

Aḥmad Zarrūq and the Ashʿarite school

by
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ABSTRACT

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Ashʿarite theology in and after the 7th/13th century has received little attention in studies of Islamic theology and philosophy. Works like the commentary of the Moroccan ṣūfī Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493) on the creed found in the *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) are unknown to historians of Sunnī theology. A close analysis of the sources used by Zarrūq in his commentary reveals a unique concern with mystical as well as theological subjects. As a result, Zarrūq displays an anachronistic preference for early Ashʿarite themes while also shying away from involved philosophical discussion which typifies later Ashʿarite *kalām*. Nevertheless, Zarrūq's commentary does demonstrate the challenges posed by the two drastically different faces of Ashʿarism and how each individual scholar, based on his particular interests and concerns, chose to harmonize these discordant sources.

RÉSUMÉ

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La théologie Ash'arite après le VIIe/XIIIe siècle avait été reçue peu d'attention dans les études sur la théologie et la philosophie islamique. Les travaux comme le commentaire du sufie Marocain Aḥmad Zarrūq (m. 899/1493) sur *Les fondations de la foi (Qawā'id al-ʿAqā'id)* d'al-Ghazālī (m. 505/1111) dans le *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* sont inconnus aux historiens de la théologie sunnite. Une analyse des sources utilisés par Zarrūq dans son commentaire indique un intérêt unique aux sujets, en même temps, mystique et théologique. En conséquence, Zarrūq montre une préférence anachronique pour les thèmes de la nascent-école Ash'arite. En outre, il évite les discussions philosophiquement rigoureuses qui caractérisent le *kalām* Ash'arite post-Ghazālīen. Néanmoins, le commentaire de Zarrūq démontre des défis posés par les deux visages très différents de l'Ash'arisme et la façon dont tout savant musulman, basé sur ses intérêts particulières, a choisi d'harmoniser ces sources discordants.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
RÉSUMÉ	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	5
INTRODUCTION	6
CHAPTER I	11
CHAPTER II	41
CHAPTER III	66
CONCLUSION	103
BIBLIOGRAPHY	124

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INTRODUCTION

Aḥmad Zarrūq (d. 899/1493) has only recently been the object of serious scrutiny in research on North African mysticism. During his life, Zarrūq was a keen and sensitive historian of North African social and intellectual history. Consequently, much of the scholarly interest in Zarrūq has been limited to his historical observations and social commentary.¹ Indeed, spread throughout his many works, Zarrūq provides invaluable first-hand accounts of the ferment of 9th/15th century Moroccan and North African society.² Aḥmad Zarrūq has also been over-shadowed by the mammoth figure of Muḥammad ibn Sulayman al-Jazūlī (d. 870/1465).³ As a result of his role as a mere observer of the events surrounding the life and death of al-Jazūlī, Zarrūq was only recently the primary subject of a substantial study.

Zarrūq was rarely appreciated in his own right as a figure deserving greater attention by historians, but, being a discriminating and prodigious writer, Zarrūq's works are cited frequently because of their rich historical content. Khushaim's *Zarrūq the Ṣūfī* was the first significant contribution in a European language devoted exclusively to the life and work of Aḥmad Zarrūq.⁴ Zeinab Istrabadi's translation of Zarrūq's *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf* (The Principles of

¹ For example, see Mercedes García-Arenal, "The Revolution of Fas in 869/1465 and the death of Sultan 'Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Marīnī," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 41 (1978): 54-58.

² Vincent Cornell in his *Realm of the Saint*, which is discussed below, cites Zarrūq's historical accounts extensively; Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin: Texas University Press, 1999).

³ "Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Jazūlī was the most important mystico-religious figure in 15th and 16th century in Morocco"; see Mercedes García-Arenal, "Mahdī, Murābiṭ, Sharīf: l'avènement de la dynastie sa'adienne," *Studia Islamica* 71 (1990): 83.

⁴ Ali Fahmi Khushaim, *Zarrūq the Ṣūfī, A Guide in the Way and a Leader to the Truth: A Biographical and Critical Study of a Mystic from North Africa* (Tripoli: General Company for Publications, 1976).

Ṣūfism) stands as a significant contribution to furthering our understanding of his thought.⁵ Vincent Cornell's insightful *Realm of the Saint* has been the most important book to encourage further research into Aḥmad Zarrūq as a scholar worthy of substantive consideration. Though not chiefly concerned with Aḥmad Zarrūq as such, this vast study of Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Jazūlī establishes Zarrūq as a formidable figure in the history of North African ṣūfism whose works were to have a lasting impact after his death. Most recently, Scott Kugle's Ph.D. dissertation on ṣūfism and society in North Africa and South Asia marks a major step forward.⁶ Drawing on a large collection of primary sources, many in manuscript, Kugle provides the fullest account of Zarrūq's life to date. His insightful analysis of many of Zarrūq's works in the context of his life will be a springboard for studies of other aspects of Zarrūq's thought.

All studies, whether primarily or secondarily concerned with Aḥmad Zarrūq, have focused on Aḥmad Zarrūq the ṣūfī. Whether in his role as historian, critic, commentator or reformer, Zarrūq has been approached within the larger context of Moroccan or North African ṣūfism. Consequently, his influence on the development of Islamic scholarship after him has been confined almost entirely to this realm. This study seeks to expand the scope of inquiry by taking Zarrūq beyond his paradigmatic role in North African ṣūfism. As much as Zarrūq was a unique scholar who stood alone among his peers (ostracized is more accurate), he

⁵ Zeinab S. Istrabadi, "The Principles of Ṣūfism (Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf): an annotated translation with introduction," (Ph.D. diss. Indiana University, 1998).

⁶ Scott Alan Kugle, "In Search of the Center: Authenticity, Reform and Critique in Early Modern Islamic Sainthood." Ph.D. diss. (Ann Arbor: UMI, 2006). The part of this dissertation dealing with Aḥmad Zarrūq was recently published as a monograph; see Scott Alan Kugle, *Rebel between Spirit and Law: Aḥmad Zarrūq, Sainthood and Authority in Islam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

was nevertheless a product of his time. Largely in reaction to the political, social and spiritual chaos and corruption and decay of 9th/15th Morocco, nearly all of Zarrūq's many writings reflect a concern with imbuing the formal Islamic sciences with the spirit of ṣūfism. At the same time, Zarrūq sought to reign in what he saw as mysticism-run-amok. Zarrūq, relentless in his caustic condemnation of corrupt and ignorant ṣūfis, devoted much of his scholarly efforts to establishing that the formal Islamic sciences such as *fiqh* are a necessary ingredient to the proper practice of *taṣawwuf*. Make no mistake, Zarrūq was a ṣūfī before he was a Mālikī faqīh or Ash'arite theologian. Yet, Zarrūq's commentary on the *Risālah* of Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996) is an authoritative work of the Mālikī *madhhab*. Though Zarrūq was not known as an authority in Ash'arite theology, he was in any case a perceptive and influential scholar of vast learning from whom valuable insights about larger trends in Islamic theology and Ash'arism in particular can be deduced.

While Zarrūq's commentary on the *Qawā'id al-ʿAqā'id* from the *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) reveals a heretofore unknown aspect of Aḥmad Zarrūq's thought, his commentary also poses some challenges when placed in the context of the Ash'arite theological tradition. The current history of Islamic theology suffers from a myopic view of post-Ghazālīan Ash'arism. Much has been said of the origins and the early history of the early Ash'arite school.⁷ In writing the school's history after al-Ash'arī, scholars have

⁷ The life and works of of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935) are well known; see William Montgomery Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1948), 135-164; W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology* (Edinburgh:

focused almost exclusively on the 150 or so years separating the lifetimes of the school's eponymous founder Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935) and of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), ignoring in the meantime nearly a millennium of later Ashʿarism.⁸ Due to the great emphasis placed on al-Ghazālī's influence on both theology and philosophy, scholars such as Zarrūq who followed al-Ghazālī are assumed to be mere ciphers of the earlier, great thinker in current literature on the history of Ashʿarism. With such intense focus on identifying the precise nature of al-Ghazālī's thought and impact on Islamic intellectual history, important figures such as Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawwānī (d. 908/1502-3) or even Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), who are perhaps more deserving of critical philosophical attention than Zarrūq is, are largely passed over. As a result, contemporary historical narratives of important trends in Ashʿarism, especially Ashʿarism after al-Ghazālī, are inadequate. This work intends to help remedy this

Edinburgh University Press, 1962), 82-90; W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Creeds: A Selection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 41-47; Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1986), 165-172; A. S. Tritton, *Muslim Theology* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1947), 166-190. For translations of his major works see Richard J. McCarthy, *The Theology of al-Ashʿarī* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953) and al-Ashʿarī, *Abu'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī's al-Ibānah ʿan uṣūl al-dīyānah* (*The Elucidation of Islam's Foundation*), trans. Walter C. Klein (New York: Klaus Reprints, 1967, [reprint ed.]). There is a gap between al-Ashʿarī's immediate students and the second generation Ashʿarites such as al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) and Abū Ishāq al-Isfarayīnī (d. 418/1027). Richard M. Frank's tireless efforts have revealed a great deal about the doctrine of the early Ashʿarite school from al-Ashʿarī to al-Ghazālī.

⁸ For example, and despite the best efforts of its author, A.J. Wensinck devotes very little time to theology after al-Ghazālī, and his conclusions about the trends in later Islamic theology being tentative at best; see A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (New Delhi: New Delhi Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, 1979 [reprint ed.]), 274-276. Watt notes in his *Islamic Creeds* that there "has been little study of Islamic theology in the centuries since al-Ghazālī"; Watt, *Islamic Creeds*, 11. In his *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, Watt notes that that our understanding of Sunni theology from the period of 1100 to 1250 is "like an early nineteenth century map of Africa"; Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 125. As a result, any study of later Ashʿarism is unable to make statements about general trends. Thus, they are forced to give no more than a list of later Ashʿarites and brief descriptions of their most famous works; e.g. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 153-157; Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, 371-378.

situation by extrapolating larger historical trends in the development of later Ash'arism from characteristics of Aḥmad Zarrūq's commentary.

Zarrūq's commentary on al-Ghazālī's *Qawā'id al-ʿAqā'id* is inspired by uniquely personal motives derived from events in Moroccan history which left an indelible impression on his mind. In addition, the education which Zarrūq received in his youth and the ṣūfī reform to which he devoted his scholarly acumen is manifest in this commentary. Zarrūq's approach to theology is unlike many of his Ash'arite predecessors in that ṣūfism is as important, if not more important, to the ideas expressed in the commentary as theology. This means two things: one, that Zarrūq cites scholars normally associated with ṣūfism in his explication of questions normally considered proper to theology. More than this, Zarrūq's belief that ṣūfism is the true path to success, inwardly and outwardly, substantially affects how he resolves theological debates. Many of the most contentious debates which preoccupied the minds of some of Islam's greatest scholars—both predecessors and contemporaries of Zarrūq—are hardly considered. Zarrūq certainly follows al-Ghazālī in his opinion that ṣūfism, not *kalām*, is the path to true knowledge of God. What is more, Zarrūq seems to believe that the highly philosophical debates that characterized Ash'arite *kalām* after al-Ghazālī, and especially after Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, were of little practical use to the Muslim scholar of his era. Instead, Zarrūq chose to embed his commentary with interpretations derived strictly from ṣūfī sources. Ultimately, it seems that Zarrūq's loyalties to *taṣawwuf* drove him to favor pre-Ghazālīan Ash'arism or the Ash'arism of the *Ihyā'* over post-Ghazālīan Ash'arism.

CHAPTER I

One of the most difficult questions to answer with regard to this commentary is simply why Aḥmad Zarrūq wrote it in the first place. The question, as with all questions about motives, is not trivial, since the answer reveals a great deal about Aḥmad Zarrūq the scholar and about Ashʿarite theology in its later manifestations. What makes our answer to this question difficult is that Aḥmad Zarrūq lived in a rich and dynamic period in Moroccan history and due to his role as a reformer of šūfism and society, social variables must be taken into account.⁹ Zarrūq's motives for writing this commentary do not appear to be purely doctrinal. Thus our answers to this "why" must take into consideration Aḥmad Zarrūq's early education, the scholarly environment in which he was raised, his pursuits as a mature scholar and šūfī and finally the larger social environment in which he lived and wrote.

Political and social turmoil profoundly affected Zarrūq as a scholar and it seems to have had deep religious implications for him. Two events particularly troubled Zarrūq: the disposition and murder in Fez of ʿAbd al-Ḥaqq II, the last Marinid sultan in 870/1465, and the bloody, twenty-year rampage of the Jazūlite šūfī imposter ʿUmar ibn Sayyāf al-Mughīṭī (d. 890/1484).¹⁰ Though it would be absurd to claim that these two events alone shaped Aḥmad Zarrūq's attitudes toward šūfism, they are representative of many of the problems that afflicted 15th

⁹ Kugle, "In Search of the Center," 205-286.

¹⁰ Al-Mughīṭī's violent rebellion began after the death of al-Jazūlī, the former's spiritual master. Al-Mughīṭī was killed twenty years later in 890/1484; see Aḥmad Zarrūq, *Kunnāsh fī ʿilm Ash* [photocopy] (mss. Rabat: KhA 1385 k), 66-67. Hereafter *Kunnāsh*. Many thanks to Professor Fredrick Colby who provided me with a copy of this manuscript.

century Morocco. At the very least, these were two major episodes in Moroccan history that probably left enduring impressions on Zarrūq.

The full details of °Abd al-Ḥaqq II's murder need not be repeated here.¹¹

Rather, a basic outline of the story will be supplied as a starting-point:

[A]fter getting rid of the Banū Wattās in 1458, °Abd al-Ḥaqq selected a Jew called Hārūn as his new vizier. This Hārūn appointed to positions of importance another Jew or Jews who ruled and oppressed people, crushing them with taxes from which not even the shurafā° were exempt.

They ruled despotically, in disregard of Islam, and acted as sultan on the occasions when °Abd al-Ḥaqq had to be away from Fās.

On one of these occasions a Jewish governor insulted a sharīfī lady when collecting taxes, to the extent of beating her and increasing his violence when she invoked the Prophet.

When the khaṭīb of the Qarawiyyīn, °Abd al-°Azīz ibn Mūsā al-Waryāghilī who had been preaching against the Jews knew of this event, he incited the people to rise. Under his leadership, the mob sacked the Mellāh, massacred its population, and took the palace, electing Muḥammad ibn °Imrān al-Jūtī [...].

When °Abd al-Ḥaqq came back to Fās, he was taken prisoner and then executed, sacrificed like a sheep at the °Īd al-Adḥā.¹²

Abū °Abdullāh Muḥammad al-Qawrī, the senior scholar and *muftī* of Fez, opposed the rebellion on legal grounds.¹³ Zarrūq had immense respect for al-Qawrī's learning and spirituality and likely followed his mentor in his objection that the rebellion was illegal according to Sacred Law. Al-Qawrī only issued a *fatwā* sanctioning the rebellion against the sultan and the sacking of the Jewish quarter when threatened with death. Zarrūq was not a scholar of great prestige and so his legal advice was not sought. Nevertheless, Zarrūq was apparently well-known enough that he seems to have payed a price for his vocal opposition to the al-Waryāghilī-inspired mayhem and slaughter. Though Zarrūq makes no

¹¹ For a full account of the events see García-Arenal, "Revolution of Fās," 43-66.

¹² This is García-Arenal's summary of the incident which she calls the "standard interpretation" of the revolution in textbooks of Moroccan history. This narrative is repeated in the histories of modern authors such as H. Terrasse's *Histoire du Maroc* and L. Massignon's *Le Maroc dans les premières années of the XVI^e siècle*; see García-Arenal, "Revolution of Fās," 45.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 46.

mention of any of these events in his autobiography, other evidence suggests that Zarrūq was seen by the rebels as sympathetic to the Jews and was thus forced out of Fez in 870/1465.¹⁴ Though Zarrūq returned to Fez after his visit to Abū Madyan's tomb with al-Zaytūnī's blessing, Zarrūq did not remain in Fez very much longer: al-Qawrī died in 872/1468 and Zarrūq left for Mecca and Egypt a year later.¹⁵ Though Zarrūq was to return in 879-880/1474-1475, he left Fez permanently soon after a rather ignominious homecoming.¹⁶

Two details about this incident are important for our purposes. One, as was indicated above, Zarrūq opposed the rebellion on legal grounds, not because he supported Sultan °Abd al-Ḥaqq II. It is highly unlikely that Zarrūq would have supported a person whose road to power was littered with Wattāsi corpses unless there were other, higher considerations.¹⁷ Not only did al-Qawrī and Zarrūq consider the rebellion illegal but Zarrūq, in defending his quietism, considered the rebellion a grave threat to Moroccan society: "To keep the Muslims united and strong in the face of their enemy they have to obey their Princes and King."¹⁸ The "enemy" Zarrūq is referring to here was, of course, the Portuguese and Spanish armies who were successfully occupying major Moroccan seaports.¹⁹ Indeed, it is likely that this whole affair should be viewed in the context of the tax increases

¹⁴ Ibid., 56. In the *Kunnāsh* Zarrūq clearly indicates that the reason he left Fez was because of a misunderstanding between him and his spiritual master al-Zaytūnī. What allows room for speculation is that throughout Zarrūq's trip to Abū Madyan's tomb, he is oddly accused of being a Jew wherever he goes. This could be Zarrūq's elliptical reference to this entire episode. See Zarrūq, *Kunnāsh*, 67; see also Kugle, "In Search of the Center," 108-109.

¹⁵ Ibid.; Kugle, "In Search of the Center," 135.

¹⁶ García-Arenal, "Revolution of Fās," 56; Khushaim, *Zarrūq the Ṣūfī*, 23.

¹⁷ García-Arenal, "Revolution of Fās," 44.

¹⁸ Khushaim, *Zarrūq the Ṣūfī*, 16.

¹⁹ García-Arenal, "Revolution of Fās," 44, n. 5.

needed to pay for defenses against Christian marauders. Thus, Zarrūq saw this rebellion not only as a contravention of Sacred Law but also considered this chaos a threat to Islam itself. The threat posed to Morocco and to Islam by the Christian raiders was, for Zarrūq, a palpable reality: Zarrūq died the year after the completion of the Reconquista. For Zarrūq, Sacred Law meant more than rules about ritual purification and prayer. As a student of the faqīh and ṣūfī al-Qawrī, Zarrūq emphasized what he saw as the hidden wisdom of the Sacred Law and the dangers posed by contraventions of it.

In this narrative the figure of al-Waryāghilī is also of interest because he was, among other things, a ranking member among the Jazūlite ṣūfī brotherhood.²⁰ Though Zarrūq and his later followers admired al-Jazūlī himself,²¹ they disapproved of the ṣūfism espoused by al-Jazūlī and his successors and deemed the later Jazūlite shaykhs “quasi-heretical innovators.”²² As for Zarrūq, he is recorded by historians of the period as having refused to pray behind al-Waryāghilī in response to his part in the rebellion. Al-Waryāghilī’s status as a scholar was undeniable. Zarrūq admits that al-Waryāghilī was a faqīh, an eloquent preacher and was “strong and solid in Allāh’s religion.”²³ Khushaim notes that al-Waryāghilī was Aḥmad Zarrūq’s teacher.²⁴ Yet, Aḥmad Zarrūq refused to pray behind al-Waryāghilī and is recorded to have called the latter a rebel and a hypocrite (*ghandūr*) in response to his role in the rebellion against

²⁰ Ibid., 55.

²¹ Zarrūq refers to al-Jazūlī as “Our *Shaykh*, my master Muḥammad al-Jazūlī”; see Zarrūq, *Kunnāsh*, 66.

²² Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 159.

²³ García-Arenal, “Revolution of Fās,” 54.

²⁴ Khushaim, *Zarrūq the Ṣūfī*, 13.

°Abd al-Ḥaqq II al-Marīnī.²⁵ Clearly, Zarrūq was of the opinion that the ṣūfism of which al-Waryāghilī was a representative, namely that espoused by al-Jazūlī, was a flawed ṣūfism. Zarrūq disapproved of populist ṣūfī movements and al-Waryāghilī's behavior no doubt solidified in Zarrūq's mind that this was ṣūfism gone terribly wrong.²⁶ Despite the fact that al-Waryāghilī was acting as an individual, Zarrūq's accusation of hypocrisy strongly implicates al-Jazūlī's methods of instructing initiates. Al-Jazūlī was responsible for the spiritual upbringing of al-Waryāghilī and the latter's shortcomings would negatively implicate former's training methods.

This was not Zarrūq's only experience with members of the Jazūliyyah. After Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Jazūlī died in 870/1465, there immediately followed a power struggle among his followers as to who was his rightful successor. °Umar ibn Sayyāf al-Mughīṭī was able to seize authority and expel the learned followers of al-Jazūlī from the brotherhood's ranks.²⁷ Al-Mughīṭī then rampaged through Morocco for 20 years before meeting an inglorious end at the hands of his wife and foster-son in 890/1485.²⁸ Zarrūq's disgust for al-Mughīṭī is evident.²⁹ By no means does Zarrūq directly blame al-Jazūlī for the actions of

²⁵ García-Arenal, "Revolution of Fās," 55.

²⁶ Al-Jazūlī is recorded to have had 12,000 followers at the time of his death. What makes matters worse is that al-Jazūlī's followers tended to be barely literate Arab tribesmen, this combined with al-Jazūlī's seemingly mahdist rhetoric in a region where there was always a latent messiansim seems to have made for an explosive combination. Being the learned faqīh and scholar that he was, it is unlikely that al-Jazūlī actually thought that he was the prophesized mahdī nor is it likely that he intend his recorded *muḥādathāt* to be used to prove he was the mahdī by those following him. See Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 180-192; García-Arenal, "Mahdī, Murābiṭ, Sharīf," 83-84.

²⁷ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 193.

²⁸ Zarrūq, *Kunnāsh*, 66-67.

²⁹ Though Zarrūq will do no more than say that al-Mughīṭī had certainly deviated from the truth, he notes that the most appropriate way to describe al-Mughīṭī and his followers was that they

one of his deluded followers. Zarrūq does seem to believe however that al-Mughīṭī's lack of proper *sharī'ah* education along with the general illiteracy of many of al-Jazūlī's other followers precipitated the violence. Zarrūq would certainly argue that had al-Jazūlī followers been more educated, al-Mughīṭī's absurd claims would have been treated as such. Unfortunately, when al-Mughīṭī claimed that he was the inheritor of prophethood or a prophet himself, that the Qur'ān and Prophetic traditions no longer applied to him, that he had rulings in Sacred Law that were particular to himself, and that he was in contact with al-Khiḍr and possessed tablets containing al-Khiḍr's wisdom, there were not enough learned people left in the Jazūliyyah camp who would dismiss al-Mughīṭī's assertions as fantasy.³⁰ Instead, he retained a following large enough to be able pursue his violent messianism for two decades. Horrified by the shame visited by al-Mughīṭī upon the good name of Shādhilism, Zarrūq was certainly convinced that the Jazūlite model for ṣūfī instruction was liable to abuse. As a result, Zarrūq went to great lengths to make it very clear to his followers that the most important part of ṣūfism is education in the Islamic religious sciences followed by strict adherence to the precepts contained therein.

These two incidents solidified in Zarrūq's mind that the Jazūlite model was a failed model and, in response, Zarrūq espoused a ṣūfism of a small group of highly learned scholars, removed from politics, who, under the tutelage of their

had "tufts of hair on the heads, dhikr-beads around their necks, swords in their hands, dhikr on their tongues and deviation (*khurūj 'an al-haqq*) [in their hearts]." Zarrūq is wary of saying that al-Mughīṭī was an unbeliever but notes that some have done so. Whatever the case, Zarrūq notes that "God relieved the Muslims of al-Mughīṭī and his party (*arāḥa Allah al-muslimīn minhum*) around the year 890. Only his (i.e. al-Mughīṭī's) son remains now whose deviance deserves little attention at all"; Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.; Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 191-194.

master, devoted themselves to inner purification and spiritual training. Zarrūq saw education as an essential part of *taṣawwuf* as much as *taṣawwuf* was an essential part of a wholesome education. Al-Waryāghilī's failure to follow the injunctions of Sacred Law was not only unjust but, according to Zarrūq's understanding, they threatened the security of Muslim lands. Al-Mughīṭī's ability to wreak havoc for so long was a startling example of the dangers of an unbridled ṣūfism without the necessary compliment of instruction in formal religious sciences. Zarrūq's ṣūfism was more about *sharī'ah* than shaykh. Zarrūq relied more on knowledge of the traditional Islamic sciences like *fiqh*, *kalām*, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*; these are what would lead the Zarrūqian murīd to the heights of spiritual realization. Consequently, Zarrūq took steps in his own writings to emphasize the truth of this fact by composing works such as his commentary on the *Qawā'id al-ʿAqā'id* to demonstrate the harmony of the precepts of ṣūfism with those of the other *sharī'ah* sciences.

If the above considerations help explain why Aḥmad Zarrūq chose to write this commentary at all, then the next question must be about why he chose to comment on the *Qawā'id al-ʿAqā'id* of Imām al-Ghazālī in particular. Again, we approach the issue of motives but from another direction. Zarrūq had other, more ideological, reasons for writing this commentary that have a much longer history than that of 9th/15th century Morocco, stretching all the way to the beginnings of ṣūfism and Ashʿarism. Though it is clear from the above discussion that Zarrūq's choices were informed by very immediate concerns, ultimately, his understanding of mysticism and theology are rooted in century-old

doctrinal debates of which Zarrūq was an inheritor as a young student in madrasahs of Fez and Cairo.

This question is immediately pertinent because al-Ghazālī's theological, logical and philosophical works are—given his fame in nearly every field of scholarship—surprisingly unpopular as the subject of scholarly commentary.³¹ In Brockelmann's two-volume *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* and its supplemental volumes, al-Ghazālī's theological, philosophical and logical works receive scant attention from commentators: only one other commentary besides Zarrūq's is listed for the *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*; his *Risālah al-Qudsiyyah* has an abridgement by a 9th/15th century scholar and has a commentary written in the late 9th/15th early 10th/16th century; his famous *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* is famously commented upon by Averröes (d. 595/1198) but received no further attention.³² No other commentaries for any of al-Ghazālī's other theological, philosophical or logical works are listed in *GAL* or its supplemental volumes. What this exercise is meant to illustrate is the significance of Aḥmad Zarrūq's choice of the *Qawā'id* over similar texts. If Zarrūq were writing a purely theological commentary, we

³¹ See Earl Edgar Elder, introduction to *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam; Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī on the Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī*, by Mas'ūd ibn 'Umar al-Taftāzānī (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), xix-xx.

