

# **Abū Hāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī**

"Deliverance from Error"  
*(al-Munqidh min ad-Dalāl)*

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DELIVERANCE FROM ERROR

AND ATTACHMENT TO THE LORD OF MIGHT AND MAJESTY

*In the name of God, the Merciful and Compassionate*

I. INTRODUCTION

Praise be to Him with Whose praise every message and every discourse commences. And blessings be upon Muhammad the Chosen, the Prophet and Messenger, and on his house and his Companions, who guide men away from error.

You have asked me my brother in religion, to show you the aims and inmost nature of the sciences and the perplexing depths of the religious systems. You have begged me to relate to you the difficulties I encountered in my attempt to extricate the truth from the confusion of contending sects and to distinguish the different ways and methods, and the venture I made in climbing from the plain of naive and second-hand belief (taqlīd) to the peak of direct vision. You want me to describe, firstly what profit I derived from the science of theology (kalām) secondly, what I disapprove of in the methods of the party of ta'lim (authoritative instruction), who restrict the apprehension of truth to the blind following (taqlīd) of the Imam, thirdly, what I rejected of the methods of philosophy, and lastly, what I approved in the Sufi way of life. You would know, too, what essential truths became clear to me in my manifold investigations into the doctrines held by men, why I gave up teaching in Baghdad although I had many students, and why I returned to it at Naysābūr (Nīshāpūr) after a long interval. I am proceeding to answer your request, for I recognise that your desire is genuine. In this I seek the help of God and trust in Him; I ask His succour and take refuge with Him. 66

You must know— may God most high perfect you in the right way and soften your hearts to receive the truth— that the different religious observances and religious communities of the human race and likewise the different theological systems of the religious leaders, with all the multiplicity of sects and variety of practices, constitute ocean depths in which the majority drown and only a minority reach safety. Each separate group thinks that it alone is saved, and 'each party is rejoicing in what they have' (Q. 23, 55; 30, 31). This is what was foretold by the prince of the Messengers (God bless him), who is true and trustworthy, when he said, 'My community will be split up into seventy-three sects, and but one of them is saved'; and what he foretold has indeed almost come about. 67

From my early youth, since I attained the age of puberty before I was twenty, until the present time when I am over fifty, I have ever recklessly launched out into the midst of these ocean depths, I have ever bravely embarked on this open sea, throwing aside all craven caution; I have poked into every dark recess, I have made an assault on every problem, I have plunged into every abyss, I have scrutinized the creed of every sect, I have tried to lay bare the inmost doctrines of every community. All this have I done that I might distinguish between true and false, between sound tradition and heretical innovation. Whenever I meet one of the Bātinīyah, I like to study his creed; whenever I meet one of the Zāhirīyah, I want to know the essentials of his belief. If it is a philosopher, I try to become acquainted with the essence of his philosophy; if a scholastic theologian I busy myself in examining his theological reasoning; if a Sufi, I yearn to fathom the secret of his mysticism; if an ascetic (*muta'abbid*), I investigate the basis of his ascetic practices; if one of the 68

Zanādiqah or Mu'attilah, I look beneath the surface to discover the reasons for his bold adoption of such a creed.

To thirst after a comprehension of things as they really are was my habit and custom from a very early age. It was instinctive with me, a part of my God-given nature, a matter of temperament and not of my choice or contriving. Consequently as I drew near the age of adolescence the bonds of mere authority (*taqlīd*) ceased to hold me and inherited beliefs lost their grip upon me, for I saw that Christian youths always grew up to be Christians, Jewish youths to be Jews and Muslim youths to be Muslims. I heard, too, the Tradition related of the Prophet of God according to which he said: 'Everyone who is born is born with a sound nature;<sup>1</sup> it is his parents who make him a Jew or a Christian or a Magian'. My inmost being was moved to discover what this original nature really was and what the beliefs derived from the authority of parents and teachers really were. The attempt to distinguish between these authority-based opinions and their principles developed the mind, for in distinguishing the true in them from the false differences appeared.

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I therefore said within myself: 'To begin with, what I am looking for is knowledge of what things really are, so I must undoubtedly try to find what knowledge really is.' It was plain to me that sure and certain knowledge is that knowledge in which the object is disclosed in such a fashion that no doubt remains along with it, that no possibility of error or illusion accompanies it, and that the mind cannot even entertain such a supposition. Certain knowledge must also be infallible; and this infallibility or security from error is such that no attempt to show the falsity of the knowledge can occasion doubt or denial, even though the attempt is made by someone who turns stones into gold or a rod into a serpent. Thus, I know that ten is more than three. Let us suppose that someone says to me: 'No, three is more than ten, and in proof of that I shall change this rod into a serpent'; and let us suppose that he actually changes the rod into a serpent and that I witness him doing so. No doubts about what I know are raised in me because of this. The only result is that I wonder precisely how he is able to produce this change. Of doubt about my knowledge there is no trace.

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After these reflections I knew that whatever I do not know in this fashion and with this mode of certainty is not reliable and infallible knowledge; and knowledge that is not infallible is not certain knowledge.

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## II. PRELIMINARIES: SCEPTICISM AND THE DENIAL OF ALL KNOWLEDGE

Thereupon I investigated the various kinds of knowledge I had, and found myself destitute of all knowledge with this characteristic of infallibility except in the case of sense-perception and necessary truths. So I said: 'Now that despair has come over me, there is no point in taking problems except in the sphere of what is self-evident, namely, necessary truths and the affirmations of the senses. I must first bring these to be judged in order that I may be certain on this matter. Is my reliance on sense-perception and my trust in the soundness of necessary truths of the same kind as my previous trust in the beliefs I had merely taken over from others and as the trust most men have in the results of thinking? Or is it a justified trust that is in no danger of being betrayed or destroyed'?

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I proceeded therefore with extreme earnestness to reflect on sense-perception and on necessary truths, to see whether I could make myself doubt them. The outcome of this protracted effort to induce doubt was that I could no longer trust sense-perception either. Doubt began to spread here and say: 'From where does

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<sup>1</sup> The interpretation of this tradition has been much discussed; cp. art. *Fitra* by D. B. Macdonald in EI. The above meaning appears to be that adopted by al-Ghazālī.

this reliance on sense-perception come? The most powerful sense is that of sight. Yet when it looks at the shadow (*sc.* of a stick or the gnomon of a sundial), it sees it standing still, and judges that there is no motion. Then by experiment and observation after an hour it knows that the shadow is moving and, moreover, that it is moving not by fits and starts but gradually and steadily by infinitely small distances in such a way that it is never in a state of rest. Again, it looks at the heavenly body (*sc.* the sun) and sees it small, the size of a shilling;<sup>2</sup> yet geometrical computations show that it is greater than the earth in size'.

In this and similar cases of sense-perception the sense as judge forms his judgements, but another judge, the intellect, shows him to be wrong in such a way that the charge of falsity cannot be rebutted.

To this I said: 'My reliance on sense-perception also has been destroyed. Perhaps only those intellectual truths which are first principles (or derived from first principles) are to be relied upon, such as the assertion that ten are more than three, that the same thing cannot be both affirmed and denied at one time, that one thing is not both generated in time and eternal, nor both existent and non-existent, nor both necessary and impossible'.

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Sense-perception replied: 'Do you not expect that your reliance on intellectual truths will fare like your reliance on sense-perception? You used to trust in me; then along came the intellect-judge and proved me wrong; if it were not for the intellect-judge you would have continued to regard me as true. Perhaps behind intellectual apprehension there is another judge who, if he manifests himself, will show the falsity of intellect in its judging, just as, when intellect manifested itself, it showed the falsity of sense in its judging. The fact that such a supra-intellectual apprehension has not manifested itself is no proof that it is impossible'.

My ego hesitated a little about the reply to that, and sense-perception heightened the difficulty by referring to dreams. 'Do you not see', it said, 'how, when you are asleep you believe things and imagine circumstances, holding them to be stable and enduring, and, so long as you are in that dream-condition, have no doubts about them? And is it not the case that when you awake you know that all you have imagined and believed is unfounded and ineffectual? Why then are you confident that all your waking beliefs, whether from sense or intellect, are genuine? They are true in respect of your present state; but it is possible that a state will come upon you whose relation to your waking consciousness is analogous to the relation of the latter to dreaming. In comparison with this state your waking consciousness would be like dreaming! When you have entered into this state, you will be certain that all the suppositions of your intellect are empty imaginings. It may be that that state is what the Sufis claim as their special 'state' (*sc.* mystic union or ecstasy), for they consider that in their 'states' (or ecstasies), which occur when they have withdrawn into themselves and are absent from their senses, they witness states (or circumstances) which do not tally with these principles of the intellect. Perhaps that 'state' is death; for the Messenger of God (God bless and preserve him) says: 'The people are dreaming; when they die, they become awake'. So perhaps life in this world is a dream by comparison with the world to come; and when a man dies, things come to appear differently to him from what he now beholds, and at the same time the words are addressed to him: 'We have taken off thee thy covering, and thy sight today is sharp' (Q. 50, 21).

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When these thoughts had occurred to me and penetrated my being, I tried to find some way of treating my unhealthy condition; but it was not easy. Such ideas can only be repelled by demonstration; but a demonstration needs a combination of first principles; since this is not admitted, however, it is impossible to make the demonstration. The disease was baffling, and lasted almost two months, during which I was a sceptic in fact though not in theory nor in outward expression. At length God cured me of the malady; my

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<sup>2</sup> Literally dīnār.

being was restored to health and an even balance; the necessary truths of the intellect became once more accepted, as I regained confidence in their certain and trustworthy character.

This did not come about by systematic demonstration or marshalled argument, but by a light which God most high cast into my breast. That light is the key to the greater part of knowledge. Whoever thinks that the understanding of things Divine rests upon strict proofs has in his thought narrowed down the wideness of God's mercy. When the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) was asked about 'enlarging' (*sharh*) and its meaning in the verse, 'Whenever God wills to guide a man, He enlarges his breast for *islām* (i.e. surrender to God)' (Q. 6, 125), he said, 'It is a light which God most high casts into the heart'. When asked, 'What is the sign of it?', he said, 'Withdrawal from the mansion of deception and return to the mansion of eternity.' It was about this light that Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, 'God created the creatures in darkness, and then sprinkled upon them some of His light.' From that light must be sought an intuitive understanding of things Divine. That light at certain times gushes from the spring of Divine generosity, and for it one must watch and wait— as Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: 'In the days of your age your Lord has gusts of favour; then place yourselves in the way of them'.

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The point of these accounts is that the task is perfectly fulfilled when the quest is prosecuted up to the stage of seeking what is not sought (but stops short of that). For first principles are not sought, since they are present and to hand; and if what is present is sought for, it becomes hidden and lost. When, however, a man seeks what is sought (and that only), he is not accused of falling short in the seeking of what is sought.

### III. THE CLASSES OF SEEKERS

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When God by His grace and abundant generosity cured me of this disease, I came to regard the various seekers (*sc.* after truth) as comprising four groups:—

(1) the *Theologians* (*mutakallimūn*), who claim that they are the exponents of thought and intellectual speculation;

(2) the *Bātinīyah*, who consider that they, as the party of 'authoritative instruction' (*ta'lim*), alone derive truth from the infallible *imam*;

(3) the *Philosophers*, who regard themselves as the exponents of logic and demonstration;

(4) the *Sufis or Mystics*, who claim that they alone enter into the 'presence' (*sc.* of God), and possess vision and intuitive understanding.

