's animal soul (i.e., imagination,

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[35] The term denotes a stage between potential intellect and acquired intellect. For a detailed discussion of its origin see Davidson, Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect, 10-12.
[36] *Kitāb al-nijāt*, 205-206.
[37] Ibid., 206.
[38] Ibid., 210-213; *Risāli-y Nafs*, 30-32.
[39] Ib Sina's line of argument (in *On States of the Soul* (*aḥwāl al-nafs*), 114-115), regarding the celestial souls' knowledge of future events goes as following: the celestial bodies' motions are voluntarily, so the agents in charge (i.e. the celestial souls) deem to possess volition. The presence of volition in their acts, in turn, makes it necessary for them to have knowledge of their movements. As such, the celestial bodies (i.e. their souls) are aware of all subsequent effects caused by their motions in the sublunar world -- they are aware of all the *particulars* (either in the present time or in the future) because the knowledge of the movement of spheres in the heavens (cause) necessitates the knowledge of particulars in the terrestrial world (effect). Cf. *Avicenna's de Anima*, 178; *Risāli-y Nafs,* 67.

estimation, and common faculties).[40] In the case of angels, for instance, the prophets "see" those incorporeal beings which deem otherwise invisible if it was not for their representation (*mithāl*) in the faculty of imagination. Or the prophets' reports on matters of the world-to-come (the physical punishments for the wicked, or physical pleasures for the righteous) should be understood in the same manner, that is, metaphorical and symbolic.

Ibn Sīnā maintains that the need for the animal soul also holds true for "intellectual prophecy." To transfer the shapeless intentions (*maʿānī*) of the divine revelation into effable wordings, the illuminations from the theoretical faculty get reflected unto the imaginative faculty of the prophet. As a result, the imitations (*muḥākkāt*) of the abstract realities emerge in symbolic, affable forms.[41] To speak of such abstract realities as God's unity or His incorporeality, the prophet utilizes his imaginative faculty; it plays an active role of a "translator" which renders the intentions into affable statements understood easily by the vulgar.

That posits prophetic vision, epistemologically speaking, in the same category as of the veracious dreams. The power of the prophets' rational soul, however, makes it possible for them to perceive either the intellectual revelations (*waḥy*) or imaginative inspirations (*ilhām*) in their wakefulness. Yet, due to their dependency on the imaginative faculty, to realize their real intentions, most of what the prophets reveal require allegorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) as the dreams demand interpretation (*taʾbīr*).[42]

Finally, we should note that Ibn Sīnā rejects the Fārābian idea of the "conjunction" with the Active Intellect in his explanatory notes on the possibility of prophecy as Marmura points out several times.[43] The

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[40] Ibn Sīnā employs two terms in his references to the two types of prophecies: "revelation" [*waḥy*] for the higher intellectual prophecy, and "inspiration" [*ilhām*] to the lower imaginative one. The latter, he holds, comes very close, both in its form and epistemology, to dreams. Ibn Sīnā follows Farbi very closely in his description of this second prophecy.

[41] *al-ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt*, 870-871.

[42] Ibid., 886-887. There is one exception here and that is in the case of "unambiguous revelation" (*waḥyᵃⁿ ṣirāḥᵃⁿ*) which, according to Ibn Sīnā, does not require *taʾwīl*.

[43] *Probing in the Islamic Philosophy*, 203-205 & "Avicenna's Psychologygical Proof of Prophecy,"49-53, Ibn Sīnā in his psychological works proves the "possibility" of the prophetic revelation not its necessity. It is in his other treatise, *The Proof for Prophecies* (*ithbāt al-nubuwwīyyāt*) and at the end of The Metaphysics of the *Shifā*, 364-367,

"higher" plane of the rational soul, whereby the illuminations of the Active Intellect are *passively* received, operates merely as a recipient of abstract universal forms. From the Avicennian perspective, what al-Fārābī terms as the "incarnation" of the Active Intellect into human being renders categorically infeasible.[44] Rather, Ibn Sīnā emphasizes that "the human soul has the innate potentiality to accept the knowledge from celestial intelligences and souls; there is no barrier [*ḥijāb*] on their part, but the barrier is from the recipients' side. As soon as the barrier is lifted, the knowledge emanates into it."[45] Thus, unlike the al-Fārābīan model in which the intellect ascends from materiality to abstraction using intellectual endeavour, Ibn Sīnā's noetic development does not conclude by the intellect's transcendence to the realm of the High Above. Avicennian perspective presumes an abstract substance for the intellect (even in its potential status) and as such its aptitude for receiving the overflow from the Active Intellect from the very beginning. It might not be wrong to say that for al-Fārābī one *becomes* a prophet, but from Ibn Sīnā's vantage point, one *born* as a prophet.[46]

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wherein he takes upon himself to infer the necessity of God's sending deputies towards human society to guide them through the right path.

[44] See al-Fārābī, *The Perfect State*, 125. Al-Fārābī writes on the one whose intellect reaches the level of the acquired intellect: "*huwā al-insān alladhī ḥalla fihi al-ʿaql al-faʿʿāl*" which literally means "He is the man in whom incarnated the Active Intellect." Cf. Ibn Sīnā, *Remarks and Admonitions: Part Four*, 100, where Inati has entitled the chapter "Admonition Concerning the Conditions Under Which the Soul Attains Conjunction with the Divine Realm" (=*al-ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt*, pp. 878-880). Her choice of the term "conjunction" seems problematic since nowhere in this chapter does Ibn Sīnā talk about conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) of the (rational) soul with the High Above; his concise note in this chapter is in a total congruity with his similar passages in the *Shifāʾ* as well as the *Nijāt*, in both of which he maintains the passive nature of the rational intellect vis-à-vis the influx from the Active Intellect.

[45] *Risāli-y Nafs*, 68. Cf. *Avicenna's de Anima,* 178.

[46] See Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 30-36.

Chapter Two: The Notion of Prophecy and Allegorical Interpretation: Al-Ghazzālī's Perspective

Al-Al-Ghazzālī is to Muslims what Maimonides is to the Jews, in that both mixed the words of the prophets with those of the philosophers and interpreted them [the former] according to the other [the latter].[47]
    -Ibn Taymiyyah, (*Averting the Conflict between Reason and Tradition*), I:131.

It is not proper for any wise man to reveal that he possesses knowledge he is hiding from the multitude. Indeed, he must never permit any reference to this. Rather, he should let them know of God's majesty and greatness through symbols [*rumūz*] and similitudes [*amthalah*] derived from things that, for them, are majestic and great…. He must tell them about felicity and misery in parables [*amthāl*] derived from what they can comprehend and conceive.
    -Ibn Sīnā, the Metaphysics of *The Healing*, 366.

This chapter explores notions of prophecy, revelation, and allegorical interpretation from al-Ghazzālī's perspective. At first, the discussion of his prophetology, the concept of revelation (*waḥy*), and their Ashʿarite and/or Sufi background have been addressed. Then I turn my attention towards his exegetical treatment of the sacred tradition (i.e., the Qurʾān and ḥadīth literature) with an eye on the meaning and necessity of allegorical interpretation.

Al-Ghazzālī's methodological approach to many theological issues seems inconsistent in the course of his life—prophecy not an exception.[48] Before his departure from Baghdad and his "spiritual" journey, the Asharite trend overshadows his mystical inclinations. His works follow the Nizamyah's institutionally approved doctrine of Ash'ari very closely. Yet upon his return to teaching in Nishapour, the mystical cosmology took over and his works, by and large, bear an overwhelming mystical overtone. His conception

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[47] Quoted in Afifi al-Akiti, "The Three Properties of Prophethood in Certain Works of Avicenna and al-Ghazālīāli," 210.
[48] On this question, I find my judgement closer to that of Alexander Treiger than the majority of modern scholars who, accepting Ibn Rushd's critique of al-Ghazālī, believe in his "duplicity." Inconsistency in works of such a prolific author whose life witnessed drastic ups and downs seems unavoidable. In specific, given al-Ghazzālī's positions in the Nizamyah in Nishapour and then in Baghdad and his political proximity to the influential political figures such as Nizam al-Mulk Tusi. Lazarus-Yafeh also argues for a remarkable stability in al-Ghazzālī's vocabulary, style, and, to a large extent, in his cosmology throughout his life. See *Studies in Al-Ghazzali*, 18, 50, 213.

of prophecy illustrates an example of such a change. Nonetheless, his hermeneutical theory does not exhibit such a shift at various works he dedicated to this topic. He, by and large, stick to the same exegetical principles throughout his oeuvre.

One can safely argue that al-Ghazzālī followed two paths in his discussions regarding revelation and prophecy: theological-philosophical and mystical-Sufic. More often than not, however, the two trends merge and bring about a novel theological discourse within Ash'arism; what I term as theological mysticism. I elaborate on his various (and sometimes seemingly contradictory) methods in the following pages. Despite that, his general attitude towards the apt method of interpreting the Scripture enjoys instead a sound theoretical framework stemming from his understanding of the intellect and its limits.

I. Al-Ghazzālī the dialectician: Critique of the *falāsifa*

In the *Precipitance of The Philosophers* (*tahāfut al-falāsifa*), al-Ghazzālī addresses the question of prophecy explicitly only at two points: in his sixteenth discussion (refuting the *falāsifa*'s assertion that "the souls of the heavens know all the particulars that occur in this world"), and in the following introduction to the second part of the book, Natural Sciences. He writes the sixteenth chapter as a rebuttal to Muslim philosophers' cosmology which partly explains the veridical dreams as well as prophetic inspirations. Although al-Ghazzālī does not mention the question of prophecy anywhere in the lengthy topic and the object seems to be confined to the referential meanings of such Qurʾānic terms as angels or the preserved tablet,[49] the prophetic knowledge finds its way into the argument as his discussion unfolds. The knowledge

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[49] Al-Ghazzālī, Abu Hamid Muhammad, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, ed. & trans. by Michael Marmura, 153. The full title reads: "On refuting their [the *falāsifa*] statement that the soul of the heavens know all the particulars that occur in this world; that what is meant by 'the preserved tablet' [Qurʾān 85:22] is the souls of the heavens; that the impression of the world's particulars in them is similar to the impression of the retained [images] in the retentive faculty entrusted in the human brain, not that the [[reserved tablet] is a solid wide body on which things are inscribed in the ways boys write on a slate, since the abundance of this writing requires a widening of the thing written on and, if the thing written is infinite, the thing written on would have to be infinite—but an infinite body is inconceivable, and it is impossible to have infinite lines on a body, and it is impossible to make known infinite things with limited lines."

of unseen (*ghayb*) and foretelling the future events by the prophets become underlying themes in this chapter of the *Precipitance*.

Al-Ghazzālī begins the discussion with a summary of the *falāsifa*'s doctrine of celestial motion and how, according to their cosmological theory, the causal chain in the terrestrial world ends ultimately to the heavenly bodies and their eternal voluntary movements. Residing at the top of the chain in the celestial world, heavenly bodies initiate all subsequent causes down to the earth and hence their souls "contain" the knowledge of all sublunary occurrences, past, and future.[50]

Since the obstacle to apprehend future incidents, according to *falāsifa*'s deterministic scheme of causality, resides only in our lack of knowledge of the chain of all causes in their entirety, one would be able to see future events if one can reach to the soul of heavens and make the "connection" (*ittiṣāl*) with the "preserved tablet" (what they would equate with the Active Intellect)-- the entity which embodies the knowledge of all the causes and their effects. That accounts for, Al-Ghazzālī writes on the *falāsifa*'s doctrine, some people's ability to dream and view future events in their visions as they sleep.[51] Their explanation goes as follows. The state of sleep delivers the soul from sensual/bodily constraints and therefore makes it possible for it to contact with the preserved tablet through the imaginative faculty. The imaginative faculty, in turn, symbolizes the reality (of future or other hidden matters) in perceivable forms and as a result what those people view in dreams resemble material beings we deal with in a daily basis. As such, one requires the knowledge of dream interpretation (*ʿilm al-taʿbīr*) to discover the true meanings behind these veridical visions.[52]

By the same token, al-Ghazzālī continues, the *falāsifa* explained prophetic knowledge in terms of their connection to the preserved table. What distinguishes them from ordinary people remains solely in

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[50] *The Incoherence*, 155.
[51] Ibid., 155.
[52] Ibid., 156.

their powerful prophetic psychological faculty (*al-quwwa al-nafsīyya al-nabawīyya*) whereby they perceive the visions while awake without their soul being submerged by external senses. Yet, similar to ordinary people, the imaginative faculty intermediates and makes representations of the knowledge (*tamaththala*) for prophets too. Thus, the *falāsifa* maintain, "revelation [*waḥy*] requires *taʾwīl* just as those dreams require *taʾbīr*. And if the preserved tablet had not contained all the knowledge of everything, prophets would not have been able to perceive the unseen neither in wakefulness nor in sleep."[53]

Al-Ghazzālī's point of departure in disapproving the *falāsifa*'s doctrine of prophetic knowledge appears to be this very last conditional statement.[54] He deduces from their line of argument that their doctrine confines prophets' ability in discovering the unseen solely to the means of their connection to the preserved tablet, with having the imaginative faculty as their intermediary. He does not find their argument persuasive, or their proofs demonstratively sound.[55] For al-Ghazzālī such a restricted explanation runs the risk of casting doubt on the Islamic notion of prophecy if the *falāsifa*'s cosmological "speculations," portrayed by them as the *only* justified elucidation, proves invalid. That is to say, his main concern is not their interpretations *per se*, rather it is their feeble cosmological arguments in support of such interpretations. To safeguard the second most important pillar of Islam against any threat, al-Ghazzālī resorts conservatively to the grey zone of the original symbolic language of religion. He, then, asks: For what reason should it render impossible for God to bestow upon His prophets the knowledge of "the unseen" (*al-ghayb*) by way of direct initiation (*ʿalā sabīl al-ʾibtidāʾ*)? Or, in the case of dreams, with what demonstrative proof can the

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[53] Ibid, 159. A comparison between al-Ghazzālī's present summary of the *falāsifa*'s prophetic knowledge and Avicenna's correspondent passage in *De anima* of the *al-Shifāʾ* shows drastic similarities between the two texts. Also see Marmura, "Avicenna's Psyphological Proof of Prophecy" Cf. Griffel, "al-Ghazālī's Concept of Prophecy"

[54] This conclusion with this format is absent from Ibn Sīnāʾs or Al- al-Fārābīa's discussions of prophecy or their cosmology. It is al-Ghazzālī's contraposition inference of their conditional statement which must have originally read by al-Ghazzālī as the following: if prophets have the knowledge of unseen (P), then the Preserved Tablet contains knowledge of all beings (Q). Hence its contraposition: if the Preserved Tablet does not contain knowledge of all beings (-Q), then the prophets do not have the knowledge of unseen (-P).

[55] In two preceding discussions in the *Precipitance*, (14th and 15th), al-Ghazzālī questions the *falāsifa*'s basic assumptions regarding voluntarily motion of the celestial bodies as well as their argument for the purposeful movement of the heavens. He laid the groundwork for his sixteenth discussion in those discussions by refuting all their Platonic cosmological premises.

falāsifa argue against the possibility of God, or one of His angels, apprising the knowledge of future incidents to people directly? Obviously, by maintaining dreams in the discussion as a form of revelation, al-Ghazzālī does not mean to rebuke the *falāsifa*'s "natural" account in its entirety.[56] His primary concern is to secure enough space for God as the primary, volitionally active agent and to sustain His presence in prophecy as the *initiator* of the prophecy.

Important to notice here is al-Ghazzālī's short parenthetical comment in passing a few lines later: "And regarding what you have mentioned [i.e., the doctrine of prophetic knowledge]-- *even if one acknowledges its possibility*--… it is not known, and its being is not ascertained." [57] Noteworthy here is al-Ghazzālī's hesitation to categorically reject the *falāsifa*'s explanatory map.[58] As the title of the sixteenth discussion suggests, his primary targets in his attack against the *falāsifa*'s prophetology are their identification of the preserved tablet (Qurʾān 85:22) and other heavenly angels with the concept of celestial souls appropriated from the Greeks-- the souls which, according to Muslim philosophers, contain the infinite knowledge of everything.[59] In other words, al-Ghazzālī's main critique in the *Precipitance* is meant for the *falāsifa*'s reading into Qurʾānic passages their cosmological schema and identifying those "religious" concepts with their correspondent metaphysical beings. He does not present his argument against their basic reasoning as for how, for instance, the prophet could gain the knowledge of "the unseen" through God's angels (here the Preserved Tablet). He does not either express any sorts of disagreements to the analogy the *falāsifa* made between dream interpretation (*taʾbīr*) and allegorical interpretation of religious texts (*taʾwīl*)--

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[56] In his discussion of prophecy in *The Jewels of Qurʾān*, al-Ghazzālī uses the analogy between prophecy and dream as a metaphorical tool to explain the nature of prophecy. See below pp. 38-39.
[57] *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 160, Marmura's translation; emphasis is mine.
[58] It is also probable to read this clause merely as a dialectical tool against the opposition. But his appropriation of a major portion of falāsifa's scheme in his later works suggests otherwise. See above, note 5.
[59] Al-Ghazzālī would consider such an explanation most damaging due to its polytheistic nature. It confirms the existence of at least one being, besides God, who has the infinite knowledge of all particulars. The knowledge which has not been bestowed from God, but is obtained independent of Him.

his silence in this matter could be read as a sign of his approval regarding the similarity between dreams and revelation. He actually employs the same analogy elsewhere.[60]

Serving as a refutation (*radd*), al-Ghazzālī's primary objective in writing the *Precipitance* is to disclaim al-Fārābī's and Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics and as such does not tell us much about his his own doctrines.[61] That makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to rely on his words at their face value and should be taken with a grain of salt. For instance, his few seemingly anti-rational positions throughout the *Precipitance*, I believe, ought to be understood in the light of his dialectical method. They may not accurately convey his view on the power and role the intellect play within this context.[62] Having said that, we cannot simply ignore his attitude regarding the limitations of the intellect altogether.

His concluding words at the end of his discussion of prophecy and its relationship with the celestial bodies read: our only path to correctly learn about prophets and the ways they learn about the unseen is "from the revelation [*al-sharʿ*], not through reason [*al-ʿaql*]."[63] His main objective here is to set a limit for our access to the proper knowledge of the heavens and their complex mechanism, and not to question intellect's innate epistemological ability to affirm the basics. He has leveled the same critique against the *falāsifa* in previous chapters where he rejected their boasted claims in terms of the heavens' voluntarily motion and their final goal: "the secrets of the heavenly kingdom are not known with the likes of these imaginings. God makes them known only to his prophets and saints by way of inspiration [*al-ʾilhām*], not by way of inferential proof [*al-ʾistidlāl*]."[64] What al-Ghazzālī does not seem to express here is that God

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[60] For instance, see *The Jewels of Qurʾān,* 48-50.

[61] In his religious preference to the *Precipitance*, al-Ghazzālī clearly expresses his aim to write the book as a "refutation of the ancient philosophers, to show the incoherence of their belief and the contradictions of their word in matters relating to metaphysics; to uncover the dangers of their doctrine and its shortcomings." Later, in his third introduction he adds: "I do not enter into [argument] objecting to them, except as one who demands and denies, not as one who claims [and] affirms." In the *Incoherence*, 3,7.

[62] I will return to his position of the intellect and the essential role it play in our understanding of religion in the following pages (Sun and eye metaphor in his introduction to *Moderation in Belief* and also the *Revival*.)

[63] In the *Incoherence*, 157. Unlike Marmura, who translates *al-sharʿ* to "the religious law," I renders the term as "revelation." See note 73 below.

[64] the *Incoherence*, 152.

reveals to his prophets and saints something contradictory to the logical inferential reasoning. Rather he hints at the *falāsifa*'s inability to come to a proper conclusion in their large cosmic scheme due to their lack of substantial evidence and reliable premises to build their case on. The *falāsifa*, unlike mathematicians or logicians, draw on "imaginings" (i.e., the existence of the soul of heavenly bodies, their volunteer movement, etc.) which they had blindly accepted from Greeks and emulated them uncritically.

In his introduction to the second part of the *Precipitance*, Natural Sciences, al-Ghazzālī returns to the subject of prophecy and brings up the *falāsifa*'s theory of prophecy once again; this time the main topic in question is miracles and their feasibility. He explicitly maintains that he holds nothing against Muslim philosophers' theories which explain "extraordinary" role various faculties of the prophets' souls play in three types of miracles: 1- the ones brought about by the superpower of prophets' imaginative faculty (e.g. their knowledge of the future events), 2- "intellectual" miracles occurred by means of their superb theoretical rational faculty (i.e. Sīnā's concept of quick wit (*ḥads*)), and 3- the influence prophets' practical faculty of the soul could have on materials outside their bodies and their capability to control external things outside their bodies. Al-Ghazzālī endorses the *falāsifa*'s scientific explanations for these three types of miracles. He, however, protests against what he called "their exceptionalism." He questions the logical basis for limiting the occurrence of "out of ordinary" deeds to these three categories and their denial of the others:[65] "We do not deny anything from what they say, and we [actually] consider them outright possible for the prophets. Yet what we deny is their confining [the miracles] to these matters and refuting the possibility of changing the staff into a serpent, the revivification of the dead, etc."[66] Here, al-Ghazzālī as the critic of the *falāsifa* seems very much consistence regarding his stance against their theory of prophecy throughout the *Precipitance*. Questionable on some levels and hardly approvable with regards to their

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[65] Neither al-Fārābī nor Ibn Sīnā does consider any of these as miraculous acts or anything out of ordinary. The prophets' power of the faculty of imagination is indeed exceptional, but nothing, as al-Ghazzālī attribute to them, *unnatural*. The same can be said about Ibn Sīnā's faculty of "quick wit."
[66] *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 165.

premises, the *falāsifa*'s theory of prophecy can be considered as a *possibility* to the extent that it does not exclude other interpretations and leaves enough room for God's volition.

Now I focus on the meaning of *taʾwīl* within his dialectical refutation of the *falāsifa*. I have already argued that al-Ghazzālī's critique of the *falāsifa*'s natural doctrine of prophecy, outlined in the sixteenth discussion of *Precipitance*, ought not to be read as his unequivocal anti-rational stance, neither can it verify his outright rejection of their cosmological map in its totality. His dialectical approach to the topics in question coupled with the primary objective of the book (i.e. refutation of their metaphysics) could not leave any room for expressing his agreement with the *falāsifa*'s modalities— even if al-Ghazzālī finds himself in a total agreement with what his foe has to say. Written for the public audience as a polemical treatise in defense of commoners' religiosity, the *Precipitance* remains silent when it comes to the applicability of allegorical interpretation in respect to the prophetic literature, or more importantly, the Qurʾānic text.

Also, as I pointed out, al-Ghazzālī made prudent literary maneuvers in his arguments against the *falāsifa*'s rational theory of prophecy to avoid falling into a self-contradiction trap later on. As a rational theologian, he was very well aware of the applicability of their theoretical model in portraying a conceivable notion of prophecy vis-à-vis the literalists camp.[67] His careful use of conditional statements in the *Precipitance* in response to the *falāsifa*'s analogy between veracious dreams and prophetic revelations signals to the elite reader that he might actually have endorsed philosophers' Platonic scheme as the best *plausible* explanation for the phenomenon of prophecy. Our suspicion proves right later on when in his

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[67] Within the Asha'rite school before al-Ghazzālī, the overwhelming majority belongs to the "literalist" camp who, under the influence of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (780-855) rejected Muʿtazilites' defence of the allegorical interpretation of the Qurʾān and Ḥadīth. Ahaʿrites' doctrine of without-how-ness (*bi-lā-kayf*) towards anthropomorphic descriptions of God (*tashbīh*) in the Scripture confirms His corporeality yet rejecting our ability to fathom its quality (how-ness). God, in their view, has a hand and does indeed sit on His throne (as the Qurʾān says), but no analogy can be made between His body and the creatures' physical characteristics; there is no likeness between what we perceive as a hand and His hand. Although al-Ghazzālī defines his own theology within the boundaries of Ashʿarī's school, he forcefully rejects Ḥanbal's version of literalism and, as we have already seen, favours the allegorical interpretation in cases when literal reading of the text cannot come into terms with demonstrative proofs (*burhān*). His discord with the Muʿtazilites and Muslim philosophers, therefore, lies in his judgement of what deems possible by the intellect and what contradicts the intellectual reasoning.

summary of the sixth chapter in the *Jewels of the Qurʾān*, and several other places, he rephrases the exact

formula as his own accepted model – the very doctrine he seemingly had challenged, or exoterically

rejected, before in the *Precipitance*. The following passage in the *Jewels of the Qurʾān* elucidates how much

he owes to Fārābian/Avicennian theory of prophecy in shaping his own theological formula, and

consequently, the usage of allegorical interpretation in uncovering the real intention of the text:

> In short, know that all conceivable matters which are related to you in the Qurʾān [are attained by you in the manner] similar as you perceive the images while dreaming and your spirit views the preserved tablet [*muṭāleᵃⁿ bi-rūḥiᵏᵃ al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*]. That [view] makes for you representations in the form of images understanding of which demand dream interpretation [*taʿbīr*]. Know that the allegorical interpretation [*taʾwīl*] follows the same principles that of the dream interpretation [*taʿbīr*] and that the two share the same nature. As I have said before, [whereas the one who sought allegorical interpretation,] the exegete (*al-mufassir*) concerns himself only with the outward meanings of the words of the Qurʾān.[68]

Important to notice here is his emphasis for the need for an allegorical interpretation in discovering the real

intention of the author and its similarity to the science of dream interpretation due to their identical

ontological source. Here he follows Ibn Sīnā very closely.[69]

All in all, al-Ghazzālī's refutational texts (in particular the *Precipitance*) cannot tell us much about his

sincere approach to the allegorical interpretation, as they do not speak to the depth of his commitment to the

rational theology either. I shall explore his attitude towards this hermeneutical strategy more in the following

sections.

II.   Al-Ghazzālī the Theologian: Public Defense of the Ashʿarism

The Moderation in Belief (*al-iqtiṣād fi al-iʿtiqād*) represents Al-Ghazzālī's most comprehensive

Asha'rite doctrinal work written shortly after the *Precipitance*. At the end of his first discussion in the

Precipitance and following his repeated assertion that the work mostly meant to refute the *falāsifa*, al-

Ghazzālī makes a promise to his reader to write a book "affirming the true doctrine after completing this

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[68] *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 52.
[69] See Notes 39&42 above.

one." He gives this provisional work the tentative title of *The Principles of Belief*.[70] Given the date of its composition and its content, it appears quite reasonable to assume that the *Moderation* is the work he ultimately composed to fulfill his promise in the *Precipitance*.[71]

As al-Ghazzālī in his introduction to the work states, the book serves mainly as an apologetic manifesto in defense of the adherents of the Sunni orthodoxy against other competitive Islamic schools of thought. The work stands out as a yardstick to distinguish Ash'arism from all the other sects, in particular Muʿtazilites and philosophers who, as al-Ghazzālī would portray them, "exaggerate and hence rely extensively on the dictates of the intellect so much so that it collides with the absolutes of the Revelation."[72] *Moderation* should nonetheless be read as al-Ghazzālī's unreserved theological plea, on behalf of the intellect, against any sorts of anti-rationalism and the blind-following of the authority (*taqlīd*). As the title of the work suggests, al-Ghazzālī's main purpose in writing the book was to lay forth what he considered to be a moderate path regarding the Islamic belief system between two extremes:

> How can one attain guidance by following the authorities' works blindly and refuting the methods of intellectual investigation? Does he not know that there is no basis for the revelation[73] [*sharʿ*] other than the words of the Prophet? And that [in turn] it is the intellectual demonstration [*burhān al-ʿaql*] which can confirm the prophet's veracity on what he related to us? And how can one be guided through the right path if he is content with the pure intellect and withdraws oneself from the light of the revelation? …How impossible! How impossible! Definitely and undoubtedly one who does not reconcile between the intellect and revelation goes astray.[74]

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[70] *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 46.

[71] See Marmura, *Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 234, n.20 & Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 121, n.57.

[72] *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād*, eds. Cubukcu & Atay, 1.

[73] In this context, I followed Aladdin M. Yaqub in his English translation by rendering "*sharʿ*" to "revelation" instead of more commonly equivalent, "religious law;" I found Yaqub's argument in distinguishing between *sharʿ* and *sharīʿa* compelling. Al-Ghazzālī, in this passage, employs *sharʿ* as the Prophet's revealed message in its totality, which includes but not limited to religious laws and regulation (*sharʿīʿat*), and posits it in contrast with *ʿaql*. In the same context, the term *sharʿ* can also be equal to "*naql*" (lit. transmit) which constitutes the corpus of written revealed tradition (Qurʾān and Ḥadīth) in the Islamic literature. I believe, the dichotomy *naql* vs. *ʿaql* conveys the same contrast as does *sharʿ* vis-à-vis *aql* for Ghazālī. His replacement of *sharʿ* with *al-Qurʾān* in his comparisons in following sentences supports my assumption.

[74] Ibid., 2.

