İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi, 30 (2013): 25-57

al-Ghazālī and the Question of Man: With a Particular Emphasis on the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*

Musa Duman*

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In this paper, I explore al-Ghazālī's understanding of human beings and the implications of this understanding for al-Ghazālī's entire epistemological and metaphysical project. I argue that al-Ghazālī has two divergent views of the human being, namely the human being as a spatial self and a substantial self, and that, under the influence of Avicenna, he ultimately tends towards the substantial view. However, I also hold that there are some crucial Kalami (Asharite) elements in the synthesis he achieved, a synthesis which underlies the main form of piety (in the orthodox Muslim world), characterizing the post-classical age of the Muslim world.

Key words: al-Ghazālī, human essence, soul, light, substance, knowledge, interiority.

Introduction

Accounting for the place of the human being in creation was always one of the central concerns of al-Ghazālī's religious thought. al-Ghazālī's mature account of this issue involves a complex cosmology and a metaphysics that draw heavily from both the philosophical and the Kalami tradition of Islam. The synthesis al-Ghazālī achieved became momentous with regard to the formation of post-classical Muslim consciousness. The *Mishkāt al-Anwār* occupies a very interesting position in that respect. It provides us with important clues about how al-Ghazālī views the human essence (*fitra*) and the basic character of meaning (*maʿnā*). The text also clearly testifies to the fact that what we have is, to a considerable extent, an attempt at a synthesis between Islam and Platonism; however, in this respect, as one might expect, it is not free of the tensions that such an attempt is destined to face. The text

* Yrd. Doç. Dr., Mardin Artuklu Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi.

presents us with an exegesis of the Surah Nūr (Qur'an, 24/35) in the form of what can be called a "phenomenology of light" built around the idea that being and light in their pure essence are the same and they refer ultimately to God himself, not only as the source of all light/being, but also as that which alone is self-luminous. God's disclosures in the physical universe and at the level of meaning are parallel and metaphorically mirror one another. This, however, presupposes an understanding and insight which refer to the *raison d'etre* of the human being, which is to say that divine disclosure and presence bear the most intimate relationship to the human essence. Another facet of the inquiry is that it is based on an interpretation of human essence in terms of faculties (that is, a "psychological" interpretation) located in a hierarchy that starts from the level of sensibility and culminates in the prophetic spirit.[1] God (or divine disclosure) is, first of all, the light which illuminates the rational spirit that is our "particular real substance" (*jawhar al-haqīqī al-khāss*).[2] Just as physical light is first necessary for any visual perception to take place, God, as the real light (that is, His manifestation), is the first and the grounding necessity for any rational grasp of forms or universals, or let us say, for making any sense, for meaning (*ma'nā*). God (as *al-awwal*) is the true *a priori*. As we will discuss below, what al-Ghazālī says here can be construed in terms of the inseparability of meaning and being that is expressed with the word, light (*nūr*), a word full of metaphysical connotations in the traditions of Islamic mysticism and Neo-Platonism.

At the center of al-Ghazālī's treatment is the verse; "God is the light of heavens and the earth".[3] He states that this light is an extremely "intense" light, and precisely because of the intensity of its manifestation it remains hidden.[4] The human being is the supreme location of this manifestation and illumination as human boundaries, unlike those of animals and angels, are not marked. The human as a rational spirit is a creature of potentiality, designed for the mission of highest realization and completion of its being. By the same token, one would naturally think that the human essence must also be the location of the most profound veiling of the divine due to its manifestation ("as His very

1 As is well-known, the main features of this account belong to Avicenna. See *Avicenna's Psychology*, trans. and ed. Fazlur Rahman (London: Oxford University Press, 1952). For an interesting discussion, see Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979). For a recent discussion, also see Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islam: Al-Ghazali's Theory of Mystical Cognition and its Avicennian Foundation* (London: Routledge, 2012).

2 *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, A Parallel English-Arabic Text, trans. D. Buchman (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1998), 33, 36.

3 Qur'an, 24/35.

4 *Mishkāt*, 22-24.

light blocks His light"[5]), to a degree that is incomparable to all other creatures. But al-Ghazālī, rather than focusing on the primacy of this fact, tends rather towards the demands of rationality. This is because he conceives of the human being ultimately as a rational substance determined by the primacy of the intellectual cognition as well as by the intrinsic movement towards the fullness of being: the human is not only a site for the divine disclosure, but also a spiritual atom informed by a godly element - rationality. This brings in its train an emphasis on the clarity of cognition that is obviously not compatible with this insuperable and ubiquitous state of being hidden. (As we will discuss below, al-Ghazālī's *yaqīn* can be conceived in reference to this clarity of cognition, even though it remains, in the final analysis, something experiential.) Accordingly, we see that al-Ghazālī interprets and exploits the expression *mishkāt al-anwār* (niche of lights) in a Neo-Platonic context, in which it stands for the realm of senses, a categorically lower realm compared with the realm of rational lights to which, in turn, the similitude of *misbāh* (lamp) corresponds. Much like Plato, the human reality, al-Ghazālī contends, is to be sought in this disembodied realm of rational lights, for the human spirit is a rational light entangled in a dark corporeal world from which it must be saved. Note that the treatise *Mishkāt al-Anwār* represents the later phase of al-Ghazālī's thought in which he (mainly under the influence of Avicenna's psychology) conceives of the human being essentially as a spirit, a rational and luminous substance. The body is thus basically an inessential addition. The world of body and spirit are categorically separate. In this sense, it is arguable that one fundamental vein of al-Ghazālī's thought anticipates the key ideas that define the positions of Descartes and Leibniz, as well as the modern subject metaphysics in general.[6]

But, as has already been suggested, it is an undeniable fact that al-Ghazālī also conceives of the essential character of being human in terms of metaphors of place/site, such as *wādī* (riverbed) and *majrā* (channel) as being

5 *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, trans. David Burrell and Nazih Daher (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2007), 134. This is the text mostly referred to as *Al-Maqsad al-Asnā* (The Highest Goal).

6 For example, Hegel, who forcefully asserts in his Inaugural Address at Heidelberg: "Man, because he is spirit [mind, *Geist*] should and must deem himself worthy of the highest; he cannot think too highly of the greatness and the power of his spirit, and with this belief, nothing will be so difficult and hard that it will not reveal itself to him. The being of the universe, at first hidden and concealed, has no power which can offer resistance to the search for knowledge; it has to lay itself open before the seeker – to set before his eyes and give for his enjoyment, its riches and its depths." G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), II, xiii.

the place where divine unveiling happens. I explore this dimension of the *Mishkāt al-Anwār* in the first section below ("light: inseparability of meaning and being"). This position implies that our bodily functions need to be refined to receive the divine light. In other words, the body is essential for the very structure of being human. We can even say that this site for the divine revelation is our worldly and bodily existence. Then one wonders why al-Ghazālī does not employ the term *mishkāt al-anwār* specifically for this purpose as it perfectly suits his elucidation of the Qur'anic allusion to God as the sole light. It is quite likely that the Avicennian framework within which he works out the metaphysical implications of the *Āyat al-Nūr* required him to do so. Then the difference between these two senses lies principally in the approach to the body. I shall also argue that although al-Ghazālī moves with both senses (i.e., spatial and substantial), a closer investigation will show that the latter sense is decisive for his thought as a whole, which can also be verified by looking at the key ideas of the other texts he has written. That is what I will try to do in the second section of this work ("human essence as spiritual substance").

Clearly, a spatial understanding of the human being (i.e., as the site of divine disclosure) and an understanding of the human being as a substantial self (most typically, a "spiritual substance) indicate different directions. The former implies receptivity of and exteriority towards the divine disclosure by an appeal to the bodily character of human life as a whole, to its finitude, fragility and contingency, whereas the latter can be associated with the independence and self-contained nature of interiority that is implicit in the very idea of "substance." The champion of this latter view of the human being is undoubtedly Descartes. Descartes thought that the human being is a thinking thing and a mental ego, a disengaged subjectivity, the ultimate mission of which is self-mastery and mastery over nature (i.e. over the object). In fact, this body-mind duality is the dominant feature in how the Western tradition understood the human being. Plato, Avicenna, Kant, Hegel and Husserl, each in their own way, subscribe to this view of man. With Nietzsche and Heidegger, we might well doubt whether this can do justice to the actual structure of being human and the phenomenon of meaning. If one considers that the body, history, culture and language (to name just the most important ones) are dimensions of human experience which cannot be bracketed, one will not feel easy with this project (we now call it "Cartesian"). Parallels between Descartes and al-Ghazālī have already been widely discussed in the literature. In line with this, I will attempt to demonstrate that there are some preliminary elements of this project (basically, the idea of "subject" and the concomitant

attempt at "pure inquiry") in al-Ghazālī's own religious thought.[7] For now, this should suffice: the quest for perfect certainty (*'ilm al-yaqīn*, *certitudo*) in addition to the critical function of doubt in it seems to be fundamental for al-Ghazālī's thought, as for Descartes'. But when we investigate the thought of the former, we also need to keep an eye on elements that are contrary to this tendency. This makes al-Ghazālī's thought complex and difficult to deal with. Part of the trouble is that there is a genuine tension in al-Ghazālī's position that is centered on this issue of the soul (or the human essence) itself.[8] Below, I first examine this spatial understanding of human essence as a site of divine disclosure and then argue for its incompatibility with the view of human essence as *jawhar mujarrad* (an immortal, spiritual thinking substance), as "immanence".

Light: Inseparability of Meaning and Being

Light (*nūr*) is the critical word of al-Ghazālī's metaphysics and psychology. In the first pages of the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, al-Ghazālī gives us a glimpse of what he understands light to be, of its metaphorical function which underscores the standpoint of the entire treatise. Light is that which is seen in itself, which is self-luminous, and through which and by which things are seen: "light is manifest and makes things manifest".[9] Certainly that much is evident from our experience of physical light and visual perception. But this only serves an analogical purpose for comprehending the true nature of light. al-Ghazālī makes the next move; saying that seeing light is more deservedly called light than seen light.[10] As he states it: "the mystery and spirit of light is manifestation to perception".[11] Here al-Ghazālī seems to believe that both the function of the soul (vision) and the external world (physical light) have their own lights, but the former is more fundamental than the latter, because "it perceives and through it perception takes place".[12] A blind person cannot

7 Even though the principal text under consideration here is the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, I will have recourse to al-Ghazālī's other texts, such as *Tahāfut*, *al-Risāla al-Laduniyya* and the *Munqidh*.

8 For this matter, see Timothy Gianotti, *Al-Ghazālī's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of the Ihyā'* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 8.