I said within myself: 'The truth cannot be outside these four classes. These are the people who tread the paths of the quest for truth. If the truth is not with them, no point remains in trying to apprehend the truth. There is certainly no point in trying to return to the level of naive and derivative belief (*taqlid*) once it has been left., since a condition of being at such a level is that one should not know one is there; when a man comes to know that, the glass of his naive beliefs is broken. This is a breakage which cannot be mended, a breakage not to be repaired by patching or by assembling of fragments. The glass must be melted once again in the furnace for a new start, and out of it another fresh vessel formed'.

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I now hastened to follow out these four ways and investigate what these groups had achieved, commencing with the science of theology and then taking the way of philosophy, the 'authoritative instruction' of the Bātinīyah, and the way of mysticism, in that order.

1. *The Science of Theology: its Aims and Achievements.*

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I commenced, then, with the science of Theology (*'ilm al-kalām*), and obtained a thorough grasp of it. I read the books of sound theologians and myself wrote some books on the subject. But it was a science, I found, which, though attaining its own aim, did not attain mine. Its aim was merely to preserve the creed of orthodoxy and to defend it against the deviations of heretics. Now God sent to His servants by the mouth of His messenger, in the Qur'an and Traditions, a creed which is the truth and whose contents are the basis of man's welfare in both religious and secular affairs. But Satan too sent, in the suggestions of heretics, things contrary to orthodoxy; men tended to accept his suggestions and almost corrupted the true creed for its adherents. So God brought into being the class of theologians, and moved them to support traditional orthodoxy with the weapon of systematic argument by laying bare the confused doctrines invented by the heretics at variance with traditional orthodoxy. This is the origin of theology and theologians.

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In due course a group of theologians performed the task to which God invited them; they successfully preserved orthodoxy, defended the creed received from the prophetic source and rectified heretical innovations. Nevertheless in so doing they based their arguments on premises which they took from their opponents and which they were compelled to admit by naive belief (*taqlīd*), or the consensus of the community, or bare acceptance of Qur'an and Traditions. For the most part their efforts were devoted to making explicit the contradictions of their opponents and criticizing them in respect of the logical consequences of what they admitted.

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This was of little use in the case of one who admitted nothing at all save logically necessary truths. Theology was not adequate to my case and was unable to cure the malady of which I complained. It is true that, when theology appeared as a recognized discipline and much effort had been expended in it over a considerable period of time, the theologians, becoming very earnest in their endeavours to defend orthodoxy by the study of what things really are, embarked on a study of substances and accidents with their nature and properties. But, since that was not the aim of their science, they did not deal with the question thoroughly in their thinking and consequently did not arrive at results sufficient to dispel universally the darkness of confusion due to the different views of men. I do not exclude the possibility that for others than myself these results have been sufficient; indeed, I do not doubt that this has been so for quite a number. But these results were mingled with naive belief in certain matters which are not included among first principles.

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My purpose here, however, is to describe my own case, not to disparage those who sought a remedy thereby, for the healing drugs vary with the disease. How often one sick man's medicine proves to be another's poison

2. *Philosophy.*

After I had done with theology I started on philosophy. I was convinced that a man cannot grasp what is defective in any of the sciences unless he has so complete a grasp of the science in question that he equals its most learned exponents in the appreciation of its fundamental principles, and even goes beyond and surpasses them, probing into some of the tangles and profundities which the very professors of the science have neglected. Then and only then is it possible that what he has to assert about its defects is true.

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So far as I could see none of the doctors of Islam had devoted thought and attention to philosophy. In their writings none of the theologians engaged in polemic against the philosophers, apart from obscure and scattered utterances so plainly erroneous and inconsistent that no person of ordinary intelligence would be likely to be deceived, far less one versed in the sciences.

I realized that to refute a system before understanding it and becoming acquainted with its depths is to act blindly. I therefore set out in all earnestness to acquire a knowledge of philosophy from books, by private study without the help of an instructor. I made progress towards this aim during my hours of free time after teaching in the religious sciences and writing, for at this period I was burdened with the teaching and instruction of three hundred students in Baghdad. By my solitary reading during the hours thus snatched God brought me in less than two years to a complete understanding of the sciences of the philosophers. Thereafter I continued to reflect assiduously for nearly a year on what I had assimilated, going over it in my mind again and again and probing its tangled depths, until I comprehended surely and certainly how far it was deceitful and confusing and how far true and a representation of reality.

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Hear now an account of this discipline and of the achievement of the sciences it comprises. There are various schools of philosophers, I perceived, and their sciences are divided into various branches; but throughout their numerous schools they suffer from the defect of being infidels and irreligious men, even although of the different groups of philosophers older and most ancient, earlier and more recent— some are much closer to the truth than others.

A. *The schools of philosophers, and how the defect of unbelief affects them all.*

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The many philosophical sects and systems constitute three main groups: the Materialists (*Dahrīyūn*), the Naturalists (*Tabrīyūn*) and the Theists (*Ilāhīyūn*).

The first group, the *Materialists*, are among the earliest philosophers. They deny the Creator and Disposer of the world, omniscient and omnipotent, and consider that the world has everlastingly existed just as it is, of itself and without a creator, and that everlastingly animals have come from seed and seed from animals; thus it was and thus it will ever be. These are the *Zanādiqah* or irreligious people.

The second group, the *Naturalists*, are a body of philosophers who have engaged in manifold researches into the world of nature and the marvels of animals and plants and have expended much effort in the science of dissecting the organs of animals. They see there sufficient of the wonders of God's creation and the inventions of His wisdom to compel them to acknowledge a wise Creator Who is aware of the aims and purposes of things. No one can make a careful study of anatomy and the wonderful uses of the members and organs without attaining to the necessary knowledge that there is a perfection in the order which the framer gave to the animal frame, and especially to that of man.

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Yet these philosophers, immersed in their researches into nature, take the view that the equal balance of the temperament has great influence in constituting the powers of animals. They hold that even the intellectual power in man is dependent on the temperament, so that as the temperament is corrupted intellect also is corrupted and the man ceases to exist. Further when he ceases to exist, it is unthinkable in their opinion that the non-existent should return to existence. Thus it is their view that the soul dies and does not return to life, and they deny the future life— heaven, hell resurrection and judgment; there does not remain, they hold, any reward for obedience or any punishment for sin. With the curb removed they give way to a bestial indulgence of their appetites.

These are also irreligious for the basis of faith is faith in God and in the Last Day, and these, though believing in God and His attributes, deny the Last Day.

The third group, the *Theists*, are the more modern philosophers and include Socrates, his pupil Plato, and the latter's pupil Aristotle. It was Aristotle who systematized logic for them and organized the sciences, securing a higher degree of accuracy and bringing them to maturity.

The Theists in general attacked the two previous groups, the Materialists and the Naturalists, and exposed their defects so effectively that others were relieved of the task. 'And God relieved the believers of fighting' (Q. 33, 25) through their mutual combat. Aristotle, moreover, attacked his predecessors among the Theistic philosophers, especially Plato and Socrates, and went so far in his criticisms that he separated himself from them all. Yet he too retained a residue of their unbelief and heresy from which he did not manage to free himself. We must therefore reckon as unbelievers both these philosophers themselves and their followers among the Islamic philosophers, such as Ibn Sīna, al-Fārābī and others; in transmitting the philosophy of Aristotle, however, none of the Islamic philosophers has accomplished anything comparable to the achievements of the two men named. The translations of others are marked by disorder and confusion, which so perplex the understanding of the student that he fails to comprehend; and if a thing is not comprehended how can it be either refuted or accepted?

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All that, in our view, genuinely is part of the philosophy of Aristotle, as these men have transmitted it, falls under three heads: (1) what must be counted as unbelief; (2) what must be counted as heresy; (3) what is not to be denied at all. Let us proceed, then, to the details.

#### B. *The Various Philosophical Sciences.*

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For our present purpose the philosophical sciences are six in number: mathematics, logic, natural science, theology, politics, ethics.

1. MATHEMATICS. This embraces arithmetic, plane geometry and solid geometry. None of its results are connected with religious matters, either to deny or to affirm them. They are matters of demonstration which it is impossible to deny once they have been understood and apprehended. Nevertheless there are two drawbacks which arise from mathematics.

(a) The first is that every student of mathematics admires its precision and the clarity of its demonstrations. This leads him to believe in the philosophers and to think that all their sciences resemble this one in clarity and demonstrative cogency. Further, he has already heard the accounts on everyone's lips of their unbelief, their denial of God's attributes, and their contempt for revealed truth; he becomes an unbeliever merely by accepting them as authorities (*bi'l-taqlīd al-mahd*), and says to himself, 'If religion were true, it would not have escaped the notice of these men since they are so precise in this science'. Thus, after becoming acquainted by hearsay with their unbelief and denial of religion, he draws the conclusion that the truth is the denial and rejection of religion. How many have I seen who err from the truth because of this high opinion of the philosophers and without any other basis!

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Against them one may argue: 'The man who excels in one art does not necessarily excel in every art. It is not necessary that the man who excels in law and theology should excel in medicine, nor that the man who is ignorant of intellectual speculations should be ignorant of grammar. Rather, every art has people who have obtained excellence and preeminence in it, even though stupidity and ignorance may characterize them in other arts. The arguments in elementary matters of mathematics are demonstrative whereas those in

theology (or metaphysics) are based on conjecture. This point is familiar only to those who have studied the matter deeply for themselves'.

If such a person is fixed in this belief which he has chosen out of respect for authority (*taqlīd*), he is not moved by this argument but is carried by strength of passion, love of vanity and the desire to be thought clever to persist in his good opinion of the philosophers with regard to all the sciences.

This is a great drawback, and because of it those who devote themselves eagerly to the mathematical sciences ought to be restrained. Even if their subject-matter is not relevant to religion, yet, since they belong to the foundations of the philosophical sciences, the student is infected with the evil and corruption of the philosophers. Few there are who devote themselves to this study without being stripped of religion and having the bridle of godly fear removed from their heads.

(b) The second drawback arises from the man who is loyal to Islam but ignorant. He thinks that religion must be defended by rejecting every science connected with the philosophers, and so rejects all their sciences and accuses them of ignorance therein. He even rejects their theory of the eclipse of sun and moon, considering that what they say is contrary to revelation. When that view is thus attacked, someone hears who has knowledge of such matters by apodeictic demonstration. He does not doubt his demonstration, but, believing that Islam is based on ignorance and the denial of apodeictic proof, grows in love for philosophy and hatred for Islam.

A grievous crime indeed against religion has been committed by the man who imagines that Islam is defended by the denial of the mathematical sciences, seeing that there is nothing in revealed truth opposed to these sciences by way of either negation or affirmation, and nothing in these sciences opposed to the truths of religion. Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, 'The sun and the moon are two of the signs of God; they are not eclipsed for anyone's death nor for his life; if you see such an event, take refuge in the recollection of God (most high) and in prayer'. There is nothing here obliging us to deny the science of arithmetic which informs us specifically of the orbits of sun and moon, and their conjunction and opposition. (The further saying of Muhammad (peace be upon him), 'When God manifests Himself to a thing, it submits to Him', is an addition which does not occur at all in the collections of sound Traditions.)

This is the character of mathematics and its drawbacks.