In following sentences, he gives an explicit example for his devotion to the intellectual theology. His simile would likely raise eyebrows, given his animosity with philosophers who he accused for giving priority to intellect over revelation:

> The intellect is like the eyesight; it is free from disease and ailments, and the example of the Qurʾān is that of the sun, whose light radiates throughout. It is more appropriate for the seeker of right guidance who dispenses with one of them for the sake of the other to be among the dim-witted. For the one who forsakes the intellect, relying only on the light of Qurʾān, is like the one who dwells in the sunlight with his eyelids shut, so that there is no difference between him and the blind. The intellect together with revelation is light upon light. He who tries to observe one of them specifically with his blind eye is hanging from an illusory rope.[75]

Having said thus in the introduction and at the outset, the content and style of the *Moderation* does not signal its author's significant divergence from the traditional Asha'rite theology. The definition and capability of the intellect as well as its limitations in this treatise should, therefore, be understood in reference to the author's devotion to the Asha'rite theology. Al-Ghazzālī's style exemplifies a full-fledged Asha'rite *mutakallim* throughout this work, and the book represents a typical treatise in those terms. He modifies and at some points compromises his "unorthodox" beliefs to safe guard the unity of his Asha'rite stance. For instance, on the subject of miracles in the *Moderation* he deviates from his well-known stance expressed in his other works, that is, the inconclusive nature of miracles as a steadfast reason for proving the veracity of the prophets.[76] Here, he conservatively embraces the traditional Asha'rite formula by confirming that the miracles can indeed be regarded sufficient, persuasive proofs for establishing the truthfulness of the prophets— even for the ones who have not been present at that extraordinary event if they attain its knowledge later on via transmitted parallel reports (*mutiwātir*).[77]

Given the above, what al-Ghazzālī tells us in the *Moderation* on prophecy follows the general trend of the Asharaite theology. Hence it cannot, as shown in the case of miracles, depict an ample trustworthy

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[75] Ibid.
[76] On al-Ghazzālī's rejection of the sufficiency of the miracles see, for exampls, *al-Qānūn kullī*, 19; *al-munqidh*, 61; *al-qistās al-mustqīm*, 58-59.
[77] *al-iqtiṣād*, 6-7.

picture of his theological doctrine in all details. Aiming it for the commoners, al-Ghazzālī evidently refrains from entering into controversial topics which in his view might disturb the multitude's peace of mind-- the general "esoteric" principle he followed up to the end of his life[78] which he shared with many of the *falāsifa*, in particular Maimonides, Ibn Sīnā, and Ibn Rushd.

Nevertheless, a closer look at his views in the *Moderation* brings into light the theological background he draws on giving us a better sense of his take on the notion of prophecy. Al-Ghazzālī begins the discussion by denying God's obligation (*wujūb*) to delegate prophets towards people as His messengers. Yet, if He does, Al-Ghazzālī stresses, it should not render disgraceful or impossible if He does not appoint anyone to guide the people. Prophecy, in this sense, constitutes God's mercy (*raḥma*) towards His people without any compulsion on His part. Al-Ghazzālī presents prophecy as a one-way road from God down to His people in this context.

Miracles constitute the main source for establishing the prophets' veracity and the truthfulness of their divine message.[79] Here, al-Ghazzālī likens miracles to the affirmation a representative receives from an authority in order to prove the validity of the delegatee's duty in that authority's presence. The simile he employs to convey his idea regarding the accountability of miracles is as follows: an individual introduces himself to a king's army as his authoritative representative whose orders must be obeyed. The king cannot talk directly to the army (as God cannot communicate directly with people) and as such the army have no other ways but to receive king's orders through a representative (as prophets convey God's words to the multitude). In this scenario, although the army cannot hear the king directly, they can see his actions (as people can see God in action in His creation, i.e., nature) and that is the only direct means of communication between the king and his army. Now, how ought the army trust this person as the king's true and

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[78] His very last work, which was reportedly finished just a couple of days before his death, addresses the very principle of hiding the theological topics, which may endanger the faith of common people, from the public audience. The title of the treatise reads: *Restraining the Multitude from Engaging in the Science of Kalam*.
[79] *al-iqtiṣād*, 160.

trustworthy messenger when they cannot verbally inquire the issue directly from the king himself? Surely, the words of the representative cannot ascertain his own claim so that the last solution would be king's visible actions before the eyes of the army. The representative, in his attempt to prove his truthfulness, requests the king to perform an action which goes contrary to his common day-to-day habit (*khilāfi ʿādatiʰ*). For instance, he asks the king to stand up from his throne three successive times and then sit down-- a deed which the king does not do habitually.

The king acts this uncommon deed *only* at this very instance in response to the request of his appointed representative to verify his claim. The king's uncommon action upon the request of his representative constitutes, al-Ghazzālī asserts, the approval gesture that miracles do for the prophets. God, upon the request of his prophet and in response to the challenge from doubtful people (*taḥaddy*), "tear" (*kharaqa*) the common course of things in His action (i.e., nature) and manifests a sign to attest his approval of the prophets' words regarding their divine mission.[80] Obviously, the work meant for the general public and as such al-Ghazzālī avoids any philosophical jargons. His elaborative description of the relationship between God, His prophets, and the people fits perfectly into the common traditional doctrine of the Kalam and he, for good reasons, keeps himself as distant as possible from philosophical discourse.[81]

In his dialectical passages throughout the book, al-Ghazzālī highlights God's attribute of "talking" (*mutakallim*). In particular, in his discussion of the seventh attribute (speech), he depicts the Deity as capable of *talking* to His deputies and the revealed Law being the outcome of His speech. As such, al-Ghazzālī asserts, the denial of God's act of speech tantamounts to the rejection of the prophecy of His massagers.[82]

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[80] *al-iqtiṣād*, 199.
[81] It was written shortly after his attack on the *falāsifa*'s metaphysics and, eventually, condemning them on three matters to heresy.
[82] Ibid., 115.

God is a "sayer" primarily in the sense that he has the perfection (*kamāl*) of the "inner speech" (*kalām al-nafs*); an anteriorly eternal attribute of which occurrent sounds and words are the indicators (*al-dilālāt*).[83]

Directly relevant to our discussion is the hypothetical question he asks in the form of an objection to the distinction he made between God's eternal inner speech and His created words and sounds: "One might say: How did Moses (peace be upon him) hear the voice of God (exalted be He)? Did he hear sound and letters? If you say so, then it contradicts your [preceding] claim that God's [inner] speech cannot be heard. If His [inner] speech is neither voice nor letters, how could he hear what is not voice and letter?"[84] Al-Ghazzālī's response to this inquiry exhibits, once and again, his adherence to the traditional Asha'rite approach throughout the treatise. His answer draws on the Asha'rite principle of "without how-ness" (*bi lā kaif*). Similar to other attributes of the Deity, God's eternal speech is beyond our perceptibility and we, as human beings, cannot describe its characteristics and/or its how-ness-- for nothing alike exists in our world. Its quiddity remains inaccessible and cannot thus be explained in words. The only satisfactory answer to such a question would be to have the inquirer "taste" the sweetness of Moses' dialogue with God-- something which proves not feasible for anyone except the prophet himself. Having said that, Al-Ghazzālī insists, we ought to embrace the existence of such an anteriorly eternal attribute and have to believe in it despite our inability to explore its nature.[85]

That leads to two other attributes of the Deity discussed by Al-Ghazzālī in the *Moderation*: God's knowledge of particulars in the sublunar world (the second attribute[86]), and His unconditional willful volition (the fourth attribute[87]). Talking to a singled-out person (i.e. the prophet) necessitates firstly His knowledge of all individuals and, secondly, His power to will and selection. That situates the *Moderation* at

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[83] Ibid., 116. Cf. *iḥyāʾ*, 110.
[84] Ibid., 121. For Qurʾānic account of Moses' direct speech with God see, for instance, 20:11-16; 28:30; 27:8. Cf. Exodus 3:4-6.
[85] *al-iqtiṣād*, 122-124. Cf. *The Niche of Lights*, 31.
[86] Ibid., 99-100.
[87] Ibid., 101-108.

the top of al-Ghazzālī's un-philosophical works which does include neither his appropriation of philosophical cosmology nor contains his mystical insights as we see in his other works.

On the topic of *taʾwīl*, *The Moderation in Belief* has to convey a lot and exhibits al-Ghazzālī's ultimate reach for a rational religiosity. In the first treatise, eighth proposition, entitled "No Anthropomorphic Description is True of God," he argues against any such readings of the Qurʾānic passages which attribute any sorts of anthropomorphic characteristics to the Almighty. The outward senses of these statements do not express the truth of matters and as such ought to be read figuratively:

> It might be said: 'So what is the meaning of the Exalted's statement: 'The Compassionate seated Himself on the throne'' (Qurʾān 20:5) and what is the meaning of the Prophet's statement: 'God descends every night to the nearest heaven?' We say: The discussion about the surface meanings [Sing. *Al-ẓāhir*] regarding this category [of statements] is very elaborate. We describe, however, a methodology for dealing with these two surface meanings, which is a guide for dealing with the rest of them.[88]

In dealing with these controversial passages, al-Ghazzālī divides people into two groups, each of which ought to follow its specific approach to the matter. It proves not appropriate to disclose the answer to this question in public and the commoners in the same manner as it would fit the scholars. The multitude, due to their intellectual inability to comprehend the truth, should be banned from entering into any detailed debates in terms of God's corporeality and subsequent method of allegorical interpretation; they should merely be told, succinctly, that God does not have a body like the physical bodies we see around us in this physical world:

> What we see suitable for the populace is that they should not be engaged with these allegorical interpretations [Sing. *taʾwīl*]. Rather whatever necessitates anthropomorphism [*tashbīh*] or indicates occurrence [*ḥudūth*] concerning God should be removed from their beliefs. It should be made firm for them that God is an existent such that: There is nothing like Him and He is the Hearer and Seer [Qurʾān 42:11]. If they ask about the meanings of these verses, they should be rebuked and told: "This is not your pursuit, so stay clear of it; for every science has its men." The answer to be given is the answer given by one of the earlier scholars [viz. Malik bin Anas]. When asked about God's sitting on the throne, he said: "The sitting is known, its modality is unknown, to ask about it is a heresy, and to believe in it is a duty." This is because the minds of the populace are inadequate to

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[88] *al-iqtiṣād*, 51.

receive the intelligibles, and their knowledge of the language is not broad enough to understand the Arabs' extensive use of metaphors.[89]

But for the man of sciences and the one who finds in himself the intellectual ability to fathom the complexity of the issue, he should be taught that the passage in question "indicates a metaphorical meaning rather than a literal one."[90] Such an allegorical interpretation, according to al-Ghazzālī, deems to obey two hermeneutical guidelines: firstly, Arabic linguistics (i.e., lexicon and syntax) and secondly the command of the intellect. That is to say, every passage should pass the twofold test of Arabic semantics and the intellectual feasibility (*al-jawāz al-ʿaqlī*).

Al-Ghazzālī elaborates on the matter further in the fourth treatise under the title of "On Showing that It is Obligatory to Believe in Matters Reported in the Revelation which Deemed Possible by the Intellect." His tone is very much explicit in this passage whereby he articulates his most radical stance regarding the necessity of adopting an allegorical method vis-à-vis the passages in the sacred tradition which their outward senses come into contrast with what al-Ghazzālī believes to be established intellectually:

> Regarding what reason deems impossible, if it is reported in the revelation, it is *an obligation* to be interpreted allegorically. It is inconceivable that the revelation contains what is conclusively contrary to reason. Most of the ḥadīths that are anthropomorphic literally, deem inauthentic, and those of them that are authentic are not conclusive but are amenable to allegorical interpretation.[91]

This steadfast position stems from this presupposition that the revelation and the intellect share the same ontological source. Even on the historical events and the reports of their details, al-Ghazzālī maintains this basic interpretive guideline. That is, all "ambiguous" matters whose plain meaning contradicts one of the fundamentals of belief should be read metaphorically or their outward message rendered figuratively since the intellect deems the occurrence of a mistake in their report: "hence we ought to maintain our rejection of any report that is not authenticated and to interpret figuratively what has been authenticated. Regarding a

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[89] Ibid., 51-52.
[90] Ibid., 57.
[91] *al-iqtiṣād*, 212. Emphasis added.

report that you cannot so interpret, say, it might have a figurative interpretation and a rationale, which I am unable to see."[92]

Having said that, al-Ghazzālī is very aware of maintaining his distance from the *falāsifa* and their "heretical" exegetical methods. In the fourth chapter, "On Explaining which Among the Sects must be Charged with Infidelity," he reiterates his accusations against the *falāsifa* and condemns them in three questions above to apostasy: bodily resurrection, God's knowledge of the particulars, and the anteriorly eternity of the world. The *falāsifa*, al-Ghazzālī states, despite their assertion on the Prophet's veracity believe that he could not be explicit enough in transmitting the truth in its totality to the masses due to their intellectual incompetence. To accuse the Prophet to "hide" part of God's message equals to, in al-Ghazzālī's view, questioning the Prophet's truthfulness and as such the *falāsifa* who confirm this idea in the name of the welfare (*maṣliha*) of mankind qualify definitely to be charged with infidelity. Their transgression is due to their belief in the metaphorical nature of the Prophet's reports on, for example, the physical punishment and rewards in the hereafter. "To assert this claim is to nullify the value of the revelation…. If it were permissible for the messengers to lie for the sake of people's interest, his statements no longer could be trusted at all."[93] That gives rise to an important question as how would al-Ghazzālī distinguish his own "appropriate" allegorical interpretation from the *falāsifa*'s heretical one? What criterion would have distinguished between a proper allegorical exegesis and the wrong one? To answer these questions I shall turn to two short treatises he composed explicitly on this topic of allegorical interpretation: *The General Rule in Allegorical Interpretation* (*al-qānūn al-kullī fī al-taʾwīl*),[94] and the sixth chapter in the *Demarcating Criterion between Islam and Godlessness* (*Fayṣal al-Tafriqa Bayn al-Islām wa al-zandiqa*).

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[92] Ibid., 243.
[93] *al-iqtiṣād*, 249-250.
[94] This short work is different from, and probably written before, the more detailed section in the *Demarcating Criterion between Islam and Godlessness* entitled "*qānūn al-taʾwīl*." In my study of this text, I consulted Maḥmūd Bījū's edition (Damascus 1992) which, as Griffel argues, is not the most reliable one, but remains the only available source so far. A partial English translation of the epistle is also available in Nicholas Heer, "Al-Ghazali: the Canons of Taʾwil," pp. 48-54.

Al-Ghazzālī wrote *The General Rule* as a response to a series of exegetical questions put forth by a student of his, Qāḍī Abu Bakr ibn al-Arabī (d. 1148). The questioner requests his master to elucidate several problematic statements in the ḥadīth corpus—passages concerning the Satan's (*al-shayṭān*) "physical" presence in one's body and the day of resurrection.[95] What all these questions have in common is the issue of the apparent conflict between what the intellect deems impossible and the outward sense of texts of ḥadīths in question.

In his introductory note prior to his responses, al-Ghazzālī provides his reader with a "general rule" (*qānūn^{an} kully^{an}*) regarding the conflict between what the intellect dictates (*al-maʿqūl*) and the text of sacred tradition (*al-manqūl*). People are divided into five camps in this regard:[96] The five categories are as follows: 1- the most extreme literalists (viz. *ḥashwīyyah*[97]) who strictly follow the outward sense of sacred tradition at the expense of the reason. Drawing on the Qurʾānic saying "Truly, God is powerful over everything," the adherents to this idea believe in the apparent meaning of the text even if it proves impossible by the intellect. 2- The opposite extreme constitutes admirers of the intellect (viz. the *falāsifa*) who adopt their *own* intellectual apprehension as the yardstick to judge the text of scripture. If the literal message of the text comes into any sorts of conflict with what they perceive intellectually "impossible," they do not hesitate to interpret it allegorically. In these cases, they believe the prophets portray (*ṣawwarah*) the higher truth of divine matters metaphorically as to be comprehensible for the multitude. Their exaggeration of the intellect leads them to accuse the prophets of lying for the benefit of the masses—hence their apostasy. 3- The ones

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[95] Griffel, "al-Ghazālī at His Most Rationalist," 91-92.

[96] In another passage in the same treatise, he divides people into three groups: 1- people whose extravagant devotion to the text of sacred tradition subdues all their attention, 2- people of the opposite [intellectual] extreme who confine their thoughts into what the intellect dictates, and 3- those moderates in between who seek to unite and reconcile what the intellect dictates and what the sacred text conveys outwardly. The moderates, in turn, are of three groups: 1- those who take what the intellect dictates fundamental and the text of sacred tradition secondary; they do not pay enough heed to the latter, 2- those who take the text of sacred tradition fundamental and what the intellect dictates secondary; they do not pay enough heed to the latter, and 3- those who take the two fundamental and endeavour to unite and reconcile between them. *Qānūn al-taʾwīl*, ed. Bījū, 15.

[97] Note that al-Ghazzālī does not point to any specific school of thought by their names in these five categories, the parenthetical names are my conclusions based on his description of their respective features.

who take what the intellect dictates fundamental and exceed in their reliance on it while their attention to the sacred text suffers from negligence. At first glance, they hastily reject whatever they find irreconcilable with the intellect, including many ambiguous ḥadīths which they label as unauthentic. In their encounter with the text of the Qurʾān, however, they retreat to the allegorical interpretation while tipping the scale in favour of the intellectual approach. 4- This group, contrary to the last, take the sacred revealed texts primary and the intellect secondary. Their focus is on justifying the plain meaning of the sacred passages to the extent that their literalism threatens the basics of reasoning. Due to their lack of scientific education, they do not have a correct understanding of the logical impossibility (ʾistiḥāla) and hence more often than not tend to read the metaphorical passages in the scripture literally. 5- The last group, whom Al-Ghazzālī calls the rightful party (al-firqat al-muḥaqqat), includes the moderates who could successfully reconcile between the intellect and the revealed tradition in a way to take them *both equally* fundamental. They genuinely deny any sorts of clash between the two and believe that

> whoever refutes [the authority of] the intellect has indeed refuted the revelation [*sharʿ*] [98] since it is by means of the intellect that we acknowledge the veracity of the revelation. That is, if the intellectual reasoning cannot prove compelling, then how can we distinguish between a [true] prophet and a claimant, between a truthful and a liar? And how can they deny the intellect by means of the revelation while the only means to prove the revelation is the intellect?[99]

Al-Ghazzālī emphasizes on the authority of the intellect in distinguishing between the passages in the revealed tradition to be read literally and the others which ought to be read metaphorically. Intellectual reasoning, therefore, remains the sole criterion which a believer can evaluate the credibility of allegorical interpretation.

Allegorical interpretation thus opens before this fifth school (the moderates) a third path in between the two extremes to embrace the authority of intellect while sustaining their religious faith in the revealed

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[98] I followed Aladdin M. Yaqub in his English translation by rendering "*sharʿ*" to "revelation" instead of more commonly equivalent, "religious law." See note 25, chapter 2.

[99] *Qānūn al-taʾwīl*, ed. Bījū, 19-20. The same idea with almost verbatim wording is present in the introduction to the *Moderation in Belief* (*al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād*), eds. Cubukcu & Atay, 1-2.

text of the Scripture. That does not, al-Ghazzālī asserts, give a conclusive answer to all textual ambiguities; sometimes the scholar has to suspend his judgment in cases where neither the apparent meaning of the text can be accepted because of its conflict with the intellect nor the reliability of the passage can be doubted. In such a scenario the researcher might say: "I know that the outward sense of the text is indeed not intended since it defies the intellect, but I do not know what the true intention might be either. Yet, there is no need [for me] to attain that knowledge, for neither the acceptance of any [religiously binding] deed is conditioned to that, nor anyone can find a path to discover the truth and certain meaning of it."[100] Speaking as a somewhat pragmatist theologian here, al-Ghazzālī highlights the unpractical aspect of these philosophical matters in order to downplay the effect of intellectual perfection in one's ultimate happiness in the hereafter.

Unlike al-Fārābī's teleological doctrine which rests essentially on the idea of one's conjunction with the Active Intellect, al-Ghazzālī's orthopraxical theology undermines the exclusively unique role the intellect may play in one's felicity. He appears very cautious in his formulation as not to exclude the uneducated commoners from the body of blissful believers—what al-Fārābī's model seems to advocate.[101] The attainment of that theoretical certitude is, therefore, not obligatory and the ordinary believer will *not* perish if he does not realize the hidden, obscure intention of God in all obscure passages.

Instead, what categorically required of any believer is "the absolute faith and the general assertion in saying 'we believe in it; all is from our Lord.'"[102] Critical to note is the reference al-Ghazzālī makes here to the famous verse in the Qurʾān which addresses the question of allegorical interpretation. The complete translation of the verse reads: "He it is Who has sent down the Book upon thee; therein are signs determined; they are the Mother of the Book, and others ambiguous [*mutashābīh^{āt}*]. As for those whose

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[100] *Qānūn al-taʾwīl*, ed. Bījū, 24. On al-Ghazzālī's view on the "faith of ordinary people," see Wohlman, *Al-Ghazali, Averroes and the Interpretation of the Qurʾan*, 92-94.

[101] On the notion of felicity in the hereafter and its relationship with intellectual perfection See notes 17 and 20 above. Regarding al-Ghazzālī's "egalitarian" position see Wohlman, *Al-Ghazali, Averroes and the Interpretation of the Qurʾan*, 91.

[102] *Qānūn al-taʾwīl*, ed. Bījū, 24.The Qurʾānic passage Ghazzālī refers to is the one in which the notion of *taʾwīl* is central. (3:7).

hearts are given to swerving, they follow that of it which is ambiguous, seeking temptation and seeking its interpretation [taʾwīl[hi]]. And none know its interpretation save God and those firmly rooted in knowledge. They say, 'We believe in it; all is from our Lord.' And none remember, save those who possess intellect." Al-Ghazzālī concludes this introduction by a famous dictum from Mālik Ibn Anas in response to the question he was asked about the Qurʾānic expression "then [God] sat Himself upon the Throne."[103] Mālik, al-Ghazzālī reports, to have said: "the [meaning] of 'sat Himself' is known, the quality of it is non-rational, the belief in it is obligatory, and to inquire about it is a heretic innovation."[104]

The *Demarcating Criterion* was, as Richard Frank points out, written as an indirect theological self-defense against the accusations that al-Ghazzālī deviated from some of the teachings of the Ash'arite school in his *Revival*.[105] The treatise was meant primarily to establish the fundamentals of religious tolerance in the Sunni Islam. In his introduction, al-Ghazzālī tells us that his main objective is to restrain the prospect of accusation of unbelief (*takfīr*) among the schools of thought within Islamic society.[106] To that end, he comes up with a tangible principle based on a textual exegetical method with which one allegedly could draw the line between unbelief (*kufr*) and faithful submission (*īmān*). Nonetheless, towards the end of the book, he does not hesitate to charge the *falāsifa* with infidelity, condemning them explicitly of uttering heretical unbelief in their teachings on God's limited knowledge and their denial of bodily resurrection.[107] In these

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[103] The Qurʾān 3:54; 10:3; 13:2; 20:5.

[104] The second part of the dictum has been reported more frequently as "the quality of it is unknown [*majhūl*]" instead of Ghazzālī's version here which says "the quality of it is non-rational [*ghayru maʿqūl*]." The former is indeed more in line with the Ashʿarite's modality of without-how-ness (*bi-lā-kayf*). Ghazzālī seems to have modified the dictum in *fayṣal al-Tafriqa* to make it more applicable to the present discussion. In *Iljām al-awām ʿan ʿilm al-kalām* (*Restraining Commoners from the Science of Theology*), 46, he quotes the dictum in the former version.

[105] *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, 76-77.

[106] The act that Ghazzālī himself was ironically among the pioneers!

[107] *fayṣal al-Tafriqa Bayn al-Islām wa al-zandiqa*, ed. Bījū, 56-60. In the *Demarcating Criterion*, Ghazzālī does not include among his accusations against the *falāsifa* their belief in the anteriorly eternal (*qadīm*) nature of the world— it is the first discussion in the *Precipitance of the Philosophers*. Its exclusion here in the *Demarcating Criterion* can be read as an indicator that Ghazzālī does not have a decisive textual evidence to support his position on the pre-eternity of the world against the *falāsifa*'s interpretation. Ibn Rushd in the *Decisive Treatise* (*faṣl al-maqāl*) attempts to illustrate that the Aristotelian cosmology does not, at least, contradict the literal sense of the Qurʾān. See….

two instances, they, as al-Ghazzālī maintains, reject the outward sense of the Scripture without having any substantial demonstrative proofs. Their political excuses, namely, the "well-being of the multitude [ṣalīḥ al-khalq]" or "this-worldly expediency [maṣlahat al-dunyā]" only attest their conviction that the Prophet *deliberately* related false facts about God and the judgment day. The Prophet, al-Ghazzālī summarizes the *falāsifa*'s inner speech, uttered what he knew was not factually correct, but he related otherwise because "the commoners cannot comprehend the intellectual resurrection [al-maʿād al-aʿqlī], yet their social well-being depends on their belief in the bodily resurrection; and also it is of their own benefit if they believe that God knows their deeds since that [belief] creates desire [for good conducts] and fear [from wicked deeds] in their hearts."[108] This affirms, not explicitly nonetheless, that the *falāsifa* uphold the idea of "white lie" in prophetic revelations; the opinion which al-Ghazzālī equates with the outright accusation of lying to the Prophet and hence the *falāsifa*'s apostasy.

Al-Ghazzālī tells us that the main criterion to distinguish between the faith and unbelief is *not* the words of Ashʿarī or, in that matter, any other Muslim theologians. A truth seeker ought not to blindly follow (taqlīd) the authorities and as such the bigotry (taʿaṣṣub) has no place in theological discussions and anyone, including al-Ghazzālī himself, has the right to criticize and even reject elements of the Ashʿrite theology.[109] He, therefore, lays down the foundation of his argument in the first three chapters. The true criterion to set apart a justified accusation of unbelief from an unfounded one is one's "affirmation of and assent to the words of the Prophet (taṣdīq al-nabī) vs. accusing him of being a liar in what he brought (takdhīb al-nabī);" whoever accuses the Prophet of uttering any lies or falsehood is thus an infidel.[110] Al-Ghazzālī walks a fine line between *takdhīb al-nabī* as indicating the rejection of the Prophet as a false claimant (hence his message in its totality) and *takdhīb al-nabī* as deeming partial lie or falsehood in his words. The former can be rightly

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[108] *fayṣal al-Tafriqa Bayn al-Islām wa al-zandiqa*, ed. Bījū, 57.
[109] Ibid., 14-23.
[110] Ibid., 25-26.

applied, as the author perceives, to non-Muslim 'infidels' while the latter makes specific cases for apostate

Muslims who distort exegesis for their own benefit.[111]

The two notions can be set apart by elaborating over the definition of "*taṣdīq*" vs. "*takdhīb*" in the

context of allegorical interpretation of the words of the Prophet and/or the Qurʾān.[112] Al-Ghazzālī offers a

hermeneutical formula which can serve as a yardstick in determining whose theological teachings may

"implicitly" accuses the Prophet of being a liar and hence an apostate accuser:

> The acknowledgment of the veracity (*al-taṣdīq*) [of the Prophet] concerns the message, or rather the messenger. It means, in its true sense, to concede the existence [*al-wujūd*] of what the Prophet- peace be upon him- related its existence. The existence, however, has five levels; neglecting this fact causes each school to blame its adversaries for being an accuser of the Prophet as a liar (*al-takdhīb*). The existence is either 'essential,' 'sensory,' 'imaginative,' 'conceptual,' or 'similar.' Whoever acknowledges, on any of these five levels, the existence of what the Prophet-peace be upon him- related its existence, he then cannot be called the accuser of the Prophet as a liar.[113]

That is to say, any existents (anything which can be pointed to as an existent "being") in the words of the

Prophet necessarily belong to one of the five modes al-Ghazzālī lists here. This ontological categorization is

unprecedented and specific to al-Ghazzālī himself. It follows that an allegorical interpretation which goes

beyond these five levels and assigns an *empty metaphorical* concept to the Prophet's words suggests,

consequently, a sort of deception in words of the Prophet or accusing him of falsity. Whatever being in the

revealed texts must, therefore, correspond to one mode of existence explicated by al-Ghazzālī.

The five levels of existence correspond to five levels of interpretation. Whatever the Prophet related,

therefore, ought to be rendered to at least one of these five levels of beings. The top-down order of them

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[111] True to its title, *fayṣal al-Tafriqa* addresses the issue of apostasy by means of distorting the interpretation. The term "*al-zandiqa*" is an Arabicized word from its Persian root "*zindīk*." During the pre-Islamic era, it was applied to Manicheans who allegedly interpreted sacred texts to appropriate them for their own benefits. *Zindīk* in this meaning refers to the "people of *taʾwīl*." See Saʿīd Riḍā Muntazirī, "The Etymology and Application of 'zendīq' in Various Texts," 175.

