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Article

Al-Ghazālī's critical arguments against Ibn Sīnā and Al-Fārābī In *the incoherence of the philosophers*: Is God bound by human logic?

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Abstract

This paper examines the philosophical and theological arguments advanced by Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (c. 1058–1111 CE) in his seminal work *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*/ "The Incoherence of the Philosophers" (English Version) c. 1095, one of the most substantial texts in the history of Islamic intellectual thought. The study focuses on al-Ghazālī's systematic critique of the Hellenistic-Islamic philosophical synthesis represented by Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950) and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 1037), whose Neoplatonic-Aristotelian framework had come to dominate elite Muslim intellectual circles at that time. The paper, thus, analyzes seven principal arguments—concerning the eternity of the world, divine knowledge of particulars, bodily resurrection, emanation, necessary causation, divine agency, and the philosophers' claims to demonstrative certainty to reconstruct the logic and theological motivations behind al-Ghazālī's polemic. This paper argues that al-Ghazālī's project is best understood not as an anti-rational rejection of philosophy, but as a principled défense of divine freedom (free will), and personal agency against a Greek-derived necessitarian metaphysics that, in his view, reduced God to a passive metaphysical principle. The study further explores how significance of al-Ghazālī's critique continue to challenge modern thinkers, not only how to define divine action and human knowledge, especially the perennial dialogue between faith and reasoning.

Keywords: Islamic intellectual thought, Philosophical, Theological, Arguments, al-Ghazālī.

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Introduction

In the 11th century, a profound intellectual crisis emerged in the Islamic world as a sophisticated blend of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy, sharpened by Islamic thinkers like Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), began to challenge the foundations of orthodox Sunni theology. While this philosophical synthesis was logically consistent and prestigious among the elite, Al-Ghazālī recognized that it arrived at a dangerous theological cost (Ghossein, 2021). The fundamental problem Al-Ghazālī identified was that this system subordinated God to metaphysical necessity. Rather than the "living God of revelation" found in the traditions of Abraham, Moses, and Muhammad, the philosophers had constructed a philosophical abstraction. By treating God as a "necessitating cause" instead of a "willing Agent," they stripped the deity of personal agency and freedom (López-Farjeat, 2015).

Under this rigid framework, God was rendered incapable of choosing when to create the world, was unable to know individual people or events (knowing only universals), and was prevented from performing miracles by the constraints of necessary natural laws. To counter this, Al-Ghazālī launched a devastating internal critique in his revolutionary work, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* (c. 1095). He did not simply dismiss the philosophers; he "beat them at their own game" by using their own logical tools to prove their claims were methodologically false (Ansary, 2009; Fakhry, 2004; Griffel, 2009). He was especially uncompromising regarding three specific doctrines he labeled as *Kufr* (unbelief): the eternity of the world, the claim that God knows only universals, and the denial of bodily resurrection (Marmura, 2000). Ultimately, Al-Ghazālī's objective was to dismantle this Greek-derived metaphysics to defend the essential concepts of divine freedom, will, and personal agency.

To truly understand the *Tahāfut,* we need to begin not with the text itself, but with the man who wrote it. Al-Ghazālī was not a theologian lashing out at philosophy from a position of ignorance or fear. He was, in fact, the opposite − a scholar who had spent years immersing himself in the very tradition he would later challenge. In his own spiritual autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error c. 1108), he describes how he undertook a rigorous, self-directed study of the philosophical corpus − working through the writings of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā with the same seriousness that any committed philosopher would − before arriving at a carefully reasoned conclusion: that their grand claims to demonstrative certainty were neither philosophically sound nor theologically safe (McCarthy, 1980; Al-Ghazali, 1981). This is what makes the *Tahāfut* so formidable. Rather than dismissing the philosophers from the outside, al-Ghazālī chose to enter their own intellectual firm and challenge them on their own terms. (The) strategy of internal critique that

gives the work a depth and staying power that simpler theological polemics simply cannot match (Frank, 1992; Griffel, 2009).