³² The other commentary on the *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* is by Muḥammad Yūsuf al-Kāfī, entitled *al-Ḥiṣn wa al-jannah 'alā 'aqīdat ahl al-sunnah*. The abridgement of *Risālah al-Qudsiyyah* was written by Kamāladdīn Muḥammad ibn Humāmaddīn 'Abdalwāḥid ibn 'Abdalḥāmid ibn al-Humām as-Siwāsī al-Iskandarī al-Ḥanafī d. (861/1457), entitled *al-Musāyara fī l-'aqā'id al-munjiya fī l-ākhirah*. The commentary is by Muḥammad Iibn Abī al-Sharīf al-Ash'arī al-Shāfi'ī d. (906/1500), entitled *al-Musāmara*. Brockelmann lists a self-commentary by al-Ghazālī on this work. See Robert Wisnovsky, "The nature and scope of Arabic philosophical commentary in post-classical (ca. 1100-1900 AD) Islamic intellectual history: Some preliminary observations," in *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin Commentaries*, vol. 2, edited by Peter Adamson, Han Baltussen and M.W.F. Stone, *Supplement to the Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 83:1-2 (2004) (London: Institute of Classical Studies), 180; also *GAL* I, 535-546; *GAL Supplement* I, 744-756.

would expect him to have chosen one of Yūsuf al-Sanūsī's very popular creeds as a subject text. Al-Sanūsī's works were very popular in the North Africa and Zarrūq is recorded to have studied al-Sanūsī's creeds under the tutelage of °Abd al-Rahmān al-Majdūlī (al-Tūnisi). Zarrūq was al-Sanūsī's student at al-Azhar during Zarrūq's years in Egypt and is listed by the famous Sudanese jurist and biographer Aḥmad Bābā as one of the transmitters of al-Sanūsī's *al-°Aqīdah al-Wuṣṭā* into West Africa.³³ All this makes Zarrūq's choice of *matn* all the more significant in that it means Zarrūq selected very deliberately. There are two reasons which explain why Aḥmad Zarrūq chose al-Ghazālī's *Qawā'id al-°Aqā'id* for commentary. The first is Aḥmad Zarrūq's scholarly training and ideological orientation as well as the historical period in which Aḥmad Zarrūq flourished; the second involves the historical personality of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī as embodied in his *Ihyā' °ulūm al-dīn*.

The roots of Zarrūq's scholarly training and his brand of ṣūfism originate in Cairo and Baghdad rather than in Fez. With the spread of the doctrines of Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820) in the 3rd/9th century, two new scholarly trends from central Islamic lands made their way to Spain and Morocco: the development of a systematic jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and the resultant emphasis on *ḥadīth* literature. These new ideas arrived in Spain and North Africa by at least the 5th/11th century. Very often the scholars who came from the East bearing these new ideas also brought Ash'arite theology and *mashriqī* modes of

³³ Joseph Kenny, "Muslim theology as presented by M. b. Yūsuf as-Sanūsī especially in his *al-°Aqīdah al-Wuṣṭā*," (Ph.D. diss. Edinburgh University, 1970), 12-13. See also Khushaim, *Zarrūq the Ṣūfī*, 13.

ṣūfī practice expounded in the pages of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* or the *Kitāb al-riʿāyah li-ḥuqūq Allāh* of ʿAbdullāh al-Ḥārith al-Muḥasibī (d. 243/857).³⁴ The particular brand of ṣūfism that was associated with the marriage of *ḥadīth* and *uṣūl* sciences and which spread in Spain and North Africa by means of works like al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'* was "juridical" or "an ascetic, praxis-oriented and jurisprudentially validated form of mysticism."³⁵ This "juridical Sufism" which entered Spain and Morocco early in the 6th/12th century posited a practical harmony between *sharīʿah* and *ḥaqīqah*, formed in the madrasahs of the major urban centers of Spain and North Africa, and was non-sectarian in that it did not favor any one of the four Sunnī legal schools. What was important about *uṣūl al-fiqh* or the "uṣūlī method" was that it was able to harness *ḥadīth* literature—one of the four sources of religious law—in order to legitimize ṣūfī practices against the criticism of anti-ṣūfī Mālikī jurists, thereby "establishing Sufism as a juridically acceptable form of Islam."³⁶

During the Almoravid period (5th/11th-mid 6th/12th century) the uṣūlī-ṣūfī methodology was challenged by the Almoravid leadership as famously symbolized by the public burning of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*.³⁷ One significant result of this suppression of uṣūlī jurists and juridically-oriented ṣūfīs was the rise of dissident movements, the most famous being the Almohad movement of Ibn Ṭūmart (d. 524/1130) who "was joined in his opposition to the Almoravids by a

³⁴ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 15-17.

³⁵ Ibid., 12-14.

³⁶ Ibid., 18.

³⁷ Paul Nwyia, introduction to *Un Mystique Prédicateur à la Qarawīyīn de Fès: Ibn ʿAbbād de Ronda (1332-1390)* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1961), XVII-XVIII. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 23-24.

number of Andalusian and North African ṣūfīs whose journeys to the Muslim East brought them into contact with Shafīʿī jurists, Ashʿarī theologians and other representatives of Sunni internationalism.”³⁸ One of the most important centers of learning in the Muslim East during this period was Egypt. It was here that Aḥmad Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh al-Iskandarī (d. 709/1309)—Shādhilī saint, student of the Shādhilī master Abū al-ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287), author of the famous *Hikam* and contemporary opponent of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328)—was born and buried.³⁹ Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh’s influence on the Shādhilī *tarīqah* is pronounced and the *Hikam* stands as one of the most famous works in ṣūfī literature and, as the subject of numerous commentaries and versified abridgements, it is also one of the most popular.⁴⁰

One of the earliest and most famous commentaries on the *Hikam* is *Ghayth al-mawāhib al-ʿāliya* by the famous ṣūfī from Ronda Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn ʿAbbād al-Nafzī al-Rundī (d. 796/1394).⁴¹ Though Ibn ʿAbbād did not have a formal, spiritual chain linking him directly to Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh, his instruction by Ibn ʿĀshir (d. 765/1362), whose emphasis on al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyāʾ* and al-Muḥāsibī’s *Kitāb al-riʿāya* as the primary sources of his teachings,

³⁸ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 24.

³⁹ See “Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh,” *ET*².

⁴⁰ Brockelmann lists 18 commentaries and four versified abridgements. See *GAL* II, 143-144; *GAL Supplement* II, 144-147. Though Brockelmann lists only one of Zarrūq’s commentaries on the *Hikam*, Zarrūq is said to have composed more than 30 commentaries on the *Hikam* in the course of his lifetime according to Paul Nwyia: “These commentaries, some of which consist of simple marginal notes, were addressed to ṣūfīs of different cities Aḥmad Zarrūq visited”; Nwyia, *Ibn ʿAbbād de Ronda*, 23.

⁴¹ See *GAL* II, 143-144; *GAL Supplement* II, 144-147. Paul Nwyia calls this work *al-Tanbīh* and notes that it is also known simply as *Sharḥ al-Hikam*; see Nwyia, *Ibn ʿAbbād de Ronda*, 252.

probably led Ibn ʿAbbād to teach that sound ṣūfism is juridical ṣūfism.⁴² After Ibn ʿĀshir's death, Ibn ʿAbbād traveled to Fez along with Abū ʿImrān Mūsā al-ʿAbdūsī (d. 776/1374-5) who was also a student of Ibn ʿĀshir. Like Ibn ʿAbbād al-Rundī, Mūsā al-ʿAbdūsī would teach in Fez the ṣūfism inspired by Ibn ʿĀshir, al-Ghazālī, al-Muḥāsibī and Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh, emphasizing the importance of religious law to the corporeal life of the mystical traveler and the wisdom found in the *Hikam* as a source of guidance for the spiritual life.⁴³ Thus, Mūsā al-ʿAbdūsī would hold public devotional gatherings in which he would comment on Ṣaḥnūn's (d. 240/854) voluminous *Mudawwanah* interspersed with comments from the *Hikam*. Abū Mūsā ʿImrān al-Janātī—the teacher of al-Qawrī who was in turn the most influential person in Zarrūq's life—was said to have inherited from his master, Mūsā al-ʿAbdūsī, this practice of public recital of the *Mudawwanah* as a “devotional exercise”.⁴⁴ Another student of al-ʿAbdūsī, ʿAbdullāh ibn Ḥamd, who also taught in Fez and was another of al-Qawrī's teachers, joined the Wafāʾiyya *ṭarīqa* in order to establish a direct connection to the Egyptian Shādhilī *silsila* of Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh.⁴⁵ Around the same time, ʿAbdullāh al-ʿAbdūsī, the grandson of Mūsā al-ʿAbdūsī, was known to have followed the model of Ibn ʿAbbād by combining mystical and legal practice.⁴⁶ It is this ʿAbdullāh al-ʿAbdūsī who served as a patron of Zarrūq's teacher al-Qawrī when the latter moved to Fez. Al-Qawrī was esteemed by many for his uplifting recitals of the

⁴² See Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 153. Nwyia, *Ibn ʿAbbād de Ronda*, 60.

⁴³ Kugle, “In Search of the Center,” 47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.

Mudawwanah and thus seems to have followed his teachers' example in which public recitals and commentary on a legal text served as a form of ṣūfī devotion. Al-Qawrī in particular was noted to be such an adept at this particular practice that some in the audience commented, "If you sit down to listen to him recite the *Mudawwanah* you would experience white magic for sure."⁴⁷

Thus, the early education that Zarrūq received at the hands of al-Qawrī and others had a long history steeped in uṣūlī methodology as well as an emphasis on juridical ṣūfism. For these ṣūfis of Fez, who populated the Maranid madrasahs and occupied judicial government posts but who also possessed a deep knowledge of ṣūfism, the "*Mudawwanah* marked the outer, public face of their teaching, meditating on the *Hikam* formed the inner, private source of illumination."⁴⁸

Similarly, for Zarrūq a *fiqh* text or a *kalām* text could be seen as having an inward and an outward aspect just like the *Mudawwanah*: given a skilled commentator, a legal or theological text could be made to inspire mystical experience. We must begin at this point when we approach the question of why Zarrūq wrote his commentary and why he chose the *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* as the subject text.

Taking the above facts into account, Zarrūq's choice of the *Qawā'id* would have been very natural in that he was one of al-Ghazālī's spiritual as well as scholarly descendents. By selecting this work, Zarrūq placed himself squarely in the tradition he had inherited from al-Qawrī and his teachers in Fez and which belonged to a sober and scholarly juridical pedigree that is traceable to Ibn 'Abbād, Ibn 'Ashir, Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh, al-Ghazālī and al-Muḥāsibī. Zarrūq knew

⁴⁷ Ibid, 52. "White magic" here means that which inspires mystical experience.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

very well—because al-Ghazālī made it so clear—that though the *Qawā'id* appears in the first chapters of the *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, it was by no means intended as a chapter touching on the “subtler realities.” Yet, neither is the *Mudawwanah*. But for Zarrūq, the *Mudawwanah* and the *Hikam* represented two manifestations of a single, mystical reality. The *Mudawwanah* is primarily a legal text taken alone, but with commentary the seemingly mundane can be “superior to love poetry in the ecstasies that it inspires.”⁴⁹ Similarly with Zarrūq’s commentary on the *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*: though in itself the creed serves as a succinct Ash'arite statement of sound belief, Zarrūq’s commentary aimed to bring out the subtler points that he sees underlying al-Ghazālī’s terse formulae. In other words, in selecting the *Qawā'id* Zarrūq indirectly indicated that his commentary was intended primarily as a work of ṣūfism, inspired by his teachers’ example of using commentary to raise the mystical out of the mundane. His concern with theology was only secondary.

Despite Zarrūq’s indebtedness to al-Ghazālī, Zarrūq disagrees with al-Ghazālī about the aims and ends of theology and ṣūfism. In perhaps his greatest work, *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf*, Zarrūq’s assessment of theology is fundamentally different from that of al-Ghazālī’s as expressed in his *Ihyā'*. That being the case, why would Zarrūq use al-Ghazālī’s *Qawā'id* when they differed in important respects on the relationship that exists between theology and ṣūfism? Al-Ghazālī’s decidedly low opinion of theology compared to ṣūfism carried a historical weight that would have been hard for Zarrūq to overlook. In order to

⁴⁹ Ibid., 51-52.

circumvent al-Ghazālī's negative view of theology Zarrūq may have concluded that the best way to do so would be to use a segment of the Imām's greatest work on ṣūfism as the subject of the commentary. This move accomplished two exegetical ends. One, Zarrūq used his commentary as a platform to advocate his own view of theology's relation to ṣūfism. Two, Zarrūq saw in this commentary the fulfillment of the uṣūlī principles expounded in his *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf*. Thus, through the *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*, Zarrūq sought refuge in the authority of al-Ghazālī, now the arch-uṣūlī, in order to legitimize his "ṣūfī commentary" on a theological text.

Understanding that al-Ghazālī's judgment on theology's place in Islam is more than simple approval or disapproval, what exactly is al-Ghazālī's view regarding theology vis-à-vis ṣūfism in the *Ihyā'*? Al-Ghazālī expounds his opinion of theology with respect to the achievement of mystical ends in the first two chapters of the *Ihyā'*, namely, the Chapter of Knowledge (*kitāb al-'ilm*) and the Fundamentals of Belief (*qawā'id al-'aqā'id*). Al-Ghazālī includes the chapter Fundamentals of Belief in the section (*rub'* lit. "fourth") of the *Ihyā'* which deals with the aspects of religious devotion (*'ibādāt*). This "fourth" also includes also the Books of Knowledge, Secrets of Purification, Secrets of the Prayer, Secrets of the Pilgrimage, Secrets of Alms-giving, Manners of Qur'ān Recitation, Remembrance and Supplication and the Sequence of the Litanies (*tartīb al-awrād*).⁵⁰ The order and the names of the sections of the first "fourth" are important. On the one hand, matters of belief are second only to epistemological

⁵⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, ed. 'Abdullāh al-Khālidi, vol. 1, *Kitāb al-'ilm* (Beirut: Dār al-arqam), 6. Hereafter *Kitāb al-'ilm*.

considerations, i.e. the Book of Knowledge.⁵¹ Again, the principles of faith are seen as prior to all the other basic aspects of devotion. However, what is also lacking is the appellation “secrets” which precedes all the mandatory acts of worship. It seems that al-Ghazālī is making the reader immediately aware that though theology has logical and epistemic priority to the acts of worship, it lacks the mystical aspect of the devotional acts. In fact, al-Ghazālī’s powerful personal confession is unambiguous about the inability of the theological sciences to lead their practitioners to spiritual, experiential knowledge:

And as for the benefit found in *kalām*, it might be thought that its utility is in its unveiling of Truths and its conferring knowledge of these Truths as they are in themselves.

Away with such [delusion]! There is not in *kalām* any fulfillment of this noble goal. Indeed, it is more likely that the stumbling and straying it causes is greater than the illumination or experiential knowledge (*maʿrifah*) that it bestows.

Perhaps when you heard [these same words] from the Traditionist (*muḥaddith* i.e. the Ḥanbalite) or the anthropomorphist it came to your mind that “people are enemies to what they are ignorant of” [and thus, you were dismissive of their words].

Then take heed from one who having acquired thorough knowledge of *kalām*, despised it. This, after attaining the greatest skill and reaching the farthest ends of the *mutakallimūn*; probing beyond into the depths of other sciences that are related generically to *kalām* (i.e. philosophy); and finally concluding with utter conviction that the path leading to the verities of gnosis from this direction is shut.⁵²

That is not to say that theology as such is bad. In fact, al-Ghazālī holds that the practice of theology has become a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāyah*) due to the proliferation of wayward beliefs. However, it is only the presence of this corruption which makes the practice of *kalām* permissible and praiseworthy. Neither the practice of theology nor its subject matter is what al-Ghazālī faults.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, ed. ʿAbdullāh al-Khālīdī, vol. 1, Kitāb Qawāʿid al-ʿAqāʿid (Beirut: Dār al-arqam), 145-146. Hereafter *Qawāʿid al-ʿAqāʿid*.

More than any other factor, it is the theologian's argumentativeness and egotistic devotion to the vindication of their own opinion that leads al-Ghazālī to his critical view of *kalām*.⁵³ Al-Ghazālī makes it very clear that *kalām* is not a religious science worth pursuing for its own sake and enlists the vituperative statements of al-Shāfi'ī, Mālik, Abū Yūsuf, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī to make this very clear.⁵⁴ However, says al-Ghazālī, the original ruling has changed inasmuch as *kalām* is not inherently forbidden like wine or swine. Al-Ghazālī argues that the original reason why the great scholars of the past forbade the practice of *kalām* was that the harm in the practice of theology was seen to outweigh the small benefit it contained. Transmission and preservation of obscure and dubious beliefs; casting doubt on faith which can only be rectified by proofs which are themselves doubtful and debatable; undue concentration on heretical beliefs; blind and obstinate chauvinism that takes hold of the heart such that the adversary would rather win the debate than the truth be manifested—this is the harm in *kalām*. The only benefit of *kalām* is to protect the general populace from the wiles of heretics who can win the weak-minded to their creed even with faulty arguments, “countering corruption with corruption that will prevent [greater] corruption.” Like the doctor, proficient in his trade, who uses a

⁵³ Ibid., 145.

⁵⁴ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal said, “The scholars of *kalām* are heretics.” Al-Shāfi'ī said “My ruling concerning the people of *kalām* is that they should be flogged then circulated among the tribes and clans while proclaiming: ‘This is the recompense of those who leave the Book [i.e. the Qur'ān] and the [Prophetic] *sunna* and [instead] delve into *kalām*’.” Abū Yūsuf said “Whoever pursues *kalām* as a [religious] science has become a heretic (*tazandaqa*)”; al-Ghazālī, *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*, 142.

dangerous medicine only in the greatest need as a cure, so must the religious scholar approach theology.⁵⁵

In principle, it seems al-Ghazālī's position regarding theology is that it is practiced *solely* for the purpose of protecting the beliefs which previous Sunnite scholars passed down through the generations. Anything beyond this simple function is a misguided search "for the unveiling (*kashf*) of realities of [divine] matters (*ḥaqā'iq al-umūr*) by improper means."⁵⁶ Elsewhere, al-Ghazālī clarifies what he means when identifying the levels of *tawḥīd*. *Tawḥīd*, says al-Ghazālī has two layers (*qishr*) and a core (*lubāb*). The first layer, which is farthest from the core, is that of a hypocrite or like a person who denies the Christian trinity with their tongue but in truth their internal reality is in opposition to the outward declaration. The second layer of *tawḥīd* is where there is nothing in the person's heart which contradicts or denies the understanding of it and, in fact, the outward aspect of the heart comprehends belief in *tawḥīd* as well as affirms its truth. This, concludes al-Ghazālī, is the level at which the theologians must function: as guardians of proper belief from the innovations of heretics (*al-mubtadi'ah*) by way of debate (*jadāl*). However, the core and the purest understanding of *tawḥīd* according to al-Ghazālī is not that of the theologian with his proofs and technical jargon, but of one who perceives that all matters are from God in such a way that one's perceiving the reality of *tawḥīd* prevents one from seeing any intermediary entity.⁵⁷ When al-Ghazālī writes his book about the

⁵⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*, 145.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁵⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-'ilm*, 51-52 and 146.

“revival of the religious sciences” it is this, the spiritual aspect of the religious sciences he wants to emphasize, and not the legal or theological. Al-Ghazālī could not make this fact any clearer when he says immediately—after he has carefully and thoroughly outlined the proper creed of Sunnī Islam in the first part of the *Qawā'id*—that what he has just mentioned is merely “a summary of the [correct] belief which is appropriate to give to a child to memorize at the beginning of his upbringing,” thereby belittling the importance of *kalām* in the seeker’s greater spiritual journey.⁵⁸

Aḥmad Zarrūq would not subscribe to all aspects of this highly critical view of theology. Zarrūq agrees with al-Ghazālī about the superiority of ṣūfism to any of the strictly intellectual sciences and explicitly identifies the way in which ṣūfism, while more particular in scope than any of the religious sciences, nonetheless encompasses all of them.

The Ṣūfī’s view of dealings with God is more particular than that of the jurist. For the jurist considers that which makes difficulty disappear, while the Ṣūfī considers that which brings about perfection. The Ṣūfī’s view is also more particular than that of the theologian because the latter examines the orthodoxy of the belief, while the former seeks that which strengthens certitude. His view is also more particular than that of the Qur’ānic commentator and the traditionalist, because both of them examine the rule and idea, and nothing else, while the Ṣūfī goes beyond that, seeking the inner meanings after ascertaining what they have established.⁵⁹

This passage is important for two reasons. First, we see that Zarrūq’s idea of the most basic goal of theology accords with al-Ghazālī’s: both agree that the theologian examines the soundness of belief by determining whether it is in accordance with the correct faith inherited from earlier, rightly-guided scholars.

⁵⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*, 140.

⁵⁹ Originally from Zarrūq’s *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf*, translated in Istrabadi, “The Principles of Ṣūfism,” 93. For a general overview of Zarrūq’s unique contribution to ṣūfī literature in his *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf* see Kugle, “In Search of the Center,” 167-181.

Second, this passage also highlights the relation that Zarrūq sees that exists between ṣūfism and theology; here Zarrūq and al-Ghazālī are also in agreement. Zarrūq agrees with al-Ghazālī that ṣūfism is related in some way to theological concerns very much like al-Ghazālī's example of the two shells and inner core that comprise *tawḥīd*: ṣūfism is treating the same subject as the theologian, i.e. *tawḥīd*, but it is treating it at an epistemologically different level and at a different level of spiritual intensity. Zarrūq and al-Ghazālī agree that the theologian can talk about *tawḥīd* in a wholly academic manner and thus his goal must be in accordance with his methods, i.e. using proofs to establish a certain intellectual certainty. The ṣūfī, while also talking about *tawḥīd*, is seeking al-Ghazālī's inner core. In other words, there is a difference in the degree to which the goal is realized, though the goal itself is the same.

The agreement between al-Ghazālī and Zarrūq ends here. Zarrūq differs from al-Ghazālī fundamentally about the means that propel people along their spiritual journey. Zarrūq's outlook is far more inclusive than al-Ghazālī's. Al-Ghazālī sees theology as essentially unconnected to the spiritual journeys. Yes, there are some requisite fundamentals that one must study, but after that, the formal aspects of any of the religious sciences, whether *fiqh* or *kalām* or *ḥadīth* are not considered to be of any importance. In some sense, ṣūfism is conceived of as its own separate science with its own principles, vocabulary, means and ends. This is very different from Zarrūq's view which sees a type of ṣūfism inhering in each of the formal sciences, with each ṣūfism having characteristics and principles peculiar to itself.

The multiple aspects of the good decree that there be a multiplicity of whatever is deemed good and of obtaining the good by everyone seeking it. Thus, every group has its own path [...] For the devotee there is a ṣūfism discussed by al-Ghazālī in his *Minhāj*. For the ascetic, there is a Ṣūfism brought to our attention by al-Qushayrī in his *Risāla*. For the hermit, there is a Ṣūfism described in the *Qūt* and the *Ihyāʾ*. For the philosopher, there is a Ṣūfism introduced by [Muḥyiddīn Ibn ʿArabī] al-Ḥatīmī in his works. For the logician, there is a Ṣūfism illustrated by Ibn Sabʿīn in his works. For the cosmologist, there is a Ṣūfism written about by al-Būnī in his *Asrār*. For the theologian, there is a Ṣūfism realized by al-Shādhilī. Every group should be taken into consideration by examining its principle in its proper place.⁶⁰

It is unlikely that al-Ghazālī would consider the ṣūfism that he has, meticulously and extensively outlined in the *Ihyāʾ* to be a ṣūfism that is meant solely for the hermit, or that his *Minhāj* is intended for the devotee to the exclusion of the philosopher, theologian or logician. Rather, al-Ghazālī is likely to have considered each of these scholarly pursuits as largely unrelated to the mystical path. Zarrūq disagreed. For him, each scholar's field colors the ṣūfism that is appropriate for that scholar. In other words, where al-Ghazālī might feel that his *Ihyāʾ* is useful for both the devotee and the philosopher, Zarrūq's view is that the particular type of ṣūfism outlined in the *Ihyāʾ* would be as inappropriate for the philosopher just as the Ibn ʿArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikam* would be inappropriate for the literal-minded jurist.

When we remember that Zarrūq was himself a Shādhilī master, the above quote takes on a greater significance in that it implies that Zarrūq strongly identified the Shādhilī path with *kalām*: the formal principles of theology are related to the principles of the particular ṣūfism of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. If Zarrūq sees the Shādhilī path as superior to others that he has examined and he further believes that the principles of the Shādhilī way are related to the principles

⁶⁰ Originally in Zarrūq's *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf*, translated in Istrabadi, "The Principles of Ṣūfism," 95-96.

of *kalām* then it is likely that Zarrūq took exception to al-Ghazālī's fierce criticisms of *kalām* in the *Iḥyā'*. In a passage preceding the one quoted above, Zarrūq explicitly enunciated his own position concerning the way of Imām al-Ghazālī versus the way of Imām al-Shādhilī:

The subdivision of a practical application is due to the subdivision of its principle. It has already been established that the principle of Sūfism is the station of spiritual virtue (*iḥsān*), which is divisible into two kinds, each of which is a subdivision for the other. They are: "That thou adore God as though thou didst see Him: for if thou dost not see Him, He nonetheless sees thee." The first part of the statement deals with the rank of the Gnostics; the second part of the statement deals with the rank of others below the Gnostic. The Shādhilis and those who hold their beliefs follow the first, whereas al-Ghazālī and those who hold his beliefs follow the second. The first is closer to the Truth because the planting of this type of tree bring forth fruits that can be reaped. Its foundation is the principles which every believer has access to. The personal nature of a person is conducive to acceptance of the principles, and the Divine Law is based on them. For the goal of the principles is to strengthen certitude and actualize it by practicing the deeds of the God-fearing. So, understand!⁶¹

Here, Zarrūq makes it clear that the Shādhilī path is not only superior to the path outlined by al-Ghazālī in the *Iḥyā'* and elsewhere in his writings but that it is also more universal, available to all people, whether trained scholar or otherwise. The principles of the Shādhilī way, says Zarrūq, are more appealing to the individual nature because they are concerned with the essential rather than the accidental practical principles of the ṣūfī path. Stated differently, Zarrūq's claim is that the ṣūfism of al-Ghazālī and others focuses on principles that are non-essential to spiritual growth, like a strict fasting regiment or prolonged periods of cloistered seclusion. Analogously, the theologians focus on the most essential religious principle, namely faith, rather than religious practice. In this way, the theologians share with Shādhilī ṣūfis a concern with this highest of religious principles. In a more positive statement about the way of Abū Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, Zarrūq says:

⁶¹ Ibid., 94.