2. LOGIC. Nothing in logic is relevant to religion by way of denial or affirmation. Logic is the study of the methods of demonstration and of forming syllogisms, of the conditions for the premises of proofs, of the manner of combining the premises, of the conditions for sound definition and the manner of ordering it. Knowledge comprises (a) the concept (*tasawwur*) which is apprehended by definition, and (b) the assertion or judgment (*tasdīq*) which is apprehended by proof. There is nothing here which requires to be denied. Matters of this kind are actually mentioned by the theologians and speculative thinkers in connection with the topic of demonstrations. The philosophers differ from these only in the expressions and technical terms they employ and in their greater elaboration of the explanations and classifications. An example of this is their proposition, 'If it is true that all A is B, then it follows that some B is A', that is 'If it is true that all men are animals, then it follows that some animals are men'. They express this by saying that 'the universal affirmative proposition has as its converse a particular affirmative proposition'. What connection has this with the essentials of religion, that it should be denied or rejected? If such a denial is made, the only effect upon the logicians is to impair their belief in the intelligence of the man who made the denial and, what is worse, in his religion, inasmuch as he considers that it rests on such denials.

Moreover, there is a type of mistake into which students of logic are liable to fall. They draw up a list of the conditions to be fulfilled by demonstration, which are known without fail to produce certainty. When, however, they come at length to treat of religious questions, not merely are they unable to satisfy these conditions, but they admit an extreme degree of relaxation (*sc.* of their standards of proof). Frequently, too, the student who admires logic and sees its clarity, imagines that the infidel doctrines attributed to the philosophers are supported by similar demonstrations, and hastens into unbelief before reaching the theological (or metaphysical) sciences. Thus this drawback too leads to unbelief.

3. NATURAL SCIENCE OR PHYSICS. This is the investigation of the sphere of the heavens together with the heavenly bodies, and of what is beneath the heavens, both simple bodies like water, air, earth, fire, and composite bodies like animals, plants and minerals, and also of the causes of their changes, transformations and combinations. This is similar to the investigation by medicine of the human body with its principal and subordinate organs, and of the causes of the changes of temperament. Just as it is not a condition of religion to reject medical science, so likewise the rejection of natural science is not one of its conditions, except with regard to particular points which I enumerate in my book, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Any other points on which a different view has to be taken from the philosophers are shown by reflection to be implied in those mentioned. The basis of all these objections is the recognition that nature is in subjection to God most high, not acting of itself but serving as an instrument in the hands of its Creator. Sun and moon, stars and elements, are in subjection to His command. There is none of them whose activity is produced by or proceeds from its own essence. 96

4. THEOLOGY OR METAPHYSICS. Here occur most of the errors of the philosophers. They are unable to satisfy the conditions of proof they lay down in logic, and consequently differ much from one another here. The views of Aristotle, as expounded by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīna, are close to those of the Islamic writers. All their errors are comprised under twenty heads, on three of which they must be reckoned infidels and on seventeen heretics. It was to show the falsity of their views on these twenty points that I composed *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. The three points in which they differ from all the Muslims are as follows:

(a) They say that for bodies there is no resurrection; it is bare spirits which are rewarded or punished; and the rewards and punishments are spiritual, not bodily. They certainly speak truth in affirming the spiritual ones, since these do exist as well; but they speak falsely in denying the bodily ones and in their pronouncements disbelieve the revelation. 97

(b) They say that God knows universals but not particulars. This too is plain unbelief. The truth is that 'there does not escape Him the weight of an atom in the heavens or in the earth' (Q. 34, 3).

(c) They say that the world is everlasting, without beginning. But no Muslim has adopted any such view on this question.

On the further points— their denial of the attributes of God, their doctrine that God knows by His essence and not by a knowledge which is over and above His essence, and the like— their position approximates to that of the Mu'tazilah; and the Mu'tazilah must not be accounted infidels because of such matters. In my book, *The Decisive Criterion for distinguishing Islam from Heresy*, I have presented the grounds for regarding as corrupt the opinion of those who hastily pronounce a man an infidel if he deviates from their own system of doctrine. 98 99

5. POLITICS. All their discussion of this is based on considerations of worldly and governmental advantages. These they borrow from the Divine scriptures revealed through the prophets and from the maxims handed down from the saints of old.

6. ETHICS. Their whole discussion of ethics consists in defining the characteristics and moral constitution of the soul and enumerating the various types of soul and the method of moderating and controlling them. This they borrow from the teaching of the mystics, those men of piety whose chief occupation is to meditate upon God, to oppose the passions, and to walk in the way leading to God by withdrawing from worldly pleasure. In their spiritual warfare they have learnt about the virtues and vices of the soul and the defects in its actions, and what they have learned they have clearly expressed. The philosophers have taken over this teaching and mingled it with their own disquisitions, furtively using this embellishment to sell their rubbishy wares more readily. Assuredly there was in the age of the philosophers, as indeed there is in every age, a group of those godly men, of whom God never denudes the world. They are the pillars of the earth, and by their blessings mercy comes down on the people of the earth, as we read in the Tradition where Muhammad (peace be upon him) Says: 'Through them you receive rain, through them you receive sustenance; of their number were the men of the Cave'. And these, as the Qur'an declares, existed in early times (cp. Surah 18).

From this practice of the philosophers of incorporating in their books conceptions drawn from the prophets and mystics, there arise two evil tendencies, one in their partisans and one in their opponents.

(a) The evil tendency in the case of the opponent is serious. A crowd of men of slight intellect 101 imagines that, since those ethical conceptions occur in the books of the philosophers mixed with their own rubbish, all reference to them must be avoided, and indeed any person mentioning them must be considered a liar. They imagine this because they heard of the conceptions in the first place only from the philosophers, and their weak intellects have concluded that, since their author is a falsifier, they must be false.

This is like a man who hears a Christian assert, 'There is no god but God, and Jesus is the Messenger of God'. The man rejects this, saying, 'This is a Christian conception', and does not pause to ask himself whether the Christian is an infidel in respect of this assertion or in respect of his denial of the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him). If he is all infidel only in respect of his denial of Muhammad, then he need not be contradicted in other assertions true in themselves and not connected with his unbelief, even though these are also true in his eyes.

It is customary with weaker intellects thus to take the men as criterion of the truth and not the truth as criterion of the men. The intelligent man follows 'Ali (may God be pleased with him) when he said., 'Do not know the truth by the men, but know the truth, and then you will know who are truthful'. The intelligent man knows the truth; then he examines the particular assertion. If it is true, he accepts it, whether the speaker is a truthful person or not. Indeed he is often anxious to separate out the truth from the discourses of those who 102 are in error, for he knows that gold is found mixed in gravel with dross. The money-changer suffers no harm if he puts his hand into the counterfeiter's purse; relying on his skill he picks the true gold from among the spurious and counterfeit coins. It is only the simple villager, not the experienced money-changer who is made to abstain from dealings with the counterfeiter. It is not the strong swimmer who is kept back from the shore, but the clumsy tiro; not the accomplished snake-charmer who is barred from touching the snake, but the ignorant boy.

The majority of men, I maintain, are dominated by a high opinion of their own skill and accomplishments, especially the perfection of their intellects for distinguishing true from false and sure guidance from misleading suggestion. It is therefore necessary, I maintain, to shut the gate so as to keep the general public from reading the books of the misguided as far as possible. The public are not free from the infection of the second bad tendency we are about to discuss, even if they are uninfected by the one just mentioned.

To some of the statements made in our published works on the principles of the religious sciences in objection has been raised by a group of men whose understanding has not fully grasped the sciences and whose insight has not penetrated to the fundamentals of the systems. They think that these statements are taken from the works of the ancient philosophers, whereas the fact is that some of them are the product of reflections which occurred to me independently- it is not improbable that one shoe should fall on another shoe-mark- while others come from the revealed Scriptures, and in the case of the majority the sense though perhaps not the actual words is found in the works of the mystics.

Suppose, however, that the statements are found only in the philosophers' books. If they are reasonable in themselves and supported by proof, and if they do not contradict the Book and the Sunnah (the example of Muhammad), then it is not necessary to abstain from using them. If we open this door, if we adopt the attitude of abstaining from every truth that the mind of a heretic has apprehended before us, we should be obliged to abstain from much that is true. We should be obliged to leave aside a great number of the verses of the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Messenger and the accounts of the early Muslims, and all the sayings of the philosophers and the mystics. The reason for that is that the author of the book of the 'Brethren of Purity' has cited them in his work. He argues from them, and by means of them he has gradually enticed men of weaker understanding to accept his falsehoods; he goes on making those claims until the heretics wrest truth from our hands by thus depositing it in their writings. 104

The lowest degree of education is to distinguish oneself from the ignorant ordinary man. The educated man does not loathe honey even if he finds it in the surgeon's cupping-glass; he realizes that the cupping-glass does not essentially alter the honey. The natural aversion from it in such a case rests on popular ignorance, arising from the fact that the cupping-glass is made only for impure blood. Men imagine that the blood is impure because it is in the cupping-glass, and are not aware that the impurity is due to a property of the blood itself. Since this property is absent from the honey, the fact that the honey is in such a container does not produce this property in it. Impurity, therefore, should not be attributed to the honey. To do so is fanciful and false. 105

Yet this is the prevalent idea among the majority of men. Wherever one ascribes a statement to an author of whom they approve, they accept it, even although it is false; wherever one ascribes it to an author of whom they disapprove, they reject it even although it is true. They always make the man the criterion of truth and not the criterion of the man; and that is erroneous in the extreme.

This is the wrong tendency towards rejection of the ethics of the philosophers.

(b) There is also a wrong tendency towards accepting it. When a man looks into their books, such as the 'Brethren of Purity' and others, and sees how, mingled with their teaching, are maxims of the prophets and utterances of the mystics, he often approves of these, and accepts them and forms a high opinion of them. Next, however, he readily accepts the falsehood they mix with that, because of the good opinion resulting from what he noticed and approved. That is a way of gradually slipping into falsehood.

Because of this tendency it is necessary to abstain from reading their books on account of the deception and danger in them. Just as the poor swimmer must be kept from the slippery banks, so must mankind be kept from reading these books; just as the boy must be kept from touching the snake, so must the ears be kept from receiving such utterances. Indeed, just as the snake-charmer must refrain from touching the snake in front of his small boy, because he knows that the boy imagines he is like his father and will imitate him, and must even caution the boy by himself showing caution in front of him, so the first-rate scholar too must act in similar fashion. And just as the good snake-charmer on receiving a snake distinguishes between the antidote and the poison, and extracts the antidote while destroying the poison, and would not withhold 106

the antidote from any in need; and just as the acute and experienced money-changer, after putting his hand into the bag of the counterfeiter and extracting from it the pure gold and throwing away the spurious and counterfeit coins, would not withhold the good and acceptable money from one in need; even so does the scholar act.

Again, when a man has been bitten by a snake and needs the antidote, his being turns from it in loathing because he learns it is extracted from the snake, the source of the poison, and he requires to be shown the value of the antidote despite its source. Likewise, a poor man in need of money, who shrinks from receiving the gold taken out of the bag of the counterfeiter, ought to have it brought to his notice that his shrinking is pure ignorance and is the cause of his missing the benefit he seeks; he ought to be informed that the proximity between the counterfeit and the good coin does not make the good coin counterfeit nor the counterfeit good. In the same way the proximity between truth and falsehood does not make truth falsehood nor falsehood truth. 107

This much we wanted to say about the baneful and mischievous influence of philosophy.