His preparation for this task was not accidental. Trained within the *Ashʿarī* school of theology under one of its greatest minds − Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī (d. 1085) − al-Ghazālī had developed an unusually sophisticated grasp of how reason and revelation relate to one another (Hourani, 1958; Garden, 2014). He was, in short, fluent in both languages: the language of the theologian and the language of the philosopher (Rahman, 2023). It was precisely this dual fluency that allowed him to write a critique of such precision and depth, a work that could not be easily dismissed as mere religious conservatism, because it was written by someone who genuinely understood what he was arguing against.

When al-Ghazālī finally sat down to write the *Tahāfut*, the result was a work of striking intellectual ambition. He organized it around twenty distinct philosophical problems, drawing a clear line between those he considered outright unbelief (*kufr*) − three in total − and those he regarded as serious but lesser theological errors (*bidʿa*) (Marmura, 2000; Griffel, 2009). At the heart of this study are seven of those twenty discussions, selected because they strike most directly at the foundations of the Avicennan system: the eternity of the world (*qidam al-ʿālam*), God's knowledge of particular things, the possibility of bodily resurrection, the doctrine of emanation (*fayḍ*), the principle of necessary causation, the nature of divine will and agency, and the fundamental question of whether the philosophers' conclusions rest on genuine logical proof (*burhān*) or merely on persuasive but ultimately unverified speculation (Leaman, 2002 ; Marmura, 1962).

Table 1. Philosophical issues (*masāʾil*) contested by al-Ghazālī

Problems	Significance
Eternity of the World	Refutes the Aristotelian view that the universe is eternal
Post-eternity of the world	The world cannot be incorruptible by its nature
God as "agent"/"creator"	Philosophers cannot consistently call God a true Creator
God's attributes & knowledge	God knows particulars, not only universals
Causality	The famous critique of necessary causation
Bodily resurrection	Affirms it against the philosophers' spiritual-only afterlife

Each of these seven issues was chosen deliberately. In every case, al-Ghazālī identified a point where the Avicennan philosophical system either directly contradicts what Islamic revelation teaches, or collapses under the weight of its own internal contradictions (Kukkonen, 2000; Wisnovsky, 2013). Contradictions that the

system's own logical standards should have prevented. The *Tahāfut* is therefore not a random catalogue of theological grievances. It is a coordinated, carefully structured philosophical offensive − one aimed squarely at the metaphysical foundations that al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā had inherited from the Greek tradition and rebuilt within an Islamic intellectual framework (Black, 2020; Goodman, 2013). To read it as anything less is to miss what al-Ghazālī was actually doing and why, more than nine centuries later, it still demands to be taken seriously.

At its core, the *Tahāfut* is driven by a single, urgent theological conviction: *that God is genuinely free*. Not free in some abstract or qualified sense, but free in the fullest meaning of the word − a willing, knowing, personally engaged agent who acts because He chooses to, not because His own nature compels Him to. This conviction is not merely one argument among many in the text (Zurriyati et al., 2023); it is the thread that runs through every discussion and binds what might otherwise look like a scattered series of technical disputes into a coherent and purposeful theological vision (Marmura, 1962)

The philosophers al-Ghazālī was arguing against held a very different picture. For al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, the universe does not emerge from a divine act of choice − it flows from God by logical necessity, in the same way that a conclusion follows inevitably from its premises. *The First Intellect, the celestial spheres, the entire structure of the cosmos*: all of it proceeds from the divine essence automatically, eternally, and without any possibility of being otherwise (Davidson, 1987; Wisnovsky, 2018). God, on this account, does not deliberate, does not choose, and does not intervene. He simply is and the universe simply follows.

Al-Ghazālī saw immediately what this meant for Islamic religious life, and the implications alarmed him. If God has no genuine freedom of action, then prayer becomes an exercise in futility (a being who cannot respond). In this sense, miracles become logical impossibilities (violations of a necessary order that even God cannot suspend). Equally significant, the Quranic portrait of a God who creates with intention (who forgives, who commands, who judges), that entire narrative is quietly reduced to a kind of elevated metaphor, a story told for the benefit of ordinary people who cannot grasp the philosophical truth (Griffel, 2009; Kukkonen, 2000).

