Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology, by Frank Griffel, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), xiii + 408 pp., ISBN 978-0-19-533162-2, $74 (hardback)

This is an illuminating book, both in its form and its substance, and it is possible for the avid reader of the history of Islamic thought initially to become excited when skimming through its contents. The author has successfully overcome the obstacles inherent in addressing such a common and well-researched topic in Islamic studies (that is, al-Ghazālī [d. 505/1111] and his theology and philosophy) by thoroughly discussing the most recent scholarship in the area. Because the book has from the time of its publication received the praise it truly deserves, I will present a different understanding of several important issues it addresses and supply several criticisms rather than providing a descriptive outline of the book.

However, before proceeding, a few comments regarding this book's place in Turkish academia are in order, given that a translation will soon become available of Turkish readers.[1] It will surely take its place in the Turkish corpus al-Ghazālī produced thus far, most of which depends on translations from al-Ghazālī's own works. From the Ottoman period onward, Turkish academia has never lost its respect for Ḥujjat al-Islām al-Ghazālī despite the fact that it has predominantly followed the heritage of the famous theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606), who was a fierce critic of al-Ghazālī. This respectful attitude can be observed in the *Tahāfut* of Khojazāda (d. 893/1488), in which both al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī were saluted as "al-Imāmān (the Two Imāms)." The acceptance of al-Ghazālī's works continued even after the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923, a period whose beginnings noted serious difficulties in religious publication, and the acceptance extends to the present day. The fact that we have five different Turkish translations of al-Ghazālī's magnum opus *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* suffices to show how desperately the Turkish people feel themselves in need of a correct understanding of the work of this great Muslim scholar. In addition, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, as demonstrated by its title, is also consistent with the place given al-Ghazālī in the history of Islamic thought, since al-

[1] *Gazâlî'nin Felsefî Kelâmı* (translated into Turkish by İbrahim Halil Üçer; Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2012, forthcoming).

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Ghazālī has been put at the very core and beginning of the new period in Kalām, which was called "the philosophical theology" (tr. *felsefî kelâm* or *müteahhirîn-i mütekellimîn*), by the common theological material in the hands of Turkish students today.[2] However, there is still a lively ongoing debate on whether al-Ghazālī deserves this place, given what we have learned, as we develop a deeper understanding of the thought and school of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044), the crucial place of which (and not that of al-Ghazālī) as the turning point for the methodology of Islamic theology has been emphasized by such eminent Ashʿarī scholars as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.

The most crucial aspect in evaluating al-Ghazalī's philosophical stance is a consideration of his sources, and this task inevitably brings to the forefront the ideas of his master, Abū l-Maʿālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085). Although identifying parallels with the philosophical terms contained in al-Juwaynī's works is at first glance exciting, one must be very cautious in tracing back to any philosophical roots ideas which were already present in Kalāmic literature. Falling into this trap is even easier when examining works written after Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) because authors from this period onward are in danger of being labeled producers of "a post-Avicennian work." In this regard, the author of this book accepts that al-Ghazālī's teacher, al-Juwaynī, was "the first Muslim theologian who seriously studied Avicenna's books" (p. 29; however, al-Juwaynī's knowledge of Avicenna's philosophy is contradictorily questioned on p. 134), and it appears that this conclusion is mainly drawn by asserting that al-Juwaynī developed a proof for the existence of God that depends on the trio of the terms necessity, possibility and impossibility (*wujūb*, *imkān/jawāz* and *imtināʿ*). Griffel, however, does not or could not provide us with any direct evidence demonstrating al-Juwaynī's relation to Ibn Sīnā's works. The only early, albeit unreliable, source of such evidence, a source which is not in Griffel's bibliography, might be Abū ʿAbd Allāh