### 3. *The Danger of 'Authoritative Instruction'.*

By the time I had done with the science of philosophy—acquiring an understanding of it and marking what was spurious in it— I had realized that this too did not satisfy my aim in full and that the intellect neither comprehends all it attempts to know nor solves all its problems. The heresy of the Ta'limīyah had already appeared, and everyone was speaking about their talk of gaining knowledge of the meaning of things from an infallible Imam who has charge of the truth. It had already occurred to me to study their views and become acquainted with what is in their books, when it happened that I received a definite command from His Majesty the Caliph to write a book showing what the religious system really is. The fact that I could not excuse myself from doing this was an external motive reinforcing the original impulse from within. I began to search for their books and collect their doctrines. There had already come to my ears some of their novel utterances, the product of the thoughts of contemporary members of the sect, which differed from the familiar formulations of their predecessors. 108 109

I made a collection, then, of these utterances, arranged them in logical order and formulated them correctly. I also gave a complete answer to them. In consequence some of the orthodox (*Ahl al-Haqq*) criticized me for my painstaking restatement of their arguments. 'You are doing their work for them', they said, for they would have been unable to uphold their system in view of these dubious and ambiguous utterances had you not restated them and put them in order'.

In a way this criticism is justified. Ahmad b. Hanbal once criticized al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī (may God have mercy on them!) for his book, *The Refutation of the Mu'tazilah*. 'It is a duty to refute heresy', al-Hārith replied. 'Certainly', said Ahmed, 'but you first give an account of their false doctrines and afterwards a refutation of them. How can you be sure what men will do? A man might read the false doctrines and grasp them with his understanding without turning afterwards to the refutation; or he might peruse the refutation without understanding its full import'. 110

Ahmad's observation is justified, but it applies 'to false doctrine which is not widely and generally known. Where such doctrine is widely known, it ought to be refuted, and refutation presupposes a statement of the doctrine. Certainly, no one should undertake to elaborate on their behalf a false doctrine which they have not elaborated. I personally did not do that. I had already heard that false doctrine from one of a group

of those who frequented my company after having been in contact with them and having adopted their faith. He related how they used to laugh at the works composed to refute their views, since the authors had not comprehended their proof; he mentioned that proof' and gave a summary of it. As I could not be satisfied with the prospect that I might be suspected of neglecting the essential basis of their proof, or of having heard it and failed to understand it, I repeated it in my book. My aim was to repeat their false doctrine as far as possible, and then to bring out its weak points.

The result was that there was no result on the part of the opponents and no force in their argument, and, had it not been for the mistaken help given by honest but ignorant men, that heresy would have been too weak to reach its present degree of success. Violent fanaticism, however, provoked the supporters of the truth to prolong the debate with them about the presuppositions of their argument and to deny all they assert. In particular they denied both their claim that 'there is need of "authoritative instruction" (*ta'līm*) and an instructor (*mu'allim*)', and their claim that 'not every instructor is adequate, there must be an infallible instructor'.

Now, their demonstration of the need for instruction and an instructor was clearly sound, while the retort of the critics was weak. A number of people were thus deceived into thinking that this was due to the strength of the system of the Ta'līmiyah and to the weakness of that of their opponents. They did not realize that this state of affairs was due to the weakness of the defender of the truth and his ignorance of the proper method of dealing with the question.

The correct procedure is in fact to acknowledge the need for an instructor and the necessity of his being infallible. But our infallible instructor is Muhammad (peace be upon him). They may say, 'He is dead; but we reply, 'Your instructor is hidden (*ghā'ib*)'. They may say, 'Our instructor instructed the preachers and spread them widely through the land, and, if they differ or are puzzled by a difficulty, he expects them to return to him'; but we reply, Our instructor instructed the preachers and spread them widely through the land and perfected the instruction, according to the word of God most high 'Today I have perfected your religion for you' (Q. 5, 5); when the instruction has been made perfect, the death of the instructor does no harm, any more than does his being hidden'. 112

There remains their argument: 'How do you judge about what you have not heard (*sc.* a point of law on which there has been no explicit ruling)? Is it by the letter of the law (*nass*)? But *ex hypothesi* you have not heard it. Is it by your independent interpretation (*ijtihād*) and opinion (*ra'y*)? That is precisely the place where differences occur'.

To this we reply: 'We do what Mu'ādh did when the Apostle of God (peace be upon him) sent him to the Yemen; we judge by the actual text where there is a text, and by our independent reasoning where there is no text.<sup>3</sup> That is exactly what their preachers do when they are away from the Imam at the remotest corners of the land. They cannot in all cases judge by the text, for the texts which are finite in number cannot deal with all the infinite variety of events; nor is it possible for them to return to the city of the Imam over every difficult case— while the preacher is travelling there and back the person concerned may have died, and the journey will have been fruitless.

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<sup>3</sup> Al- Ghazali refers to a well-known story about Mu'ādh b. Jabal. Muhammad, on appointing him as judge in the Yemen, questioned him about the principles on which he would base his rulings; he replied that he would base them firstly on the text of the Qur'an, then, if no text was applicable, on the Sunnah of the Prophet, then, if neither was available, on the independent exercise of his judgement.

For instance, if a man is in doubt about the *qiblah*,<sup>4</sup> the only course open to him is to pray according to his independent judgement. If he were to go to the city of the Imam to obtain a knowledge of the *qiblah*, the time of prayer would be past. As a matter of fact prayer fulfils the law even when directed to what is wrongly supposed to be the *qiblah*. There is the saying that the man who is mistaken in independent judgement receives a reward, but the man who is correct a twofold reward; and that is the case in all questions left to independent judgement.

Another example of the same is the giving of alms to the poor. A man by his independent judgement will often suppose the recipient poor although he is really rich and hides his wealth. The giver of alms is not punished for this, though he was mistaken; he is liable to punishment only for the motive leading him to make the supposition (*sc.* his resolution to give alms).

It may be said to us: 'The supposition of a man's opponent is as good as his own. We reply: 'A man is commanded to follow his own opinion; just as in the case of the *qiblah*, the man exercising independent judgement follows his own opinion even if others differ from him.

Again it may be said (to us): 'The man who accepts authority in all legal matters (*muqallid*) follows either Abū Hanīfah. or al-Shāfi'ī (may God have mercy on them) or someone else (*sc.* and so you admit the principle of 'authoritative instruction')'. I reply: 'What does such a man do in the question of the *qiblah* where there is dubiety and the independently-judging authorities differ'? My opponent will say: 'The man must use his own judgement to decide which is the soundest authority and the most learned in the proofs of the *qiblah*, and then he follows his own decision'. Exactly the same happens in deciding between religious systems (*sc.* and so, the principle of 'authoritative instruction' is admitted to be inadequate). 114

Prophets and religious leaders of necessity made mankind have recourse to independent judgement, even although they knew that they might fall into error. Indeed the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) said, 'I judge by externals, but God administers the inmost hearts'; that is to say, 'I judge by the more probable opinion, based on the account of the witnesses, but the witnesses may be mistaken'. The prophets had no way to obviate error in the case of such matters of independent judgment. So how can we hope to attain that? 115

There are two questions which the raise at this point. (1) One is this argument of theirs: 'Even if this is the case in matters of independent judgement, it is not the case with regard to fundamental beliefs. Any mistake there is not to be excused. How then is a man to proceed'? I reply: 'The fundamental beliefs are contained in the Book and the Sunnah; in questions of detail and other disputed matters apart from these fundamentals the truth is known by weighing them in 'the just balance', that is, the standards set forth by God most high in His Book; and they are five in number as I show in *The Just Balance*.

It may be said to me: 'Your adversaries do not agree with you about the standard'. I reply: 'It is not to be imagined that anyone 'Who understands that standard should be in disagreement about it. The Ta'limīyah will not disagree about it, because I have inferred it from the Qur'an and learnt it there; the logicians will not disagree about it because it is in accordance, not in disagreement, with the conditions they lay down in logic; the theologians will not disagree about it because it is in accordance with their views about the proof of speculative propositions, and provides a criterion of the truth of theological assertions'.

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<sup>4</sup> The direction in which Mecca lies, in which a Muslim must face in saying his prayers.

My adversary may say: 'If you have in your hand a standard such as this, why do you not remove the disagreement among mankind? I reply: 'If they were to give heed to me I would remove the disagreement among them. I described the method of removing disagreement in *The Just Balance*. Study it and you will find that it is sound and does completely remove disagreement if men pay attention to it; but they will not all pay attention to it. Still a group of men have paid attention to me and I removed the disagreement between them. Now your Imam wants to remove the disagreement between them although they do not pay attention to him. Why then has he not removed it ere this? Why did not 'Alī (may God be pleased with him), the first of the Imams remove it? Does the Imam claim that he is able to bring them all forcibly to pay attention? Then why has he not so far done so.? To what day has he postponed it? Is not the only result of his claim that there are more disputes among mankind and more who dispute? The disagreements certainly gave grounds for fearing that evils would increase until blood was shed, towns reduced to ruins, children orphaned, communications cut and goods plundered. What has actually happened is that throughout the world such blessings have attended your removal of disagreement that there is now disagreement the like of which has never before been seen'.

The adversary may say: 'You claim that you remove the disagreement among mankind. But the man who is in doubt about the merits of the rival systems is not obliged to listen to you rather than to your opponents. The majority of your opponents disagree with you; and there is no vital difference between them and you'. This is their second question.

I reply: 'First of all, this argument turns back against yourself. If you summon the man in doubt to accept your own views, he will say, 'On what grounds are you to be preferred to your opponents, seeing that the majority of scholars disagree with you'? Would that I knew what answer you will give! Will you reply by saying, 'My Imam is established by the very words of Scripture'? Who will believe this claim to have its scriptural basis, when he has not heard the words from the Messenger? All that he has heard is your claim, and the unanimous judgement of scholars that it is an invention and to be disbelieved. 117

Let us suppose, however, that this scriptural claim is granted. Yet the man may still have doubts on the subject of prophethood; he may say, 'Grant that your Imam adduces as proof the miracle of Jesus; that is, he says, 'The proof of my truthfulness is that I will bring your father to life; he actually restores him to life and says to me that he is performing what he promised. How do I know that he is truthful? This miracle has not brought all mankind to know the truthfulness of Jesus. On the contrary, serious objections can be raised against it, which are only to be repelled by detailed rational considerations. Rational considerations, however, are not to be trusted, according to your view. Yet no one knows the argument from miracle to truthfulness unless he knows magic and the distinction between that and miracle, and unless he knows that God does not lead His servants astray. The topic of God's leading men astray is one where it is notoriously difficult to make a reply. How then can you rebut all these objections when there is no reason for following your Imam rather than his opponent? The matter comes back to the intellectual proofs which you deny; and your adversary adduces proofs similar to yours but clearer.' 118

Thus this topic turns back against themselves so decisively that, even if the older and younger members of the sect agreed to give an answer, they would be unable to do so. The corrupt doctrine has grown apace only because a group of inferior intellects argued against them and employed the method of 'reply' (*jawāb*) instead of that of 'reversal' (*qalb*) (*sc.* tried to reply to objections to their own views instead of finding inconsistencies in the opponents' assertions). Such a procedure prolongs the debate and neither readily convinces men's minds nor effectively silences the opponents.