[112] As Griffel has remarked, al-Ghazzālī 's change of the orthodox discussion of "*taṣdīq bi-Allah*" to "*tasdīq al-nabī*" bears significant theological remarks. I believe it does not, however, shift the basis of belief from the transcendental sphere of God to the human sphere, as Griffel noticed. Al-Ghazzālī's innovation should be read in the light of his "unitary" view expressed most clearly in the last part of the *Niche of Light*. See Griffel, "Al-Gazālī's Concept of Prophecy," pp.123-124

[113] *Qānūn al-taʾwīl*, ed. Bījū, 27-28. The five levels of the existence are respectively: *dhātī, ḥissī, khayālī, ʿaqlī*, and *shibhī*.

should also be followed. Namely, one cannot retreat from the essential level to the sensory unless the demonstrative reasoning (*al-burhān*) necessitates that. The tolerability of engaging in allegorical interpretation is "contingent upon having established the logical impossibility of the apparent [*ẓāhir*] of a text."[114]

Al-Ghazzālī sets another rule to limit the possibility of *takfīr* further: On secondary issues, the matters which are not directly related to the fundamental principles of creed such as the religious Law (*fiqh*) or the status of the Companions, no allegorical interpretation, no matter how "wrong" it may sound, deems a person to be labeled unbeliever. Contradictory understandings of a ḥadīth or conflicting interpretations of a historical event (narrated in the form of a ḥadīth) cannot justify an extension of the maxim. Nonetheless, if that legal claim is based on an interpretation which casts doubt on the truthfulness of the Prophet or correctness of his message, then, drawing on the general rule of "*takdhīb al-nabī*," the one who follows that claim deems to be an unbeliever even though he proclaims the tenets of Islam.[115]

Considering the above ontological chart and its corresponding interpretive theory we can now have a better idea as what criterion distinguish al-Ghazzālī's allegorical interpretation from the *falāsifa*'s. It is the *falāsifa*'s heedless precipitance, as the former would put it, in denying the outward layer of the meaning and their unnecessary resort to the lower levels of being in their interpretations. Those philosophers, al-Ghazzālī would argue, simply reject the possibility of an apparent meaning for an inward one without presenting sufficient intellectual proof for their faulty readings. It follows that they actually renunciate an existential reality to the words of the Prophet, an act which in turn verifies their heretical attitude. Other than that, al-Ghazzālī seems to agree with the *falāsifa*'s underlying assertion that the intellect and the revealed tradition cannot contradict each other and, as such, any unconformity between the two has to be reconciled by means of allegorical interpretation.

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[114] Ibid., 47.
[115] *fayṣal al-Tafriqa Bayn al-Islām wa al-zandiqa*, ed. Bījū, 62.

Methodologically speaking, it is fair to maintain that their positions are not that far apart and that al-Ghazzālī shares his fundamental rule for allegorical interpretation with the *falāsifa*. That assumption is true with the proviso that his epistemological framework does not completely abide by the Greek tradition, represented by the *falāsifa*, in particular when it comes to the definition of intellect, its limitations, what may deem possible intellectually, and what considers irrational. What bothered him the most, I suggest, was the socio-political ramifications such "naturalistic" interpretations could bring about in the lives of ordinary people. Muslim philosophers' insistence on a *merely* political function for prophetic parables could easily lead, al-Ghazzālī might argue, to the denial of the Prophet's divinely stature and eventually let the genie of autonomous reasoning (in the name of religion) out of the bottle. Unlike the majority of adherents to the intellectual tradition among Muslim philosophers, al-Ghazzālī viewed the intellect as nothing but the guardian of the sacred tradition.

III. Al-Ghazzālī between the Worlds: A Conservative Mystic

In *The Just Balance* (*al-qisṭās al-mustaqīm*), which meant primarily as a treatise on the logic, al-Ghazzālī alludes to the notion of prophecy in the light of his "theory of parallelism" (*muwāzanah*).[116] He does not expand on his definition of the theory in the same text, but in the second chapter of *The Niche of Lights* (*mishkāt al-anwār*) we can find his more detailed description of the method and what it stands for. Based on his definition, the visible world (*ʿālam al-shahāda*) or the world of the mundane kingdom (*al-ʿālam al-mulk*) serves the spiritual wayfarer (*al-sālik*) as a ladder for his ascent to the world of Invisible and Divine Sovereignty (*ʿālam al-ghayb wa al-malakūt*). That is, the wayfarer travels through the straight path to the Source;[117] the journey occurs in this world, and he has no other means but to climb up this ladder to lead him eventually to the ultimate felicity. That spiritual transition from the visible world to the world of

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[116] Ibid., 45. The term "*muwāzanah*" literally means counterbalancing, levelling, equalizing.
[117] The "straight path" according to Ghazālī is the religion (of Islam) and its revealed law.

Divine Sovereignty, Al-Ghazzālī argues, necessitates a sort of connection (*ittiṣāl*) between the two; an association which cannot render possible unless there exists an analogous correspondence (*munāsiba*) between the two realms.

The relationship between the two worlds, al-Ghazzālī has already noted in the first section, is "like the shell in relation to the kernel, the form and mold in relation to the spirit, darkness in relation to light, and the low in relation to the high."[118] More precisely, the lower world (i.e., the visible one) "comes forth from the world of Divine Sovereignty just as the shadow comes forth from the thing that throws it, the fruit from the tree, and the effect from the cause."[119] That being the case, everything in this world is a/an similitude/image (*mithāl*) of one or several realities from the Above. [120] Recognition of this peculiar relationship between the two worlds makes prophecy conceivable for us.[121]

Now, returning to his note on prophecy in the *Just Balance*, al-Ghazzālī acknowledges the enigmatic nature of the theory of parallelism and calls it an absolute *mystery*.[122] The mystery which reveals its secrets only to a very few who have already fathom the parallelism between the sensible and the intelligible. If done so, then, "truly there would be opened before them a significant chapter in the knowledge of parallelism between the visible world and the world of Divine Sovereignty." Dream, he says, is the key to reveal the secret of this enigma, for it is in dreams where imaginative similitudes (*al-amthalat al-khiyālīyyah*) embody formless mystical realities and it is in those spiritual visions (in dreams) whence the mystic encounters the world of the Truth for the first time. All that come true because the two worlds disclose in their entirety before the prophet and that "the [veracious] dream is a substratum [*juz^{un}*] of

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[118] *The Niche of the Lights* (*mishkāt al-anwār*), trans. Buchman, 11.
[119] Ibid., 12.
[120] Ibid., 28.
[121] On the definition of the *muwāzanah*, see also *Kīmīyā*, pp. 55-56.
[122] He expresses the same idea in *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 55-56: "Abandon your ambition for attaining this knowledge of correspondence and seek it only through the door of mortification and righteousness…. Know with certainty that the secrets of the world of Divine Sovereignty is hidden from the hearts which filled with the love of mundane world."

prophethood."[123] He maintains that the real nature of this proximity (*al-ʿalāqah*) between two worlds cannot be disclosed by any such discursive methods practiced by, for instance, theologians or the *falāsifa* in their training. It is a secret which only can be sought through self-cleansing, purification, and mortification.[124]

Even though al-Ghazzālī does not elaborate on the ontological premises underlying his analogy between dreams and prophetic revelation in this passage and that he avoids mentioning the presence of this comparison his predecessors, the influence of the Avicennian doctrine of prophecy on his cosmology is evident. Adapting a different terminology with overtones of Sufism, al-Ghazzālī sketches, by and large, the same Avicennian theoretical schema of prophecy.[125] It is very likely that he intends to distance himself from the philosophical jargon as much as possible and also to conceal his appropriation of philosophers' thoughts— as is obvious in his translation of Ibn Sīnā's *The Book of Knowledge for ʿAla ad-Dawlah* into an Arabic version entitled *The Aims of the Philosophers* without mentioning the original text and/or the author of it.

The differentiating elements of the two approaches ought to be addressed nonetheless. The cognitive role of the intellect is entirely absent from Ghazzālīan context in the *Just Balance*. Unlike Fārābīan/Avicennian ontological formula, the prophet's intellect *per se* neither conjoins with a source of intellection in the Above, nor, as Ibn Sīnā prefers, functions as a passive recipient of the Divine illumination. Al-Ghazzālī remains ambiguous, or at least silent, on elaborating these psychological matters. He seems to refrain from getting into details of the issue in question. That is probably due to his pedagogical considerations which perceive such scientific explanations unsuitable or even repulsive for the masses.

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[123] *al-qistās al-mustqīm*, ed. Beiju, 45.
[124] *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 56.
[125] See Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qurʾān*, 20, 51. Cf. Marmura, "Avicenna's Psychological Proof of Prophecy" & idem, "Avicenna's Theory of Prophecy in the Light of Ashʾarite Theology."

On the same note, in the *Jewels of Qurʾān* (*Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*), al-Ghazzālī rephrases his analogy between prophecy and dreams drawing on the theory of parallelism. He writes that an example of this parallelism could be found in dreams. Any veracious dream (*al-ruʾyā al-ṣaḥīḥah*) can illustrate an example of such parallel connection between the two worlds. He lists two examples following with his apt interpretations to describe how the imaginary found in dreams can point to realities in the outside world.[126]

In his first example, a teacher dreams "hanging pearl necklaces around the necks of pigs." Here, pearl symbolizes the teacher's most precious possession, namely his knowledge, and the pigs personify unmerited, morally foul students who do not deserve receiving their teacher's most valuable gift of knowledge. The second dream pictures a man who "seals with his ring men's mouths and women's genitals during the month of *Ramaḍān*." A learned, experienced interpreter sees through the superficial layer of the dream what the images really convey: the dreamer is a *muʾadhin*, who calls out to prayer five times a day. Since during the month of *Ramaḍān* he is the one who announces the beginning of fasting day every morning (before the dawn), he figuratively seals the men's mouth and genitals of women by calling adhān on the minaret.[127] These sorts of reliable dreams, in the eyes of al-Ghazzālī, contain within themselves factual realities hidden under the guise of metaphoric symbolism.[128]

That may raise the question as why do we vision truths in the form of similitudes and images and not in their actuality? Al-Ghazzālī responses that the state of our soul in this world conditions theses similitudes to be the only visible images for us. For we are all asleep in this world[129] and similar to one who

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[126] The same connection is made between veracious dreams and the knowledge of the theory of parallel worlds in *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 53-54.

[127] Besides a restriction on eating and drinking during the fasting period (from dawn to dusk), Muslims are also forbidden from having intercourse, or any sorts of sexual activities, during the day in the month of *Ramaḍān*.

[128] *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān wa duraruh*, ed. Qabbānī, 49.

[129] reference to the ḥadīth: "Men are asleep; they wake up when they die"

dreams and vision things in images and similitudes, the ordinary people cannot help but to comprehend the true reality of matters in images as long as they abide in this world.[130]

His short description of the prophets' attainment of the knowledge of unseen in the *General Rule* illustrates another example of al-Ghazzālī's reliance on Avicennan model. In the short epistle which he wrote in response to one of his students, he makes a short note on how the prophets could relate future events and unseen matters:

> the account of all things either in the past or in future are written and recorded in a thing sometimes called 'a tablet' and other times 'a registry' and at times 'a book;' as God, the exalted be He, said: 'in a clear book'[131] and 'in a clear registry.'[132] They are recorded in it as the Qurʾān is recorded in the brain of the one who has memorized it by heart; it is nothing like our writing a letter on a limited surface since the infinite cannot be written on a finite space like regular books. The heart is like a mirror; and the tablet is like a mirror too, but there is a curtain between the two. When the curtain is lifted, you can see in the heart what is recorded in the tablet. The curtain is the occupier [*shāghil*] and the heart is occupied [*mashghūl*] in this world. The majority of its occupation is thus thinking about what the senses brought up to it. When the senses stagnate during the sleep,… the heart may see some of those images which are written in the tablet."[133]

I can now address the meaning of *taʾwīl* in the light of his "theory of parallelism" (*muwāzanah*). Al-Ghazzālī devoted a significant portion of the *Jewels of Qurʾān* to his discussion of religious sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-dīnīyyah*)—sciences which he believes can be best explicated in relation to and from the Qurʾān.[134] He divides them into two general categories: the sciences which explore the outer "seashell" of the Qurʾān, and the sanctified sciences which look into the most hidden secrets and jewels (sing. *juwhar*) of the Sacred Text. The two are not, however, distinct and contradictory. Drawing on his theory of parallelism which

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[130] *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 54.

[131] "And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He; and He knows what is on land and sea; no leaf falls but that He knows it, nor any seed in the dark recesses of the earth, nor anything moist or dry, but that it is in a clear Book." (6:59).

[132] "Truly We give life to the dead and record that which they have sent forth and that which they have left behind. And We have counted all things in a clear registry" (36:12).

[133] *Qānūn al-taʾwīl*, ed. Bījū, 28-29.

[134] Cf. Hermann Landolt, "Ghazālī and 'Religionwissenschaft'," 20-21 on another classification of sciences by al-Ghazzālī in the *Revival*.

depicts the relationship between the worlds analogous to that of concentric circles, each layer of meaning has a two-fold connection, one with the outward tier and the other with the inner one:

> These seashell sciences of rind, however, are not of the same grade. [They are analogous to a real seashell]. The seashell has a face towards its interior [bāṭin]. This side encounters the pearl face to face and due to its proximity and continues contiguity, the inside face resembles the pearl very much—appears nearly identical with that. Unlike the outward face which resembles regular stones for its remoteness [from the pearl] and the lack of continuity with the interior. Likewise is the shell of the Qurʾān. Its outward face is the sound, and the man entrusted with the knowledge of correcting its outlets in transmission and pronunciation is a man who possesses knowledge of letters. Thus he is the possessor of the knowledge of the outward rind which is removed from the interior part of the shell, let alone the pearl itself."[135]

In regards to the Qurʾān, then, the seashell sciences include knowledge of Arabic language, its syntax, morphology, semantics, etc. all of which can be integrated under the title of the outward exegesis (*al-tafsīr al-ẓāhir*). This innermost outward tier constitutes the last grade of the seashell science of the Qurʾān which is nearest in its contact with the pearl of Qurʾān's truth and because of its resemblance to the "pearl" of Qurʾān some uncultivated minds come to believe that it is the highest attainable knowledge of the Holy Scripture.[136] Yet this is not the case and another, most hidden, Qurʾānic sciences do exist.

The second type of religious knowledge (the one dealing with "jewels of the truth/Qurʾān") is called "sciences of the kernel" (*ulūm al-lubbāb*).[137] It is called kernel for two main reasons: firstly its *inward* nature which stands against the apparent feature of the "seashell" type of knowledge. The second implies its veiled secrecy hiding it from the strange eyes. Sciences of the kernel do not concern the outer rind of the text at its face value; rather, they probe the depth of the message to discover higher realms of knowledge attainment of which does call for both purify soul and cultivated intellect. At the inferior degree of the kernel sciences, resides the science of theology (*kalām*). Despite its practical efficacy in repelling the heretical beliefs among the commoners, the science of *kalām* does not concentrate on the disclosure of the truths

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[135] *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 36.
[136] Ibid., 37.
[137] The Arabic term "*lubb*" is an equivalent for "*Juwhar*" meaning the core of something; the kernel or essence of it. In the Qurʾānic literature, the phrase "*ulil albāb*" (2:179, 2:197, 3:190) means, literally, "owners of the kernel" and has been translated as "possessors of intellect." The term conveys a dual concept: core/kernel as well as the intellect.

(*kashf al-ḥaqāyiq*). Al-Ghazzālī is very explicit about it and even lists his own works which, in his view, were basically meant for that end: *Precipitance of the Philosophers*, *Moderation in Belief*, *Scandals of the Esoterics*.[138] At the highest grade of these sciences and the noblest of them is the knowledge of God and His essence; all other sciences are sought as prerequisites for this very highest goal—they are the science of the path to Him, the latter the science of the end. It is nonetheless beyond most people's ability to fathom this holiest gnosis (*ʿilm al-maʿrifa*) and as such it ought not to be disclosed openly— if does so, it harms the majority of commoners who are merely followers in their attainment of knowledge.[139]

Al-Ghazzālī's model for the multifaceted nature of the Holy Scriptures stems from his theory of parallelism. Multiple layers of the meaning each enjoy its authenticity at its respective level; the outward message do not, and in al-Ghazzālī's view cannot, contradict the most hidden one as the parallel worlds exist in complete harmony with one another. That is why one cannot envisage his hermeneutics of the "shell" vs. "kernel" sciences unless one grasps his ontological model. The allegorical interpretation can thus operate at the heart of his ontological theory as a means to reconcile between the apparent (*ẓāhir*) and the inward (*bāṭin*). He explains this in the following words.

> There is no obscure [*ṭams*] term in the Qurʾān unless there exist beneath it symbols and hints to a concealed meaning which can only be grasped by those who comprehend the analogues correspondence [*munāsiba*] and parallelism [*muwāzanah*] between the world of mundane kingdom and the world of manifestation, on the one hand, and the world of Unseen and Divine Sovereignty, on the other. That is because there is nothing in the world of mundane kingdom and manifestation unless it constitutes a similitude [*mithāl*] of corresponding spiritual entity from the world of Divine Sovereignty. So much so that the former can be identified with the latter in its spirit and meaning, save its physical form and shape. Through the corporeal similitude in the world of manifestation one ascends [*mundarij*[140]] to the spiritual meaning of the other world. Thus, this [corporeal] world

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[138] *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 38-39.
[139] Ibid., 43.
[140] The term can either mean (in its verbal form) "to include" or the stepping stone, a ladder. Quasem's English transition reads: "it includes," but Khadiv Jam translates it as "*nardibān*" (ladder). I preferred the second equivalent since al-Ghazzālī, in *mishkāt*, has a very similar passage in which he likens the world of manifestation to a ladder: *kāna ʿalam al-shahādah mirqāt^{un} ʾilā ʿālam al-malakūk*. Elaborating on the connection between the two worlds, here al-Ghazzālī likens the bodily similitudes to those means through which one should ascend to the world of divine sovereignty. See, *mishkāt*, 27.

> constitutes an inevitable station [*manzil*] among the stations of mankind in his path towards God.[141] As one cannot reach the kernel but by passing through husk and shell, one cannot rise towards the world of spirits but only by means of similitudes of the world of corporeality.[142]

Al-Ghazzālī goes on to maintain that the same is true about many passages in the Qurʾān and the ḥadīth corpus. Two examples elaborate his point. The prophet is related to have said: "The heart of believer locates between the two fingers of the Most Gracious." For al-Ghazzālī, God's incorporeality proves to be out of the question; he spends a significant part of the *Moderation in Belief* refuting those ideas pertaining anthropomorphism. The prophetic ḥadīth, then, does not indicate God as having fingers or His bodily characteristic; rather, the statement aims to reveal the degree of immediate influence and control God enjoys in his relationship with the believers.[143] Given his charges of unbelief against whoever deems the words of the Prophet containing a lie or misleading information, his metaphorical interpretation gives rise to a question here: Does his *taʾwīl* signal that the Prophet attributes corporeality to God while he knows the impossibility of that attribution? If so, then al-Ghazzālī himself proves to be among the heretics who have been condemned by his judgment. That is not the case; I shall return to it shortly.

Al-Ghazzālī applies his allegorical interpretation as a method to uncover the "true" intention of the Prophet functions as follows: The two fingers represent two opposite inclinations within us: satanic vs. angelic which are both subdued to the Almighty's absolute power. As such He can flip the believer's heart, as it were, as easy as a man can move around a thing between his fingers. You should take note here, Al-Ghazzālī says, "what the connection between you and your fingers share with the relationship between God and His two fingers, namely the two angels: it is merely spiritual and not formal." One expects to obey the same interpretative strategy when it comes to the other similar ḥadīths like the famous one: "God created Adam in His image." For al-Ghazzālī it goes without saying that the ḥadīth does not allude to the physical

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[141] He expresses the same idea regarding the spiritual wayfarer (*sālik*) in the *Just Balance*, 45, and also in the *Niche of the Lights*, 28.
[142] *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 48-49.
[143] Ibid., 49-50.

likeliness between Adam and God— obviously, God does not have a body and "only a dim-witted would imagine such a resemblance."[144]

What the outward message conveys, however, is indeed true in the same sense that the representations (*tamaththu^{āt}*) of the spiritual realities in a veracious dream deem authentic and reliable. The similitudes nonetheless do not convey the literal message they superficially seem to express, yet they prove real in one of the five-grade-reality-chart Al-Ghazzālī depicts. What al-Ghazzālī insists on in this regard, in a proclaimed disagreement with esoterics (*bāṭiniyyah*)[145] and the *falāsifā*, is the trustworthy report of the Prophet in all his words, including the Qurʾān, regarding the true reality of the related message. In the abovementioned ḥadīth, for example, the term "image" (*ṣurah*) ought to be applicable both to the Almighty and Adam. To solve the problem of anthropomorphism, al-Ghazzālī does not merely utilize the metaphorical exegetical method, but he argues for the existence of two parallel "representations" of the same reality in two parallel worlds. Allegorical interpretation, therefore, functions as a translation method to render the other levels of reality to the one which is comprehensible for our day-to-day cognition. That demands Al-Ghazzālī to revisit the conventional meaning of terms—what his note in the *Niche* suggests.[146]

Prophecy can then be justly defined within his theoretical framework as the disclosure (*kashf*) of the most hidden, ineffable realities in the form of the Prophet's representative words. Allegorical interpretation,

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[144] *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 50.

[145] Ghazzālī evidently expresses his disdain from the Ismaelites' rejection of the apparent meaning of the text at the end of his discussion of the allegorical interpretation of the Light Verse in the *Niche*, p.32: "Do not suppose from this example and this way of striking similitudes that I permit the abolishing of outward meanings and that I believe in their nullification…God forbid! Nullifying the outward meaning is the view of esoterics [*bāṭiniyyah*] who have one blind eye and look only at one of the two worlds, not recognizeing the parallel between the two or understanding its significance."

[146] *The niche*, 25-26. In his introductory note to the second chapter, he states that the "spirits of the meanings" come down from the world of Reality while the frames of terms assigned to those concepts come about in this world. The dual origin of each word brings about synonymous terms which despite their various frames share the same conceptual meaning. The reality of terms belongs to the spiritual world of unity while their husk associates with the lower world of bodily existents. As such, each conceptual reality may have several similitudes in the lower realm of plurality: "One who considers the realities of these words may become bewildered by the multiplicity of the words and imagine many meanings. But one to whom the realities are unveiled will make the meaning primary and the words secondary."

in turn, does what exactly the term *taʾwīl* means, that is, to carry the concept to a higher grade of reality (within the five-level theory) if the lower one cannot communicate its reality. That accounts for the analogy between the art/science of dream interpretation (*taʿbīr*) and *taʾwīl*: "Know that whatever the Qurʾān conveys to you deem to be comprehensible to your cognition. For that reason, it presents to you [those realities] in a similar way your soul would study the preserved tablet at sleep. They would be related to you through symbols understanding of which require dream interpretation. Thus it said 'the allegorical interpretation follows the same rules as that of dream interpretation.'"[147]

IV.   Al-Ghazzālī the Freelance Sufi: Philosophizing Mysticism

Treatise Al-Ghazzālī wrote from the time he gave up teaching at the Nizamiyyah in Baghdad (488/1095) up to the time of his return to the Nishapour (499/1106) reflect his most sincerely unreserved passages in respect to his theological doctrines thanks to his lack of political affiliations, detachment from his former teaching as well as communal responsibilities, and, most importantly, the mystical experience he had gone through. Among the pieces composed in the course of that period, a selection of four display more vividly al-Ghazzālī's take on the question of divine inspirational knowledge. The works which I believe can bring into light a more accurate account of his final theory of prophecy: *The Niche of* Light, The *Alchemy of Felicity* (*kīmīyā-y saʿādat*),[148] *The Deliverer from Error* (*al-munqidh min al-ḍilāl*).[149]

I began this section with *The Niche of Lights*-- the treatise which the author may not have intended to publish and meant it for a small circle of his Sufi students in Ṭūs.[150] Among the abovementioned works, the *Niche* illustrates al-Ghazzālī's most uncompromised, and likely the final, view on what may be called

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[147] *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 52.
[148] I have not included his magnum opus, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*), in this list due to its size and also the inclusion of the *Alchemy*. Thematically speaking, the *Alchemy* is almost identical to the *Revival* (al-Ghazzālī wrote the former in response to the request of his Persian speaking followers who could not read the Arabic text of the latter. As such, the *Alchemy* is a concise, less technical version of the *Revival*).
[149] The *Deliverer*, according to Triger, must have been written shortly after his return to teaching in Nishapour in response to the controversy erupted when he was in Ṭūs in late 499 HJ.
[150] Gairdner, "Al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār* and the Ghazālī-Problem," 121.

his mystical cosmology. The work stands as al-Ghazzālī's most detailed and cohesive pieces in regards to his unitary[151] mystical cosmology. His metaphysics of light in the *Niche* paints a picture of the cosmos whereby the connection between the One and plurality of His creation is depicted in the most imaginal Qurʾānic fashion. Drawing on the Light Verse and corresponding sayings of the prophet, al-Ghazzālī lays out, among other things, his doctrine of prophetic inspired knowledge. The theory which, as Treiger has shown, very much influenced by and appropriated from Avicennian cosmology as well as the philosopher's psychology.[152] Its importance relies on four factors: A) It is one of the last works of al-Ghazzālī in which his latest "developments" in terms of his doctrine can be studied, B) Contrary to his other works which he composed during his teaching position at Nizamyyah in Baghdad, the *Niche* reflects his uncompromised cosmological view, i.e., mystical cosmology, C) al-Ghazzālī did not write the treatise for the public audience and, as its introduction shows, he meant it for one of his fellow Sufi students in Tus, D) As Hava Lazarus correctly points out,[153] al-Ghazzālī's cosmology (within his Sufi scheme) seems much more detailed and, for the reason I mentioned above, explicit in the *Niche* than his discussions in *Revival* or *Alchemy*. As such, the *Niche* (together with one of his Persian letters[154]) provides the best source for studying al-Ghazzālī's cosmology which is primarily drawn on his "monistic" view.

Its title is borrowed from the well-known Light Verse in the Qurʾān in which, in a uniquely exceptional case, God is said *to be* the "Light of heavens and earth" and that the parable of His light is a

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[151] Al-Ghazzālī's ontological approach in the *Niche* can be called "unitary" in the sense which, later on in the school of Ibn ʿArabi, was called "the unity of existence" (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). See for example his statements in which he denies any (independent) existences other than His, pp. 16, 17, 19, 20, 21.
[152] See Triger, *The Inspired Knowledge*.
[153] *Studies in al-Ghazālī*, 506ff.
[154] Alexander Treiger, "Monism and Monotheism" sheds more light on the depth of al-Ghazzālī's mystical cosmology and its relationship with Avicennian metaphysics. A closer look at the final passages in the *Mishkāt* alongside al-Ghazzālī's Persian letter, which serves as an explanatory-apologetic note on the same passage in *Mishkāt*, reveals his commitment to the, later called, the Sufi doctrine of Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). I would like to suggest that al-Ghazzālī's (in)famous criticism of causality, best discussed in the 17th discussion of *Tahāfut*, should also be understood against this mystical background.

niche.[155] The verse, in and by itself, has posed a hermeneutical challenge for many Muslim thinkers for in the Qurʾān God repeatedly speaks of Himself as the One who is not comparable to anything.[156] The same exegetical question, as al-Ghazzālī's introduction to the first chapter illustrates, motivates him to write the treatise in response to the request of one of his friends (or probably one of his spiritual students) while he was in Tus in 499 and before his return to Nishapour for teaching at the Nizamiyah there.[157] The questioner asks al-Ghazzālī to explain for him the meaning of the "divine light" and the interpretation of related passage in the Qurʾān and ḥadīth literature.[158] Although the student's demand poses a danger (as it is famously said "to divulge the mystery of Lordship is unbelief"), al-Ghazzālī unfolds before this talented, worthy student of his some aspects of the matter in question, but only in the form of abridged allusions and brief hints.[159]

The *Niche* shares the same underlying Platonic assumption which has guided al-Ghazzālī throughout most of his theological/mystical works. We come across two layers of reality at any encounter with the perceivable matters in this world. That is, each and every existent thing in our world of sensational bodily perception reflect a higher, more sublet similitude in the world of Divine Sovereignty with which the

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[155] Light Verse (24:35): "God is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is a niche, wherein is a lamp. The lamp is in a glass. The glass is as a shining star kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West. Its oil would well-nigh shine forth, even if no fire had touched it. Light upon light. God guides unto His Light whomsoever He will, and God sets forth parables for mankind, and God is Knower of all things."

[156] The phrase "Naught is like unto Him" (*laysa kamithli*[hi] *sha*ʾ) among the most famous and often repeated phrases in the Qurʾān which conveys one of the basic notions of the Islamic theology: God's complete transcendence (*tanzīh*) from any sorts of corporeality. It stands in contrast to the notion of analogous likeliness (*tashbīh*). See, for instance, 112:4; 42:11.

[157] The *Niche* was definitely written no earlier than the completion of *Al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, but not later than al-Ghazzālī's return to his teaching position in Nishapur in late 499. Most probably, and more accurately, the *Niche* was composed while he was in Tus taking seclusion in his Sufi lodge (*Khānaqāh*).

[158] al-Ghazzālī mentions here another prophetic saying: "God has seventy veils of light and darkness; were He to lift them, the august glories of His face would burn up everyone whose eyesight perceived Him."

[159] *The Niche of Lights*, ed. & trans. By David Buchman, (Utah: Brigham Young University Press), 2. al-Ghazzālī's reluctance on elaborating on such "mysteries" in the public actually proved well advised. Not very long after the *Niche* was written, the Nishapour controversy erupted and had al-Ghazzālī to response to the Sultan regarding the accusations leveled against him by a group of Ulama. One of the main accusations was based on the *Niche*. See for more details Treiger, *The Inspired*, 96 ff.

sensible reality enjoys a constant correspondence analogy.[160] This binary ontological scheme constitutes the theoretical basis for his discussions in the *Niche*.

The first chapter dedicates to his elaborative discussion of the meaning of light. There is only one real light, and that is God's Light. Every other lights, then, prove to be illusory and metaphorical (*majāz*). Corresponding to the two lights, we have two eyes each of which opens to one of the two worlds. The external (*ẓāhir*) eye which sees the world of sensations, and the internal (*bāṭin*) eye with which we perceive the reality of the world of Divine Sovereignty. The inner eye can also be called the intellect; similar to the external eye, the intellect once disengaged from the coverings of fancy and sensual obstacles does not commit any errors in seeing the reality.[161] Prophets, on account of being human beings, also have these two eyes.