9 *Mishkāt,* 4.

10 *Mishkāt,* 6.

11 *Mishkāt,* 6.

12 *Mishkāt*, 4. We can already see in Plato (*Timaeus*, 45b ff) the assertion that vision is the result of the interaction between the light "flowing through the eyes" and the light of the external things (what is called "emission theory of vision"). This must be read together with *Republic*'s allegory of the cave, where the metaphor of light serves an ontological function. The point in question here is perhaps best captured by W.

see because, even if there is light all around, he does not have "the light of the seeing eye".[13] But if this blind person is a normal sane person, he has the light of reason by virtue of which he *is* human; this does not depend on a bodily organ for its function. Thus, the light of reason is superior to perceptual light. What is more, spirit or reason is a luminous substance that has the capacity to think and engage with meaning, not only independently of external world of senses, but also in a way that rules over all cognitive faculties. Angels, too, are luminous spiritual substances without bodies. Thus, we have a complicated hierarchy of lights, starting from the physical light and ranging up to the archangel. But their lights, al-Ghazālī asserts, are "borrowed light", granted by an ultimate source which he identifies as God, the First, and actually the Sole Light. In other words, all beings stand in need of being kindled by an absolute source ("fire") which confers light/being on them, and it is this light which shines in them and makes them appear. What is striking is that al-Ghazālī here operates with and elaborates Avicenna's distinction between *māhiyya* (essence) and *wujūd* (existence). According to this, being is accidental/contingent for beings (*mawjūdāt*, those which are borrowed of being, those which are made to "be") and essential/necessary only for God, who is *wājib al-wujūd* or *mawjūd bi-dhātihi* (one can observe that al-Ghazālī replaces this phrase of Avicenna with the Qur'anic word, *al-haqq*).[14] Put simply, God's essence and existence are one and the same.

Thus Avicenna's ontological hierarchy is paraphrased in terms of a hierarchy of lights that culminate and are anchored in the One Absolute Being, or the Real, Original Light. But this move is not as simple as it seems. In fact, it has far-reaching implications and consequences (which may or may not have been appreciated by Avicenna). As we have seen, al-Ghazālī attempts to trace the phenomenon of light back to its ultimate, original source, the Self-Luminous Being, Who lights up all entities; this amounts to what might be called the self-disclosure of the Divine. After all, light is a word that is related to "disclosure".[15] This disclosure constitutes the essential ground of luminous substances that think. In the case of the human being, unlike angels, reason cannot operate purely, but it is, in one way or another, linked with the body, with sensual factors and impulses. A rational attempt at meaning, at the

Goethe; "Wär nicht das Auge sonnenhaft/Wie können wir das Licht erblicken?" As we will discuss, following Avicenna, al-Ghazālī speaks of the divine element of the human soul as a spiritual or rational substance, but, unlike Avicenna, al-Ghazālī interprets it as the ground of the Sufi/mystical path which, he believes, is the inner life of Islam.

13 *Mishkāt,* 4.

14 *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 124.

15 *Mishkāt,* 16, 19.

thinking of pure forms, of divine truths happens as a struggle to break free from physical entanglements. This is the Platonic (or Neo-Platonic) context of al-Ghazālī's thought. While the human bodily impulses pull them downwards to the dark realm of the world of the senses, to the darkness of non-existence, their spiritual/rational nature desires to ascend to the higher, the true reality of the rational world, to the divine reality. However, for now, let us set this aside and focus on the specific character of being human in al-Ghazālī.

We should see that the identity of light and absolute being, in the very person of God, is the fundamental idea of the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*.[16] However, to repeat, the physical light (the sun) represents merely the metaphorical moment of the real light (God). This implies that al-Ghazālī's assertion that God as a pure act of being is self-luminous and it is by and through Him that entities become manifest must be understood primarily with respect to the level of meaning. God principally manifests itself as the phenomenon of meaning. "God is the light of everything" means "God is with everything" and "that which makes manifest cannot be separate from that which is made manifest".[17] But this also suggests that the divine light is, in a particular sense, before and above everything as the self-luminous manifester of everything. Still the critical point is that this self-luminosity of pure being remains concealed since we cannot perceive things except by setting analogies, connecting and identifying what is common and by way of contrast. Something utterly different (i.e., unique) and thus utterly self-same would be incomprehensible to us and could not be accomodated in our space of making sense. Generalities (in the sense of *ti esti*, *māhiyya,* or *quidditas*) do not work here; "since all things are exactly the same in testifying to the oneness of their Creator, differences disappear and the way becomes hidden".[18] al-Ghazālī intimates, in several places of the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, that this "way" which remains closed to the conceptual approach to reality is a way of, what he variously calls, *wijdān*, *ʿirfān* and *dhawk,* which does not abstract but experiences. Hence, the pure light which enables understanding and thinking and which is immediate to meaning remains hidden in a particular way. In a sense, al-Ghazālī indicates, through the extreme intensity of His self-disclosure, the Divine remains veiled: the sun is hidden because of His brilliance! It is also possible to say that we seek refuge in the shadow of things, for the light of everyday life can

16 Hence, if God is the sole light/being, then it is reasonable to ask whether al-Ghazālī's position here should be considered in terms of monotheism or monism. For a useful discussion, see Alexander Treiger "Monism and Monotheism in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 9/1 (2007): 1-27.

17 *Mishkāt,* 24.

18 *Mishkāt*, 23.

be described only as shadow in comparison with the pure divine light. In al-Ghazālī's view, human essence is a site (a riverbed, *wādī*) for the occurrence and diffusion of this divine disclosure; that is, for its hidden lightening.

The human essential constitution in its pure, intact form (*fitra*, *qalb*) is the realm for divine meanings and mysteries, the receptivity for their manifestation. Things become manifest in this or that sense by and through divine self-disclosure. Meanings somehow are rays originating and radiating from the self-luminosity of the divine (*al-haqq*); one does not point to the rays, but rather to the sun itself.[19] As indicated, entities are not luminous/visible in themselves. This is another way of saying that they are in themselves non-existence. Only the first/the original light, *al-haqq*, is self-luminous and only that which is self-luminous can be seen in itself; all entities are seen/unveiled by and through that which is self-luminous. That which is seen in itself, the self-luminous, is the ultimate condition and basis of all seeing/meaning and equally all manifestation; it is the light itself, unique, pure, absolute light. It follows that, for al-Ghazālī, God is the sole phenomenon[20] from Whom the light of things come and to Whom they ultimately refer. Lights of things are *āyat*, to use the Qur'anic terminology, which radiate from the phenomenon and refer us back to it, the unitary origin of their outpouring. al-Ghazālī, in this connection, suggests that all entities have two faces; one referring to themselves and the other referring to God.[21] The former gives us its quiddity, whereas the latter its *wujūd* (being) and *haqīqa* (truth). Taken in reference to itself, an entity is thus sheer non-existence, an empty structure in need of content that is its light, i.e. being and truth makes it manifest. Being is an occurrence of manifestation, that is, that which, as something manifest in itself, lights up or manifests beings (in the broadest sense of "being manifest").

Further, only a few special people who have a refined understanding/heart can experience this *a priori* disclosure of the divine and, thus, can say; "I never see something without seeing God before it".[22] For al-Ghazālī, this denotes the highest point of Muslim consciousness. Most people, however, are "veiled and

19 *Mishkāt*, 20.

20 This is indeed the case, at least when one takes "phenomenon" in Heidegger's sense: "Als Bedeutung des Ausdrucks »Phänomen« ist daher festzuhalten: das Sich-an-ihm-selbst-Zeigende, das Offenbare." *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1967), 28. Hence, a phenomenon is "what shows itself in itself, the manifest". Cf. *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, the discussion of the divine name *Al-Zāhir,* 134-37.

21 *Mishkāt*, 17.

22 This statement is attributed to Abu Bakr, companion of the Prophet and the first caliph. In the same context, al-Ghazālī also refers to the Qur'an 8/24 ("God comes between a man and his heart").

heedless".[23] The expression implies that they are veiled because they are *ghāfil* (heedless), which, in turn, means that "thoughtfulness" is the principal goal of the *dīn* (religion) and it consists in acknowledging the divine disclosure that opens entities to us meaningfully (i.e., experiencing God as the light of all things). To overcome this heedlessness one needs to make a genuine effort at reflection (both *dhikr* and *ta'ammul*), which serves to reclaim the original purity of the *fitra*, to recover the original aptness of the human soul for divine meanings, and somehow "recollect" one's original bond with the Divine, a point which easily suggests Platonic associations.[24] But al-Ghazālī suggests that this veiled nature has nothing to do with a failure of our reflective powers, rather it is a state of being veiled through "radiance" and it is on the basis of this that the rational faculty operates. Hence, this fact requires one to traverse a different path, a *tarīqa* that takes one beyond the rational experience to the higher level of experience, the world of prophetic guidance which consists of the *dhawk* and *wajd* of the Divine. It follows that *dhawk* is higher than *'ilm*, for the former consists in the direct experience/sensing of God, whereas the latter amounts to the construction of generalities. As he says in the *Munqidh*, "*Dhawq*…is comparable to actual seeing and handling: this is found only in the way of the Sufis".[25] We may, however, question the legitimacy of such a separation between *'ilm* and *dhawk*, and al-Ghazālī's qualifying the former as *qishr* (external/superficial) and the latter as *lubb* (internal/essential). For instance, Averroes (as a good Aristotelian) would respond that *theoria* is the most perfect *dhawk* for humans as it makes possible to fully achieve *ittisāl* (conjoining) with *'aql al-fā'il* (divine activity).

This insistence on *dhawk* is, in fact, directly relevant to al-Ghazālī's skeptical experience. Remember that he comes to a point of extreme skepticism at the end of his theological-metaphysical investigation into the pure foundations of Islamic truth; there must be a pure truth, he thinks, independent of all cultural and historical contingency. Such purity must then correspond to perfect certainty, a feature which we find only in the ideal exactness of mathematical notions.[26] al-Ghazālī, however, did not/could not discover an absolute starting-point for all consciousness as the truth of Islam, but rather its impossibility. Nothing but God's assistance (as "light") brought an end to

23 *Mishkāt,* 23.

24 Al-Ghazālī touches on this theme of "recollecting" in the *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, trans. M. Smith in *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (two issues, April and July 1938), 369-72.

25 *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* (Deliverance from Error), trans. R. J. McCarthy (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 1999), 64.

26 *Al-Munqidh*, 20.

this skepticism.[27] Thus, the truth of Islam is not a mental cognitive content, but rather a matter of actual practical experience (*dhawk*, *ma'rifa*) in relation to God. Then al-Ghazālī identified it with the inner-oriented Sufi way of life.