This was not a conclusion al-Ghazālī was willing to accept − not because he was hostile to reason, but because he believed the philosophers had reasoned badly. His charge was specific and damaging: they had systematically confused logical necessity with ontological necessity, and in doing so had dressed up a set of unverified metaphysical assumptions in the language of rigorous demonstration (Marmura, 2000; Janssens, 2003). Strip away that language, al-Ghazālī argued, and what remains is not proof − it is speculation with philosophical credentials it has not

earned. What al-Ghazālī was ultimately fighting to recover was the full voluntarist character of Islamic theism: a God who genuinely wills, who knows each particular thing in creation, and who acts freely within history. In defending this picture, he was doing two things at once. First, defending the coherence of prophetic revelation and second, defending the rational legitimacy of religious practice itself. These were not separate projects. They were, for al-Ghazālī, the same project.

The *Tahāfut* did not remain confined to its own time and place. Written in eleventh-century Baghdad, it set in motion a chain of intellectual consequences that would reach across centuries and across civilizational boundaries. The most immediate response came from Ibn Rushd, known to Christian Europe as Averroes, (d. 1198), who composed a direct rebuttal titled *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence), a work that itself became a cornerstone of Latin Scholastic thought and profoundly shaped the course of European Aristotelianism through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Van Den Bergh, 1954). The debate al-Ghazālī started, in other words, did not end in Baghdad, it continued in Paris, Oxford, and Cologne.

The most striking of the *Tahāfut*'s long-range resonances concerns al-Ghazālī's treatment of causation. In the seventeenth discussion, he argues that the regular conjunction we observe between causes and their effects − fire burning, food nourishing, medicine healing − is not a matter of logical necessity but of habit (*ʿāda*): God's customary way of ordering events, which He remains entirely free to suspend at any moment (Marmura, 2000; Rayan, 2004). The connection between cause and effect, on this view, is real and reliable, but they are not necessary in the way that mathematical truth is necessary, rather their denial implies no logical contradiction.

This position bears a remarkable structural parallel, though not necessarily a direct genealogical one, to the empiricist critique of causation that David Hume would develop approximately six and a half centuries later in his Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748) and, more fully, in A Treatise of Human Nature (1739–40). Hume argued, on strictly epistemological grounds, that we never perceive necessary connection between events in experience; what we observe is only their constant conjunction and regular succession, from which the mind forms a habit of expectation (David, 2018). The resemblance between the two thinkers lies in their shared rejection of necessary causation as observable or logically demonstrable, yet the grounds differ fundamentally: al-Ghazālī's skepticism toward natural necessity is theologically motivated, preserving divine omnipotence and the possibility of miracles, while Hume's is epistemologically motivated, grounded in the limits of sensory experience and the critique of rational inference. Scholar such as Majid Fakhry (2013) has documented this parallel carefully, while cautioning against overstating the historical influence of Islamic occasionalism on early modern

European philosophy, for which direct transmission remains difficult to establish.

Yet to dwell too long on the Humean resonance risks obscuring what is most distinctive and most radical about al-Ghazālī's project in the *Tahāfut*. His rejection of necessary causation is not an endpoint but an instrument: a critical tool deployed in the service of a larger theological argument against the Aristotelian philosophical tradition as systematized by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. For al-Ghazālī, the deeper question is not merely whether causal necessity can be observed, but whether the entire rational framework that the *falāsifa* constructed, their doctrines of the eternity of the world, the emanation of intellects, and the necessity of divine action, can be reconciled with the absolute freedom and transcendence of God. To subject God to the constraints of Aristotelian logic and necessity, al-Ghazālī contends, is not philosophical rigor but a form of intellectual presumption that ultimately undermines the very foundations of Islamic theology. It is this confrontation, between the God of the philosophers and the God of revelation, between demonstrative necessity and divine freedom, that the present paper sets out to examine. Specifically, it investigates the critical arguments al-Ghazālī advances against Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī in the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, and asks the question that animates the entire work: Is God bound by human logic?

Method

This study employs a qualitative, text-based approach grounded in the methods of philosophical analysis and close textual hermeneutics, drawing on the broader interpretive traditions of intellectual history and comparative philosophical theology. The primary source is Marmura's critical edition and translation of al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, which is *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, which is read alongside al-Ghazālī's companion volume *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa* (The Aims of the Philosophers) to ensure that his representation of the philosophers' positions is examined on its own terms before his refutations are assessed. To reconstruct the views he targets, the study consults relevant passages from Ibn Sīnā's *al-Shifāʾ* and *al-Najāt*, as well as al-Fārābī's *Mabādiʾ Ārāʾ Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, in order to verify the accuracy of al-Ghazālī's portrayals and to identify points of legitimate philosophical disagreement.

