



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

Zooming out

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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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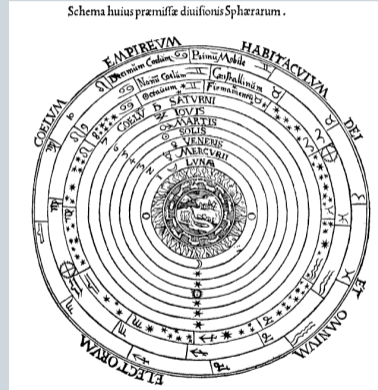
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Aristotelian Preliminaries

- 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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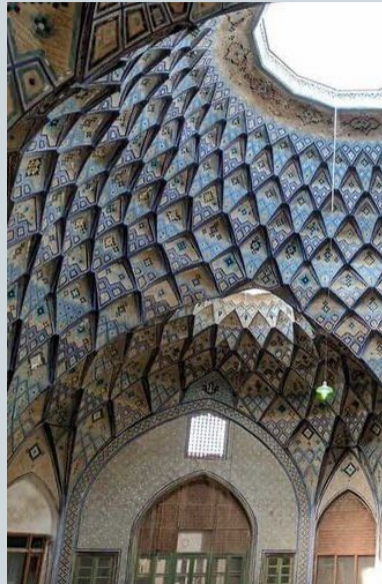
Qur'an + Speculative theology

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, accidents (+ 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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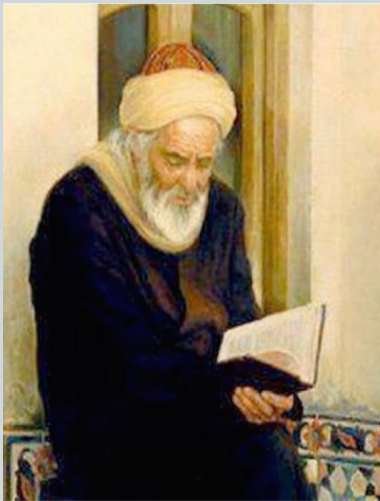
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Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali



- 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 at $t - 1$? (Referring to the divine will doesn't help; the regress returns.)

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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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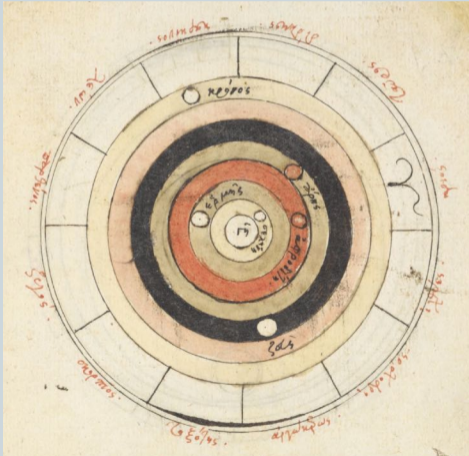
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Against Eternity 2

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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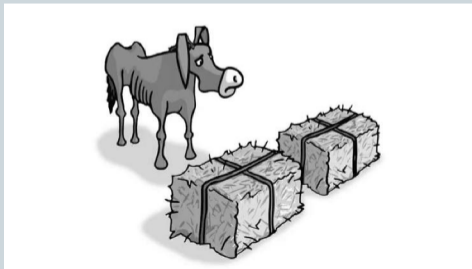
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Al-Ghazali's Response (§33)

“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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Some positions on the eternity of the world:

- The eternity of the world is philosophically demonstrable (Aristotle)
- The non-eternity of the world is demonstrable
 - Philosophically (Al-Ghazali)
 - Empirically (Roland of Cremona, etc.)
- Neither the eternity, nor the non-eternity is demonstrable philosophically (Aquinas)

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Medieval Views on Free Will

- **Augustine**: free will is a power for opposites.
- **Damascus**: free will is the ability to choose the good (no-coercion + sourcehood).
- **Anselm**: free choice is the power to preserve rectitude of will for the sake of rectitude itself.
- **Al-Ghazali**: free will is what can discriminate and choose between altogether similar things.
- **Aquinas**: free will is rational deliberation about the best means to a desired end.
- **Henry of Ghent**: the will is free because it moves itself.
- **Duns Scotus**: the will is free because it can will otherwise *even when it wills*.
- **Marguerite of Porete**: we are free when we don't have a will!
- **Albo**: our choice is free if (1) we choose among alternatives, (2) knowingly, and (3) desire to maintain the act.

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God created everything, all at once, at the beginning of time:

- *all at once?* (cf. Augustine, seminal reasons, etc.)
- *everything?* Even matter? Perhaps not (cf. Gregory)
- creation or emanation? Or are they compatible? (cf. Avicenna)
- *at the beginning of time?* Does that make sense?

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