The prophetic internal eye has such a cleansed light and radiance that it takes control over the prophet's senses (instead of senses having supremacy over them as it is the case among ordinary people). That prophetic light penetrates through the veils of fancy imaginations and other sensual occupations and enables the prophet to "see in his wakefulness what others would see in a dream."[162] God endows them with this ability to view not only the forms, but also to witness the meanings behind those forms. In his elucidation as how the prophets view the meaning of intelligibles in forms, al-Ghazzālī applies a shortened, modified version of Ibn Sīnā's discussion of the prophecy in the *Remarks and Admonitions*:[163]

> In most cases, the meaning [*maʿnā*] precedes the internal witnessing. Then the meaning radiates from the internal witnessing on to the imaginal spirit from which the imagination becomes imprinted with a form that parallels the meaning and resembles it. This type of revelation in wakefulness needs allegorical interpretation [*taʾwīl*], just as in dreams we need dream interpretations [*taʿbīr*]…. This is one of the third qualities of the prophecy.[164]

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[160] I have already discussed al-Ghazzālī's theory of "analogous correspondence" in the *Jewels of Qurʾān*. See note 66 above.

[161] *The Niche*, 6.

[162] Ibid., 35.

[163] *al-ishārāt wa al-tanbīhāt*, 870-871. See notes 25 & 26 above.

[164] *The Niche*, 36. In the *Alchemy*, Ghazālī talks about three distinctive characteristics of a mystic-prophet. See *Kīmīyā*, 34. And also note 104 below.

Through this illuminative power, the holy prophetic spirit [*al-rūḥ al-qudsī al-nabawī*] can reach even another stage beyond the realm of the intellect whereby he can cognize "marvels and wonders" which are not manifest to the intellect.[165]

Contrary to the al-Fārābīan model and much closer to the Avicennian theory, al-Ghazzālī believes that one cannot obtain this prophetic taste [*dhawq*][166] or spiritual power by instruction, intellectual exercise, or any sorts of similar spiritual purification. It resembles the innate "talent" some have for poetry or music which many others may lack. The friends of God and the mystics, however, can have an ample portion of it due to their God-given spiritual taste, yet the multitude is almost devoid of that.[167]

But this Avicennian theory of prophecy (drawing on his definition for "quick wit") which al-Ghazzālī masterfully fits into his theological context is not the only one in the *Niche*. A closer look at the text reveals yet another "esoteric" notion of prophetic illumination which al-Ghazzālī might have intentionally concealed beneath his abridged allusions and brief hints here and there. He never distinctively marks this pure monistic theory of prophecy as an alternative to the Avicennian one. In the following, I try to give this scattered portrait a more concrete image.

Al-Ghazzālī tells us at the outset, at the very beginning of the first chapter, that in the *Niche* he deals with *three* parallel stages of gnosis (*maʿrifat*) in respect to the notion of the term "light:" the way the commoners (*al-ʿawām*) perceive the term, the view of the elect (*al-khawāṣ*), and the manner in which the elect of the elect (*khawās al-khawās*) apprehend it.[168] He promises to explain these three notions further in

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[165] *The Niche*, 37.
[166] Treiger makes the argument for al-Ghazzālī's appropriation of this notion (i.e. "*dwawq*") from Ibn-Sīnā. See *Inspired knowledge*, chapter 3, pp. 48 ff.
[167] *The Niche*, 38.
[168] Ibid., 3. I have already claimed that Ghazālī follows a dualistic, Platonic ontological formula. What he says here about three degrees of knowledge does not contradict the preceding two-layer doctrine. The first degree of knowledge concerns the first layer of reality (i.e. the world of sensation), at the second and third degrees of knowledge one comes to recognize reality in the second layer of reality (i.e. the world of Divine Sovereignty). In other words, both the second and third stages of knowledge occur in the High Above.

the chapters to come, but in a heedless reading of the treatise one probably misses the third category since al-Ghazzālī does not mention it explicitly as the theory of the third group anywhere after this initial note.

The most apparent or outward sense of the term "light," according to al-Ghazzālī, is what common people perceive and recognize as the apparent illuminating power of a lamp or sun in the sky. Whenever they refer to "light," they mean that the *sensible* agent emanates from the sun power of which enables our external eyes to see external objects. The second degree of knowledge of light renders hidden from the multitude, but lies within reach of the recognition of the elect. Light in this second meaning brings about the wisdom of unknown not using any sensible rays, but by shedding the light of the intellect (or the inner eye) on the objects of its inquiry. I have already discussed this second meaning of the light and have also shown the notion of prophecy al-Ghazzālī meant by this second sense of the term.

What seems to be missing is the third and last meaning of the term and its consequent notion of prophecy. Al-Ghazzālī evidently lays out his cosmology in the *Niche* on a two-fold ontological pattern: he talks about *two*, not three, eyes, suns, and worlds.[169] Prophets, accordingly, ascend from the ladder of this world to the heavens and, through the eye of intellect illuminated by God's grace, "look down from there upon the low, and when they gaze from top to bottom, they become informed of the hearts of the servants and gain the sciences of the unseen [in the same manner]."[170] One would not have a hard time identifying this description with Ibn Sīnā's psychology. That, I would argue, constitutes al-Ghazzālī's second notion of prophecy after his first Asha'rite one discussed in his other works, appealing mostly to the elect—people of intellectual preponderance.

Nonetheless, within the same context and right after the second notion, he depicts a higher domain concerning the meaning of the Divine Light whereby any duplicity vanishes and, as such, any duality

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[169] The external (bodily) eye vs. the internal eye (i.e. the intellect); the physical sun vs. the spiritual sun (i.e. the Qurʾān); and the world of mundane kingdom vs. the world of Divine Sovereignty.
[170] *The Niche*, 12.

between the beholder and the beholded, between the eye and the light, between the sensible light and the Light disappear. Within this realm, the prophet speaks *as if* he has become the Light Itself:

> It is more apt to call it the "shining lamp" due to its overflow of light upon other things. This is the quality that we find in the holy prophetic spirit. [That is so] because it is through this spirit that many types of knowledge overflow upon creatures. Hence, we understand the meaning of God's naming Muḥammad a "shining lamp." All the prophets are lamps, and so are the scholars, but the disparity between them is beyond reckoning.[171]

In his earlier accounts of the intellect, al-Ghazzālī alluded to the mystery of the Prophet's words, "Verily God created Adam upon His form," by arguing for the existence of "correspondence" between the Divine Light and the light of human intellect.[172] But he left any further explanations for the appropriate time and did not expand on his interpretation of the ḥadīth.

Later on, he tells us that light has only *one* actual reality. Hence, the name "light" *per se* appropriates that self-iluminating Highest Light which shines in Itself and bestows light upon every other light. From that al-Ghazzālī infers that any other light is merely a metaphor vis-à-vis God's true Light.[173] We also learn that light is another name for the concept of existence and that by saying "there is no light except His light," al-Ghazzālī means more accurately "He is everything… nothing possesses a quiddity other than He, except in a metaphorical sense."[174] Should one understands the unity creed (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*) from this vantage point, it conveys three distinct messages for the multitude, the elect, and the elect of the elect: "there is no god but Allah," "there is no god but He," and "there is no he but He" respectively.[175] The third view of the monist draws on a unitary ontology whereupon no dependent existent thing deserves the attribute of "existence" save the One: "It is not that each thing [other than God] is perishing at some

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[171] *The Niche*, 13.
[172] Ibid., 6. Also in *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*, 50-52.
[173] Ibid., 15.
[174] Ibid., 20.
[175] Ibid., 20.

point in time. Nay! it has been perished from eternal past to the eternal future; when the essence of anything other than He is considered in respect of its own essence [separate from Him], it is sheer nonexistence."[176]

The mystics (*al-ʿārifūn*) having ascended to the heaven of this reality (i.e., the third stage of recognition belonging to the elect of the elect) "see nothing in existence save the One, the Real."[177] Similarly, when the prophets climb up to that kingdom of pure singularity and upon reaching that level, in accordance with the ḥadīth, God becomes the hearing by which they hear, the sight by which they see, and the tongue by which they speak.[178] That is the true interpretation of the Prophet's saying, "Verily God created Adam upon His form," which constitutes the ultimate stage of "annihilation" (*fanāʾ*) in al-Ghazzālī's eye. The prophet at this stage becomes the mirror in which God's words and His attributes get reflected upon other people *as if* the prophet has become united with the One and *as if* his essence consumed by His essence.

Nowhere in the *Niche*, has al-Ghazzālī explicitly expressed his inclination to this third notion of prophecy as an alternative to the second Avicennian formula. Neither does he clearly draw the connection between the mystics' stage of annihilation and the prophetic revelation. It is not clear to me whether al-Ghazzālī views the two incompatible or treats them, according to his theory of analogous parallelism discussed before, two sides of the same coin. Nonetheless, his scattered hints can lead to a reasonable argument for the existence of that link and may lead to an interesting case for further studies. I end up this part with a passage from the last two pages of the *Niche*. The following, I believe, once and again exemplifies al-Ghazzālī's esoteric approach to this third notion of prophecy. The stage *beyond* (and not contrary to) the realm of intellection and rationality; his third theory of prophecy which instead of drawing on the perfection of the prophetic intellect, evolves out of the prophet's illumined annihilation:

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[176] *The Niche*, 16.
[177] Ibid., 17.
[178] Ibid., 21.

Another group, the elect of the elect, pass beyond this stage. The august glories of His face burn them up, and His majesty and highness envelopes them. He overcomes them, and thus their essences annihilate. They become extinct from themselves so that they cease observing themselves. Nothing remains to save the One, the Real. They taste and embrace the meaning of His words, "Everything is perishing except His face."… This is the ultimate end of those who have arrived. But another group [the prophets]… for them the path is not long…. What dominates over the others at the end, dominates over them at the beginning. His disclosure [*tajallī*] rushes upon them at once, and the august glories of His face burn up everything that sensory sight and rational insight can perceive. It is likely that the first path is that of the Friend [the Prophet Ibrāhīm] and the second is that of the Beloved [the prophet Muḥammad]. God knows best the mysteries of the steps of these two and the lights of their stations." [179]

That can, to some extent, explains why al-Ghazzālī would not find the attribution of words of the Qurʾān to the Prophet problematic. Although he never explicitly expresses this unorthodox or even heretical view, in several instances he tacitly shifts the classical Ash'rite doctrine of *taṣdīq bi-Allah* to *taṣdīq al-nabī*.[180] I think his "unitary" view made this new formula feasible by fusing God's attribution of Talking to the Prophet's soul so much so that the wording of the Qurʾān can either be attributed to God or the Prophet whose being-ness (*shayʾīyyat*) has been annihilated, as it were, in God's Essence. That follows, whatever the Prophet says, either in the form of ḥdith or Qurʾānic verses, pertain to the same divinely value because of his ascendance to the realm of Oneness whereupon no duality can be perceived or imagined. Al-Ghazzālī does not reveal this reality to the masses, similar to many others, due to his esoteric approach to such matters.

Now let us turn to al-Ghazzālī's most famous Persian treatise: *The Alchemy of Felicity*. It is the *Alchemy* wherein al-Ghazzālī displays, in Persian, his theory of prophecy regarding a correlation between prophecy and Sufism. His vivid depiction of prophets as high-ranking, perfect mystics comes into contrast with his traditional Asharite theory in which the mystical element does not underlie the argument.[181] Al-Ghazzālī in the *Alchemy* presents a case of an absolute harmony between his theory of prophecy and

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[179] *The Niche*, 52.
[180] See Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's Concept of Prophecy," 123-125.
[181] A close reading of his Asharite text shows that even in those passages al-Ghazzālī exhibits his deep devotion to the Sufi approach. Yet in the *Alchemy*, for the reasons discussed above, he leaves aside his conservative method and expresses his mystical concepts very openly.

Sufism; what may be termed as al-Ghazzālī's "philosophizing mysticism." Written not very long after the *Niche* and meant primarily for the common readers who had not the command to read and comprehend such Arabic technical texts as the *Revival* or *Niche*,[182] *Alchemy* can be regarded as abridged, simplified version of the Revival in which he laid out his unitary (*tawḥīdī*) cosmology.

Al-Ghazzālī devotes the first chapter of the *Alchemy* to his discussion of human soul. Like Ibn Sīnā, the point of departure in his theory of prophecy is soul's twofold feature: an abstract, divinely given substance vis-à-vis a non-eternal, occurrent governor of the body. Yet, uncharacteristic of Ibn Sin's writings and typical of his own style, al-Ghazzālī in his depiction of the soul he draws heavily on Qurʾānic passages as well as Ḥadīth literature.[183]

At the outset, al-Ghazzālī tells us the motif and the reason for his dedication to the topic: the self-knowledge of one's soul opens up the gate of gnosis (*maʿrifat*) of one's Lord.[184] At the centre of the soul and its kernel (*bāṭin*) dwells the heart (*dil*) which belongs to the World of Decree (*ʿālam-i amr*); the heart is an occurrent and hence created, but, at the same time, of an immaterial indivisible substance.[185] As the king (*shahrīyār*) of the body, the heart governs both bodily and spiritual needs of the man; it also rules over the intellect which in turn controls the senses. al-Ghazzālī views the intellect as the handmaid of the heart, "its vizier," "its candle and light" with which the former can find the path of the Lord.[186] In a nutshell: "they created the heart and bestowed upon him this kingdom [of the body] and the army [of senses] and

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[182] See his reference to the *Niche* in reference to the interpretation of the Light verse in the Qurʾān (24:35), *Kīmīyā*, 58.

[183] The number and frequency of his reference to the traditional literature (i.e. Qurʾān and Ḥadīth) in the *Alchemy* is much less in comparison to the text of the *Revival*.

[184] In reference to the famous Ḥadīth: "Whoever knows his own soul, he then knows his Lord." Cf. *The Niche of Lights*, 31.

[185] *Kīmīyā*, 17.

[186] In his definition of the human soul, its power and divisions al-Ghazzālī follows Ibn Sīnā's Psychology very closely. See notes 28& 29 above. Cf. Marmura, "Avicenna's Theory or Prophecy in the Light of Ashʿarite theology," 208-213. Al-Akiti, "The Three Properties of Prophethood,"195, maintains that al-Ghazzālī was the first theologian who used Avicennian doctrine in his works.

bequeathed to him the vessel of the body so that he may travel from the world of dust to the Loftiest Heights."[187]

The heart, al-Ghazzālī elaborates, has two faculties; the apparent (*ẓāhir*) one which the common people are most familiar with and the "spiritual" power, knowledge of which is confined to a very selected few. Man obtains all sciences (math, geometry, medicine, astronomy, and even the science of religious texts (*sharīʿat*)) by the former. This faculty enables man to conquer the nature and its creatures, learn about stars, and gain all sorts of power within reach of this world. This faculty is called apparent for all these sciences are absorbed from *without* the heart through the means of the five senses. And yet, the heart also opens an aperture from *within* to the world of Divine Sovereignty. [188] Although the acceptance of such a faculty might seem challenging for some, al-Ghazzālī finds dreams the most persuasive proof in that respect:

> During the sleep, in the time when gates of the five senses shut closed, that inner door opens and [the heart] begins to receive the unseen from the world of Divine Sovereignty and the preserved tablet. It happens in such a manner that the heart learns about and views what will come in the future— either as it will [exactly] be, or [in the form of] similitudes that will necessitate dream interpretation [*taʾbīr*].… You should know that the heart likens a mirror and the Preserved Tablet likens [another] mirror in which forms [*ṣūrat*] of all beings exist. All the forms in the Preserved Tabled may reflect into the heart if the two become analogous if the latter get cleansed, unrestrained from sensibles, and [then] hold before the other. However, as long as the heart is occupied with the sensibles, it is veiled from the analogy with the world of Divine Sovereignty.[189]

Whoever can unshackle his heart from the control of sensibles, appetite, and lust, may perceive those forms from the preserved tablet even in his wakefulness. That is the path of Sufis as well as the prophets who receive their sciences from *within* their hearts directly from God, unlike the scholars who learn their knowledge using instruction and standard methods of learning from *without*.[190]

This description may give rise to a very critical question as what distinguishes a Sufi, or a friend of God (*walī*), from a prophet? Al-Ghazzālī's reply indicates that in respect to the method and means of

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[187] *Kīmīyā*, 21.
[188] Ibid., 27.
[189] Ibid., 28.
[190] Ibid., 29-30.

attainment of their inspired knowledge, the Sufi and prophet enjoy the same epistemological means of communication with the Above. But the yardstick to distinction the two from each other lies in their duties in regards to the community. Whereas a prophet whom God appoints to guide the community and hence the revealed knowledge to him constitutes a binding religious law (*sharīʿa*), the Sufi encounters the truth on a personal level and his cognition of the hidden (*al-ghayb*) does not oblige him to publicly declare any sorts of religious mission in the same scale and quality as a prophet does.

That absence of a prophetic, communal dimension to the mystic's vision could be of two reasons: either the last revealed law still maintains its effect on people and their community and as such a new law is not required, or the mystic lacks some of the required characteristics of a prophet. In either case, al-Ghazzālī asserts, it is within the absolute power of God to appoint a qualified Sufi a prophet or to avoid a qualified Sufi to become a prophet.[191]

On the same token, the charismatic gifts (*kirāmat*) mystics perform time to time share the same source of power as the prophetic miracles: the extraordinary power of the mystic's/prophet's heart[192] with which he can control the material realm outside his bodily domain. Unlike common people's heart which rules within the body limits it, a mystic's/prophet's heart may outreach its body bounds to change, for instance, a staff into a serpent. Here, again, what distinguishes prophetic miracles from mystics' charismatic gifts is the audience and motif. In the case of a miracle, the goal is to prove the truthfulness of the prophet's claim and legitimacy of his religious law while the mystic, reluctant to "show off," may carry out his spiritual gifts to guide people to the path of the prophets.[193]

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[191] *Kīmīyā*, 32. This passage can also be read against Maimonides' third view on prophecy in which he also believes God can withhold a required individual from becoming a prophet.
[192] In this specific passage, al-Ghazzālī uses the term "heart" (*dil*) in reference to one's soul. In other paragraphs, however, he writes about the power of one's soul. It seems to me that he uses the two terms "soul" and "heart" interchangeably. Cf. Trieger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 17-29 where he compares the notions of intellect (*ʿaql*) and heart (*dil*).
[193] *Kīmīyā*, 34.

The mystic-prophet, therefore, bears three distinctive qualities. First, what discloses for the rest of people regarding future events in their dreams are revealed to him in his wakefulness. Second, unlike ordinary people whose souls may solely control their bodies, the soul of the mystic-prophet can also affect materials outside his body. And third, whatever people learn through instruction and formal education he acquires directly from within the kernel of his heart (*bāṭin*).[194]

The last work explored in this section is al-Ghazzālī's most famous "confession," *The Deliverer from Error*. In a short passage, al-Ghazzālī talks about the question of prophecy from his Sufi perspective. In their spiritual journey, he tells us, prophets go beyond the limits of intellect to another stage wherein another eye opens for them by which they perceive the hidden and what will take place in the future. Unconceivable for the intellect, it could easily be dismissed if God has not granted us the mercy of dreams in which, similar to the prophets, we can view future events either clearly as they will actually happen or in the form of similitudes and examples.[195] On the same token, the miracles of the prophets, deem mostly impossible from the intellect's vantage point, render absolutely feasible should the beholder taste (*dhawq*) it through the path of Sufism.

This type of "taste" or "personal experience" substitutes the backbone of his arguments regarding prophecy in the *Deliverer*. Whoever has not had the privilege to taste this preliminary level of prophecy, i.e., reliable dreams, he cannot be taught about the true nature of prophecy at its highest possible levels. This mystical experience, which can only be acquired through the path of Sufism, similarly enlightens you seeing (*mushāhida*) or taking by hand (*al-akhdh bi-lyad*) a tangible object can do for you in the world of sensations.[196] Prophecy, therefore, believes to be a branch of Sufism (or the highest stage of that) whose true knowledge and comprehension depend on the spiritual status of the acquirer.

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[194] *Kīmīyā*, 34.
[195] *Al-munqidh*, 108.
[196] Ibid., 110-111.

I believe al-Ghazzālī presents his final version, and in that respect his most genuine, theory of *taʾwīl* in his later works, written after returning from his spiritual journey to his hometown, Tus.[197] *The Niche of Lights* stands in this regard as the most prominent treatise in which he, as I have already pointed out, elaborates his "unitary" doctrine unreservedly. It is in the light of his unitary doctrine that the notion of allegorical interpretation finds its apt place within his final phase of mystical theology.

Al-Ghazzālī does not, however, exhibit in the *Niche* one homogeneous hermeneutical method. In the first chapter, his treatment of the topic draws very much on his theory of parallelism. We are told that such notions/concepts as "light" and "sun" not only refer to mundane realities in the physical world, but also connote most sublime, spiritual realities in the parallel world of Divine Sovereignty: "Hence, it is appropriate for the Qurʾān to be named 'light,' just as the light of the sun is named 'light.'"[198] As there are two outward (*ẓāhir*) and inward (*bāṭin*) eyes, there are two corresponding suns: "One of the two suns is outward, while the other is inward. The outward sun belongs to the visible world; it is the sun perceived by the senses. The other belongs to the world of Divine Sovereignty; it is the Qurʾān and the revealed books of God."[199] Within this theoretical framework, the visible world functions as does the shell to the kernel of the World of Unseen, that is, the physical realities hide and protect the most valuable inner truths. Ontologically speaking, as discussed above, the visible world is a similitude of the world of dominion.[200]

The first type of allegorical interpretation in the *Niche*, therefore, draws on this parallel/corresponding relationship between the two realms by directing the attention of truth seeker towards the origin (*aṣl*) of the mundane visible similitudes. In other words, it pierces the curtain of outward representations and opens the

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[197] Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qurʾān*, 101-123, detects the influence of the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā* in the *Niche*. He also argues for the influence of Ibn Sīnā on al-Ghazzālī in the latter's Sufi interpretation (the comparison between Ibn Sīnā's short commentary on the Light Verse with the *Niche* is outstanding). As I have tried to show in below, al-Ghazzālī has indeed gone beyond Ibn Sīnā's philosophy to suggest a mystical-philosophical cosmology specific to his worldview.

[198] *The Niche*, 10.

[199] Ibid., 11.

[200] See above119 on page 35

inner eye of intellect to the High Lights so much so that the observer can appreciate the two parallel realities at the same time—he calls this first formula "the reality (ḥaqīqa)" of the matters. This initial definition of allegorical interpretation can easily come into terms with what he had to say in the *General Rule* or the sixth chapter in the *Demarcating Criterion*.

The "Reality of realities (ḥaqīqat al-ḥqāʾiq)" tells us otherwise. The mystic wayfarer goes beyond the lowlands of metaphors and allegories to the highlands of reality. It is at that stage where he witnesses that "there is none in existence save God and that 'Everything is perishing except His face' [Qurʾān 28:28]."[201] In the heaven of Reality, plurality vanishes; by entering the kingdom of singularity, even the rational faculty immersed, and hence dissolved, into the Real One. This is the gnosis upon which we can truly comprehend the accurate allegorical interpretation of the statement "God created Adam upon the form of the All-Merciful."[202] Al-Ghazzālī seems to suggest here that whatever he has been saying about the two parallel worlds, the correspondence between them, the inward vs. outward layers of meaning, five levels of existence, etc. they all render meaningless if one does not envision this "unitary" doctrine which encompasses all the theories above. The elect of elect taste this doctrine with their hearts and, as such, when contemplating upon the words of God or His Prophet do not notice any sorts of duality between its *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*; their piercing sight Light does not require allegorical interpretation or similar exegetical tools to unfold the truth before them as they see the naked Truth notwithstanding. Therefore, allegorical interpretation constitutes the primary means to teach unprepared ones about the truth.

V. Summary

As Treiger rightly observes, it is al-Ghazzālī's various pedagogical considerations which have shaped his various writing styles as well as degree, quality, and manners of his esotericism throughout his vast

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[201] *The Niche*, 16.
[202] Ibid., 22.

intellectual corpus. His "audience- and context-dependent" method of expression reflects his utmost caution and concern for his implied reader among the multitude.[203] He applies a range of literary strategies, from rhetorical to dialectical, from poetics to logics, to convey his intellectual-mystical message. He does not view the discoveries of his mystical "tasting" at odds with the demonstration of the intellect—the former, however, enjoys a much higher scientific value in his worldview than the latter.

Allegorical interpretation, then, comes into play as an effective pedagogical tool through which he would argue for the presence of multiple layers of meanings each of which appropriated for a specific stratum of society. In other words, his theory of allegorical interpretation allows him to determine the boundaries of "true" vs. "false" doctrines, mostly aiming to defeat his ideological adversaries. On the practical level, it balances between exoteric vs. esoteric interpretations and assists him to adopt an appropriate, as he defines the term, disclosure degree of his Sufi doctrine. As I showed, that hermeneutical strategy enables al-Ghazzālī to exhibit four personas in the course of his life: the zealot dialectician who opposes the *falāsifa* by rejecting their "heretical" cosmology, the orthodox Ashʿarite theologian who represents the voice the Seljuk's/Abbasids' political ideology in the *Nizamiyyah*, a conservative mystic who endeavours to cast some light on the hidden reality of matters for the elite, and the ascetic Sufi who, in his seclusion from the commoners and politics relate the truth of truth (*al-ḥaq al-ḥaqiqa*) to a very selected students of his—the mysteries which eventually "leaked" outside the circle unwillingly and caused him troubles.[204] These four personas neither contradict one another, nor, as a superficial reading of *The Deliverer from Error* suggests, reveal a fundamental shift in al-Ghazzālī's intellectual character or his inner psyche in the course of his life. They all contribute to the complex character of *one* author who, wittingly appropriated the *falāsifa*'s doctrines of prophecy, incorporates the rational Sufi element into the Ash'arite kalam.

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[203] *Inspired Knowledge*, 7.
[204] For a detailed account of the "Nishapour Controversy," See Treiger, *The Inspired*, 96 ff. & Garden, "al-Māzarī al-dhakī," 90 ff. & al-Ghazzālī's letters in response to the controversy in *Makātib-i Fārsī-i Ghazzāli*, 45-49 & note 159 abve.

Chapter Three: Prophecy and Allegorical Interpretation: Maimonides' View

The best of people is the one whose soul is perfected [by becoming] an intellect in act and who attains the morals that constitute practical virtues. The best of [the latter] is the one ready [to attain] the rank of prophethood. This is the one who, in his psychological powers, has three distinctive properties which we have mentioned—namely, that he hears the speech of God, exalted be He, and sees His angels that have been transformed for him into a form he sees.... He thus hears it without this being speech from people and the terrestrial animal. This is the one to whom revelation is given.

-Ibn sīnā, the Metaphysics of the *Healing*, 359.

Know that the key to the understanding of all that the prophets, peace be upon them, have said, and to the knowledge of its truth, is an understanding of the parables [*amthāl*], of their import, and of allegorical interpretation [*taʾwīl*] of their words.

-Maimonides, the *Guide* I:10.

Unlike al-Ghazzālī, who defines his theological project most vividly against the *falāsifa*'s metaphysics (at least outwardly), Maimonides finds the relationship between the the Greeks' intellectual tradition and Jewish religion by and large at home. Unlike al-Ghazzālī his Muslim counterpart, Maimonides' prominent keen interest in philosophical discourse (in particular al-Fārābīan school) creates a relatively more systematic picture of his theology. Nonetheless, he, similar to al-Ghazzālī, provides us with a range of variations when it comes to the question of prophecy, the nature of revelation, and the necessity of allegorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) in that context. In his more "religious" passages addressing general Jewish audience, his tendency towards presenting a super-natural divine revelation wins over his philosophically driven emanationism whereas his relatively "intellectual" treatise whereby he expresses his devotion to the peripatetic theoretical schema.

What the majority of medieval Jewish theologians viewed as a matter of fundamental incompatibility [seems too strong to me] became the very subject of his philosophical magnum opus, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (*dilālat al-ḥāʾrīn / more ha-nevukim*),[205] in which he made all the effort to prove the

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[205] Any references to the Arabic text of the *Guide* and subsequent pagination are that of Atāy's critical edition (Beirut, 2011). Shlomo Pines's English translation (Chicago, 1968) have also been consulted. It is not an easy task to call the *Guide* a philosophical treatise in the same sense that, for instance, Ibn Sīnā's *Healing* (*shifā*) is called

contrary. In his view, philosophy and Jewish textual tradition (Torah and Talmud in particular) taught basically the same truth but in two different languages each meant for its own specific audience. He was among religious philosophers who endorsed the "shared source" theory according to which the Greeks were very much indebted to the Patriarchs for their sciences, in particular in metaphysics (*al-falsafat al-ʾūlā / filosofia ha-rishona*). Maimonides perceived their philosophy as nothing but the prophets' "lost" theoretical sciences; the divinely revealed wisdom which the Greeks had managed to maintain while the Jews, true heirs to it, had eventually forgotten due to their negligence. That being the case, the preserved intellectual tradition in Aristotelian philosophy ought to be in essential conformity with the Jewish textual heritage, hence Maimonides' philosophical project.

In respect to his philosophy, Maimonides follows al-Fārābī very closely on a wide range of matters including, but not limited to, his political theory.[206] As a faithful disciple of al-Fārābī, Maimonides defines the ultimate felicity of humanity in one's intellectual perfection within the context of the ideal society governed by a "philosopher/prophet-king."[207] The prophet stands at the peak embody the societie's utmost stage of intellectual perfection. A human being who, in his "conjunction" with the Active Intellect, receives the knowledge and have the ability to rule the society. As such and in accordance with the second teacher's religious philosophy scheme, Maimonides attempts to lay down a theory of prophecy which could harmonize the traditional Jewish view of the matter with his political/metaphysical philosophy.[208]

According to Moshe Halbertal, Maimonides employs the *idea* of esotericism in his works, in specific *the Guide of the Perplexed*, to breach the bounds of secrecy. His repeated argument about and his

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philosophical. The work, as Maimonides wrote in his introduction, is meant for religious ends and as such represents more a theological treatise (closer to al-Ghazzālī's *Moderation in Belief*) rather than a philosophical text in the conventional sense of the term.

