

AVERROES

ON THE HARMONY OF RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

A translation, with introduction and notes, of Ibn Rushd's

Kitab fasl al-maqal, with its appendix (*Damima*) and
an extract from *Kitab al-kashf 'an manahij al-adilla*

by

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PREFACE

I AM grateful to the International Commission for the Translation of Great Works and the Trustees of the Gibb Memorial Fund for sponsoring the publication of this book, and to the Graduate School of the University of Michigan for financial assistance towards research. I have been fortunate in having the translation carefully read and criticized by R. P. Georges Anawati, Professor N. Golb, Professor I. Kavar and Rev. Richard J. McCarthy; their help has led to many improvements and is warmly acknowledged. Very substantial, too, is my debt to the published works of Alonso, Asín, Bouyges, Gauthier, Goichon, Van den Bergh and others referred to in my notes. I thank my wife and Mrs. Cynthia Goldstein for typing the greater portion of my manuscript, and my wife for her encouraging

interest which has sustained my effort.

GEORGE F. HOURANI.

Ann Arbor,
1960.

In memory of my father

CONVENTIONS

The translation is based on the Arabic text in *Ibn Rushd (Averroes) Kitab fasl al-maqal*, ed. G. F. Hourani (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959). But all references are to the *editio princeps* of M. J. Müller, *Philosophie and Theologie von Averroes* (Munich, 1859). The numbers in the margins of my edition and translation indicate Müller's pages and lines. (ed. these have been eliminated in the e-text.)

() Parentheses or numerations attributable to Ibn Rushd.

<> Editor's conjectural additions to the text as found in the Arabic manuscripts.

[] Translator's explanatory additions, including all chapter headings and summaries.

The Arabic article is omitted in front of single names, e.g. "Farabi" for "al-Farabi", but "Abu Nasr al-Farabi". Diacritical marks are omitted where an Arabic name is incorporated in an English form, e.g. "Hanbalites", but "Ibn Hanbal".

Ed. Note: in this e-text version I have eliminated diacritical marks from the properly transliterated terms for easy viewing for those who do not have the original font that this document was created in.

THE DECISIVE TREATISE, DETERMINING THE NATURE OF THE CONNECTION BETWEEN RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY (1)

[What is the attitude of the Law to philosophy?]

Thus spoke the lawyer, *imam*, judge, and unique scholar, Abul Walid Muhammad Ibn Ahmad Ibn Rushd:

Praise be to God with all due praise, and a prayer for Muhammad His chosen servant and apostle. The purpose of this treatise (2) is to examine, from the standpoint of the study of the Law, (3) whether the study of philosophy and logic (4) is allowed by the Law, (5) or prohibited, or commanded, either by way of recommendation or as obligatory. (6)

[CHAPTER ONE]

[THE LAW MAKES PHILOSOPHIC STUDIES OBLIGATORY]

[If teleological study of the world is philosophy, and if the Law commands such a study, then the Law commands philosophy.] (7)

We say: If the activity of 'philosophy' is nothing more than study of existing beings (8) and reflection on them as indications 9 of the Artisan, 10 i.e. inasmuch as they are products of art (for beings only indicate the Artisan through our knowledge of the art in them, and the more perfect this

knowledge is, the more perfect the knowledge of the Artisan becomes),” and if the Law has encouraged and urged reflection on beings, then it is clear that what this name signifies is either obligatory or recommended by the Law.

[The Law commands such a study.]¹²

That the Law summons to reflection on beings, and the pursuit of knowledge about them, by the intellect is clear from several verses of the Book of God, Blessed and Exalted, such as the saying of the Exalted, ‘Reflect, you have vision:’ ¹³ this is textual authority for the obligation ¹⁴ to use intellectual reasoning, or a combination of intellectual and legal reasoning. ¹⁵ Another example is His saying, ‘Have they not studied the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and whatever things God has created?’: ¹⁶ this is a text urging the study of the totality of beings. Again, God the Exalted has taught that one of those whom He singularly honoured by this knowledge was Abraham, peace on him, for the Exalted said, ‘So we made Abraham see the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, that he might be’ [and so on to the end of the verse]. ¹⁷ The Exalted also said, ‘Do they not observe the camels, how they have been created, and the sky, how it has been raised up?’, ¹⁸ and He said, ‘and they give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth’, ¹⁹ and so on in countless other verses. ²⁰

[This study must be conducted in the best manner, by demonstrative reasoning.] ²¹

Since it has now been established that the Law has rendered obligatory the study of beings by the intellect, and reflection on them, and since reflection is nothing more than inference and drawing out of the unknown from the known, and since this is reasoning ²² or at any rate done by reasoning, therefore we are under an obligation to carry on our study of beings by intellectual reasoning. It is further evident that this manner of study, to which the Law summons and urges, is the most perfect kind of study using the most perfect kind of reasoning; ²³ and this is the kind called ‘demonstration’. ²⁴

[To master this instrument the religious thinker must make a preliminary study of logic, just as the lawyer must study legal reasoning. This is no more heretical in the one case than in the other. And logic must be learned from the ancient masters, regardless of the fact that they were not Muslims.]

The Law, then, has urged us to have demonstrative knowledge of God the Exalted and all the beings of His creation. But it is preferable and even necessary for anyone, who wants to understand God the Exalted and the other beings demonstratively, to have first understood the kinds of demonstration and their conditions [of validity], and in what respects demonstrative reasoning differs from dialectical, rhetorical and fallacious reasoning. ²⁵ But this is not possible unless he has previously learned what reasoning as such is, and how many kinds it has, and which of them are valid and which invalid. ²⁶ This in turn is not possible unless he has previously learned the parts of reasoning, of which it is composed, i.e. the premisses and their kinds. ²⁷ Therefore he who believes in the Law, and obeys its command to study beings, ought prior to his study to gain a knowledge of these things, which have the same place in theoretical studies as instruments have in practical activities. ²⁸

For just as the lawyer infers from the Divine command to him to acquire knowledge of the legal categories ²⁹ that he is under obligation to know the various kinds of legal syllogisms, ³⁰ and which are valid and which invalid, ³¹ in the same way he who would know [God] ³² ought to infer from the command to study beings that he is under obligation to acquire a knowledge of intellectual reasoning and its kinds. Indeed it is more fitting for him to do so, for if the lawyer infers from the saying of the Exalted, ‘Reflect, you who have vision’, the obligation to acquire a knowledge of legal reasoning, how much more fitting and proper that he who would know God should infer from it the obligation to acquire a knowledge of intellectual reasoning!

It cannot be objected: ‘This kind of study of intellectual reasoning is a heretical innovation since it did not exist among the first believers.’ For the study of legal reasoning and its kinds is also

something which has been discovered since the first believers, yet it is not considered to be a heretical innovation. So the objector should believe the same about the study of intellectual reasoning. 33 (For this there is a reason, which it is not the place to mention here.) But most (masters) of this religion support intellectual reasoning, except a small group of gross literalists, who can be refuted by [sacred] texts. 34

Since it has now been established that there is an obligation of the Law to study intellectual reasoning and its kinds, just as there is an obligation to study legal reasoning, it is clear that, if none of our predecessors had formerly examined intellectual reasoning and its kinds, we should be obliged to undertake such an examination from the beginning, and that each succeeding scholar would have to seek help in that task from his predecessor in order that knowledge of the subject might be completed 35 For it is difficult or impossible for one man to find out by himself and from the beginning all that he needs of that subject, as it is difficult for one man to discover all the knowledge that he needs of the kinds of legal reasoning; indeed this is even truer of knowledge of intellectual reasoning. 36

But if someone other than ourselves has already examined that subject, it is clear that we ought to seek help towards our goal from what has been said by such a predecessor on the subject, regardless of whether this other one shares our religion or not. 37 For when a valid sacrifice 38 is performed with a certain instrument, no account is taken, in judging the validity of the sacrifice, of whether the instrument belongs to one who shares our religion or to one who does not, so long as it fulfils the conditions for validity. By 'those who do not share our religion' I refer to those ancients who studied these matters before Islam. So if such is the case, and everything that is required in the study of the subject of intellectual syllogisms has already been examined in the most perfect manner by the ancients, presumably we ought to lay hands on their books in order to study what they said about that subject; and if it is all correct we should accept it from them, while if there is anything incorrect in it, we should draw attention to that. 39

[After logic we must proceed to philosophy proper. Here too we have to learn from our predecessors, just as in mathematics and law. Thus it is wrong to forbid the study of ancient philosophy. Harm from it is accidental, like harm from taking medicine, drinking water, or studying law.]

When we have finished with this sort of study and acquired the instruments by whose aid we are able to reflect on beings and the indications of art in them (for he who does not understand the art does not understand the product of art, and he who does not understand the product of art does not understand the Artisan), then we ought to begin the examination of beings in the order and manner we have learned from the art of demonstrative syllogisms. 40

And again it is clear that in the study of beings this aim can be fulfilled by us perfectly only through successive examinations of them by one man after another, 41 the later ones seeking the help of the earlier in that task, on the model of what has happened in the mathematical sciences. For if we suppose that the art of geometry did not exist in this age of ours, and likewise the art of astronomy, and a single person wanted to ascertain by himself the sizes of the heavenly bodies, their shapes, and their distances from each other, that would not be possible for him, e.g. to know the proportion of the sun to the earth or other facts about the sizes of the stars even though he were the most intelligent of men by nature, unless by a revelation or something resembling revelation. 42 Indeed if he were told that the sun is about 150 or 160 times 43 as great as the earth, he would think this statement madness on the part of the speaker, although this is a fact which has been demonstrated in astronomy so surely that no one who has mastered that science doubts it.