This path of *ma'rifa,* which is higher than *'ilm,* is also a path of discovery (*kashf*) of the most intimate. Phenomenologically speaking, al-Ghazālī is well-aware that "intending" cannot reveal/make manifest anything unless the distance "through" which something is perceived and through which this act of intending relates to something is first illuminated. al-Ghazālī's point here may be illustrated in reference to Descartes' notion of *lumen naturale*.[28] Descartes sees that the subject's vision in relating to an object traverses a distance which first needs to be illuminated in order for the subject to see the object in question (actual or possible object, i.e., object in the phenomenological sense). While for Descartes, this distance is illuminated by what he calls *lumen naturale*, natural light, for al-Ghazālī it is illuminated by the divine light which actually refers to Divine self-disclosure. As suggested, God is the sole phenomenon and this disclosure is the *a priori* of all meaning.

But al-Ghazālī, in some other places, especially in the *Munqidh* when recounting his journey through doubt, speaks as if sense-perception and self-evident truths are "normally" the most immediate thing to us; here he first starts from establishing their trustworthiness[29] and later in the essay considers the creation of sensual faculties as a super-addition to our initial creation in the form of a "blank simplicity",[30] thereby providing us our first access to the beings of the external world.[31] This is in harmony with the picture in the *Mishkāt* where we get the impression that al-Ghazālī starts with the senses only to discover, upon closer inspection, that their immediacy is *prima facie* and this only at the expense of covering the more primordial "immediacy" of the Divine to us (i.e., "the inward divine light").[32] Thus doubt can, in no way, be defeated by an appeal to sense-data or self-evident truths;

27 *Al-Munqidh*, 23.

28 *Meditations on First Philosophy*, see 3rd Meditation.

29 *Mishkāt*, 21.

30 al-Ghazālī argues that human beings were created first in "blank simplicity" without any knowledge of beings (*Munqidh*, 59). Because knowledge is an essential attribute of the soul and included in it in every respect, it follows that this original state of creation (*asl al-fitra*) does not represent the full or proper being (*nafs*) of the human being. This only comes later, after the creation of sensual faculties, with the superaddition of spiritual-intellectual powers (*'aql*) by God, that is, when this initial state is promoted to a substantial self, as it were, as the fulfilment of this "blank simplicity."

31 *Mishkāt,* 59.

32 *Mishkāt*, 34.

yaqīn, as "the origin and the foundation"[33] is solely the gift of the divine light. al-Ghazālī also asserts in the *Mishkāt* that *maʿrifa al-darūriyyat al-kullīyah* (universal self-evident knowledge)[34] is the defining engagement of rational spirit (as "the specific human substance"[35]). As he says: "when a human being perceives a particular individual with the senses, the rational faculty acquires from it a general, unlimited meaning."[36] This is clearly Platonic/Aristotelian. Aristotle speaks of *gnôrimon hêmin*, things known to us, that is, in terms of sense-perception (*aisthesis*), as opposed to *gnôrimon tê physei*, things known by nature (accessible at the level of *noesis*).[37] A crucial difference, however, is that al-Ghazālī believes that the true potential of human rational essence can never be realized without the guidance of the highest level of human spirit, the prophetic spirit. The prophetic spirit, so to speak, first enkindles our rational spirit, thereby arousing the higher forms of spiritual experiences (*dhawk* and *wajd*) of the Divine in us. It alone activates the eye of our rational substance, "the inward divine light".[38] But neither sense-perception nor entities themselves are immediate to us, as they can only be manifest (i.e., they can only be encountered) under the divine light, with the light by which God illuminates them, that is, illuminates the distance through which we can see things and, equally, by which, they can step into "presence". This light is prior to the seeing/meaning and the seen/meant. And it operates through the core level of being human (pure interiority, as *qalb*). Hence, we have a phenomenology of light/being according to which *maʿnā* (meaning) is constituted by and through God's self-disclosure as a necessary pre-condition, i.e., the necessary pre-condition of beings' emerging into encounterability for us.[39]

What seems to follow is that man is not a being conceivable self-referentially, but only in reference to this self-disclosure that grants meanings (like

33 *The Book of Knowledge*, trans. N. Amin Faris (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 1962), 192. This is the translation of the first book of *Ihyā'* called *Kitāb al-ʿIlm*.

34 *Mishkāt,* 37.

35 *Mishkāt*, 36.

36 *Mishkāt*, 38.

37 *Physics*, 184a 17-21.

38 *Mishkāt*, 34.

39 Given all this, it is possible to suggest that there is a certain degree of affinity between al-Ghazālī's emphasis on "interiority" (the spiritual substance of mankind) as the cognitively priviledged level and Husserl's "pure consciousness" as the ground of self-evidence. Muhammad Kamal draws parallels between Husserl's phenomenology (as the study of pure cosnciousness) and al-Ghazālī's purely subjective search for divine truth ("search for presuppositionless beginning for religious consciousness"). He has this to say: "[for al-Ghazālī] Consciousness has a direct relation with the object without relying on pre-given ideas or theories." See Muhammad Kamal, "al-Ghazālī's Hermeneutics and Phenomenology", *Religion East and West*, 4 (June 2004): 82.

rays radiating from sun). Human essence is the sole place for this granting of meaning/light because, as al-Ghazālī says in the *al-Risāla al-Laduniyya*, animals are purely physical entities lacking what qualifies humans, a rational essence.[40] Thus, the human being belongs to this self-disclosure; the human appears basically as an *'abd* (servant) for the disclosure of truth, which is ultimately the truth of God as its manifestation/radiation (*haqīqa* coming from and indicating *al-haqq*). This place al-Ghazālī also calls the *qalb*, our "innermost center", as a place only for *al-haqq*. So we should, al-Ghazālī urges, cleanse everything from this innermost center which only belongs to *al-haqq*, for the enactment of His truth for the sake of which humanity exists, and in which the genuine flourishing (*sa'āda*) of the human being consists. But he also sees no harm in identifying the *qalb* with human rational essence.[41]

The *mishkāt* (niche) is a place which can receive light, allow light "in", as opposed to the density of earth. al-Ghazālī also indicates the Quranic word, *wādī* (riverbed), which also invites similar spatial connotations. *Wādī* is a "riverbed that receives flowings from the Divine, each in its measure".[42] But it is principally the prophetic sprit (as "*al-wādī al-muqaddas*") which serves as "the *majrā* (channel) for the flashes of holiness"[43], i.e., for the highest meanings that have a divine ground for a community (*qawm*). al-Ghazālī is clear that the ultimate truths of God –the knowledge of lordship (*'ilm al-rabbāniyat*)– are revealed only for the prophetic spirits who are superior to rational and reflective spirits.[44] This might be construed in the following way. The human soul (that is, being human) is to be understood in reference to *izhār* (making manifest, the occurrence of meaning), to the divine self-disclosure as its site. The human essence (heart) is called the *misbāh* (lamp) which is found in a *mishkāt al-anwār* (niche for lights), in a "lighted realm", a world where meaning happens, where beings become manifest. Each lamp (each human being) is enkindled by the light of this realm which is a historical world, a world of events ("divine flowings", "flashes of holiness") founded by particular prophetic revelations (*wahy*). We might say that history is principally something established by prophetic revelations; this refers to a historical world/space as the gift of the *wahy*. Accordingly, *wahy* bequeaths us a world that is the basis of human essence; this is a historical formation, and it is from this

40 See *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 195-96. al-Ghazālī's rather mechanistic characterization of animals in the *Risāla al-Laduniyya* (195-96) points to another intersection with Descartes, for whom animals are purely physical and mechanical structures.

41 See for instance *Mishkāt*, 5; *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 194.

42 Qur'an, 13/17. Cf. *Mishkāt*, 32.

43 *Mishkāt*, 26.

44 *Mishkāt*, 37, par. 51.

that human essence is inseparable. The historical foundation established by prophetic revelations enkindle the lamp/*nafs*/*rūh* of the prophet in question and makes it a "*sirāj al-munīr*" (light-giving lamp)[45] for a community.[46] But this line of interpretation, contra al-Ghazālī, requires that we construe *mishkāt* not as a faculty or realm of the senses, that is, not psychologically, not in terms of interiority, but as a (historical) "world", thus in terms of exteriority.

We can summarize our findings as follows: (1) human essence (as both *qalb* and *'aql*) is the site of divine disclosure. (2) The divine being as the unique sun from which all lights radiate is self-luminous, but also veiled; divine self-disclosure is the ultimate condition of all meaning, of all states of manifestation and the manifestability of entities. (3) It manifests entities, but essentially and principally it only manifests itself; entities shine in God's light and owe their visibility and perceptibility to this light. (4) Divine self-disclosure is the light that illuminates the distance which seeing (in the phenomenological sense) traverses so as to relate to and engage with the seen. (5) This disclosure is the sole *a priori* of human perception and conception, and the sole phenomenon that makes possible not only all manifestation and appearing (*zuhūr/phainesthai* and *tajallī/physis*), but also, correspondingly, all making sense (*ma'nā/aleutein*). (6) It gives its own truth to mankind through prophetic revelations, which, as genuinely historical moments in the life of humankind, enable the ascension of the human rational spirit to divine reality, to the rational world (*'ālam al-malakūt*).

That being said, it should give us pause when al-Ghazālī suggests that the human being is essentially a spirit, a rational substance, a subject ruling over a "kingdom" of his own, namely over the kingdom of cognitive faculties and the body; indeed, this is a pervasive theme in al-Ghazālī.[47] The key idea is this: "the soul, itself, unlocated and indivisible, governs the body as God governs the universe."[48] We can observe that al-Ghazālī works from the dualistic Platonic belief in the essential separateness of the soul from the body and the essential antagonism between the two. This seems almost incontrovertibly

45 Qur'an 33; 46.

46 *Mishkāt*, 30.

47 Jules Janssens convincingly argues that this theme, too, has an Avicennian foundation. See "Al-Ghazālī between Philosophy (*Falsafa*) and Sufism (*Tasawwuf*): His Complex Attitude in the Marvels of the Heart (*'Ajā'ib al-Qalb*) of the *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*", *The Muslim World*, 101/4 (2011): 614–32. It is easy to see that the notion of self-mastery implicit in this perspective refers us to "the flying-man argument", to the idea of human essence as a detached substance and, by virtue of this, ruling over a realm of faculties, bodily and cognitive.