The *usuli* concentrates on analyzing faith through the instrument of reliable knowledge and thereby realizing certainty, until he can see the truth with his own eyes. By these means, realization of the ultimate reality arises within himself from his own deep comprehension. In this way, he advances or holds back according to the measure of reality that he really grasps. He never hesitates, for he is at ease from the beginning of his training until the end, and arrives at spiritual realization in the shortest stretch of time...As Shaykh Ibn Mashīsh taught to his disciple, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, “Point people toward God alone and don’t point them toward anything else. Whoever recommends to you the world has cheated you, and whoever recommends that you practice pious actions has wearied you. Yet whoever recommends to you God has given you reliable advice”⁶²

The Shādhilī path envisioned in the words of ʿAbd al-Salām Ibn Mashīsh (d. 625/1227-8), the *shaykh* of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, does not point the seeker toward the world, nor yet even toward the performance of pious deeds. Rather, the Shādhilī way claims to point the wayfarer toward God Himself. It is clear that the *ṣūfism* which Zarrūq envisions is highly intellectual; one that “insists on apprehending and translating even the most subtle spiritual truth through the intellect.”⁶³ Zarrūq clearly feels that the analysis of faith, normally the task of the theologian, can result in the spiritual realization of certainty such that the spiritual seeker “can see the truth with his own eyes.” Here, Zarrūq associates himself explicitly with his *uṣūlī* lineage in the line of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. At first glance it seems contradictory that it is Zarrūq’s very association with the *uṣūlī* mode of *ṣūfism* that would lead him to disagree strongly with al-Ghazālī, given that it is from al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyāʾ* that the *ṣūfis* of Aḥmad Zarrūq’s lineage derive much of their inspiration. Nevertheless, Zarrūq believes that Abū al-Ḥasan al-

⁶² Principle 73 in Zarrūq’s *Qawāʿid al-Taṣawwuf* translated in Scott Kugle, “In Search of the Center,” 177-178. For a complete but slightly inaccurate translation of this *qāʿida*, see Iṣṭabadi, “The Principles of *Ṣūfism*,” 107. Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh is quoted saying “Do not take up invocations except those which a power in your soul will help you to love them.” Al-Shādhilī is quoted as saying, “The spiritual master guides you to repose, not weariness.” See Aḥmad Zarrūq, *Qawāʿid al-Taṣawwuf ʿalā wajh yajmaʿ bayn al-sharīʿah wa al-ḥaqīqah wa yaṣil al-uṣūl wa al-fiqh bi al-ṭarīqah* (Damascus: Dār al-Bayrūtī, 2004), 106-107. Hereafter, *Qawāʿid al-Taṣawwuf*.

⁶³ Kugle, “In Search of the Center,” 177.

Shādhilī differed from al-Ghazālī concerning the paths to spiritual maturation and realization and Zarrūq certainly posits a difference between the paths of al-Shādhilī and al-Ghazālī. The *taṣawwuf* advocated by Zarrūq—i.e. the *taṣawwuf* of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī as understood by Zarrūq—is not as labor-intensive as the *taṣawwuf* that is found in al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’*. According to Zarrūq, the climb to higher spiritual stations is not the necessary result of a strict fasting regiment or renunciation of the world or performing a heroic numbers of prayers daily. Zarrūq’s way is a path of the person endowed and empowered with a sound intellect where the intellect itself, through its contemplation, serves as the means by which a person may ascend to spiritual realization. The path of al-Shādhilī, Zarrūq would claim, is surer and quicker because it aims to deal with the most basic principle of ṣūfism. Like the *mutakallim* whose task is the analysis of the most basic assumptions of the faith, the ṣūfī of the Shādhilī *tarīqa* focuses on the most basic principle of *taṣawwuf*: “abandoning self-determination in deference to the Truth.”⁶⁴ Zarrūq clarifies in the following *qā’ida* saying that the consequence of accepting this one principle is “following the [Prophetic] *sunna*, contemplating God’s grace, and submitting to the divine rules while understanding their wisdom.”⁶⁵ Zarrūq quotes from Ibn ‘Aṭa’illāh’s *Kitāb al-Tanwīr* to conclude his remarks about the way of al-Shādhilī, saying:

The path that is to be followed is the path of Unity (*maslak tawḥīdī*) which no one can either reject or defame, which leaves no praiseworthy quality behind without securing it for the seeker, nor any blameworthy quality without ridding him of it through purification.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁶⁵ Originally from Zarrūq’s *Qawā’id al-Taṣawwuf*, translated in Istrabadi, “The Principles of Ṣūfism,” 108.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

It seems that Zarrūq acquired the idea that the Shādhilī *ṭarīqah* is most suited to the scholar of *kalām* or *uṣūl al-dīn* from Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh in that we have an explicit statement from the foremost individual in the Shādhilī *ṭarīqah* that directly associates the methodology of the Shādhilī path with the primary concern of the theologians. The phrase “*maslak tawhīdī*” recalls the foundational Islamic principle of *tawhīd*, which suggests a shared methodological principle between *kalām* and the Shādhilī way, namely, that for both the theologian and the Shādhilī ṣūfī, the ultimate aim of their efforts is the realization of a foundational principle. The *maslak tawhīdī* for the theologians is unifying God’s attributes and act in an utterly single Godhead. For the Shādhilī, *maslak tawhīdī* seems to suggest, from Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh’s usage, the unification of all paths in the Shādhilī path. Unlike the *fiqh* scholar, the *mutakallim* is not concerned with the legal aspect of human actions. Rather, his primary concern is with God Himself and the intellectual explication of God’s reality. In a similar way, unlike the ascetic (*zāhid*) consumed in the quenching of desires, unlike the devotee (*ʿābid*) consumed in the constant performance of virtuous acts, unlike the faqīh who is consumed by the punctilious observance the religious law, the Shādhilī—it is claimed—bypasses these accidental, material aspects of the ṣūfī way and focuses his attention on the internal realization of God Himself and an experiential attainment of God’s reality. The ends of the Shādhilī and the other ways are the same, namely, the attainment of God, but, as Zarrūq says, the Shādhilī way is superior and available to all who possess an intellect. Zarrūq believes that the Shādhilī path shares with *kalām* an operational principle, namely, the realization of *tawhīd*. For the

theologian, the implication of *tawhīd* is human responsibility and, thus, *sharīʿah*; for the Shādhilī ṣūfī, the implication of *tawhīd* is the experience of self-negation and, thus, *ḥaqīqa*. If Zarrūq believes that these parallels between *kalām* and Shādhilism are genuine and that the theologians and the Shādhilīs share practical principles, it seems reasonable to conclude that Zarrūq, while respecting al-Ghazālī's opinion in the *Iḥyāʾ*, would disagree with al-Ghazālī about his highly critical opinion of *kalām* and even about the nature of ṣūfism itself.

The above doctrinal considerations should shed some light on the reason why Zarrūq wrote his commentary as well as reveal the motivations behind his choice of the *Qawāʿid al-ʿAqāʾid* as subject-text. Zarrūq is definitely not adhering to al-Ghazālī's opinion that a person should only engage in *kalām* as a matter of necessity: in his commentary Zarrūq hardly speaks about theological heresies, whether in his day or in the past. If Zarrūq were following al-Ghazālī's opinion about when it is appropriate for a religious scholar to engage in theological discussion, he would be violating al-Ghazālī's major condition: if your concern when speaking about *kalām* is not addressing and refuting contemporary heresies, then a scholar—especially one who claims to be a devotee of the Way like Zarrūq—should not be engaged in composing works on theology, much less intending it as a work of ṣūfī devotion. Yet Zarrūq has done just that. How does Zarrūq justify himself? One possibility is that Zarrūq wants to associate himself with the author of the *Qawāʿid al-ʿAqāʾid*. Taken this way, it may be that Zarrūq, in his choice of *Qawāʿid al-ʿAqāʾid* as subject text, wants to identify with al-Ghazālī's historical persona as uṣūlī scholar *par excellence*. Much of Zarrūq's

scholarly work, especially his *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf*, was devoted to the reform of ṣūfism from the inside. Zarrūq came from an educational background where his teachers were ṣūfis as well as scholars of the formal religious sciences. Just as Almohad-era scholars used *uṣūl al-fiqh* to “cleanse” religious law of what was inauthentic, i.e. what disagreed with *ḥadīth* literature, so Zarrūq sought the *uṣūl* of *taṣawwuf* so that these could be used to cleanse the practice of *taṣawwuf* of inauthentic accretions that had stuck on to ṣūfī practice.⁶⁷ To this end, Zarrūq crafted his *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf*, a work which is unique in the genre of mystical literature.⁶⁸ Among the many principles stated in the *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf*, Zarrūq posits that the ṣūfī path has many manifestations congruent with the many human natures. Of these ṣūfī paths, Zarrūq identifies one as peculiar to the theologians. If their scholarly activity can be used as a ladder to higher truths, as Zarrūq believes, then it is logical that a commentary on a creedal work could be harnessed by devotees of this path to unveil the mystical truths which underlie their bland creedal statements. In this way, Zarrūq saw his mystical commentary on a theological text as realization of the principles he asserted in the *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf*.

Another justification for Zarrūq's writing this commentary could have been his desire to defend the Shādhilī way from the indirect attack posed by al-Ghazālī's critique of *kalām*. In order to accomplish this objective, Zarrūq chose the *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* in order to make it clear that he was rejecting al-Ghazālī's opinion regarding *kalām* as presented in the *Ihyā'*. Zarrūq's choice of the

⁶⁷ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 14-15.

⁶⁸ Kugle, “In Search of the Center,” 168.

Qawā'id is an unspoken yet powerful exegetical move. His audience was familiar with the *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, which had been a central text in Western ṣūfism since the Almoravid period.⁶⁹ Zarrūq's readers were likely aware of Imām al-Ghazālī's criticisms of *kalām* and in this way Zarrūq's choice would have been immediately understood in light of the opinions expressed in the *Kitāb al-'ilm* and elsewhere. Zarrūq was forcefully yet respectfully expressing a difference of opinion with the great *imām*. Zarrūq was compelled to disagree with al-Ghazālī because of the former's interpretation of the principles of the Shādhilī way. Zarrūq shared with Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh the opinion that the principles of theology and the practical principles of the Shādhilī way were similar to the extent that Zarrūq says the Shādhilī path is best befitting the theologian. Not only that, but the guiding principles of theology—establishing the reality of *tawḥīd*, the reality of existence, the reality of the attributes, the truthfulness of the prophets—are also the guiding principles of the Shādhilī *ṭarīqah*. The Shādhilī ṣūfī aims to realize experientially the reality of the *tawḥīd*, the reality of existence, the reality of the divine attributes, the reality of the Prophetic example. Zarrūq was apparently not alone in his opinion in that he is able to cite Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh in support of his claims. For ṣūfis of Zarrūq's lineage, Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh's word carried a great deal of weight and thus for Zarrūq, al-Ghazālī's criticism hit too close to home. Zarrūq did not mean to repudiate al-Ghazālī completely. His commentary is only meant to demonstrate that the principles of the mystical path outlined in the *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf* constituted a genuine methodology that was implied in the words and

⁶⁹ Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 23.

works of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī and Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh al-Iskandarī. Contrary to al-Ghazālī, the way of al-Shādhilī—the way of the theologians—was, to Zarrūq’s mind, the the superior one.

Given all the political, social, ideological, doctrinal and education motivations discussed in this chapter, it is now possible to give a fairly accurate answer to the question of why Zarrūq wrote this commentary. Zarrūq’s scholarly production was inspired by historical events in his day. Morocco in the 9th/15th century was a country of tumult: Christian invasions, millenarian and messianic movements, tribal warfare, popular uprisings, dynastic violence over succession. Zarrūq saw all of these as threats—direct or indirect—to religious life. Moreover, what perhaps bothered Zarrūq the most was how ṣūfism had become a major ingredient in this seething mix. Zarrūq did not believe that *taṣawwuf* should be used for such worldly ends: *sharīʿah* was the place for worldly affairs, ṣūfism was for the inner life of the spirit. Zarrūq was educated in an ancient tradition where the optimal balance between the worldly and other-worldly planes was achieved by learning the formal Islamic sciences, followed by strict adherence to its commands. This was the tradition established by al-Ghazālī above all. Yet for all Zarrūq’s admiration of al-Ghazālī, Zarrūq was a Shādhilī and differed from Imām al-Ghazālī about the nature of the Path. In the parts of the Zarrūq’s *Qawāʿid al-Taṣawwuf* discussed above, one point is clear: the intellect is a tool utilized to achieve spiritual realization, over and above the performance of non-compulsory devotional acts. According to Zarrūq’s interpretation of the path of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, it is the intellectual realization of certainty, an intellectual striving to

realize *tawḥīd* which is the defining characteristic of the Shādhilī way. This is how Zarrūq can claim that the principles of the Shādhilī way are similar to those of *kalām*. Given that this is Zarrūq's genuine opinion, it would be very natural for him to write a commentary on a *kalām* text that was not, strictly speaking, purely theological in its content. Rather, the discussions of tenets of faith have a dual purpose: one, to actually teach ṣūfīs the Ashʿarite creed; two, to make this a spiritual exercise where the wisdom expounded in the commentary brings the reader closer to a mystical understanding of reality.

CHAPTER II

The aim of this chapter is to give a holistic description of Zarrūq's commentary on al-Ghazālī's *Qawā'id al-ʿAqā'id*.⁷⁰ In the previous chapter we speculated about the motives which might have compelled Zarrūq to choose to write not only a theological commentary but a commentary on a creed that was not commonly used as a subject-text. Now that we have the commentary before us, we hope that some of that speculation will find confirmation in Aḥmad Zarrūq's words. However, before we move on to the meat of the text, a few general observations about the commentary are in order.

Among other things, the commentary—whether on theology, metaphysics, logic, grammar, or mysticism—is an important pedagogical tool. In addition, as much as it is a vehicle of change, it is a vehicle of preservation.⁷¹ Aḥmad Zarrūq meant his commentary to be all of these. Zarrūq intended his commentary to serve as a teaching tool for his students; nevertheless, he obviously had an ideological axe to grind. Against al-Ghazālī in the *Ihyā'* and rooted in Zarrūq's understanding of Shādhilī ṣūfism, Zarrūq argues quite vociferously that instruction in theology is an essential part of a ṣūfī's spiritual training. In large part the content of this commentary—as we shall illustrate in greater detail in the next chapter—is meant to prove this very point. What's more, it is very clear that Zarrūq intended this commentary to preserve the basic tenets of the Ash'arite

⁷⁰ *Qawā'id al-ʿAqā'id* for the purposes of Zarrūq's commentary means only the short creed in the chapter by the same name which appears in the *Ihyā'*. This creed has been translated in Ahmad ibn Naqib al-Misri, *Reliance of the Traveler*, trans. Nuh Ha Mim Keller (Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 1991; [revised 1994]), 816-825.

⁷¹ Wisnovsky, "Nature and scope," 153.

school and thus follows al-Ghazālī very closely, never departing from him in basic tenets. What is noteworthy however is the manner in which Zarrūq argues the Ashʿarite tenets of faith. Unlike other theologians, both preceding and proceeding him, Zarrūq rarely constructs an argument based on a reasoned process from premises to conclusions. Rather, in support of his interpretations of al-Ghazālī's statements, Zarrūq's most common mode of argument is from authority; whether authoritative texts like Qurʾān or *ḥadīth* or authoritative scholars in *kalām*, *fiqh*, *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth* or *taṣawwuf*. There are two implications from this fact: one, this commentary takes belief as well as a good deal of scholarly training for granted, allowing Zarrūq to avoid prolonged theological discussion and, instead, delve into ṣūfism; second, Zarrūq clearly does not consider rational proof definitive evidence for a tenet of faith. Instead, rational argumentation takes a back seat to Scriptural and mystical considerations.

Zarrūq states the process of composing his commentary:

I will mention in [this commentary (*taʿlīqah*)] what occurred to me (*ḥaḍara lī*) of definitive demonstrations or clear proofs, call attention to whatever is possible for me [to indicate] of meanings, and point out some foundational principles; intending [in all this] to avoid prolixity and being overly attentive to detail (*tadqīq*).⁷²

Zarrūq's method does not seem to be very formal in that he does not indicate that much "research" went into his comments. If anything, it seems more appropriate for an informal teacher-student setting. Rather, Zarrūq's words make it quite clear that his intent for this work is less theological than mystical. Even the phrase *ḥaḍara lī* suggests the idea that Zarrūq was speaking spontaneously from

⁷² Aḥmad Zarrūq, *Sharḥ ʿaqīdat al-imām al-Ghazālī* in the margins of *Al-Kifāyah fī sharḥ bidāyat al-hidāyah*, by ʿAbd al-Qādir ibn Aḥmad al-Fākihī (Cairo: n.p., [1879]; London: British Library Reproductions, 2005), 2. Hereafter *Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid*.

his own personal inspiration rather than a prepared set of notes drawing from more encyclopedic works. We do indeed find evidence at the end of Zarrūq's commentary that suggests this. It appears that Zarrūq's intended audience is a group of his own students who are relatively advanced in their formal and spiritual education. In this commentary, Shaykh Zarrūq in his role as *murabbī* is both teaching the inward aspects of theology and offering advice on how their own students should approach theology in relation to the spiritual way.

The section following the *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* is entitled "On the manner in which to approach guidance and the order of the levels of faith," a small portion of which Zarrūq appends to his commentary as a supplement.⁷³ What is important to Zarrūq from this small excerpt is that al-Ghazālī here explains how belief is to manifest itself in action and what the real purpose of such a creed is.⁷⁴ According to Zarrūq, this practical aspect is the most important thing to know after a person has analyzed and understood the points of belief. In his opinion, action is the most perfect complement to faith.⁷⁵ Al-Ghazālī begins the section saying that, as we noted above, the creed he has just set down is best taught to a person in his childhood. Zarrūq commented that the reason for this is because the child's nature is uncorrupted by sin, unhampered by troubles and uncluttered by confusion. Moreover, the child's mind is easily impressed by ideas which, when acquired, are not easily forgotten. In an important textual variance, Zarrūq quotes al-Ghazālī saying that "the *murīd* on the outset of the spiritual path (*wa al-murīdu*

⁷³ Ibid., 154.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

fi awwali iqbālihi) is like the child in the beginning of his upbringing.”⁷⁶ Without this phrase, the rest of the paragraph would be directed toward the subject of childrearing whereas, with this addition to the text, the rest of the paragraph *could* be interpreted as talking about the rearing of the spiritual novice. Whether or not this addition is original to al-Ghazālī’s text or whether he intended to address the issue of rearing the spiritual novice is, for our purposes, unimportant. What is important is that Zarrūq’s copy of the *Iḥyā’* on which the text of his commentary was based, contained this additional phrase and, more importantly, Zarrūq interpreted the rest of the paragraph such that it is addressing the topic of the proper schooling of the fledgling mystic. Zarrūq responds affirmatively to al-Ghazālī’s analogy explaining that like the child, the novice is free of distraction from other than what he turns his attention to. His internal state, softened by his fresh enthusiasm, is like wax in that it willingly accepts every impression; every stipulation and command is enthusiastically met with assent. Zarrūq avers that the inductee should be given a creed like this one while he is in this sensitive state so that sound belief will penetrate his heart.⁷⁷ Donning the hat of the faqīh, Zarrūq then makes the following legal judgment:

To [the new initiate], if he is sound in faith and knows all of the beliefs that it is required to know, give him a creed similar to this in order to renew his belief. If not, then [learning the proper creed] is mandatory (*wājib*) for him in order to correct his beliefs. However, for a scholar of theology who knows the foundations of belief, what he already knows is sufficient. And God knows best.⁷⁸

This seems to confirm our suspicion that Zarrūq’s intended audience is a group of his own students who will benefit from advice on how to instruct fresh initiates to

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 155.

the ṣūfī path. The above details also indicate that Zarrūq's students who are listening to their master's advice are quite mature, both in their formal legal training as well as in their spiritual training; so much so that they would appreciate his psychological profile of the fresh initiate and thus understand the basis of Zarrūq's legal opinion about the optimal time for the instruction on matters of faith. The fact that Zarrūq even considers the possibility that a mature scholar of theology might submit to their spiritual guidance further recommends this conclusion.

Al-Ghazālī delves further into matters of spiritual pedagogy in the remarks immediately proceeding those mentioned above. Memorization, al-Ghazālī declares, is the first step in teaching sound belief but, as the child matures, the elements of faith will be revealed, bit by bit. Thus, according to al-Ghazālī's arrangement, memorization of the basic elements of the creed is first, followed by an intellectual understanding of the meanings in the creed, followed lastly by true faith. All of this, however, can be acquired by the child in his youth without requiring any proof (*burhān*).⁷⁹ Zarrūq's sequence for the proper instruction of belief differs significantly from al-Ghazālī's. Remember that Zarrūq, unlike al-Ghazālī, is talking strictly about the ṣūfī initiate who is normally a person who has already reached the age of legal responsibility. It is with this assumption that Zarrūq's ordering is constructed: first, belief in the totality of the elements of faith followed by elaboration on and close scrutiny of each article; then memorization followed by deep understanding (*tafahhum*); finally, augmenting faith and

⁷⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*, 140.

understanding with proof and building a firm foundation for the initiate's faith and comprehension by verifying each article of the creed.⁸⁰

What is the source of the different didactic schemes? Al-Ghazālī's sequencing of instruction is more general in its application than Zarrūq's, yet there remains a fundamental difference between the two. There are two differences: unlike al-Ghazālī, who places memorization of the text of the creed first, Zarrūq relegates it to a later step after the student has understood the whole creed and studied it in greater detail. Not only does Zarrūq posit that belief must come first but he justifies himself by asserting that belief in all of the articles of faith is the first legally mandated act of the person who has reached the age of legal responsibility. The second difference is that al-Ghazālī goes out of his way to minimize the importance of demonstrative proofs for faith. Zarrūq does the opposite in that he includes demonstration of the truth of the articles of faith as one of the important steps in its perfection.

"Pure memorization without recourse to the student's comprehension or anything like it" is how Zarrūq explains al-Ghazālī's first step in the instruction of a child. Zarrūq continues asserting that the student memorizes the text of the creed "in order to establish faith both conceptually and verbally in the student's visceral thoughts (*khayāl*)."⁸¹ Zarrūq notes that once the creed becomes permanently lodged in the seeker's mind,

then [the initiate] will seek its meaning in such a way that his search becomes intuitively necessary (*darūriyyan*). As a result, the concepts of the meanings will become clear whether by [his own] mental discernment or by the scholar who will facilitate his understanding [of the points of faith]. Then he will seek out what is

⁸⁰ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 156.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

behind the [basic meaning of the creed] and [those deeper meanings] will become evident to him in accordance with the strength of his intellect, comprehension and thought.⁸²

Zarrūq explains that what al-Ghazālī means by “intuitively necessary”

(*darūriyyan*) is not that the person has actually acquired faith but that the articles of belief have become entrenched in the mind such that “they are not amenable to change nor is it possible that doubt removes firm resolve [of their truth].”⁸³

Zarrūq explains further, saying that “whenever [the majority of people] see a matter, they instinctively refer to (*indafa‘ū*) whatever [the situation] demands of meanings which are associated with it.”⁸⁴ Thus, when Zarrūq says that belief becomes intuitively necessary ([*al-‘aqā'id*] *taṣīru darūratan*) he means that, like a person saying “*subḥāna-l-lāh*” when they are astonished or “*lā ilāha illā-lāh*” when they see something unusual, there is a sort of conditioning that makes their faith instinctive and thus lends it a sort of stubborn strength.⁸⁵ Yes, admits al-Ghazālī in answer to potential detractors, faith which results solely from following another’s personal authority (*taqlīd*) is not devoid of a type of weakness in the beginning in that a person’s faith can be shaken if it is met by what is contrary to it.⁸⁶ Zarrūq elaborates on al-Ghazālī’s statement saying that despite the weakness inherent in this scheme, the believer will eventually, over time, see the wisdom and the truth in the articles of faith that he learned as a child, and

as the years progress, his observing [life’s] fortunes (*al-taṣrīf*), the proofs in creation and the many aspects of wisdom aid him such that [his faith] increases until it is complete.⁸⁷

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 157.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Qawā'id al-‘Aqā'id*, 140.

⁸⁷ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 157. “Wisdom” is a loose translation of “*ḥikmah bālighah*. The

It may very well be, however, that Zarrūq includes himself as one of al-Ghazālī's detractors. Zarrūq sees al-Ghazālī's scheme as prone to weakness. Having simply memorized the articles of faith without the additional aspect of understanding, if a young, impressionable child or a naïve spiritual novice was met with the arguments of the skeptic or heretic, then in that very delicate time, there is a danger that either could be led astray. For Zarrūq, memorization is not enough if it is not accompanied by understanding. This is especially true when talking in the context of the mature ṣūfī neophyte who possesses neither a child's pure heart nor the intellectual clarity of untainted thought. As Zarrūq observes, though the ṣūfī initiate has taken the first step on the spiritual path, "the heart of the mature person is captivated by things such that he must seek preservation by overcoming whatever illusions that enter [the heart] and by defending whatever is opposing until there is no danger [of his going astray]."⁸⁸ Zarrūq is not content to sit idly by relying on the memorized phrases in a creed like a crutch that will allow the believer to hobble slowly and precariously through life. Rather, his instructional scheme focuses primarily on a thorough comprehension of the articles of faith and only secondarily on memorization. Moreover, Zarrūq strongly believes that the best way to combat the fragilities of the human heart is by enlisting the aid of demonstrative proofs that overcome the illusions which assail the believer.

word appears in the Qur'ān, LIV:5. It could be referring to revelation such as the Qur'ān itself or to *kalām* or it could simply be referring to the wisdom of the mature adult who has witnessed life's tides. It seems that the latter may be the closer to Zarrūq's intention in that it accords with the meaning of the rest of the sentence.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 156.

Al-Ghazālī disparages proof in matters of creed. The highest levels of certitude, claims al-Ghazālī, can be “acquired by the child without the aid of proof”; and in fact, al-Ghazālī considers it “among God’s favors to a person that his heart is receptive to faith in his youth without needing proof or demonstration.”⁸⁹ Zarrūq, however, strongly emphasizes the utility and practical necessity of proofs for attaining true faith. Certitude may come easily for the child but the mature adult acquires unshakable faith by scientific proofs (*dalā’il ‘ilmiyyah*) and demonstrations such that his is an informed certitude that is a direct result of knowledge (*‘ilm*) rather than a child’s intuitive faith.⁹⁰ As was described above, proof figures prominently in Zarrūq’s educational scheme and occupies the two highest levels in Zarrūq’s hierarchy of belief. After admitting that the generality of Muslims in his time possess weak faith based on *taqlīd* or what might be described in this context as “belief based on common opinion,” al-Ghazālī vehemently asserts that it is absolutely necessary to “strengthen and establish [faith] in the soul of the child and the common person so that [their faith] is firmly grounded and unshakable.”⁹¹ In explanation of this, among the many things that Zarrūq lists which help establish faith, the first is proofs from observation and the natural order of creation.⁹²

But Zarrūq has left out *the* crucial aspect of al-Ghazālī’s argument; that part which, if it had been included, would have made Zarrūq’s job as commentator extremely difficult. What follows immediately after Zarrūq’s last

⁸⁹ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā’id*, 156.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 155 and 156.

⁹¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Qawā’id al-‘Aqā’id*, 140.