But what calls even more strongly for comparison with the art of mathematics in this respect is the art of the principles of law; and the study of law itself was completed only over a long period of time. And if someone today wanted to find out by himself all the arguments which have been discovered by the theorists of the legal schools on controversial questions, about which debate has taken place between them in most countries of Islam (except the West), 44 he would deserve to be ridiculed, because such a task is impossible for him, apart from the fact that the work has been done already. Moreover, this is a situation that is self-evident not in the scientific arts alone but also in the practical arts; for there is not one of them which a single man can construct by himself. Then how can he do it with the art of arts, philosophy? If this is so, then whenever we find in the works of our predecessors

of former nations a theory about beings and a reflection on them conforming to what the conditions of demonstration require, we ought to study what they said about the matter and what they affirmed in their books. And the should accept from them gladly and gratefully whatever in these books accords with the truth, and draw attention to and warn against what does not accord with the truth, at the same time excusing them. 45

From this it is evident that the study of the books of the ancients is obligatory by Law, since their aim and purpose in their books is just the purpose to which the Law has urged us, and that whoever forbids the study of them to anyone who is fit to study them, i.e. anyone who, unites two qualities, (1) natural intelligence and (2) religious integrity and moral virtue, 46 is blocking people from the door by which the Law summons them to knowledge of God, the door of theoretical study which leads to the truest knowledge of Him; and such an act is the extreme of ignorance and estrangement from God the Exalted. 47

And if someone errs or stumbles in the study of these books owing to a deficiency in his natural capacity, or bad organization of his study of them, or being dominated by his passions, or not finding a teacher to guide him to an understanding of their contents, or a combination of all or more than one of these causes, 48 it does not follow that one should forbid them to anyone who is qualified to study them. For this manner of harm which arises owing to them is something that is attached to them by accident, not by essence; and when a thing is beneficial by its nature and essence, it ought not to be shunned because of something harmful contained in it by accident. 49 This was the thought of the Prophet, peace on him, on the occasion when he ordered a man to give his brother honey to drink for his diarrhea, and the diarrhea increased after he had given him the honey: when the man complained to him about it, he said, ‘God spoke the truth; it was your brother’s stomach that lied.’ 50 We can even say that a man who prevents a qualified person from studying books of philosophy, because some of the most vicious people may be thought to have gone astray through their study of them, 51 is like a man who prevents a thirsty person from drinking cool, fresh water until he dies of thirst, because some people have choked to death on it. For death from water by choking is an accidental matter, but death by thirst is essential and necessary.

Moreover, this accidental effect of this art is a thing which may also occur accidentally from the other arts. To how many lawyers has law been a cause of lack of piety and immersion in this world! Indeed we find most lawyers in this state, although their art by its essence calls for nothing but practical virtue. Thus it is not strange if the same thing that occurs accidentally in the art which calls for practical virtue should occur accidentally in the art which calls for intellectual virtue. 52

[For every Muslim the Law has provided a way to truth suitable to his nature, through demonstrative, dialectical or rhetorical methods.] 53

Since all this is now established, and since we, the Muslim community, hold that this divine religion of ours is true, 54 and that it is this religion which incites and summons us to the happiness that consists in the knowledge of God, Mighty and Majestic, and of His creation, that [end] 55 is appointed for every Muslim by the method of assent which his temperament and nature require. For the natures of men are on different levels with respect to [their paths to] assent. One of them comes to assent through demonstration; another comes to assent through dialectical arguments, just as firmly as the demonstrative man through demonstration, since his nature does not contain any greater capacity; while another comes to assent through rhetorical arguments, again just as firmly as the demonstrative man through demonstrative arguments. 56

Thus since this divine religion of ours has summoned people by these three methods, assent to it has extended to everyone, except him who stubbornly denies it with his tongue or him for whom no method of summons to God the Exalted has been appointed in religion owing to his own neglect of such matters. 57 It was for this purpose that the Prophet, peace on him, was sent with a special mission to ‘the white man 58 and the black man’ alike; I mean because his religion embraces all the methods of summons to God the Exalted. This is clearly expressed in the saying of God the Exalted, ‘Summon to the way of your Lord by wisdom and by good preaching, and debate with them in the most effective manner’. 59

[CHAPTER Two]

[PHILOSOPHY CONTAINS NOTHING OPPOSED TO ISLAM]

[Demonstrative truth and scriptural truth cannot conflict.] 60

Now since this religion is true and summons to the study which leads to knowledge of the Truth, we the Muslim community know definitely that demonstrative study does not lead to [conclusions] conflicting with what Scripture has given us; for truth does not oppose truth but accords with it and bears witness to it.

[If the apparent meaning of Scripture conflicts with demonstrative conclusions it must be interpreted allegorically, i.e. metaphorically.]

This being so, whenever demonstrative study leads to any manner of knowledge about any being, that being is inevitably either unmentioned or mentioned in Scripture. If it is unmentioned there is no contradiction, and it is in the same case as an act whose category is unmentioned, so that the lawyer has to infer it by reasoning from Scripture. 61 If Scripture speaks about it; the apparent meaning of the words inevitably either accords or conflicts with the conclusions of demonstration about it. If this [apparent meaning] accords there is no argument. If it conflicts there is a call for allegorical interpretation of it. The meaning of 'allegorical interpretation' is: extension of the significance of an expression from real to metaphorical significance, without forsaking therein the standard metaphorical practices of Arabic, such as calling a thing by the name of something resembling it or a cause or consequence or accompaniment of it, or other things such as are enumerated in accounts of the kinds of metaphorical speech. 62

[If the lawyer can do this, the religious thinker certainly can. Indeed these allegorical interpretations always receive confirmation from the apparent meaning of other passages of Scripture.]

Now if the lawyer does this in many decisions of religious law, with how much more right is it done by the possessor of demonstrative knowledge! 63 For the lawyer has at his disposition only reasoning based on opinion, 64 while he who would know [God] <has at his disposition> reasoning based on certainty. So we affirm definitely that whenever the conclusion of a demonstration is in conflict with the apparent meaning of Scripture, that apparent meaning admits of allegorical interpretation according to the rules for such interpretation in Arabic. This proposition is questioned by no Muslim and doubted by no believer. 65 But its certainty is immensely increased for those who have had close dealings with this idea and put it to the test, and made it their aim to reconcile the assertions of intellect and tradition. 66 Indeed we may say that whenever a statement in Scripture conflicts in its apparent meaning with a conclusion of demonstration, if Scripture is considered carefully, and the rest of its contents searched page by page, there will invariably be found among the expressions of Scripture something which in its apparent meaning bears witness to that allegorical interpretation 67 or comes close to bearing witness.

[All Muslims accept the principle of allegorical interpretation; they only disagree about the extent of its application.]

In the light of this idea the Muslims are unanimous 68 in holding that it is not obligatory either to take all the expressions of Scripture in their apparent meaning or to extend them all from their apparent meaning by allegorical interpretation. They disagree [only] over which of them should and which should not be so interpreted the Ash'arites for instance give an allegorical interpretation 69 to the verse about God's directing Himself 70 and the Tradition about His descent, 71 while the Hanbalites take them in their apparent meaning. 72

[The double meaning has been given to suit people's diverse intelligence. The apparent contradictions are meant to stimulate the learned to deeper study.]

The reason why we have received a Scripture with both an apparent and an inner meaning lies in the diversity of people's natural capacities and the difference of their innate dispositions with regard to assent. The reason why we have received in Scripture texts whose apparent meanings contradict each other is in order to draw the attention of those who are well grounded in science to the interpretation which reconciles them. ⁷³ This is the idea referred to in the words received from the Exalted, 'He it is who has sent down to you the Book, containing certain verses clear and definite' [and so on] down to the words 'those who are well grounded in science'. ⁷⁴

[In interpreting texts allegorically we must never violate Islamic consensus, when it is certain. But to establish it with certainty with regard to theoretical texts is impossible, because there have always been scholars who would not divulge their interpretation of such texts.]

It may be objected: 'There are some things in Scripture which the Muslims have unanimously agreed to take in their apparent meaning, others [which they have agreed] to interpret allegorically, and others about which they have disagreed; ⁷⁵ is it permissible, then, that demonstration should lead to interpreting allegorically what they have agreed to take in its apparent meaning, or to taking in its apparent meaning what they have agreed to interpret allegorically?' We reply: If unanimous agreement is established by a method which is certain, such [a result] is not sound; but if [the existence of] agreement on those things is a matter of opinion, then it may be sound. This is why Abu Hamid, ⁷⁶ Abul-Ma'ali, ⁷⁷ and other leaders of thought said that no one should be definitely called an unbeliever for violating unanimity on a point of interpretation in matters like these. ⁷⁸

That unanimity on theoretical matters is never determined with certainty, as it can be on practical matters, may be shown to you by the fact that it is not possible for unanimity to be determined on any question at any period unless that period is strictly limited by us, and all the scholars existing in that period are known to us (i.e. known as individuals and in their total number), and the doctrine of each of them on the question has been handed down to us on unassailable authority, ⁷⁹ and, in addition to all this, unless we are sure that the scholars existing at the time were in agreement that there is not both an apparent and an inner meaning in Scripture, that knowledge of any question ought not to be kept secret from anyone, and that there is only one way for people to understand Scripture. But it is recorded in Tradition that many of the first believers used to hold that Scripture has both an apparent and an inner meaning, and that the inner meaning ought not to be learned by anyone who is not a man of learning in this field and who is incapable of understanding it. Thus, for example, Bukhari reports a saying of 'Ali Ibn Abi Talib, may God be pleased with him, 'Speak to people about what they know. Do you want God and His Prophet to be accused of lying?' ⁸⁰ Other examples of the same kind are reported about a group of early believers. ⁸¹ So how can it possibly be conceived that a unanimous agreement can have been handed down to us about a single theoretical question, when we know definitely that not a single period has been without scholars who held that there are things in Scripture whose true meaning should not be learned by all people?