[2] Bekir Topaloğlu, *Kelâm İlmi – Giriş* [*Islamic Theology – Introduction*] (Istanbul: Damla Yayınevi, 1981), 28 ff. This idea was undoubtedly taken from İzmirli İsmail Hakkı's *Yeni İlm-i Kelâm*, and he was also a dedicated follower of Ibn Khaldūn in assessing the general history of Kalām, which was presented in his *al-Muqaddima*.

al-Māzarī (d. 536/1141), who peculiarly commented that al-Juwaynī was a contemporary of Ibn Sīnā and had discussions with him![3]

A century before Ibn Sīnā, Muslim theologians were well aware of the terms *wājib* (*ḍarūrī*), *mumkin* (*jāʾiz*) and *mumtaniʿ* (*mustaḥīl*), and theologians defined them as general judgments or judgments of reason (*qaḍāyā ʿaqliyya*) to be applied to our logical statements. Here, one must remember that this was the very context in which al-Ghazālī used these terms in his *Tahāfut*, a position Griffel defines as nominalism (p. 97). The works of Abū l-Qāsim al-Kaʿbī al-Balkhī (d. 319/931), as we learn from quotations in al-Maqdisī's (d. after 355/966) *al-Badʾ wa-l-tārīkh*, al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) and from his follower Abū Salama al-Samarqandī (lived in the second half of the fourth/tenth century), provide us with enough reasons to conclude that this trio of terms was already in circulation in theological works as well as in their philosophical counterparts, as it is in al-Fārābī's works (see especially his *al-Nukat fī aḥkām al-nujūm*). Later from the beginning of the fifth/eleventh century on, we come across to the instances in which the trio was used as a methodological framework to be applied to the general outline of the Kalāmic viewpoint regarding "the nature" of God, His attributes and their relation to the universe, as seen in the works of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), al-Juwaynī and al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490). Furthermore, those terms did not wait to observe Ibn Sīnā's works to gain their meanings on the ontological level. The author of *Mafātīḥ al-ʿulūm*, al-Kātib al-Khwārazmī (d. 387), had already made the clear distinction that God is the necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*), while other beings are contingent (*mumkin al-wujūd*). From the fourth/tenth century onwards, the *mutakallimūn*, such as al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), Abū Isḥāq al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027) and Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), tended to see necessary existence (*wujūb al-wujūd, wujūb al-thubūt*) as a term corresponding to the classical divine attribute of eternity (*qidam*). They made use of "the necessity" in their establishment of the eternal existence of God, having formulated that proposition as an ontological rule in the form of the principles "if the eternity is established for something, it is impossible for it to become non-existent" (*mā thabata qidamuhū imtanaʿa ʿadamuhū*), or "the eternal cannot become non-existent" (*al-qadīm lā yuʿdam*). Being a

[3] Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī al-Māzarī, *Īḍāḥ al-maḥṣūl min burhān al-uṣūl* (ed. ʿAmmār al-Ṭālibī; Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2001), 123.

