

Al-Ghazālī, *The Rescuer from Error*

[77] Praise be to God, with whose praise every epistle and treatise begins, and blessings upon Muḥammad, the chosen one, prophet, and messenger, and upon his kin and companions who guide one from error.

You have asked me, my brother in religion, to convey to you the aim and secrets of the sciences, as well as the confusing intricacies of creeds, and to relate what I have endured in extricating truth from the mayhem of factions, with their differing approaches and methods, and how I have ventured to raise myself from the depths of conformity to the heights of insight. You have also asked me to relate, first, what I gleaned from theology; second, what I gathered¹ from the methods of the Instructionists,² who hold that truth is apprehended solely by conforming to the instruction of the imām; third, what I criticized of the methods of philosophizing; and finally, what I endorsed of [78] the method of mysticism. You have asked me to convey the nuggets of truth that I uncovered in the midst of my investigation into the doctrines of humanity, what diverted me from the spread of knowledge in Baghdād despite the large number of students, and what led me to resume teaching in Nishapur after a long absence. Therefore, I will hasten to comply with your demand, having determined the sincerity of your request, and will relate this to you, asking God for assistance, support, success, and refuge.

May God Almighty guide you and allow truth to lead you: you should know that the differences among people in sects and religions, and the

¹ Reading *iḥṭawaytuhu* rather than *ijṭawaytahu* (despised).

² The Instructionists (*Taʿlīmīyyūn*) are the Ismāʿīlīs, an Islamic sect who believe in “authoritative teaching in religion, which could be carried out only by a divinely chosen imām in every age after the prophet” (*EI* entry on Ismāʿīlīyya).

divergences among the masters³ of various creeds, factions, and methods, is a deep ocean in which many have drowned and from which only a few have been saved. Each faction claims that they are [79] saved, and “each is content with what they have” [cf. Qur’ān 23:53, 30:32]. This was predicted by the Prince of the Messengers (the blessings of God be upon him), for he is the truthful and sincere one, who said: “My community will be divided into seventy-three factions, one of which will be saved.” His prediction has almost come true.

I have persisted, ever since the prime of my youth and my tender years – all the way from my adolescence, before reaching the age of 20, until the present day, when I am over 50 – to plumb the depths of this ocean and to plunge into it boldly, not with diffident cowardice. I have attempted to penetrate every obscurity, grapple with every problem, tackle every predicament, examine the beliefs of every faction, and investigate the hidden creed of each sect [80]. I have done so in order to distinguish the honest person from the liar, and the orthodox from the heretic. I never let an esotericist go by without wanting to ascertain his esotericism, nor do I pass up an exotericist without wanting to know the outcome of his exotericism.⁴ I never meet a philosopher without seeking to understand the underlying nature of his philosophy, a theologian without making an effort to become acquainted with the aim of his theology and dialectic, a mystic without aspiring to find the secret of his mysticism, an ascetic without scrutinizing the aim of his ascetic worship, and a blasphemous atheist⁵ without prying [81] into the reasons behind the audacity of his atheism.

The thirst for apprehending things as they really are has been my pre-occupation and principle from a very early age. It is part of my God-given instinct and nature, a matter of temperament not of choice or invention. Hence, I was freed from the bonds of conformity and my inherited beliefs were shattered while I was just a boy, since I observed that Christian boys grew up only to be Christians, Jewish boys only to be Jewish, and Muslim boys only to be Muslim. I also heard the Ḥadīth⁶ attributed to the Prophet

³ The Arabic term *imām* is being used in a loose sense here, not in the narrow sense of prayer leader.

⁴ An esotericist (*bāṭinī*) is one who ascribes figurative meanings to certain Qur’ānic passages, and an exotericist (*ẓāhirī*) is one who insists on a literal reading.

⁵ Literally, a Manichean denier of the attributes of God (*ẓindīqan mu’aṭṭilan*). However, Ghazālī seems to use both Arabic terms rather loosely, applying them sometimes to blasphemers or atheists in general.