The situation is different in practical matters: everyone holds that the truth about these should be disclosed to all people alike, and to establish the occurrence of unanimity about them we consider it sufficient that the question [at issue] should have been widely discussed and that no report of controversy about it should have been handed down to us. ⁸² This is enough to establish the occurrence of unanimity on matters of practice, but on matters of doctrine the case is different.

[Ghazali's charge of unbelief against Farabi and Ibn Sina, for asserting the world's eternity and God's ignorance of particulars and denying bodily resurrection, is only tentative, not definite.]

You may object: 'If we ought not to call a man an unbeliever for violating unanimity in cases of allegorical interpretation, because no unanimity is conceivable in such cases, what do you say about the Muslim philosophers, like Abu Nasr ⁸³ and Ibn Sina? ⁸⁴ For Abu Hamid called them both definitely unbelievers in the book of his known as *The disintegration* [Tahfut - full title is better translated as *Incoherence of the philosophers. ed.*], ⁸⁵ on three counts: their assertions of the pre-eternity of the world and that God the Exalted does not know particulars' (may He be Exalted far above that [ignorance]!), 'and their allegorical interpretation of the passages concerning the

resurrection of bodies and states of existence in the next life.’

We answer: It is apparent from what he said on the subject that his calling them both unbelievers on these counts was not definite, since he made it clear in *The book of the distinction* that calling people unbelievers for violating unanimity can only be tentative. 86

[Such a charge cannot be definite, because there has never been a consensus against allegorical interpretation. The *Qur’an* itself indicates that it has inner meanings which it is the special function of the demonstrative class to understand.]

Moreover, it is evident from what we have said that a unanimous agreement cannot be established in questions of this kind, because of the reports that many of the early believers of the first generation, as well as others, have said that there are allegorical interpretations which ought not to be expressed except to those who are qualified to receive allegories. These are ‘those who are well grounded in science’; for we prefer to place the stop after the words of God the Exalted ‘and those who are well grounded in science’, because if the scholars did not understand allegorical interpretation, there would be no superiority in their assent which would oblige them to a belief in Him not found among the unlearned. 87 God has described them as those who believe in Him, and this can only be taken to refer to the belief which is based on demonstration; and this [belief] 88 only occurs together with the science of allegorical interpretation. 89 For the unlearned believers are those whose belief in Him is not based on demonstration; and if this belief which God has attributed to the scholars is peculiar to them, it must come through demonstration, and if it comes through demonstration it only occurs together with the science of allegorical interpretation. 90 For God the Exalted has informed us that those [verses] have 91 an allegorical interpretation which is the truth, and demonstration can only be of the truth. That being the case, it is not possible for general unanimity 92 to be established about allegorical interpretations, which God has made peculiar to scholars. This is self-evident to any fair minded person.

[Besides, Ghazali was mistaken in ascribing to the Peripatetics the opinion that God does not know particulars. Their view is that His knowledge of both particulars and universals differs from ours, in being the cause, not an effect, of the object known. They even hold that God sends premonitions in dreams of particular events.] 93

In addition to all this we hold that Abu Hamid was mistaken about the Peripatetic philosophers, in ascribing to them the assertion that God, Holy and Exalted, does not know particulars at all. 94 In reality they hold that God the Exalted knows them in a way which is not of the same kind as our way of knowing them. For our knowledge of them is an effect of the object known, originated when it comes into existence and changing when it changes; whereas Glorious God’s Knowledge of existence is the opposite of this: it is the cause of the object known, which is existent being. Thus to suppose the two kinds of knowledge similar to each other is to identify the essences and properties of opposite things, and that is the extreme of ignorance. And if the name of ‘knowledge’ is predicated of both originated and eternal knowledge, it is predicated by sheer homonymy, as many names are predicated of opposite things: e.g. *jalal* of great and small, *sarim* of light and darkness. 95 Thus there exists no definition embracing both kinds of knowledge at once, as the theologians of our time imagine. We have devoted a separate essay to this question, impelled by one of our friends. 96

But how can anyone imagine that the Peripatetics say that God the Glorious does not know particulars with His eternal Knowledge, when they hold that true visions 97 include premonitions of particular events due to occur in future time, and that this warning foreknowledge comes to people in their sleep from the eternal Knowledge which orders and rules the universe? 98 Moreover, it is not only particulars which they say God does not know in the manner in which we know them, but universals as well; for the universals known to us are also effects of the nature of existent being, while with His Knowledge the reverse is true. Thus the conclusion to which demonstration leads is that His Knowledge transcends qualification as ‘universal’ or ‘particular’. Consequently there is no point in disputing about this question, i.e. whether to call them unbelievers or not.

[On the question of the world, the ancient philosophers agree with the Ash'arites that it is originated and coeval with time. The Peripatetics only disagree with the Ash'arites and the Platonists in holding that past time is infinite. This difference is insufficient to justify a charge of unbelief.] 99

Concerning the question whether the world is pre-eternal or came into existence, the disagreement between the Ash'arite theologians and the ancient philosophers is in my view almost resolvable into a disagreement about naming, especially in the case of certain of the ancients. For they agree that there are three classes of beings: two extremes and one intermediate between the extremes. They agree also about naming the extremes; but they disagree about the intermediate class.

[1] One extreme is a being which is brought into existence from something other than itself and by something, i.e. by an efficient cause and from some matter; and it, i.e. its existence, is preceded by time. This is the status of bodies whose generation is apprehended by sense, e.g. the generation of water, air, earth, animals, plants, and so on. All alike, ancients and Ash'arites, agree in naming this class of beings 'originated'. [2] The opposite extreme to this is a being which is not made from or by anything and not preceded by time; and here too all members of both schools agree in naming it 'pre-eternal'. This being is apprehended by demonstration; it is God, Blessed and Exalted, Who is the Maker, 100 Giver of being and Sustainer of the universe; may He be praised and His Power exalted!

[3] The class of being which is between these two extremes is that which is not made from anything and not preceded by time, but which is brought into existence by something, i.e. by an agent. This is the world as a whole. Now they all agree on the presence of these three characters in the world. For the theologians admit that time does not precede it, or rather this is a necessary consequence for them since time according to them is something which accompanies motion and bodies. They also agree with the ancients in the view that future time is infinite and likewise future being. They only disagree about past time and past being: the theologians hold that it 101 is finite (this is the doctrine of Plato and his followers), 102 while Aristotle and his school hold that it is infinite, as is the case with future time.

Thus it is clear that [3] this last being bears a resemblance both to [1] the being which is really generated 103 and to [2] the pre-eternal Being. So those who are more impressed with its resemblance to the pre-eternal than its resemblance to the originated name it 'pre-eternal', while those who are more impressed with its resemblance to the originated name it 'originated'. But in truth it is neither really originated nor really pre-eternal, since the really originated is necessarily perishable and the really pre-eternal has no cause. Some, Plato and his followers, name it 'originated and coeval with time', 104 because time according to them is finite in the past.

Thus the doctrines about the world are not so very far apart from each other that some of them should be called irreligious and others not. For this to happen, opinions must be divergent in the extreme, i.e. contraries such as the theologians suppose to exist on this question; i.e. [they hold] that the names 'pre-eternity' and 'coming into existence' as applied to the world as a whole are contraries. But it is now clear from what we have said that this is not the case. 105

[Anyhow, the apparent meaning of Scripture is that there was a being and time before God created the present being and time. Thus the theologians' interpretation is allegorical and does not command unanimous agreement.]

Over and above all this, these opinions 106 about the world do not conform to the apparent meaning of Scripture. For if the apparent meaning of Scripture is searched, it will be evident from the verses which give us information about the bringing into existence of the world that its form really is originated, 107 but that being itself and time extend continuously at both extremes, i.e. without interruption. Thus the words of God the Exalted, 'He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His throne was on the water', 108 taken in their apparent meaning imply that there was a being before this present being, namely the throne and the water, and a time before this time, i.e. the one which is joined to the form of this being, namely the number of the movement of the celestial sphere. And the words of the Exalted, 'On the day when the earth shall be changed into other than earth, and the heavens as well,' 109 also in their apparent meaning imply that there will be a second being after this being. And the words of the Exalted 'Then He directed Himself towards the sky, and

it was smoke', 110 in their apparent meaning imply that the heavens were created from something.