⁹² Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā’id*, 158.

citation of al-Ghazālī is a withering attack by the latter on the use of *kalām* and its arguments in aid of belief. Al-Ghazālī says on the heels of Zarrūq's last citation that "learning *kalām* and argumentation (*jadāl*) are *not* the way to strengthen [faith]" and in fact, rather than serving as a remedy to weak belief, they corrupt it.⁹³ Al-Ghazālī is especially harsh against the so-called faith of the *mutakallimūn* whom he sees as being no better than illiterate but pious believers and in fact al-Ghazālī sees the faith of the righteous commoner as unquestionably superior to that of the theologian. While the commoner's faith is likened to a lofty mountain, the theologian who guards his faith with argumentation is like "the long piece of string which the wind blows here at one time and there another time."⁹⁴ Except, says al-Ghazālī, for the theologian who

hears some proof of faith and so he seizes it by merely admitting the truth of the proof [*fa-talaqqafa taqlidan*] in the same way that he seizes faith itself by merely admitting its truth. Thus, there is no difference in the matter of *taqlid* between the teaching of the proof (*dalīl*) and learning conclusions of the proof (*madlūl*, i.e., the articles of faith themselves). The teaching of the proof is one thing and seeking the proof [of the articles of faith] through investigation (*al-istidlāl bi al-naẓar*) is something else which is completely different (*baʿīd ʿanhu*).⁹⁵

Al-Ghazālī's argument succeeds in limiting the utility of belief based on learning theological proofs. As he indicates, there is no difference between an instructor's teaching the student's the proof, step-by-step, until the student has learned (i.e.

⁹³ Al-Ghazālī, *Qawāʿid al-ʿAqāʾid*, 140. Rather, says al-Ghazālī, the recitation of Qurʾān and learning its meaning and reading the Prophetic sayings and comprehending their meaning and being busy with the performance of devotional acts. If such is done, then belief will continue to increase simply due to the fact that his hearing will be repeatedly struck by the proofs in the Qurʾān, by the amazing benefit to be gleaned from the Prophetic example, by the light that will shine as a result of the performance of devotions and by the example of pious, God-fearing people, witnessing their humility and obedience to God's command. Thus, concludes al-Ghazālī, the beginning of the instruction in matters of faith is like planting a seed in the heart. Recitation of Qurʾān, reading Prophetic sayings, performing devotional acts and keeping the company of righteous people are like watering and tending the seed so that it will grow and flourish.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 140-141.

memorized) it, and the student merely learning the conclusions of the proofs, meaning the tenets of faith themselves. In either case, the student does nothing more than accept on the teacher's authority, either the proofs and its conclusions or just the conclusions. In the end, the result is the same, namely that even if the student understands the proofs and the articles, this is not the same as the student investigating the problem himself, searching for his own proofs and eventually, earning the spoils of his own internal battle, arriving at faith based on proof with which his intellect and heart are satisfied. It seems that for al-Ghazālī, the matter of proof is not a one-size-fits-all situation, but, rather, to each their own path to faith. Al-Ghazālī would argue that the proof of God's existence that every madrasah student learns is not enough: whether he memorizes the tenets of faith or merely the proofs with the tenets, the student remains the passive party, accepting all on the authority of the teacher. In fact, teaching the proofs might actually discourage the student from attempting to search out the proofs through his own investigation, leaving his faith immature and susceptible to doubt when confronted by what is contrary to it.

This argument threatens Zarrūq's reliance on the instruction of creed based on arguments constructed by theologians. Confronted in this manner, Zarrūq was compelled to balance his loyalties carefully. On the one hand, Zarrūq was a solid supporter of the means and ends of *kalām*, as has been amply demonstrated. Yet, the other loyalty he must weigh is the strength of al-Ghazālī's argument. Confronted by the specter of both, Zarrūq was impelled to find some middle path between the two opposing parties. The tension in Zarrūq's enterprise

is palpable and Zarrūq was, more often than not, cornered into an apology as Zarrūq directly confronted al-Ghazālī's words against theology. When al-Ghazālī's blatantly asserted that the path to strengthening the faith of the young student or the naïve initiate is not that of teaching him the art of theology or dialectic (*jadāl*), Zarrūq must admit that, in either scenario, there is a danger of the arguments increasing rather than removing doubt. Zarrūq counters saying that it is still necessary to know the foundations (*uṣūl*) and principles (*qawā'id*) on which *kalām* is based and that this is a responsibility for those who possess the ability to investigate such matters.⁹⁶ Inasmuch as the commoner can ask the theologian questions and thereby have his misgivings answered, theology, as a protection for faith, must be considered for some a necessity, while at other times it can be seen as harmful.⁹⁷ Again and again in these last pages of his commentary Zarrūq is forced to parry al-Ghazālī's thrusts. From the fact that the uncouth bedouins in the Prophetic age were not expected to affirm any more than the simplest aspects of faith, al-Ghazālī inferred that deep investigation and the construction of proofs for each article of faith is not at all required by holy law (*fa-lam yukallifū dhālika aṣlan*). Zarrūq can do no more than cite the opinion of the *mutakallimūn* who have, for their part, unanimously agreed that such an activity is, in fact, required by religious law.⁹⁸ As al-Ghazālī ends his argument by asserting the superiority of faith derived from mystical experience, Zarrūq heartily agrees, saying:

⁹⁶ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 159.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 160.

If they disagree about the degree of their sequence then: [1] belief which is devoid of proof (*burhān*) is like looking at something in the dead of night, yet there is no doubt in [the faith] itself nor in its properties (*wa lā shakka fihi dhātān wa wasfan*); [2] belief, despite being based on proof, is like looking at [something] in pre-dawn gloom; [3] belief based on mystical unveiling is like looking at [something] in clear sunlight. Each of the above paths achieves the same end. They only differ in the manner of perception (*fa al-kull fī intifāʾ al-shakk wa al-tawahhum wāḥid wa innamā ikhtalafat wujūh al-mushāhadāt*).⁹⁹

This is Zarrūq's last word on the subject and it is perhaps as close to a compromise as he achieves, given al-Ghazālī's staunch criticism. Zarrūq was probably pleased with the result in that he believed as much as al-Ghazālī in the superiority of belief derived from mystical experience. For Zarrūq, it was important to establish that most people are of sound faith, whether based mystical experience, rational deduction, intuition, or a passive acceptance of the tenets of belief based on another's authority. Doubt is effectively removed by any one of these paths and all fulfill the requirement imposed by sacred law; they only differ in the grades of faith which they lead to.¹⁰⁰ This does not differ very much from what al-Ghazālī might say. What *is* different in this situation is the prominent place given to proof—and by implication to *kalām*—as a sound method by which true faith can be attained and which is superior to faith based on no proof at all. Zarrūq is quite insistent on this point, and even in the face of all of al-Ghazālī's criticism Zarrūq still goes out of his way to quote extensively from this section of the *Iḥyāʾ*. Why?

⁹⁹ Ibid., 160-161.

¹⁰⁰ In the popular *Murshid al-muʿīn*—a didactic poem containing the fundamentals of Ashʿarite theology, Mālikī *fiqh* and the ṣūfism of al-Junayd—Ibn ʿĀshir says that the first mandatory act (*wājib*) for any person who becomes legally responsible (*kullīfā*) is to know God and the Messengers by the attributions which [God's] signs have indicated and which is, furthermore, established by investigation (*mumakkinan min naẓarin*); See Ibn ʿĀshir, *Murshid al-muʿīn ʿalā al-darūri min ʿulūm al-dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1993), 3-4. To get an idea of this poem's popularity see Wisnovsky, "Nature and scope," 178-179.

Zarrūq and al-Ghazālī shared the same end, namely, showing that ṣūfism is the genuine path to faith. As a result, Zarrūq considered it quite appropriate to quote from this section of the *Ihyāʾ* because it is here that al-Ghazālī asserts that genuine certitude is the exclusive prerogative of the ṣūfī path. It is this very fact that Zarrūq is referring to when he says that al-Ghazālī presents how to perfect the various aspects of faith that were discussed in the main body of Zarrūq's commentary. Where al-Ghazālī and Zarrūq differed is the means which the spiritual seeker can take in order to attain certainty. Zarrūq associated the path of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī with the principles of theology and asserted its superiority over any other spiritual path including those contained in the books of Imām al-Ghazālī. Taken this way, Zarrūq's stubborn defense of theology was not for theology's own sake, but because Zarrūq, as a Shādhilī saint, wanted to come to the defense of his *ṭarīqah*. This methodological difference is manifested in the pedagogical schemes outlined by Zarrūq and al-Ghazālī. Zarrūq went to great lengths to defend his assertion that rational proof is a genuine path to attaining a certain level of faith. However, Zarrūq took this one step further: for the Shādhilī ṣūfī, the subject matter and principles of *kalām* were not only appropriate to the theologians. The Shādhilī mystic also used the topics discussed in the creeds as the source of mystical insight and inspiration. Thus, if Zarrūq believed, as he says, that al-Ghazālī's words in this section of the *Ihyāʾ* regarding *kalām* are the principle and path to the perfection of faith, it seems safe to assume that, to an appreciable extent, Zarrūq would have taken al-Ghazālī's advice and followed this same methodology in his own work on theology. Al-Ghazālī's assertion that

ṣūfism possesses the key to true certitude is taken by Zarrūq as *the* guiding principle of his commentary. If Zarrūq believed that the Muslim creed is meant to have a practical purpose for ṣūfī initiate, then we must assume that it is along these lines that Zarrūq crafted his commentary: to serve as a guide to the novice mystic, alerting him to the spiritual basis lying beneath the formal aspects of the Muslim creed.

This conclusion finds further support in the manner in which Zarrūq argues for or against a certain position. It is remarkable that though Zarrūq does occasionally argue discursively, i.e. deducing the desired conclusion from first principles, most doctrines are argued by simply citing a number of authorities who will either confirm Zarrūq's interpretation or condemn the opinion which contradicts Zarrūq's explanation. In the end, the weight of the authorities cited is proof enough that what al-Ghazālī said was true and that Zarrūq's explanation is sound. The reason for this method of argumentation is three-fold: first, with an eye toward instruction, Zarrūq is able to detail for his reader the whole spectrum of opinions which might exist with regard to any particular debate; two, in that Zarrūq wants to emphasize the spiritual aspect of the tenets of faith, protracted discursive argumentation might not be considered appropriate for Zarrūq's intents; three, Zarrūq does not deem discursive proof nearly as strong as support from Scripture or from a respected religious authority. Two examples must suffice to demonstrate these claims: Zarrūq's discussion about the creation of human acts and the beatific vision.

Let there be no doubt, Zarrūq does supply arguments that do not rely

primarily on the scholarly or Scriptural authority. However, as we will see, Zarrūq does not explain the arguments very fully and often the arguments raise more questions than they answer. In this example, Zarrūq steps away from commenting on God's acts (*af'āl*) to an ancillary discussion of the creation of human acts and our responsibility for them in the Afterlife. This example is valuable because it is one of the few times that Zarrūq relies almost entirely on discursive argumentation.

Know that concerning the creation of [human] actions, people are divided into three groups. The first group is called the Jabriyyah. They hold that the servant does not acquire anything from his actions and so they link tyrannical oppression (*al-jawr*) to [just] punishment (*al-tadhīb*), nullifying Sacred Law and its rulings. And the intellectual refutation of them is that the person of sound mind is able to discern the difference between involuntary movement and voluntary movement. Moral responsibility is based on voluntary action not compulsion. The Scriptural refutation is God's saying: "For every soul is what it has earned and against it is what it has earned"; and He—May He be exalted—says: "They can do nothing with what they have earned."¹⁰¹

The second group is called the Qadariyyah. They hold that the servant creates his own actions, misguiding them or guiding them. They say the servant does ten things and so the servant is attributed with knowledge, ignorance, doubt, suspicious, thought, intention, belief, speech, movement and rest. Their view of those ten [things] depends on [legal] commands and prohibitions and reward and punishment [in the Afterlife. ...] The refutation of them is: in that power is connected to existence according to them and that existence, inasmuch as it is existence does not vary, rather, things only vary according to their states (*ahwāl*); then if the servant was the creator of his acts, then he must also be the creator of all the bodies and all the accidents. The upshot being that the servant is attributed with attributes of lordship (*rubūbiyyah*) which is absurd. [...]

The third is the Sunnī majority (*ahl al-sunnah*) and the party of truth who say that the servant is compelled in all but his choice. Rather, he has a power which is linked with the destined event but it has no power to effectuate (*ta'aththur*). Similarly, [this power] is with [the servant] in one locus, the locus being the moving body parts and so the power is connected to destined actions but, again, it has no influence. He says—May He be exalted—"For them is what they have earned and against them it what they have earned."¹⁰² Thus, [God] has made reward and punishment a result of acquisition, not compulsion. Some of the moderns (*muta'akhhirīn*) from among the masters of our masters have said, "Our way is that we have a created power (*qudrah ḥādithah*) but we have no power with it. [It is only that] our creator has permitted it to be termed as such because of His saying "before you have power."¹⁰³ Others of them say that disputation about this

¹⁰¹ Q: II.286; Q: II.264 respectively.

¹⁰² Q: II.286.

¹⁰³ "Except those who repent before you have power over them. Know that God is forgiving and merciful"; Q: V.34.

matter has continued since Adam to the present and it will not be resolved until the cover over the eyes is lifted in the Hereafter. And God knows best.¹⁰⁴

Zarrūq begins by refuting the Jabriyyah.¹⁰⁵ According to Zarrūq, they are the group who denies that they acquire any sin for their wrongdoing. Because humans are compelled by God to act, there cannot possibly be legal or moral responsibility which assumes human volition. Zarrūq provides two proofs refuting their position, one rational (*‘aqlan*), the other scriptural (*naqlan*). Based on common experience, it is certainly true that humans can distinguish voluntary actions like speaking from involuntary actions like shivering. That being the case, if people were being compelled by God to act in a certain way, they would certainly notice this fact in their everyday experience. The fact that the existence of choice is a common notion among all people of sound intellect indicates the falsity of their claim. Zarrūq follows this rational proof with verses from Scripture which indicate that, contrary to the Jabriyyah, people are indeed morally responsible for the actions which they acquire while they are alive. Though this argument deals with only an implication of the Jabriyyah argument, namely that there is no legal responsibility, for Zarrūq’s purposes it is only this aspect of the Jabriyyah doctrine that is problematic.

The Qadariyyah, says Zarrūq, hold that people have the power (*qudrah*) to create their actions.¹⁰⁶ They are free to act piously or impiously and they bear sole responsibility for them. According to the Qadariyyah, says Zarrūq, all people possess ten attributes. The manifestation of these attributes amounts to all human

¹⁰⁴ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā‘id*, 108-110.

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of the Jabriyyah see W. Montgomery Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London: Luzac & Company Ltd., 1948), 96-99.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 48-57.

action which is then viewed in light of the legal commands and prohibitions Sacred Law. If the person's acts are found to be in accordance with the prescriptions of Sacred Law then he is rewarded and if not, then he is punished. Zarrūq's refutation of this doctrine is rather curious. Zarrūq says that according to the Qadariyyah, the power to act is connected to necessarily to the act's existence. Zarrūq then asserts that existence, inasmuch as it is existence, does not vary; rather, things only vary according to their states (*al-wujūd min ḥaythu huwa wujūd lā yakhtalif wa innamā takhtalif al-ashyā' bi al-aḥwāl*). What this statement means exactly is unclear but Zarrūq seems to be implying is that given any human action, the existence of that action implies the existence of all matters which are related to this action coming into existence. For example, someone claps. Zarrūq seems to be arguing that if a Qadarite were to say that he created this action or brought this action into existence, then, properly speaking, he would have to bring into existence all the matters which are related to the clapping coming into existence, namely, hands, arms, skin color, muscles, sound etc. This is dismissed as absurd because it implies that this person has the god-like attribute of creator.

Whether these arguments are convincing or not is of no concern here. What is important for our purposes is to provide some illustration of how Zarrūq argues rationally in this commentary. Zarrūq's description of the classical Ash'arite position about human responsibility is close to the Jabriyyah position but he still insists on human responsibility. Man is certainly compelled in all his actions except in the choice to act. In fact, it seems that the only reason why

Ash'arites hold that humans possess power at all is due to a verse in the Qur'ān which indicates this fact. Zarrūq explains the reason why people do not notice that their actions are under compulsion by saying that humans are given a power which is linked with the destined event and thus there is an appearance of unfettered volition. In reality, says Zarrūq, this power has no influence on the procession of events. However, after Zarrūq has finished refuting the Jabriyyah and the Qadariyyah and explaining the sound Ash'arite doctrine he ends the discussion by dismissing the whole problem, saying that this issue has been a point of contention since the beginning and will never be resolved until the veils are removed from the eyes, meaning either death or perhaps spiritual unveiling. From the standpoint of education, it is important that Zarrūq's students are aware of the doctrines of the other two groups and the basic arguments against them. Beyond that, Zarrūq admits that the issue is one that has never and will probably never be resolved if we limit ourselves to purely rational data.

In fact, most of Zarrūq's commentary suggests that Zarrūq's aim is to take his readers beyond purely rational data. Though the above does provide a demonstration of how Zarrūq does argue using classical Ash'arite methods, the structure and content of most of Zarrūq's commentary indicates that Zarrūq prefers to eschew involvement in argumentation, arguing instead from scriptural and scholarly authority. Moreover, as the following discussion will demonstrate very clearly, after providing his readers with a basic theological primer in the issue at hand, Zarrūq's prefers to delve deeper into the mystical aspects of al-Ghazālī's creed. Zarrūq's remarks about the beatific vision provide an excellent

demonstration of these points. Al-Ghazālī initiates the discussion saying that God's essence is seen by the eyes (*mar'ā al-dhāt bi al-abṣār*) to which Zarrūq adds:

Meaning that in the manner in which His existence is known, vision of Him is intellectually feasible due to the fact that the cause (*'illah*) of vision is existence. If the vision of an existent entity is possible, then seeing any existent entity is possible. However, the Law-maker (i.e. God) has prevented its occurrence in the present life. This is narrated in the tradition of the Antichrist in [the ḥadīth collection of] Muslim: "One of you will not see God until he has died." Al-Qushayrī has transmitted from [Abū al-Ḥasan] al-Ash'arī a report affirming [the beatific vision in the present life] and another denying it. The first is not found in any other report [other than al-Qushayrī's]. This implies that denial [of the vision of God in the present life] is his real opinion (*rujū'an 'anhu*). This tradition is unequivocal (*naṣṣ*) and does not lend itself to some other interpretation. [Qāḍī] 'Iyād in his [*Shifā'*] chose to refrain [from passing judgment] due to the lack of definitive proof. Later Ash'arites (*muḥaqqiqūn*) say the beatific vision is possible in sleep. [Whatever the case], the beatific vision in the Hereafter is established by legal consensus, deriving from rigorously authenticated Prophetic traditions and unambiguous [Qur'ānic] verses. God the Most-High says: "at their Lord they gaze."¹⁰⁷ The Messenger of God—May peace descend upon him—said: "You shall see your Lord as you see the full moon." It is said that the act of gazing (*al-naẓar*) [in the Afterlife] resembles the act of gazing [in this life] but the "thing gazed at" [in the Afterlife] (i.e. God) does not resemble the "thing gazed at" [in this life], the proof being the [Prophetic saying], 'You will not compare [seeing the moon] with seeing Him (*lā tuḍāhūna fī ru'yatihi*)'. Some were asked, "How is God seen in the Hereafter?" They answered, 'He shows Himself to His creation, neither in a direction from Himself nor in a direction from His creation.' Some say that [the beatific vision] is vision of existence because it is in a particular place. In the commentary on the creed of Ibn Dahhāq—God have mercy on him—'Abū Ḥamid said, "if you are asked about the vision then say: As you know Him without knowing the way he is known (*min ghayr takyīf*), you will see him in the same [unknown] manner in the Hereafter. And this [position] is what Sunnī Muslims (*ahl al-sunnah*) have unanimously agreed upon [as being correct]."¹⁰⁸

Zarrūq's presents of the entire range of Ash'arite opinion on the beatific vision to his readers, citing early and later Ash'arites and Scripture. After establishing the rational possibility of the beatific vision, Zarrūq shift to a closely related discussion about whether or not this vision is possible in the present life. With regard to this debate, Zarrūq begins by quoting Scripture which suggests that the vision of God is not possible in the *dunyā*. Zarrūq notes that al-Qushayrī has

¹⁰⁷ Q: LXXV.23.

¹⁰⁸ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 55-56.

transmitted two mutually conflicting reports from Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī. However, Zarrūq only admits the report in which al-Ashʿarī affirms that the vision is a bliss exclusive to the Hereafter, dismissing the other report as unsubstantiated. Zarrūq next cites Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ bin Mūsā al-Yaḥṣubī (d. 544/1149) in the latter's *Shifāʾ*, despite the fact that he is not considered a theological authority and his *Shifāʾ* is a work devoted exclusively to enumerating the immensity of the Prophet Muḥammad's rank. Nevertheless, Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ was a respected scholar and the fact that he felt there was not enough evidence to be able to deny or affirm the possibility of the vision of God in the *dunyā* is powerful testimony for Zarrūq. This combined with the fact that later-Ashʿarites (*muḥaqqiqūn*) affirmed the possibility of the vision in sleep constitute enough evidence such that Zarrūq also neither affirms nor denies the beatific vision before death.

Though Zarrūq begins with a classic Ashʿarite argument from analogy (*qiyās*) for the vision of God, Zarrūq, like al-Rāzī, is dismissive.¹⁰⁹ Zarrūq does not use this proof to conclusively demonstrate the reality of the vision but rather uses it only to establish its intellectual feasibility. For Zarrūq, the testimony of Scripture is definitive. Prophetic traditions, Qurʾānic verses and legal consensus (*ijmāʿ*) are enlisted to establish absolutely the truth of the beatific vision in the Afterlife and to inform Zarrūq's murīds that the manner in which God is seen is unqualifiable. In fact, it is on the mystical aspect of the vision of God that Zarrūq prefers to focus his comments. After he has determined the basic necessities of

¹⁰⁹ See Ayman Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī: 6th/12th century developments in Muslim philosophical theology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 15 (2005): 166.

sound belief, namely, that a person must believe in the beatific vision in the Hereafter, Zarrūq switches his commentatorial voice from faqīh to ṣūfī. After al-Ghazālī is quoted saying that the vision of God is “a perfection of the heavenly bliss by gazing at His glorious countenance”, Zarrūq explains:

[This is so] because every vision in which the beloved is absent is deficient; in fact, it is not bliss at all. As is stated [by the poet]:

Amal, if you left, the days would be but funerals,
And I would see and hear no joy.

Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh's says in the *Hikam*: “Bliss—even if its outward appearance is multifarious—is ultimately witnessing Him and drawing nearer to Him. Agony (ʿadhāb)—even if its outward appearance is multifarious—is ultimately a result of a veil (*hijāb*). Thus, the cause of agony is the existence of a veil. The perfection of bliss is gazing at God's glorious countenance.

[God's] countenance (*al-wajh*) is something that people have differed about, whether interpreting it or leaving the matter to God (*al-wajh mimmā ikhtalafa fīhi bi al-taʾwīl wa al-tafwīd*). [That is], after excluding the impossible “countenance” which is limited or quantifiable—Exalted and Magnified is our Lord.

Karam can have two meanings: one is gloriousness of the essence and attributes and is equivalent to their exaltedness and loftiness. Then there is generosity (*karam*) which means to begin to give before being asked. Either of these meanings of *karam* is possible in this instance because his bestowing the vision upon [the people of Paradise] stems from the generosity of His acts, while [this vision] transcends every deficiency in the gloriousness of His essence and His attributes. It is said three things in Paradise are greater than Paradise itself: felicity (*naʿīm*), the beatific vision (*ruʾyah*), and [God's] satisfaction (*riḍā*). With reference to God's saying “To those who do good is requital and increase,” it is said that the “requital” is Paradise and the “increase” is the vision [of God]. Sahl ibn ʿAbdullāh [al-Tustarī] was asked about God's essence—May He be exalted. He responded: “Knowledge is attributed to it. [Human] comprehension cannot grasp it. In the present life, the eyes do not see it. It exists in connection with the realities of faith without definition, comprehension, or incarnation. The eyes will see Him in Paradise, manifest in His Dominion and Might but creation is ever veiled from gnosis of His very essence (*maʿrifat kunh dhātihī*). [His servants] are led to Him by His signs and thus the hearts know him but the intellects do not. With their eyes, the believers will look at Him without encompassment and without perception of any finitude.”¹¹⁰

The tenor of this passage is palpably different from the one above. Zarrūq's style switches to ṣūfī parlance and the authorities—Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh and al-Tustarī—are not known for their Ashʿarism but their ṣūfism.¹¹¹ Scripture retains its place of importance but now Zarrūq adds the insight of love poetry and applies it to ṣūfī

¹¹⁰ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid*, 57-59.

¹¹¹ See “Sahl al-Tustarī,” *EF*².

longing for the divine presence. Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh's fascinating interpretation of punishment (*ʿadhāb*) and bliss (*naʿīm*) takes the standard Ashʿarite position of bodily and spiritual recompense a little further, simplifying the entire matter to grades of proximity to the divine. In the first passage Zarrūq dealt with the formal aspects of the creed, providing his readers with some historical insight into the range of the debate as well as providing them with the soundest positions within the school. His rational argument for the feasibility of the beatific vision is not much more than an afterthought. In addition, Zarrūq does not outline the various positions within the Ashʿarite school in much detail. Rather, Zarrūq's real interest lies with more mystical considerations, meaning that Zarrūq is able to take the formulaic statements by al-Ghazālī and to consider them in a mystical light. Not only does Zarrūq detail the various opinions in the Ashʿarite school and provide the Scriptural sources of these opinions. Having dispensed with this material, Zarrūq can now turn his attention to the ṣūfī longing to be in the divine presence and redefining the agonies of Hell as being veiled from the divine and the delights of Paradise as witnessing and approaching the divine. Zarrūq ends his comments with the words of the famous ṣūfī Sahl ibn ʿAbdullāh al-Tustarī who talks at length about the nature of the beatific vision, though his comments lack the force of Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh's words.

Zarrūq's commentary is not even 60 pages in length.¹¹² Yet, for such a short commentary, the frequency and variety of Zarrūq's citations are quite astonishing. Zarrūq has over 100 individual citations of more than 40 different

¹¹² The commentary is printed in the margins and is spread over 161 pages but the margins are a third of the width of a full page.

scholarly authorities from *kalām*, *taṣawwuf*, *fiqh*, *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*.¹¹³ Even the most cursory glance at this commentary reveals an unusual number of references to authorities who are not commonly known as theologians, and also those who were known primarily for their ṣūfism. This is unheard of in the Ashʿarite *kalām* literature. Of course, this commentary was intended to serve chiefly as a tool for teaching novices the basics of the Ashʿarite creed and for this reason Zarrūq is very cautious about the doctrinal positions he adopts. Similarly, he chooses to quote heavily from Scripture in order to bolster confidence in the soundness of Ashʿarite doctrine and his own choices. This brings Zarrūq's disagreement with al-Ghazālī to the forefront in that Zarrūq still felt strongly that instruction in *kalām* was an important part of ṣūfī training. Zarrūq argued vociferously that instruction in theology is an essential part of a ṣūfī's spiritual training. Without a doubt, it is the spiritual aspect of the creed that seems to draw Zarrūq's attention.