faithful disciple of his master al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935-36) ("*shaikhunā*" in the words of al-Juwaynī), a thorough and careful examination of al-Juwaynī's *al-Shāmil* demonstrates that al-Ashʿarī (most probably together with his contemporaries and successors) suggested an ontological proof for the existence of God implying the distinction between necessary and contingent beings and clearly emphasizing the particularization (*ikhtiṣāṣ*, *tarjīḥ*) of God, a proof that we know as "*dalīl al-imkān*." Because the early *mutakallimūn* held that God's existence is only achievable by way of proving (*istidlāl*), not by necessity (*ḍarūra*), they hesitated to accept a way that proposed necessary knowledge and depended completely on the concept of being. This is the reason why they debated whether dependence on the mere concept of being is reliable, as observed in Abū Rashīd al-Nīsābūrī's (d. after 420/1029) *Fī l-tawḥīd*, and why Ibn Sīnā at the beginning of the metaphysics of his *al-Shifāʾ* recommended the *mutakallimūn* to depend on the concept of existence and leave behind their classical method *istidlāl bi-l-shāhid ʿalā l-ghāʾib*. With all this in mind, it is quite doubtful that al-Juwaynī departed from his predecessors and proposed a new way of proving God's existence in Ashʿarī theology. Note that the proof he used in his *al-ʿAqīda al-Niẓāmiyya* mainly relied on the principle of particularization (*takhṣīṣ*), rather than on a dichotomy between the contingency and necessity of beings. Thus, the conclusion al-Juwaynī reached (that there must be a chooser to create all things *the way* they exist now) was a precept Ashʿarī theologians already accepted before al-Juwaynī. This observation runs contrary to Griffel's position, which places al-Juwaynī at the center of the issue. Thus, Griffel's conclusions regarding Ibn Sīnā's application of the three terms to the existence of God and the acceptance of that application by such Ashʿarī theologians as al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī and Ibn Tūmart (d. 524/1130) (p. 79) must be seriously revised. Undoubtedly, al-Ghazālī and Ibn Tūmart could have been directly influenced by Ibn Sīnā's works, but this must not lead us to a one-dimensional reading of the case that assigns all the credit to Ibn Sīnā, who was not at all an original thinker on this issue. The fact that only a few works of the classical Ashʿarī scholars are extant is a critical obstacle to any attempt to answer the questions surrounding the relationship between theology and philosophy in early Islamic thought.

This particular, yet important, issue is but one example that brings to our attention the complex nature of the interaction between *kalām*

and *falsafa*. It questions a linear understanding of the history of Kalām with regard to the proposition that philosophical thinking mainly began with al-Juwaynī and that his disciple, al-Ghazālī, was naturally influenced by him. In this sense, the act of discussing "al-Ghazālī's philosophical theology" goes beyond the simple concept the book's title initially suggests. It can be said that, arguably, all the main objections al-Ghazālī raised against philosophers in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* were continuations of the early Muʿtazilī-Ashʿarī theological tradition, as demonstrated by his discussion in the third introduction to his work, in which he propose to use Muʿtazila's and others' views to invalidate (and thus silence) the pseudo-demonstrative proofs of philosophers. Accordingly, al-Ghazālī's fundamental principle regarding the most crucial issue dealt with in *Tahāfut*, that is, the problem of the eternity of the world, was a restatement of the classical stance that predated al-Ghazālī's work and can be found in theological as well as jurisprudential writings. This stance can be summarized as "the eternal being cannot have a cause." The same applies to his stance on philosophers' views contained in chapter seventeen, where he places the concept of "possibility (*imkān*)" at the center of the discussion and maintains the classical theological principle that "the impossible cannot be subject to the power of God" (*al-muḥāl lā qudrat*^{a} *ʿalayh*^{i}). This was, again, the very context in which the earlier Muʿtazilīs discussed the nature of the omnipotence of the Creator and the position of other beings: whether they are possible or impossible according to God's power. If we recall the section on the general concept of "being and thing" in Ibn Sīnā's *al-Shifaʾ/al-Ilāhiyyāt*, we see that even Ibn Sīnā dealt with the issue after having considered related discussions in Muʿtazilī theology. Therefore, evaluating al-Ghazālī's philosophical theology, as it is called, cannot be accomplished successfully without underlining the importance of an earlier theological tradition, whether Muʿtazilī or Ashʿarī.

Overall, this book provides a very intricate account of the issues it treats, but problems occur in some of its details that might lead the author to draw the wrong conclusions. For example, the author calls a passage by ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī (d. 525/1131) a "pseudo-Avicennian quote" because he could not find it in any of Ibn Sīnā's writings, although al-Hamadānī had attributed it to the latter (pp. 84-85). In fact, it is contained in one of Ibn Sīnā's letters to the famous