Thus the theologians too in their statements about the world do not conform to the apparent meaning of Scripture but interpret it allegorically. For it is not stated in Scripture that God was existing with absolutely nothing else: a text to this effect is nowhere to be found. Then how is it conceivable that the theologians' allegorical interpretation of these verses could meet with unanimous agreement, when the apparent meaning of Scripture which we have mentioned about the existence of the world has been accepted by a school of philosophers!...

[On such difficult questions, error committed by a qualified judge of his subject is excused by God, while error by an unqualified person is not excused.] 112

It seems that those who disagree on the interpretation of these difficult questions earn merit if they are in the right and will be excused [by God] if they are in error. 113 For assent to a thing as a result of an indication [of it] arising in the soul is something compulsory, not voluntary: i.e. it is not for us [to choose] not to assent or to assent, as it is to stand up or not to stand up. 114 And since free choice is a condition of obligation, 115 a man who assents to an error as a result of a consideration that has occurred to him is excused, if he is a scholar. This is why the Prophet, peace on him, said, 'If the judge after exerting his mind makes a right decision, he will have a double reward; and if he makes a wrong decision he will [still] have a single reward.' 116 And what judge is more important than he who makes judgments about being, that it is thus or not thus? These judges are the scholars, specially chosen by God for [the task of] allegorical interpretation, and this error which is forgivable according to the Law is only such error as proceeds from scholars when they study the difficult matters which the Law obliges them to study. 117

But error proceeding from any other class of people is sheer sin, equally whether it relates to theoretical or to practical matters. For just as the judge who is ignorant of the [Prophet's] way of life is not excused if he makes an error in judgment, so he who makes judgments about beings without having the proper qualifications for [such] judgments is not excused but is either a sinner or an unbeliever. And if he who would judge what is allowed and forbidden is required to combine in himself the qualifications for exercise of personal judgment, namely knowledge of the principles [of law] and knowledge of how to draw inferences from those principles by reasoning, how much more properly is he who would make judgments about beings required to be qualified, i.e. to know the primary intellectual principles and the way to draw inferences from them! 118

[Texts of Scripture fall into three kinds with respect to the excusability of error. [1] Texts which must be taken in their apparent meaning by everyone. Since the meaning can be understood plainly by demonstrative, dialectical and rhetorical methods alike, no one is excused for the error of interpreting these texts allegorically. [2] Texts which must be taken in their apparent meaning by the lower classes and interpreted allegorically by the demonstrative class. It is inexcusable for the lower classes to interpret them allegorically or for the demonstrative class to take them in their apparent meaning. [3] Texts whose classification under the previous headings is uncertain. Error in this matter by the demonstrative class is excused.] 119

In general, error about Scripture is of two types: 120 either error which is excused to one who is a qualified student of that matter in which the error occurs (as the skilful doctor is excused if he commits an error in the art of medicine and the skilful judge if he gives an erroneous judgment), 121 but not excused to one who is not qualified in that subject; or error which is not excused to any person whatever, and which is unbelief 122 if it concerns the principles of religion, or heresy 123 if it concerns something subordinate to the principles.

This [latter] error is that which occurs about [1] matters, knowledge of which is provided by all the different methods of indication, 124 so that knowledge of the matter in question is in this way possible for everyone. Examples are acknowledgement of God, Blessed and Exalted, of the prophetic missions, and of happiness and misery in the next life; for these three principles are attainable by the three classes of indication, by which everyone without exception can come to assent to what he is obliged to know: I mean the rhetorical, dialectical and demonstrative indications. So whoever denies such a thing, when it is one of the principles of the Law, is an unbeliever, who persists in defiance

with his tongue though not with his heart, or neglects to expose himself to learning the indication of its truth. For if he belongs to the demonstrative class of men, a way has been provided for him to assent to it, by demonstration; if he belongs to the dialectical class, the way is by dialectic; and if he belongs to the class [which is convinced] by preaching, the way for him is by preaching. With this in view the Prophet, peace on him, said, 'I have been ordered to fight people until they say "There is no god but God" and believe in me'; he means, by any of the three methods. of attaining belief that suits them.

[2] With regard to things which by reason of their recondite character are only knowable by demonstration, God has been gracious to those of His servants who have no access to demonstration, on account of their natures, habits or lack of facilities for education: He has coined for them images and likenesses 125 of these things, and summoned them to assent to those images, since it is possible for assent to those images to come about through the indications common to all men, 126 i.e. the dialectical and rhetorical indications. This is the reason why Scripture is divided into apparent and inner meanings: the apparent meaning consists of those images which are coined to stand for those ideas, while the inner meaning is those ideas [themselves], which are clear only to the demonstrative class. These are the four or five classes of beings mentioned by Abu Hamid in *The book of the distinction*. 127

[1] But when it happens, as we said, that we know the thing itself by the three methods, we do not need to coin images of it, and it remains true in its apparent meaning, not admitting allegorical interpretation. 128 If an apparent text of this kind refers to principles, anyone who interprets it allegorically is an unbeliever, e.g. anyone who thinks that there is no happiness or misery in the next life, and that the only purpose of this teaching is that men should be safeguarded from each other in their bodily and sensible lives, that it is but a practical device, and that man has no other goal than his sensible existence. 129

If this is established, it will have become clear to you from what we have said that there are [1] apparent texts of Scripture which it is not permitted to interpret allegorically; to do so on fundamentals is unbelief, on subordinate matters, heresy. 130 There are also [2] apparent texts which have to be interpreted allegorically by men of the demonstrative class; for such men to take them in their apparent meaning is unbelief, while for those who are not of the demonstrative class to interpret them allegorically and take them out of their apparent meaning is unbelief or heresy on their part. 131

Of this [latter] class are the verse about God's directing Himself and the Tradition about His descent. 132 That is why the Prophet, peace on him, said in the case of the black woman, when she told him that God was in the sky, 'Free her; for she is a believer'. 133 This was because she was not of the demonstrative class; and the reason for his decision was that the class of people to whom assent comes only through the imagination, i.e. who do not assent to a thing except in so far as they can imagine it, find it difficult to assent to the existence of a being which is unrelated to any imaginable thing. 134 This applies as well to those who understand from the relation stated 135 merely [that God has] a place; these are people who have advanced 136 a little in their thought beyond the position of the first class, <by rejecting> belief in corporeality. 137 Thus the [proper] answer to them with regard to such passages is that they belong to the ambiguous texts, and that the stop is to be placed after the words of God the Exalted 'And no one knows the interpretation thereof except God'. 138 The demonstrative class, while agreeing unanimously that this class of text must be interpreted allegorically, may disagree about the interpretation, according to the level of each one's knowledge of demonstration.

There is also [3] a third class of Scriptural texts falling uncertainly between the other two classes, on which there is doubt. One group of those who devote themselves to theoretical study attach them to the apparent texts which it is not permitted to interpret allegorically, others attach them to the texts with inner meanings which scholars are not permitted to take in their apparent meanings. This [divergence of opinions] is due to the difficulty and ambiguity of this class of text. Anyone who commits an error about this class is excused, I mean any scholar.

[The texts about the future life fall into [3], since demonstrative scholars do not agree whether to take them in their apparent meaning or interpret them allegorically. Either is permissible. But it is inexcusable to deny the fact of a future life altogether.] 139

If it is asked, ‘Since it is clear that scriptural texts in this respect fall into three grades, to which of these three grades, according to you, do the descriptions of the future life and its states belong?’, we reply: The position clearly is that this matter belongs to the class [3] about which there is disagreement. For we find a group of those who claim an affinity with demonstration saying that it is obligatory to take these passages in their apparent meaning, because there is no demonstration leading to the impossibility of the apparent meaning in them, this is the view of the Ash’arites; while another group of those who devote themselves to demonstration interpret these passages allegorically, and these people give the most diverse interpretations of them. In this class must be counted Abu Hamid and many of the Sufis; some of them combine the two interpretations of the passages, 140 as Abu Hamid does in some of his books.

So it is likely that a scholar who commits an error in this matter is excused, while one who is correct receives thanks or a reward that is, if he acknowledges the existence [of a future life] and merely gives a certain sort of allegorical interpretation, i.e. of the mode of the future life not of its existence, provided that the interpretation given does not lead to denial of its existence. In this matter only the negation of existence is unbelief, because it concerns one of the principles of religion and one of those points to which assent is attainable through the three methods common to ‘the white man and the black man’. 141

[The unlearned classes must take such texts in their apparent meaning. It is unbelief for the learned to set down allegorical interpretations in popular writings. By doing this Ghazali caused confusion among the people. Demonstrative books should be banned to the unqualified, but not to the learned.] 142

But anyone who is not a man of learning is obliged to take these passages in their apparent meaning, and allegorical interpretation of them is for him unbelief because it *leads to* unbelief. That is why we hold that, for anyone whose duty it is to believe in the apparent meaning, allegorical interpretation is unbelief, because it leads to unbelief. Anyone of the interpretative class who discloses such [an interpretation] to him is summoning him to unbelief, and he who summons to unbelief is an unbeliever.