¹¹³ Among the ḥadīth scholars Zarrūq quotes al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148), ʿAbd al-Rahmān b. al-Ḥusayn al-Miṣrī al-Ḥāfiẓ al-ʿIrāqī (d. 806/1404), Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn al-Walid al-Ṭurṭūshī (d. 474/1081), al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ ibn Mūsā al-Yaḥṣubī (d. 544/1149), Abū Zarʿah Zayn al-Dīn al-ʿIrāqī 826/1423; among the jurists he quotes Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn Rushd (d. 520/1126), Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), Ibn ʿArafah (d. 803/1401), Taj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 769/1368), Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 802 or 803/1399-1401), Ṣaḥnūn (d. 240/855), Ibn Abī Jamrah (d. 699/1300), Abū Ḥanifa (d. 150/767), Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820), Mālik bin Anas (d. 179/796), Ibn Abī Zayd al-Qayrawānī (d. 386/996), ʿIzz al-Dīn ibn ʿAbd al-Salām al-Sulamī (d. 660/1262); of the scholars of tafsīr he quotes Abū Ḥayyān (d. 745/1344); from the theologians is Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935-6), Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015), Abū Ishāq al-Isfarayīnī (d. 418/1027), Sayf al-Dīn al-ʿAmidī (d. 631/1233), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), Saʿd al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 793/1390), al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), Abū al-Walid Sulaymān ibn Khalaf al-Bājī (d. 474/1081), Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Simnānī (d. 444/1052); and finally from the ṣūfis: al-Ghazālī (d. 505/111), Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Wāsiṭī (d. 320/932), Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī (d. 656/1258), Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh (d. 709/1309), Abū ʿAbbās al-Mursī (d. 686/1287), Abū Madyan (d. 594/1197), al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), Dhu al-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 246/861), al-Junayd (d. 298/910), ʿUmar al-Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234), al-Buṣṣirī (d. 694-696/1294-1297), al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. 318-320/936-938), Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 215/830), Abū ʿAlī al-Rūdhbarī (d. 322/933), Abū al-Ḥasan al-Būshanjī (d. 348/959-960), Abū ʿUthmān al-Maghribī (d. 373/983), Yaḥyā ibn Muʿādh al-Rāzī (d. 258/871), Abū ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAṭāʾ (d. 369/979), and Abū Bakr Dulaf ibn Jaḥdar al-Shiblī (334/945).

As we will see in the next chapter, Zarrūq considers ṣūfī authorities in tandem with theological authorities. Zarrūq's mysticism clearly influences his theology.

CHAPTER III

We concluded the previous chapter by suggesting that Zarrūq's attitude toward ṣūfism affected how he approached theological matters. It is clear that Zarrūq's interest lies chiefly with *taṣawwuf* but how exactly Zarrūq uses the ideas of ṣūfism in his commentary requires further clarification. What is clear after considering the evidence below is that Zarrūq does not use ṣūfī sources only to draw out the mystical aspects of the formal creed, but ṣūfis are also given an authoritative voice as sources of sound theological opinion. Given that this is the case, it can be easy to lose sight of the fact that this is a theological commentary and it is on this aspect of our study that we wish to apply careful analysis. Zarrūq quotes many theologians who are, unsurprisingly, Ash'arites. What is more significant is that Zarrūq seems to favor early Ash'arite authorities over later Ash'arites. In fact, Zarrūq appears to show disdain for many of the most consequential debates of later Ash'arism. We cannot divine Zarrūq's motives with complete certainty but it seems that Zarrūq felt that the content and style of early Ash'arite *kalām* was more in line with his intentions for a "mystical" commentary.

Regarding his use of ṣūfī references, Zarrūq's draws almost exclusively on two drastically different sources of ṣūfī material. Unsurprisingly, the first is Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh as well as other major figures of the Shādhilī *ṭarīqah*. The second, more interestingly, is the *Risālah* of the renowned ṣūfī and Ash'arite theologian Abū al-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072). There are a number of reasons why Zarrūq might favor these two sources above others but, ultimately,

we must conclude that Zarrūq sees in the Shādhilī way and in al-Qushayrī's *Risālah* a common concern with the harmony between theology and mysticism. Zarrūq is interested in reinforcing this harmony because, as he asserts in his *Qawā'id al-Taṣawwuf*, it stands as a principle of the Shādhillī path.

Ṣūfī references are not evenly distributed throughout the commentary. If we divide the commentary in half, we find the first contains almost 30 references to ṣūfī authorities while the second half, excluding Zarrūq's supplemental discussion about education, has six.¹¹⁴ The reason for this large discrepancy probably lies in the fact that this division roughly corresponds to the division of the creed into God and God's attributes in the first half and God's acts in the second half.¹¹⁵ Inasmuch as Zarrūq considers the proper object of ṣūfism to be the mystical apprehension of God's inner reality, it is most appropriate that ṣūfī references would be more numerous in this first section.

Indeed, Zarrūq gives ṣūfīs the authority to provide their opinion on difficult creedal matters such as the meaning of *tawḥīd*, God's essence, God's knowledge, God's will, the famous problem of *istiwā'* and the meaning of the "throne ('*arsh*)", the idea of divine proximity (*qurb*), the beatific vision (*al-ru'yah*), etc. The overwhelming majority of these citations come from two principal sources: the *Hikam* of Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh and the ṣūfī masters who appear in al-Qushayrī's *Risālah fī 'ilm al-taṣawwuf*. The fact that Zarrūq quotes the *Hikam* frequently (11 times) should not come as a surprise given Zarrūq's predilection

¹¹⁴ If we were to include this section then twelve.

¹¹⁵ God's acts meaning, here, creation, Prophets, Messengers, revelations, Man's responsibility, Heaven, Hell, the Day of Reckoning, etc.

for this particular work. Nevertheless, Zarrūq does not use quotes from Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh as positive statements of creed. Rather, Zarrūq uses his quotes to demonstrate how a formal point of faith is related to the spiritual reality. This is not the case with the ṣūfis of the *Risālah* whom both Zarrūq and al-Qushayrī rely upon as sources of sound statements of the orthodox creed but whose statements are largely bereft of any spiritual import.¹¹⁶ Thus, on the one hand, by using ṣūfī authorities as references on theological matters, Zarrūq is proving his assertion in his *Qawāʿid al-Taṣawwuf* that there is a certain harmony that exists between ṣūfism and theology. However, Zarrūq wants to go a bit further. As we saw in the previous chapter, Zarrūq saw the ṣūfism typified by al-Shādhilī as superior to that of al-Ghazālī and al-Qushayrī. With that in mind, by using quotes taken from al-Qushayrī's *Risālah* which are not clearly mystical in content, Zarrūq is asserting the spiritual superiority of the Shādhilī way by making Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh the great unifier of the intellectual and spiritual realms, that is, of theology and mysticism.

We begin with a section in which Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh is quoted in the context of al-Ghazālī's assertion that "the throne does not carry God; rather, it and its bearers are all borne by God's subtle might."¹¹⁷ Zarrūq begins his explanation by clarifying al-Ghazālī's words saying that it is impossible for *istiwāʾ* to mean that God sat on the throne such that the throne somehow "supports" Him, when, in truth, it is the throne and the bearers of the throne who all derive their power and

¹¹⁶ By "orthodoxy" I mean what al-Qushayrī calls *ahl al-sunnah* in his *Risālah*.

¹¹⁷ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid*, 39.

strength to carry its burden from God.¹¹⁸ Zarrūq attempts to answer the obvious question of why God would create the throne if He had no need for it. Zarrūq's interpretation of this celebrated problem is that the throne is God's manifestation of His mercy. Consequently, God did not bring the throne into existence out of His need for it, but in order to bestow His mercy on creation.¹¹⁹ In support of his interpretation he cites a verse from Scripture and the following lines from the

Hikam:¹²⁰

Oh you who by His mercifulness (*rahmāniyyah*) is seated on His throne whereby the throne has disappeared in His mercifulness as worlds have disappeared in His throne. Footprints are obliterated by footprints and all which is other [than He] (*al-aghyār*) is obliterated by oceans of celestial lights.¹²¹

Taken as is, the meaning of this quote and its relation to the topic under discussion are not obvious. Zarrūq notes that this statement by Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh is a short excerpt from an intimate dialogue (*munājāh*) between Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh and God, the meaning of which even Zarrūq would admit is not wholly clear. Accordingly, Zarrūq provides his readers with an intralineal commentary in order to substantiate his own interpretation of the ʿ*arsh*, the reason for its creation, and the meaning of God's *istiwāʾ*.

Oh you who by His mercifulness is seated on His throne...
i.e., [His throne] is manifested by [His mercy].¹²² Thus, the throne neither exists nor subsists in existence except by [His mercy].
... whereby the throne has disappeared in His mercifulness...
i.e., [the throne has disappeared] inasmuch as it does not possess an relation to (*nisbah*) [God's mercy], not that it has [disappeared from] existence entirely or that its immensity [is hidden]. In other words, meaning that [the throne] is hidden in [His mercy]...
... as worlds have disappeared in His throne.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 40.

¹²⁰ Q:XI.119.

¹²¹ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid*, 40.

¹²² *Rahmānīyah* has been translated as "mercy". A more precise but unwieldy translation would be "mercifulness".

i.e., [worlds] have [disappeared in the throne] as a ring tossed in a desert waste.
Footprints [in the sand] are obliterated by [other] footprints.
 i.e., whatever is in the throne is hidden by it and, thus, does not possess an individual identity along with it.
and all that is other than He...
 i.e. the throne and all that is in it.
is obliterated by oceans of celestial lights...
 ...which are the vestiges of [God's attributes of] Power, Will and Mercy.¹²³

To a certain degree, Zarrūq's commentary does provide the reader with some insight into the meaning and purpose of the *‘arsh* and *istiwā’* in that it gives us some idea about a probable source for Zarrūq's interpretation of this particular tenet of faith. But other than providing a vague idea of the connection between God's mercy and the throne, Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh's words as well as Zarrūq's commentary raise more questions than they answer. Zarrūq is clearly using Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh's words to substantiate his own interpretation of God's "throne" and the "seating (*istiwā’*)." Nevertheless, the quote does not succeed in making any aspect of al-Ghazālī's words any clearer, at least from the perspective of simple matters of belief. Whatever problems this matter raises, it does, however, appear to demonstrate that Zarrūq's use of Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh's words is meant to draw out the mystical aspects of al-Ghazālī's creed. As much as Ibn ‘Aṭā’illāh's aphorisms were used to draw out the subtle mysteries from the *Mudawwanah*, Zarrūq seems to intend the same here in his commentary on the *Qawā‘id*.

How different this is from Ja‘far ibn Naṣīr's curt "[God's seating Himself on the throne means] His knowledge of everything. Thus, there is nothing closer to him than any other thing."¹²⁴ The reason Zarrūq uses this citation are to to

¹²³ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā‘id*, 40.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 38. Zarrūq attributes the quote to Dhū-n-Nūn al-Miṣrī; see al-Qusharyrī, *Risālah*, 6. Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad ibn Naṣīr (d. 348/959-60). He was born and raised in Baghdad and was the companion of al-Junayd and traces his lineage to him. He died in Baghdad; see ‘Abd al-

deny that God's "seating himself on His throne" implies that God increases in spatial proximity to His throne or anything else in creation, and also to show to his readers that a figurative interpretation of Scripture in this instance is permissible since other authorities in the past have done so. Zarrūq thereby gives himself some wriggle room so that he can eventually provide his own interpretation. What is most striking, however, when we compare these two interpretations—one by Zarrūq but based on Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh and the other by Jaʿfar ibn Naṣīr—is the difference in content. That is, the latter's interpretations is more akin to that of an Ashʿarite theologian in that it possesses none of the obscurity of Zarrūq's and Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh's more elaborate mystical language. The precise, formulaic definitions of *tawḥīd* provided by al-Junayd, Abū ʿAlī al-Rūdhbārī, and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Būshanjī, the descriptions of God's essence articulated by Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī and Sahl ibn ʿAbdullāh al-Tustarī, and the concise and articulate summary of *tawḥīd* by al-Ḥusayn ibn Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj, all are similar to statements that might be made by a theologian. On the other hand, none contain the spiritual aspect that epitomizes Zarrūq's quotations from Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh or any of the other Shādhilī masters.

To illustrate another side of Zarrūq's concern with mystical insight rather than theological rigor, we turn to another topic treated in al-Ghazālī's creed, namely, the fact that God is not limited or encompassed by thought, space, time or measure. In his elaboration on this point, Zarrūq quotes Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, then Yaḥyā ibn Muʿādh al-Rāzī, followed by al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī, and

Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Qushayrī, *Al-Risālah al-Qushayriyyah fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿArabī, 1980), 28. Hereafter *Risālah*.

only then ends this rather lengthy discussion with a quote from Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh. Again, this quote is not directly related to the discussion at hand. When al-Ghazālī says very plainly that God has no limits, al-Juwaynī is first cited, identifying how the anthropomorphists and the atheists have placed limits on God in the past. Then Yaḥyā ibn Muʿādh al-Rāzī, one of the *imāms* of al-Qushayrī's *Risālah*, is quoted by Zarrūq denying even the possibility of any real human description of God. Al-Ḥasan is quoted answering questions about God, God's attributes, and God's act, deriving his responses entirely from Scripture. It is only at this juncture that Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh is quoted in the *Hikam* as saying:

God (lit. *al-Ḥaqq*, the Truth or the True or the Real) is not veiled. The only one veiled is *you*; [veiled] from looking upon Him. If something were to veil Him, then whatever veils Him has covered Him. If He had something that covered Him, then His existence would have some limit. Everything which limits something else is subjugated by it. [And how can this be] when "He is over all things Irresistible."¹²⁵

This quote is related to the larger discussion only inasmuch as it talks about the fact that nothing veils God for if God were veiled, then there would be some other power in existence to which He is subject, which is impossible based on the clear evidence from Scripture. But the primary thrust of the quote is something else entirely. Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh is only accidentally concerned with God's limitlessness and more concerned, properly speaking, with teaching the *ṣūfī*-in-training about who is at fault for his lack of spiritual progress. Sins and disobedience are the cause of the *murīd*'s continuing failure to reach God; it is not God who is veiled but the seeker who is effectively veiling himself. Clearly, Zarrūq's quote has not added anything substantially new to the discussion in terms of theology.

¹²⁵ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid*, 33. Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh quotes Q:V.18. The literal translation of the verse is that "He is over His slaves, absolutely dominant (*wa huwa al-qāhiru fawqa ʿibādih*).

Moreover, Zarrūq cites Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh without comment, leaving the reader at a loss as to how to properly relate this quote to the topic under scrutiny. We cannot but assume that Zarrūq is not relying on Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh for further clarification of possible points of confusion in the creed. In line with his overall purpose of using the commentary on a theological text as a springboard for drawing out spiritual insight, Zarrūq instead uses the discussion of God's limitlessness as a pretext to involve Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh's practical insight into the nature of the relationship between God and His servant vis-à-vis the latter's spiritual journey.

How does Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh's quote compare to Yaḥyā ibn Muʿādh al-Rāzī's in the same context?¹²⁶

It was said to Yaḥyā ibn Muʿādh al-Rāzī, "Inform us about God."

He said "He is one God."

It was said, "How is He (*wa kayfa huwa*)?"

He said, "He is a mighty king."

It was said, "Where is He?"

He said, "He is on a watch-tower (*bi al-mirṣād*)."¹²⁷

The questioner then said, "I did not ask you about that."

He said, "Anything other than this is an attribute of the creation. As for the attribute of the Creator, I have not informed you about them."¹²⁸

The differences between this and the above quotes taken from the *Hikam* are drastic. The meaning of the passage is quite clear and is not possessed of any overtly spiritual significance. Yaḥyā al-Rāzī's quote has direct bearing on the subject under discussion and is intended primarily as an extension of al-Ghazālī's statement in that it highlights another aspect of God's limitlessness. Not only can

¹²⁶ It is interesting to note that Yaḥyā al-Rāzī's quote is a conversation between him and an anonymous questioner which was narrated to al-Qushayrī much like *ḥadīth* were narrated (I heard from Fulān that Fulān heard from *Shaykh* Fulān...). The anonymous questioner who comes seeking enlightenment from the *ṣūfī* master is a common setting in al-Qushayrī's *Risālah* for statements about the tenets of faith.

¹²⁷ This is from Q: LXXXIX.14. "For thy Lord is on a watch-tower."

¹²⁸ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 32. Al-Qushayrī, *Risālah*, 6. Reading *fa mā akhbartuka ʿanhā* rather than *ʿanhu*.

God not be encompassed by space or time or any other things in the created universe, but even human language is utterly powerless to offer any proper description of God with other than terms derived from the divine language of Scripture. Both al-Juwaynī's and al-Ḥusayn's testimony confirm the general conclusion of Yahyā al-Rāzī: intellect and language are incapable of either grasping or articulating God's reality.¹²⁹ Finally, al-Rāzī's response to the questioner, unlike Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh's quote, is not meant to endow the ṣūfī novice with any special spiritual insight beyond that which is readily apparent: that human language and human intellect, for all its complexity, cannot hope to give a proper description of God with other than the language of Scripture.

What does Zarrūq intend by all this? Both groups were well-respected ṣūfīs before they were theologians, yet Zarrūq enlists their aid in theological as well as spiritual matters. Moreover, Zarrūq seems to exploit the quotes taken from each group to different ends. It has been demonstrated above that Zarrūq intended his commentary to serve dual purposes, as both a theological as well as mystical exposé. To this end, it is unremarkable that Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh and other Shādhilī masters would be quoted, given Zarrūq's affiliation with the *ṭarīqah*, given his numerous commentaries on the *Ḥikam*, and given his many years of scholarly training under scholars and ṣūfī masters who either were directly associated with the *ṭarīqah* or at least strongly associated with the methodology

¹²⁹ "Al-Imām Abū al-Maʿālī [al-Juwaynī]—May God have mercy on him—said, "Whoever satisfies his mind with the mere fact that God is an existent and nothing more is a person who claims God resembles His creation (*mushabbih*). This is the doctrine of the anthropomorphists. Whoever satisfies his mind with complete denial [of God's existence] is one who denies God all attributes. This is the doctrine of the atheists (*dahriyyah*). Whoever satisfies his mind with the fact that God is an existent whose reality he is incapable of perceiving, this person believes properly in *tawḥīd* (*fa huwa muwahḥid*)"; Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid*, 32.

outlined in the *ṭarīqah*'s foundational works. The curiosity, then, is al-Qushayrī and his *Risālah*. Al-Qushayrī should be something of a hero for Aḥmad Zarrūq: he is as famous for his ṣūfism as he is for his Ashʿarism. His *Risālah*, composed in 438/1045, is one of the most famous books on ṣūfism in Islamic history as well as one of the oldest. As both the student of Abū Ishāq al-Isfarayīnī and Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak, he is just as well-regarded as a major authority in the Ashʿarī school.¹³⁰ So in one sense, al-Qushayrī embodies Zarrūq's paradigmatic saint who, like the Shādhilīs, combines knowledge of the principles of theology with those of mysticism. We should recall Zarrūq's critical statement in his *Principles* where he lays down an important practical criterion for the spiritual path, saying that the ṣūfī quickest to spiritual realization is the one concerned with foundational principles (*uṣūl*) and who "concentrates on analyzing faith through the instrument of reliable knowledge."¹³¹ Not only al-Qushayrī but the rest of the great mystics of the *Risālah* are also portrayed as embodying this Zarrūqian ideal but only inasmuch as their presence in Zarrūq's commentary demonstrates his theses in the *Principles of Sūfism*. Zarrūq is using these quotes from the *Risālah* not only to clarify a theological point but also, and more importantly, to prove a point. It is not so much that Zarrūq necessarily agrees with the *taṣawwuf* in al-Qushayrī's

¹³⁰ Ibn ʿAsākir reports in *Tabyīn Kadhib al-Muftarī* that Abū Ishāq al-Isfarayīnī said that he was "one who reached the level of *mujtahid* from among the scholars due to the depth of his knowledge. He meets all the requirements of being an [*mujtahid*] *imām* [in his] knowledge of Arabic, fiqh, theology (*kalām*) and jurisprudence (*uṣūl*) as well as his knowledge of scripture (*Qurʾān wa sunnah*)". See Abū Qāsim ʿAlī ibn ʿAsākir, *Tabyīn Kadhib al-Muftarī* (Damascus: Maṭbaʿat al-Tawfīq, [1928-29]), 243-244. Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak along with al-Bāqillānī was one of the students of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Bāhili who was the direct student of al-Ashʿarī. Both were important early sources for the Ashʿarite school. Ibid., 178. Also "Ibn Fūrak," *ET*².

¹³¹ Kugle, "In Search of the Center," 177-178.

Risālah—in fact, he most likely does not—but Zarrūq is using this book as a source because he can prove through his own commentary that theology and *taṣawwuf* share similar principles, and similar ends.

Paradoxically, the same principle that Zarrūq is using al-Qushayrī and company to prove, requires that he disagree with them as well. Here, Zarrūq's disagreement with al-Ghazālī about *taṣawwuf* is important. As we saw above, Zarrūq considers the ṣūfism of al-Shādhilī as superior to the ṣūfism of al-Ghazālī. By extension, given the methodological similarity between al-Qushayrī and al-Ghazālī, Zarrūq would consider the way of al-Shādhilī superior to that of al-Qushayrī as well.¹³² If Zarrūq gives Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh spiritual authority in his commentary, then it is because Zarrūq feels that this is truly the case. We see this in the types of quotes drawn from al-Qushayrī's *Risālah*: they consistently and unambiguously deny the ability to know God as He is in reality. Moreover, their statements about the beatific vision (*ruʾyah*) and divine proximity (*qurb*) weigh heavily toward the unknowable, emphasizing Man's intellectual impotence. Their formulae are, in essence, statements by theologians. Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh's quotes differ in that they deal always with elaborate spiritual complexities or with spiritual insight that will aid the seeker in his path. In this way, Zarrūq has clearly established Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh's spiritual superiority over the imāms of the *Risālah*. In the realm of theology, Zarrūq defers to the *Risālah* in order substantiate claims in the *Qawāʿid al-Taṣawwuf*. But in the realm of the saint, Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh is king.

Interestingly, Zarrūq never quotes al-Qushayrī in his capacity as a ṣūfī

¹³² Aurthur John Arberry, *Sufism: An Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950), 74.

though he is Zarrūq's most frequently-quoted theological authority. In general, Zarrūq seems to prefer the theologians of the ancient Ash'arite school over the moderns: Zarrūq quotes Ash'arite theologians who lived before and including al-Ghazālī on 22 separate occasions. Zarrūq generally employs early Ash'arite authorities in a fairly simple manner, usually in order to provide a discussion with a historical context within the Ash'arite school. There are two major observations about how Zarrūq employs citations of early authorities of theology. The first is that early Ash'arites (i.e. those before Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī) are cited throughout Zarrūq's commentary. The second observation is that while Zarrūq quotes early Ash'arites more frequently, he rarely quotes them at length. More often than not, they are merely related as having held such-and-such an opinion and their actual words are not provided. More often than not, Zarrūq's citations are no more than "al-Qusharyrī held this view" or "al-Qusharyrī reports Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī held two different opinions on such-and-such" or "al-Bāqillānī held this or that opinion."¹³³ If the authority is actually quoted then usually the quote is not more than a few lines in length. However, what is interesting about these quotes is that although they are brief, Zarrūq uses them to give historical depth to a particular theological debate. This reveals the historical complexity of the debate, broadens the number of opinions that the reader is aware of and allows Zarrūq to argue more convincingly for his opinion at the end of the discussion.

For example the debate about whether faith founded on passive acceptance of scholarly authority (*taqlīd*) is sound, Zarrūq says that al-Ghazālī and the

¹³³ For example, see Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 55, 56, 71, 83, 142, 146, 151.

majority of the scholars of theology have affirmed the soundness of faith based on *taqlīd*.¹³⁴ Zarrūq moves to reduce the debate to a moot point by quoting Ibn Abī Jamrah saying that “al-Bājī related from al-Simnānī that the statement that the first legal obligation is investigation and seeking proof [of God’s existence] is a matter acquired from the Mu^ctazilites which characterized a certain creedal position within the [Mu^ctazilite] school.”¹³⁵ Immediately afterwards, Zarrūq quotes a historical report from Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī which notes that, contrary to the opinions mentioned previously, al-Ash^carī held that faith based on *taqlīd* is unsound. But Zarrūq immediately cites al-Qushayrī who said, according to Zarrūq, that this particular report was a fabrication falsely attributed to al-Ash^carī.¹³⁶ Thus, in a matter of a few lines, Zarrūq is able to present an irenic view of the debate on *taqlīd* which raged within the Ash^carī school.¹³⁷ Only after this does Zarrūq finally conclude with a more nuanced middle path between the two positions he quoted: if the person’s belief is taking the word of another without proof, and doubt and delusion endure, then their faith is invalid. If,

¹³⁴ Ibid., 151. Zarrūq notes that in matters of religious faith, it is enough for the Muslim’s faith to be based solely on the authority of others (*taqlīd*). Zarrūq also notes that the majority of scholars are with al-Ghazālī on this matter. Zarrūq cites al-Ghazālī’s proof in the *Qawā’id* which says that the Prophet Muḥammad accepted the Islam of the illiterate desert Arabs and those like them; Cf. al-Ghazālī, *Qawā’id al-‘Aqā’id*, 141. Zarrūq also says that in the same way that a person can become an apostate by following another into disbelief so can a person’s faith be sound by following another in sound belief.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid. The discussion of this prickly issue continues into the prologue (*khātimah*) and beyond. Zarrūq quotes the jurist Ibn Rushd who says that “investigation like that of the theologians is not legally obligatory by scholarly consensus. Rather, any path one takes [to acquire certainty] is sufficient.” Zarrūq then quotes Ibn ‘Arafah who explains Ibn Rushd’s words saying that what Ibn Rushd meant by the construction of analytical proofs not being obligatory was that it is, rather, recommended (*mandūb*). Zarrūq concludes saying that “talk on this matter is expansive in all creed texts”; see pages 152-153.