⁶ A Ḥadīth is a saying attributed to the prophet Muḥammad.

of God (may he be blessed by God) that states: “Every child is born in the natural state; his parents make him a Jew, Christian, or Magian.” I was therefore inwardly moved to seek out the reality of this original nature, as well as the reality of the beliefs acquired out of conformity [82] to parents and teachers. I also sought to distinguish among these conformist beliefs about which there are disagreements in differentiating true from false, beginning with the instilled beliefs. I said to myself: “Since I seek to know things as they really are, I must first seek out the reality of knowledge itself.” It became apparent to me that certain knowledge is that in which what is known is laid bare in such a way as to leave no room for doubt, and is unaccompanied by the possibility of error or illusion, to the point that the mind⁷ cannot even conceive it. Rather, what is secure from error should be so closely associated with certainty, that if someone tried to show that it was false by turning stone into gold or a stick into a snake, for example, that would not make it doubtful or refute it. Thus, if I came to know that ten is greater than three, and someone said to me: “No, three is greater than ten, in proof of which I will turn this stick into a serpent,” then went on to do so in plain view, I would not as a result of that come to doubt what I was cognizant of. The only outcome would be wonderment at how he is able to perform such a feat. As to doubt concerning what I know, there is none. Thus, I knew that whatever I did not know in this manner and was not certain of in this way was untrustworthy and insecure knowledge; and every knowledge that is insecure is not certain knowledge.

[83] Then I searched the sum of my knowledge and found myself devoid of knowledge characterized by this attribute, apart from sensory beliefs and necessary beliefs.⁸ I said: “Now, after despair has set in, I have no hope of solving problems except with regard to what is evident, which are sensory beliefs and necessary beliefs. Hence, I must safeguard them first to make certain of my confidence in sensory beliefs and my security from error when it comes to necessary beliefs. Is it of the same kind as my former trust in conformist beliefs and the trust that most people have in theoretical beliefs?⁹ Or is it a justified trust, which is neither deceptive nor confused?” [84] I proceeded in real earnest to contemplate sensory beliefs

⁷ Literally, the heart (*al-qalb*); but see Ghazālī’s remarks on the “heart” at [151].

⁸ Ghazālī calls them, quite simply, “sensories” (*al-ḥissīyyāt*, or *al-maḥsūsāt*) and “necessaries” (*al-ḍarūrīyyāt*).

⁹ Alternatively, speculative beliefs or speculations (*naẓarīyyāt*).

and necessary beliefs, to see whether I could make myself doubt them. After a lengthy process of doubt, my mind did not allow me to maintain my trust in sensory beliefs either, and began gradually to cast doubt on them, saying: "Where does this confidence in sensory beliefs come from? The strongest sense is vision, which looks at a shadow and sees that it is stationary, and judges that there is no motion. But then as a result of experience and observation, after an hour, it is cognizant that the shadow is indeed moving. Moreover, it finds that it did not move suddenly, all at once, but rather incrementally atom by atom, in such a way that it was never actually stationary. Likewise, vision looks at a celestial body and sees that it is small, around the size of a dinar, but then geometrical proofs indicate that it is in fact larger than the earth in size. In this and other such sensory matters, the judge of sensation makes its judgments, but the judge of reason¹⁰ then judges it to be false and disproves it irrefutably." So I said: "My confidence in sensory beliefs has also been annulled. Perhaps one can only trust the rational beliefs,¹¹ which are among the first principles, such as the statements, 'Ten is greater than three,' 'Negation and affirmation cannot coexist in the same thing,'¹² and 'The same thing cannot be both originated and eternal, or existent and nonexistent, or necessary and impossible'" [85]. The sensory beliefs replied: "How can you be sure that your confidence in rational beliefs is not like that in sensory beliefs? You trusted in me, but the judge of reason disproved me. Were it not for the judge of reason, you would have continued to believe me. Perhaps behind rational apprehension there is another judge who, if he were to manifest himself, would disprove the judgment of reason, just as the judge of reason manifested himself to disprove the judgments of sense perception. The fact that such an apprehension has not manifested itself does not indicate that it is impossible."

My mind hesitated a while before responding to that. Meanwhile, sense perception underscored the problem by referring to dreams, saying: "Do you not believe things in dreams and imagine situations that you believe to be permanent and stable, never doubting them while you are in that state? And do you not then wake up and come to know that all your

¹⁰ In this text, the Arabic term *ʿaql* (often used to translate the Greek *nous*) is sometimes translated as reason and sometimes as intellect.

¹¹ It is clear from what follows that the rational beliefs (*al-ʿaqlīyyāt*) are the same as the necessary beliefs (*ḍarūrīyyāt*).