Therefore allegorical interpretations ought to be set down only in demonstrative books, because if they are in demonstrative books they are encountered by no one but men of the demonstrative class. But if they are set down in other than demonstrative books and one deals with them by poetical, rhetorical or dialectical methods, as Abu Hamid does, 143 then he commits an offence against the Law and against philosophy, even though the fellow intended nothing but good. For by this procedure he wanted to increase the number of learned men, but in fact he increased the number of the corrupted not of the learned! As a result, one group came to slander philosophy, another to slander religion, and another to reconcile the [first] two [groups]. 144 It seems that this [last] was one of his objects in his books; an indication that he wanted by this [procedure] to arouse minds is that he adhered to no one doctrine in his books but was an Ash’arite with the Ash’arites, a Sufi with the Sufis and a philosopher with the philosophers, so that he was like the man in the verse

‘One day a Yamani, if I meet a man of Yaman,
And if I meet a Ma’addi, I’m an ‘Adnani.’ 145

The *imams* of the Muslims ought to forbid those of his books which contain learned matter to all save the learned, just as they ought to forbid demonstrative books to those who are not capable of understanding them. But the damage done to people by demonstrative books is lighter, because for the most part only persons of superior natural intelligence become acquainted with demonstrative books, and this class of persons is only misled through lack of practical virtue, unorganized reading, and tackling them without a teacher. 146 On the other hand their total prohibition obstructs the purpose to which the Law summons, because it is a wrong to the best class of people and the best class of beings. For to do justice to the best class of beings demands that they should be known profoundly, by persons equipped to know them profoundly, and these are the best class of people; and the greater the value of the being, the greater is the injury towards it, which consists of ignorance of it. Thus the Exalted has said, ‘Associating [other gods] with God is indeed a great wrong.’ 147

[We have only discussed these questions in a popular work because they were already being publicly discussed.]

This is as much as we see fit to affirm in this field of study, i.e. the correspondence between religion and philosophy and the rules for allegorical interpretation in religion. If it were not for the publicity given to the matter and to these questions which we have discussed, we should not have permitted ourselves to write a word on the subject; 148 and we should not have had to make excuses for doing so to the interpretative scholars, because the proper place to discuss these questions is in demonstrative books. God is the Guide and helps us to follow the right course!

[CHAPTER THREE]

[PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF SCRIPTURE SHOULD NOT BE TAUGHT TO THE MAJORITY. THE LAW PROVIDES OTHER METHODS OF INSTRUCTING THEM.]

[The purpose of Scripture is to teach true theoretical and practical science and right practice and attitudes.]

You ought to know that the purpose of Scripture is simply to teach true science and right practice. True science is knowledge of God, Blessed and Exalted, and the other beings as they really are, and especially of noble beings, 149 and knowledge of happiness and misery in the next life. 150 Right practice consists in performing the acts which bring happiness and avoiding the acts which bring misery; 151 and it is knowledge of these acts that is called 'practical science'. They fall into two divisions: (1) outward bodily acts; the science of these is called 'jurisprudence'; and (2) acts of the soul such as gratitude, patience and other moral attitudes which the Law enjoins or forbids; the science of these is called 'asceticism' or 'the sciences of the future life'. To these Abu Hamid turned his attention in his book: as people had given up this sort [of act] and become immersed in the other sort, 152 and as this sort [2] involves the greater fear of God, which is the cause of happiness, he called his book *'The revival of the sciences of religion'*. 153 But we have digressed from our subject, so let us return to it.

[Scripture teaches concepts both directly and by symbols, and uses demonstrative, dialectical and rhetorical arguments. Dialectical and rhetorical arguments are prevalent because the main aim of Scripture is to teach the majority. In these arguments concepts are indicated directly or by symbols, in various combinations in premisses and conclusion.]

We say: The purpose of Scripture is to teach true science and right practice; and teaching is of two classes, [of] concepts and [of] judgments, 154 as the logicians 155 have shown. Now the methods available to men of [arriving at] judgments are three: demonstrative, dialectical and rhetorical; 156 and the methods of forming concepts are two: either [conceiving] the object itself or [conceiving] a symbol of it. 157 But not everyone has the natural ability to take in demonstrations, or [even] dialectical arguments, let alone demonstrative arguments which are so hard to learn and need so much time [even] for those who are qualified to learn them. Therefore, since it is the purpose of Scripture simply to teach everyone, Scripture has to contain every method of [bringing about] judgments of assent and every method of forming concepts.

Now some of the methods of assent comprehend the majority of people, i.e. the occurrence of assent as a result of them [is comprehensive]: these are the rhetorical and the dialectical [methods], and the rhetorical is more comprehensive than the dialectical. Another method is peculiar to a smaller number of people: this is the demonstrative. Therefore, since the primary purpose of Scripture is to take care of the majority (without neglecting to arouse the elite), the prevailing methods of expression in religion are the common methods by which the majority comes to form concepts and judgments. 158

These [common] methods in religion are of four classes : 159

One of them occurs where the method is common, yet specialized 160 in two respects: i.e. where it is certain in its concepts and judgments, in spite of being rhetorical or dialectical. These syllogisms are those whose premisses, in spite of being based on accepted ideas or on opinions, 161 are accidentally certain, and whose conclusions are accidentally to be taken in their direct meaning without symbolization. Scriptural texts of this class have no allegorical interpretations, and anyone who denies them or interprets them allegorically is an unbeliever.

The second class occurs where the premisses, in spite of being based on accepted ideas or on opinions, are certain, and where the conclusions are symbols for the things which it was intended to conclude. [Texts of] this [class], i.e. their conclusions, admit of allegorical interpretation.

The third is the reverse of this: it occurs where the conclusions are the very things which it was intended to conclude, while the premisses are based on accepted ideas or on opinions without being accidentally certain. [Texts of] this [class] also, i.e. their conclusions, do not admit of allegorical interpretation, but their premisses may do so.

The fourth [class] occurs where the premisses are based on accepted ideas or opinions, without being accidentally certain, and where the conclusions are symbols for what it was intended to conclude. In these cases the duty of the elite is to interpret them allegorically, while the duty of the masses is to take them in their apparent meaning.

[Where symbols are used, each class of men, demonstrative, dialectical and rhetorical, must try to understand the inner meaning symbolized or rest content with the apparent meaning, according to their capacities.]

In general, everything in these [texts] which admits of allegorical interpretation can only be understood by demonstration. The duty of the elite here is to apply such interpretation; while the duty of the masses is to take them in their apparent meaning in both respects, i.e. in concept and judgment, since their natural capacity does not allow more than that.

But there may occur to students of Scripture allegorical interpretations due to the superiority of one of the common methods over another in [bringing about] assent, i.e. when the indication contained in the allegorical interpretation is more persuasive than the indication contained in the apparent meaning. Such interpretations are popular; 162 and [the making of them] is possibly a duty for those whose powers of theoretical understanding have attained the dialectical level. To this sort belong some of the interpretations of the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites, though the Mu'tazilites are generally sounder in their statements. 163 The masses on the other hand, who are incapable of more than rhetorical arguments, have the duty of taking these [texts] in their apparent meaning, and they are not permitted to know such interpretations at all.

Thus people in relation to Scripture fall into three classes:

One class is those who are not people of interpretation at all: these are the rhetorical class. They are the overwhelming mass, for no man of sound intellect is exempted from this kind of assent. 164

Another class is the people of dialectical interpretation: these are the dialecticians, either by nature alone or by nature and habit.

Another class is the people of certain interpretation: these are the demonstrative class, by nature and training, 165 i.e. in the art of philosophy. This interpretation ought not to be expressed to the dialectical class, let alone to the masses.

[To explain the inner meaning to people unable to understand it is to destroy their belief in the apparent meaning without putting anything in its place. The result is unbelief in learners and teachers. It is best for the learned to profess ignorance, quoting the Qur'an on the limitations of man's understanding.]

When something of these allegorical interpretations is expressed to anyone unfit to receive them, especially demonstrative interpretations because of their remoteness from common knowledge both he who expresses it and he to whom it is expressed are led into unbelief. The reason for that [in the case of the latter] 166 is that allegorical interpretation comprises two things, rejection of the apparent meaning and affirmation of the allegorical one; so that if the apparent meaning is rejected in the mind of someone who can only grasp apparent meanings, without the allegorical meaning being affirmed in his mind, the result is unbelief, if it [the text in question] concerns the principles of religion.

Allegorical interpretations, then, ought not to be expressed to the masses nor set down in rhetorical or dialectical books, i.e. books containing arguments of these two sorts, as was done by Abu Hamid. They should <not> be expressed to this class; and with regard to an apparent text, when there is a <self-evident> doubt whether it is apparent to everyone and whether knowledge of its interpretation is impossible for them, they should be told that it is ambiguous 167 and [its meaning] known by no one except God; and that the stop should be put here in the sentence of the Exalted, ‘And no one knows the interpretation thereof except God’. 168 The same kind of answer should also be given to a question about abstruse matters, which there is no way for the masses to understand; just as the Exalted has answered in Isis saying, ‘And they will ask you about the Spirit. Say, “The Spirit is by the command of my Lord; you have been given only a little knowledge”’. 169

[Certain people have injured the masses particularly, by giving them allegorical interpretations which are false. These people are exactly analogous to bad medical advisers. The true doctor is related to bodily health in the same way as the Legislator to spiritual health, which the *Qur'an* teaches us to pursue. The true allegory is “the deposit” mentioned in the *Qur'an*.]

As for the man who expresses these allegories to unqualified persons, he is an unbeliever on account of his summoning people to unbelief. 170 This is contrary to the summons of the Legislator, 171 especially when they are false allegories concerning the principles of religion, as has happened in the case of a group of people of our time. 172 For we have seen some of them thinking that they were being philosophic and that they perceived, with their remarkable wisdom, things which conflict with Scripture in every respect, i.e. [in passages] which do not admit of allegorical interpretation; and that it was obligatory to express these things to the masses.