¹³⁷ Richard M. Frank, “Knowledge and *taqlīd*: the foundations of religious belief in classical Ash‘arism,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109: 1 (1989): 37-62.

however, their faith is firm, then following another authority without demanding proof is sufficient.¹³⁸

That is not to say that Zarrūq considers the early Ash'arite theologians as no more than historical props. Zarrūq's longest quotation of an early Ash'arite involves a general methodological point rather than a specific creedal point and is taken by Zarrūq as a practical standard when dealing with tricky issues involving God's attributes. The quote comes early in Zarrūq's commentary in the section on divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) in which al-Ghazālī is speaking about the problem of *istiwā'*. Zarrūq comments saying that we can only properly understand this matter if we keep in mind God's transcendence beyond the physical created universe and similarly, denying any meaning that smacks of anthropomorphism. In this particular case, Zarrūq asserts, the literal meaning of "God is seated on the throne" contradicts what is intellectually feasible. Thus, recourse must be had either to interpretation of the otherwise impossible, literal meaning or simply resignation of the matter to God (*tafwīd*), the latter being the safer, though, perhaps, less satisfying route.¹³⁹ In support of his assertions Zarrūq quotes Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak who lays out a practical principle for dealing with difficult questions about some of God's attributes.¹⁴⁰ Inevitably, the literal sense of scripture (*al-ẓawāhir al-naqliyyah*) will contradict what the intellect deems necessarily true (*al-adillah al-'aqliyyah*). In our particular case, we know with certainty that God does not literally sit on the throne, regardless of what the literal

¹³⁸ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 151.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 35. Zarrūq reports that either route is acceptable according to Ash'arite scholarly consensus (*ijmā'*) because both avoid falling into anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*).

¹⁴⁰ For the entire discussion, see Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 34-36.

meaning found in scripture might suggest. Four different scenarios are possible when dealing with this type of situation, only one of which Ibn Fūrak finds satisfactory. If we affirm both the literal sense as well as what the intellect deems necessarily true then we are forced into the highly unsavory position of affirming two contradictory propositions. Were we to deny both the literal sense as well as what the intellect deems necessarily true, such a move would obviously amount to denying scripture entirely. On the other hand, we could affirm the literal sense of scripture and deny what the intellect deems necessarily. The problem with this choice, says Ibn Fūrak, is that such a move is intellectually inconsistent. The fact that such a position would be indefensible in debate aside, anyone who held such a view would forever be challenged by their own intellect in an unceasing internal debate. The reason for this, explains Ibn Fūrak, is that the indices of the intellect or the proofs which the mind constructs in an effort to understand a concept constitute the foundation upon which the understanding of the literal sense of scripture is built. The intellect is necessarily prior to scripture and thus, accepting the validity of a practical application of a principle while denying the validity of the principle itself leads to the denial of both. Thus, concludes Ibn Fūrak, in a situation such as this, no other option is available to us except to hold the validity of what the intellect deems necessary and to interpret the literal sense of the scripture, if an interpretation can be found that the intellect admits as feasible. Or, if not, there is nothing to do but to resign the matter to God.¹⁴¹

Despite the fact that the principles derived from Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 35-36.

inform much of Zarrūq's discussion of problems of God's attributes, it is still very easy to view this and the rest of Zarrūq's quotes of the early Ash'arite school as mainly an exercise in providing his readers with a bit of ancient Ash'arite history. Only on rare occasions are early Ash'arites employed to actually explain the meaning of a certain concept. Even when they are, their word is never definitive. As we saw above, al-Ash'arī, al-Qushayrī and al-Simnānī were all cited in order to supply a certain context to Zarrūq's discussion and eventual resolution of the issue of *taqlīd*. Even more than these, Ibn Fūrak's approach to scriptural ambiguities is rooted in the ideology of al-Ash'arī himself. As Corbin observes, al-Ash'arī's system of thought is marked by the struggle to reconcile the two extremes of *tashbīh* and *ta'ṭīl* and this tendency appears in nearly all the solutions proposed by him.¹⁴² In reference to the challenges posed by verses in the Qur'ān and Prophetic literature whose literal meaning implies an anthropomorphic deity, al-Ash'arī's chief goal was to give the literal sense of scripture as well as the intellect their proper due. In this case, al-Ash'arī and those after him were forced to walk a thin line between the Mut'azilites for whom all anthropomorphic attributes were metaphor and the literalists for whom the attributes were very real phenomena and must be understood as such.¹⁴³ Al-Ash'arī's solution accorded with the literalists in that it affirmed the attributes as non-identical with the divine essence. At the same time, it denied any and all physical or material reality to the divine attributes.¹⁴⁴ However, al-Ash'arī eventually had to admit that human

¹⁴² Corbin, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, 168.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 169-170.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 168.

intellect is ultimately incapable of grasping the reality of these aspects of scripture. Accordingly, as summed up in his famous *bi lā kayf*, al-Ash^carī both affirms what the intellect deems necessary, i.e. the impossibility of an anthropomorphic God, and what scripture has established as true, i.e. that God possesses Hands, Face, etc. Ibn Fūrak's formulation of this same principle, though not identical, is similar to the stance adopted by al-Ash^carī himself. Though resigning the matter to God (*tafwīd*) is closer to al-Ash^carī's idea of *bi lā kayf*, interpretation of the literal sense (*ta'wīl*), though more controversial, affords the same end for, as Zarrūq says, it neither denies the reality of the divine attributes nor affirms an anthropomorphic Godhead.¹⁴⁵

The benefit of providing a broad historical context for his comments is obvious. Background provides readers with a greater appreciation of the sources and complexities of certain theological debates while providing a broad scope of opinions that existed even within the same school. A more nuanced resolution of the issue which considers both sides of the debate is thereby made possible. Zarrūq's resolution of the debate on *taqlīd* conforms to neither camp exactly. However, since he has provided some historical context, his resolution, nonetheless unquestionably falls within the bounds of acceptable Ash^carite opinion. This same sort of motivational clarity is not possible when dealing with the late Ash^carites. Zarrūq only cites theologians after and including Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī six times.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, these quotes are concentrated in only four

¹⁴⁵ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 35.

¹⁴⁶ There are six primary sources of quotes: from among the early theologians we have Abū al-Hasan al-Ash^carī, Abū Ishāq al-Isfarayīnī, Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak, al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī,

locations in the text.¹⁴⁷ Though Zarrūq only quotes the moderns infrequently, his quotes are often quite extensive but are not as complex as the language that normally characterizes Islamic theology after Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.¹⁴⁸ The reasons for Zarrūq's reluctance to cite more contemporary sources are certainly not expressed explicitly but, at the very least, it is likely that Zarrūq felt that dwelling on philosophical minutiae was not appropriate for a "ṣūfī" commentary. In any case, Zarrūq does not seem to have placed much importance on the differences characterizing the earlier and later trends in the Ash'arite school though he was evidently aware of them.¹⁴⁹ Rather, he seems to see the development of the school as one long progression from al-Ash'arī to his own *shaykh* Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490). In other words, he wouldn't necessarily see Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī as any less "Ash'arī" than Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, though the methodology and content of their works be starkly dissimilar.¹⁵⁰

By Zarrūq's day the use of Avicennian logic and metaphysics was

Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī, and Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī. Outside of the *Qawā'id*, al-Ghazālī is only quoted once in his capacity as a theologian. From the moderns we have three: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī, and Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftazānī

¹⁴⁷ He first quotes al-Taftazānī in a revealing discussion about the use of the term *azalī* to describe God; see Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 18. Next comes a critical discussion inspired by al-Ghazālī's assertion that "In Himself, God's existence is known by the intellect (*wa annahu fī dhātihī ma'lūm al-wujūd*)"; *ibid*, 55. Al-Rāzī has a very long quote in the context of God's will and human responsibility; *ibid*, 77-79.

¹⁴⁸ Watt has noted what he calls philosophy's invasion of theology. All are called "philosophical theologians" meaning that philosophy becomes increasing important as the basis for rational arguments for Ash'arite tenets of faith. See Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 127.

¹⁴⁹ E.E. Elder, apparently following Ibn Khaldūn, notes the distinction between the ancient (*mutaqaddimūn*) and the modern (*muta'akhkhirūn*) Ash'arites. Given the drastic differences between the two "schools" and given that later theologians like al-Jurjānī and al-Taftazānī discuss it in their theological works, it is unlikely that Zarrūq was unaware of the distinction. See Elder, introduction to *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, xvi. Also Robert Wisnovsky, "One aspect of the Avicennian turn in Sunnī theology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14 (2004): 65.

¹⁵⁰ In what remains of this chapter we will discuss how Zarrūq interacts as a commentator with the later Ash'arites but we will leave the broad implications for the last chapter.

common in Ash'arite theological discourse.¹⁵¹ In the works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, °Aḏūd al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), Sa°d al-Dīn al-Taftazānī (d. 793/30/1390), Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233), °Abdullāh al-Bayḏāwī (d. 685/1286?), Maḥmūd al-Iṣfahānī (d. 749/1348), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawwānī (d. 907/1501), and Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490) just to name a few, there is ample evidence that suggests that Avicennian metaphysics and logic were being used constructively. The length and complexity of their works was unparalleled in the history of Ash'arism. The result of this was that there is hardly any similarity between the works of, say, Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. The practical implications of this fact are that anyone who wanted to understand and participate in later Ash'arite discussions had to be thoroughly educated in Avicennian logic, physics and metaphysics. For Zarrūq the ṣūfī, this was an untenable position, because he believed as al-Ghazālī had that *taṣawwuf* was the superior path to truth. Al-Ghazālī's criticisms in the *Iḥyā'* would have been a powerful deterrent to dressing God in the vestments of theological debate. We cannot say that Zarrūq disapproved of these developments in Ash'arism or that he felt that what later Ash'arties said was untrue: we have no evidence to support this conclusion. More than anything else, Zarrūq's loyalty to ṣūfism would have drawn Zarrūq away from further involvement in Ash'arite debate, especially in this commentary. For Zarrūq's purposes, the Ash'arism of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'* and the Ash'arites before al-Ghazālī were more in harmony with Zarrūq's mystical ends.

¹⁵¹ Wisnovsky, "Nature and scope," 4-8.

At the very least, the thrust of al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* would have given the cautious Zarrūq pause about the foundational principles of Ash'arism in his day.

Zarrūq does indeed appear to have been averse to getting very deep into the technical aspects of theology, especially that of the later Ash'arites. With the earlier Ash'arites, this was less of a challenge given the greater brevity of the works as well as the technical linguistic simplicity. An instructive example appears in Zarrūq's opening remarks on the section on divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) where Zarrūq begins by offering its definition. According to Zarrūq, divine transcendence is the human individual's intellectual negation of anything that is unbecoming of being associated with God. Moreover, says Zarrūq, this transcendence is necessary, having been established by intellectual and scriptural proof. This idea of necessity leads Zarrūq to say:

And no discussion on this matter or on any other matter involving rational intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*) will ever be successful except after understanding the types of rational judgments (*aḥkām al-ʿaql*) of which there are three: necessity (*al-wujūb*), possibility (*al-jawāz*), and impossibility (*al-istiḥālah*). As for the necessary, it is anything for which the denial of its existence is deemed necessarily invalid by the intellect (*mā lā yaṣiḥḥu nafyu wujudihi bi ʿarḍi al-ʿaqli*). The possible (*al-jāʾiz*) is anything for which the denial [of its existence] is not more likely than its existence nor the opposite (*mā laysa nafyuhu bi awlā min thubūtihi wa lā bi al-ʿaks*). The impossible (*al-mustaḥīl*) is anything whose affirmation is invalid and whose existence is inconceivable (*mā lā yaṣiḥḥu ithbātuhu wa lā yutaṣawwaru wujūduhu*). [The impossible] is then categorized further: impossible in itself (*maḥālun li dhātihi*) and impossible by other than itself (*maḥālun li ḡayrihi*). In a similar way are the necessary and possible [categorized]. But talk on this subject is vast so investigate it in the encyclopedic compendia (*muṭawwalāt*).¹⁵²

We can be reasonably sure that Zarrūq acquired this particular categorization directly from Yūsuf al-Sanūsī, his teacher at the Azhar. Compare what Zarrūq says in his comments translated above and what al-Sanūsī says in his famous

¹⁵² Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid*, 22.

Middle Creed (al-‘Aqīdah al-Wuṣṭā):

For this you must first know that a determination of intelligibility is restricted to three categories: necessity, admissibility, and impossibility. These three categories are the pivot of all the investigations of the science of *kalām*. Something necessary is what is inconceivable in its intelligibility as non-existent, as occupying space for a substance, for example. Something impossible is what is inconceivable in its intelligibility as existent, as a body being devoid of both motion and rest, for example. Something admissible is that whose intelligibility permits its existence or non-existence.¹⁵³

As has been suggested by Wisnovsky, the categories of rational judgments in Islamic theology are a distinctive mark of later Sunnī *kalām*.¹⁵⁴ We notice too the importance that al-Sanūsī gives to these three rational categories. Al-Sanūsī is not exaggerating when he says that “these three categories are the pivot of all investigations in the science of *kalām*”; his entire *‘Aqīdah al-Ṣuḡhrā* is solely based on them.¹⁵⁵ Zarrūq too, as we can see above, admits the great importance of understanding these categories. Yet, for all this, Zarrūq is altogether dismissive. Though Zarrūq admits that this issue of the categories is a long and complex one, he leaves the subject to the student to research on his own. For his own part, Zarrūq uses this categorization of rational judgments in only one other instance at the beginning of al-Ghazālī’s prologue (*khātimah*).¹⁵⁶ Having just

¹⁵³ Originally from al-Sanūsī’s *al-‘Aqīdah al-Wuṣṭā*, translated in Kenny, “Muslim Theology”, 58-59. In this study, Kenny notes that Zarrūq was a transmitter of this text into West Africa. There is further evidence which suggests that despite Zarrūq never quotes al-Sanūsī explicitly, al-Sanūsī’s influence was nonetheless present as we shall see later.

¹⁵⁴ See Wisnovsky, “One aspect of the Avicennian turn,” 66-67.

¹⁵⁵ The *‘Aqīdah al-Ṣuḡhrā* is also commonly known as *Umm al-Barahīn*. In broad strokes, *Umm al-barahīn* outlines what is necessary, possible and impossible to attribute to God and the Prophets followed by very brief proofs for important statements. No other topics are discussed; see Jamāl al-Dīn Būqālī Ḥasan, *Al-Imām Ibn Yūsuf al-Sanūsī wa-‘ilm al-tawḥīd* (Algeria: al-Mu’assasah al-Waṭaniyyah li al-Kitāb, 1985), 445-453.

¹⁵⁶ “The basis of faith is founded on three principles: knowledge of God (*al-mursil*), His Messenger (*al-mursal*) and the Qur’ān (*al-mursal bihi*). Each is [known by] what is necessary, impossible and possible in its reality. [A1] Three things are necessary of God: [i] absolute existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*), [ii] absolute perfection, [iii] absolute eternal continuity (*al-baqā’ al-muṭlaq*). [A2] Three things are impossible of God, namely, the opposition of the [previous] three: [i] non-existence or limited existence (*taqyīd al-wujūd*), [ii] deficiency or

finished outlining the concept of the categories, Zarrūq returns to the problem of explaining the meaning of divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) and incorporates none of these new ideas into the discussion. Divine transcendence, explains Zarrūq, revolves around the affirmation of the divine essence and attributes (*al-dhāt wa al-ṣifāt*) and while also denying any “how-ness” (*kayf*) and anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) in relation to God. This statement recalls an early Ash‘arite concern with creating a compromise between Ḥanbalite anthropomorphism and Mu‘tazilite rationalism more than, say, al-Sanūsī’s elegant simplification of all of theology to levels of intellectual necessity.

Zarrūq’s indifference to delving into theological complexities, at least in this commentary, is made very clear in a note (*tanbīh*) appearing later in the section on divine transcendence. Speaking in general terms, Zarrūq says that, to a large extent, investigation of the idea of divine transcendence proceeds by way of five grades of comparison: similarity (*mithl*), dissimilarity (*ghayr*), difference (*khilāf*), contrary (*ḍidd*), and contradiction (*naqīḍ*). Zarrūq then provides a brief

limited perfection, [iii] cessation (*fanāʾ*) or limited continuity. [A3] Three things are possible of God: [i] the bringing into existence of the contingent object (*al-maʿdūm al-jāʾiz*) [ii] the taking out of existence of the contingent object (*al-mawjūd al-jāʾiz*), [iii] bringing about a miracle; the habitual flow of events (*al-muʿtād*) not affecting him in the least (*īqāʿ al-khāriq ka al-muʿtād alladhī lā yuʿjizuhu shayʾ*). [B1] Three things are necessary of God’s Messenger: [i] truthfulness, [ii] trustworthiness, [iii] conveying the message. [B2] Three things are impossible of God’s Messenger: [i] untruthfulness, [ii] untrustworthiness, [iii] not conveying the message. [B3] Three things are possible of God’s Messenger: [i] minor aims which were unsuccessful (*al-aghrāḍ al-fāsīdah*), [ii] accidental human imperfections (e.g. bleeding) (*al-aʿrāḍ al-qāḍihah*), [iii] minor sicknesses. [C1] Three things are necessary of the Qurʾān: [i] its truth, [ii] its perfection, [iii] the realization of its determinations in its principles in eternity or creation. [C2] Three things are impossible of the Qurʾān: [i] its untruthfulness, [ii] imperfection, [iii] temporal creation of its eternality or its eternal creation [in time]; for the Qurʾān is eternal (*qadīm*) and other than it is created (*ḥādith*). [C3] Two things are possible of the Qurʾān: [i] its being divided into three types of speech: command, prohibition, and preference, [ii] accidents of speech like abrogation and specification [of a universal legal principle] and other such accidental attributes of speech which appear in the books of jurisprudence and in other places.” Yūsuf al-Sanūsī’s influence here is obvious though Zarrūq differs from his teacher very significantly; Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid*, 113-115.

definition of the terms while providing examples for a few. Two contradictories (*naqīdayn*), says Zarrūq, are what must necessarily inhere in an object or concept but neither can exist in the presence of the other.¹⁵⁷ Zarrūq offers the example of movement and rest in a body. A body must either be moving or at rest but it can never be both or neither. Two contraries (*diddān*)—Zarrūq gives the example of black and white—are two concepts which can never be present in an object or concept concomitantly but they can both be absent. Two different things (*khilāfān*) are two existent things which do not agree in every essential attribute (*ṣifāt al-nafs*) though they can differ in accidental attributes. Two dissimilar things (*ghayrān*) are similar to the previous type and two similar things (*mithlān*) are the opposite of the previous type. Finally, after he has emphasized the importance of these concepts and after all this explanation, Zarrūq again commands the reader to investigate it on his own for “it is important for those that want [to discuss] theology (*fa innahu muhimmun ‘alā man arāda al-kalām*).”¹⁵⁸ The implication is that he does not want to discuss *kalām*, and so it is unnecessary to delve into the subject any further.

If Zarrūq is not intending to talk about theology in his commentary, what does he intend? His apathy concerning theological niceties does not mean that Zarrūq did not appreciate or was unaware of them. Given the fact that Zarrūq quotes from al-Rāzī’s *Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah* we must assume that Zarrūq was well aware of the depth and profundity of later Ash‘arite theological debate, especially after al-Rāzī. Thus, what is most likely is, despite the fact that his

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 34.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

comments appear in the context of a purely theological text, Zarrūq nevertheless intended to focus on aspects of ṣūfism. As a consequence, Zarrūq would have shied away from becoming bogged down in complex theological disputes, instead preferring to simplify a difficult topic which, if pursued, would distract from Zarrūq's aim, namely, a discussion of *taṣawwuf*. One excellent example of this appears in Zarrūq's discussion of God's endless pre-eternality (*qidam*). The discussion is inspired by al-Ghazālī's assertion that God is "One, Eternal (*qadīm*), who has no first; Endless, (*azalī*) who has no beginning."¹⁵⁹ In explanation, Zarrūq says that the second phrase is a repetition of the first or, in any case, they can be explained such that they convey a similar meaning.

God, as the Endless (*al-azalī*), is the First (*al-awwal*) whose existence has no inception (*muftataḥ*). He is the one who has no beginning (*lā bidāyata lahu*). In the end, they all have the meaning of "the Eternal (*al-qadīm*)."¹⁶⁰ Although [the Eternal] does not appear as an expression in the Prophetic literature or in the Qur'ān, al-Taftazānī said that [to use this expression] is permissible on the authority of scholarly consensus and that [this expression] was established by proof derived from religious law. [Al-Taftazānī] said "It may be said that [the Eternal (*al-qadīm*)] is the name of God—May He be exalted—and that the Necessary (*al-wājib*) and the Eternal (*al-qadīm*) are synonymous terms (*alfāz mutarādifah*) and that existence is intrinsic to the Necessary (*al-wujūd lāzimun li al-wājib*). Thus, if religious law decrees the designation of [the meaning of] a word linguistically, then [the word] is [understood] by whatever is synonymous with it in that language or any other language and by whatever implies its meaning."¹⁶⁰

It appears that Zarrūq has chosen to use this quote for two distinct reasons. One is that it constitutes proof for his claim that the Endless (*al-azalī*) and the First (*al-awwal*) and the Eternal (*al-qadīm*) are all synonymous in that each possesses a meaning which implies the others. The second reason is that this quote in particular goes a step further including in the discussion explaining the term the

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 17-18.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 18.

Necessary (*al-wājib*) as synonymous with the Eternal (*al-qadīm*). Zarrūq must have felt that a clarification of the term “the Necessary” (*al-wājib*) was needed considering that his students would most likely have been familiar with it as it was part of common parlance among theologians in Zarrūq’s day. Yet, if that is, in fact, the case, then Zarrūq seems to dispense with the issue quite prematurely. Surely Zarrūq was aware of the great lengths to which al-Taftazānī and other later Ash‘arties went in discussing and resolving this contentious point. Even Zarrūq’s enlisting al-Taftazānī’s comments in support his own conclusion seems to rest on shaky ground. The structure of al-Taftazānī’s quote prefaced with “it may be said (*wa qad yuqālu*)” hints that al-Taftazānī himself disagreed with the opinion that would have followed, had Zarrūq continued the quote. Rather, this sentence suggests that al-Taftazānī is representing another opinion in the debate but only inasmuch as its exposition is intended as a prelude to its refutation. In his famous commentary on the Māturīdite *‘Aqā’id* of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), al-Taftazānī, in contrast to Zarrūq, discusses this very issue at great length. Having already established the fact that God is the Necessary of Existence, al-Taftazānī says, commenting on al-Nasafī’s assertion that “the Eternal” is one of God’s attributes:

This is in explanation as a necessary consequence of what we already know, inasmuch as the Necessarily Existent can not be other than eternal, that is to say, there is no beginning to His existence. If He were something originated proceeded by non-existence, His existence would then of necessity be contingent on something else. For this reason some have made the statement that the Necessary Existent and the Eternal are synonymous terms.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Mas‘ūd ibn ‘Umar al-Taftazānī, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftazānī on the creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī*, trans. Earl Edgar Elder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 39. Hereafter *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*.

This is precisely the conclusion that Zarrūq draws, though Zarrūq's own opinion appears to be based on al-Taftazānī's linguistic rather than theological reasoning which we find here. The argument al-Taftazānī provides is that the relationship between God's eternity and God's necessity is biconditional and, as such, Zarrūq feels certain that it is safe to assume that the terms are synonymous. While the complete identity of eternality and necessity seems to have been sufficient for Zarrūq's purposes—it is his last word on this topic—it is unlikely that this was the case for al-Taftazānī, who says, immediately after the excerpt quoted above, that such a conclusion is not entirely accurate.¹⁶² In the end, it seems that Zarrūq is quoting al-Taftazānī in support of his own assertion that all four of these terms have precisely the same meaning. Yet it seems that al-Taftazānī himself may not have agreed with Zarrūq's conclusion.

The issue of God's being the Eternal and the Necessary stands at the center of two crucial Ash'arite debates.¹⁶³ The first involves the naturalization of the concept of the Necessary of Existence in itself into Ash'arite *kalām*, representing an ongoing effort in the Ash'arite school to harmonize the meaning as well as the larger implications of this concept into pre-existing Ash'arite molds i.e. the *kalām* of al-Ghazālī and those before him.¹⁶⁴ The second debate which is very apparent in al-Taftazānī's commentary is a generational, intra-Ash'arite struggle carried out by later Ash'arites like al-Taftazānī to correct mistakes made

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Al-Taftazānī, *A Commentary on the Nasafīte Creed*, 52. Al-Taftazānī saw this debate as striking at the heart of orthodox Islam (*ahl al-sunnah wa al-jamā'ah*) in as much as the problematic implied a multiplicity of Necessarily Existing entities and thus, in a certain sense, a multiplicity of divine, God-like entities.

¹⁶⁴ For the problems and historical implications involved in this debate see Wisnovsky, "One aspect of the Avicennian turn," 65-100.

by their early Ash'arite ancestors. Al-Taftazānī for example, censures early Ash'arites for, among other things, having erred in their opinion on the relationship of the divine attributes to the divine essence.¹⁶⁵ Given the difficulty and delicacy of the debate, given Zarrūq's demonstrated desire to avoid a plunging deeply into theological subtleties, and, perhaps most of all, given his preference for al-Qusharyī and Ash'arites of the ancient school, Zarrūq seems to have chosen to avoid the whole issue by recasting the Eternal versus Necessary debate as merely a problem of semantics, not substance. Zarrūq had an interest in avoiding direct criticism of early Ash'arites: in the realm of theology and mysticism, he relies on their sayings and methodology as sources for his commentary. At the same time, Zarrūq could not avoid later Ash'arite concepts like the Necessary of Existence (*wājib al-wujūd*) in that they were commonly discussed and utilized by later Ash'arites.¹⁶⁶ Nor could Zarrūq avoid the clear criticisms of early Ash'arites in popular works such as al-Taftazānī's commentary on al-Nasafī's *'Aqā'id*. Zarrūq had to find a solution that would find a comfortable middle ground between the two positions. To this end, Zarrūq found in the work of a later Ash'arite an opinion that would minimize the friction between the two sides. By positing that the terms the Necessary, the Eternal, the Endless and the First were all simply synonymous and then supporting it with

¹⁶⁵ See, for example, al-Taftazānī's discussion of God's attributes which are "not He nor other than He"; al-Taftazānī, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, 51-55. This discussion is of central importance in Wisnovsky's article. We must keep in mind on the other hand that al-Taftazānī was not your normal Ash'arite. In the introduction to his translation of the *Nasafite Creed* Elder notes several major creedal points where al-Taftazānī's opinion differs from the Ash'ari school.

¹⁶⁶ Zarrūq never uses this phrase himself. It appears only once in the whole commentary, in a quote from Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

proof from the later Ash'arite al-Taftazānī, Zarrūq was able to avoid delving into the topic in excess. If he had, he might have been confronted with explaining away the unpleasant charges that al-Taftazānī levels against early Ash'arites.

