



Al-Ghazali on the Will

Overview

Medieval Arabic Philosophy

Falsafa

Kalam

Al-Ghazali

The will

Eternity of the world: pro

Eternity of the world: con

The will

Medieval Arabic Philosophy

- (caveat about terminology)
- the translation movement (8–10th c.):
 - virtually *all* of Greek philosophy and science translated into Arabic!
 - Logic, natural science, medicine, metaphysics. . . .
 - Aristotle, Plato, Themistius, Alexander of Aphrodisias, Neoplatonists, Euclid, Archimedes, Galen, Ptolemy. . . .



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0OJkNuAkaw>



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Al-Ghazali and the Will

Falsafa: the continuation and refinement of Greek philosophy; *via* the Neoplatonic movement (Alexandria)

Kalam – Islamic speculative theology

- Sufi mystics
- Asharites (cf. Al-Ashari)
- Mutazilites (“rationalists”)

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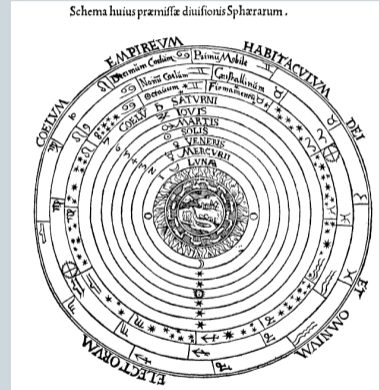
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Aristotelian Preliminaries

- All motion and change requires a cause / explanation (Aristotle, *Physics*).
- Is the cosmos in eternal motion? Or did it begin to exist?
 - Aristotle: demonstrating eternity
 - John Philoponus (6th c.), Al-Kindi: temporal origin of cosmos (absurdities about infinity)
- The basic topology of the cosmos: Earth (center; 4 elements); the sphere of the Moon; planets (7, including Sun and Moon); fixed stars.
 - epicycles, deferents
 - very good explanation of the available empirical data!



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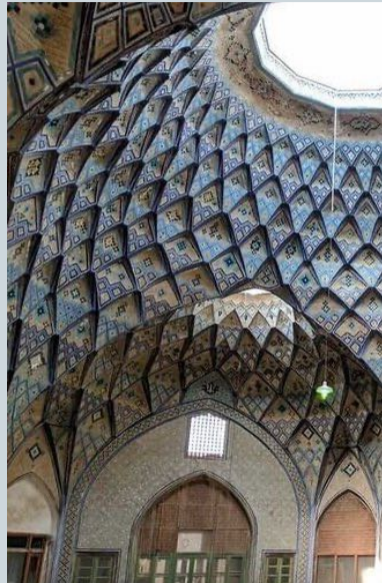
Qur'an + Speculative theology

1 Qur'an

- God exists; is perfect, unchanging, omnipotent, and omniscient
- God is a creator; created the world out of nothing (and perhaps in time)
- immortality of the soul; bodily resurrection

2 Kalam

- God, atoms, accident (+ void?)
- constant re-creation (+ occasionalism)



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Some Notable Islamic Thinkers

- Al-Kindi (801–873)
- Al-Razi (865–925)
- Al-Farabi (870–950)
- Ibn Al-Haytham (Alhazen) (965–1040)
- Ibn Sina (Avicenna) (980–1037)
- **Al-Ghazali (1058–1111)**
- Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (1126–1198)



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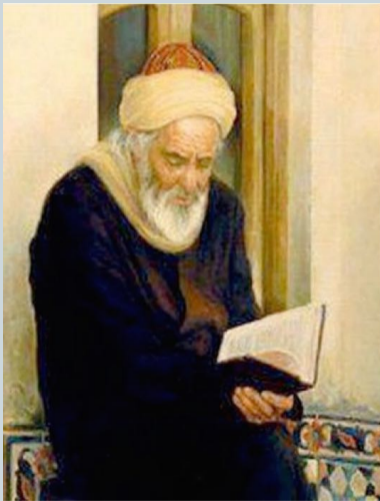
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Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali



- theologian, mystic, jurist (*not* a philosopher!)
- from northern Persia
- education in law, then speculative theology, with distinguished Asharite theologians
- serves the Sultan; teaching law at the best university in Baghdad
- *Incoherence of the Philosophers*: written in Baghdad during this time
- spiritual crisis; turn to Sufi mysticism, leaving teaching.
- “love-hate” relationship with philosophy at best

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The Incoherence of the Philosophers

- Al-Ghazali describes it as a “refutation of the philosophical movement” – but misleading!
- Main aim: to show that the philosophers’ proofs are not demonstrative, strictly speaking
- Examines 20 claims (metaphysics, natural philosophy), and contrasts it with the high epistemic standards that the philosophers purportedly subscribe to



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Outline: The Eternity of the World

- Presenting the positions.
- The strongest proof of the opposition: a new world requires a new determining factor in the divine will; regress.
- Some clarification of the argument; the notion of necessitation.
- Refuting the argument.
- Showing that the eternity of the world is in fact absurd.
- Elaborating on the notion of the will.

A very debated issue in medieval philosophy! Philoponus, Augustine, Aquinas, the condemnations of 1277, etc.

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The arguments for the affirmative:

- God is eternal; God is a sufficient condition for the world to exist; therefore, the world must be eternal.
- If it is not eternal, there was a new determining factor that led to its creation. But this leads to regress.
- If it is created at a time, say t , why was it created at t and not $t - 1$? (Referring to the divine will doesn't help; the regress returns.)

Al-Ghazali's strategy:

- show that the arguments were not demonstrative, i.e., that there is no contradiction between positing an eternal God and also positing temporal creation
- show that the 'eternity view' is absurd

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The arguments were not demonstrative:

- there is no real contradiction – what would be the middle term in the syllogism showing it?
- the analogy between uncreated and created will does not stand

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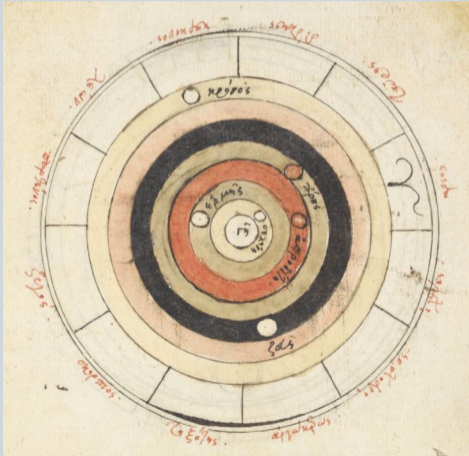
Eternity of the world: con

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Against Eternity 2

Eternity involves absurdity!

- Usual argument: there can be no actual infinity
- If there were, the infinite would both be equal to and unequal to itself!



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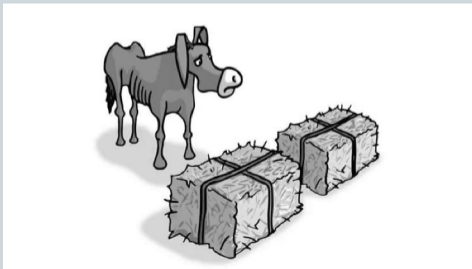
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Al-Ghazali's Response (§33)

“We respond that the world came to exist when it did and according to the description [with] which it came to exist and in the place in which it came to exist only by will. The will is an attribute whose character is to distinguish something from its like” (p. 248).

- the thought-experiment



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