But by expressing those false beliefs to the masses they have been a cause of perdition to the masses and themselves, in this world and the next. 173

The relation between the aim of these people and the aim of the Legislator [can be illustrated by] a parable, 174 of a man who goes to a skilful doctor. [This doctor’s] aim is to preserve the health and cure the diseases of all the people, by prescribing for them rules which can be commonly accepted, about the necessity of using the things which will preserve their health and cure their diseases, and avoiding the opposite things. He is unable to make them all doctors, because a doctor is one who knows by demonstrative methods the things which preserve health and cure disease. Now this [man whom we have mentioned] goes out to the people and tells them, ‘These methods prescribed by this doctor for you are not right’; and he sets out to discredit them, so that they are rejected by the people. Or he says, ‘They have allegorical interpretations’; but the people neither understand these nor assent to them in practice. Well, do you think that people in this condition will do any of the things which are useful for preserving health and curing disease, or that this man who has persuaded them to reject what they formerly believed in will now be able to use those [things] with them, I mean for preserving health? No, he will be unable to use those [things] with them, nor will they use them, and so they will all perish.

This [is what will happen] if he expresses to them true allegories 175 about those matters, because of their inability to understand them; let alone if he expresses to them false allegories, because this will lead them to think that there are no such things as health which ought to be preserved and disease which ought to be cured, let alone that there are things which preserve health and cure disease. 176 It is the same when someone expresses allegories to the masses, and to those who are not qualified to understand them, in the sphere of Scripture; thus he makes it appear false and turns people away from it; and he who turns people away from Scripture is an unbeliever.

Indeed this comparison is certain, 177 not poetic as one might suppose. It presents a true analogy, in that the relation of the doctor to the health of bodies is [the same as] the relation of the Legislator to the health of souls: i.e. the doctor is he who seeks to preserve the health of bodies when it exists and to restore it when it is lost, while the Legislator is he who desires this [end] for the health of souls. 178 This health is what is called ‘fear of God’. The precious Book has told us to seek it by acts conformable to the Law, in several verses. Thus the Exalted has said, ‘Fasting has been prescribed for you, as it was prescribed for those who were before you; perhaps you will fear God.’ 179 Again the Exalted has said, ‘Their flesh and their blood shall not touch God, but your fear shall touch him’; 180 ‘Prayer prevents immorality and transgression’; 181 and other verses to the same effect contained in

the precious Book. Through knowledge of Scripture and practice according to Scripture the Legislator aims solely at this health; and it is from this health that happiness in the future life follows, just as misery in the future life follows from its opposite.

From this it will be clear to you that true allegories ought not to be set down in popular books, let alone false ones. The true allegory is the deposit which man was charged to hold and which he held, and from which all beings shied away, i.e. that which is mentioned in the words of the Exalted, 'We offered the deposit to the heavens, the earth and the mountains', [and so on to the end of] the verse.

182

[It was due to the wrong use of allegorical interpretation by the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites that hostile sects arose in Islam.]

It was due to allegorical interpretations, especially the false ones, and the supposition that such interpretations of Scripture ought to be expressed to everyone, that the sects of Islam arose, with the result that each one accused the others of unbelief or heresy. Thus the Mu'tazilites interpreted many verses and Traditions allegorically, and expressed their interpretations to the masses, and the Ash'arites did the same, although they used such interpretations less frequently. 183 In consequence they threw people into hatred, mutual detestation and wars, tore the Scriptures to shreds, and completely divided people. 184

In addition to all this, in the methods which they followed to establish their interpretations they neither went along with the masses nor with the elite: not with the masses, because their methods were <more> obscure than the methods common to the majority, and not with the elite, because if these methods are inspected they are found deficient in the conditions [required] for demonstration, 185 as will be understood after the slightest inspection by anyone acquainted with the conditions of demonstration. Further, many of the principles on which the Ash'arites based their knowledge are sophistical, 186 for they deny many necessary truths such as the permanence of accidents, the action of things on other things, the existence of necessary causes for effects, of substantial forms, and of secondary causes. 187

And their theorists wronged the Muslims in this sense, that a sect of Ash'arites called an unbeliever anyone who did not attain knowledge of the existence of the Glorious Creator by the methods laid down by them in their books for attaining this knowledge. But in truth it is they who are the unbelievers and in error! From this point they proceeded to disagree, one group saying 'The primary obligation is theoretical study', another group saying 'It is belief'; i.e. [this happened] because they did not know which are the methods common to everyone, through whose doors the Law has summoned all people [to enter]; they supposed that there was only one method. Thus they mistook the aim of the Legislator, and were both themselves in error and led others into error.

[The proper methods for teaching the people are indicated in the Qur'an, as the early Muslims knew. The popular portions of the Book are miraculous in providing for the needs of every class of mind. We intend to make a study of its teachings at the apparent level, and thus help to remedy the grievous harm done by ignorant partisans of philosophy and religion.]

It may be asked: 'If these methods followed by the Ash'arites and other theorists are not the common methods by which the Legislator has aimed to teach the masses, and by which alone it is possible to teach them, then what are those [common] methods in this religion of ours?' We reply: They are exclusively the methods set down in the precious Book. For if the precious Book is inspected, there will be found in it the three methods that are available for all the people, <namely> the common methods for the instruction of the majority of the people and the special method. 188 And if their merits are inspected, it becomes apparent that no better common methods for the instruction of the masses can be found than the methods mentioned in it.

Thus whoever tampers with them, by making an allegorical interpretation not apparent in itself, or [at least] not more apparent to everyone than they are (and that [greater apparency] is something non-existent), is rejecting their wisdom and rejecting their intended effects in procuring human happiness. This is very apparent from [a comparison of] the condition of the first believers with the condition of those who came after them. For the first believers arrived at perfect virtue and fear of God only by

using these sayings [of Scripture] without interpreting them allegorically; and anyone of them who did find out an allegorical interpretation did not think fit to express it [to others]. But when those who came after them used allegorical interpretation, their fear of God grew less, their dissensions increased, their love for one another was removed, and they became divided into sects.

So whoever wishes to remove this heresy from religion should direct his attention to the precious Book, and glean from it the indications present [in it] concerning everything in turn that it obliges us to believe, and exercise his judgment in looking at its apparent meaning as well as he is able, without interpreting any of it allegorically, except where the allegorical meaning is apparent in itself, i.e. commonly apparent to everyone. 189 For if the sayings set down in Scripture for the instruction of the people are inspected, it seems that in mastering their meaning 190 one arrives at a point, beyond which none but a man of the demonstrative class can extract from their apparent wording a meaning which is not apparent in them. 191 This property is not found in any other sayings.

For those religious sayings in the precious Book which are expressed to everyone have three properties that indicate their miraculous character: 192 (1) There exist none more completely persuasive and convincing to everyone than they. (2) Their meaning admits naturally of mastery, up to a point beyond which their allegorical interpretation (when they are of a kind to have such an interpretation) can only be found out by the demonstrative class. (3) They contain means of drawing the attention of the people of truth to the true allegorical meaning. 193 This [character] is not found in the doctrines of the Ash'arites nor in those of the Mu'tazilites, i.e. their interpretations do not admit of mastery nor contain [means of] drawing attention to the truth, nor are they true; and this is why heresies have multiplied.

It is our desire to devote our time to this object and achieve it effectively, 194 and if God grants us a respite of life we shall work steadily towards it in so far as this is made possible for us; and it may be that that work will serve as a starting point for our successors. For our soul is in the utmost sorrow and pain by reason of the evil fancies and perverted beliefs which have infiltrated this religion, and particularly such [afflictions] as have happened to it at the hands of people who claim an affinity with philosophy. 195 For injuries from a friend are more severe than injuries from an enemy. I refer to the fact that philosophy is the friend and milk-sister of religion; thus injuries from people related to philosophy are the severest injuries [to religion], apart from the enmity, hatred and quarrels which such [injuries] stir up between the two, which are companions by nature and lovers by essence and instinct. It has also been injured by a host of ignorant friends who claim an affinity with it: these are the sects which exist within it. But God directs all men aright and helps everyone to love Him; He unites their hearts in the fear of Him, and removes from them hatred and loathing by His grace and His mercy!

Indeed God has already removed many of these ills, ignorant ideas and misleading practices, by means of this triumphant rule. 196

By it He has opened a way to many benefits, especially to the class of persons who have trodden the path of study and sought to know the truth. This [He has done] by summoning the masses to a middle way of knowing God the Glorious, [a way] which is raised above the low level of the followers of authority 197 but is below the turbulence of the theologians; and by drawing the attention of the elite to their obligation to make a thorough study of the principles of religion. God is the Giver of success and the Guide by His Goodness.

[APPENDIX: Damima] 198

THE QUESTION MENTIONED BY THE SHAYKH
ABUL-WALID IN *THE DECISIVE TREATISE*

[We shall try to solve your problem about God's Knowledge.]

May God prolong your power, continue to bless you, and keep you out of sight of misfortunes! 199

By your superior intelligence and Abundant talents you have surpassed many of those who devote their lives to these sciences, and your sure insight has led you to become aware of the difficulty that arises about the eternal, Glorious Knowledge,' 200 on account of Its being connected with the things

originated by It. It is therefore our obligation, in the interests of truth and of ending your perplexity, to resolve this difficulty, after formulating it; for he who does not know how to tie a knot cannot untie it. 201

[The problem: How can God be aware of a change in reality without a corresponding change occurring in His eternal Knowledge?]