Indeed, how Zarrūq interacts with early and later Ash'arites forms one of the most interesting aspects of this study. The manner in which Zarrūq employs certain authorities and in what context they appear reveals a great deal about the commentator's motivations. As we have already mentioned, though the moderns are cited in relation to only four distinct topics, this does not mean that Zarrūq disapproves of later Ash'arite views: al-Imām al-Fakhr al-Rāzī's explanation of human responsibility and the Ash'arite concept of *kasb* is probably the longest quote in the commentary; and al-Taftazānī, as we saw, was quoted approvingly.¹⁶⁷ Finally, al-Rāzī and al-Āmidī are cited in a discussion about the extent to which the intellect can know God's essence. What is particularly interesting about this latter discussion is how late and early Ash'arite authorities are employed by Zarrūq in order to justify his own conclusion on this matter. Not unsurprisingly, it seems that Zarrūq ultimately follows the methodology of al-Ash'arī himself, preferring the safer route as a solution. However, Zarrūq's *bi lā kayf* is not one

¹⁶⁷ In the discussion about God's unknowability, Zarrūq clearly identifies a quote from the *Sharḥ al-Irshād* with al-Jurjānī (*fa lahu fī sharḥ al-irshād li al-sharīf* [al-Jurjānī]). See Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 55. Similarly in a discussion of God's speech and the Qur'ān Zarrūq cites a commentary on the *Irshād* entitled *al-Muqtaraḥ*; *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 91. Al-Jurjānī does have a book entitled *al-Rashād fī sharḥ al-irshād* which is his commentary on a grammar text by al-Taftazānī's. See Mas'ūd ibn 'Umar by al-Taftazānī, *al-Rashād fī sharḥ al-Irshād* ([Mecca]: Nādī Makkah al-Thaqāfī al-Adabī, [1996-7]). Yet, this grammar text does not have a discussion of this point, though it does discuss God's speech (*kalām*). There is another *Sharḥ al-Irshād* which belongs to Abū al-'Izz ibn al-Muzaffar ibn 'Alī al-Shafī'ī who wrote a commentary on al-Juwaynī's *Irshād* entitled *al-Muqtaraḥ*. Despite the fact that this scholar is not well-known, this must be the very *al-Muqtaraḥ* to which Zarrūq is referring in a discussion of will and human responsibility; Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 79. See Wisnovsky, "Nature and scope," 176. This suggests that the above identification of *Sharḥ al-Irshād* with al-Jurjānī is erroneous.

which is informed by just the opinions of early Ash'arites; the later Ash'arites are given their say as well.

Al-Ghazālī initiates the debate with his contention that “In Himself, God’s existence is known to the intellect (*wa annahu fī dhātīhi ma‘lūmu al-wujūd bi al-‘uqūl*).”¹⁶⁸ Zarrūq, following on the heels of al-Ḥallāj’s summation of divine transcendence, begins his explanation along these same lines. No more can be known about God than this, says Zarrūq, for the intellect’s knowledge is limited exclusively to the affirmation of God’s existence. The intellect cannot know or comprehend God’s nature (*kayf*), nor can it form any proper concept (*ṣūrah*) of Him.¹⁶⁹ Zarrūq calls to aid the august later Ash'arites (*al-muḥaqqiqūn*) who he reports agree that “the reality of God’s essence is not known to us in the present life (*dunyā*),” but these same scholars also differed about the possibility of knowing the reality of God’s essence in the afterlife (*al-ākhirah*).¹⁷⁰ Zarrūq quotes al-Rāzī from the *Mabāḥith al-Mashriqīyah* in which the latter forcefully declares that “perception of the reality of the Necessary of Existence (*ḥaqīqatu wājib al-wujūd*) and what He, of necessity, possesses of attributes of beauty and descriptions of perfection does not occur to our souls.”¹⁷¹ Immediately following, in commentary on a passage in the Qur’ān which says, “And they shall not compass Him with their knowledge,” al-Āmidī attributes the impossibility of a comprehensive knowledge of God to Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, Abū Ḥāmid

¹⁶⁸ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 54.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. As Elder notes in his translation of al-Taftazānī’s commentary on the *‘Aqā'id* of al-Nasafī, the word *muḥaqqiqūn* “was a term applied to many of the later Scholastic Theologians like al-Rāzī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Ījī, and al-Taftazānī himself; see Elder, introduction to *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, 65, n. 16.

¹⁷¹ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 54.

al-Ghazālī, the philosophers (*al-ḥukamāʾ*) and the majority of the later Ashʿarite theologians (*li jumhūr al-muḥaqqiqīn*).¹⁷² At this point, Zarrūq points out that all of the above is precisely what the ṣūfis like al-Junayd and others like him say about the inability to have a comprehensive knowledge of God.¹⁷³ Some theologians—their identity remains a mystery—have held that God’s essence is known, reasoning that since we know God’s existence and we also know that His existence is His essence (*wujūduhu nafsu dhātihi*), then we know God’s essence. Zarrūq’s only comment is that this argument’s weakness is obvious. Reports on the opinion of al-Bāqillānī differ, notes Zarrūq. Abū al-ʿIzz ibn al-Muẓaffar ibn ʿAlī al-Shafīʿī in his commentary on al-Juwaynī’s *al-Irshād* says that al-Bāqillānī denied the possibility of knowing God’s essence while al-Āmidī reports that al-Bāqillānī chose to remain silent (*al-waḳf*) on the issue.¹⁷⁴ After this dizzying flurry of citations, Zarrūq finally concludes saying that al-Ghazālī did not intend to discuss any more than our knowledge of God’s existence (*kalām al-muṣannif lā yanṣab illā ʿalā al-ʿilm bi muṭlaq al-wujūd*).¹⁷⁵

Obviously some comment is needed. Despite Zarrūq’s very dense style in this passage—which is similar to his style in the rest of the commentary also—Zarrūq is able to demonstrate convincingly that there is virtual unanimity among scholars of theology that his conclusion is the correct one, namely, that, save for

¹⁷² Q:XX.110.

¹⁷³ Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawāʿid*, 54. Elsewhere, Zarrūq quotes al-Junayd: “When will the one who has neither like nor equal ever be reached by one has a like and an equal? Never! This is but an absurd fantasy except for one to whom the Benevolent has been benevolent and only inasmuch as there is neither perception (*dark*) nor mental conception (*wahm*) nor understanding except by indications of certainty and the realization of faith (*taḥqīq al-īmān*)”; Ibid., 47.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 55.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

His existence, God's essence is imperceptible to the intellect. What is more, Zarrūq is able to enlist the aid of late as well as early Ash'arites in support of his conclusion. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in particular and the *muḥaqqiqūn* in general testify to the truth of Zarrūq's conclusions. Al-Āmidī and Abū al-ʿIzz ibn al-Muẓaffar ibn ʿAlī al-Shafīʿī in their roles as Ash'arite historians also give convincing reports that early Ash'arites also held the same view. Though al-Āmidī and Abū al-ʿIzz disagree about al-Bāqillānī's exact opinion—whether outright denial or silence—at the very least, al-Bāqillānī does not contradict Zarrūq's conclusion. Save for a few anonymous theologians, Zarrūq seems to have the weight of Ash'arite opinion in his favor.

Let us examine these few anonymous theologians more carefully. This group claims that God's essence can be perceived by the intellectual faculties. Their reasoning is based on two premises: one, that we can intellectually perceive God's existence; and two, that God's essence is identical with His existence. From this they conclude that since we know God's existence and we know God's existence is identical with His essence, we therefore can conclude that we know God's essence. The first premise is self-evident while the second is apparently hotly disputed.¹⁷⁶ The reality of the situation is more complicated than Zarrūq lets on. A closer look at this debate reveals the Ash'arite school had two radically different opinions concerning the second premise of the argument made by the anonymous theologians, namely that God's existence is identical with His

¹⁷⁶ ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar Bayḍāwī, *Nature, Man and God in Medieval Islam: ʿAbd Allah Baydawi's Text Tawālīʿ al-Anwar min Matalīʿ al-Anzar along with Mahmud Isfahani's Commentary Matalīʿ al-Anzar, Sharh Tawālīʿ al-Anwar*, ed. and trans. by Edwin E. Calverley and James W. Pollock (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 2:744.

essence.¹⁷⁷

The first is that of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī as well as the Muʿtazilite al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044). They stated that not only was the existence of God identical with His essence but that the existence of every object in the world, whether a mental (*dhihnī*) or extra-mental (*khārijī*), was identical with its essence. Some decided to take al-Ashʿarī's and al-Baṣrī's words figuratively. Thus, they interpreted the idea of identity (*ʿayniyyah*) figuratively rather than literally such that identity of essence and existence now meant the non-existence of extra-mental distinctions (*ʿadam al-tamāyuz al-khārijī*). In other words, there was still no difference between things in concrete reality but the mind could differentiate between donkey and dog. In this new formulation, the mind can now distinguish between mental and extra-mental existence such that if the mind observes an object leave existence, the mind no longer equates the non-existence of something from the mind to the non-existence of all existent reality.¹⁷⁸ Obviously this new formulation is of little use either since it does no more than avoid an absurdity. The majority of theologians took the stance that existence is univocal, meaning that it is a concept understood in a single way which is then predicated of all existing things equally (*anna li al-wujūd mafhūman wāḥidan mushtarakan bayn*

¹⁷⁷ In ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī's (d. 898/1492) *al-Durrah al-Fākhirah*. A complete translation of this work and its commentary can be found in Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *The Precious Pearl: al-Jāmī's al-Durrah al-fākhirah together with His Glosses and the Commentary of ʿAbd al-Ghafūr al-Lārī*, trans. Nicholas Heer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979). Hereafter *The Precious Pearl*. As Heer notes in the Arabic edition to the text, Jāmī's principle sources on theology are al-Jurjānī's *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif* and al-Taftazānī's *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* which is a commentary on his own *Maqāṣid al-tālibīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*; see Nicholas Heer, introduction to *al-Durrah al-fākhirah fī taḥqīq madhāhib al-ṣūfiyyah wa al-mutakallimīn wa al-ḥukamāʾ al-mutaqaddimīn*, by Nūr al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, eds. Nicholas Heer and Ali Musawi Bihbihani (Tehran: University of McGill and University of Tehran, 1980), 8-9.

¹⁷⁸ Jāmī, *al-Durrah al-Fākhirah*, 3.

al-mawjūdāt). This single concept then multiplies and becomes divisions of existence but only in its relation to other things; in the same way that the single concept of existence is predicated equally of both a dog and a donkey. Under this scheme, the existence inhering in each of these divisions is distinct from the essences. The later theologians disagreed about whether existence was additional to essences only in relation to mental objects (*dhihnan*) or in relation to both mental and extra-mental objects.¹⁷⁹ In other words, there is a reality to a dog—i.e. the dog's essence—which is independent of whether or not that dog exists. Taking the example further, what later theologians disagreed about was whether existence is additional to the essence of the dog only in the case of a dog which exists in the mind or whether this distinction should also be applied to the dog barking in concrete, extra-mental reality.

Needless to say, Zarrūq mentions none of these matters, in part due to the fact that they are not directly relevant to the topic of whether God's essence can be encompassed by the intellect. Yet Zarrūq never explains why the anonymous theologians were so obviously in the wrong. The validity of the argument hinges on the validity of the second premise of Zarrūq's statement, namely, God's essence is identical with His existence. Zarrūq is silent about whether this is in fact a valid premise or not. If it is valid, then why is the conclusion so clearly false? If it is not, then why not? Zarrūq may have considered this argument as little more than a bit of irreligious sophistry on the part of the anonymous theologians, yet he passes over it with barely a glance. As with the other

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

examples we have discussed above, Zarrūq is loath to attack the finer points of al-Ghazālī's creed. Indeed, talking about whether or not God's essence is identical with His existence seems superfluous given his original motives for this commentary. Yet we also see here something which we did not see so clearly in previous examples. To a certain degree, Zarrūq appears to be consciously overlooking significant differences that arose between the ancients and moderns of the Ash'arite school. Ibn Khaldūn reports that later Ash'arite scholars studied the basic premises of the earlier theologians and promptly proceeded to refute them.¹⁸⁰ Watt notes that in the *Nihāyat al-iqdām fī 'ilm al-kalām* of al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153)—Ash'arite and contemporary of al-Simnānī—the views of older theologians, meaning the early Ash'arites, are reformulated using new terms and argument such that “the authors, had they been present, might have had difficulty in recognizing their own intellectual progeny.”¹⁸¹ Even in the above discussion of God, the Eternal, versus God, the Necessary, at the heart of this debate, as al-Taftazānī makes very clear, lies a fundamental difference between the early and later Ash'arite schools which leads the latter to mount an attack on the former's views on the relation of God's attributes to His essence. So, clearly the differences were there and were likely known to Zarrūq. Still, the reasons for his reticence to emphasize intra-Ash'arite debate remain unanswered. To be sure, Zarrūq's stated intention to avoid excessive concern for minute details and his clear preference for dealing with spiritual matters all must contribute to this

¹⁸⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967), 3:52.

¹⁸¹ Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 127.

tendency. Even given all of these reasons, this explanation seems incomplete.

What seems certain is that Zarrūq closely identifies with early Ash^ʿarite theologians. As was indicated above, al-Ash^ʿarī's concern with inability of the human intellect to comprehend God's reality, embodied in his *bi lā kayf*, causes the early Ash^ʿarite school to be overwhelmingly concerned with affirming divine transcendence (*tanzīh*) and shunning anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*). This fact is illustrated in Ibn Fūrak's summation of early Ash^ʿarite methodology: between the two poles of crude anthropomorphism and the complete denial of an extra-essential reality to God's attributes (*taʿṭīl*) is the happy Ash^ʿarite middle ground of divine transcendence (*tanzīh*). This methodology affirms both the reality of divine attributes as established by scripture and the validity of the intellect's judgment that God does not possess attributes similar to creation. Finding the right balance between the Muʿtazilites and Ḥanbalites preoccupied not only al-Ash^ʿarī but those members of his "school" like Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak and Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī. Al-Qushayrī is distinguished from the rest of his peers by the fact that he was as renowned a mystic as he was a theologian. In his famous *Risālah*, it is obvious from the very beginning that the ṣūfis who al-Qushayrī affirms to be representatives of orthodoxy (*ahl al-sunnah*)—the most famous example being al-Junayd—are those that conform to an essentially Ash^ʿarite creed and methodology: affirm divine transcendence, deny anthropomorphism. We have seen the importance of al-Qushayrī and al-Qushayrī's *Risālah* in Zarrūq's commentary. Given that it is intended as a spiritual exercise as much as it is a theological, it is not difficult to see why Zarrūq might look to al-Qushayrī's

Risālah for inspiration. Similar to Zarrūq's intent with his commentary, al-Qushayrī's *Risālah* contains the words of famous early mystics who speak with authority on matters directly related to theology. However, in the same way that Zarrūq found inspiration from al-Qushayrī's *Risālah*, this also influenced the way he perceived and approached matters in theology. In other words, he acquired an early Ash'arite preoccupation with *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*. Yet, by Zarrūq's day, Ash'arism had changed drastically. Zarrūq's loyalty to the Ash'arite school and its famous adherents like al-Rāzī compelled him to minimize as much as possible the differences that arose between the two Ash'arite camps. However, in reference to matters where mysticism and theology intersected, Zarrūq seems to have believed that the theology of the early mystics was closer to revealing spiritual truth than, say, the logical categories of al-Sanūsī or the obscure philosophical debate of later theologians like al-Taftazānī.

What can we conclude from all this? One thing is clear: Zarrūq's concern with *taṣawwuf* unquestionably affected how he approached theology. Zarrūq does more than simply apply ṣūfī interpretations and a ṣūfī logic of veils and light to formal Ash'arite doctrines. Zarrūq goes as far as to make ṣūfīs authorities on theology as much as the greatest theologians of the Ash'arite school. The influence of ṣūfism goes deeper still. Indeed, we can see also that when Zarrūq is confronted by a particular theological debate, Zarrūq tends to cite the opinions of early Ash'arite theologians before he cites later Ash'arites. Even more than this, Zarrūq passes over many of the most contentious debates in the history of Ash'arism with hardly a glance. Both of these tendencies appear to be rooted in

Zarrūq's loyalties to ṣūfism as the true and sure path to God and in this Zarrūq clearly draws inspiration from al-Ghazālī. On the other hand, Zarrūq considers the philosophical debates which characterize Ash'arite *kalām* after al-Ghazālī, and especially after Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, as impractical and unfitted to his purposes and ultimately, it seems that Zarrūq's ṣūfism drove him to prefer doctrines and ideas dervied from pre-Ghazālīan Ash'arism over those from post-Ghazālīan Ash'arism.

CONCLUSION

Our concern is with a particular clique which overran and spread throughout out this our Maghrib in both rural and urban areas, and much more in the rural areas. This was invented by certain people to benefit from the rulers of this world. They started gathering the ignorant and vulgar, male and female, whose hearts are blank and whose minds are immature. They instilled into them from a religious point of view the belief repentance is to be had by shaving the head, gobbling up food, gathering for banquets, invoking by turn, utterances and cries, using mantles and beads, making a show of themselves, and holding that so-and-so is their master and that there is no other master save him. They tour the country and whenever they arrive at a populated area they start invoking by turn, as sheep and cattle are slaughtered for them. They move from one place to another with their servants. Some of them on horses. They assert that by this they revive and display religion, while persuading the vulgar to believe that the ulema are obstructing the way to God, and warn the ignorant against them. So they became enemies of the learned and learning.¹⁸²

Aḥmad Zarrūq, a keen observer and critic of Moroccan society, lived in a North Africa awash in chaos. Amid the political and social unrest of 15th-century Morocco Zarrūq perceived what he saw as decay in the spirit and practice of ṣūfism. Zarrūq was a dogged critic of the scandalous innovations that had become widespread among many ṣūfī groups in Morocco. Zarrūq was deeply troubled by what he saw. As a result, he devoted many works, such *al-Radd ʿalā ahl al-bidʿah* and *ʿUddat al-murīd*, entirely to the condemnation and critique of blatant heresies that he saw as infecting ṣūfī practice. His other works too, like the *Qawāʿid al-Taṣawwuf*, deal with this issue from a theoretical perspective. In all, the great majority of Aḥmad Zarrūq's ṣūfī and non-ṣūfī writings tend to be highly practical, often in the form of advice to ṣūfī initiates about following the sound ṣūfī way. What's more, Zarrūq believed that the decadence of the ṣūfī *ṭuruq* was largely due to ignorance, not just of religious learning but also ignorance about what it means to be a ṣūfī and to follow the ṣūfī path. As we saw,

¹⁸² A quote from Zarrūq's *al-Radd ʿalā ahl al-bidʿah*, corrected in Cornell, *Realm of the Saint*, 230-231. Originally translated in Khushaim, *Zarrūq the Ṣūfī*, 191.

Zarrūq's scholarly and ṣūfī training emphasized that the real ṣūfī was one who possess deep religious learning and thereby was able to harmonize the formal aspects of religion and mysticism. As a result, Zarrūq considered this the model for what a ṣūfī and a scholar should be, namely, one who combines both the inward and the outward in a natural harmony. To this end, Zarrūq composed works which were meant to emphasize this very theme. This did not just involve advice to instruct the novice on how to practice the ṣūfī path but also the use of non-traditional ṣūfī texts—such as his commentary on al-Ghazālī's *Qawā'id* or his ṣūfī commentary on the didactic grammar poem *al-Ajurrūmiyyah*—which revealed the mystical aspects underlying more mundane religious topics. Above all, his works were intended to instill in his audience the importance of education to the ṣūfī way.

In other words, Zarrūq focused almost exclusively on aspects of ṣūfī praxis. Of the dozens of works he composed on a wide variety of topics, only a few dealt with overtly mystical subjects, all of which are commentaries.¹⁸³ This practicality is essential to a proper understanding of Zarrūq's methodology in his

¹⁸³ His commentary on the *Nūniyyah* of al-Shushtarī might be an apologetic work aimed at freeing al-Shushtarī and his master, Ibn Sab'īn, from accusations of heresy. Ibn 'Ashir, the "grandfather" of the Zarrūqian way, neither praised nor condemned Ibn Sab'īn but he did praise Shushtarī's famous ode highly. See Nwiya, introduction to *Ibn 'Abbād de Ronda*, lxvii-lxviii. The other is a commentary on a work by his true ṣūfī master, al-Ḥaḍramī, which deals with "cosmic realities" in a manner similar to that of Ibn 'Arabī; see Kugle, "In Search of the Center," 142-148. Despite the fact that al-Ḥaḍramī was Zarrūq's true ṣūfī master, Zarrūq stayed with him for less than a year. Ibn 'Ajība, who disagreed with Zarrūq on many points, takes Zarrūq to task for his lacking of higher spiritual training at the hands of a true ṣūfī *shaykh*; see Kugle, "In Search of the Center," 269. Zarrūq clearly did not inherit his master's interest in "cosmic realities" and, in all, it seems that the most influential "master" to Zarrūq was the *mufī* and enthusiast of Ibn 'Aṭā'illāh's *Hikam*, al-Qawrī. Zarrūq also has two commentaries on the *Ḥizb al-baḥr* and one on the *Ḥizb al-barr* (a.k.a. *Ḥizb al-Kabīr*), both of which are popular litanies by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī. For a detailed bibliography of Zarrūq's known works see Khushaim, *Zarrūq the Ṣūfī*, 41-94.

commentary on the *Qawā'id*. Ample evidence has been collected to suggest that Zarrūq's commentary on al-Ghazālī's *Qawā'id al-ʿAqā'id* is more as a work on ṣūfism than on theology. The reasons why Zarrūq might choose a theological medium in order to convey mystical ideas must ultimately lie in the fact that Zarrūq wants to emphasize to his students the importance of formal religious study in order to properly practice *taṣawwuf* and, above all, the harmony of the two pursuits. This, Zarrūq's ultimate end, comes across clearly in Zarrūq's commentary. There is no discussion about "cosmic realities," no "ṣūfī metaphysics," and no discussion of any interpretive, mystical subtleties that might otherwise be expected. The ṣūfism of this commentary is that of Ibn ʿAṭāʾillāh and other masters of the Shādhilī way, whose words are employed to extract mostly practical ṣūfī insight from otherwise strictly theological formulae; practical in the sense that they are intended to inspire a state of mind which will lead them to a deeper understanding of themselves, God, or their relation to Him.

Given that Zarrūq is aiming for a spiritual commentary on a theological text, it is appropriate that it comes from al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*. Zarrūq shares with al-Ghazālī a common understanding of what constitutes the proper balance between form and spirit. Zarrūq's spiritual and scholarly upbringing was, in a sense, a weaving of the *Mudawwanah* and the *Hikam*. The teachers who were most influential on Zarrūq trace their religious practice back to Ibn ʿĀshir and then back to al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ* and al-Muḥāsibī's *Riʿāyah*. In other words, Zarrūq shares with al-Ghazālī a certain praxis-oriented understanding of ṣūfism

which is the intent of books like al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'*.¹⁸⁴ If al-Ghazālī hoped to revivify the formal religious sciences by breathing into them the spirit of ṣūfism, Zarrūq hoped to revivify ṣūfism by reigning in the now unfettered spirit with formal religious instruction. As much as al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'* is credited with having combined legal forms with ṣūfī spirit, Zarrūq must have had this in mind choosing the *Qawā'id* for commentary. His audience would surely have been aware of this uncommon choice by Zarrūq and understood the statement he was trying to make. Al-Ghazālī strove to find the right balance between the formal and spiritual aspects of religious practice and the enduring popularity of the *Iḥyā'* stands as a monument to his success. Taking a chapter from the *Iḥyā'* (in both meanings of the phrase), Zarrūq signaled with this choice of text that he intended a similar balancing act; not in the grand sense of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'* but in terms of providing a concrete proof of his claim that the union of both spirit and form is necessary in order to make a successful ṣūfī.

Zarrūq's hands-on approach also affects his treatment of theological matters. Zarrūq states from the very beginning that he intends to avoid prolixity, and, as a result, Zarrūq's discussions of even the most historically contentious theological debates are settled often in a matter of lines. The method he follows usually is to provide his own, brief explanation of al-Ghazālī's words and then to provide proof for his interpretation based on the positions held by earlier authorities in theology and ṣūfism. Indeed, central to Zarrūq's theological

¹⁸⁴ Al-Ghazālī says "the purpose of this book (i.e. the *Iḥyā'*) is the [elucidation of] the knowledge of practical application (*ʿilm al-muʿāmalah*) only." Al-Ghazālī, author's introduction to *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*, vol. 1, ed. ʿAbd Allāh al-Khālīdī (Beirut: Dār al-arqam, 1998), 8.

discussions are the sayings of the famous early ṣūfī masters from Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī's *Risālah fī ʿilm al-taṣawwuf*. These ancient *shaykhs* are rarely relied upon for mystical comment; that is the job of the Shādhilis. Rather, al-Qushayrī's *imāms* are, like Zarrūq's ideal ṣūfī, masters of the inward as well as the outward sciences. We see very quickly, however, that Zarrūq's outlook in matters of theology is colored by those of the *shaykhs* of al-Qushayrī's *Risālah* whose theological views were formed in a time when theological controversy involved very different subjects than those of Zarrūq's day. As al-Qushayrī attempts to demonstrate, the *imāms* of his famous epistle are *imāms* of orthodox Islam (*ahl al-sunnah*). For al-Qushayrī, the famed Ashʿarite, this meant that they were Ashʿarites. As a result, in his *Risālah*, al-Qushayrī quotes statements al-Junayd and al-Wāsiṭī and even al-Ḥallāj in an effort to demonstrate their alignment with Ashʿarite doctrine. In al-Qushayrī's day, this implied a concern with the idea of God's divine transcendence (*tanzīh*), which meant balancing between Ḥanbalite anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) as well as Muʿtazilite "stripping" (i.e., God of His attributes) (*taʿṭīl*). Zarrūq takes this early Ashʿarite agenda to heart and founds the theological outlook of his entire commentary on a nostalgic early Ashʿarite problematic. This does, however, accord well with Zarrūq's overall program because early Ashʿarite *kalām*'s focus on divine transcendence in all matters relating to God is, generally speaking, not highly involved and instead allows Zarrūq to focus on practical, spiritual lessons that can be concentrated from al-Ghazālī's concise statements.