48 *The Alchemy of Happiness*, trans. E. L. Daniel (London: Octagon Press, 1980), 19.

true for *Mishkāt*, *al-Risāla al-Laduniyya*, *Munqidh* and *Ma'ārij al-Quds*, as well as for *Tahāfut* (the 20th Discussion) and for most of *Ihyā'*, even though in some other works al-Ghazālī adopts the perspective of (Asharite) Kalam, which speaks of the human being in corporeal, atomistic terms. Furthermore, in the aforementioned texts, we notice that al-Ghazālī carries this dualistic notion of human beings to a new, indeed more radical, level, as will be discussed below. al-Ghazālī himself did not see any problem here. He did not realize that understanding human beings in a unitary or a dualistic manner might have huge metaphysical implications for Islam. Fazlur Rahman suggests that nowhere in the Qur'an is there a dualistic depiction of the human being, rather the Qur'an characteristically tends towards a unitary perspective of the world and mankind.[49] Thus, we can assert that the account al-Ghazālī offers us invites a critical engagement from a Qur'anic perspective, as well. Also questionable is his decisive tendency to view human essence in terms of interiority and/or subjectivity, which is closely connected to this dualism. Now I shall examine this dimension of al-Ghazālī's thought, which revolves around his view of the human soul.

The Human Essence as Spiritual Substance

Before al-Ghazālī, the mainstream Muslim consciousness looked with suspicion on the view of the *falāsifa* that the soul is naturally immortal and death is merely the dissolution of the body, leaving the soul untouched. In fact, these people were not at all familiar with any essentialistic soul-body discourse. They, almost naturally, tended to think that human being was not intelligible apart from a corporeal existence (hence the Kalami concept of soul as an accident of the body). In the Hereafter an eternal life will be granted to human beings in keeping with God's promise (*wa'd*), not upon the basis of a supposed immortality of the soul in its own nature; this eternal life is presented by the Qur'an as the second creation.[50] Generally speaking, the early Muslim theological discourse (the schools of *fıqh* as well as of *kalām*) refrained from any notion of the human soul as an independent substance essentially separate from the body. As Friemuth observes, al-Ghazālī "was probably the first theologian to adopt a philosophical view of the soul".[51]

49 Fazlur Rahman, *The Major Themes of the Qur'an* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 17, 112. Fazlur Rahman also, I think rightly, argues that al-Ghazālī is chiefly responsible for the domination of this dualistic understanding of man in "later orthodox Islam" (17).

50 Qur'an, 29/20.

51 Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought* (London: Routledge, 2006), 158. By "philosophical view of the soul", Friemuth first of all is referring to Avicennian

Even al-Ghazālī himself, as suggested above, in some of his works continues to think along the classical conception. Yet, the *Mishkāt*, the *Tahāfut*[52], most books of the *Ihyā'*, *al-Risāla al-Laduniyya*, *Ma'ārij al-Quds*, *Mīzān al-'Amal*, *Mihakk al-Nazar*, *Munqidh*) strongly convey Avicennian motifs concerning the soul. The *Mishkāt* is perhaps the clearest case in which we see the profound influence of the Neo-Platonic ontology on al-Ghazālī's thought; sometimes it is in harmony, but sometimes it is at odds with traditional Islamic views. Another important point is that the *nafs* is viewed now in this context as the *rūh* (spirit), as a rational and luminous substance, a substantial and separate entity in need of being saved from the tomb which is the body. Everything indicates that after the *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī's thought developed more and more along Avicennian lines. As some commentators maintain, al-Ghazālī's later theological/philosophical position does not seem intelligible without appreciating his debt to Avicenna.[53] Consequently, he distanced himself from the Kalami view of soul as an accident of the body, moving towards a view of the soul as a spiritual substance that seems much more in harmony with the inner-oriented spiritual life of Sufism. However, al-Ghazālī (as in *Tahāfut*, for instance) never felt sympathy with the idea of the soul as one universal entity that is scattered somehow in all human beings. Rather, each soul must be a disengaged, atomic entity constituting the essence and identity of each individual human being. In this sense, he comes much closer to Descartes and, as distinct from Plato, Aristotle and *falāsifa*, he can never see matter/body as a sufficient individuating factor for human beings.[54] Now, let us explore this latter dimension and its implications for al-Ghazālī's basic metaphysical position a bit more.

dualism. Decades earlier (1932) Duncan B. McDonald referred to al-Ghazālī's thought as the autoritative statement of the conception of spirit in the post-classical Islam in his article "The Development of the Idea of Spirit in Islam", *The Muslim World*, 22/2 (1932): 156.

52 *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, A Parallel Arabic-English Text, trans. Michael Marmura (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 18th and 20th Discussions.

53 Some notable representatives of this thesis include Richard Frank, Frank Griffel and Alexander Treiger. For a discussion, see Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10-11.

54 We observe in the 19th Discussion of the *Tahāfut* a rejection of the idea of one universal soul identical for all individual human beings, the cornerstone of the psychology we find in Platonism and Aristotelianism. According to a common (but widely challenged) interpretation of Aristotle, he considers *only* matter/body as the individuating factor since form (soul) is something common to all individuals; this is a view for which al-Ghazālī has little patience in the 18th, 19th, and 20th Discussions of the *Tahāfut*. Interestingly, there is a suggestion in the 19th Discussion that we should see moral dispositions as the basis of individuation for human beings (*Tahāfut*, 202-3). But his acceptance of a *nafs al-kulliya* in the *Risāla al-Laduniyya* (whose authenticity is disputed) is to be noted.

We first notice al-Ghazālī's assertion that "no realities/truths whatsoever are veiled from this rational substance, but it can veil itself due to certain attributes associated with it."[55] Actually, what he means here is physical constraints, i.e., the negative intervention of sensations and imaginings.[56] Al-Ghazālī lists five types of spirits; *al rūh al-hassas* (the sensitive spirit), *al-rūh al-khayālī* (the imaginative spirit), *al-rūh al-ʿaqlī* (the rational spirit), *al-rūh al-fikrī* (the reflective sprit) and *al-rūh al-nabawī* (the prophetic spirit). Faculties of sense and imagination are basically at the disposal of the rational spirit, or rather, the rational spirit controls and shapes them in such a way that they serve its purposes, rather than their own degrading drives. The reflective spirit, in turn, is essentially the exercise of our rational nature. The prophetic spirit brings the lights from the heaven down to the earth, which helps our rational nature actualize itself, "to become like god."[57] For, al-Ghazālī is convinced, we are created in the image of God.[58] It is in this sense that we are *khalifa* (vicegerents) of God on earth. The actualization of this vicegerency is the actualization of our rational nature, which, in turn, refers to the actualization of human beings as creatures of knowledge. Knowledge, in the ultimate sense, is the knowledge of God; human beings are created for this knowledge and for its enactment in the earth. What al-Ghazālī says echoes the hermetic wisdom: "If it were not for divine mercy, human beings would not be capable of knowing their Lord, since one knows one's Lord only by knowing oneself".[59] That is, it would be impossible for us to be human beings

55 *Mishkāt*, 6.

56 *Mishkāt*, 9, par. 20.

57 The metaphysical function of al-Ghazālī's prophet invites a discussion of parallels with Plato's philosopher-king, who has the mission to lead people towards the light of the sun.

58 *Mishkāt,* 6, 32. See also the translator's (Buchman) footnote 2 (1st chapter) and 8 (2nd chapter). Buchman claims that this is a sound hadith, while, in fact, its authenticity is doubtful. Actually, this is a characteristic Christian belief stated clearly in the Old Testament (the Book of Genesis). Interestingly, despite many shared points between the Bible and the Qur'an concerning the genesis of humanity, this idea (*imago dei*) has no parallel in the Qur'an.

59 *Mishkāt*, 31. This delphic maxim appears in some other texts as well. Janssens examines the context of its employment in the *ʿAjā'ib al-Qalb* of the *Ihyā'* (Janssens, "al-Ghazālī between Philosophy and Sufism", 617). Al-Ghazālī connects it with Qur'an, 59/19 ("They forgot God, and so He let them forget them themselves. They are the rebellious transgressors.") and 8/24 ("and know that God comes in between a man and his heart"). But contrary to al-Ghazālī's intentions, the routes to understanding portrayed by the Delphic maxim and the Qur'an are clearly opposite; the former emphasizes an inner path, the latter a movement from God to ourselves. This fact casts serious doubts on whether the introspective path to God is really natural to the Qur'an itself. Rather, it seems that the Qur'an prescribes an exteriority anchored in God. If this is the case, al-Ghazālī's *ʿilm al-bātin* represents the introduction of a perspective into Islam, which is wholly alien to it.

and we would be no different from the animals. It follows that the acquisition of this knowledge requires an inward journey and an inward concentration, pure interiority.[60] Senses are obstacles on this path; when one is freed from senses (e.g., in sleep), one can turn towards one's innermost self, one's heart, one's rational essence, which is fundamentally "the inward divine light".[61] As al-Ghazālī notes: "sleep has an effect on witnessings such as these because the the ruling authority of the senses forces the person to turn away from the inward divine light, as the senses keep him occupied and attract him toward the world of sense perception, turning his face away from the world of the unseen and dominion" (*ʿālam al-ghayb wā al-shahāda*).[62] The body appears as a hindrance once again, as something to be overcome, to be freed from. Indeed, one can say that al-Ghazālī thinks the human essence (*qalb*) in exact contradistinction to body.[63] We normally live under "the rule of the senses". Sometimes he speaks as if we could be freed from them wholly, but other times he tends to concede that this can be achieved only imperfectly. In general, he seems to think in the shadow of Avicenna's "flying man argument".[64] In the *Mishkāt* al-Ghazālī gives the example of sleeping states and dreams as support for this claim, where, he argues, "some of the prophetic lights rise up and take control".[65]

Further, as we see in the above quotation, al-Ghazālī interprets the *ghayb*, a Qur'anic notion, in terms of Plato's intelligible world. In fact, he employs a few expressions throughout the text, all of which basically correspond to Plato's dichotomy between the sensible and the intelligible world; *ʿālam al-mulk* and *ʿālam al-malakūt*, *ʿālam al-shahāda* and *ʿālam al-ghayb*, *ʿālam al-khayāl* and *ʿālam al-mithāl*, *ʿālam al-ʿaqliyya* and *ʿālam al-hissiyyah* etc.[66] Even heaven signifies the real world *ʿālam al-malakūt*, while this world is the lower world, the

60 As he notes: "… study is only the return of the soul to its own proper substance and the bringing forth to actuality of that which is contained in its own inner self" (*Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 370).

61 *Mishkāt*, 34.

62 *Mishkāt*, 34.