The difficulty is compelling, as follows. If all these things were in the Knowledge of God the Glorious before they existed, are they in their state of existence [the same] in His Knowledge as they were before their existence, or are they in their state of existence other in His Knowledge than they were before they existed? If we say that in their state of existence they are other in God's Knowledge than they were before they existed, it follows that the eternal Knowledge is subject to change, and that when they pass from nonexistence to existence, there comes into existence additional Knowledge: but that is impossible for the eternal Knowledge. 202 If on the other hand we say that the Knowledge of them in both states is one and the same, it will be asked, 'Are they in themselves', i.e. the beings which come into existence, 'the same before they exist as when they exist?' The answer will have to be 'No, in themselves they are not the same before they exist as when they exist'; otherwise the existent and the non-existents 203 would be one and the same. If the adversary admits this, he can be asked, 'Is not true knowledge acquaintance with existence as it really is?' If he says 'Yes', it will be said, 'Consequently if the object varies in itself, the knowledge of it must vary; otherwise it will not be known as it really is'. Thus one of two alternatives is necessary: either the eternal Knowledge varies in Itself, or the things that come into existence are not known to It. But both alternatives are impossible for God the Glorious.

This difficulty is confirmed by what appears in the case of man: His knowledge of non-existent things depends on the supposition of existence, while his knowledge of them when they exist depends <on existence itself>. For it is self-evident that the two states of knowledge are different; otherwise he would be ignorant of things' existence at the time when they exist.

[God's foreknowledge of all change does not solve the problem, as the theologians think, for the actual occurrence of the change presumably adds something new to His Knowledge.]

It is impossible to escape from this [difficulty] by the usual answer of the theologians about it, that God the Exalted knows things before their existence as they will be at the time of their existence, in respect of time, place and other attributes proper to each being. For it can be said to them: 'Then when they come to exist, does there occur any change or not?', with reference to the passage of the thing from non-existence to existence. If they say 'No change occurs', they are merely being supercilious. But if they say 'There does occur a change', it can be said to them: 'Then is the occurrence of this change known to the eternal Knowledge or not?' Thus the difficulty is compelling. In sum, it can hardly be conceived that the knowledge of a thing before it exists can be identical with the knowledge of it after it exists. Such, then, is the formulation of this problem in its strongest possible form, as we have explained it to you in conversation. 204

[Nor is Ghazali's solution satisfactory. He regards God's Knowledge as a term in a relation, which does not change in itself when that to which it is related, the known object, changes its relation to it. But knowledge is a relation, not a related term.]

The [full] solution of this difficulty would call for a lengthy discourse; but here we shall only go into the decisive point of the solution. Abu Hamid in his book entitled The disintegration wanted to resolve this difficulty in a way which carries no conviction. 205 He stated an argument the gist of which is as follows. He asserted that knowledge and the object known are related; and as one of two related things may change without the other changing in itself, this is just what seems to happen to things in the Knowledge of God the Glorious: they change in themselves, but the Knowledge of God the Glorious about them does not change. A parallel case of related things would be if a single column were first on the right of Zayd and then came to be on his left: meanwhile Zayd 206 would not have changed in himself. But this [argument] is not correct. For the relation has changed in itself:

the relation which was a right-handed one has become a left-handed one, and the only thing which has not changed is the subject of the relation, i.e. its bearer, Zayd. If this is so, and knowledge is the relation itself, it must necessarily change when the object known changes, just as, when the column changes [its position], the relation of the column to Zayd changes, coming to be a left-handed relation after having been a right-handed one.

[The correct solution is that the eternal Knowledge is the cause of beings, not their effect as originated knowledge is. Therefore It does not change when they change.]

The way to resolve this difficulty, in our opinion, is to recognize that the position of the eternal Knowledge with respect to beings is different from the position of originated knowledge with respect to beings, in that the existence of beings is a cause and reason for our knowledge, while the eternal Knowledge is a cause and reason for beings. If, when beings come to exist after not having existed, there occurred an addition in the eternal Knowledge such as occurs in originated knowledge, it would follow that the eternal Knowledge would be an effect of beings, not their cause. Therefore there must not occur any change such as occurs in originated knowledge. The mistake in this matter has arisen simply from making an analogy between the eternal Knowledge and originated knowledge, i.e. between the supra sensible and the sensible; and the falsity of this analogy is well known. Just as no change occurs in an agent when his act comes into being, i.e. no change which has not already occurred, so no change occurs in the eternal Glorious Knowledge when the object of Its Knowledge results from It.

Thus the difficulty is resolved, and we do not have to admit that if there occurs no change, i.e. in the eternal Knowledge, He does not know beings at the time of their coming into existence just as they are; we only have to admit that He does not know them with originated knowledge but with eternal Knowledge.

For the occurrence of change in knowledge when beings change is a condition only of knowledge which is caused by beings, i.e. originated knowledge.

[The philosophers hold that God knows particulars with eternal Knowledge, not that He does not know them at all. Indeed, they consider that His knowledge is the cause of their coming into existence, also that It sends premonitions of particulars in dreams.]

Therefore eternal Knowledge is only connected with beings in a manner other than that in which originated knowledge is connected with them. This does not mean that It is not connected at all, as the philosophers have been accused of saying, in the context of this difficulty, that the Glorious One does not know particulars. Their position is not what has been imputed to them; rather they hold that He does not know particulars with originated knowledge, the occurrence of which is conditioned by their occurrence, since He is a cause of them, not caused by them as originated knowledge is. This is the furthest extent to which purification [of concepts] 207 ought to be admitted.

For demonstration compels the conclusion that He knows things, because their issuing from Him is solely due to His knowing; it is not due to His being merely Existent or Existent with a certain attribute, but to His knowing, as the Exalted has said: 'Does He not know, He who created? He is the Penetrating, the Omniscient! 208 But demonstration also compels the conclusion that He does not know things with a knowledge of the same character as originated knowledge. Therefore there must be another knowledge of beings which is unqualified, 209 the eternal Glorious Knowledge. And how is it conceivable that the Peripatetic philosophers could have held that the eternal Knowledge does not comprehend particulars, when they held that It is the cause of warning in dreams, of revelation, and of other kinds of inspiration? 210

[Conclusion]

This is the way to resolve this difficulty, as it appears to us; and what has been said is incontestable and indubitable. It is God who helps us to follow the right course and directs us to the truth. Peace on you, with the mercy and blessings of God.

[EXTRACT: *Kitab al-kashf 'an manahij al-adilla*, pp. 122-27]

[THE FUTURE LIFE] 211

[Corporeal symbols are more effective than spiritual ones. in instructing the masses about the life beyond, and are used in the *Qur'an* which is primarily concerned with the majority.] 212

All religions, as we have said, agree on the fact that souls experience states of happiness or misery after death, 213 but they disagree in the manner of symbolizing these states and explaining their existence to men. And it seems that the [kind of] symbolization which is found in this religion of ours is the most perfect means of explanation to the majority of men, and provides the greatest stimulus to their souls to [pursue the goals of] the life beyond; and the primary concern of religions is with the majority. Spiritual symbolization, on the other hand, seems to provide less stimulus to the souls of the masses towards [the goals of] the life beyond, and the masses have less desire and fear of it than they do of corporeal symbolization. Therefore it seems that corporeal symbolization provides a stronger stimulus to [the goals of] the life beyond than spiritual; the spiritual [kind] is more acceptable to the class of debating theologians, but they are the minority.

[There are three interpretations of the symbols by Muslims. (1) The life beyond is the same in kind as' this one, but it is permanent, not limited in duration. (2) It differs in kind: (a) The life beyond is spiritual, and is only symbolized by sensible images for the purpose of exposition. (b) It is corporeal, but the bodies are other, immortal ones not these perishable ones. This opinion is suitable for the elite. It avoids the absurdity of (1), arising from the fact that our bodies here provide material for other earthly bodies and so cannot at the same time exist in the other world. But every opinion is permissible except total rejection of another life.]

For this reason we find the people of Islam divided into three sects with regard to the understanding of the symbolization which is used in [the texts of] our religion referring to the states of the future life. One sect holds that that existence is identical with this.

existence here with respect to bliss and pleasure, i.e. they hold that it is of the same sort and that the two existences differ only in respect of permanence and limit of duration, i.e. the former is permanent and the latter of limited duration. Another group holds that there is a difference in the kind of existence. This [group] is divided into two subdivisions. One [sub-] group holds that the existence symbolized by these sensible images is spiritual, and that it has been symbolized thus only for the purpose of exposition; these people are supported by many well known arguments from Scripture, but there would be no point in enumerating them 214 Another [sub-] group thinks that it is corporeal, but believes that that corporeality existing in the life beyond differs from the corporeality of this life in that the latter is perishable while the former is immortal. They too are supported by arguments from Scripture, and it seems that Ibn 'Abbas was one of those who held this opinion, for he is reported to have said, 'There is nothing in this lower world like the next world except the names.' 215

It seems that this opinion is more suitable for the elite; 216 for the admissibility of this opinion is founded on facts which are not discussed in front of everyone. One is that the soul is immortal. The second is that the return of the soul to other bodies 217 does not involve the same absurdity as <its> return <to> those same [earthly] bodies. This is because it is apparent that the materials of the bodies that exist here are successively transferred from one body to another: i.e. one acid the same material exists in many persons at different times. Bodies like these cannot possibly all exist actually [at the same time], because their material is one: for instance, a man dies, his body is transformed into dust, that dust is transformed into a plant, another man feeds on that plant; then semen proceeds from him, from which another man is born. But if other bodies are supposed, this state of affairs 218 does not follow as a consequence.