[206] For more details on the influence of al-Fārābī on Maimonides see Shlomo Pines, Introduction to the Guide, clvii-cxxxiv; Steven Harvey, "Did Maimonides' Letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon Determine Which Philosophers Would Be Studied by Later Jewish Thinkers?,"52.

[207] The *Perfect State*, 125-126. See the last chpter, p. 6, n.14.

[208] As I shall discuss below, he offers in the *Guide* three views on the prophecy. His own sincere view cannot easily be nailed down due to his proclaimed "esoteric" strategy.

detailed discussion of secrecy throughout the *Guide*, in particular in his introduction to the first part, persuades Halbertal that Maimonides aims to construct an "exegetical strategy" by virtue of which he can persuade the perplexed student of philosophy that "there is an esoteric stratum to the Torah itself, the recognition of which will resolve his perplexity."[209] The Torah for Maimonides, from Halbertal's vantage point, could be self-sufficient if, and only if, the student of religion is taught the "lost" exegetical tool of philosophical sciences, Aristotelian metaphysics, and other elements of the forgotten tradition.

For the sake of limited space and time, Maimonides' theory of prophecy has only been dealt with in this study in two texts: *Commentary on the Mishnah* and *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

I.   Commentary on the Mishnah

Maimonides' *Commentary on the Mishnah* (*mishnah ʿim perush*), written originally in Judeo-Arabic, also known in the Arabic version as the *Book of Luminary* (*kitāb al-sirāj*), is his first contribution in the form of a comprehensive treatise in the field of Jewish Law. Maimonides finished its composition around the age of thirty, almost ten years before completion of his major work on the Halakha, *Mishnah Torah*. The work contains his early views on the question of prophecy and illustrates Al-Fārābī's extensive influence on his theory of prophetic revelation. It also accounts for his inquiry into the question of allegorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) as an essential component of his hermeneutical discourse.

The two introductions which I shall study below have each its own implications for Maimonides' view on the topic of prophecy. While in the first one we hear the voice of a mainstream rabbi fully committed to the cause of Jewish Law as God's last revealed edict and to His people as the "chosen" one, he casts a philosophical light on his creedal discussion in the second, elevating the whole debate to an entirely different level of intellectual sophistication. Moses' uniquely paramount prophetical stature is evident in both two introductions. Maimonides tells us that Moses' *purely* intellectual revelatory wisdom eclipses all other prophecies before and after him as mere side-notes to his unrepealable Law. The prophets' domain of

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[209] *Maimonides: Life and Thought*, 288.

legislative authority is hence restricted to the interpretive realm and their socio-political locus restrained with his ever-lasting Torah.

On the surface, the topic of allegorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) does not seem to concern Maimonides primarily in these two introductions. But a closer examination of his statements shows that the subject constitutes one of the fundamental principles for his cause of a rational (Aristotelian?) religiosity. This hermeneutical strategy gives him the necessary tool to harmonize, whenever deems necessary, between what he recognizes as the basis of the intellect (*al-ʾaql*) and the Jewish sacred revealed traditions reflected mainly in the texts of Tanaḫ and Talmud.

a. Introduction to the *Seder Zeraʿim*

Maimonides' first reference to the subject of prophecy could be found at the very beginning of his introduction to the *Seder Zeraʿim*.[210] In this opening passage, he asserts that the Written Torah was sent down to "our teacher Moses along with its explanations." God is said to dictate to Moses not only the literal text of the Written Torah, but He also "talked to him its interpretation (*tafsīrah/pirusho*) and also its allegorical interpretation (*taʾwīlah/biuro*)."[211] At the very outset, Maimonides defines the allegorical interpretive tradition as an indispensable part of the phenomena of prophecy. From this perspective, the holy revelation comprises two distinct, yet intertwined, layers of meanings: what the literal reading of the Scripture dictates, and a more profound, probably hidden, message which an interpretive endeavor would disclose. Crucial to notice here is that the author attributes both two levels of reality to the Divine source. He signals to the reader that for Jews to comprehend God's message in its totality they need not only the text of the Torah, but also its apt exegetical complementary revealed alongside it to Moses.

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[210] I have consulted three versions of the text in this study: 1- my main reference is the original Judeo-Arabic manuscript, written by the author himself: "Commentary on the Mishnah (Seder Zeraʿim)," MS. Pococke 260, Neubauer 400, 1221-1222 CE., accessed through Digital Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/, 2- Josef Kafih's Hebrew translation (Jerusalem, 1963), and 3- Zvi L. Lampel's English translation (New York, 1975). Regarding the pagation: the first digit represent the digital page-number assigned to the page of the Pococke MS by Bodlein website followed by the line number. The second alphabetic number indicates the corresponding page number in Kafih's Hebrew translation.

[211] Pococke MS 260, 13: 3-5 /*mishnah ʿim perush*, א.

Maimonides' goal is twofold. He primarily responses to the pressing need to reaffirm the authority of the Oral Torah to defend the orthodoxy of the rabbinic Judaism against the threat of Karaism,[212] and, secondarily, to pave the way for his subsequent theory of allegorical interpretation as an essential hermeneutical tool in protecting the Bible against charges of incompatibility with the Jewish lost intellectual tradition (allegedly preserved in the Greek philosophy).

Right after listing the chain of transmission for the Torah's oral supplementary (which includes within it the interpretative corpus), Maimonides addresses the authoritative power of prophetic revelations which come after Moses. The gate of divinely inspired interpretation (*tafsīr*), he writes, deemed closed for good after Moses. That is to say, the prophets who came after Moses would have no interpretive control over and beyond the "thirteen methods of interpretations" set by Moses by God's order in the Mount Sinai.[213] As such, their prophecies could not abrogate, add to, or subtract anything from the Mosaic Law. Their words should, therefore, be regarded as enjoying the same level of authority as that of the compilers of the Gemora, and nothing more: "[Y]ou should know, concerning any prophecies [coming after Moses], that they are not useful in respects to the interpretation [*tafsīr*] of the Torah and deriving the details [i.e., *mitzvot*] beyond the thirteen principles. What Joshua and Pinhas conducted regarding speculation and using deductive analogy [*qiyās*] was the same as what Rabina and R. Ashi did."[214]

Maimonides has made two points clear by now. Firstly, that he distinguishes between literary (or legislative) interpretation of the Scripture which he denotes by the term "*tafsīr*" and the allegorical/metaphorical interpretation (*taʾwīl*) that, as we shall see later, concerns the method to disclosure concealed divine knowledge. Secondly, that his approach to the question of prophecy in the first part of his introduction to the *Seder Zeraʿim* proves to be basically halakhic and rarely philosophic—hence the

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[212] On Maimonides' relationship with the Karaits see Daniel Lasker, "Maimonides and the Karaits." See also Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in His World*, pp. 38-52.
[213] Pococke MS 260, 15: 10-11 /*mishnah ʿim perush*, ג.
[214] Pococke MS 260, 15: 16-20 /*mishnah ʿim perush*, ג.

question of legislative interpretation (*tafsīr*) not allegorical one in the first segment. Therefore, whenever he talks about post-mosaic prophecy and its relationship with exegetical activities, he means to points to the judicial-legislative issues associated with halakhic interpretation (not directly related to the topic of this study.)

Maimonides tells us in this first segment that the prophets' foremost duty besides unfolding the true meaning of Mosaic Law resides in their socio-political power—the issue which I shall return to shortly. But before that, we face another question as for how can we, in the first place, establish the prophecy of a claimant? Traditionally speaking, Jewish theologians before Maimonides (most notably Saʿadia Gaon) gave very great heed to miracles on the question of prophecy.[215] To a large extent, it was a shared opinion among Muslim and Jewish theologians alike. The veracity of a claimant would be verified by the wondrous deeds he brought about before the people, and they had to rely on these out-of-ordinary actions as the most persuasive testimony to a claimant's God-appointed mission. But Maimonides breaks with this well-established principle of theologians by questioning the intrinsic adequacy of miracles in certifying one's claim on his divinely revealed message.[216] He does *not*, however, deny the supernatural occurrence of miracles reported in the Tanaḥ, neither tries (like some Muslim and Jewish philosophers) to interpret their accounts as mere "metaphors," but he challenges the idea that the chief utility of miracles is to establish one's claim to prophecy. "All the miracles [*muʿjizāt*/ *moftim*] which Elijah, Elisha, and other prophets performed were not done to prove their prophecy, for their prophecy had already been established. Rather, they wrought them for their needs."[217] Miracles, therefore, had an *instrumental* functionality following one's established status as a prophet in the community. Miracles should therefore not be regarded as signs, as it were, to uphold people's trust in one's prophetic mission.

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[215] See Saʿadia, *The Book of Doctrines and Beliefs* (*al-amānāt wa al-iʿtiqādāt*), ed. & trans. Alexander Altmann, 95.
[216] Maimonides' stance in down-playing the role of miracles in prophecy seem very similar to that of Ghazzālī. On Ghazzālī's denial of the miracles in his rejection of the Ismailism, see note 54 above.
[217] Pococke MS 260, 16: 3-5 /*mishnah ʿim perush*, ג.

To ascertain a prophet's truthfulness, Maimonides lays out his own rational procedure according to which even the reliability of a wondrous deed ought to be examined by the *content* of the revealed message. No eruption of the course of nature, in the name of a miracle, can thus outdo the most basic principles of faith in Judaism (presented in his Thirteen Principles). Each prophetic claim should, therefore, undergo the so-called "faith-test" which in turn guarantees Judaism's continuity.

The first, and most crucial, benchmark in that regard is that any claims on behalf of any "foreign" deity other than the One God condemn worthless at the outset. No such an invitation to worship an idol by anyone should be tolerated, and the claimant should be put to death on the spot. Therefore, no request for bringing about any sorts of miracles or wondrous deeds ought to be allowed.[218] In this case, Maimonides asserts that no one should even request such a person to perform miracles since the intellect (*al-aql/ ha-sekhel*), which is much stronger in deciding on these matters than the eye, had proved beforehand the inconceivability of worshiping anything save the One.[219]

Now that the prophecy of idol-worshipers has been dismissed, how can we decide on the truthfulness of the ones who prophesied in the name of the One? Given Maimonides' socio-religious context, this class of prophets poses even a graver threat to the Jewish community than the first. Due to the subtle nature of their claims and sensitivity of the matter, Maimonides engages more pointedly in his discussion of this category. He probably had in mind Islam and Christianity as two rival schools which both preached in the name of the same deity and as such threatened Jewish community on a theological level. To dispel the two main contestants, Maimonides posits Torah's eternal validity as the primal criterion against which any prophecies should be evaluated.

The central touchstone principle is as follows. Nothing can be added or deleted from the commandments Moses related to the Israelites from his encounter with the One at the Mount Sinai. The

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[218] Deuteronomy, 13:3.
[219] Pococke MS 260, 16: 25 /*mishnah 'im perush*,ד .

words of the One will never change and should anyone make such a claim in His name, in the form of adding anything to the commandments or introducing any new law to what already had been established by Moses, his prophecy deemed invalid and he, according to the Torah, shall die.[220]Consequently, the only remaining group that can theoretically pass the two initial levels of "faith-test" are the ones who, firstly, invite people to worship the God of Israel and, secondly, whose prophecies get in line with the perpetual authority of the Tanaḥ-- these are the only ones whose prophecies may be ascertained through miracles according to Maimonides.

Drawing on the biblical statement (Deut. 18:22) and to testify the claimants who fit the descriptions mentioned above, Maimonides turns to miracles as a last, but not least, resort. If the individual who speaks for God of Israel can predict future events to their fullest details, then people may have faith in his truthfulness and hence his prophetic mission considered authentic. To pass this test, he should however, be able to foretell several events on different occasions— the condition that distinguishes a true prophet from an enchanter or an astrologer. The same can be said about a real prophets' dreams (Jeremiah 23:28). Maimonides regards dreams as conveying the same level of certainty as one's prophecy can relate.

Upon establishing one's sincere and authentic divine mission, the prophet can enjoy a relatively absolute political authority. If required, he can even temporarily withhold a negative commandment. For instance, Maimonides tells us, if a prophet, whose prophethood has been clearly verified for us, order people to wage war on the Sabbath, then, no one is allowed to disobey him on the excuse that making fire or working is forbidden on the Sabbath. Communal good can override *mitzvot* temporally if a true prophet is in power. Yet, no one, even a prophet, is allowed to nullify a Mosaic commandment permanently or may he order people something which goes against the fundamental principles of the Torah (e.g., worshiping an idol). Whatever temporal amendments the prophet may order (as the political leader) should, however, have

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[220] Deuteronomy, 18:20.

been derived using speculation and deduction (*al-naẓar wa al-qiyās*). If he attributes those changes to God

as the orders he received through revelation (*waḥy*), this very claim proves his deceitful character and hence

a false prophet.[221]

As such, the only distinctive character of post Mosaic prophets that separates them from ordinary

people is the political power God granted them to exercise over the society. Other than that, and when it

comes to speculative reasoning and mastery of religious laws (*tafaqquh/khakirah bedin*), they have the same

stature and an equal authority as that of the Sages (*ḥakhamim*). To reinforce his idea of prophets' lack of

legislative superiority over Sages, Maimonides depicts the following scenario:

> if a prophet gives an interpretation [*ta'wāil/pirush*] and another [sage] gives another one [which is at
> odds with the prophet's], should the prophet say 'God told me that my interpretation is indeed the
> correct one,' it is not accepted from him. Even if one thousand prophets, all having the same
> prominence as Elijah or Elisha, would give one interpretation and one thousand and one Sages
> favour the opposite, you ought to follow the majority (*akharei rabim lahatut*[222]) and ought to do
> according to the school (*madhhab*) of the one thousand and one Sages, and not the school of the one
> thousand honoured prophets.[223]

The prophets can therefore be followed only in matters concerning the order of society and also political

sovereignty. In halakhic disputations, Jews must instead follow the sages (not the prophets) who belong to

the category of the people of deductive analogy (*ahl al-qiyās/ ḥakhamim baʿalei ha-din*).[224] That is a rather

astonishing statement on Maimonides' part. Read exoterically, this passage denies categorically any

association between prophecy and intellectual perfection— what we would expect to deduce from his

philosophical approach.

Post-Mosaic prophecies, then, prove only to serve an interpretative task, not a legislative one, as

long as they can abide with the exegetical principles that were also formulated by God and thereafter related

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[221] Pococke MS 260, 24: 4-9 /*mishnah 'im perush*, ה.
[222] Exodus 23:2.
[223] Pococke MS 260, 24: 10-15 /*mishnah 'im perush*, ה.
[224] Pococke MS 260, 24: 23-24 /*mishnah 'im perush*, ה. You shall see in below that his portrayal of prophets, if read literally as "non-intellectuals," contradicts his own definition of prophecy in the Sixth Principle of faith in *Pereq Ḥeleq*.

by Moses. Furthermore, the opinion of the majority has the last word in all legal disagreements even if it comes into contrast with that of one thousand true prophets. That is the case not because a true prophet may err in relating what God reveals to him, but since this principle has been set by God, and because God does not contradict Himself, a *true* prophet may never say anything at odds with this principle.

Maimonides concludes his discussion of the prophecy in this segment by reiterating the two main principles, that is, A) the impossibility of Torah's abrogation and B) the ruling of the majority. One the first, he repeats what he has already adduced from the Torah: No new Torah would have ever been revealed after it was given to the "first prophet" (i.e., Moses). Hence, the capital punishment awaits any false prophet who dares to alter or delete any Mosaic commandments in the God's name. The rabbi's uncompromising repeated attack on any such a prophecy, as I mentioned before, should be read against his reasonable concern regarding the influence of Islam and Christianity on Jewish minorities around the world. Besides political and social persecution of the Jews and the waves of forced conversions, what worried the Rabbi most was the existential threat of *volunteer* mass conversions. Should theological reasoning, on the part of Jewish authorities, justify the conversions, it struck the deadliest blow to the Jewish communities. As such Maimonides leaves no room for any tolerance in respect to the legitimacy of non-Israelite post-Mosaic prophecies— the Yemenite Crisis is the best example which illustrates the real danger any such an acceptance could bring about.[225] Maimonides' emphasis on the theological dimension of prophecy, at the expense of a more "natural" or philosophical explanation, should be understood in the background of his mostly polemical motives in passages in question.

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[225] See Nathanael Ibn al-Fayyumi's (in)famous treaties entitled *bustān al-uqūl* (Hebrew: *Gan HaSikhilim*) in which he openly endorses the prophecy of Muhammad, the truthfulness of his words, and the Qurʾān as the word of God. Although he confines Muhammad's mission to idol-worshiper-Arabs and not the Jews who already worshiped the One, his theological tolerance made a huge impact on the Yemenite Jews in less than a generation and threatened the very existence of Jewish community in that region. See *The Bustan al-Ukul*, ed. David Levine, pp. 69-69 (in the Judeo-Arabic) and pp. 105-110 for the corresponding English translation. Maimonides' *Epistle to Yemen*, written in response to Fayyumi's son, was meant largely as a "remedy" to Fayyumi by rejecting the authenticity of Islam and Muhammad as the true prophet of God. For a detailed discussion see, Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 47-51; Davidson, *Maimonides: The Man and His Works*, 493, n.33.

On the second principle (the ruling of the majority), he highlights the decisive role of deductive reasoning *over* revelation. Maimonides' depiction of revelation seems to be devoid of any intellectual trait, and the prophet who received this divine knowledge did not necessarily perfect his reasoning beforehand. Contrary to what Fārābian/Avicennian models showed us, Maimonides in this part of theological text does not exhibit his reliance on classical Greek sources. That can be explained, as I have already alluded to, by taking into account his halaḥic end in this first segment of the introduction.

Towards the middle of the introduction, however, Maimonides adds another dimension to the complexity of his exegetical theory by introducing the notion of "hidden sciences" within the corpus of Talmudic literature. We are told that the inclusion of homiletical expositions (*derashot*) in the Talmud by the Sages illustrates their abiding devotion to the esotericism as well as their sincere loyalty to the intellectual tradition of the *Tannaim*. Those homilies, viewed by an outward eye (*ẓāhir^{an}*), may at some points seem to contain statements contradicting the intellect (*mufāriqat al-ʿaql*), yet when one investigates their innermost meanings with an eye to their ulterior (*naẓar^{an} bāṭin^{an}*) one would find out that the homilies do not comprise but "absolute goodness and that they reveal divine matters which the sages [*ahl al-ʿilm*] and all the philosophers had long sought for." What makes the authors of the Mishnah to express these metaphysical matters in the form of homilies and the reason for concealing their grandiose nature was, according to Maimonides, to fulfill a twofold objective: firstly a pedagogical end as to gradually sharpen their pupils' minds, and secondly to blindfold the ignorant (*al-jāhil*) from being exposed to such glowing truths. An uncultivated individual, whose natural disposition deprived him of the ability to comprehend realities concerning divine matters, would naturally be confused and his religion threatened if he learns about them without sufficient intellectual training.[226] Maimonides goes on to assert that neither the wisdom of the "work of the Chariot" (i.e., the metaphysics) nor the science of the "work of creation" (i.e., material

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[226] Pococke MS 260, 44: 5-15 /*mishnah ʿim perush*, כא.

sciences) ought to be taught or discussed publicly.[227] It follows that "teaching the multitude [*al-jumhūr*] deems impossible save by way of riddles [Sing. *lughz*] and parables [Sing. *mathal*]."[228] Sages had, therefore, followed the same principle in their writings and taught the metaphysical subjects in a symbolic manner. That can shed an explanatory light on Maimonides' political reluctance to fully unfold his intellectual theory of prophecy in this treatise which is primarily meant for the commoners. His inclination towards a traditional/theological scheme can thus be attributed to his esoteric strategy.

That being the case, Maimonides concludes, should one encounter anything in words of the Sages that seems to contradict the intellect, one has to blame his own incapability to decipher the intention of the passage in question rightly. The ruling presumption is that the Sages, equipped with the knowledge of both sciences (divine as well as material) would never utter a statement unless it confirms the intellect either outwardly or inwardly. Whoever thus challenges any of their statements as opposing a rational imperative, his intellect must have remained in potentiality (*al-aql bi-l-quwwah*) unlike the individual who finds in himself the skill to reconcile any "superficial" discords between the outward sense of their words and the intellect— he is indeed bestowed with the active *in actu*. (*al-ʿaql bi-l-fiʿl*).[229]

Although Maimonides does not devote an independent portion of his lengthy introduction to the topic of allegorical interpretation, from what we just quoted concerning the outward meaning vs. inward meaning, his apparent emphasis on the need for and necessity to conceal the scientific knowledge from the sight of the vulgar, and the metaphorical medium (i.e. riddles and parables) utilized by the Sages to convey the hidden sciences, one can safely deduce his stance on the question of *taʾwīl*. All in all, allegorical interpretation renders [?] to be *the* key element in his hermeneutics without which a significant portion of Jewish sciences would remain buried underneath the layers of metaphorical hints and allusions. His initial remark at the very beginning can also be illuminating where he notifies the reader of the inclusion of an

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[227] Pococke MS 260, 45: 1-3 /*mishnah ʿim perush*, כב.
[228] Pococke MS 260, 45: 14-16 /*mishnah ʿim perush*, כב.
[229] Pococke MS 260, 46: 1 /*mishnah ʿim perush*, כב.

allegorical interpretive tool within the Oral Tradition. With that in mind, he not only justifies the use of this exegetical method to reconcile between the Scripture and the intellect, but also introduces his hermeneutical discourse as a part of Jewish religious tradition, a critical component which has been ignored for very long.

b. Introduction to the *Pereq Ḥeleq*

Maimonides returns to the question of prophecy and the decisive role of allegorical interpretation in his introduction to the tenth chapter of the Tractate *Sanhedrin* (known as *Pereq Ḥeleq*).[230] His introduction consists of two parts: in the first he explains the theoretical foundation of his exegetical hermeneutics, in the second he lists his famous "Thirteen Principles" alongside brief explanatory notes for each. Far from what one would expect after reading his earlier introduction to the *Seder Zera ʿim* (discussed above), an entirely new theory of prophecy emerges from his introductory notes to the Sanhedrin's tenth chapter. His theoretical framework, as well as his definition of prophecy, exhibits a totally different persona than the one who authored the first segment of the previous introduction. In particular, his unreserved philosophical approach to the definition of prophecy illustrates his devotion to the Fārābian school of thought; a description which hardly comes into terms with the traditional view of the matter elaborated in his introduction to the *Seder Zera ʿim*.

The question of exegesis, also woven throughout the text, emerges several times as the decisive criterion to separate what Maimonides perceives to be "an intellectually scientific" reading of the passages vis-à-vis the popular view shared by the masses. Along the same lines of his discussion above on the subject of esotericism, he divides people into various categories based on their hermeneutical approach.

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[230] I have consulted three texts in my study of Maimonides' introduction to *Pereq Ḥelek*: 1- in the original Judeo-Arabic and medieval Hebrew translation of Jacob ben Yosef, *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ mi-Perush ha-Mishnah*, ed. Yitshak Aharon Holtzer (1901), accessed in the pdf form through Hebrew Books: http://hebrewbooks.org/33111, 2- Josef Kafih's Hebrew translation (Jerusalem, 1963), and 3- Fred Rosner's English translation, *Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishnah Tractate Sanhedrin* (New York, 1981). Parenthetical Hebrew terms are those of Jacob ben Yosef's translation. The page numbers are also that of Holtzer's edition.

As he expresses at the beginning of the chapter, his primary goal is to lay out the basics of tenets of faith (*uṣūl al-iʿtiqādādt/ ha-amonot gadulim*); the thirteen-fundamental-creeds any faithful Jew ought to believe in to secure his portion in the world to come and, as a result, to evade the perpetual punishment/annihilation. From this description, one expects Maimonides to proceeds in the same "exoteric" style as he had elaborated the matters in the previous introduction, that is, a nontechnical approach comprehensible for an average-level typical Jew of the time. Yet, for some reasons not clear for me, in his approach in this part, he distances himself from the traditional theological debates, mostly appealing to the masses, by including philosophical jargon and unfolding the real meaning of intellectual felicity as the true happiness, a notion which goes beyond the widespread understanding of the term.

Felicity (*saʿāda / tuva*) is the crucial first term Maimonides elaborates on in this section. The notion is the most crucial for it embodies *the* objective of religions: to bring about happiness and blissful life for people (either in this world and/or in the hereafter). And it is also closely related to the topic of our inquiry because the station of prophecy, according to Al-Fārābī and Maimonides, constitutes the highest form of felicity any individual can rise to. In other words, the prophet is the Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*) who has reached the uppermost level of felicity and it is by means of this station that he can bring the map to the salvation, as it were, down to other people and also be able to rule the society to its ultimate happiness.

Maimonides divides ordinary people on the meaning of felicity into five main groups. The people of the first category view the ultimate happiness in an enjoyable life in the Garden of Eden filled with sensual pleasures (eating, drinking, etc.). They believe so and bring their proofs for this view drawing on statements of the Sages, understand them on their outward senses (Sing. *ẓāhir/ peshat*).[231] The second group image the Days of Messiah to bring them the final good. They also quote passages which, on a superficial level, line with their idea (*yuwāfiq ẓāhir^h daʿwā^hum /yoskim peshotm*).[232] The third depicts the blissful life

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[231] *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ*, 2.
[232] Ibid., 2.

after death and the resurrection of righteous people as their awaiting felicity—their selective method assists them to derive supporting passages. The forth see the physical bliss God bestows them in this world upon observing the Commandments as their reward. They may find many statements in the Scripture to prove their point. And, finally, the fifth group which consists of the majority of people, combines all the opinions above as the true meaning of happiness.

What makes any of these camps different from the other depends, as Maimonides assesses, on the way each group interprets sacred written tradition (*al-naql*). People in each of these classes interpret verses in the Torah and words of the Sages according to their specific intentions. That brings home the final role interpretation plays in one's religion.

But Maimonides undermines all of these ideas as mere "childish" fantasies. He proves his point by bringing up an example (*mithāl / mashal*). A child who has just started his Torah education cannot fathom the joy and benefits of the education *per se* at that initial stage due to his young age and the weakness of his intellect. The teacher has, therefore, to motivate the child by objects which he interests like nuts, figs, and honey. The ignorant child obeys orders of his teacher (in reading and writing) and progresses through his learning, not because he appreciates the value of the Torah, but for some "worthless" attractive gifts. As the child grows, the wise teacher replaces the stimulating gifts with other more appealing things, like money, to usher his pupil to yet a higher level of understanding. At higher stages, when the student reaches higher intellectual capacity, the teacher should encourage him to continue his education by promising him fame and power. Although he does not pursue the "honey and figs" anymore, the student's ultimate goal is still something other than the Torah, and it proves his imperfection. It is not only after he realizes all these years of learning was meant solely for the purpose of the Torah *itself* that the student reaches the final level of his studies.

Analogous to the student in his early stages, the ones who observe God's commandments for worldly or any sorts of physical rewards, says Maimonides, deserve to be called fools (*kesilim*) due to their intellectual deficiency (*ḍaʿf ʿaqlī*^hm / *miʿuṭ skhilahm*) in comprehending the true ultimate goal of obedience to the Law.[233] Maimonides argues that none of the groups mentioned above can put forth a satisfactory answer to the question of the true meaning of felicity for their incompetent teleology. It is only the perfect, righteous man (i.e., the prophet) who is capable of grasping the real reality of matters (*al-fāḍil al-kāmil al-mudrik al-ḥaqāyiq / ha-ish ha-shalem ha-mashig emetet ha-ʿanainim*) and he is the one who can offer an authentic answer to the question. As Shimon the Righteous correctly said,[234] one ought to "believe in the truth for truth's sake."[235] That is the same to say "one should serve God out of love for Him (*obed meahava*)."[236]

What Maimonides emphasizes here is the ontological connection between one's intellectual perfection and the eternal happiness.[237] We have already seen the same argument in several passages by Al-Fārābī.[238] One's quality of connection with the Active Intellect determines his soul's subsistence after the demise of one's body. Important to notice here is the way Maimonides incorporates these philosophical notions into the fabric of his creedal discussion without making any apparent signs of disconformity. That is made possible by means of the simile of "child and his Torah education." He highlights the usefulness, and in some cases the necessity of, applying the figurative tool to convey the most complex theoretical issues.

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[233] *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ*, 6.
[234] Perikei Avot 1:3: "Do not be like the servants who serve their masters in order to receive an award, rather be like the servant who serve their masters without [having in mind] the condition of receiving a prize."
[235] *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ*, 6. "*iʿtaqid al-ḥaq li-nafs al-ḥaq / yeamin be-emet le-etzem be-emet*"
[236] Ibid., 6-7.
[237] Cf. Josef Stern, *The Matter and Form of Maimonides'* Guide, 7. Stern maintains that Maimonides regards the observation of the commandments as a "spiritual exercise" that prepares one for a happy life regulated by the intellectual ideal. From Stern's sceptical view, the human perfection, in this sense, relies on the process rather than the outcome of intellectual endeavour.
[238] See the first chapter of *Aphorisms of the Statesman* (*Fuṣūl al-Madanī*) for his detailed discussion of different types of felicity, pp. 103-116; and for the social happiness in the ideal city see, ibid pp. 120-121. Also in *The Perfect State,* he elaborates on the ways in which voluntary actions and theoretical wisdom can lead one to the felicity, pp.105-107; *The Political Regime* (*al-Sīyāsa al-madanīyya*), 32.