63 *Mishkāt*, 64-65.

64 Avicenna's "flying man" argument seems to be designed to prove that this is indeed possible; anything bodily can be read separately from the ego as rational substance. Avicenna, drawing on the neo-Platonic tradition, brings together the Platonic belief that soul and body are essentially distinct with the Aristotelian idea of substance (*ousia*). The emergence of modern philosophy owes a lot to this neo-Platonic synthesis that was achieved in a systematic form by Avicenna.

65 *Mishkāt*, 35.

66 For a discussion of the importance of Platonic elements in al-Ghazālī's thought as a whole, see Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazālī* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 308–9.

world of senses,[67] or as he says in the *Munqidh*, "an abode of delusion".[68] The true vocation for mankind, then, consists of "journeying to the garden/heaven (*jannah*)"[69], which is, in a sense, a journeying to "the inward divine light", a spiritual devotion that struggles to free itself from all bodily entanglements. The world of the senses is but a "ladder"[70] for this journey, a ladder travelling to that which constitutes "the straight path" of the Qur'an, and which requires leaving behind "the darkness of the senses".[71] As indicated, the same al-Ghazālī also warns us that it is extremely difficult for reason (*'aql*, rational faculty or rational substance) to achieve a disengagement from the sensuous.[72] This freedom from the corporeal can be perfected only after death,[73] which invites, I think, a parallel reading of Plato's *Phaedo* (66e). One should here raise the question: Does al-Ghazālī urge maximal disentanglement from the physical (sensations and imaginations), or does he say, as discussed in the second part above, that we need to polish, refine and purify our physical capacities, and most importantly, our imagination? Indeed, it is terribly unclear whether he endorses a disciplining of our physical life in the sense of the Aristotelian golden mean (*mesotos*) or in the sense of Platonic asceticism (overcoming the bodily inclinations, evident in the *Phaedo*). The *Ihyā'* is full of this ambiguity; sometimes al-Ghazālī exhibits a deep hostility towards the body, while at other times he warns us only against over-tolerance to the sensual. As a matter of fact, al-Ghazālī vacillates between these two positions, a fact which is obviously part of the tension I mentioned in the introduction. Taken as a whole, I tend to believe that al-Ghazālī's attitude towards the human bodily life can be best characterized as "minimalism" (the less you tolerate physical pleasures, the better you do) which is in turn practically indistinguishable from asceticism.

This asceticism cannot be conceived apart from a view of the soul as an essentially detached sphere. More remarkably, in *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, al-Ghazālī clearly suggests that the human soul "is a perfect, simple substance concerned solely with remembering, studying and reflection, discrimination and careful consideration,"[74] that it "is purely intellectual without sensibility."[75] He also

67 *Mishkāt*, 35.
68 *Mishkāt*, 53.
69 *Mishkāt*, 35.
70 *Mishkāt*, 26-27.
71 *Mishkāt*, 47.
72 *Mishkāt*, 9, par. 20.
73 *Mishkāt*, 9; also *Munqidh*, 23.
74 *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 194.
75 *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 197.

adds that it does not occupy any location[76] and the body is not its habitation, but rather its instrument.[77] These points are also present in *Ma'ārij al-Quds* and *al-Madnūn al-Saghir*. They clearly convey a view of the soul as an immaterial substance that stands in contrast to anything corporeal. One may well object that the authenticity of all these texts can be disputed.[78] Nevertheless, we need not rely exclusively on these texts to defend the thesis that al-Ghazālī espouses a dualistic understanding of mankind. We can find this dualistic perspective between the lines of some books of *Ihyā'*, the psychology of which owes so much to Avicenna. Further, we can find it in *Tahāfut* (18th Discussion, p. 178) quite clearly stated. Moreover, they form the background to many of al-Ghazālī's later works, coming to expression in this or that degree of clarity. *Mishkāt* itself (together with *Munqidh*) is built upon this view of the soul and, as we will explore here, reveals it in various instances.

It is possible that a further examination of this Avicennian or Neoplatonic background is necessary. As al-Ghazālī understands it, the *'ālam al-mulk* (the world of property, the world of senses) is, in essence, an effect of *'ālam al-malakūt* and therefore, naturally, bears a resemblance; it is a *tamthīl* (similitude) for the rational world, a shadowy realm that reveals (to rational beings) the reality beyond it. al-Ghazālī, in this connection, interprets the *Āyat al-Nūr* in a quasi-Platonic manner; "God draws similes for mankind". According to this, a similitude is something striken between the phenomenal world and the world of dominion (the world of luminous substances); "there is nothing in this world that is not a similitude of something in the world of dominion."[79] This is also in perfect agreement with the assertion that what is corporeal corresponds to "the accidents of the luminous human spirit".[80] al-Ghazālī, then, quite consistently, interprets the verses where God orders

76 *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 199.

77 *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 199.

78 The argument for the inauthenticity of these texts (defended by H. Lazarus-Yafeh and M. Watt, among others) is not really well-established and continues to be controversial in every respect. For example, it seems to be a prioristic; al-Ghazālī cannot have used philosophical terminology. In a very careful study, "Al-Ghazzâlî and his Use of Avicennian Texts" (in *Problems in Arabic Philosophy*, ed. M. Maróth, Piliscaba: Avicenna Institute of Middle East Studies, 2003, 37–49) Jules Janssens concludes that al-Ghazālī might well be the author of the *Ma'ārij al-Quds*. I assume that *Risāla al-Laduniyya* and *Ma'ārij al-Quds* are al-Ghazālī's authentic works, but the accuracy of my argument does not entirely depend on their content. See also M. Afifi al-Akiti's study: "The *Madnūn* of al-Ghazali: A Critical Edition of the Unpublished Major *Madnūn* with Discussion of His Restricted, Philosophical Corpus" (Ph.D. Diss., 3 vols., Oxford University, 2007).

79 *Mishkāt,* 27.

80 *Mishkāt*, 30, par. 26.

Moses "*na'layk aleyh...*"[81] in the sense of "throwing off the corporeal, sever your ties with the senses" so that you can ascend to the rational world of God, which is really God's presence (*al-hazrah al-rabbāniya*), for the human being as "luminous" (*nūrānī*) spiritual substance. The human beings, through their rational capacities, are able to "climb to this presence".[82]

In this context, we should call attention to al-Ghazālī's conviction that *'aql,* as a "luminous substance", as that which does not work with physical instruments, is self-transparent and bears a capacity for a full mastery over its pure contents (attributes). This, as one might see, anticipates the core Cartesian position. Hence, human essence appears in al-Ghazālī's thought also as "subject", or as a (potentially) disengaged subjectivity. Here we should understand "subject" in terms of atomic detachedness (immanence) and self-mastery (autonomy). One should meanwhile recognize the fact that the notion of "subject" emerged historically (in its most explicit form, first in Descartes' ontology) when the Aristotelian notion of substance (*ousia*) is transcribed into the human sphere as the mind completely disassociated from the physical dimension; this had been accorded only to *theos* in Aristotle's philosophy. Human essence is now identified as mental substance (*res cogitans*) in contradistinction to extended physical substances (*res extensa*). In this sense, it is assumed to be composed of (cognitive) powers that are at the disposal of reason; it is through these that it can exercise self-rule as well as rule over the faculties of the senses and the imagination, and consequently mastery over the body and external entities.[83] It is presupposed that human essence can disengage itself from the external world as a neutral, detached observer. Naturally, one appeals here to the self-transparency of consciousness. al-Ghazālī's picture, in this respect, seems to be in tune with that of Descartes, who views a subject as a spiritual substance, as a thinking thing with a self-contained complete structure ontologically separate from the external world of *res exstensa*. Accordingly, the subject shows itself to be an isolated atomic being positioned vis-à-vis nature in a way completely alien to the latter (hence the inner-outer dichotomy) while, at the same time possessing a definitive capacity to represent adequately both its internal

81 Qur'an, 20/12.

82 *Mishkāt,* 30.

83 As al-Ghazālī writes, the rational substance is: "the controller of the faculties, and all serve it and comply with its command" (*Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 194). As Griffel points out, both in the *Mihaqq al-Nazar* and in the *Iljām al-'Awām*, al-Ghazālī equates the rule of a self-subsistent, immortal, non-extended soul over body to God's rule over universe. See Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 269. We find this same point in the *Mishkāt* as well (especially 21, par. 57).

states and external entities.[84] Anticipating Descartes' lecture to the Paris theological faculty, centuries ahead, al-Ghazālī proposes that: "a knowledge of the mind and its true nature is the basis of religion and the foundation of the way of the godly".[85]

Tamara Albertini is certainly correct when she selects interiority "as the epistemic cornerstone in his [al-Ghazālī's] philosophy."[86] Indeed, Descartes' view that rational knowledge is about the explication of innate ideas that we possess by a reflexive procedure is clearly anticipated by al-Ghazālī: "And when the door of thought has been opened to the soul, it has learnt how to reflect and how to return by way of conjecture to what was sought, and this man's heart is expanded and his understanding is opened and what is in his soul of potentiality becomes actuality, without excessive search and prolonged toil."[87] Even if this talk of potentiality and actuality refers us to Aristotle's *De Anima*, the reflexive search for ultimate truths is something entirely alien to Aristotle. al-Ghazālī, as opposed to Aristotle, perceives *'aql* subjectively, that is, as the inner subjective power of the human being[88] and as a created capacity with a determinate structure and content; the mind and its contents are contingent.[89] We clearly observe in *Mi'yār al-'Ilm* that in the context of a nominalist critique of Aristotelian epistemology, al-Ghazālī makes a case for

84 For a clear parallel, see *Mishkāt*, 7 (16th paragraph).

85 *Ihyā' 'Ulum al-Dīn* (Beirut, 1996), III, 3. Quoted in Eric Ormsby, *Al-Ghazālī* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 128.

86 Tamara Albertini, "Crisis and Certainty of Knowledge in al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) and Descartes (1596-1650)", *Philosophy East and West*, 55/1 (2005): 6. According to Albertini, both in al-Ghazālī and in Descartes "doubt could be defeated by creating an 'epistemoogical platform' that is grounded in subjectivity" (2). However, we should note that al-Ghazālī, as distinct from Descartes, believes that ultimately no cognitive content is enough to secure one from doubt. Only the assistance ("light") of God can provide the certainty upon which life and knowledge can be established. This "light" (mentioned in the *Munqidh*, 23) should give us an indication of how to approach the notion of light in *Mishkāt al-Anwār*. It works through a complete interiority by illuminating the spiritual essence immanent in man. The public standards of intelligibility are not relevant here; a completely ineffable experience constitutes the very center from which all religious and metaphysical intelligibility flow. But the problem is that a radical sceptical orientation presupposes religious foundationalism and the possibility of a starting point without presuppositions. Given the revealed text and world as the context (in the sense of "hermeneutical circle") in which religious understanding can operate, can an extreme sceptical strategy have any genuine place within Muslim consciousness (not to mention the ontological worries pertinent to this purist quest)? If not, is this skeptical strategy a necessary path onto which each Muslim should be initiated, thus surmounting *taqlīd* and attaining *tahqīq* in faith?