The truth in this question is that every man's duty is [to believe] whatever his study of it leads him

to [conclude], provided that it is not such a study as would cause him to reject the principle altogether, by denying the existence [of the future life] altogether; for this manner of belief obliges us to call its holder an unbeliever, because the existence of this [future] state for man is made known to people through their Scriptures and their intellects. 219

[The basic assumption of all the permissible views is the immortality of the soul. It can be proved from the *Qur'an*, which equates death with sleep; now since we know that the soul is not dissolved in sleep, the same applies to death. In both cases the organ, not the soul itself, ceases.] 220

The whole of this [argument] is founded on the immortality of the soul. If it is asked 'Does Scripture contain an indication of the immortality of the soul or [at least] a hint of it?', we reply: This is found in the precious Book in the words of the Exalted, 'God receives the souls at the time of their death, and those which have not died He receives in their sleep', [and so on to the end of] the verse. 221 The significant aspect of this verse is that in it He has equated sleep and death with respect to the annihilation of the soul's activity. Thus if the cessation of the soul's activity in death were due to the soul's dissolution, not to a change in the soul's organ, the cessation of its activity in sleep [too] would have to be due to the dissolution of its essential being; but if that were the case, it would not return on waking to its normal condition. So since it does return to it, we know that this cessation does not happen to it through anything which attaches to it in its substantial nature, but is only something which attaches to it owing to a cessation of its organ; and [we know] that it does not follow that if the organ ceases the soul must cease. Death is a cessation; it must therefore be of the organ, as is the case in sleep. As the Philosopher says, 'If the old man were to find an eye like the young man's eye, he would see as the young man sees'. 222

This is as much as we see fit to affirm in our investigation of the beliefs of this religion of ours, the religion of Islam.

[ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION]

[Texts of Scripture fall into the following classes

(1) Where the apparent meaning is the meaning really intended. Such texts may not be interpreted allegorically.

(2) Where there is symbolization:

- (i) Where it is difficult to know both that there is symbolization and what is symbolized. Such texts may be interpreted allegorically only by the learned.
- (ii) Where it is easy to know both that there is symbolization and what is symbolized. Such texts must be interpreted allegorically by everyone.
- (iii) Where it is easy to know that there is symbolization but difficult to know what is symbolized. In these cases the masses must be told that only the learned are able to understand the true interpretation; or they must be given an easy allegorical explanation, according to the rules laid down by Ghazali.
- (iv) Where it is difficult to know that there is symbolization, but easy to know what it symbolizes. In these cases it is preferable to deny the existence of symbolization. When it is made known, the resulting popular beliefs are apt to cause confusion.] 223

It now remains for us out of our programme only to study what portions of Scripture it is permissible and what it is not permissible to interpret allegorically, and, when it is permissible, to whom the permission is given. With this [topic] we shall conclude the argument of this book.

We say that the ideas found in Scripture fall into five classes i.e. they are divided into two primary classes, and the second of the two is divisible into four [sub-] classes.

[1] The first, indivisible class consists of [the cases] where the idea which is [outwardly] expressed is identical with the idea really intended. 224

[2] The second, divisible class consists of [the cases] where the idea expressed in Scripture is not

the idea really intended, but is merely substituted for ii as a means of symbolization. 225 This class is divided into four parts. [i] The first is where the idea, which is expressed by its symbol, is known <in> its reality only by difficult composite syllogisms, taking a long time and many skills to learn, and which superior minds alone can grasp; and where the fact that the symbol expressed is distinct from the thing symbolized is known only with as much difficulty as that we have [just] described. [ii] The second is the opposite of this, where it is easy to know both things, i.e. that what is expressed is a symbol, and what it symbolizes. [iii] The third is where it is easy to know that it is a symbol for something, but difficult to know what it symbolizes. [iv] The fourth is the reverse of this, where it is easy to know what it symbolizes but difficult to know [in the first place] that it is a symbol. 226

Now it is undoubtedly an error to interpret allegorically [1] the first of the two primary classes.

In the case of [2, i] the first [sub-]class of the second [class], that which is difficult in both respects, allegorical interpretation is the special task of ‘those who are well grounded in science’, and it is not permitted to be expressed to any but ‘the well grounded’.

[ii] In the opposite class, that which is easy in both respects, an allegorical interpretation is intended and it is obligatory to express it.

[iii] <In the third class the case is otherwise,> because in this class on account of its difficulty symbolization does not occur for the purpose of explanation to the masses, but only occurs to stimulate souls towards to it. 227 Thus for example in the words of the Prophet, peace on him, ‘The Black Stone is the right hand of God on earth’, 228 and other similar sayings, it is self-evident or easily known that there is a symbol, but it is difficult to know what it symbolizes. Therefore such [a text] ought not to be interpreted allegorically by any but the elite and the scholars; and those who notice that it is symbolic, without being of the class of people who can understand what it symbolizes, should either be told that it is of the ambiguous kind whose meaning is known by the well grounded scholars, or the symbolization in it should be translated for them into something [even] easier than what they know, the fact that it is symbolic. The latter course seems more suitable as a means of ending the doubt which arises in the soul from this [class of text].

The rule in this regard is that which was followed by Abu Hamid in *The book of the distinction*: 229 that this class of persons should learn that one and the same thing has five [modes of] existence, which are called by Abu Hamid ‘essential’, ‘sensible’, ‘imaginary’, ‘intellectual’ and ‘metaphorical’. Thus when the question arises one considers which of these four [last named modes of] existence is more persuasive 230 to the class of persons who find it impossible [to believe] that what is meant by it is essential existence, i.e. that which is external; then he brings down this symbolization for them to [the level of] that [mode of] existence whose possibility is most acceptable to their way of thinking. To this sort [of texts] belong the words of the Prophet, peace on him, ‘There is nothing that I have not seen, but I have seen it already in this place of mine -even Paradise and the Fire’; 231 and ‘Between my basin and my pulpit there is one of the gardens of Paradise, and my pulpit is close by my basin’; 232 and ‘Dust consumes all of a son of Adam except his *os coccygis*’. 233 It is easy to perceive that all these sayings are symbolic, but difficult to perceive what they symbolize. Thus to the class [of people] who notice this much, these sayings ought to be brought down to that one of those four modes of existence which most nearly resembles [the essential mode].

This manner of interpretation, if it is employed in these contexts and in this way, is authorized by Scripture; but if it is employed in other contexts, it is an error. Abu Hamid did not make such a distinction: for instance [2, i] when it is difficult to understand the context in both respects, i.e. that it is a symbol and what it symbolizes, but there arises at first glance a suspicion of the imagination that it is symbolic. That suspicion is idle; 234 therefore in such a case that suspicion ought to be discredited and it [the text] should not be made an object of allegorical interpretation, as has happened in so many contexts (as I have shown you in this book) at the hands of the theologians, i.e. the Ash’arites and Mu’tazilites.

[iv] The fourth class is the opposite of this: that in which it is difficult to know that it [the text] is symbolic, but when once it is, admitted that it is symbolic, it easily becomes apparent what it symbolizes. Here again we must be circumspect in giving allegorical interpretations, i.e. among the class [of people] who, if they perceive that it is symbolic, perceive what it symbolizes, but who only perceive that it is symbolic through a suspicion or persuasion, since they are not scholars, ‘well grounded in science’. So it is possible to say that the surest way to maintain respect for Scripture is not to interpret these [texts] allegorically, and to discredit in the minds of these people the things

through which they have come to think that such sayings are symbolic; and this is the most suitable course.

It is also possible to release the allegorical interpretation to them, because of the strong resemblance between the thing mentioned and what it symbolizes. However, when allegorical interpretations of these two classes [of texts] [iii and iv] are declared openly, they give birth to strange beliefs, remote from the apparent meaning of Scripture; and sometimes these become widespread, until they are denied by the masses. This is what happened to the Sufis and to those scholars who followed this path: when allegorical interpretation of this Scripture was controlled by men who did not distinguish either these contexts or the class of people to whom it is permissible to give allegorical interpretations, the situation became confused, and various sects arose among them, each accusing the other of unbelief; and all this is ignorance of the purpose of the Law and transgression against it.

[Conclusion]

From our account you have now become aware of the amount of error that occurs as a result of allegorical interpretation. It is our desire to have the chance to fulfill this aim with regard to all the statements of Scripture: i.e. to discuss which of them have to be interpreted allegorically and which not, and, when they have to be interpreted, to whom the interpretations should be given; I mean, [to deal thus] with every difficult passage in the *Qur'an* and the Traditions, and show the place of all the statements in these four classes. 235 But the aim which we have pursued in this book is now accomplished; and we have given it precedence only because we have held it to be the most important of aims connected with Scripture. It is God who helps us to follow the right course and guarantees our reward, through His favour and mercy.

This book was concluded in the year 575. 236

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