Each of the seven arguments treated in this paper is examined through a three-stage analytical procedure: (1) exposition, in which the philosophers' position is reconstructed in its strongest form; (2) internal analysis, in which al-Ghazālī's counter-arguments are dissected for their logical structure, premises, and rhetorical strategies; and (3) theological situating, in which each critique is located within the broader Ashʿarite kalām tradition and al-Ghazālī's overarching defense of divine freedom. The study further engages secondary scholarship—particularly the works of Frank Griffel, Michael Marmura, Oliver Leaman and Taneli Kukkonen—to triangulate interpretive claims and to situate the analysis within ongoing scholarly debates regarding al-Ghazālī's intellectual identity, his relationship to *falsafa*, and the coherence of his

theological endeavor. The paper also draws comparative connections to later philosophical developments, most notably Hume's critique of causation—not to anachronistically modernize al-Ghazālī, but to illuminate the enduring philosophical depth of the questions he raised. Throughout, the methodology aims to honor both the philosophical rigor and the religious solemnity of al-Ghazālī's works, treating *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* not merely as a historical artifact but as a living philosophical text that continues to repay close and sympathetic reading.

Result and Discussion

One of the most revealing aspects of al-Ghazālī's intellectual project is what it was not. He was not waging a war against reason itself. On the contrary, he actively championed Aristotelian logic (*mantiq*) as an essential instrument for both theology and jurisprudence − a tool he himself wielded with considerable skill. His target was not philosophy as a method, but specific philosophical conclusions that he believed had crossed into dangerous territory. Al-Ghazālī's critiques followed a clear hierarchy of severity (see Table 2).

Table 2. The internal critique by al-Ghazālī

Doctrine Attacked	Main Target	Severity
Eternity of the World	Both	Kufr
God knows only universals	Ibn Sīnā	Kufr
No bodily resurrection	Ibn Sīnā	Kufr
Emanation hierarchy	Al-Fārābī	Heretical innovation
Necessary natural causation	Both	Erroneous
God as necessitating cause, not willing agent	Both	Erroneous
Claim to demonstrative proof	Both	Methodologically false

Three doctrines − the eternity of the world, God's knowledge of universals only, and the denial of bodily resurrection − were condemned as outright infidelity, each violating a core Islamic commitment. Al-Fārābī's emanation hierarchy was rejected as heresy, while necessary causation was classified as serious error, countered by al-Ghazālī's occasionalism: God alone acts as the world's immediate agent.

The Eternity of the World (*Qidam al-ʿĀlam*)

The doctrine of the world's eternity is the cornerstone of the entire Neoplatonic-Aristotelian cosmological framework. For Aristotle, the universe is eternal because motion is eternal and motion requires an eternal unmoved mover; for al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, this Aristotelian eternity is recast within an emanationist framework in which the universe flows necessarily and eternally from divine self-contemplation (Davidson, 1987, pp. 52–73). In Ibn Sīnā's formulation, God is the Necessary Existent (*Wājib al-Wujūd*) whose very essence entails existence, and from whose eternal self-

knowledge the First Intellect — and through it, the entire cosmic hierarchy — proceeds with logical necessity and without temporal beginning (Davidson, 1992; Marmura, 2000; Wisnovsky, 2013; 2018). The world, on this account, has no first moment; it is as eternal as God Himself, differing only in that its existence is derived rather than self-subsistent.

Further, Al-Ghazālī attacks this doctrine on multiple fronts in the first and second discussions of the *Tahāfut*, deploying arguments of considerable logical sophistication (Marmura, 2000). His primary objection is that the philosophers have committed a non sequitur or not clearly related to anything previously said. From the premise that God's will is eternal and unchanging, it does not follow that the object of that will — the created world — must be co-eternal with it (Marmura, 2000). A single, eternal, and unchanging act of divine will could freely determine that the world begin at a particular moment in time, just as a man who has always willed to stand up stands up at a specific moment without any change in his will (Kukkonen, 2000).