87 *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 363.

88 *Mishkāt,* 10.

89 *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 19.

the *a priori* contents of mind (*awwalīyāt*, namely, the realities of the divine inscribed in the human soul) as independent of all sense experience (thus of the external world) and as grounding all knowledge. He believes that the universality and necessity of knowledge depend on a subjective act (*qiyās khafī*) that deploys these a priori elements and "merges many observations into one,"[90] rather than on the things in the external world.[91] Accordingly, this *a priori* content is said to be always present in the mind.[92] It is to be expected that such a notion of mind should lead to an emphasis on interiority and reflexivity, and should sound, therefore, quite familiar to the modern philosophy which is based on the subject-centered view of the world.[93]

Quite understandably, al-Ghazālī speaks of this rational substance as *al-rūh al-basīra* (seeing spirit). This substance actually belongs to a world of luminous subtances and aspires to return there, to free itself from this shadowy world. What is not clear, however, is whether these Platonic dichotomies so freely exploited by al-Ghazālī can easily sit with the mainstream Muslim tradition (notably, *kalām* and *fiqh*). Given all this, one might wonder whether al-Ghazālī can continue to reject the idea of the soul as naturally immortal? Can thus conceived soul/spirit be a mortal one? Can it die when we die in natural terms?[94] Moreover, does it make any sense to defend a resurrection for

90 Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 211.

91 This notion of *qiyās khafī* is again Avicennian (for a discussion, see Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 209-13). It refers us to the flying man argument, and thereby to the idea of "pure I".

92 *Munqidh*, 22, 24.

93 There are a series of studies which attempt to show that Descartes and some early modern philosophers borrowed many things from al-Ghazālī. If correct, this lends even more weight to what I am arguing here. For instance, Cemil Akdoğan writes: "We can trace the origins of modern philosophy back to Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī…who anticipated some of the major ideas at which Rene Descartes and David Hume arrived in the course of their study and philosophical speculation. Although their frameworks are different, the parallel between al-Ghazālī and Descartes, particularly on the issues of absolute truth, scepticism, dreamlike reality, and the separation of soul from body, is very conspicuous. As for Hume's work on causality which prompted Immanuel Kant to write his famous *Critique of Pure Reason*, it is fundamentally not more than what al-Ghazālī accomplished on the same subject a long time ago." "Al-Ghazālī, Descartes and Hume: The Geneology of Some Philosophical Ideas," *Islamic Studies*, 42 (2003): 487. What Akdoğan argues in this paper can be summarized as the thesis that al-Ghazālī has exerted a crucial impact on the rise of modern epistemology by introducing effectively the assumption of disembodied subjectivity into the way we talk about ourselves and the world.

94 In the *Ihyā'*, the *Risāla al-Laduniyya* (198) and the *Ma'arij al-Quds* al-Ghazālī convincingly answers these questions in the negative. Even *Tahāfut* (20th Discussion) gives us an indication of this. Consider the following statement from the *Ihyā'*: "… death does not destroy the substrate of the knowledge of God. Its locus is the spirit which

a body once you see it as something base[95] and evil,[96] and once you regard the human rational soul in its immanence as something perfect?[97] The situation must be as M. Smith describes it: "the death of the body means for the soul only a return to the state in which it was before it was abased".[98]

But the natural immortality of the soul, in any event, is crucially linked with a perception of the soul as an intellectual essence categorically distinct from the natural realm. It is immortal, as Plato contends in the *Phaedo,* for instance, because it is determined by a divine element which is not at home in this world of bodies, but rather wants to return to its eternal home in the world of forms. In short, the human being is fundamentally an intellectual substance, a mental entity. One can find the echoes of this underlying conviction from Avicenna's "flying man" argument up to Husserl's meditations on "worldless ego" and on "pure consciousness." Most presumably, the intellectualism of the Western tradition has its roots in the Platonic notion of the soul, which later gave rise to the idea of subject and to an understanding of world based on the subject-object model. It is interesting in this context to note that Sartre, in the *L'Être et le Néant*, argues that the fundamental project that defines humans is the project of being a complete, separate and self-sufficient entity ("subject"), which is actually the project of becoming God (which is, he holds, inherently contradictory and therefore leads to "nausea"). For Heidegger, this is the historical project ("humanism") that determines the Western tradition. In the making of Western understanding of man (i.e., as subject), Heidegger holds, the Christian doctrine of *imago dei*, the belief that man is created in the image of God,[99] played a key role. The result is Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, who is to conquer the center that was once occupied by God. We might conclude that the idea and ideal of subject-hood involves measuring human beings against the parameters which apply to God, and are fundamentally alien to the very character of being human. This might make us more sensitive to certain aspects of al-Ghazālī's thought which attributes our striving to become like God to our inherent nature as rational beings;[100] that is, as beings created in the form of God. Our inborn resemblance to God belongs to our

is a divine and heavenly thing. Death alters only its circumstances, death frees it from its captivity, but as for annihilating it? Absolutely not!" *Ihyā'*, 4:327. Quoted in Ormsby, *Al-Ghazālī*, 138.

95 *Mishkāt,* 7.

96 *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 193.

97 See *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 193-94.

98 Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazālī: The Mystic* (London: Luzac & Co., 1944), 145.

99 Genesis 1:26.

100 *Mishkāt,* 6.

essence and its actualization signifies the vocation of the human being as god's *khalīfa* on the earth. Also significant, in this context, is the crucial ethical maxim, "*al-takhulluq bi-akhlāk Allāh*."[101] Al-Ghazālī addresses this problem in several places. In the *Highest Goal* (*Al-Maqsad al-Asnā*), he responds to it in a typically Avicennian manner; there is an absolute, unbridgeable difference between God and the created in that while God is *wājib al-wujūd*, all other beings are contingent and dependent on God for their existence.[102] There is a sense in which the human similarity to God remains a matter of infinite approximation. In fact, al-Ghazālī is profoundly aware of this danger of "humanism"; he not only rejects any notion of self-subsistence and self-ownership, but he also asserts forcefully that the human being is only a mirror of divine properties, and not the real owner of any property.[103] Even though defined principally by rationality, being human consists in utter poverty which undergirds his ultimate vocation on the earth, namely servant-hood to God. He also adds that the only (albeit inadequate) way to know God is to depart from the resemblance that exists between our own human states and those of God (e.g., power and knowledge).[104] It is imperative to cultivate the angelic (rational) side in us in opposition to the animal (corporeal) one, since the former involves proximity to the divine.[105] It is reasonable to conclude that our truly human side, as our rational side, is a disembodied level. The quest incumbent upon all humans is the actualization of this potentiality which is the actualization of our humanity. Thereby, we actualize nothing but our likeness with the Divine. But this, if I have understood correctly, is no different from Avicenna and means interpreting the human being on the basis of the ideal of a perfected (disembodied) rationality as full subject-hood. To the extent that al-Ghazālī thinks of human being in this framework, his thought seems to belong to the wider context of the Western tradition. If there is something deeply problematic in this project (e.g., intellectualism), that is, if the presuppositions of this view of the human being as disembodied subjectivity entail a deep misinterpretation of who we are, then al-Ghazālī's

101 This maxim is a weak hadith. Plato in the *Theaetetus* (176b) sets the highest goal of human life as *homoiosis to theo* and similarly Aristotle in the *Nichomachean Ethics* (10th Book) urges that even if we will never be like God we should try to be like God as far as possible, with a life based on *theoria*. The Muslim philosophical tradition (from Avicenna to Mulla Sadra) follows this ethical understanding almost entirely by recognizing *tashabbuh bi'l wajīb al-wujūd* as the ultimate basis of human life and of philosophical activity alike. Al-Ghazālī can be seen as echoing this same line of thinking.

102 *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 35.

103 *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 153-54.

104 *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 39.

105 *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, 33-34, 43.

account also appears to be infected with this misinterpretation. Crucial here is al-Ghazālī's conviction that the human essence as an immaterial substance has similarities with God's nature. [106]

It is strange that al-Ghazālī's thought, albeit with some striking tensions (as discussed above), fits this major tendency of the Western tradition, which relies on the primacy of consciousness and on the ideal of the fullness of being, as regards the human, meaning and being.[107] As we saw, al-Ghazālī conceives of human essence as a spiritual substance that operates as distinct from and in antagonism with the corporeal and external world. How does al-Ghazālī conceive of *jawhar* (substance)? In the Kalami sense, in the Aristotelian sense, in the Neo-Platonic sense or in the Avicennian sense?[108] Each, despite affinities, can reveal subtle differences as well. In *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī seems to consider the non-Kalami sense as ontological independence (*al-qiyām bi al-nafs*).[109] In the 18th Discussion, he addresses the question of whether the human soul is a substance in this sense. His answer is in the affirmative, namely that "the soul's essence is self-subsistent substance;"[110] this, he says, is verified by the revelation, but reason cannot pretend to establish this argument without the aid of revelation.[111] I think

106 Maha Elkaisy-Freimuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought: Abd al-Jabbār, Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī* (London/New York: Routledge, 2006), 121.

107 The primacy of consciousness (the intellectual) and the ideal or desire of fullness of being go hand in hand and are inseparable from one another; eventually they become unified in the modern notion of subject, from Descartes up to Hegel. We may read Plato's *Symposium* as one of the earliest and the most striking testimonies for this *telos* of Western tradition.

108 In the *Risāla al-Laduniyya*, al-Ghazālī indicates that *jawhar* (substance) is understood differently by different groups of people, that is, by philosophers, Sufis and *mutakallimūn*, but he refrains from discussing these differences (*Risāla al-Laduniyya*, 2). Most probably, he espouses the Sufi sense of the term, but it is hard to see what kind of differences in meaning might exist between the Sufi and the philosophical interpretation.

109 *Tahāfut*, 5.

110 *Tahāfut*, 181.