Some one may say: 'This is 'reversal'; but is there any 'reply' to that'? I answer: 'Certainly. The reply is that, if the man in doubt says, 'I am in doubt', and does not specify the topic about which he is in doubt, it

may be said to him, You are like a sick man who says, 'I am sick', without specifying his disease, and yet asks for a remedy; he has to be told, 'There does not exist any remedy for disease in general but only for specific diseases like headache., diarrhoea and so forth". Similarly the man in doubt must specify what he is in doubt about. If he specifies the topic, I show him the truth about it by weighing it by the five standards which everyone who understands them acknowledges to be the true balance on which men rely whenever they weigh anything. The balance and the soundness of the weighing are understood in just the same way as the student of arithmetic understands both arithmetic and the fact that the teacher of arithmetic knows the subject and speaks truly about it'. I have explained that in *The Just Balance* in the compass of twenty pages, and it may be studied there. 119

My object at the moment is not to show the falsity of their views, for I have already done so (1) in *Al-Mustazhiri*, (2) in *The Demonstration of Truth*, a reply to criticisms made against me in Baghdad, (3) in *The Fundamental Difference (between Islam and Unbelief)*, in twelve chapters, a reply to criticisms made against me in Hamadān, (4) in the book of the *Durj* drawn up in tabular form, which deals with the feeble criticisms of me made in Tūs, and (5) in *The Just Balance*, which is an independent work intended to show what is the standard by which knowledge is weighed and how the man who has comprehended this has no need of an infallible Imam.

My present aim is rather to show that the Bātinīyah have nothing to cure them or save them from the darkness of mere opinions. Their inability to demonstrate that a specific person is Imam is not their only weakness. We went a long way in agreeing with them; we accepted their assertion that 'instruction' is needed and an infallible 'instructor'; we conceded that he is the one they specified. Yet when we asked them what knowledge they had gained from this infallible person, and raised objections against them, they did not understand these, far less answer them, and in their perplexity had recourse to the 'hidden Imam' and said one must journey to see him. The astonishing thing is that they squander their lives in searching for the 'instructor' and in boasting that they have found him, yet without learning anything at all from him. They are like a man smeared with filth, who so wearies himself with the search for water that when he comes upon it he does not use it but remains smeared with dirt. 120

There are indeed certain of them who lay claim to have some special knowledge. But this knowledge, as they describe it, amounts to some trifling details of the philosophy of Pythagoras. The latter was one of the earliest of the ancients and his philosophical system is the weakest of all; Aristotle not only criticized him but showed the weakness and corruption of his thought. Yet he is the person followed in the *Book of the Brethren of Purity*, which is really but the dregs of philosophy. 121

It is truly amazing that men should toil all their life long searching for knowledge and in the end be content with such feeble and emaciated knowledge, while imagining that they have attained the utmost aims of the sciences! These claimants to knowledge also we have examined, probing into both external and internal features of their views. All they amounted to was a deception of the ordinary man and the weak intellect by proving the need for an 'instructor'. Their further arguments to show that there is no need for instruction by theological reasoning are strong and unanswerable until one tries to help them to prove the need for an 'instructor' by saying, 'Give us some examples of his knowledge and of his "instruction".' Then the exponent is at a loss. 'Now that you have submitted this difficulty to me', he says, 'I shall search for a solution; my present object, however, is limited to what I have already said'. He knows that, if he were to attempt to proceed further, his shameful condition would be revealed and he would be unable to resolve the least of the problems— that he would be unable even to understand them, far less to answer them.

This is the real condition in which they are. As it is said, 'Try them and you will hate them!'— after we had tried them we left them also severely alone.

#### 4. *The Ways of Mysticism.*

When I had finished with these sciences, I next turned with set purpose to the method of mysticism (or Sufism). I knew that the complete mystic 'way' includes both intellectual belief and practical activity; the latter consists in getting rid of the obstacles in the self and in stripping off its base characteristics and vicious morals, so that the heart may attain to freedom from what is not God and to constant recollection of Him.

The intellectual belief was easier to me than the practical activity. I began to acquaint myself with their belief by reading their books, such as *The Food of The Hearts* by *Abū Tālib* al-Makkī (God have mercy upon him), the works of al-Hārith al-Muhāshibī, the various anecdotes about al-Junayd, ash-Shiblī and Abū Yazīd al-Bistāmī (may God sanctify their spirits), and other discourses of their leading men. I thus comprehended their fundamental teachings on the intellectual side, and progressed, as far as is possible by study and oral instruction, in the knowledge of mysticism. It became clear to me, however, that what is most distinctive of mysticism is something which cannot be apprehended by study, but only by immediate experience (*dhawq*— literally 'tasting'), by ecstasy and by a moral change. What a difference there is between *knowing* the definition of health and satiety, together with their causes and presuppositions, and *being* healthy and satisfied! What a difference between being acquainted with the definition of drunkenness— namely, that it designates a state arising from the domination of the seat of the intellect by vapours arising from the stomach— and being drunk! Indeed, the drunken man while in that condition does not know the definition of drunkenness nor the scientific account of it; he has not the very least scientific knowledge of it. The sober man, on the other hand, knows the definition of drunkenness and its basis, yet he is not drunk in the very least. Again the doctor, when he is himself ill, knows the definition and causes of health and the remedies which restore it, and yet is lacking in health. Similarly there is a difference between knowing the true nature and causes and conditions of the ascetic life and actually leading such a life and forsaking the world.

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I apprehended clearly that the mystics were men who had real experiences, not men of words, and that I had already progressed as far as was possible by way of intellectual apprehension. What remained for me was not to be attained by oral instruction and study but only by immediate experience and by walking in the mystic way.

Now from the sciences I had laboured at and the paths I had traversed in my investigation of the revelational and rational sciences (that is, presumably, theology and philosophy), there had come to me a sure faith in God most high, in prophethood (or revelation), and in the Last Day. These three credal principles were firmly rooted in my being, not through any carefully argued proofs, but by reason of various causes, coincidences and experiences which are not capable of being stated in detail.

It had already become clear to me that I had no hope of the bliss of the world to come save through a God fearing life and the withdrawal of myself from vain desire. It was clear to me too that the key to all this was to sever the attachment of the heart to worldly things by leaving the mansion of deception and returning to that of eternity, and to advance towards God most high with all earnestness. It was also clear that this was only to be achieved by turning away from wealth and position and fleeing from all time-consuming entanglements.

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Next I considered the circumstances of my life, and realized that I was caught in a veritable thicket of attachments. I also considered my activities, of which the best was my teaching and lecturing, and realized that in them I was dealing with sciences that were unimportant and contributed nothing to the attainment of eternal life.

After that I examined my motive in my work of teaching, and realized that it was not a pure desire for the things of God, but that the impulse moving me was the desire for an influential position and public recognition. I saw for certain that I was on the brink of a crumbling bank of sand and in imminent danger of hell-fire unless I set about to mend my ways.

I reflected on this continuously for a time, while the choice still remained open to me. One day I would form the resolution to quit Baghdad and get rid of these adverse circumstances; the next day I would abandon my resolution. I put one foot forward and drew the other back. If in the morning I had a genuine longing to seek eternal life, by the evening the attack of a whole host of desires had reduced it to impotence. Worldly desires were striving to keep me by their chains just where I was, while the voice of faith was calling, 'To the road! to the road! What is left of life is but little and the journey before you is long. All that keeps you busy, both intellectually and practically, is but hypocrisy and delusion. If you do not prepare *now* for eternal life, when will you prepare? If you do not now sever these attachments, when will you sever them?' On hearing that, the impulse would be stirred and the resolution made to take to flight. 128

Soon, however, Satan would return. 'This is a passing mood', he would say; 'do not yield to it, for it will quickly disappear; if you comply with it and leave this influential position, these comfortable and dignified circumstances where you are free from troubles and disturbances, this state of safety and security where you are untouched by the contentions of your adversaries, then you will probably come to yourself again and will not find it easy to return to all this'.

For nearly six months beginning with Rajab 488 A.H. (=July 1095 A.D.), I was continuously tossed about between the attractions of worldly desires and the impulses towards eternal life. In that month the matter ceased to be one of choice and became one of compulsion. God caused my tongue to dry up so that I was prevented from lecturing. One particular day I would make all effort to lecture in order to gratify the hearts of lily following, but my tongue would not utter a single word nor could I accomplish anything at all.

This impediment in my speech produced grief in my heart, and at the same time my power to digest and assimilate food and drink was impaired; I could hardly swallow or digest a single mouthful of food. My powers became so weakened that the doctors gave up all hope of successful treatment. 'This trouble arises from the heart', they said, 'and from there it has spread through the constitution; the only method of treatment is that the anxiety which has come over the heart should be allayed'. 129

Thereupon, perceiving my impotence and having altogether lost my power of choice, I sought refuge with God most high as one who is driven to Him, because he is without further resources of his own. He answered me, He who 'answers him who is driven (to Him by affliction) when he calls upon Him' (Qur'an 27, 63) He made it easy for my heart to turn away from position and wealth, from children and friends. I openly professed that I had resolved to set out for Mecca, while privately I made arrangements to travel to Syria. I took this precaution in case the Caliph and all my friends should oppose my resolve to make my residence in Syria. This stratagem for my departure from Baghdad I gracefully executed, and had it in my mind never to return there. There was much talk about me among all the religious leaders of 'Iraq, since none of them would allow that withdrawal from such a state of life as I was in could have a religious cause, for they looked upon that as the culmination of a religious career; that was the sum of their knowledge.

Much confusion now came into people's minds as they tried to account for my conduct. Those at a distance from 'Iraq supposed that it was due to some apprehension I had of action by the government. On the other hand those who were close to the governing circles and had witnessed how eagerly and assiduously they sought me and how I withdrew from them and showed no great regard for what they said, would say, 130

'This is a supernatural affair; it must be an evil influence which has befallen the people of Islam and especially the circle of the learned'.

I left Baghdad then. I distributed what wealth I had, retaining only as much as would suffice myself and provide sustenance for my children. This I could easily manage, as the wealth of 'Iraq was available for good works, since it constitutes a trust fund for the benefit of Muslims. Nowhere in the world have I seen better financial arrangements to assist a scholar to provide for his children.

In due course I entered Damascus and there I remained for nearly two years with no other occupation than the cultivation of retirement and solitude, together with religious and ascetic exercises, as I busied myself purifying my soul, improving my character and cleansing my heart for the constant recollection of God most high, as I had learnt from my study of mysticism. I used to go into retreat for a period in the mosque of Damascus, going up the minaret of the mosque for the whole day and shutting myself in so as to be alone. 131

At length I made my way from Damascus to the Holy House (that is, Jerusalem). There I used to enter into the precinct of the Rock every day and shut myself in.

Next there arose in me a prompting to fulfill the duty of the Pilgrimage, gain the blessings of Mecca and Medina, and perform the visitation of the Messenger of God most high, (peace be upon him)) after first performing the visitation of al-, the Friend of God (God bless him).<sup>5</sup> I therefore made the journey to the Hijaz. Before long, however, various concerns, together with the entreaties of my children, drew me back to my home (country); and so I came to it again, though at one time no one had seemed less likely than myself to return to it. Here, too, I sought retirement, still longing for solitude and the purification of the heart for the recollection (of God). The events of the interval, the anxieties about my family, and the necessities of my livelihood altered the aspect of my purpose and impaired the quality of my solitude, for I experienced pure ecstasy only occasionally, although I did not cease to hope for that; obstacles would hold me back, yet I always returned to it.