Furthermore, the philosophers' assumption that an eternal cause must produce an eternal effect illicitly imports a principle of sufficient reason that has not been demonstrated, assuming without proof that divine will operates according to the same temporal logic as natural causation. Al-Ghazālī further argues that the concept of an actually infinite past, required by the doctrine of eternal creation, generates irresolvable mathematical paradoxes, since it would entail that the number of past celestial revolutions is both infinite and yet measurably different for different celestial bodies (Marmura, 2000). This critique is not merely theological; it is a rigorous logical challenge to the internal consistency of the philosophers' cosmological framework (Griffel, 2009).

The doctrine of the world's eternity is designated by al-Ghazālī as one of the three positions constituting outright unbelief (*kufr*), because it directly contradicts the Quranic teaching of temporal creation (*ḥudūth*) and, more fundamentally, because it eliminates the very concept of a free, creative divine act from the structure of reality (Griffel, 2009). If the world is eternal, God did not choose to create it; He merely generated it, as necessarily as the sun generates light. Like Hume, who argued that necessary causation is never given in experience but projected by habit, al-Ghazālī warns that a God bound by necessity collapses into a deterministic process, erasing the free, historically acting God of revelation.

The Doctrine of Emanation (*Fayḍ*)

Closely related to the eternity of the world is the doctrine of emanation, which al-Fārābī elaborated in his *Mabādiʾ Ārāʾ Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* and Ibn Sīnā refined in the cosmological sections of the *al-Shifāʾ*. According to this doctrine, the universe

proceeds from God not through a deliberate act of creation but through a necessary process of intellectual overflow: God contemplates Himself, and from this self-contemplation the First Intellect proceeds. The First Intellect, in turn, contemplates both God and itself, and from this dual act of contemplation the Second Intellect and the first celestial sphere emerge. This process continues in a hierarchical cascade through ten intellects, each generating the next, until it reaches the Active Intellect, known in Arabic as *al-ʿAql al-Faʿʿāl*. Occupying the lowest rank among the cosmic intellects, the Active Intellect governs the sublunary world and serves as the bridge between the material realm and the Divine, a concept that became foundational to both Islamic philosophy and the broader Neoplatonic tradition.

Al-Ghazālī's critique of emanation, developed across the third and fourth discussions of the *Tahāfut*, targets the logical mechanism by which the philosophers attempt to derive multiplicity from absolute divine unity. The philosophers' own principle — "from the One, only one can proceed" (*min al-wāḥid lā yaṣduru illā al-wāḥid*) is intended to preserve divine simplicity, but al-Ghazālī argues that it simultaneously makes the generation of a multiple universe logically impossible (Marmura, 2000). If God is absolutely one and simple, and if only one thing can proceed from the One, then the entire emanative chain — with its multiple intellects, spheres, and souls — cannot be derived from the divine unity without violating the very principle the philosophers invoke to explain it (Leaman, 2002). Furthermore, al-Ghazālī challenges the philosophers' claim that intellectual self-contemplation is a sufficient causal mechanism for the production of real, distinct entities: the move from God's self-knowledge to the existence of a First Intellect is asserted rather than demonstrated, and no logical bridge is provided between the act of contemplation and the production of a numerically distinct being (Griffel, 2009).

The emanationist framework is theologically objectionable to al-Ghazālī not only because it eliminates divine freedom but because it depersonalizes the divine-world relationship entirely. A God who generates the universe as an inevitable by-product of His self-contemplation is not a Creator in any meaningful sense; He is a metaphysical source, as impersonal as a mathematical axiom generating its theorems. Al-Ghazālī's insistence on the incoherence of emanation is therefore simultaneously a logical argument and a defence of the personal, relational God of Quranic revelation.

Divine Knowledge of Particulars

Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of divine knowledge represents one of the most philosophically sophisticated, and, for al-Ghazālī, most theologically dangerous (elements of the Avicennan system). Confronted with the problem of how an eternal, immutable God can know changing, contingent particulars without His knowledge itself becoming subject to change, Ibn Sīnā proposed that God knows particulars in a universal

manner (*ʿalā wajh kullī*): He knows the universal laws and principles that govern all particular events without knowing the individual events themselves as they occur in time (Marmura, 1962; Wisnovsky, 2013).