111 *Tahāfut*, 181-82. However, in another place in the *Tahāfut* (19th Discussion) al-Ghazālī espouses the view that without a body, the soul cannot have reality. Leor Halevi wonders whether this is not an obvious contradiction. He attributes this fact, which "leaves us in the dark about al-Ghazālī's belief" to "the nature of the text" (38). For Halevi, the whole strategy of the *Tahāfut* consists in deploying skeptical games against the naive self-confidence of the claims of metaphysical speculation; it is in fact, "an ecclectic work of theological scepticism" (38). See Leor Halevi, "The Theologian's Doubts: Natural Philosophy and the Skeptical Games of Ghazālī", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 63/1 (2002): 19-39. If Halevi is right, the *Tahāfut* must be re-interpreted in line with the (functional) skepticism al-Ghazālī practices. But, taken on the whole, it might be more worthwhile to see al-Ghazālī's wavering here as signalling a tension in his thought about the nature of soul, as suggested above.

this conclusion should be combined with another point made in the *Tahāfut*, the point that "… knowledge is one of the *dhātī* (essential) attributes of the soul and the essential attributes are included with the essence in every relation."[112] Also important is the sudden change of position in the 20th Discussion, where, as Frank Griffel notices, "he openly concedes the point that the soul may be incorporeal, self-subsisting, and incorruptible."[113] Arguably, this view of the soul constitutes the background (the hidden center) of al-Ghazālī's thought after *Tahāfut* in a crucial way.[114] We could even add that *Munqidh*'s entire strategy of doubt becomes intelligible against the backdrop of this notion of the self as self-subsistent intellectual substance, or, in other words, disembodied subjectivity.[115] That being said, one thing seems to be clear; al-Ghazālī is no longer operating in the traditional Kalami sense, in so far as the latter views the soul to be merely an accident of the body, something basically material (*jism latīf* /a subtle body). Actually, it is quite reasonable to assume that al-Ghazālī retains the idea of the "atom", but turns it into something incorporeal in the case of soul, which is to say that the soul now becomes an incorporeal and perpetual atom/substance

112 *Tahāfut*, 202.

113 Frank Griffel, review of *al-Ghazālī's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul* by Timothy Gianotti, *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 124/1 (2004): 110.

114 In the *Mihaqq al-Nazar*, al-Ghazālī lists three opinions about soul and discusses them ("6. Imtihan"). This section of the text leaves one with the impression that al-Ghazālī has found an answer about the nature of soul, but consciously avoids expressing it because he believes that religion does not allow it (referring to the Qur'an, 17/85). However, he is also sure that an understanding of the soul is quite important for the religion; one who does not know *nafs*/*rūh* does not know himself (and thus cannot know God). This same conscious reluctance or vagueness in making clear his position about the human soul is evident in the *'Ajāib al-Qalb* (one of the key books of the *Ihyā'*), as well (Janssens, "Al-Ghazālī between Philosophy and Sufism", 619). But this "unrevealed" view of the soul functions pervasively in the background and determines the key points made in the text. Janssens suggests that his view of the soul in the *'Ajāib al-Qalb* appears really to be Avicennian at each point. I believe that a close look at the "6. Imtihān" of the *Mihaqq al-Nazar* should lead us to the conclusion that al-Ghazālī's unrevealed view can be none other than the philosophical view (as "the view of the elites"), namely the view of the soul as incorporeal self-subsistent substance. For Kojiro Nakamura, al-Ghazālī held two different positions concerning soul; one is the public position (Kalami/Asharite view) and the other is the private one, namely the philosophical view (the view of the elites). See "Was Ghazālī an Asharite?", *The Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko*, 51 (1993): 16-18.

115 al-Ghazālī's case against authority and tradition, and the whole process of doubt ensuing thereupon in the *Munqidh* gives us a glimpse of this underlying framework. Surely, he assumes that there must be an ultimate level of consciousness detached from history and culture and upon this level genuine faith should be pursued, if it is not to be a mere imitation (*taqlīd*).

that rules over a realm of corporeal accidents. At a more precise point, each person is a spiritual atom.[116]

It may also be necessary to distinguish al-Ghazālī's position concerning the soul from Neoplatonism and even from Avicenna. For al-Ghazālī, it seems evident that each person has an individual *rūh* (spirit) that constitutes the very identity of that person. As indicated, the body is never sufficient to serve the much-needed function of individuation, which is basically something spiritual and given prior to all experience. It is also equally clear that the traditional Asharite atomism cannot account for the individuation of persons. This implies that the basis of individuation must be sought at a purely internal/spiritual level.[117] Further, for the diachronic personal identity the consciousness and belief contents must be part of who a person is. So what differentiates Zayd from Amr must also involve some acquired moral-cognitive content or build-up of individual consciousness (say, "belief structure").[118] al-Ghazālī does this by treating *'ilm* (consciousness/knowledge) as an intrinsic attribute of the soul, and thus as something required for individuation. Then *'ilm* not only means consciousness, but, more importantly, also self-consciousness. For Avicenna, by contrast, the soul itself cannot serve the function of individuation and ultimately is not something individual.

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116 al-Ghazālī unequivocally asserts in the *Ihyā'*: "The intellect does not change by death. What changes is the body and its members. The dead man thinks, perceives and knows pains and joys, since nothing of the intellect changes. The perceiving intellect is not of these members. It is something hidden (*bātin*) and has neither length nor width. It is that which cannot be divided in itself, and that which is the perceiver of things. If the bodily members of a mana re all scatttered and do not remain except the cognitive part that cannot be divided (*al-juz' al-mudrik alladhī lā yatajazza'u wa lā yankasimu*), then the thinking man remains completely. So does it after death, since that part does not dissolve by death and does not go out of existence" (IV, the *Ihyā'*, 4 vols, Cairo: Isa 'l Babi 'l Halabi, 487. Quoted in Nakamura, "Was Ghazālī an Asharite?", 18). Please note that these last sentences imply that the body is entirely irrelevant to the essence of humanity.

117 For a clear indication, consider the following passage from the *Arba'īn*: "(Though your body perishes by death, you yourself remain.) That is to say, your essence by which you are yourself remains. For you are at present the same person who was in your childhood. Perhaps nothing of these bodily parts remains [up till now]. They have all resolved and been substituted by others through nourishment, and your body has totally changed, while you remain yourself" (*Kitāb al-Arba'īn fī Usūl al-Dīn*, Cairo: Al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrā, 1925, 282. Quoted in Nakamura, "Was Ghazālī an Asharite?", 18).

118 This also invites comparison to Descartes' presuppositions about individuation. Obviously, for Descartes the body is irrelavant to personal identity. For a useful discussion, see Udo Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 35-61.

At issue also is the concept of an afterlife as an article of faith, which seems to demand the individuality of human beings as an essential fact. al-Ghazālī, I think, is prepared to acknowledge that this intrinsic individuality of the human soul, above all, requires us to ascribe some sort of autonomy to human agency in order to keep the individuals genuinely responsible for what they do or do not do. Indeed, if we are justified here in judging al-Ghazālī in view of this line of argument concerning the human soul, then it becomes apparent that he has to presuppose autonomy; metaphysically, his view of human essence (rational substance and "its kingdom"[119] over the cognitive faculties, the body and physical objects) leads to ontological independence which, in turn, means autonomy (as a gift of God).[120] Yet, as a matter of fact, we do not find in al-Ghazālī any explicit discourse of human agency along the lines that we find in the Mu'tazila. Rather, he carefully avoids evoking Mu'tazilite associations in the reader. At this point, attention should be called to Frank Griffel's observation that al-Ghazālī frequently resorts to the language used by Mu'tazilites in *al-Maqsad al-Asnā*, in the context of explaining human agency in relation to God (by the famous simile of the water clock); this revolves around words such as *wld* (generate), which suggest that human beings create their own actions and the immediate results.[121] In addition, it is a curious fact about al-Ghazālī that he sometimes draws ideas from the rival schools against which he bitterly disputes in public. al-Ghazālī's relationship with the Mutazila might be more complex than we know. Suffice it to note that what he says about human essence is more in tune with a notion of human agency as described by Mutazilite thinkers. Nonetheless, one can make the case that this autonomy need not squarely clash with Asharite occasionalism. In the *Tahāfut,* al-Ghazālī provides us with a concise idea about what he understands by agency; "The agent is an expression [referring] to one from whom the act proceeds, together with the will to act by way of choice and the knowledge of what is willed".[122] God creates/presents a set of alternatives for the human being to choose from; as a human agent (*fā'il* as *mukhtār*), with the human's temporarily created power, they select to will a specific act in accordance with their knowledge or beliefs.[123] Indeed, al-Ghazālī's occasionalist descriptions in

119 *Mishkāt,* 6, 8, 2; *The Ninenty-Nine Names of God,* 139-40.

120 See also *The Ninenty-Nine Names of God*, 57-59. Al-Ghazālī notes here: "this kingship is a gift to man from the true king… [it] lies in being free and able to dispense with everything" (59).

121 Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 239-40.

122 *Tahāfut*, 56.

123 Likewise, al-Ghazālī sums up in the *al-Iqtisād* (2. *maqsad*, 1. *mas'ala*) that God's power creates both the action and the power of man. This created power, in turn, produces the created action.

Ihyā'[124] can reinforce the impression that he thinks that the human self resides as a detached atom/substance, as it were, in a closed non-physical dimension, from which things can be related only through acts that are willed or chosen by a power momentarily created by God for the human being; that is, the acts are created only by God's occasionalist intervention or mediation. It follows that the soul's relationship to the body, like the relationship of a user to a tool, is something mediated.[125] Thus, it is not a mere coincidence that occasionalism appeared to be attractive to the Cartesian world-picture in the thought of a Malebranche.

Given all this, we should wonder whether the Kalami background of al-Ghazālī's thought played a serious role in his pushing the Avicennian psychology to a more radical level, i.e., to the notion of atomic incorporeal substance, a thesis which will later appear to be Descartes' point of departure as a whole. This Kalami background might again have proved functional for al-Ghazālī in resolving the seeming tension in *Mishkāt* (and elsewhere) between the notion of substantial self and the view that God alone has *huwiyyah* (identity), that nothing but God has existence. It is not only that the human ontological independence is a gift from God (i.e., mediated in each case by God's power) and rests on God, but also that this gift of autonomy makes God's ontological independence something intelligible to us. We understand that God is the sole agent in and *mālik* of the universe[126] by measuring it with our relationship to what is external to us. At any rate, our likeness with God is the basis of attaining an understanding of revealed truths, the mysteries of divine nature. As he clearly asserts:

> No one can understand a king but a king; therefore God has made each of us a king in miniature, so to speak, over a kingdom which is an infinitely reduced copy of His own. In the kingdom of man God's "throne" is represented by the soul; the Archangel by the heart, "the chair" by the brain, the "tablet" by the treasure chamber of thought. The soul, itself, unlocated and

124 For a useful elucidation, see Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 216-21. Also important is Thérèse-Anne Druart's article "al-Ghazālī's Conception of the Agent in the *Tahāfut* and the *al-Iqtisād*: Are People Really Agents?", *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. James E. Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 427–40.