Zarrūq's preference for early Ashʿarite *kalām* also accords well with his

choice of subject text. For all his fame, al-Ghazālī's various creeds received almost no attention from Ash'arite commentators. The reasons for this are unknown. Why did Zarrūq choose to break with tradition and comment on this text out of all the creeds available to him? Perhaps the best way to answer this question is to pose another, namely, why did Zarrūq not choose one of Yūsuf al-Sanūsī's immensely popular creeds as subject text? Zarrūq is reported to have studied under al-Sanūsī at the Azhar and this report finds some collaborative material in this commentary. That being the case, it should have been natural for Zarrūq to select a text which would likely have been familiar to many of Zarrūq's students and with which he must have been well-acquainted himself. In several locations in his commentary we find Zarrūq discussing a point that suggests al-Sanūsī's influence. Another is Zarrūq's listing of God's twenty necessary attributes, which recalls al-Sanūsī's presentation of the twenty necessary attributes.¹⁸⁵ The other was Zarrūq's very short outline and explanation of rational judgment (*al-ḥukm al-'aqlī*), a passage that was discussed at length in the previous chapter. The tripartite categorization of necessity, possibility and impossibility as well as the definitions of each clearly point to al-Sanūsī's influence. All in all, when we return to the question of why Zarrūq did not use one of his teacher's texts for commentary, the answer appears to be that Zarrūq simply was not interested. Al-Sanūsī's innovative condensation of all creedal matters into three intellectual determinations does not seem to have interested Zarrūq nor does Zarrūq ever return to al-Sanūsī's twenty necessary attributes in

¹⁸⁵ See Zarrūq, *Sharḥ al-Qawā'id*, 18-19.

order to explain them any further. Zarrūq's lack of enthusiasm for delving into later Ash'arite debate also holds true for how Zarrūq resolves the issue of God's being eternal (*qidam*, *baqā'*, *azalī*) versus God's being Necessary of existence (*wājib al-wujūd*), and for the debate about the identity of God's essence and His existence. The reason for this appears to be that given Zarrūq's fondness for early Ash'arite *kalām*, Zarrūq would have found al-Ghazālī's creed more in line with his tastes than any of al-Sanūsī's creeds.

How are we to understand Aḥmad Zarrūq's commentary on al-Ghazālī's *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* in the context of Ash'arite history? Perhaps the more pertinent question is how are we to understand Zarrūq's commentary in light of Western studies of Ash'arite history? Zarrūq's commentary presents a problem to scholars of Islamic theology: it is not overtly philosophical like al-Ījī's *Kitāb al-mawāqif* for example, it was not written in the philosophy-rich Islamic East, and Zarrūq's claim to fame as a historical personality is as a sober, legal-minded, 15th-century, Moroccan, Shādhilī ṣūfī. Yet for these very reasons, Zarrūq's commentary provides us with an opportunity to gain a new perspective about the development of later Ash'arite *kalām*. Zarrūq's commentary is unique but we should not study it merely as an interesting anomaly, divorced from its historical and philosophical context. Nor should Zarrūq's ṣūfism detract from his commentary's historical value as a genuine example of developments in later Ash'arism.

What do we mean by later Ash'arism? In general, later Ash'arism is the Ash'arism after al-Ghazālī after whom Avicennian logic and metaphysics were to

become increasingly important in theological discourse. The fusion of logic and *‘ilm al kalām* has been taken by Western historians of Islamic theology as al-Ghazālī’s chief contribution to this latter field.¹⁸⁶ Due to al-Ghazālī’s enormous stature in all aspects of Islamic scholarship, his endorsement of syllogistic logic was understood by later Ash‘arite theologians as a blank check for incorporating not only logic but other philosophical sciences into theology. Al-Ghazālī’s efforts were apparently not in vain as theology after him became redolently philosophical. As W. Montgomery Watt says,

Al-Ghazālī, however, while attacking the philosophers, became an enthusiast for some philosophical disciplines, especially logic, and was responsible for a further injection of Greek thought into Kalām. Some of the results of this can be seen especially in the creed of al-Sanūsī. Many theologians became more interested in the philosophical basis of theology than in the actual doctrines; and it may be asked whether this was beneficial for Islamic theology and did not rather lead to a form of stagnation.¹⁸⁷

As a result of taking al-Ghazālī as the great synthesizer of Greek logic into Islamic theology, his real influence on the development of later Ash‘arism is distortingly amplified. His works are viewed as being the model and standard for the development of later Ash‘arism and works that come centuries after al-Ghazālī are described as wholly indebted to him. At the same time, the tremendous influence of other figures like Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī or even Avicenna on these later works are overlooked completely.

From the fourth century of the Hijra the statements of the orthodox creed assumed a more logical form. Al-Ghazzālī (d. 505 A.H.) is credited with having won the day for the Ash‘arite position in the west. He wrote at least three treatises on things necessary to Belief. His exposition of the two phrases of the Witnessing formula which appears in the first section of the second book of the *Ihyā’* is the forerunner of a whole group of creeds which center all the articles of Belief around Allah and His attributes and His Messenger Muhammad. This type of creed

¹⁸⁶ Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 117-118.

¹⁸⁷ Watt, *Islamic Creeds*, 10.

signified a reversion to the bare essentials of faith and became later very stereotyped in the creeds of al-Sanūsī (d. 895 A.H.) and al-Faḍālī (d. 1236 A.H.) where all arguments for Allah's existence rest on the existence of the universe.¹⁸⁸

If we can use al-Sanūsī's treatment as illustrative, the author of the above quote takes an accidental similarity shared by al-Ghazālī's creed in the *Ihyā'* and al-Sanūsī's—they both state that all of faith is encompassed in the two phrases of the Muslim statement of faith ("Witnessing formula")—and makes this innovation by al-Ghazālī the foremost structural paradigm for creeds like al-Sanūsī's. This conclusion, however, is inaccurate. At the beginning of his *Umm al-Barahīn*, al-Sanūsī makes it clear that the structural paradigm of his work is not the statement of faith but rather the tripartite categorization of rational judgments: the necessary, possible and impossible. Not only does al-Sanūsī explicitly assert the centrality of this categorization in the beginning his *al-ʿAqīdah al-Wuṣṭā*, its importance is obvious given the most perfunctory examination.¹⁸⁹ Historians of Islamic theology, by writing such an inaccurate account of al-Ghazālī's influence on later Ashʿarism, have sketched a historical caricature. As we can see, interpretations which rely on this initial assumption are non-trivially skewed. The result is that the influence of other historical figures is minimized while other figures are emphasized disproportionately to their true importance.

Another more subtle narrative diminishes al-Ghazālī's influence on Islamic philosophy.¹⁹⁰ Al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* is seen, and rightly so, as a work

¹⁸⁸ Elder, introduction to *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, xix.

¹⁸⁹ For an analysis of these logical categories see Robert Wisnovsky, "Avicenna and the Avicennian tradition," In *The Cambridge Guide to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 113-133.

¹⁹⁰ See Professor Dimitri Gutas' penetrating critique "The study of arabic philosophy in the Twentieth Century: an essay on the historiography of Arabic philosophy," *British Journal of*

primarily of theological interest which had little impact on the later practice of philosophy in Islam. While the practice of philosophy continued to be practiced as always by many well after al-Ghazālī, his stature as jurist *par excellence* set a needed precedent for Ashʿarite theologians. Al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* was, in a sense, a *fatwā* which legally sanctioned dabbling in philosophy in order to refute heresies. However, perhaps as a reaction to decades of al-Ghazālī's mythical destruction of philosophy, this narrative goes too far in overcompensating, radically diminishing the role played by Ashʿarite theologians after al-Ghazālī.

More significantly, calling Arabic philosophy 'Islamic' and consequently seeing it as 'essentially linked to the religious and spiritual facet of Islam' injects an overwhelming religious dimension to it which was not there. The distinction between philosophy and theology is well known to any student of medieval Latin philosophy and the two should not be confused: Arabic philosophy is not Islamic theology, either in the period before Avicenna or after him. Islamic theology may have borrowed concepts and positions from Arabic philosophy (mainly in dialectics and epistemology), just as Arabic philosophy paid attention to some of the subjects at the centre of Islamic theology (like the nature of the prophet's knowledge and the attributes of the supreme being), but they remained distinct in so far as philosophy argued on the basis of philosophical data about philosophical subjects in demonstrative terms, while theology argued on the basis of revelational data about a largely different set of subjects in dialectical or rhetorical terms.¹⁹¹

The final conclusion is faulty on two counts. One, it suggests that theology does not argue on the basis of philosophical data about philosophical subjects in demonstrative terms; two, it asserts that theologians argued primarily on the basis of revelational data about subjects that are distinct from philosophy. Looking at Maḥmūd al-Iṣfahānī's commentary on ʿAbdullāh al-Bayḍawī's *Ṭawāliʿ al-anwār min maṭāliʿ al-anzār* we can see very clearly that they have adopted much of Avicenna's metaphysics and logic, arguing on the basis of philosophical data about philosophical, mostly metaphysical, subjects. Moreover, the manner in

Middle Eastern Studies 29:1 (2002): 7.

¹⁹¹ Gutas, "The study of arabic philosophy," 18.

which these theologians argue their points is consistent within the logical and metaphysical system they have adopted, meaning their arguments and conclusions are valid within Avicenna's logical and metaphysical system.

Contrary to popular opinion, a closer look at later Ash'arite *kalām* reveals a philosophical complexity which has not been appreciated in most Western accounts of the history of Islamic theology. Again we begin with Ibn Khaldūn:

The later scholars were very intent upon meddling with philosophical works. The subjects of the two disciplines (theology and philosophy) were thus confused by them. They thought that there was one and the same (subject) in both disciplines, because the problems of each discipline were similar.

It should be known that the theologians most often deduced the existence and attributes of the Creator from the existing things and their conditions. As a rule, this was their line of argument. The physical bodies form part of existing things, and they are the subject of the philosophical study of physics. However, the philosophical study of them differs from the theological. The philosophers study bodies in so far as they move or are stationary. The theologians, on the other hand, study them in so far as they serve as an argument for the Maker. In this same way, the philosopher's study of metaphysics studies existence as such and what it requires for its essence. The theological study (of metaphysics), on the other hand, is concerned with the *existentia*, in so far as they serve as argument for Him who causes existence.¹⁹²

According to Ibn Khaldūn, due to the similarity of theology and philosophy, later theologians confused them such that theology, to a certain extent, became philosophy. However, as Ibn Khaldūn points out, there is an important distinction: the ends of each distinguished one from the other. The end of theology was God, regardless of the conceptual philosophical system adopted or the technical vocabulary employed. In contrast, the end of philosophy, according to Ibn Khaldūn, was itself. The ends aside, what is clear from this passage is that later theologians began to study the physics and the metaphysics of the philosophers in order to serve their own ends. Thus, the theologians' concern,

¹⁹² Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 3:52-53.

especially after al-Ghazālī, was not only a polemical preoccupation with refuting the philosophers but also a thoughtful harnessing of physics and metaphysics in a constructive sense.¹⁹³ This passage also implies that the scope of interest for the theologians did not include all aspects of philosophy; rather, it was physics and metaphysics which theologians discussed at great length. The reasons for the popularity of physics are quite obvious—and Ibn Khaldūn confirms this—namely, that arguments derived from physics were used to prove God’s existence. This is nothing earth-shattering. The argument deducing God’s existence and attributes from creation can be found in scripture and served as *the* proof for God’s existence in early Ash‘arite *kalām*.¹⁹⁴ Thus, the interest on the part of theologians in physics can be understood as a continuation of a popular early Ash‘arite form of the proof of God’s existence and necessary attributes.

Metaphysics is an altogether different animal for it has little precedent in early Ash‘arite theology. Of course, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī talked about God’s essence (*dhāt*) and God’s existence (*wujūd*) and we see in the writings of al-Ghazālī and al-Juwaynī the idea of God as the One whose existence is necessary.¹⁹⁵ Al-Ghazālī’s opinion of metaphysics is markedly uncomplimentary in the *Ihyā’* and in the *Tahāfut* he spends most of his time pointing out flaws in conclusions from the metaphysics of Avicenna and al-Fārābī. Surely al-Ghazālī’s towering presence would have given theologians pause before adopting that

¹⁹³ Ayman Shehadeh has documented this negativist mania in Shihadeh, “From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī,” 149-162. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s thoughtful harnessing is described in Shihadeh, “From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī,” 168-174.

¹⁹⁴ See H.A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 134-153.

¹⁹⁵ Wisnovsky, “One aspect of the Avicennian turn,” 91-95.

metaphysics for the explicit purpose of constructing Ash'arite doctrine. There must have been some utility or need which drove the theologians to adopt Avicenna's metaphysics to serve ends other than refutation. What is certain is that in the post-Ghazālīan intellectual milieu, the *Tahāfut* did not halt the increasing popularity of Avicenna's philosophy. Having gathered enough strength in al-Ghazālī's day that he felt the need to write the *Tahāfut*, the popularization of Avicenna's philosophy continued unabated, especially among non-specialists, well after al-Ghazālī's death.¹⁹⁶

The fascination of the people of our time and the scholars of our age in studying the sciences of the ancients and in borrowing from old philosophers has increased, such that it led them away from studying Legal matters and religious issues. That passion may drive one of them to frequently display his recklessness, by omitting obligations and committing prohibited things, imagining that he is one of the firmly-grounded philosophers and erudite virtuous men (although he is the most ignorant of men in what he claims and the furthest among them from knowing what it involves), and fooled by the bombastic words and strange-sounding names that he hears [...] The utmost of the most erudite among them is to have superficial knowledge of the words, instead of [knowing their] meanings.¹⁹⁷

Because philosophy had become an alternative path to virtue, weakness in religious practice became common-place and, as Avicenna's philosophy increased in popularity, the common notion was that Avicenna's philosophy was superior to the religious sciences. Theologians who were interested in defense of religion had to combat this destructive trend in some way but clearly, seeing the failure of the *Tahāfut* to have any real inhibitory effect, refutation was not the way to go. People who were convinced of Avicenna's great worth would not likely be put off purely by negativist critiques. If Ash'arite theologians wanted to meet this threat to religion head-on, they would have to prove the tenets of faith within

¹⁹⁶ Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī," 148-149.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 148; from MS of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī's *Daqā'iq al-haqā'iq*.

Avicenna's philosophical system, not just point to incoherencies in Avicenna's reasoning.

Avicenna's proof of God's existence is an excellent example of the difficulties facing later Ash'arite theologians. The utility of Avicenna's proof to Ash'arite *mutakallimūn* was obvious because it assumed so little.¹⁹⁸ There was also a certain familiarity to it in that it resembled the traditional Ash'arite proof of God from creation. There are two likely explanations for why later Ash'arites preferred Avicenna's proof over the traditional Ash'arite proof from creation. One reason may be that Ash'arite theologians felt compelled to "update" their proof. Given Avicenna's lofty rank in the eyes of many scholars after al-Ghazālī, Ash'arite theologians would have been embarrassed of by the fact that their proof had been deemed "vile" by Avicenna.¹⁹⁹ As defenders of religion, the theologians must have felt compelled to bring the proof for God's existence up to par with the accepted standards of proof for their day. In so far as al-Ghazālī and like-minded theologians were already proficient with Avicenna's philosophy, it would not have posed much of a challenge to take Avicenna's proof for God's existence and integrate it into Ash'arite textbooks. Another reason would be that the Ash'arite proof for God's existence from creation was based on causation. It began with the assertion that everything that we see has a cause and then followed the chain

¹⁹⁸ For a statement of the proof see al-°Allāma al-Ḥillī's creed in Watt, *Islamic Creeds*, 98-99. See Toby Mayer, "Faḥr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī's critique of Ibn Sīnā's argument for the unity of God in the Iṣārāt and Naṣīr ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī's defense," in *Before and After Avicenna: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group*, eds. David C. Reisman and Ahmad H. Al-Rahim (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 199-200. For a longer discussion of this proof see Toby Mayer, "Ibn Sīnā's 'Burhān al-Ṣiddiqīn'," *The Journal of Islamic Studies* 12:1 (2001), 18-39.

¹⁹⁹ See Mayer, "Faḥr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī's critique," 199-200.

of prior causes back to the Uncaused.²⁰⁰ The only problem with this is that al-Ghazālī's critique of the philosopher's theory of causation in the *Tahāfut* revealed weaknesses in the normal understanding of causality. Moreover, if al-Ghazālī and others were going to hold to an occasionalist system that implied that the relationship between cause and effect is not necessary, they would likely have to throw this proof out the window or at least find a new one that did not rely on temporal causation.²⁰¹ If they did not, the philosophers could easily attack their proof of God's existence using their very own theory of causation. For both reasons, Avicenna's proof of God's existence was an attractive alternative.

This was easier said than done. Unfortunately for later Ash'arite theologians, Avicenna's proof of God's existence also had certain hidden implications that were incompatible with Asharite *kalām* as it had been known in the past. Avicenna's proof, as it appears in the *Tawālī*^c of al-Bayḍawī runs as follows:

- [...] There is no doubt at all about the existence of an existent entity. Indeed,
1. If this should be a necessary reality, then that would be the logical goal of the proof demonstration. And
 2. if it should be a possible reality, then it would have a necessary cause either at its beginning point or as an intermediary.²⁰²

The first step in the proof is establishing the simple fact that "[t]here is no doubt that there is existence."²⁰³ Few have any problem here so the proof moves on to

²⁰⁰ See 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar Bayḍawī, *Nature, Man and God in Medieval Islam: 'Abd Allah Baydawi's Text Tawālī^c al-Anwar min Matalī^c al-Anzar along with Mahmud Isfahani's Commentary Matalī^c al-Anzar, Sharh Tawālī^c al-Anwar*, ed. and trans. Edwin E. Calverley and James W. Pollock (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 2:740.

²⁰¹ See Michael E. Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 145-153.

²⁰² Baydawi, *Nature, Man and God*, 2:740.

²⁰³ Mayer, "Ibn Sīnā's 'Burhān aṣ-Ṣiddiqīn'," 23.

establish two options for types of existents: they are either necessary or contingent. If the existent is necessary, then we need look no further. If the existent is contingent, i.e. if its existence requires a cause, then we apply the same rule to this prior existent and so until the Necessary Existent is reached.²⁰⁴ The utility of the proof is that it requires very little from the skeptical reader, namely, all that is required from the reader is that he affirm that there is something, somewhere which exists. The only drawback from accepting the validity of such a proof is that Ash'arite theologians are now confronted by all the assumptions underlying the proof and all the implication which follow.²⁰⁵

The major objection to the proof, which al-Bayḍāwī treats immediately after the proof's statement, is rooted in the nature of the relation between essence and existence, and how this relation is understood in reference to the concept of cause. Turning to the objection to al-Bayḍāwī's proof, as paraphrased by al-Iṣfahānī:

Let no one object by saying that it would be impossible for the cause of a possible reality to be a necessary reality either as its beginning or as an intermediary. [This is] because if the cause of a possible reality should be a necessary reality, then the existence would be an addition, according to the preceding discussions, namely, that existence would be a factor additional to the quiddity both in possible reality and in necessary reality.

Therefore, if the existence should be a factor added, then it would be a characteristic of the essence, and a characteristic needs an essence, the essence

²⁰⁴ As al-Ghazālī says in his *Maqāṣid al-falāsifah*: "The Philosophers' method in proving the existence of the Necessary Existent is: There is no doubt at all about the existence of any existent. If that should be the necessary existent, then that would be the goal of the proof. If that should be a possible, then there must be some cause which caused its existence to be preferable to its nonexistence (or which made it exist rather than continue non-existent). We then transfer the argument to it. Then would follow either the circular argument or the infinite series argument, both of which are impossible. Or we end up with the Necessary Existent, which is the intend goal of the demonstration"; quoted in Bayḍāwī, *Nature, Man and God*, 2:741, n. 36.

²⁰⁵ "Māhiyyah" is commonly translated as quiddity which is closer to the literal meaning. For our purposes, they can be used interchangeably to signify something's identity or its "what-is-itness" in the mind.

being something other than itself, and everything needing something else is a possible reality.²⁰⁶

The objection appears to be purely dialectical in that it is intended only as a way to demonstrate some inconsistency in the argument. However, there is a possibility that it was put forward by another Ash'arite theologian who wanted to avoid making God a cause whose effect was necessary in itself. The danger in that position was that it threatened the Ash'arite assertion that God's exercised His free will, without compulsion. Whatever the case, the objection does effectively bring out the difficulties which faced theologians who adopted philosophical arguments while still trying to remain loyal to the conclusions of theology. Simply stated, the proof used by al-Bayḍāwī to arrive at the Necessary Existent is invalid, says the interlocutor, because a necessarily existent cause is, like all existents, composed of existence and essence where existence is additional to the essence. If existence is taken as an attribute of the essence, then al-Bayḍāwī must admit that inasmuch as an attribute needs an essence, the necessarily existent cause's existence—being itself an attribute—needs the essence. But this cannot be, because then the essence plays the absurd part of being the cause of a necessarily existent cause.²⁰⁷ If the necessarily existent cause were to itself have a cause it could not properly be called necessary; rather it would be called contingent. Al-Bayḍāwī, in the words of al-Isfahānī, parries, countering that this objection is actually a misrepresentation of al-Bayḍāwī's real opinion. His true position is that, in reality, the Necessary Existent's "essence

²⁰⁶ Bayḍāwī, *Nature, Man and God*, 2:743. Without some of the translator's interpolations.

²⁰⁷ See Mayer, "Fahṛ ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī's critique," 202.

necessarily requires His own existence, without regard for existence or non-existence.”²⁰⁸ Thus, the accusation that the Necessary Existent is in some way contingent is based on the fact that its existence *needs* its essence and is thus contingent. Al-Bayḍāwī says that the essence of the Necessary Existent does not need existence, rather it requires it by the very fact that it is the Necessary Existent.

The upshot of all of this is that al-Bayḍāwī, clearly following Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, admits that the Necessary Existent is composed of quiddity and existence.²⁰⁹ In fact he goes to great lengths to demonstrate that not only are all contingent existents composed of existence and essence but so is the Necessary Existent, the proof of which receives a special section of its own in the beginning of his *Tawālī‘ al-Anwār*.²¹⁰ Why would al-Bayḍāwī hold such an opinion? Indeed, al-Iṣfahānī, al-Bayḍāwī’s commentator, takes great care in proving al-Bayḍāwī wrong on this very point, concluding that in reality “the existence of God is identical with Himself [i.e. His essence], and so it does not need a ‘cause’; thus the objecting argument falls apart.”²¹¹ The reason the objection falls apart is because the argument assumes that existence is something additional to the Necessary Existent.²¹² Al-Bayḍāwī’s argument was susceptible to this objection because he had assumed this for the Necessary Existent. Al-Iṣfahānī is able to

²⁰⁸ Bayḍāwī, *Nature, Man and God*, 2:744. Without translator’s interpolations.

²⁰⁹ Mayer, “Fakhr ad-Dīn al-Rāzī’s critique,” 211-212. It seems that al-Rāzī had two views on this matter. It seems that in his *Tafsīr* he held the view that God’s existence was identical to his essence.

²¹⁰ Bayḍāwī, *Nature, Man and God*, 1:198-199.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2:744. Al-Iṣfahānī goes to even greater lengths to refute al-Bayḍāwī’s assertion that God is a composite of essence and existence in his commentary. See Bayḍāwī, *Nature, Man and God*, 1:199-209.

²¹² Bayḍāwī, *Nature, Man and God*, 2:744, n. 45.

undermine the objection by denying the fact that God is a composition at all.

There are dangers in both options. There are many reasons why al-Rāzī and by extension al-Bayḍāwī, might have held that existence was additional to the quiddity of the Necessary Existent. Al-Rāzī was wary of adopting a concept of God that was too simple, i.e. the God of the Muʿtazilites and the philosophers for whom the attributes were mere metaphor without a reality distinct from the divine essence. As a good Ashʿarite, al-Rāzī had to somehow allow for a distinct reality to God's attributes. In so far as attributes require an essence, al-Rāzī needed to make sure that his understanding of the Necessary Existent allowed for attributes to reside in the divine essence. Al-Rāzī also had to balance God's divine transcendence above created beings while at the same time allowing for a human knowledge of God's existence. In the same way that doubt as to whether the world is necessary or contingent is not the same as doubt about whether the world exists, questions about existence are different from questions of characterization generally. Thus, al-Rāzī holds that the two must be distinct with respect to God.²¹³ God's characterization or His true reality, i.e. his essence (or quiddity), cannot possibly be known for He is transcendent of such matters, whereas God's existence is something which can be known. Thus, says al-Rāzī, these two are distinct with respect to the Necessary Existent.²¹⁴ In a similar vein, inasmuch as existence is predicated of the Necessary and contingents equally, i.e. univocally, al-Rāzī posited a quiddity for the Necessary in order to make His existence truly

²¹³ Mayer, "Fahṛ ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī's critique," 211.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

transcendent of contingent existence.²¹⁵ Yet, for all of al-Rāzī's reasons, al-Iṣfahānī and others could not ignore that al-Rāzī's solution of making existence additional to God's essence hedged uncomfortably close to multiplicity in God's essence.²¹⁶

This lengthy discussion is meant to demonstrate two things. One, clearly there is much to appreciate in the philosophical complexity of later Ash'arite *kalām*. Al-Bayḍāwī, likely a Rāzī-enthusiast, follows the latter in important philosophical distinctions which would later lead al-Iṣfahānī to refute al-Bayḍāwī and al-Rāzī by extension. This was not an Ash'arism that was passively and thoughtlessly incorporating philosophical thought in order to combat philosophical heresy, nor was it merely dressing old arguments and conclusions in new philosophical clothes. Nor was it an Ash'arism that argued on the basis of revelational data about non-philosophical subjects in dialectical or rhetorical terms. Quite on the contrary, Avicenna's philosophy posed a challenge to the Ash'arites which they were compelled to accept or risk becoming an anachronism, totally incapable of defending the religion. Thus, they actively adopted the language and concepts of the philosophers in order to argue for religion. Yet, this was by no means a simple task, as we saw above. Thus, after al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī there continued to be a naturalization of aspects of philosophy into Ash'arite *kalām*. As we saw in al-Iṣfahānī's rejection of God's existence being additional to His essence and in al-Bayḍāwī's acceptance, this

²¹⁵ Ibid., 209.

²¹⁶ Interestingly, for all of al-Rāzī's work in philosophy, he seems to have rejected Avicenna's ontological proof of God preferring a more traditional Ash'arite one which begins with contingency; See Mayer, "Ibn Sīnā's 'Burhān al-Ṣiddiqīn'," 18, n. 1.

naturalization process was often being carried out in the medium of the creedal commentary.

Ultimately, we must see Zarrūq's commentary as part of this process of naturalization. That is not to say that Zarrūq's role is the same as that of ʿAbdullāh al-Bayḍāwī or Maḥmūd al-Iṣfahānī. Zarrūq represents another aspect of this naturalization. The very fact that Zarrūq shies away from the complexity of later Ashʿarite discourse and favors early Ashʿarites instead is part of a process whereby Muslim scholars react to the process initiated by al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī of adopting Avicennian philosophy into pre-existing Ashʿarite debates. Like many later Ashʿarites, Zarrūq neither completely rejects nor completely accepts the challenge posed by the incorporation of Avicenna's philosophy into Ashʿarism. Above all other factors, ṣūfism seems to have tempered Zarrūq's reaction to contemporary or near contemporary incarnations of Ashʿarism. Yet this relationship between ṣūfism and theology in Zarrūq's commentary brings us to an important point: even if we admit that Zarrūq's commentary has little in the way of groundbreaking philosophical insights or deep mystical inspiration, it does provide a model for how the conclusions of ṣūfism are applied to and are considered equal to the conclusions of theology and philosophy. In terms of the process of naturalization of Avicennian philosophy into *kalām*, this would mean that ṣūfism would be testing the conclusions of the Avicennized theologians: Ashʿarism filtered through the eyes of the gnostics.

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