As one's level of intellectual perfection rises, then, one will obtain higher and deeper understanding of the text going beyond its literal sense (ẓāhir/peshot).

Accordingly, he divides people into three classes in respect of their notions regarding the words of the Sages and their thoughts of the allegorical interpretation. The first camp, which accounts for the majority of people, reads the words of the Sages literally (ʿalā ẓāhir). They refrain from delving into the core of the text by applying allegorical interpretation (taʾwīl/pirush); "this is owing to their being ignorant of science and far away from gnosis [maʿrifa]."[239] The second group is the theologians who, like the first one, do not reach to the real intention of the Sages despite their claim to know the sciences. The last, are the very few ones who has "comprehended the truth" that the words of the Sages "have both an outward [ẓāhir] and an inward [bāṭin] meaning" and that whenever their outward senses contain anything sounds impossible, it was indeed uttered "in the form of riddle and parable."[240] The scholars belong to this third camp have done nothing unorthodox, Maimonides maintains. They rightly followed the lead of Sages in interpreting the Scripture: "the Sages themselves drew the words of the Bible out of their outward senses [sing. ẓāhir] to adjust them to the intellect and make them accord with truth…. They acted upon their [method of] allegorical interpretation in bringing them out of their outward senses present them as parables."[241]

Back to the notion of felicity, let us take a closer look at the way Maimonides formulates this concept. The "love for the truth" engenders the highest spiritual pleasure, and as any peripatetic philosopher like Maimonides would say, that keen for the truth derives from the soul's *knowledge* of the Creator. Love for the Truth elevates one's soul to the proximity of its object of knowledge so much so that the intellector (al-ʿāqil) eventually became identical with the object of its intellection (al-maʿqūl). As such, Maimonides asserts, an individual can enjoy the everlasting and uninterrupted pleasure to the degree he intellects God

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[239] *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ*, 8.
[240] Ibid., 10.
[241] Ibid., 10.

['*aqalūh* / *yude*']; and if his intellect may "unite" with Him, he then will enjoy the everlasting bliss.[242]

Maimonides proceeds with this metaphysical principle and interprets the Talmudic phrase "their crowns upon their heads"[243] as relating that the righteous enjoy immortality in the world-to-come because their souls become united with the object of their intellection (i.e., God).[244] In a nutshell, and contrary the belief of the masses including the majority of Jewish theologians,

> the felicity and the ultimate goal is arrived at the Highest Assembly [*al-mala' al-a'lā* / *ha-khevra ha-'aliuna*], obtaining this degree, and hence the soul's subsistence [*baqā' al-nafs* / *ḳium ha-nefesh*]. That is the case since, as it has been demonstrated in the metaphysics, the soul's recognition of God's unlimited subsistence causes the former's subsistence.[245]

Maimonides' appropriation of al-Fārābī's teleology, as I summarized in the first section, is noticeable here.[246] The Jewish rabbi reads into the first sentence of *Pereq Ḥelek* ("all Israel have a portion in the world to come… except the following…") his metaphysical conception of felicity. For Maimonides, the soul of one who immerses himself in (forbidden) physical pleasures is cut off (*tikeret*) from the body of virtuous souls and subsequently perishes because of his failure to intellectually conjoin with the Creator.[247] Their transgressing of such-and-such a commandment does not thus contribute directly to their souls' destruction; rather, their misbehaviour brings about an *intellectual impediment* which hinders their soul from reaching to the degree of intellectual perfection whereupon their souls would "unite" with God's Essence and as a result enjoy the perpetual bliss.

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[242] *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ*, 12.

[243] In Berakhot 17a:12, "The world-to-come is not like this world. In the world-to-come there is no eating, no drinking, no procreation, no business, no negotiation, no jealousy, no hatred, and no competition. Rather the righteous sit with their crowns upon their heads, enjoying the splendor of the Divine Presence, as it is stated: 'And they behold God, and they ate and drink' (Ex. 24:11). Meaning that beholding God's countenance is tantamount to eating and drinking."

[244] *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ*, 13. The Arabic reads: "by 'their crowns on their heads' they intend saying that the eternal existence of the soul depends on the eternal existence of its object of knowledge [*baqā' al-nafs bi-baqā' al-ma'lūmih wa kawnihī*]. This and that [become] one thing as the renowned philosophers have explained."

[245] Ibid., 13-14. Cf. Al- al-Fārābī's definition of "intellectual felicity" p. 5-6 above, n.12.

[246] Cf. pp. 5-6 above.

[247] Ibid., 14.

Sages, Maimonides would argue, had this metaphysical intent in mind uttering the statement at the beginning of this *Pereq*. It is not God's arbitrary decision to cast off a group of people due to their immoral acts (such as denying resurrection of the dead, denying the Torah's divine origin, reading heretical books, etc.), instead, these deeds, which mostly contribute to one's beliefs and not his practices, diminishes their intellects' keenness to gain the true knowledge of the One. God's will, therefore, plays a minimal role, if any, in their miserable faith. Can we conclude that in the case of prophecy, too, Maimonides does not believe in God's "supernatural" intervention in choosing or denying one to become a prophet? If the station of ultimate happiness is the same as prophetic stature, then one can safely assume his theory of prophetic knowledge goes hand in hand with Al-Fārābī's model.

Having said that, Maimonides could not propagate this fundamental truth without creating social tribulations given his position in the Jewish *kehila*. His options were also bounded due to the inability of the masses in realizing the subtle nature of the topic. Very few can reach that final stage of knowledge and join the Sages in their respect for the value of the truth for its own sake and to enjoy the pleasure of becoming one of them. The majority of the vulgar, as he mentioned, obey rules of the law only in so far as they can in return benefit from some sorts of mundane pleasures.

Nonetheless, the rabbi does not go to the extreme of utterly repudiating the reality of what the literalists tells the masses regarding the physical awards for the righteous Jew in the world to come (or at least he does not explicitly deny them). In his view, our efforts should be directed towards educating the masses to comprehend, to the extent of their ability, that the ultimate good resides beyond those sensual pleasures. This pedagogical objective accounts for the presence of two layers of *parallel* (and not mutually exclusive) meanings in the words of the Sages. Understanding the complexity of the matter and the multitude's limited intellectual capacity, they tend to hide their sincere intentions cleverly behind the guise of words' apparent meanings; they formulate the wisdom which masses could not fathom in riddles and

parables as the prophets did in their words. If the book of Job, Solomon's Proverbs, and Songs of Songs (to give a few examples) can be parables, why not words of the Sages?

But not all people who study the Torah and Talmud accept this and many, like the majority of the meaning of the term felicity, diverge from the real truth. They insist on the outward meaning of words of the Sages, embracing their literal sense solely of their metaphorical implication *even if* that outward meaning come into contrast with demonstrative proofs of the intellect. The intellect constitutes Maimonides' "red-line." He sets this criterion for distinguishing literalists' camp from his own: "if you are from the third group [discussed above], whenever you come across the Sages' words and find in them anything which 'threatens' the intellect [*yūʿid al-ʿaql / hadaʿat marḥiq*], you pause over it and think that it must be a parable or a riddle."[248] The demonstrative proof, therefore, becomes Maimonides' touchstone for understanding whether the Scripture should be read in its literal sense or it ought to be interpreted metaphorically. Not even God's words exempted from this law.

As we have seen by now, Maimonides theorizes the necessity for esotericism (regarding metaphysical topics) in a step-by-step approach. He first utilizes the simile of "the progressive student" to advocate his theory of intellectual hierarchy in the society. The majority of people, either born incapable or due to their lack of proper education, are incompetent of high-level theoretical issues. In the second step, by presupposing the Sages' superiority and their knowledge of metaphysics in respects to the intellectual reality of matter, he opens a new avenue within his theological corpus. An avenue which introduces, as we shall see, in short, philosophical jargon into what supposed to be a purely halakhic treatise. This first theoretical part of his introduction to the *Pereq Ḥeleq* serves as the stepping stone for his more comprehensive treatment of exegetical hermeneutics in his proceeding work, *The Guide for the Perplexed*:

> In the future, I hope to compose a work in which I will collect all the expositions (on the subject) that are found in the Talmud and elsewhere. And I will explain them and interpret [*al-tʾawīl*] them

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[248] *mavo le-pereḵ Ḥeleḵ*, 11.

in manner which agrees with the truth. And I will bring proof for all of this from the Sages' own words. And I will reveal which of their statements are (to be understood) literally and which are (to be understood) metaphorically; and which occurred during a dream but were mentioned in plain terms as if they happened during a wakeful state.[249]

Maimonides opens up his second part of the introduction by defining specific terms and then proceeds to his famous thirteen fundamental principles. Clearly noticeable is the philosophical overtone resonates throughout these doctrinal discussions. In particular, in the first principles (viz. The Existence of the Creator, His Unity, and His Incorporeality) Maimonides proves his absolute commitment to the peripatetic philosophy.

For the sake of brevity, I bring into attention only one of his statements under the third principle. Simple, Unique God of the *falāsifa* cannot have a physically composite body-- hence the third basic principle of faith. That accounts for Maimonides' negation of any sorts of physical aspect to God's Essence which in turn renders any such attributes which relate to Him having bodily activities inconceivable. That includes, for instance, those actions like walking, standing, sitting, and *speaking* (*al-kalām* / *ha-dibur*).

God's incorporeality, as Maimonides perceives it, necessitates all references to any such bodily descriptions of God's actions in the Scripture to be read as figures of speech (*majāz* / *hashʾalah*).[250] That metaphysical impediment gives rise to the critical question in respect to the nature of God's relationship with his deputies: if God cannot even talk and all those statements in the Torah in which God is reported to be "speaking" to his prophets ought to be understood metaphorically, then what can prophecy mean at all? Rejecting the concept of a talking-God, Maimonides knowingly undermines the very basic delineation of the prophecy as it was understood within traditional circles. An alternative description has therefore to be offered; his forthcoming discussion of the prophecy gives us his substitute definition.

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[249] *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ*, 19. He does return to this question in the *Guide* I:9: "We had promised in the Commentary on the *Mishnah* that we would explain the strange subjects in the 'Book of Prophecy' and in the 'Book of Correspondence'—the latter being a book in which we promised to explain all the difficult passages in the *Midrashim* where the external sense manifestly contradicts the truth and departs from the intelligible. They are all parables." See Twersky, *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides*, 11.
[250] Ibid., 22.

Prophecy, as an independent principle, stands in the list at the sixth place. The rabbi provides his supposedly ordinary reader with the most bizarre definition. Prophets are depicted as exceptional human beings whose souls, due to their superiority and unsurpassed perfection, accept the form of the intellect. Their human intellects then conjoin (*yattaṣil / yodbaq*) to the Active Intellect through which they receive a noble emanation.[251] Maimonides does not elaborate any further here and leaves his remark as succinct as possible. It could be that he purposes to keep the matter as ambiguous as possible in order to prevent the masses from entering into any further arguments around it. Or he might have had in mind his few educated readers who, given their prior philosophical studies, had already known the untold details. Either way, including such a short and technical definition admits a halakhic treatise seems very much ironic, or somewhat problematic.

Firstly, God apparently plays no active role in the process of prophetic revelation. He does not, as most theologians would argue drawing on a literal reading of the Torah, "choose" anyone among His people. Maimonides' theory casts doubt on God's sovereignty, the notion of His providence, and most importantly, the concept of a Willful God. Secondly, this philosophical perspective does not tell us how the "noble emanation" translates into words and phrases prophets relate to people. Thirdly, he is silent about the difference between Mosaic prophecy and other prophets. Putting this definition into the context of his discussion of Mosaic vis-à-vis post-Mosaic prophecies in the *Seder Zeraʿim*, one hardly finds a way to justify his prior arguments for the perpetual validity of the Torah, the overruling power of "the majority" (even if it comes at odds, with the opinion of one thousand true prophets), and the mere interpretative role of the prophets after Moses.

None of the critical terms utilized by Maimonides in his brief definition (Active Intellect, conjunction, over-flow, etc.) belong to the halakhic jargon. A closer look at his phrasing illustrates the fact

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[251] *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ*, 23.

that his formula is mainly taken from al-Fārābī's theory of prophecy discussed above.[252] The prophet from al-Fārābī's perspective, as we have shown, receives the revelation through his own illuminated state of intellect. God cannot, technically, have any knowledge of a particular individual "prophet" let alone speaking to him. Within this theoretical framework, no distinction can be made between the prophecy of, for instance, Moses and Isaiah. Here, again, aware of the theological consequences his definition may bring about, Maimonides introduces his Seventh Principle in which he treats the prophecy of Moses exclusively, setting it apart from all other prophecies as an "exceptional" case.

Maimonides retreats from his metaphysical principles when it comes to the prophecy of Moses. He occupies the highest rank among all prophets (who came before or after him) as he was the God-chosen (*ṣafwat Allah*/*ha-nivkhar*) from among the human species.[253] He reached the highest stage of understanding of God among all people at all times; he attained such an extreme stature of exaltedness, *above* the level of human beings, that he reached to the level of angels so much so that there was "no curtain [*ḥijāb*/*masakh*] which he did not pierce."[254] Right from the very beginning, Maimonides signals to his reader that Mosaic prophecy cannot be deliberated in the same manner as the other prophecies have been. He posits Moses beyond any natural categorization of human beings and as such preludes to his proceeding "super-natural" treatment of his prophecy.[255]

The key to understand Maimonides' approach to the Mosaic prophecy resides in his depiction of Moses' soul as containing "pure intellect" devoid of any bodily constraints or physical defects. Unlike other prophets who receive the revelation through an intermediator angel (that is, their human intellect's conjunction with the Active Intellect), Moses was the only superhuman who could, due to the suspension

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[252] See above pp. 5-6.
[253] *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ*, 23.
[254] Ibid., 24.
[255] It should be noted that, other than a generic claim regarding Moses' outstanding intellectual stature at the outset, he provides no additional insights as what renders Moses an angelic-human capable of talking directly to God whenever he wants.

(*taʿṭṭalah/nitbaṭel*) of his faculties of imagination and sensations, "talk" to God directly. That is according to Maimonides the true meaning of the verse "with him I speak mouth to mouth [*pe el pe*]."[256] Maimonides depicts Mosaic prophecy nothing less than a rational miracle. Rational, because he managed to find an explanation within his metaphysical framework to elucidate as how Moses could have perceived God's words using his intellect; nonetheless miraculous, for the prophet's absolute perfection of his soul's characteristics which differentiates him from the rest of prophets in the history.

To make the matter yet clearly evident to his common audience and, probably, to reinforce his religious stance against possible future accusations of the masses, Maimonides added a supplementary note to the end of his Seventh Principle listing four exclusive aspects of Moses' prophecy: 1- As it is written in the Torah, unlike all other prophets who talked to God with intermediaries, Moses communicated with Him without a mediator (*dūn wāsitah / ele ʿal yadai emṭsaʿi*);[257] 2- all other prophets received *waḥy* while asleep or the day after a deep sleep for it is only in this state that their senses suspend, but the words came to Moses in the daytime (emphasising his intellect's perpetual dominance over other faculties);[258] 3- contrary to other prophets, like Daniel, who would be weaken upon receiving God's revelation,[259] Moses talked to God like a friend talks to his friend without any fear, "face to face" (*penim el penim*), that exhibits the intensity of his conjunction with the intellect (*shiddat ittiṣalihi bil-ʿaql/ khazaḳ davḳuto be-sekhel*);[260] and 4- while for other prophets the descension of the *waḥy* is out of their control and depends completely on God's Will (they had

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[256] *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ*, 24. Numbers 12:6-8: "and He said: 'Hear these my words: when a prophet of the Lord arises among you, I make Myself known to him in a vision, I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is trusted throughout My household. With him I speak mouth to mouth, plainly and not in riddles, and he beholds the likeness of the Lord. How then did you not shrink from speaking against My servant Moses!"

[257] Ibid., 24. Numbers 12:6-8.

[258] Here, Maimonides again refer to the verses Num. 12:6-8.

[259] Daniel 10:8-9: "So I was left alone to see this great vision. I was drained of strength, my vigor was destroyed, and I could not summon up strength. I heard him speaking; and when I heard him speaking, overcome by a deep sleep, I lay prostrate on the ground."

[260] Exodus 33:11: "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face as one man speaks to another…"

to "purify their thoughts" prior to its reception, but it would never come down to them until God willed), Moses could talk to God whenever he wished.[261]

It is indeed a painstaking job, if not impossible altogether, to reconcile what Maimonides offers above, in respect to Moses' exceptional prophetic experience, with his preceding Fārābian formula.[262] His whole general definition of prophecy breaks down in the Seventh Principle when he strips Moses of his natural human soul. There is, however, one solution to this apparent discrepancy: to read his description of the Mosaic prophecy through the lens of his esoteric approach. It was rather a common practice among subsequent Jewish philosophers up to now to perceive his comments on Moses' super-natural character as mere pedagogical (or esoterical) technique.

Among the four features above, the second and third ones make compelling cases for a closer probe. In the second, he alludes to the analogy between dreams and prophetic visions. As I have already discussed, this was a very common analogy utilized by Muslim philosophers and theologians (in particular Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazzālī) to talk about the meaning of prophetic knowledge. Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazzālī, etymologically speaking, view veracious dreams and prophecy of the same category— the former being the highest and the perfect variation of the latter.[263]

Maimonides, however, takes the analogy to a different level. He downgrades all non-mosaic prophecies as "dream visions" while uplifts Moses as the *only* prophet in the history whose immediate "conjunction" with the One (and not with the Active Intellect) was brought about in his wakefulness. In other words, and in total harmony with his discussion in the *Seder Zeraʿim, the* prophet (in the real sense of the word) considered to be Moses and him alone.[264] That is why, Maimonides writes, Moses is called the

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[261] Numbers 9:8: "Moses said to them: 'Stand by, and let me hear what instructions the Lord gives about you."

[262] In another passage in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*, the *Shemonah Peraqim* (*The Eight Chapters*), Maimonides says that the only veil between Moses and God is the human intellect attached to a material body which prevents Moses from "the perception of the true reality of God's existence." See *Ethical writings of Maimonides*, 83.

[263] For further see above, p. 9-10; 20-22.

[264] He utters almost the same idea in the *Guide*, II:34, 367.

"lawgiver" (*mekhoḳeḳ*) and all other prophets serve only as commentators on his words.[265] As such, Maimonides seems to suggest that his definition of the prophecy (the Sixth Principle) is only applicable to non-mosaic prophets.

Maimonides' take on Moses' peculiar encounter with the Deity, as described in the third feature, brings to the fore another interesting matter regarding the unique relationship between his prophecy and the intellect. Moses' "face to face" intimate encounter with God is reported by the rabbi as a reassuring scene, by no means awful. Moses is said not to have been taken over by God's Loftiness like other prophets due to, as Maimonides reads into it, "the intensity of his conjunction with the intellect."[266] It is not clear to what this "intellect" refers? Does Maimonides suggest here that Moses' human intellect ascended in its rank to the level of the Active Intellect so much so that it embodies the same cosmological stature of the Active one and as such could receive God's words "directly"? Or does he indicate that Moses' soul in its entirety became perceptible to the Divine overflow for its intense purity? Maimonides seems not to be eager to unfold the issue into further details.

In the Eight Principle, on the divine origin of the Torah, he enigmatically (or esoterically?) juxtaposes his peripatetic metaphysic position (represented in Third and Sixth principles) with a conservative reading of the Mosaic prophecy (Seventh Principle):

> One ought to believe that this entire Torah which is found in our hand today is the Torah which was given to Moses, and that it is of the divine origin [*mefi ha-gbura*]. That is, it all reached him from God in a manner that we metaphorically call 'speech.' No one knows the exact quality of that attainment [*wuṣūl / haniʿah*] except Moses, peace upon him, to whom it was revealed. He acted as a scribe [*nāsikh/ ṣofer*] to whom one dictates and who writes.[267]

The passage conveys two mutually exclusive messages: on the one hand, it ratifies the most literal reading of the Scripture, that is, Moses writing the words of God verbatim; on the other however, it reconfirms Maimonides' Third Principle whereupon the idea of talking-God goes against rational acceptance. Should

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[265] *mavo le-pereḳ Ḥeleḳ*, 26.
[266] Ibid., 25.
[267] Ibid., 26.

one read his admission to our inability in grasping Moses' encounter with God as his sincere intent (which is, in a sense, in line with the preceding sentence whereby his emphasis on the metaphoric notion of "speech" underpins his philosophical view)? Or does his last statement in which Moses is pictured as a passive scribe represent Maimonides' true purpose? If we were to read these sentences regarding Leo Struss's esotericism paradigm, we would have a very reasonable case to make here regarding the rabbi's acute method: he tacitly deludes his uneducated readers by including the last sentence while hinting to the elite how the matters ought to be truly understood beforehand. I leave the discussion of his esotericism open here. It serves as an appropriate conclusion to the study of prophecy in his *Commentary on the Mishnah*; I will return to this disputed question in short in my treatment of *The Guide of the Perplexed*.

II.   *The Guide of the Perplexed*

Maimonides' overarching presumption throughout his oeuvre, in specific *The Guide of the Perplexed*, is that what Aristotle and his commentators have demonstrated by means of logic in respect to metaphysical sciences could not contradict with what is (to be) found in words of the prophets and the Sages— *if*, however, the two were studied prudently and the correct method of interpretation (i.e., allegorical) is applied.[268] As he writes in his dedicatory epistle to the *Guide*, the work serves as a guiding tool for any student of Jewish religion who, in his pursuit of truth using philosophy, may come across the chasm between elements of philosophical inquiry and his faithful commitment to the Torah, hence the *Guide of the Perplexed*. The work also served, as he promised in his introduction to the *Pereq Ḥeleq*,[269] as a collection of his interpretive measures to deal with problematic passages in the Scripture which, in his view, would contradict the intellect in their literal senses.

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[268] Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides: Life and Thought*, divides Maimonides' "philosophical" project in the *Guide* into three components: Firstly to cleanse Jewish religious mentality from any types of anthropomorphisms being even at the mental level and in regards to the Divine attributions; secondly, the replacement of the natural and causal order at the centre of discussions about Divine's creation instead of His arbitrary will; and, thirdly, to put an end to the conflict between the "sciences" and sacred texts by incorporating the knowledge of the former within the religious curriculum as an essential prerequisite for comprehending the secrets of the latter.

[269] See note 44 above.

But there is a complicating problem with the study of Maimonides' view on any given subject in the *Guide*: his self-claimed esoteric style of presentation. He explicitly warns the reader in the introduction regarding hidden actual opinions of his which have intentionally been obscured from the eyes of the unprepared audience whose religiosity may be upset due to the subtlety of "divine science."[270] The esoteric nature of Maimonides' work reflects the twofold responsibility he feels towards Jewish community of his time as well as generations to come. On the one hand Maimonides views himself as a religious authority whose words should serve the well-being of his community both in terms of spiritual perfection and social order; on the other, he bears the heavy burden of teaching "the secrets of Torah" in order to pass it on to future generations and also to protect students of sciences and/or philosophy from denying the authority of Scripture due to its seemingly contradictions with words of the philosophers.[271]

This esotericism, which has been subject to debates among his commentators from the thirteenth century up to this very day,[272] makes the job of unraveling his complex web of "allusions" and piecing together his scattered remarks to discover his real intentions the most difficult one. Given its peculiar style, if not creating more confusions in the mind of its reader, the *Guide* can hardly serve as a guide for the perplexed student of religious philosophy.

The notion of prophecy is not an exception. No single account can illustrate the whole story and one needs to read each of them against both the context in which it is written and also other statements in other places in the text. After all, it is Maimonides' own suggested method for the reader: "if you wish to grasp the totality of what this treatise contains, so that nothing of it will escape you, then you must connect its chapters

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[270] the *Guide* I: intro., 15-20. By "divine science" Maimonides means metaphysics.

[271] Halbertal situates Maimonides besides Plato and al-Fārābī as the leading Jewish philosopher of Medieval Ages whose esoteric style aims as much to protect the philosophers from scorns of the masses as it is meant to protect the masses from losing their faith. In Halbertal's view, Maimonides would argue that society, being manly populated by the multitude, "cannot survive under conditions of metaphysical transparency."See *Maimonides*, 282.

[272] See Leo Strauss, the *Guide*, "How to Begin to Study the *Guide of the Perplexed*," xi-lvi. Strauss argues that, contrary to what Maimonides writes at the superficial level, the *Guide*'s esoterically meant to teach the elite that the existence of God or any other incorporeal beings cannot be proved scientifically or philosophically Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Secrets of the *Guide of the Perplexed*: Between the Thirteenth and the Twentieth Centuries."

one with another; and when reading a given chapter, your intention must be not only to understand the totality of the subject of that chapter, but also to grasp each word that occurs in it in the course of speech."[273] To some degrees, the same is also true about his exegetical method. In this second issue, Maimonides' perspective can be grasped and studied easier. In my analysis of the concept of prophecy and the notion of allegorical interpretation in the *Guide,* I start from the very beginning, the introduction, and as I go further to the end I try to piece together the best picture I can.

An outstanding portion of the introduction is devoted to the topic of secrecy in the words of the prophets and sages. While the outward meaning (*ẓāhir*) of their words serve the well-being of human socio-political life, they also contain most valuable inward meaning (*bāṭin*) which include secrets of the divine knowledge. Prophets are depicted as the perfect men (*al-kāmil^īn*) among the knowledgeable who employed parables in their words to convey the two-layer message to the people; their words are likened to the golden apple decorated (and also concealed) in the settings of silver.[274] The multitude would have access to the apparent layer of their messages and can benefit from them accordingly while the intellectual elite may reach out, by means of philosophical inquiry and the method of allegorical interpretation, to the depth of their parables and cultivate their intellect.

To this end, Maimonides utilizes a version of famous Platonic light metaphor to illustrate quality as well as the hierarchy of knowledge among the prophets. Prophets' learning of the Secrets of the divine knowledge (*asrār al-ʿilm al-ʾilāhī*) is like flashing light in the darkness; it illuminates instantly, lights up the surrounding and burns out very fast. For high ranking prophets, the light constantly flashes so much so that they seem to be in the brightest time of a day. Those prophets thus recognize the truth in its fullest degree. For other prophets and sages, however, it comes and fades away very fast; the truth reveals itself for a

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[273] the *Guide* I:intro., 15.
[274] Maimonides borrows this metaphor from Proverbs 25:11. He explains how the golden apple in a silver setting may appear from the distance to contain only silver, but a closer look at it reveals its inner, most valuable material, i.e. golden core.

moment and hides behind the darkness of bodily constraints the next moment. The worst in that regard are the ignorant common folks who never see any lights and are hence devoid of any sorts of divine knowledge.[275]

Intellectual illumination is therefore the main component of prophetic knowledge. Although Maimonides is silent here on preliminary stages prophets might have taken before reaching this level of "seeing" the light of the truth, he does elaborate on prerequisite stages students of metaphysics should master prior to delving into the secrets of divine knowledge: "this divine science cannot be obtained except after a study of natural science since the latter borders on the former and precedes it in terms of its study."[276]

The text formulates prophecy as an instinctive, direct encounter with the reality of the truth in the light form. It is not yet clear from this introductory passage whether the illuminative feature belongs to the prophet's intellect or his soul in its totality receives the light of knowledge. In other words, Maimonides does not elaborate whether, as Al-Fārābī would tell, it is the prophet's intellect which in its process of actualization reached to (or conjoined with) the High Above or the soul perceives the light directly regardless of its connection to the intellect.

Maimonides tells his reader in the introduction that the second purpose of this treatise is to explain "the hidden parables occurring in the books of the prophets which [from a reading of the text] are not explicitly identified as such;" the parables which the ignorant would merely understand their outward meanings.[277] The parables whose true meanings are hidden beneath the silver shell of their apparent meaning and the key to the understanding of all that is to comprehend the allegorical interpretation of their statements.[278]

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[275] the *Guide* I:intro., 7-8.
[276] Ibid., 9. Maimonides expresses the same principle in the epistle dedicatory. A student of philosophy must master mathematics, astronomy, logic and other prerequisite "natural sciences" before he may be taught divine sciences (metaphysics).
[277] Ibid., 6.
[278] Ibid., 10-11.

Subsequent chapters which mainly deal with the issue of anthropomorphism shed more light on his intention. At the end of the fifth one, he tells us that any references to the notions like "seeing" and "vision" in regards to God and His attributes must be interpreted in the sense of intellectual apprehension (*ʾidrāk ʿaqli*) and not the material eyesight (*ruʾyat ʿayn*).[279] The rationale is quite obvious. God cannot have a (composite) body and hence any such descriptions of bodily vision or the divine material light deem irreconcilable with principles of Aristotelian metaphysics. God can solely be "seen" by the faculty of intellect and any such attributions of physicality ought to be read and understood metaphorically.

The same holds true for the physical movement. Statements in the Scripture in which God is reported to pass (*ʾabara*) or alludes to His physical action ought to be read figuratively too.[280] Those accounts occurred mostly in "prophetic visions" (*marʾāy al-nabuwwah*) and do not relate, as Maimonides reads them, His literal passage between two points in the physical world; their true reality belongs to the world of intellectual apprehension. When, for instance, it is said that "the Lord passed by before his face,"[281] the verb indicates what the prophet Moses missed in his encounter with God, that is, his inability to grasp His true reality. By the same token, Maimonides interprets Moses' demand to view God's glory/presence (*Exodus* 33:18) as the prophet's demand to *intellectually* apprehend (*idrāk*) His face (i.e., His essence) – the request which was ultimately rejected.[282] In all these, Maimonides sees the recourse to sensual apprehensions implausible. For him, the intellect constitutes the sole medium for prophets' inspired knowledge.