I continued at this stage for the space of ten years, and during these periods of solitude there were revealed to me things innumerable and unfathomable. This much I shall say about that in order that others may be helped: I learnt with certainty that it is above all the mystics who walk on the road of God; their life is the best life, their method the soundest method, their character the purest character; indeed, were the intellect of the intellectuals and the learning of the learned and the scholarship of the scholars, who are versed in the profundities of revealed truth, brought together in the attempt to improve the life and character of the mystics, they would find no way of doing so; for to the mystics all movement and all rest, whether external or internal, brings illumination from the light of the lamp of prophetic revelation; and behind the light of prophetic revelation there is no other light on the face of the earth from which illumination may be received. 132

In general, then, how is a mystic 'way' (tarīqah) described? The purity which is the first condition of it (*sc.* as bodily purity is the prior condition of formal Worship for Muslims) is the purification of the heart completely from what is other than God most high; the key to it, which corresponds to the opening act of

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<sup>5</sup> That is, Abraham, who is buried in the cave of Machpelah under the mosque at Hebron, which is called 'al- Khalīl' in Arabic; similarly the visitation of the Messenger is the formal visit to his tomb at Medina. 133

adoration in prayer,<sup>6</sup> is the sinking of the heart completely in the recollection of God; and the end of it is complete absorption (*fanā'*) in God. At least this is its end relatively to those first steps which almost come within the sphere of choice and personal responsibility; but in reality in the actual mystic 'way' it is the first step, what comes before it being, as it were, the antechamber for those who are journeying towards it.

With this first stage of the 'way' there begin the revelations and visions. The mystics in their waking state now behold angels and the spirits of the prophets; they hear these speaking to them and are instructed by them. Later, a higher state is reached; instead of beholding forms and figures, they come to stages in the "way" which it is hard to describe in language; if a man attempts to express these, his words inevitably contain what is clearly erroneous.

In general what they manage to achieve is nearness to God; some, however, would conceive of this as 'inherence' (*hulūl*) some as 'union' (*ittihād*), and some as 'connection' (*wusūl*). All that is erroneous. In my book, *The Noblest Aim*, I have explained the nature of the error here. Yet he who has attained the mystic 'state' need do no more than say:

Of the things I do not remember, what was, was;  
Think it good; do not ask an account of it.  
(Ibn al-Mu'tazz).

In general the man to whom He has granted no immediate experience at all, apprehends no more of what prophetic revelation really is than the name. The miraculous graces given to the saints are in truth the beginnings of the prophets; and that was the first 'state' of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) when he went out to Mount Hirā', and was given up entirely to his Lord, and worshipped, so that the bedouin said, 'Muhammad loves his Lord passionately'.

Now this is a mystical 'state' which is realized in immediate experience by those who walk in the way leading to it. Those to whom it is not granted to have immediate experience can become assured of it by trial (*sc.* contact with mystics or observation of them) and by hearsay, if they have sufficiently numerous opportunities of associating with mystics to understand that (*sc.* ecstasy) with certainty by means of what accompanies the 'states'. Whoever sits in their company derives from them this faith; and none who sits in their company is pained.

Those to whom it is not even granted to have contacts with mystics may know with certainty the possibility of ecstasy by the evidence of demonstration, as I have remarked in the section entitled *The Wonders of the Heart* of my *Revival of the Religious Sciences*.

Certainty reached by demonstration is *knowledge* (*'ilm*); actual acquaintance with that 'state' is *immediate experience* (*dhawq*); the acceptance of it as probable from hearsay and trial (or observation) is *faith* (*imān*). These are three degrees. 'God will raise those of you who have faith and those who have been given knowledge in degrees (*sc.* of honour)' (Q. 58, 12).

Behind the mystics, however, there is a crowd of ignorant people. They deny this fundamentally, they are astonished at this line of thought, they listen and mock. 'Amazing', they say. 'What nonsense they talk!'

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<sup>6</sup> Literally, the 'prohibition' *tahrīm*; the opening words of the Muslims Worship, 'God is great', are known as *takbīrat al-tahrīm*, the prohibitory adoration, 'because it forbids to the worshipper what was previously allowable'. Cp. Calverley, *Worship in Islam*, p. 8, etc.

About such people God most high has said: 'Some of them listen to you, until, upon going out from you, they say to those to whom knowledge has been given, 'What did he say just now'? These are the people on whose hearts God sets a seal and they follow their passions'. (Q. 47, 18) He makes them deaf, and blinds their sight.

Among the things that necessarily became clear to me from my practice of the mystic 'way' was the true nature and special characteristics of prophetic revelation. The basis of that must undoubtedly be indicated in view of the urgent need for it.

#### IV. THE TRUE NATURE OF PROPHECY AND THE COMPELLING NEED OF ALL CREATION FOR IT

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You must know that the substance of man in his original condition was created in bareness and simplicity without any information about the worlds of God most high. These worlds are many, not to be reckoned save by God most high Himself. As He said, 'None knows the hosts of thy Lord save He' (Q. 74, 34). Man's information about the world is by means of perception; and each and every form of perception is created so that thereby man may have some acquaintance with a world (or sphere) from among existents. By 'worlds (or spheres)' we simply mean 'classes of existents'.

The first thing created in man was the sense of touch, and by it he perceives certain classes of existents, such as heat and cold, moisture and dryness, smoothness and roughness. Touch is completely unable to apprehend colours and noises. These might be nonexistent so far as concerns touch.

Next there is created in him the sense of sight, and by it he apprehends colours and shapes. This is the most extensive of the worlds of sensibles. Next *hearing* is implanted in him, so that he hears sounds of various kinds. After that *taste* is created in him; and so on until he has completed the world of sensibles.

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Next, when he is about seven years old, there is created in him *discernment* (or the power of distinguishing -*tamyīz*). This is a fresh stage in his development. He now apprehends more than the world of sensibles; and none of these additional factors (*sc.* relations, etc.) exists in the world of sense.

From this he ascends to another stage, and *intellect* (or reason) (*'aql*) is created in him. He apprehends things necessary, possible, impossible, things which do not occur in the previous stages.

Beyond intellect there is yet another stage. In this another eye is opened, by which he beholds the unseen, what is to be in the future, and other things which are beyond the ken of intellect in the same way as the objects of intellect are beyond the ken of the faculty of discernment and the objects of discernment are beyond the ken of sense. Moreover, just as the man at the stage of discernment would reject and disregard the objects of intellect were these to be presented to him, so some intellectuals reject and disregard the objects of prophetic revelation. That is sheer ignorance. They have no ground for their view except that this is a stage which they have not reached and which for them does not exist; yet they suppose that it is non-existent in itself. When a man blind from birth, who has not learnt about colours and shapes by listening to people's talk, is told about these things for the first time, he does not understand them nor admit their existence.

God most high, however, has favoured His creatures by giving them something analogous to the special faculty of prophecy, namely dreams. In the dream-state a man apprehends what is to be in the future,

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which is something of the unseen; he does so either explicitly or else clothed in a symbolic form whose interpretation is disclosed.

Suppose a man has not experienced this himself, and suppose that he is told how, some people fall into a dead faint, in which hearing, sight and the other senses no longer function, and in this condition perceive the unseen. He would deny that this is so and demonstrate its impossibility. 'The sensible powers', he would say, 'are the causes of perception (or apprehension); if a man does not perceive things (*sc.* the unseen) when these powers are actively present, much less will he do so when the senses are not functioning'. This is a form of analogy which is shown to be false by what actually occurs and is observed. Just as intellect is one of the stages of human development in which there is in 'eye' which sees the various types of intelligible objects, which are beyond the ken of the senses, so prophecy also is the description of a stage in which there is an eye endowed with light such that in that light the unseen and other supra-intellectual objects become visible.

Doubt about prophetic revelation is either (a) doubt of its possibility in general, or (b) doubt of its actual occurrence, or (c) doubt of the attainment of it by a specific individual.

The proof of the possibility of there being prophecy and the proof that there has been prophecy is that there is knowledge in the world the attainment of which by reason is inconceivable; for example, in medical science and astronomy. Whoever researches in such matters knows of necessity that this knowledge is attained only by Divine inspiration and by assistance from God most high. It cannot be reached by observation. For instance there are some astronomical laws based, on phenomena which occur only once in a thousand years; how can these be arrived at by personal observation? It is the same with the properties of drugs. 140

This argument shows that it is possible for there to be a way of apprehending these matters which are not apprehended by the intellect. This is the meaning of prophetic revelation. That is not to say that prophecy is merely an expression for such knowledge. Rather, the apprehending of this class of extra-intellectual objects is one of the properties of prophecy; but it has many other properties as well. The said property is but a drop in the ocean of prophecy. It has been singled out for mention because you have something analogous to it in what you apprehend in dreaming, and because you have medical and astronomical knowledge belonging to the same class, namely, the miracles of the prophets,<sup>7</sup> for the intellectuals cannot arrive at these at all by any intellectual efforts.

The other properties of prophetic revelation are apprehended only by immediate experience (*dhawq*) from the practice of the mystic way, but this property of prophecy you can understand by an analogy granted you, namely, the dream-state. If it were not for the latter you would not believe in that. If the prophet possessed a faculty to which you had nothing analogous and which you did not understand, how could you believe in it? Believing presupposes understanding. Now that analogous experience comes to a man in the early stages of the mystic way. Thereby he attains to a kind of immediate experience, extending as far as that to which he has attained, and by analogy to a kind of belief (or assent) in respect of that to which he has not attained. Thus this single property is a sufficient basis for one's faith in the principle of prophecy. 141

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<sup>7</sup> This is a little obscure; al-Ghazālī appears to regard certain miraculous signs as belonging to the spheres of medicine and astronomy; perhaps he was thinking of this when he spoke of events occurring once in a thousand years.

If you come to doubt whether a specific person is a prophet or not, certainty can only be reached by acquaintance with his conduct, either by personal observation, or by hearsay as a matter of common knowledge. For example, if you are familiar with medicine and law, you can recognise lawyers and doctors by observing what they are, or, where observation is impossible, by hearing what they have to say. Thus you are not unable to recognise that al-Shāfi'i (God have mercy upon him) is a lawyer and Galen a doctor; and your recognition is based on the facts and not on the judgement of someone else. Indeed, just because you have some knowledge of law and medicine, and examine their books and writings, you arrive at a necessary knowledge of what these men are.

Similarly, if you understand what it is to be a prophet, and have devoted much time to the study of the Qur'an and the Traditions, you will arrive at a necessary knowledge of the fact that Muhammad (God bless and preserve him) is in the highest grades of the prophetic calling. Convince yourself of that by trying out what he said about the influence of devotional practices on the purification of the heart— how truly he asserted that 'whoever lives out what he knows will receive from God what he does not know'; how truly he asserted that 'if anyone aids an evildoer, God will give that man power over him'; how truly he asserted that 'if a man rises up in the morning with but a single care (*sc.* to please God), God most high will preserve him from all cares in this world and the next. When you have made trial of these in a thousand or several thousand instances, you will arrive at a necessary knowledge beyond all doubt.

By this method, then, seek certainty about the prophetic office, and not from the transformation of a rod into a serpent or the cleaving of the moon. For if you consider such an event by itself, without taking account of the numerous circumstances accompanying it— circumstances readily eluding the grasp of the intellect— then you might perhaps suppose that it was magic and deception and that it came from God to lead men astray; for 'He leads astray whom He will, and guides whom He will'. Thus the topic of miracles will be thrown back upon you; for if your faith is based on a reasoned argument involving the probative force of the miracle, then your faith is destroyed by an ordered argument showing the difficulty and ambiguity of the miracle.

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Admit, then, that wonders of this sort are one of the proofs and accompanying circumstances out of the totality of your thought on the matter; and that you attain necessary knowledge and yet are unable to say specifically on what it is based. The case is similar to that of a man who receives from a multitude of people a piece of information which is a matter of common belief... He is unable to say that the certainty is derived from the remark of a single specific person; rather, its source is unknown to him; it is neither from outside the whole, nor is it from specific individuals. This is strong, intellectual faith. Immediate experience, on the other hand, is like actually witnessing a thing and taking it in one's hand. It is only found in the way of mysticism.