125 Indeed al-Ghazālī in numerous places likens the relationship between body and soul to the relationship between user and tool. I can use a tool whenever I wish or need, but certainly before using a tool I am free to consider using it; I may not use it at all. Its usage is accidental and secondary to my being as I am. This user-tool model, then, suggests a sharp dualism between soul and body. Occasionalism mentioned above makes this dualism even sharper.

126 See *Mishkāt*, 15, par. 39.

> indivisible, governs the body as God governs the universe. In short, each of us is entrusted with a little kingdom, and charged not to be careless in the administration of it.[127]

It is also clear from the above that al-Ghazālī does not perceive the notion of substance in the sense that Aristotle did. Aristotle understands substance (*ousia*) in terms of the criteria of *khoriston*/separateness (*Categories*, 2a11) and *tode ti*/thisness (*Categories*, 3b10).[128] In Aristotle's thought, however, the soul does not appear as a separate substance; the human is a composite of body and soul, and soul is the form of the body. Thus, the soul is substance only as the form/functionality of an organic body, not as something intelligible when taken separately from the body. The human soul is *hypokeimeneon* (*mahal*) for the activity of thinking/knowing done ultimately by a pure and separate divine agency, what Aristotle calls *nous*. Put in modern terms, it is, as it were, a hardware designed for receiving software, the ultimate origin of which is the pure activity of *nous*. Among living beings, only the organic structure of the human is receptive to meaning; this, in turn, distinguishes the human being from all nature. Mankind is *zoon logon echon*. Here there is no inner-outer dichotomy. Likewise, the soul cannot be viewed via the principal permanence of consciousness.[129] Within the broader spectrum of the functions of the soul, being conscious of something as a momentary occurrence or process of attending something arises either practically (in response to a matter, *pragma*, in life which invites consideration and deliberation) or theoretically, out of *aporia*, i.e., out of wonder (*thaumezein*). In both cases, consciousness can be construed only as the activity of coming to an awareness of certain *phainomena* under attention, as illuminated by the divine activity of *nous*. The modern notion of the subject as an atomic, independent, self-contained agent standing in opposition to a world of objects (external world) is surely a far cry from what Aristotle intended originally with the word *hypokeimenon* (although, without much difficulty, it lends itself to al-Ghazālī's standpoint). The same is

127 *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 19.

128 But it is a matter of scholarly consensus that the *Categories* belongs to the early period of Aristotle's philosophical development. Aristotle's mature ontological position is based on the idea of hylomorphism, which is not mentioned in the *Categories* and does not really fit its scheme. Hylomorphism requires that the substances of the senses (which include "human beings" as well) are not separate and thus we can speak of their ontological independence only in a qualified sense. Aristotle's ontological reflections culminate in what he calls *theologia*, that is, an exploration into the separate substance, the divine substance (*theos*) which forms the focus of the 12th book of the *Metaphysics*.

129 Aristotle even did not have a word for "consciousness". One of the reasons was that he avoided the soul-body dualism and is not therefore compelled to view humanity by excluding the corporeal.

also true for the notion of *ousia*, which the Medievals translated (poorly) as *jawhar* and *substantia*, and later, with modern philosophy, was used to define the very structure of thinking subject. In light of these points, it follows that for Aristotle (1) the human is mortal by nature and (2) disembodied subjectivity is, in principle, irrelevant because the body belongs to the essence of being human. In the Muslim tradition, it was Averroes who followed in the footsteps of these and similar insights in Aristotle's ontology, trying thus to bring Aristotle into harmony with the Islamic world-view.

Concluding Remarks

In the first section, we discussed al-Ghazālī's spatial understanding of the human being, while in the second we contrasted it with an understanding of the human being as a spiritual and rational substance, as a self-subsistent immanence. While the former involves an experience of the human beings' relation to the divine in terms of exteriority and receptivity, the latter requires an introspective concentration on the inner life of the mind in order to cultivate the interiority that belongs to the rational substance, a project defined in opposition to the evils of the body and the external life of the world, a project of purification from anything external. This project finds its highest realization in the attainment of *yaqīn* (certainty as freedom from doubt) as the true meaning of *īmān*. We saw that *Mishkāt al-Anwār* contains both views of the human being. Then to expand this thesis we had recourse to some other texts belonging to al-Ghazālī. Actually, al-Ghazālī's placing inner experience at the center of religion is characteristic of his position as a whole. As is well-known, *Ihyā'* begins with a treatise on knowledge entitled *Kitāb al 'Ilm*. One should notice the pivotal importance of knowledge as well as mind for al-Ghazālī's renowned attempt at "reviving the religion".[130] But, on closer inspection, it appears that he understands knowledge in a renewed sense; he complains of the '*ulūm al-dunyā* and demands sciences that can enable us to prepare for the *ākhira*. He claims that both *fiqh* and *kalām* have become worldly sciences. A negation and denouncement of this world and an urging for the other world mark the *Ihyā'*. Knowledge of the other world ('*ilm al ākhira*), which now comes to be the primary form of all knowledge, appears to be the sort of knowledge that indicates a Sufi way of life, a knowledge that

130 Again, this priority of knowledge and mind refers to a deep affinity with Descartes' epistemological starting-point. Yet there is a profound difference as well. Part of this difference can be understood with reference to J. Maritain's charge against Descartes that he reduced "clarity in itself to clarity for us" (*Art and Scholasticism*, part V, fn 1). For al-Ghazālī, clarity cannot be exhausted by the subjective sources of the knowing subject. It has an inspired (divine) origin.

prescribes an ascetic and introspective understanding and practice of Islam. *Fitra*, for instance, is now understood as innate knowledge that needs to be recollected/ purified. While *'ilm al-ākhira* (as *'ilm al-bātin*) is required for a full cultivation of spiritual inwardness, *'ulūm al-dunyā* deal with the exteriorities of this fleeting and essentially futile worldly life. We are told that the world is a bad place and that the source of all evil lies precisely in the love of this world. Expressed in Sufi terminology, the sort of knowledge al-Ghazālī has in mind is the knowledge of *qalb* or *rūh*, as a separate essence that does not really belong to this life and which needs salvation from the calamities of this earthly existence. Religiosity turns into an inner-oriented, introspective struggle and search for "purification" that is understood as being freed from the ills associated with the multi-layered entanglements with the exterior life of a bodily existence, i.e. with this world (*dunyā*). Perhaps we should understand one aspect of the reaction against al-Ghazālī's thought, among the Muslim intelligentsia (from the Nishapuri controversy and the reaction in al Andalus up to Ibn al Taymiyya) against this background.

Hence if one can speak of a Ghazālīan transformation of Muslim piety, it consists in al-Ghazālī's over-emphasis on interiority, on "the treasure house of the mind and its reasoning faculties".[131] As we discussed above, this is basically related to the dualism he adopts in relation to man. It is to be expected that body (together with the external world) appears, in this context, inessential and even hostile. Within the context of an inner-outer dichotomy, salvation is sought in a reflexive or introspective search, in an endless self-scrutiny. The interior truth of Islam is sharply distinguished from and elevated above the exterior one. This truth then requires the purification of our interior selves by means of a self-discipline, which in turn means a struggle against the bodily. To keep our inner intentional realm as pure as possible, a deliverance from natural desires is necessary. This deliverance prepares and makes possible direct vision (*dhawk* or *mukāshafa*), the highest instance of truth. Truth mandates a life of asceticism and, to the same extent, a life of inner watchfulness. Eyes must be kept away from anything external and focus must be on the immediacy of the internal, on the inner life of the self. To be near to God the Ghazālīan pious must shut his eyes as firmly as possible. Obviously, al-Ghazālī considers the mystic to be in possession of the privileged experience of truth that transcends reason ("private truth"), which cannot be translated into ordinary discourse and which, therefore, must not be subjected to the public criteria of truth (unless, of course, it explicitly transgresses the *sharī'a*),

131 *Ninety-Nine Names of God in Islam*, trans. R. C. Stade (Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1970), 110. Here I follow Stade's translation of the *Maqsad*, rather than Burrell's.

save through a special kind of interpretation (*ta'wīl*).[132] This direct vision does not mean a negation of rational truths, but represents their perfection.[133] This private spiritual experience alone concerns with the inner essence (*lubb*) of things, while all others remain on the surface (*qishr*). Without a doubt, al-Ghazālī was chiefly responsible for one of the characteristic features of the later orthodox Muslim piety; an overriding emphasis on inwardness. Like the Platonic or the Cartesian soul, the Ghazālīan soul (*rūh*), too, has no place in this world and remains a foreigner.

Gazzâlî ve İnsan Sorunu: *Mişkātü'l-Envâr*'a Özel Bir Vurguyla

Bu makalede, Gazzâlî'nin insan tasavvurunu ve bu tasavvurun Gazzâlî'nin tüm bir epistemolojik ve metafizik projesi açısından imalarını inceliyorum. Gazzâlî'de iki ayrı insan görüşünün bulunduğunu savunuyorum; mekansal ve tözsel insan görüşü. Ayrıca, İbn Sînâ'nın etkisi altında Gazzâlî'nin son tahlilde tözsel görüşe kaydığını ileri sürüyorum. Bu bağlamda, öte yandan, Gazzâlî'nin gerçekleştirdiği sentezde bazı hayati Kelâmî (Eş'arî) unsurların da bulunduğunu göstermeye çalışıyorum. Söz konusu sentez klasik-dönem sonrası Müslüman dünyayı karakterize eden başat dindarlık formunun temelinde yatmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Gazzâlî, insani öz, nefs, ışık, töz, bilgi, içsellik.

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132 For example, see *Mishkāt*, 22; *The Ninety-Nine Names of God*, 157. In fact, private truth is simply a natural outcome of al-Ghazālī's discourse on the interior truth of Islam (realized supremely in the Sufi practice) as distinct and more fundamental than the exterior ones (including rational truths). Any notion of "private truth" rests on the assumption that there can be a truth which is independent of a historical and public world of intelligibility. A discussion of this issue in relation to Wittgenstein's "private language argument" (*Philosophical Investigations*, pars 243-315) would be interesting, since, presumably, thus-conceived truth presupposes the possibility of a private language, granted that there is an interdependence between truth and language.

133 Cf. Elkaisy-Freimuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought*, 120-21, 151.