mystic Abū Saʿīd Abū l-Khayr found in Ibn Sīnā's corpus.[4] We can also come across to some efforts which try to decipher the meaning of the "mysterious" correspondence between Ibn Sīnā and Abū Saʿīd afterwards. Among these efforts is a short commentary by one of the Ottoman mystics Jamāl-i Khalwatī (d. 899/1494), in which he interestingly used the vocabulary of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240) to make sense of the text.[5] In this case, the quote cannot be interpreted as an inspiration of al-Hamadānī by some Ghazālian explanations. Accordingly, quick and sweeping conclusions should be avoided in ascribing the originality of some concepts or views to al-Ghazālī. The author's explanations of the concept of "the chains of events" can be re-considered in this regard (p. 80). Seeing "something strikingly new in al-Ghazālī's *fatwā* against three teachings of the *falāsifa*" (p. 103) might not be entirely correct because, as was shown above, al-Ghazālī mainly followed a pre-existing tradition. To provide a particular example, denouncing philosophers as unbelievers due to their views on the eternity of the world was already a de facto position for Muslim theologians (see Abū l-Qāsim al-Bustī's [d. 420/1029] *al-Baḥth ʿan adillat al-takfīr wa-l-tafsīq* for attitudes similar to that of al-Ghazālī's in other issues). To argue "For al-Ashʿarī, there is neither causality nor laws of nature" (p. 127) would be an unfair judgment of al-Ashʿarī due to the scarcity of the sources. The list of al-Ghazālī's most influential students the author provides to prove the judgment that "al-Ghazālī was by far the most influential religious figure during the sixth/twelfth century" (p. 95) might be considered controversial, and the reasons for the inclusion of some persons attributed as "followers" of al-Ghazālī deemed unconvincing, if we carefully consider each these persons and their views as Griffel presents them. As an example of a possible misunderstanding, the author believes that al-Ghazālī's third argument on the issue of the eternity of the world is probably not from the works of Ibn Sīnā (p. 165); however, a reading of Ibn Sīnā's relevant sections in *al-Shifāʾ/al-Samāʾ al-ṭabīʿī* and his *al-Najāt* disproves this conclusion. Last but not least, the author's approach to the issue of God's necessity in all aspects and under-

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4 ʿAbd al-Amīr Shams al-Dīn, *al-Madhhab al-tarbawī ʿinda Ibn Sīnā min khilāl falsafatihī l-ʿilmiyya* (Beirut: al-Sharika al-ʿĀlamiyya li-l-Kitāb, 1988), 398.

5 See the forthcoming article which includes the Arabic text: Veysel Kaya & Ulvi Murat Kılavuz, "An Example of the Mystical Avicennism in the Ottoman Thought – Aqsarāyī's Interpretation of Ibn Sīnā's *Risāla ilā Abū Saʿīd Abū l-Khayr*".

standing of it, both regarding the texts of Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī, are in question (p. 271). At first, neither Ibn Sīnā nor al-Ghazālī used the phrase mentioned "to express that God's actions follow with necessity from His essence." Ibn Sīnā basically used this principle to prove that there are neither *genera* nor parts (*ajzāʾ*) for God; thus, He is not subject to change (See Ibn Sīnā, *ʿUyūn al-ḥikma* and *al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād*). Griffel's reference to al-Ghazālī's usage of the phrase "*min jamīʿ jihātih*" as spatial direction (p. 272) is controversial. In addition to these examples, an ambitious reader might be distracted by some "trivial" information that interrupts the flow of the text, such as the Qurʾānic account of lifespan (p. 188), the depiction, description and historical information regarding al-Ghazālī's water clock (p. 238-239) and the detailed depiction of Oğuz Turks' murderous act (p. 76), all of which might impair the systematic structure of the work.

Claiming to be the most thorough examination to date of al-Ghazālī (in English), Frank Griffel's study without doubt deserves to be a handbook for students and researchers of Islamic studies in both his quest to assemble and evaluate data pertaining to the life and thought of this prominent Muslim thinker and also in presenting a starting point for deeper discussions in our attempt to understand the heritage of Islamic thought.

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