Al-Ghazālī's response, developed in the thirteenth discussion of the *Tahāfut*, is one of the most incisive arguments in the entire work. He argues that Ibn Sīnā's solution is not a resolution of the problem but a capitulation to it: to say that God knows particulars only universally is simply to say that God does not know them as particulars, which is to say that God's knowledge is, in the most relevant sense, ignorance (Marmura, 2000). The philosophical motivation for this position — the preservation of divine immutability — is itself, al-Ghazālī argues, an undemonstrated assumption: it assumes that knowledge of changing things must involve change in the knower, but this is a principle derived from human cognitive psychology and has no demonstrated application to divine knowledge. God's mode of knowing, al-Ghazālī insists, is not constrained by the limitations of human cognition, and the philosophers' attempt to define it in terms of those limitations is a paradigmatic instance of binding God by human logic.

Necessary Causation and the Possibility of Miracles

The philosophers' commitment to necessary causation — the doctrine that every natural effect follows necessarily from its cause, such that given the cause, the effect cannot fail to occur is the metaphysical foundation of their scientific worldview and the principle that most directly threatens the Islamic doctrine of miracles. For Ibn Sīnā, natural causal relations are grounded in the essential natures of things: fire burns because burning is part of what fire essentially is, and to deny this is to deny the intelligibility of the natural order (Goodman, 2013).

The seventeenth discussion of the *Tahāfut* contains al-Ghazālī's most celebrated and philosophically consequential argument: his denial of necessary causation and his substitution of divine habit (*ʿāda*) as the ground of natural regularity. Al-Ghazālī argues that the observed conjunction of cause and effect — fire and burning, food and satiation, decapitation and death — is a matter of God's habitual willing rather than logical necessity (Marmura, 2000). The human mind observes the regular conjunction of events and infers necessity, but this inference is a cognitive habit, not a logical demonstration: there is no logical contradiction in the supposition that fire might touch cotton without burning it, as in the Quranic narrative of Abraham in the fire *(Al Qur'an. 21:69*). God, who sustains every causal sequence by His continuous willing, retains the freedom to produce any effect without its customary cause, or to withhold any effect from its customary cause — which is precisely what miracles are (Goodman, 1978; Griffel, 2009). This argument, as Alon (1980) has noted, anticipates Hume's skepticism about necessary connection

with striking precision, though al-Ghazālī's motivation is theological rather than empiricist: he is not skeptical about causation in general but is specifically denying that causal necessity constrains divine action.

Divine Agency and Will (Irāda and Ikhtiyār)

For al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, divine agency is not genuinely voluntary in the sense of involving deliberation, choice, or the possibility of acting otherwise. God acts as He does because His nature necessitates it; His "will," insofar as the term applies at all, is identical with His essence and admits of no alternatives (Davidson, 1987). Al-Ghazālī's treatment of divine agency, distributed across several discussions of the *Tahāfut* and most concentrated in his treatment of the world's pre-eternal origination, argues that the philosophers' concept of divine agency is self-contradictory: a being whose action is entirely necessitated by its nature is not an agent in any meaningful sense but a mechanism (Marmura, 2000, Kukkonen, 2000). True agency requires the genuine possibility of alternative action — the capacity to do otherwise — and it is precisely this capacity that the philosophers' necessitarian framework eliminates. Al-Ghazālī insists that the God of Islamic revelation is a genuine agent who chooses, wills, and acts for reasons that are His own and that are not reducible to logical necessity. This defence of divine voluntarism is the theological heart of the entire *Tahāfut* project.

Bodily Resurrection

Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, following the Neoplatonic tradition, maintained that the soul is an immaterial substance that survives the death of the body and that the afterlife consists in the soul's intellectual union with the Active Intellect. The resurrection of the body (affirmed explicitly and repeatedly in the Quran) — was interpreted allegorically or dismissed as a concession to popular religion (Leaman, 2002, Fakhry, 2004). Al-Ghazālī designates the denial of bodily resurrection as one of the three positions constituting *kufr*, arguing that the philosophers' allegorical reinterpretation of Quranic eschatology is not a philosophically motivated refinement but a straightforward contradiction of revealed truth (Marmura, 2000). More pointedly, he argues that the philosophers have no philosophical basis for denying bodily resurrection: their argument rests on the assumption that matter cannot be reassembled after dissolution, but this assumption is itself grounded in the doctrine of necessary causation. If God is not bound by natural necessity, then the reassembly of dispersed matter is not logically impossible but merely unusual, and the philosophers' denial of resurrection is exposed as a consequence of their prior, undemonstrated commitment to necessitarianism (Griffel, 2009).