This is a sufficient discussion of the nature of prophetic revelation for my present purpose. I proceed to speak of the need for it.

## V. THE REASON FOR TEACHING AGAIN AFTER MY WITHDRAWAL FROM IT

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I had persevered thus for nearly ten years in retirement and solitude. I had come of necessity— from reasons which I do not enumerate, partly immediate experience, partly demonstrative knowledge, partly acceptance in faith— to a realization of various truths. I saw that man was constituted of body and heart; by 'heart' I mean the real nature of his spirit which is the seat of his knowledge of God, and not the flesh and

blood which he shares with the corpse and the brute beast. I saw that just as there is health and disease in the body, respectively causing it to prosper and to perish, so also there is in the heart, on the one hand, health and soundness— and 'only he who comes to God with a sound heart' (Q. 26, 89) is saved— and, on the other hand, disease, in which is eternal and other worldly destruction— as God most high says, 'in their hearts is disease' (Q. 2, 9). I saw that to be ignorant of God is destructive poison, and to disobey Him by following desire is the thing which produces the disease, while to know God most high is the life-giving antidote and to obey Him by opposing desire is the healing medicine. I saw, too, that the only way to treat the heart, to end its disease and procure its health, is by medicines, just as that is the only way of treating the body.

Moreover, the medicines of the body are effective in producing health through some property in them which the intellectuals do not apprehend with their intellectual apparatus, but in respect of which one must accept the statement of the doctors; and these in turn are dependent on the prophets who by the property of prophethood have grasped the properties of things. Similarly I came of necessity to realize that in the case of the medicines of formal worship, which have been fixed and determined by the prophets, the manner of their effectiveness is, not apprehended by the intellectual explanations of the intellectuals; one must rather accept the statements (*taqlīd*) of the prophets who apprehended those properties by the light of prophecy, not by intellectual explanation.

Again, medicines are composed of ingredients differing in kind— one, for instance, is twice another in weight and amount; and this quantitative difference involves secret lore of the same type as knowledge of the properties. Similarly, formal worship, which is the medicine for the disease of the hearts is compounded of acts differing in kind and amount; the prostration (*sujūd*) is the double of the bowing (*rukū'*) in amount, and the morning worship half of the afternoon worship; and such arrangements are not without a mystery of the same type as the properties which are grasped by the light of prophecy. Indeed a man is very foolish and very ignorant if he tries to show by intellectual means that these arrangements are wise, or if he fancies that they are specified accidentally and not from a Divine mystery in them which fixes them by way of the property.

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Yet again, medicines have bases, which are the principal active ingredients, and 'additions' (auxiliaries or correctives), which are complementary, each of them having its specific influence on the action of the bases. Similarly, the supererogatory practices and the 'customs' are complements which perfect the efficacy of the basic elements of formal worship.

In general, the prophets are the physicians of the diseases of hearts. The only advantage of the intellect is that it informed us of that, bearing witness to prophetic revelation by believing (*sc.* the trustworthiness of the prophets) and also to its own inability to apprehend what is apprehended by the eye of prophecy; then it took us by the hand and entrusted us to prophetic revelation, as the blind are entrusted to their guides and anxious patients to sympathetic doctors. Thus far may the intellect proceed. In what lies beyond it has no part, save in the understanding of what the physician communicates to it.

These, then, are matters which we learnt by a necessity like that of direct vision in the period of solitude and retirement.

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We next observed the laxity of men's belief in the principle of prophecy and in its actuality and in conduct according to the norms elucidated by prophecy; we ascertained that this was widespread among the people. When I considered the reasons for people's laxity and weakness of faith, I found there were four:

- (a) a reason connected with those who engage in Philosophy;
- (b) a reason connected with those who engage in the mystic way;

(c) a reason connected with those who profess the doctrine of *ta'lim*;

(d) a reason based on the practice of those who are popularly described as having knowledge.

For a time I went after individual men, questioning those who fell short in observing the Law. I would question one about his doubts and investigate his inmost beliefs. 'Why is it', I said, 'that you fall short in that? If you believe in the future life and, instead of preparing for it, sell it in order to buy this world, then that is folly! You do not normally sell two things for one; how can you give up an endless life for a limited number of days? If, on the other hand, you do not believe in it, then you are an infidel! Dispose yourself to faith. Observe what is the cause of your hidden unbelief, for that is the doctrinal system you inwardly adopt and the cause of your outward daring, even though you do not give expression to it out of respect towards the faith and reverence for the mention of the law!'

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(1) One would say: 'If it were obligatory to observe this matter, then those learned in religious questions would be foremost in doing so; but, among persons of distinction, A does not perform the Worship, B drinks wine, C devours the property of trusts and orphans, D accepts the munificence of the sovereign and does not refrain from forbidden things, E accepts bribes for giving judgement or bearing witness; and so on!'

A second man claims to have knowledge of mysticism and considers that he has made such progress that he is above the need for formal worship.

A third man is taken up with another of the doubts of the 'Latitudinarians' (*Ahl al-Ibāhah*; *cp. Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. 'Ibāhiya'). These are those who stray from the path of mysticism.

(2) A fourth man, having met the party of *tā'lim* would say: 'Truth is difficult, the way to it blocked, and the disputes over it numerous. No one system of doctrine is preferable to any other. Rational proofs contradict one another, and no confidence can be placed in the speculations of the speculative thinkers (*ashāb al-ra'y*). He who summons to *ta'lim* makes assertions without proof. How then through doubt can I keep certainty?'

(3) A fifth man says: 'I do not perform these acts out of obedience to authority (*taqlīdan*). I have studied philosophy and I know that prophecy actually exists and that its achievement is wise and beneficial. I see that the acts of worship it prescribes aim at keeping order among the common people and restraining them from fighting and quarreling with one another and from giving rein to their desires. But I am not one of the ignorant common people that I should enter within the narrow confines of duty. On the contrary I am one of the wise, I follow wisdom, and thereby see clearly (for myself) so that I do not require to follow authority!'

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This is the final word of the faith of those who study the system of the theistic philosophers, as you may learn from the works of Ibn Sīnā and Abū Nasr al-Fārābī.

These are the people who show politeness to Islam. Often you see one of them reading the Qur'an, attending the Friday assembly and public Worship and praising the sacred Law. Nevertheless he does not refrain from drinking wine and from various wicked and immoral practices! If someone says to him, 'If the prophetic revelation is not genuine, why do you join in the prayers'? perhaps he will reply, 'To exercise my body, and because it is a custom in the place, and to keep my wealth and family'. Or perhaps he says, 'The sacred Law is genuine; the prophetic revelation is true'; then he is asked, 'And why then do you drink wine'? and he replies, 'Wine is forbidden only because it leads to enmity and hatred; I am sufficiently wise to guard against that, and so I take wine to make my mind more lively'. Ibn Sina actually writes in his *Testament* that

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he swore to God that he would do various things, and in particular that he would praise what the sacred Law prescribed, that he would not be lax in taking part in the public worship of God, and that he would not drink for pleasure but only as a tonic or medicine. Thus the net result of his purity of faith and observance of the obligations of worship was that he made an exception of drinking wine for medical purposes!

Such is the faith of those philosophers who profess religious faith. Many have been deceived by them; and the deceit has been the greater because of the ineffectiveness of the criticism levelled against the philosophers, since that consisted, as we have shown above, in denying geometry and logic and others of their sciences which possess necessary truth.

I observed, then, to what an extent and for what reasons faith was weak among the various classes of men; and I observed how I myself was occupied with the resolving of this doubt, indeed I had devoted so much time and energy to the study of their sciences and methods— I mean those of the mystics, the philosophers, the 'authoritarian instructionists' (*ta'limiyah*) and the outstanding scholars (*mutawassimun*)— that to show up their errors was easier for me than drinking water. As I observed all this, the impression was formed in me: 'That is a fixed and determinate character of this time; what benefit to you, then, are solitude and retirement, since the sickness has become general, the doctors have fallen ill, and mankind has reached the verge of destruction?' I said to myself, however: 'When will you busy yourself in resolving these difficulties and attacking these obscurities, seeing it is an age of slackness, an era of futility? Even if you were to labour at summoning men from their worthless ways to the truth, the people of this age would be united in showing hostility to you. How will you stand up to them? How will you live among them, seeing that such a project is only to be executed with the aid of time and through a pious sovereign who is all-powerful?'

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I believed that it was permissible for me in the sight of God to continue in retirement on the ground of my inability to demonstrate the truth by argument. But God most high determined Himself to stir up the impulse of the sovereign of the time, though not by any external means; the latter gave me strict orders to hasten to Naysābūr (Nīshāpār) to tackle the problem of this lukewarmness in religious matters. So strict was the injunction that, had I persisted in disobeying it, I should at length have been cut off! I came to realize, too, that the grounds which had made retirement permissible had lost their force. 'It is not right that your motive for clinging to retirement should be laziness and love of ease, the quest for spiritual power and preservation from worldly contamination. It was not because of the difficulty of restoring men to health that you gave yourself this permission'.

Now God most high says: 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Alif, Lām, Mīm. Do the people think that they will be left in the position that they say, 'We have believed', without their being tried? We tried those who were before them' (Q. 29, 1), and what follows. He (may He be exalted!) says to His messenger who is the noblest of His creatures: 'Messengers have been counted false before thee, but they patiently endured the falsehood laid to their charge and the insults done them, until Our help came to them; no one can change the words of God, and surely there has come to thee some information about those who were sent (as messengers).' (Q. 6, 34). He (may He be exalted) says too: 'In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Yā', Sīn. By the Qur'an that decides . . . Thou wilt only warn him who follows the Reminder' (Q. 36, I and II).

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On this matter I consulted a number of men skilled in the science of the heart and with experience of contemplation. They unanimously advised me to abandon my retirement and leave the *zāwiyah* (hospice). My resolution was further strengthened by numerous visions of good men in all of which alike I was given the assurance that this impulse was a source of good, was genuine guidance, and had been determined by God most high for the beginning of this century; for God most high has promised to revive His religion at the

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beginning of each century.<sup>8</sup> My hope became strong, and all these considerations caused the favourable view of the project to prevail.

God most high facilitated my move to Naysābūr to deal with this serious problem in Dhu'l-Qa'dah, the eleventh month of 499 (=JULY, 1106 A.D.). I had originally left Baghdad in Dhu'l-Qa'dah, 488, (=NOVEMBER, 1095), so that my period of retirement had extended to eleven years. It was God most high who determined this move, and it is an example of the wonderful way in which He determines events, since there was not a whisper of it in my heart while I was living in retirement. In the same way my departure from Baghdad and withdrawal from my position there had not even occurred to my mind as a possibility. But God is the upsetter of hearts<sup>9</sup> and positions. As the Tradition has it, 'The heart of the believer is between two of the fingers of the Merciful'.

In myself I know that, even if I went back to the work of disseminating knowledge, yet I did not go back. To go back is to return to the previous state of things. Previously, however, I had been disseminating the knowledge by which worldly success is attained; by word and deed I had called men to it; and that had been my aim and intention. But now I am calling men to the knowledge whereby worldly success is given up and its low position in the scale of real worth is recognized. This is now my intention, my aim, my desire; God knows that this is so. It is my earnest longing that I may make myself and others better. I do not know whether I shall reach my goal or whether I shall be taken away while short of my object. I believe, however, both by certain faith and by intuition that there is no power and no might save with God, the high, the mighty, and that I do not move of myself but am moved by Him, I do not work of myself but am used by Him. I ask Him first of all to reform me and then to reform through me, to guide me and then to guide through me, to show me the truth of what is true and to grant of His bounty that I may follow it, and to show me the falsity of what is false and to grant of His bounty that I may turn away from it. 154

We now return to the earlier topic of the causes for the weakness of faith, and consider how to guide men aright and deliver them from the perils they face.