His notes in the forty-sixth chapter move us one step closer to the Fārābian formula discussed above.[283] Prophecy, he asserts, renders meaningful, at least in the eyes of the multitude, only when the

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[279] the *Guide* I:6, 31.
[280] the *Guide* I:21, 47-51.
[281] Exodus 34:6.
[282] Exodus 33:20. the *Guide*, I:48. Maimonides has a relatively extensive piece on this very verse and its interpretation in his *Shmonah Perakim* (Eight Chapters). See *Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, 82-3.
[283] See above pp. 4-6.

notion of a "talking" God may be indicated. Yet the perception of a mechanical speech (which requires bodily organs as well as physical actions) for the absolutely incorporeal deity deems impossible at the outset. The solution lies in revisiting the very concept of God's speech and the way His communicative message transmitted to the prophets. To that end, Maimonides employs the same strategy he utilized in the preceding chapters in attributing a figurative function to the organs of speech mentioned in the Scripture. Talking God does not produce sounds neither the prophets heard the voice of angels literally. The revelation (*waḥy*) is in fact "the overflow of the [celestial] Intellects towards the prophets" which occurred "at the stage [*maqām*] of prophetic vision."[284] Therefore, it was the prophets' intellect which figuratively "heard" the divine voice and communicated the message to the people.

This metaphoric interpretation adds another layer of meaning to his earlier remarks (in the fifteenth chapter) regarding Jacob's dream of the ladder and ascending/descending angels thereof.[285] In his initial description, the angelic characters in the parable represent the prophets who "after the ascent and the attainment of certain knowledge descend having received decrees with a view to governing and teaching the people of earth."[286] From what he tells us in chapter forty-six, however, we can arguably conclude that the angels' (or for that matter the prophets') ascendant to the sky symbolizes the prophets' intellectual perfection vis-à-vis the overflow of intellectual emanation from the Above embodied in the descendance of the angels.

In the first part of the *Guide* Maimonides also sets the limits for prophetic inspired knowledge. He begins the fifty-fourth chapter by a description of Prophet Moses and his unique stature among all the prophets. Moses stands as the ideal, perfect man whose intellectual as well as political status constitute the highest level of perfection humanity can ever achieve. Nonetheless, even Moses cannot apprehend God as He truly is and his demand to know His "glory" and to see His "face" (i.e., His essence) were consequently

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[284] the *Guide* I:46,100.
[285] Genesis 28:12.
[286] the *Guide* I:15,41.

rejected.[287] Instead, as Maimonides reads Exodus 33:13, Moses requests to learn God's "ways" (i.e., His attributes) which reside within the human's perceptibility. To learn divine attributes, in turn, Moses has to contemplate upon God's actions ($af\bar{a}li^h$) for it is His actions in the *natural world* whereupon His attributes are derived and later comprehended.[288] That leads us back to the natural sciences. If taken literally and by itself, this passage aligns very well with the concept of prophetic progression al-Fārābī formulated. The prophet, like philosophers, begins with the study of natural sciences and that acts as the opening gate for him; his contemplation on God's actions prepares his intellect to firstly apprehend God's attributes and consequently His existence. One should keep in mind that unlike Ibn-Sīnā, who addresses the proof of the Necessary Existence as a metaphysical issue, al-Fārābī (and also Ibn Rushd) pertain the discussion to the physics in their treatise; Maimonides follows his mentor's, al-Fārābī's, lead in this regard and treats the ontological question as a matter within the scope of natural sciences and not metaphysics.[289]

Maimonides expresses the same idea towards the end of the *Guide* (III: 51) with the famous parable of "the King in His Palace."[290] People's distance to (i.e., relationship with) the Deity is said to be accorded with their knowledge; their proximity to the King depends on the level of their intellectual perfection. He

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[287] Exodus 33:18-20. This, according to Halbertal, entails Maimonides' ultimate "skeptical" position regarding our inability to comprehend God's essence. The chapter, according to Halbertal, reveals that in Maimonides' view even Moses (the greatest prophet who achieved the highest possible intellectual level any human being can attain, even higher than Aristotle as *the* philosopher) is unable to grasp the knowledge of God's face (His essence), but could only cognize His back (His actions, i.e. the universe). Therefore, skeptical reading of the *Guide* denies any possibility to gain metaphysical knowledge of the divine or His attributes; we can merely gain the knowledge of physics not metaphysics. "Knowledge of God, then, is knowledge of His actions on earth." See Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 309.

[288] the *Guide* I:54, 125.

[289] Maimonides distinguishes between the Essence of the One and His acts. While the former cannot be fully understood and comprehended, the latter can indeed. For a comparison between him and al-Ghazzālī on God as simultaneously knowable and unknowable see Girdner, "Ghāzālī's Hermeneutics," 263-268.

[290] He has probably adapted this symbolical narration directly from Ibn Sīnā or al-Ghazzāli, or through the poetry, from Ibn Gabirol. Ibn Sīnā in his very short and relatively unknown philosophical-mystical treatise, the *Epistle of the Bird* (*risālat al-Ṭayr*), depicts a parable very much close in its theme to what Maimonides presents here. It tells the story of a flock of birds who, in pursuit of freedom, travel over the mountains towards a city in which the Greatest King rules. They enter his palace and after crossing several courtyards they are granted the permission to see the face of the King and talk to Him beyond the curtain. For a full English translation of the treatise, see Peter Heath, "Disorientation and Reorientation in Ibn Sīna's Epistle of the Bird." Al-Ghazzālī has adopted Ibn Sīna's theme and composed a treatise with the same title (*risālat al-Ṭayr*). Ibn Gabirol has also utilizes the same metaphor to symbolize the relationship between the man and God. See Andrew Gluck, "The King in His Palace."

categorizes the prophets alongside the religious philosophers as the King's inner circle. The order of people

in the parable is as follows. The first, lowest in rank, is unbelievers, who follow no religious laws, and as

such reside outside the walls of the city (of humanity). The second group reside at the outskirts of the city;

despite their engagement in speculation reach the wrong results; they are occupants of the city but due to

their errors turn their back upon the King's habitation and will never arrive at His palace. The third people

are the multitude of the adherents of the Mosaic Law who follow the right path towards but never see the

King's habitation. The fourth are jurists who arrive at the doors of His palace and walk around it, but for

they adopt true ideas by means of emulation of authorities (*taqlīd*^{*an*}) and because of their failure to engage in

speculation concerning the fundamental principles of religion, they cannot enter the palace. It is the

intellectual elite, the fifth and only assembly, who may enter the antechambers of the palace and be with the

King in the inner-most part. Within this group, people with different ranks exist whose proximity to the

King is determined by the level of scientific knowledge they have acquired. Here Maimonides gives us their

order, and by that, the order in which the sciences ought to be learned:

> Know, my son, that as long as you are engaged in studying the mathematical sciences and the art of logic, you are one of those who walks around the house searching for its gate,…. If, however, you have understood the natural things, you have entered the habitation and are walking in the antechambers. If, however, you have achieved perfection in the natural sciences and have understood divine science [*ilāhīyyat*], you have entered the King's place *into the inner court* and are with Him in one habitation. This is the rank of the men of science; they, however, are of different grades of perfection.[291]

Besides those short, dispersed discussions in the first part of the *Guide*, Maimonides' devotes

sixteen consequent chapters in the second section entirely to the question of prophecy (II: 32-48). The first

chapter concerns itself with three different beliefs among people regarding the prophecy; the three views

which, as Maimonides asserts at the outset, "are like their opinions concerning the eternity of the world or its

creation in time," laid out in II:13.[292] Many have taken this very first sentence to indicate an existence of an

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[291] the *Guide*, III:51, 619.
[292] the *Guide*, II: 36.

esoteric correlation between the two sets of opinions and have tried to uncover Maimonides' true view on prophecy by matching the elements from the two lists. Yet since Maimonides' true opinion on creation remains a matter of long (and probably never-ending) debates and, as such, cannot be pinpointed, I do not find it fruitful to add the ambiguity of his view on creation on top of his discussion of prophecy by tiding the two tangles together.[293] He indeed might have had a reason to hint the association between the two, but, as Kreisel points out, "a comparison between the opinions does not appear to help us better understand Maimonides' approach to prophecy; it only serves to perplex us regarding his approach to creation."[294] For this reason, I shall leave out this debate in the present study.

The three opinions among people on the question of prophecy are as follows. The first one belongs to vulgar (*jumhūr al-jāhilīyyah*[295]) and some of the ordinary people among the Jews. This camp holds the most literal reading of the Scripture, that is, the idea that God arbitrarily chooses whoever he wishes— young or old, knowledgeable or ignorant. The only condition is the prophet's moral traits. God does not, according to Maimonides' description of the first opinion, choose a wicked individual as a prophet and if He wishes to do so, He first "turns him into a good man."[296]

The second opinion is that of the philosophers who view prophethood as a perfect state in the nature of man; the perfection which "cannot be attained but acquired by means of immense exercise to pass the

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[293] The central question of creation gives raise to further issues such as the concept of prophecy, the problem of evil, the idea of divine providence, and the reasons for commandments. As such, the question does not merely address an aspect of Maimonides' ontological view, rather its answer can have a much broader influence on almost all fundamental principles of Jewish faith. That is why he dedicates thirty six chapters of the *Guide* wrestling with this question (from I.71 to II.31). The mater at stake in these chapters is whether the world was created by God's will at a specific time from absolute nothingness (creation *ex nihilo*), or the cosmos had existed for eternity following God's ultimate wisdom? Each view requires its own set of definitions of God's power, His wisdom and knowledge.

[294] *Prophecy*, 226.

[295] Pines translates it as "the Pagans," probably following Munk's French translation. Their translations seem to me inaccurate as the Pagans, as the recorded history shows us, had not believed in any God-chosen prophets. The term *jāhiliyyah* must then be read as an adjective for describing the state of knowledge among the commons who believed in this sort of prophecy (and not indicating the era of Pagans). Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation reads "*hamon ha-petaim*" (naïve people). In his modern translation, Michael Schwartz has also rendered the phrase "the ignorant masses" (*hamon ha-būrim/ha-sekhalim*). See Schwartz footnote no.3 on p. 373 for further explanations on the variety of opinions on this phrase and its translations.

[296] the *Guide*, II:32, 361.

potentiality which exists in the human species into actuality." Not all individuals can achieve this perfection in its highest and most extreme form, it must, therefore, "exist necessarily in at least one particular individual."[297] It follows that an ignorant person cannot become a prophet merely on God's volition, rather an individual in an excellent state of perfection regarding his moral, intellectual, and imaginative faculties becomes prophet out of necessity (*ḍarūrat^{an}*). This inevitability rises from the prophet's natural innate dispositions as well as his education and intellectual training.

The third view is that of the Law and doctrine; it renders almost identical with the second one with an exception. God may prevent a person who perfectly fits for prophecy to become one on account of the divine will (*mashīyyat elāhīyyah*). Maimonides states here that the divine intervention with the natural course of things in prophecy falls into the same category as that of miracles.[298] By deterring a qualified candidate from receiving intellectual emanation from the Active Intellect, God proves His absolute volition over His creation—in the same manner as His will determines the time of world creation. Maimonides seems to endorse this third view by offering several scriptural statements in its support.

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[297] Maimonides' inferential argument here is scant, bewildering, and ambiguous. How can he conclude from the "impossibility of all people being prophets" to the "necessity of existence of at least one prophet" among them? He presents this as a summary of philosopher's view on prophecy. The closest passage I come across to suggest the same idea is Ibn Sīnā's discussion in his short treatise *On the Proof of Prophecies* (*Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt*). Ibn Sīnā's thesis is based on three general premises. 1- The rational soul differentiates human species from other animals. It exists in all human beings *per se*, but its power varies in each individual. 2- There are different levels of intellectual power among people and since there is finitude in the direction of weakness, therefore, there needs to be finitude in the direction of strength too. 3- Whatever inheres in another thing accidentally, exists in it potentially at one time and actually at another. Yet, it needs to exist in something else essentially and always in the state of actuality. From the three premises, Ibn-Sian concludes that there must exist among people at least one who, standing above and rules all the genera below him, has obtained the angelic intellect (i.e. the rational soul in its fullest actuality) and receives all the emanations directly from the Active Intellect, hence the prophet. This argument does seem to have flaws and ambiguities. Miahcael Marmura addresses some of them in his introduction to his Arabic edition of the text (Ibn Sīnā 1968) and in more details in "Avicenna's Psychological Proof of Prophecy."

[298] *The Guide* II: 32, 361. We have learned from his preceding discussions on the creation of the world (esp. II:25, p. 329) that the opinion which accommodates the traditional view on miracles is creation *ex nihilo*: "Know that with a belief in the creation of the world in time, all the miracles become possible and the law becomes possible, and all questions that may be asked on this subject, vanish. …The answer to all these questions would be: He wanted it this way; or His wisdom required it this way. And just as He brought the world into existence having the form it has, when He wanted to, without us knowing His will with regard to this or in what wisdom there was in His particularizing the forms of the world and the time of its creation- in the same way we do not know His will or the exigency of His wisdom that caused all the matters, about which questions have been posed above, to be particularized."

Laying the basic foundations of his view, he proceeds to highlight the uniqueness of Moses among all the prophets came before him and those would come after. Maimonides has already deliberated some aspects of that in his introduction to the *Pereq Ḥeleq*, which I discussed above.[299] The word "prophecy" is merely an amphibolous term in reference to Moses vis-à-vis other divinely inspired individuals. The same applies to his miracles in comparison to other prophets' miracles. The fundamental principle in understanding the mosaic prophecy lies in accepting that Moses, contrary to all other prophets, received revelation directly from God and not through the medium of an angel.[300] In the thirty-fifth chapter, Maimonides reinforces this distinctive feature by reminding his reader the seventh article of faith (elaborated in the *Pereq Ḥeleq*) where he lists the four unique characteristics of the Mosaic prophecy.[301] As such, he considers Moses' actions and his consequent prophetic knowledge extraordinary phenomena the true reality of which beyond our ability to grasp.[302] Yet, despite his unequivocal position in that respect and his clear statement that in all these chapters (devoted to the question of prophecy) he can only deal with non-mosaic prophecy and that he shall not discuss matters pertaining Moses, he contradicts himself in an explicit return to this very subject at the end of next chapter where he explains why prophetic revelation did not come down to Moses because his imaginative faculty was preoccupied after the disastrous incident of *spies*.[303]

The prophet reaches the perfect stature by, firstly, observing the "golden mean" and acquiring the moral habits, abolishing his desire for bestial demands, and overcoming his wish for political dominance over people. He then would need to sharpen his intellect by pursuing natural sciences which in reality embody the reflection on God's works. And finally, if his imaginative faculty has the perfect natural

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[299] See above note 40.
[300] the *Guide*, II:34, 367.
[301] See above notes 40-45.
[302] the *Guide*, II:35, 369.
[303] the *Guide*, II:36, 372-3. Maimonides explanatory sentences following this statement are confusing. He writes that the delay in receiving revelation occurred to Moses as a result of his sorrow and the suffer he experienced after that incident. Yet, Maimonides insists, Moses' imaginative faculty had no role in his reception of the revelation and it was solely his intellect which was involved. He does not say any more how could Moses' intellect be affected by the sorrow or, more importantly, how his prophetic knowledge could become the subject of an inquiry if, as he insisted at the end of last chapter, the nature of mosaic prophecy goes beyond our grasp.

predisposition, then he will become a prophet who "will see only God and His angels, and will only be aware and achieve knowledge of matters that constitute true opinions and general directives for the well-being of men."[304] Here it is not clear whether Maimonides contradicts his previous statement in the third opinion (of our Law and doctrine) regarding God's last word on one's ability to become a prophet or these words convey the same idea. On the one hand, this passage could be read as formulating a completely natural process of prophethood in which God has no arbitrary providence (i.e., that of the philosophers in the second view). On the other, however, the element of "natural predisposition" can be understood as alluding to God's role in determining who can or cannot become a prophet. Since this innate ability cannot be acquired and is wholly given, one can argue for the conformity of this passage with the third opinion. I believe this passage, by and large, reveals Maimonides' true intention on his theory of prophecy. It has both the traditional element of the third view and can easily come into terms with the rational opinion of the philosophers in the second. In other words, he has forged the fourth opinion, belonging to Maimonides himself, providing a rational and, at the same time, a religious explanation for the question of prophecy.

Given the above, he distinguishes between three classes of people. The philosophers are the ones whose imperfect imaginative faculty hinders them from the ability to translate raw intellectual intelligibles into comprehensible forms. The existing deficiency in their imaginative power makes it impossible for them to communicate the received overflow of intellect into a language suitable for governing the society. On the other end of the spectrum are politicians, poets, and soothsayers whose most potent imaginative faculty enables them to have similar visions to that of genuine prophets. Nonetheless, their lack of intellectual training and weakness of scientific education impede their ability to lead the society towards the desired

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[304] the *Guide*, II:36, 372. Here it is not clear whether Maimonides contradicts his previous statement in the third view (view of our Law and doctrine) regarding God's last word on one's ability to become a prophet. On the one hand, this passage could be read as drawing on a completely natural process of prophethood (i.e. that of the philosophers; second view). On the other, however, the element of "natural predisposition" can allude to God's role in determining who can or cannot become a prophet. Since this innate ability cannot be acquired and is totally given, one can argue for the conformity of this passage with the third view. My view is that this passage represents Maimonides' true view on prophecy. What he meant by God's veto power is the natural

felicity.[305] The prophets are the only class among the people who, endowed with the noblest imaginative power, can rightfully claim the leading role for the society. Their claim rests not only on their skill in communicating with the masses but also on their fully actualized faculty of intellect which can only bring about by years of speculation and training.[306]

Furthermore, Maimonides names two other faculties as immediate requirements for any divine missionaries: the faculty of courage (*ʾiqdām*) and that of intuition/divination (*shuʿūr*[307]). Regarding the latter Maimonides writes:

> You will find among people a man whose conjecturing (*ḥads*) and divination (*shuʿūr*) are powerful and habitually hit the mark, so that he hardly imagines (*yatakhayyal*) that a thing comes to pass without its happening wholly or in part as he imagined it. The causes of this are many- they are various anterior, posterior, and present circumstances. In virtue of the strength of this divination, the mind goes over all these premises and draws from them conclusions in the shortest time, so that it is thought to happen in no time at all. In virtue of this faculty, certain people give warnings concerning significant future events.[308]

From the context, I assume Maimonides uses the two terms "conjecturing" and "divination" interchangeably and most probably employs them to talk about the same faculty. If that is the case, then we face a challenge here. The second part of his description reminds us of Ibn-Sina's formula in which the "quick wit" element (the power of *ḥads*) was said to play a decisive role in distinguishing common intelligence from the divinely endowed intellectual capability of a prophet.[309] However, there seems to be a

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[305] At the end of chapter 38, p. 378, he expresses his disdain for such soothsayers who think that "what they have seen in sleep is something else than the opinion that they believe in or that they had heard while awake. Therefore, one ought not to pay attention to one whose rational faculty has not become perfect and who has not attained the ultimate term of speculative perfection." In chapter 45, p. 397, he repeats the same idea: "not everyone who has seen a veridical dream is a prophet."

[306] the *Guide*, II:37, 374-5.

[307] Pines, following Munk, translates "*quwwat al-shuʿūr*" as the faculty of divination. Davidson, in *alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, chooses "intuition" as a better equivalent. Ibn Tibbon and Schwartz render it as "*kuakh mishʿar*" in Hebrew.

[308] the *Guide*, II:38, 376.

[309] See pp. 6-9 above for a closer study of faculty of "quick wit" from Ibn Sīnā's perspective. *Precipitance*, p.163, includes the Avicennian notion of *ḥads* as one of the few cases in which philosophers endorse the possibility of intellectual miracles: "The second is a special property belonging to the theoretical rational faculty. This pertains to the power of intuition [*quwwat al-ḥads*]—namely, the quick transition from one object of knowledge to another. For with many a quick-witted person, when a thing proved is mentioned to him, he [immediately] awakens to the proof [that led to the conclusion]; and, when the proof is mentioned, he by himself [immediately] awakens to what is proved…. Hence, it may well be the case that the intuition of a holy and pure soul would proceed uninterruptedly

misinterpretation occurs here in understanding the meaning of the Avicennian technical notion of *ḥads*.[310] The Arabic term primarily means conjecture, or a guess-work; what exactly the first part of Maimonides' depiction alludes to. The power of *ḥads* (in this day-to-day usage) then constitutes an individual's ability to make a guess drawing on insubstantial premises, hence depending on the individual's power of imagination.

But what Ibn Sīnā means by *ḥads* (as an endowed *intellectual* power) is an entirely different concept associated with the intellectual and not imaginative faculty or imagination. *Ḥads*, in Avicennian psychology, refers to the innate characteristic of very few potential intellects which enables the person to know the middle term of a syllogism very quickly and without any needs for contemplation. He can do so because the potential intellect is empowered with that gift which allows him to receive the middle terms from the Active Intellect without any great effort or needs for instruction.[311] Ibn Sīnā's definition of *ḥads* matches the second part of Maimonides' description, in which he talks about "the strength of this divination," the one. My conclusion is that Maimonides appropriated Ibn Sīnā's concept of *ḥads* under the new title, that is divination (*shuʿūr*).

Veracious dreams are, according to Maimonides, the cause of prophecy; or better said, these sorts of visions constitute the means through which a prophet "sees" what his imaginative faculty pictures out of the received emanation.[312] Epistemologically speaking, prophetic revelations and veridical dreams share the same source of emanating knowledge (*fayḍ*). Maimonides accordingly quotes a couple of dicta from Sages: "Dream is the unripe fruit [*nobeleth*] of prophecy;" "A dream is a sixtieth part of the prophecy." [313] The latter rabbinic statement bears a striking resemblance to what al-Ghazzālī quoted (as a ḥadīth) in his *Just*

[so as to grasp] all the intelligibles in the quickest of times. [The one endowed with such a soul] would thus be the prophet who [performs] a miracle relating to the theoretical faculty."

[310] Herbert Davidson questions Maimonides' genuine knowledge of philosophical literature in his rabbinic period (i.e. in the course of writing *Commentary on the Mishnah*, and *Mishneh Torah*) and even in his later period while he was writing the *Guide*. This can be a supporting example of Davidson's argument. See *Maimonides the Rationalist*, in specific chapters three and five.

[311] See p.8, last chapter.

[312] the *Guide*, II:36, 370.

[313] the *Guide*, II:36, 370.

Balance: "the [veracious] dream is a substratum [*juz ʾun*] of prophethood."[314] Or, in another variation, in *the Jewels of the Qurʾān,* he quotes the Prophet as saying: "A true dream is a forty-sixth part of prophethood."[315] Maimonides also agrees with al-Ghazzālī's stand on the ontological nature of the revelation and its shared quiddity with veracious dreams; their difference resides only in degree (intensity or weakness: *bi-l-ʾakthar wa al-ʾaqal*), not in kind (*bi al-nawʿ*).[316] Revelation is hence a form of dreaming in its highest degree of perfection and comes in the form of a perfect vision (*marʾeh*). The perfection is conditioned to and determined by the power of prophet's imaginative faculty which is an innate disposition. He nevertheless warns against the "diviners" whose rational faculty does not meet the highest degree of perfection. What such soothsayers vision in their dreams is nothing but their own imaginations. Therefore, one ought not to pay heed to their words.[317]

Maimonides establishes the dreams as the focal point and as the main principle for any non-mosaic prophecies: "it is known and established as a principle that no prophecy and no prophetic revelation come in any other way except *in a dream* [*fī ḥulmʾun*] or *in a vision* [*bi-l-mirʾāy al-nubuwwah*] and through the agency of an *angel*."[318] He repeats the same principle several times throughout the second part of the *Guide*.[319] That is the key to understand his hermeneutical method in dealing with biblical passages.

If *all* prophecies (for the exception of mosaic ones) came about in prophets' state of vision then, as he explicitly expresses, it should not be surprising to argue that the greater part of those visions are depicted

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[314] *al-qistās al-mustqīm*, ed. Beiju, 45. For a detailed discussion see p.21 the last chapter.

[315] *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān*. 49.

[316] the *Guide*, II:36, 370. The same notion and analogy is presented by Ibn Sīnā, al-Fārābī, and al-Ghazzālī. The latter expresses exactly the same analogy between the dreams and revelation. The current passage can rightly be regarded as a paraphrase of al-Ghazzālī's paragraph in *Kīmīyā* quoted and discussed in the last chapter, p.32.

[317] the *Guide*, II:38, 378.

[318] Ibid., II:41, 386.

[319] See, for instance, the beginning of chapter 42, p.388: "We have explained that wherever it is mentioned that an *angel* was seen or had spoken, this has happened only in a *vision of prophecy* or *in a dream* whether this is explicitly expressed or not." Or the beginning of chapter 44, p.394: "prophecy occurs only in a vision or in a dream, as we have already explained several times."

in the parable form.[320] The parables which their meanings "sometimes explicated to him [the prophet] in that very same *vision of prophecy*…. or whose meaning becomes known after one awakes."[321] The reason for that has already been discussed. The imaginative faculty, upon receiving the overflow from the intellect, designates the closest equivocal term it can to the perception emanated and that creates the whole structure of the allegoric revelation.[322]

That theoretical framework gives Maimonides the platform to argue for degrees of prophecy. At its primary stage, some righteous people might receive help from God through the spirit of the Lord (*rūḥ Allah*) but "just as not everyone who has seen a veridical dream is a prophet, not everyone who has received divine help" can be rightly called a prophet.[323] If one talks through the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudus*) and that gives him the power to speak wisdom, like David's *Psalms* or Solomon *Proverbs*, this can neither be called pure prophecy as they did not beget prophetical visions. The minimum requirement for a vision to qualify it as a revelation is its manifestation in the dream of prophecy (*al-ḥulm li-l-nubuwwah*). Any voices heard, individuals viewed (including angels), or parables observed during this state are considered true revelation by Maimonides.[324] Yet one should take note that contrary to what the multitude may think, all these sorts of actions, voices, and visions could not have occurred in the reality of external world observable to our external senses.[325]

Maimonides' concluding words at the end of his discussion on the prophecy (in the second part of the *Guide*) read as follows. Words of the prophets should be carefully dealt with having the touchstone of a demonstration at hand since the use of figurative language is very much frequent in the Scripture given the nature of prophetic visions and the role of imaginative faculty therein. Every statement ought to be

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[320] the *Guide*, II:47, 407.
[321] Ibid., II:43, 391.
[322] Ibid., II:47, 407
[323] Ibid., II:45, 397.
[324] Ibid., II:45, 400-403.
[325] Ibid., II:46, 404.

examined prudently as it might have been uttered figuratively. The intellect remains the primary (and only) means by which one can distinguish between a parable, a hyperbole, or a simile in those texts and if not taken seriously, the misreading of the holy text may, at some occasions, even lead to infidelity.[326]

III.   Summary

Maimonides' offers two (sometimes mutually exclusive) theories of prophecy: halakhic and philosophical. It is not suggesting that his halakhic passages render totally devoid of any philosophical ideas or jargons and that his so-called rational arguments leave out apologetical biases in their entirety. In his halakhic approach, expanded and discussed best in his introduction to the *Seder Zera'im*, prophecy is viewed from a creedal and, more often than not, apological perspective. At stake in these passages is not a metaphysical description of prophecy, rather their ability to interpret Mosaic Law and their political role appear to be Maimonides' primary concern.

Al-Fārābīan intellectual model is very much followed and appropriated by Maimonides, in specific in the case of Mosaic prophecy. His relatively succinct statements in the introduction to *Pereq Ḥeleq* receive their due attention in the *Guide*, as he promised at the end of the introduction. Yet, another notion of prophecy (which can arguably be called his "mystical" definition of the phenomenon) emerges in the last quarter of the third part of the *Guide*.

The prophets, in this mystical view, are those who surpass these levels of intellectual perfection by attaining the "action" and love for the One. Here, again, we can see Maimonides' emphasize on the natural science as the gate, the prerequisite level, to learn about God's attributes and hence His existence:

> There are those who set their thought to work after having attained perfection in the divine science, turn wholly toward God, may He be cherished and held sublime, renounce what is other than He, and direct all the acts of their intellect toward an examination of the beings with a view to drawing from them proof with regard to Him, so as to know His governance of them in whatever way it is

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[326] the *Guide*, II:47, 408-9.

possible. These people are those who are present in the King's council. This is the rank of the prophets.[327]

This framework can also reconcile two seemingly contradictory roles Maimonides has taken: Maimonides the Halakhist vs. Maimonides the philosopher. He interprets Maimonides' movement from a much stronger Aristotelian stance, in *Commentary on the Mishnah* written in his thirties, to a skeptical one in the *Guide*, written in the last decade of his life, as a sign for the author's rejection of Ibn Bajja's elitist position. Unlike Ibn Bajja who advocates philosophers' separation from the multitude as the enactment of his perfection, from the skeptical perspective, Maimonides' contemplation led him to return to the masses. That is to say, when at the end of his intellectual journey Maimonides the philosopher comes to realize that he cannot gain the "true" knowledge of the divine, i.e. metaphysics, but can only reach to His creations, that very moment of disillusionment leads him back to the world, to the realm of Halakhah. Since the science of God's essence deems out of the reach of humanity, submission to the ritual acts seems suffice to gain the salvation. That is how Maimonides' halakhick works can go hand in hand with his philosophy, according to this skeptical reading. As Halbertal puts it: "It is the ideal of the contemplative life itself that leads the philosopher to action."[328]

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[327] the *Guide*, III:51, 620.
[328] *Maimonides*, 307.