Figure 1. The Seven Critiques by al-Ghazālī (Mind-Map)

The Philosophers' Claims to Demonstrative Certainty

The seventh and in many ways most fundamental critique in al-Ghazālī's arsenal concerns not any specific metaphysical doctrine but the epistemological status of the entire philosophical enterprise. Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā presented their metaphysical conclusions — the eternity of the world, the necessity of emanation, the structure of the cosmic intellects — as demonstrated truths, established by the same rigorous logical methods that yield certainty in mathematics and formal logic (Griffel, 2009). Al-Ghazālī's response, articulated in the preface and reinforced throughout the *Tahāfut*, is that this claim to demonstrative certainty is the philosophers' most consequential and least defensible pretension. In his earlier work *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa*,

al-Ghazālī had demonstrated his thorough mastery of the Avicennan system; in the *Tahāfut*, he turns that mastery against the system's epistemological self-presentation, arguing that the philosophers' metaphysical conclusions rest not on genuine demonstration (*burhān*), which requires premises that are self-evident or empirically certain but on speculative inference, analogical reasoning, and unverified assumptions about the nature of God and causality (Marmura, 2000; Janssens, 2003). The philosophers have dressed speculation in the language of demonstration, and it is this intellectual dishonesty (or self-deception) that makes their influence so dangerous. A speculative metaphysics presented as mere opinion would be harmless; a speculative metaphysics presented as demonstrated truth, and used to override Quranic teaching, is a profound threat to the integrity of Islamic intellectual life.

Conclusion

What emerges from this systematic examination is that al-Ghazālī's seven critiques are not independent objections but a coordinated philosophical campaign with a clear internal logic. The argument proceeds in three interlocking movements. First, at the cosmological level (critiques 1 and 2), al-Ghazālī dismantles the eternal, necessary structure of the Avicennan universe, restoring the possibility of free, temporal divine creation. Second, at the theological level (critiques 3, 4, and 5), he dismantles the impersonal, necessitarian God of the philosophers, restoring the personal, knowing, willing, and freely acting God of Islamic revelation. Third, at the epistemological level (critiques 6 and 7), he dismantles the philosophers' claim to have demonstrated these conclusions, exposing their metaphysics as speculation and their God as a construction of human logic rather than a discovery of divine reality. The coherence of this campaign is captured in the paper's governing question: Is God bound by human logic? Al-Ghazālī's answer, argued with philosophical precision across twenty discussions and seven principal critiques, is an unequivocal no — and the Tahāfut al-Falāsifa is his demonstration of why the philosophers' attempt to bind Him was, from first to last, incoherent.

Al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* is a work of enduring philosophical significance precisely because it refuses the false choice between reason and faith, between philosophical rigor and theological commitment. His key critiques — of eternal emanation, necessary causation, and the philosophers' epistemological overconfidence — are not the objections of a man who fears reason but of a thinker who has followed reason to its own limits and found, at those limits, not the God of the philosophers but the God of the Quran: free, knowing, willing, and irreducibly personal. His representations of the philosophers, while polemically sharpened, are grounded in genuine mastery of the Avicennan corpus, as the *Maqāṣid* irrefutably

demonstrates. And his theological perspective, rooted in *Ashʿarī* voluntarism yet open to selective philosophical appropriation, constitutes not a retreat from intellectual engagement but a principled redrawing of its boundaries. What al-Ghazālī ultimately argues — and what this analysis affirms — is that the question "Is God bound by human logic?" is not a question that logic itself can answer. To insist that it can is not philosophical sophistication; it is, as al-Ghazālī recognized with characteristic precision, the most consequential of all philosophical errors. The *Tahāfut* remains, more than nine centuries after its composition, an indispensable text for anyone who wishes to think seriously about the relationship between human reason and divine transcendence — not because it closes the question, but because it asks it with a depth and rigor that has never been surpassed.

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