For those who profess perplexity as a result of what they have heard from the party of *ta'līm*, the treatment is that prescribed in our book, *The Just Balance*., and we shall not lengthen this essay by repeating it.

As for the fanciful assertions of the Latitudinarians (*Ahl al-Ibāhah*), we have collected their doubts under seven heads, and resolved them, in our book, *The Chemistry of Happiness*.

In reply to those who through philosophy have corrupted their faith to the extent of denying prophecy in principle, we have discussed the reality of prophecy and how it exists of necessity, by showing that there exists a knowledge of the properties of medicines, stars, and so forth. We introduced this preliminary study precisely for this purpose; we based the demonstration on medical and astronomical properties precisely because these are included in the science of the Philosophers. To every one who is expert in some branch of 155

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<sup>8</sup> There was it well-known Tradition to the effect that at the beginning of each century God would send a man to revive religion. The events in question took place a few months before the beginning of the sixth century A.H.

<sup>9</sup> *Muqallib al-qulūb*— with a play on the words.

science, be it astronomy (? astrology) or medicine, physics, magic or charm-making, we offer proof of prophecy based on his own branch of science.

The man who verbally professes belief in prophecy, but equates the prescriptions of the revealed scriptures with (philosophic) wisdom, really disbelieves in prophecy, and believes only in a certain judge (v.l. philosopher) the ascendancy of whose star is such that it determines men to follow him. This is not prophecy at all. On the contrary, faith in prophecy is to acknowledge the existence of a sphere beyond reason; into this sphere an eye penetrates whereby man apprehends special objects-of-apprehension. From these reason is excluded in the same way as the hearing is excluded from apprehending colours and sight from apprehending sounds and all the senses from apprehending the objects-of-reason.

If our opponent does not admit this, well, we have given a demonstration that a suprarational sphere is possible, indeed that it actually exists. If, however, he admits our contention, he has affirmed the existence of things called properties with which the operations of reason are not concerned at all; indeed, reason almost denies them and judges them absurd. For instance, the weight of a *dāniq*, (about eight grains) of opium is a deadly poison, freezing the blood in the veins through its excess of cold. The man who claims a knowledge of physics considers that when a composite substance becomes cold it always does so through the two elements of water and earth, since these are the cold elements. It is well-known, however, that many pounds of water and earth are not productive of cold in the interior of the body to the same extent as this weight of opium. If a physicist were informed of this fact, and had not discovered it by experiment, he would say, 'This is impossible; the proof of its impossibility is that the opium contains the elements of fire and air, and these elements do not increase cold; even supposing it wits entirely composed of water and earth, that would not necessitate this extreme freezing action, much less does it do so when the two hot elements are joined with them'. He supposes that this is a proof!

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Most of the philosophers' proofs in natural science and theology are constructed in this fashion. They conceive of things according to the measure of their observations and reasonings. What they are unfamiliar with they suppose impossible. If it were not that veridical vision in sleep is familiar, then, when someone claimed to gain knowledge of the unseen while his senses were at rest, men with such intellects would deny it. If you said to one, 'Is it possible for there to be in the world a thing, the size of a grain, which, if places in a town, will consume that town in its entirety and then consume itself, so that nothing is left of the town and what it contained nor of the thing itself?'; he would say, 'This is absurd; it is an old wives' tale'. Yet this is the case with fire, although, when he heard it, someone who had no acquaintance with fire would reject it. The rejection of the strange features of the world to come usually belongs to this class. To the physicist we reply: 'You are compelled to admit that in opium there is a property which leads to freezing, although this is not constant with natures as rationally conceived; why then is it not possible that there should be in the positive precepts of the Divine law properties leading to the healing and purifying of hearts, which are not apprehended by intellectual wisdom but are perceived only by the eye of prophecy? Indeed in various pronouncements in their writings they have actually recognizes wonderful properties observed when the following figure was employed in treating cases of childbirth where delivery was difficult:–

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IV	IX	II
III	V	VI

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

VIII	I	VI
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The figure is inscribed on two pieces of cloth untouched by water. The woman looks at them with her eye and places them under her feet, and at once the child quickly emerges. The physicists acknowledge the possibility of that, and describe it in the book entitled *The Marvels of Properties*.

The figure consists of nine squares with a number in each, such that the sum of each row or line, vertically, horizontally and diagonally, is fifteen.

How on earth is it possible for anyone to believe that, and then not to have sufficient breadth of mind to believe that the arrangement of the formal prayers— two *rak'ahs* in the morning, four at midday and three at sunset— is so made on account of properties not apprehended by philosophical reflection? The grounds of these arrangements are the difference of the times of day, but these properties are perceived only by the light of prophecy.

It is curious, however, that, if we replace the above expressions by expressions from astrology, they admit the difference of times as reasonable. We may say, for example: 'Is it not the case that the horoscope varies according as the sun is in the ascendant, in the ecliptic or in declension? And in their horoscopes do they make this variation the basis of the difference of treatment and of length of life and hour of death? Is there not a distinction between declension and the sun's being in the ecliptic, and likewise between sunset and the sun's being towards setting? Is there any way to believe this?' If it were not that he hears it in astrological terminology, he would probably have experimentally observed its falsity a hundred times. Yet he goes on habitually believing in it, so that if an astrologer says to him, 'If the sun is in the ecliptic, and star A confronts, while the ascendant is constellation B then, should you put on a new garment at that time, you will be killed in that garment'; he will not put on the garment at that time, even though he may suffer from extreme cold and even though he hears this from an astrologer whose falsity he has acknowledged a hundred times. 159

How on earth when a man's mind is capable of accepting such strange statements and is compelled to acknowledge that these are properties— the knowledge of which is a miracle for some of the prophets— how does he come to reject a similar fact in respect of what he hears of the teaching of a prophet, especially when that prophet speaks truth, is accredited by miracles, and is never known to have been in error?

If the philosopher denies the possibility of there being such properties in the number of *rak'ahs*, the casting of stones (in the valley of Mina during the Pilgrimage), the number of the elements of the Pilgrimage and the other ceremonies of worship of the sacred law, he will not find, in principle, any difference between these and the properties of drugs and stars. He may say, 'I have some experience in medical and astronomical (or astrological) matters, and have found some points in the science true; as a result belief in it has become firmly settled in me and my heart has lost all inclination to shun it and look askance at it; prophecy, however, I have no experience of; how shall I know that it actually exists, even if I admit its possibility?' 160

I reply: 'You do not confine yourself to believing what you have experience of, but, where you have received information about the experience of others, you accept them as authorities. Listen then to the words of the prophets, for they have had experience, they have had direct vision of the truth in respect of all that is dealt with in revelation. Walk in their way and you too will come to know something of that by direct vision'.

Moreover I say: 'Even if you have not experienced it, yet your mind judges it an absolute obligation to believe in it and follow it. Let us suppose that a man of full age and sound mind, who has never experienced illness, now falls ill; and let us suppose that he has a father who is a good man and a competent physician, of whose reputation in medicine he has been hearing as long as he can remember. His father compounds a drug for him, saying, 'This will make you better from your illness and cure your symptoms' What judgement does his intellect make here, even if the drug is bitter and disagreeable to the taste? Does he take it? Or does he disbelieve and say, 'I do not understand the connection of this drug with the achieving of a cure; I have had no experience of it'. You would certainly think him a fool if he did that! Similarly people of vision think you a fool when you hesitate and remain undecided'.

You may say: 'How am I to know the good will of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his knowledge of this medical art? I reply: 'How do you know the good will of your father, seeing this is not something perceived by the senses? The fact is that you have come to know it necessarily and indubitably by comparing his attitude at different times and observing his actions in various circumstances'.

If one considers the sayings of the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) and what is related in Tradition about his concern for showing to people the true way and about his graciousness in leading men by various acts of sympathy and kindness to improve their character and conduct and to better their mutual relations— leading them, in fine, to what is the indispensable basis of all betterment, religious and secular alike— if one considers this, one comes to the necessary knowledge that his good will towards his people is greater than that of a father towards his child.

Again, if one considers the marvellous acts manifested in his case and the wonderful mysteries declared by his mouth in the Qur'an and in the Traditions, and his predictions of events in the distant future, together with the fulfilment of these predictions, then one will know necessarily that he attained to the sphere which is beyond reason, where an eye opened in him by which the mysteries were laid bare which only the elect apprehend, the mysteries which are not apprehended by the intellect.

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This is the method of reaching necessary knowledge that the Prophet (peace be upon him) is to be believed. Make the experiment, reflect on the Qur'an, read the Traditions; then you will know that by seeing for yourself.

We have now dealt with the students of philosophy in sufficient detail, discussing the question at some length in view of the great need for such criticism at the present time.

(4) As for the fourth cause of weakness of faith, namely, the evil lives of the religious leaders (*'ulamā'*, singular *'ālim*) this disease is cured by three things.

(a) The first is that you should say to yourself that the *'ālim* whom you consider to eat what is prohibited has a knowledge that wine and pork and usury are prohibited and also that lying and backbiting and slander are prohibited. You yourself also know that and yet you do these latter things, not because you

do not believe they are sins, but because your desire overcomes you. Now the other man's desire is like your desire; it has overcome him, just as yours has overcome you. His knowledge of other matters beyond this (such as theological arguments and the application of legal principles) distinguishes him from you but does not imply any greater abstinence from specific forbidden things. Many a believer in medical science does not hold back from fruit and from cold water even though the doctor has told him to abstain from them! That does not show that they are not harmful, or that his faith in medicine is not genuine. Such a line of thought helps one to put up with the faults of the *'ulamā'*.

(b) The second thing is to say to the ordinary man: 'You must believe that the *'ālim* has regarded his knowledge as a treasure laid up for himself in the future life, imagining that it will deliver him and make intercession for him, so that consequently he is somewhat remiss in his conduct in view of the excellence of his knowledge. Now although that might be an additional point against him, yet it may also be an additional degree of honour for him, and it is certainly possible that, even if he leaves duties undone, he will be brought to safety by his knowledge. But if you, who are an ordinary man, observing him, leave duty undone, then, since you are destitute of knowledge, you will perish through your evil conduct and will have no intercessor!'

(c) The third point is the fact that the genuine *'ālim* does not commit a sin except by a slip, and the sins are not part of his intention at all. Genuine knowledge is that which informs us that sin is a deadly poison and that the world to come is better than this; and the man who knows that does not give up the good for what is lower than it.

This knowledge is not attained by means of the various special branches of knowledge to which most people devote their attention. As a result, most people's knowledge only makes them bolder in disobeying God most high. Genuine knowledge, however, increases a man's reverence and fear and hope; and these come between him and sins (in the strict sense) as distinct from the unintentional faults which are inseparable from man in his times of weakness. This proneness to lesser sins does not argue any weakness of faith, however. The believer, when he goes astray, repents. He is far from sinning intentionally and deliberately. 164

These are the points I wanted to discuss in criticism of the faults of the philosophers and the party of *ta'līm* and the faults of those who oppose them without using their methods.

We pray God Almighty that He will number us among those whom He has chosen and elected, whom He has led to the truth and guided, whom He has inspired to recollect Him and not to forget Him, whom He has preserved from the evil in themselves so that they do not prefer ought to Him, and whom He has made His own so that they serve only Him.