Conclusion

In his comparison between al-Ghazzālī's hermeneutics in the *Niche of Lights* and Maimonides'

exegetical method in the *Eight Chapters*, Scott Girdner views the former's attitude as a "traditionalist

critique of rational discipline" and calls the latter's "a rationalist approach to tradition."[329] I hope I have

shown in the above that this view, and similar clichés, does not hold with many of al-Ghazzālī's passages in

which the rational theologian expresses his high heed for the role of intellect as the very *touch stone* to

evaluate the credibility of any literal readings of the sacred tradition.[330] His critique of the *falāsifa* as well as

his theology are very much in line with his appreciation of the intellect as the backbone of his cosmology,

ontology, and hermeneutics. I have argued and showed that the fundamentals of his theory of prophecy

draw on the basics of Farabian-Avicennian formula.[331] His invariable warnings on the heedless divulgence

of the "secrets" to the uneducated vulgar led to his formulation of a specific interpretive tool, *taʾwīl*, which

came to function not only as his yard-stick to distinguish between faithful vs. apostate Muslims, but also to

justify his own mystical interpretations.

Maimonides, on the other hand, pays his intellectual debt to the "second teacher" overtly by naming

him several times, in specific in the *Guide*. He does not try to conceal his reliance on the philosophical

tradition in the Islamic world. He shares the same sociological concerns with al-Ghazzālī when it comes to

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[329] "Ghazālī's Hermeneutics and Their Reception in Jewish Tradition," 253. Cf. Herbert Davidson, *Maimonides the Rationalist*, 3. Davidson challenges one of the most popular assumptions which has been circulated for centuries: Maimonides the Jewish (Medieval) *philosopher*. He questions the appropriate applicability of the term "philosopher" not only to talk about Maimonides, but also other Jewish thinkers who, Davidson believes, should rather be called "medieval Jewish *rationalists*, and not, narrowly, medieval Jewish *philosophers*." These Jewish rationalists, as Davidson sees them, cannot be deemed genuine philosophers in the strict sense of the term, and would rather belong to the camp of religious (Jewish) rationalists who, in their encounter with Greek philosophy, strive to (re-)establish the connection between foundations of Jewish faith and philosophical rationalism.
[330] See above notes 74, 75, 91, and 99.
[331] As Martin Whittingham and Alexander Treiger argue correctly, al-Ghazzālī's complex attitude towards Ibn Sīnā shows signs of both an adversary as well as a mentor. See Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qurʾān*, in specific pp.104-125 where he traces al-Ghazzālī's heavy reliance on Ibn Sīnā in the *Niche of Lights* & Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, in specific his discussion in the fourth chapter and pp. 79-81. See also conclusions to the two books.

the disclosure of obscure matters to the commoners. The burden of religious responsibility toward the common folks within the Jewish *kehilla* forces the rabbi to appropriate almost similar esoteric strategies. Moses' exceptional stature among the prophets illustrates an example of Maimonides' esoteric treatment of the texts. A detailed comparison between the two sages' approach to the topic of prophecy and the question of allegorical interpretation goes beyond the limits of this short study. Notwithstanding these limitations, a brief comparative assessment of their doctrines deems necessary at this point.

1- On the stature of the intellect in their epistemic scheme: al-Ghazzālī regards the intellect an essential, yet not the only, component of religious faith, but it constitutes a ladder to reach the "light" beyond it. His mystical school of thought is not by any means anti-rational, nonetheless, he recognizes the limits of the intellectual endeavour. Within this framework, he views the *falāsifa*'s sole dependence on the supremacy of the intellect vis-à-vis the authority of the revealed sacred tradition problematic. The light of intellect illuminates our path to the gnosis and at some point on, the true Light guides us beyond the realm of duality. Maimonides, on the other hand, respects the intellect as the most honourable means humanity has in reach to cognize the cosmos (viz. God's actions and attributes). Nothing exists beyond the intellectual comprehension. It follows that we cannot ever fathom God's essence, hence his negative theology.

2- Regarding the cosmological definition of prophecy: al-Ghazzālī relies much more on the Avicennian analogy of the prophecy vs. dreams while Maimonides' theory draws mainly on the Fārābian (neo-) Platonic intellectual emanationism. While the Muslim theologian derives his intellectual-Sufi paradigm from Ibn Sīnā's notion of *ḥads* (quick wit), the Jewish rabbi focuses on the concept of the philosopher-king in Fārābī's *Perfect State*. In that respect, al-Ghazzālī's theory tends to be a response to his pursuit for a personal spiritual perfection

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whereas Maimonides' whose priority in the well-being of the Jewish community give rise to a social view of the prophet. Although Maimonides' very last chapters of the *Guide* allude to his mystical tendencies, his overall approach proves to be devoid of any mystical declinations. The ultimate goal of human being and the meaning of felicity in their views follow the same rule. Al-Ghazzālī summarizes his view in the *Niche of Lights* where he defines the ultimate goal of any individual to be his ascendance to the realm of pure singularity and hence his annihilation in/with the One. Unlike Maimonides' Farabian concept which dictates the outmost journey of humanity to be his intellectual conjunction with the Active Intellect; the conjunction which is the sole anchor to evade soul's perishment after the demise of the corporeal body.

3- The significance of *taʾwīl* as a hermeneutical methodology: For al-Ghazzālī, the allegorical interpretation (analogous to the science of dream interpretation) discloses the reality of meanings by piercing the curtains of the outward layers. The rigorous technique, however, demands mastery of both the sciences of this world (i.e. *tafsir*, *fiqh*, *kalām*, etc.) and that of the other (i.e. Sufism). The analogous correspondence between the worlds makes underlies his theoretical formula. His five-level-reality-chart paves the way for endorsement of the mystical realities *and*, simultaneously, maintaining the validity of the outward meanings (which deem necessary for the accountability of the Law). Maimonides' primary concern in regards to esotericism does not have, contrary to al-Ghazzālī, a mystical feature. His pessimistic view of the multitude relies mainly on his belief in their inability to comprehend the depth of natural sciences ("the Account of the Beginning") and the divine sciences (i.e. metaphysics) ("the Account of the Chariot"). He thus utilizes the allegorical interpretation principally as a pedagogical feature in the *Guide of the Perplexed* and his other philosophical passages to disclose some elements of these hidden sciences in the Torah and words of the Sages. On the

other passages, dealing mainly with the Law and with the commoner reader in mind, Maimonides, relatively akin to his Muslim counterpart, applies *taʾwīl* as an apologetical practice to defend rabbinical Judaism against rival schools.

The last, but not least, theme I would like to bring forth as a suggestion for future studies is on the possible influence of al-Ghazzālī on Maimonides. We do not have a substantial proof for Maimonides' reading of al-Ghazzālī's works.[332] But very few would disagree with Shlomo Pines's remark regarding Maimonides' unlikely unfamiliarity with al-Ghazzālī and, in particular, his *Precipitance*: "No philosopher who wished to keep abreast of the intellectual debate of this period could have afforded not to have done so [namely, reading al-Ghazzālī's works, in particular his *Tahafut*]; and such a lacuna in Maimonides' knowledge of Arabic theological literature would have been most uncharacteristic."[333] Pines's reasonable doubt stems from three main observations: firstly Maimonides' Islamicate intellectual environment, his marked knowledge of Islamic philosophy and theology; secondly his acquaintance with Averroes (d. 1198)[334] whose *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* constitutes the most comprehensive refutation to al-Ghazzālī's Precipitance, and thirdly scattered passages in the *Guide* which, as Pines reads them, can allude to themes or theological discussions very similar to that of al-Ghazzālī.[335]

As a side note here, I would like to add to the list of possible "intermediators" between Maimonides and al-Ghazzālī two names: 1) Jewish theologian, Yehuda ha-Levi (d. 1141) who was probably "quite

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[332] Herbert Davidson questions Maimonides' knowledge of Kalam as well as philosophical literature. Maimonides' philosophical scheme, according to Davidson, was rather shaped by his reading Arabic Aristotelian works of al-Fārābī and al-Ghazzālī. For more details see Maimonides the Rationalist, 84-90.

[333] Shlomo Pines, *The Guide of Perplexed*, cxxvii. His relatively long introduction to his English translation is entitled "The Philosophical Sources of the *Guide of the Perplexed*."

[334] On Maimonides' familiarity with Averroes see Pines's introduction to the *Guide*, cviii & Herbart A. Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 108-113. Both Pines and Davidson conclude that there is no evidence to assume Maimonides had read Averroes' commentaries before or during his writing the *Guide*. See also Steven Harvey, "Maimonides' Letter to Samuel Ibn Tibbon;" in particular p. 60, n. 29 in which Harvey, like many others, infers from other sources that Maimonides must have read al-Ghazzālī despite the fact that his name was never mentioned anywhere in Maimonides' works.

[335] See Pines, Introduction to the *Guide*, cxxvi-cxxxi. Regarding the third factor, Pines provides his reader with only one overarching example, that is, al-Ghazzālī's definition of God's free volition vis-à-vis philosophers' God of Neoplatonist Aristotelian causal modality. Drawing on the same issue, Pines maintains, Maimonides discusses the concept of "particularization" (*takhṣīṣ*) (*Guide* I:74) drawing on al-Ghazzālī's *Tahafut*.

familiar" with Ghazzalian theology and "draws heavily" on his works,[336] and, in turn, had his imprint on Maimonides' philosophy;[337] 2) Spanish Muslim philosopher, Ibn Bajja (d. 1138) whose been cited explicitly in the *Guide* several times and his name is also mentioned in Maimonides' letter to Ibn Tibbon.[338]

Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, whose pioneer study of al-Ghazzālī's Arabic writing style and language[339] opened a new avenue in the English scholarship decades ago, concludes in her concise article that Maimonides *must have* had read al-Ghazzālī.[340] Her later study which focuses on tracing possible affinities between Maimonides' thought in his Arabic literary style does not lend itself to a positive conclusion regarding a specific trace of Ghazalian writing within Maimonides' Arabic works. Most recently, Tzvi Langermann calls into question these assumptions in his article "Al-Ghazālī's Purported 'influence' on Maimonides"[341] and denies the existence of any substantial evidences to support such an influence. The topic seems to deserve further and more scrutinized study in the future studies on Maimonides and/or al-Ghazzālī.

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[336] Barry S. Kogan, "Al-Ghazali and Halevi on Philosophy and the Philosophers," 60. Studies which address the question of relationship between al-Ghazzālī and ha-Levi are very few and far between. Kogan focuses primarily on only one aspect of the issue, that is, how the two sages view philosophy. The first modern piece I could find on the relationship between al-Ghazali and ha-Levi was David Zvi Baneth, "Judah Halevi and al-Ghazali" which appeared for the first time in German as "Jehuda Hallewi und Gazali" and later a Hebrew translation in *Keneset*, vol.7 (1941), and eventually its English version, "Judah Halevi and al-Ghazali." See also Diana Lobel, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy*, in which she touches upon the mystical aspect of that, but does not examine other dimensions of the connection in a great depth.

[337] Pines' introduction to the *Guide*, cxxxiii. See also Howard Kreisel, "Judah Halevi's Influence on Maimonides."

[338] For more details on Ibn Bajja and Maimonides' letters see above, note 6. For the relationship between Ibn Bajja's thoughts and the *Guide*, see Pines, Introduction to the *Guide*, ciii-cviii & Herbert Davidson, *Moses Maimonides*, 113-115 & Howard Kreisel, *Maimonides' Political Thought*, 142-145 & Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides*, 306-310. For a summary of discussions on Maimonides' "skeptical" doctrine, which is directly drawn on an Ibn Bajja's quotation from al-Fārābī, see Josef Stern, *The Matter and Form*, 132-148 & Herbert Davidson, *Maimonides*, 173-211.

[339] *Studies in Al-Ghazzali* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1975).

[340] "Was Maimonides Influenced by al-Ghazali?" [Hebrew], *Tehillah le-Moshe*.

[341] His article has not been published yet, he shared a copy of that with me via e-mail. The full title reads: "Al-Ghazālī's Purported 'Influence' on Maimonides: A Dissenting Voice in Trending Scholarship." He has a three-part video podcast on this theme at this address: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cgrc_45Ebls.

Appendix A.

Frank Griffel questions the long-lasted consensus on al-Ghazzālī's birth year (450 AH. /1058-9 CE.).[342] He maintains that al-Ghazzālī must have been born two to four years earlier than the widely-accepted date, 1058. Alexander Treiger, following Girffel's lead, sets forth 447/1055-6 as a more accurate date for al-Ghazzālī's birth year.[343] To this end, both Griffel and Treiger draw on al-Ghazzālī's Persian letters (*Faḍāʾil al-ʾanām min Risāʾil Ḥujjat al-Islām/Makātib-i Fārsī-i Ghazzali*), in specific the first letter in this collection.[344] Al-Ghazzālī wrote this letter to Sultan Aḥmad Sanjar (r.1097-1157) as an "excuse note" hoping that the sultan would pardon him from presence before the court-- the excuse which was not granted and al-Ghazzālī eventually had to go to the court to defend himself against accusations. In the letter, writing about himself in the third person, al-Ghazzālī portrays a man of fifty-three-year-old who managed to keep his vow at *Ibrāhīm-i khalīl*'s grave (in *Bayt al-Maqdis* in Dhū l-Qaʿda 489) for twelve years: "not to appear in the court of any sovereign, not to accept money from them, and not to engage in public disputes anymore."[345] If the year in which al-Ghazzālī wrote this letter could be figured out, hence his birth year.

Griffel and Treiger took two different paths to estimate the date of its writing. Whereas Griffel, who focuses on the phrase "for twelve years" to solve the puzzle, Treiger refers to an external historical record to estimate the date for "Nīshāpūr controversy" during which al-Ghazzālī supposedly wrote the letter. According to Garden, the controversy is said to have occurred in 500 /1106-7, and this amounts to Treiger's dating.[346]

I found Griffel's reasoning being laid on a shaky basis for two reasons: 1) in the abovementioned letter, al-Ghazzālī, talking about himself in the third person, uses simple past tense to say how he managed

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[342] See Frank Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 23-25.
[343] *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, 121, n.49
[344] Qurbānyān's edition, 45-49
[345] *Makātib-i Fārsī*, 48.
[346] Kenneth Garden, "Al-Māzarī al-Dhakī," 102.

to keep his vow for twelve years: "*va davāzdah sāl bidīn ʿahd vafā kard*" (and for twelve years [he; viz. al-Ghazzālī] remained faithful to his vow." There is no syntactic, neither contextual, a reason to assume, as Griffel did, that al-Ghazzālī meant here that the twelve-year span ended at the date the letter was written. Al-Ghazzālī is basically saying that he kept his vow for twelve years, but nothing here is said about when it started and till when he managed to keep it. 2) I could spot two other places in this collection of Persian letters where he talks about the "twelve years." In the first one, he spells out the month and year the span came to an end: "And it came to happen, during the months of the year 499 (*sani-i tisʿa wa tisʿīn wa arbaʿ miʾa*) when the author of these words *twelve years after he had taken seclusion* was compelled to move to Nīshāpūr and obliged to begin teaching science (*ʿilm*) and to spread (the words of) *Shariʿa*."[347] Here, al-Ghazzālī sets the beginnings of twelve-year span in 487 and its end, with his return to teaching in Nīshāpūr, in 499. However, as Griffel has correctly noted, this dating is problematic.[348] As we know, according to the *Deliverer*, al-Ghazzālī left Baghdad in *Dhū l-Qaʿda* 488 and therefore his seclusion could not have begun in 487. In the second place where I spotted the phrase "twelve years," al-Ghazzālī depicts those years in a very similar manner as he had done in the first one. The only additional information is that he mentions the name of *Fakhr al-Mulk* (Sanjar's vizier) followed by "*raḥmat-u-llāh ʿalaih*" which means that the letter was written after the vizier's assassination in 10 *Muḥarram* 500. It falls out of the scope of this study to explore the reason for these date discrepancies, but whatever it might be, it calls into question the reliability of these letters as an accurate source for dating al-Ghazzālī's date of birth.

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[347] *Makātib-i Fārsī*, 56.
[348] *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 51.

Appendix B

A note on al-Ghazzālī's "scepticism" and the meaning of certainty (*yaqīn*) in the *Revival*

In the *Revival*, The Book of Knowledge, al-Ghazzālī has a section on the significance and meaning of certitude (*yaqīn*) in which he explicates on the relationship between various types of certitude and prophecy. Since the discussions contribute to this study, I have attached a summary of that section as an appendix to the end of this section. I have already argued for a third notion of prophecy within Ghazzālīan corpus whereupon he casts doubt on the intellect's ability to comprehend those stages of prophetic perfection. My main goal here is to dismiss any sorts of claims for al-Ghazzālī's "scepticism" due to this third notion of prophecy.

As the following passages show, al-Ghazzālī cannot be viewed, epistemologically speaking, as a skeptic. He recognizes the validity of certainty even in metaphysical issues and believes that one can, for instance, prove the existence of God using demonstration or intellectual proofs. Hence a theoretical certainty is indeed within reach. Yet, at the same time, he maintains degrees of certitude in respect to "practical righteous" and mystical vision which is not conceivable (or "off the radar") by the intellect.

The term "certainty" (*yaqīn*) is an equivocal word with two closely related meanings each of which intended by a faction of people in its given context. Accordingly, al-Ghazzālī divides the term into two general categories regarding its application. From another perspective, he argues for three types or stages in *yaqīn* based on the level of its strength/weakness, abundance/scarcity, and disclosure/concealment.[349]

1- speculative thinkers (*al-nāẓirin*) and theologians (*al-mutakallimūn*) adopt *yaqīn* in its first meaning: "the absence of doubt in one's tendency towards verifying the truthfulness of a matter." Ghazzālī counts four levels for this first application: A) The state of absolute doubt (*al-shake*) in which a person cannot affirm or

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[349] Cf. López-Farjeat, "Al-Ghazzālī on Knowledge (*ʿilm*) and Certainty (*yaqīn*)" in which the same notions have been explored in *The Deliverer from Error* and the *Just Balance*.

deny either side of a given matter and as such his soul does not incline to either. B) The supposition (*al-ẓan*) whence one side comes to preponderate over the opposite in the eyes of the beholder; this preference does not, however, totally exclude the likelihood of the contrary, but preference is made drawing on a plain conjecture. C) The belief closest to *yaqīn* which characterizes the faith of the common folk and their beliefs in religious doctrines and revealed traditions. Merely based on hearsay, this state of mind is not an outcome of speculative reasoning and, if properly questioned, may yield to doubt. D) The real *yaqīn* which is the outcome of the true knowledge (*al-maʿrifah al-ḥaqīqīyya*) obtained either using demonstration (*al-burhān*), empirical experience, senses, or reports handed down through recurrent chains of transmission (*mutawātir*). For this type of knowledge can neither be doubted nor leaves any room for doubt in it, it necessarily leads to the absolute *yaqīn*. To give an example of how one can attain such a degree of certitude, Ghazzālī presents a concise version of Avicenna's "Demonstration of the Truthful" but in his own *kalām* settings.[350] At the end of this section al-Ghazzālī points to a significant reminder. He asserts that any type of cognition that leaves no place for doubt in one's soul can bring about *yaqīn* regardless of means or methodological ways the knowledge or cognition is obtained. Therefore, one cannot imagine intensity or weakness regarding this notion of *yaqīn* because "there is no difference in the negation of the doubt.[351]"

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[350] In the Avicennian argument, the existence of at least one necessary existent (*wājib al-wujūd*) vis-à-vis the existence of the body of contingents (*mumkin al-wujūd*) is demonstrated (*al-Ishārāt*, v.3, pp. 19-30; *The Metaphysics of* The Healing, 30-34; *Dānishnāmi-y ʿalāʾī*, 65-66). Following closely the Avicennian line of reasoning and structure, al-Ghazzālī replaces Avicenna's key terms with his own theological ones: *ḥādith* (occurrent) for contingent, and *qadīm* (anteriorly eternal) instead of necessary existent; therefore, proving the existence of at least one anteriorly eternal being (i.e. God).

[351] Al-Ghazzālī's position sounds indeed ambiguous and poses several problems here. On the one hand, this last note seems to suggest a sort of binary criterion for distinction between the possession of *yaqīn* or lack of it: upon receiving a cognition, you *either* find your soul doubtful regarding a matter's truthfulness *or* you do not. On the other, however, he crafts a detailed account of *gradual* levels one's soul goes through from the state of an absolute doubt to the so-called unreachable certainty. What does constitute, one should ask, the threshold of this last stage of *yaqīn*? Are there any grey zones between the doubt and certainty? The issue renders more problematic when al-Ghazzālī, besides demonstration (*burhān*), acknowledges empirical experiences, recurrent traditional/historical reports, and even the knowledge gained by senses as possible means of securing *yaqīn*. Had he limited the means of acquiring to demonstration, the passage could have been dealt with very similar to that of other medieval philosophers who followed Aristotelian logic; yet, here again, al-Ghazzālī breaks with the rule.

2- The application of the term "certainty" among the jurists, the Sufis, and the majority of scholars (*al-ʿulamāʾ*). This second definition of the term does not deal with the discussion of doubt or conjure in the face of intellectual speculations. At issue here, al-Ghazzālī maintains, is the dominance (*istīlāʾ*) of a belief over and its taking hold of (*ghalabih*) one's intellect and/or heart[352]. For instance, while no one suspects the reality of death and we all, at least theoretically, confirm its inevitability, a group of people pay a higher heed to it while many others are not so much "certain" of our final destination. This difference in this notion of "certainty" is reflected in the people's actions: some prepare themselves for the hereafter unlike others who ignore its advent. For al-Ghazzālī, while they all enjoy the same degree of certainty regarding the advent of death (in the first sense of the term), it is only the righteous believers who exhibit an actual *yaqīn* (in the second application of the term) in their lives. For this reason, it is said: "so and so has a weak certainty in death yet he has no doubt in it [that is, he is certain about it]." In other words, not everyone who possesses the "theoretical" *yaqīn* necessarily takes action accordingly and many may not end up having "faithful" *yaqīn*.[353] In this second sense of the term, *yaqīn* is subjected to various stages of strength, clarity, or richness because of its quality of dominance over the soul.

Having elaborated on the two meanings and various degrees of *yaqīn*, al-Ghazzālī goes on to make a connection between the notion of certainty and prophecy. He regards the prophets' entire mission as a "by-product" of *yaqīn*. For al-Ghazzālī, it tantamount to a specific recognition (*maʿrifah*) pertaining the knowledge through which the revealed laws have been handed down to us.[354] It is not only the means of transmission, but also qualifies one to secure his prophethood mission.

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[352] In these passages, al-Ghazzālī seems to be very much lenient regarding his terminology. At the beginning, he states that this second type of certitude denotes state of the intellect (al-ʿaql) in which it is been taken over and prevailed by the certitude. Yet, few sentences after that, he rephrases the same definition regarding the heart. Given that the intellect and the heart (*qalb*) convey two very distinctive notions (and often than not contradictory) in the Sufi literature.

[353] The phrases "theoretical certainty" vs. "faithful certainty" are not al-Ghazzālī's, but are my choices to elaborate the difference between the two applications of *yaqīn*.

[354] *Iḥyāʾ*, 88.

The passage in question can be read in a couple of ways which project very distinct notions of prophecy and the ways it is related to faithful certainty. Two critical phrases pose the main challenge in this regard: "*majārī al-yaqīn*" and "*mutiʿalliqi^h*." A literal rendering of al-Ghazzālī's first sentence can read: "All which the prophets—Allah's blessings and His peace be upon them-- brought down [to men] from its beginning to its end, *huwa min majārī al-yaqīn*." Nabih Faris's translation: "what the prophets handed down belongs in its entirety to the means whereby the *yaqīn* is secured." My version, unlike Faris's, recognizes *yaqīn* as playing an active role in the process of revelation. Al-Ghazzālī perceives *yaqīn* in this passage not merely being secured by any means, but rather, it is through the channels of *yaqīn* that the prophets receive revealed law in its entirety. That is to say, the prophets may not receive any revelations until they obtain an appropriate level of certitude through which they comprehend the realities of the Hidden World. Al-Ghazzālī's following sentence in the passage reinforces my reading. "Thus, *yaqīn* is an expression of specific recognition and *mutiʿalliqi^h* are the knowledge through which the revealed laws have been transmitted." *mutiʿalliqi^h* means, literally, "the things connected to it" or, as Faris puts it, "its [*yaqīn*'s] appurtenance." Yet, *mutiʿalliqi^h* means more accurately "the objects of *yaqīn*," namely, what this specific recognition (i.e., *yaqīn*) brings about is the knowledge through which the revealed laws are transmitted. Here, again, *yaqīn* underlies revelation and its subsequent knowledge.

Appendix C

A short note on some inconsistencies in Pines's English translation of the *Guide*[355]

Obviously, Pines in his famous English translation of the *Guide* was very much influenced by Munk's French translation of the Jeduo-Arabic text; Munk, in turn, had followed Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation very closely. While this strategy did have fruitful results (i.e. their standard English and French translations), reading their translations without having the original Judeo-Arabic text in view can sometimes be misleading. Following is one of the examples I have come across in Pines's translation so far, which I find very much problematic:

In the introduction to the first part of the *Guide*, Maimonides elaborates on his motifs to compose such a book. On his second goal he writes:

- «وتضمنت هذه المقالة غرضاً ثانياً وهو تبيين *أمثال خفية* جداً جاءت في كتب الأنبياء ولم يصرَّح بأنها مثل.»[356]

- "This Treatise also has a second purpose: namely, the explanation of very *obscure parables* occurring in the books of the prophets, but not explicitly identified there as such."[357]
- "Ce traité a encore un deuxième but: c'est celui d'expliquer des allégories très *obscures* qu'on rencontre dans les livres des prophètes sans qu'il soit bien clair que ce sont des allegories."[358]
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- 'וּבִכְלָל הַמַּאֲמָר הַזֶּה- כַּוָּנָה שְׁנִיָה, וְהִיא- בֵּאוּר מְשָׁלִים *סְתוּמִים* מְאֹד, שֶׁבָּאוּ בְסִפְרֵי הַנְּבִיאִים...'[359]

Maimonides in this sentence does not mean to say that the parables in question convey any sorts of ambiguity, as the term "obscure" suggests in Munk's and Pines's translations, rather, he talks about *hidden* messages these parables contain and can hence convey to the elite at the inward

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[355] See note 295 above for another example of Pines' inaccurate translation.
[356] Ḥusain ʾAtāy's critical Arabic edition, Beirut 2011, 34. My emphasis.
[357] Pines's English translation, Chicago 1963, 6. My emphasis.
[358] Munk's French version, Paris 1856, 8. My emphasis.
[359] Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew version, Jerusalem 2000, ה. My emphasis.

level. Obviously, the two western translations followed Ibn Tibon's choice (i.e. *stumim*) which suggests the notion of vagueness and uncertainty.

Three notes on my suggestion: firstly, the original Arabic term *khafiyyah* (kh.f.y) denotes primarily secrecy and hiddenness not obscurity. From the same root we have the adjective *makhfiyy* (secret, hidden), and the noun *ikhtifāʾ* (the state of being invisible, hiddenness). Secondly, following the very same sentence, Maimonides goes on to distinguish between two layers of meaning when it comes to the parables in the books of prophets— his reference to the famous dichotomy of outward (*ẓāhir*) vs. inward (*bāṭin*) is significant and should not be overlooked:

«بل يبدو للجاهل و الذاهل أنها على *ظاهرها* و لا *باطن* فيها، فإذا تأملها العالم بالحقيقة و حملها على ظاهرها، حدثت له أيضاً حيرة شديدة.»[360]

"Hence an ignorant or heedless individual might think that they possess only an external sense, but no internal one. However, even when one who truly possesses knowledge considers these parables and interprets them according to their external meaning, he too is overtaken by great perplexity."

Miamonides returns to this internal vs. external dichotomy at the end of his introduction in the parable of golden apple overlaid with silver filigree-work.

Thirdly, Maimonides uses another term (*al-ghāmiḍ* pl. *al-ghawāmiḍ*) to talk about the obscurity of matters:

- "بل القصد هنا فهم *الغوامض* بلا شك."[361]

  - "Rather what this text has in view here is, without any doubt, the understanding of *obscure matters*."[362]

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[360] Ḥusain ʾAtāy's Arabic critical edition, 34.
[361] Ḥusain ʾAtāy's Arabic critical edition, 40. My emphasis.
[362] Pines's English translation, 11. My emphasis.

- "bien au contraire, on avait ici pour but, sans doute, l'intelligence des choses profonds."[363]

- 'אֲבָל הַכַּוָּנָה הִיא-- הֲבָנָה הָעֲמֻקוֹת וְהַסְּתוּמוֹת, בְּלֹא סָפֵק'.[364]

Pines translates *al-ghawāmiḍ*, rightly here, to obscure matters, but he fails to maintain constancy in his translations, and moreover, in my view, his translation is at some points misleading.

To make sure, I checked Michael Schwartz's modern Hebrew translation. His choice for the first phrase (*amthāl al-khafiyyah*) is משלים נסתרים. And he renders the second one (*al-ghawāmiḍ*) to הדברים העמוקים which is very close to Ibn Tibbon's as well as Munk's.

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[363] Munk's French version, Paris 1856, 18. My emphasis.
[364] Ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation, י. My emphasis

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