¹² Alternatively, something cannot be affirmed and denied at once.

imaginings and beliefs were baseless and futile? Why are you so sure that everything that you believe in your waking state on the basis of the senses or reason is true in relation to your current state? A state may arise that bears the same relation to your waking state as your waking state does to your dream state. By comparison to that state your waking state would be like sleep. If such a state were to occur, you would become certain that all the things conjured up by your reason were inconsequential imaginings. Perhaps that state is what the mystics hold to be their state, for they claim to have a vision in their states when they are immersed in themselves and lose awareness of their senses, which does not agree with these rational beliefs.¹³ Or perhaps that state is death, for the Prophet of God (blessings be upon him) said: ‘People are asleep, and when they die [86] they wake up.’ Thus, perhaps the temporal life is slumber by comparison with the afterlife, and when you die things will appear differently to you from the way they do now. At that point, you will be told: ‘We have removed your veil and your vision is now acute’ [Qur’ān 50:22].”

When these notions occurred to me and made an impression on my mind, I sought a cure but found none. For they could only be rebutted with a proof, and a proof can only be constructed by combining the first [principles of] knowledge.¹⁴ If these are not given, then it is impossible to arrange a proof. This disease defied all cure and lasted for almost two months, during which I embraced the sophistical¹⁵ creed in actual fact, though not in speech nor expression. Eventually, God cured me of this disease and my mind was restored to health and balance. The rational necessary beliefs were once again accepted and trusted, both securely and certainly. This did not come about by composing a proof or by an arrangement of words, but rather by a light that God Almighty cast into my breast, which is the key to the greater part of cognizance. Whoever supposes that enlightenment¹⁶ depends upon explicit proofs has [87] narrowed the expanse of God’s mercy. The Prophet of God was asked about the meaning of “opening” in the Qur’ānic verse: “Whomever God desires to guide, He opens his heart to Islam” [Qur’ān 6:125]. He said: “It is a light that God Almighty casts into the heart.” He was asked: “What

¹³ For more on the state (*ḥāl*) of the Islamic mystics or Ṣūfīs, see below (especially [140–1]).

¹⁴ Ghazālī has already stated that these include the necessary truths that he has rejected earlier.

¹⁵ Though Ghazālī writes “sophistical creed” (*madhhab al-safṣaṭah*), his arguments are more reminiscent of the ancient skeptics than the sophists.

¹⁶ Literally, uncovering or removing the veil (as in the Qur’ānic passage quoted above).

is its sign?” He replied: “Aversion to the realm of conceit and devotion to the realm of eternity.” He also said (blessings be upon him): “God Almighty created people in darkness then sprinkled them with his light.” Enlightenment must be sought from that light, which flows from God’s bounty at certain times and must be monitored closely. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said: “Your Lord sends breaths [of grace] in the days of your lifetime; put yourselves in their way” [88]. The intention behind these statements is that the utmost efforts should be made in seeking [knowledge], right up to the point that one ends up seeking what cannot be sought. For first principles are not sought but are present, and if what is present is sought it will be lost and will disappear. Moreover, whoever seeks what cannot be sought cannot be accused of falling short in seeking what can.¹⁷

[89] After God Almighty cured me of this disease by His grace and all-embracing generosity, I narrowed down the seekers of knowledge to four factions: (i) Theologians, who claim that they are the party of opinion and theoretical speculation; (ii) Esotericists, who claim that they are the party of instruction and are privileged to receive instruction from the infallible imām; (iii) Philosophers, who claim that they are the party of logic and demonstration; and (iv) Mystics, who claim that they alone are privileged to be in the presence¹⁸ of God and are the party of vision and illumination. I said to myself: “Truth must not lie outside the purview of these four types, for they are the ones who follow the paths of truth-seeking. If truth eludes them all, then I have no hope of apprehending it, for there is no point in reverting to conformism once one has left it behind. It is a precondition of being a conformist [90] that the conformist not know that he is merely conforming. Once he comes to know that, the glass of conformity is fractured and the damage is irreparable. It cannot be reassembled using the techniques of restoration and renovation, but must rather be melted down in the fire and created all over again.”

Without further ado, I prepared to travel this course of truth-seeking and to detail what these factions had accomplished, beginning with the

¹⁷ This passage is somewhat obscure. Perhaps the sense is as follows: Ghazālī sought what could be sought right up to the point of seeking what cannot be sought (first principles). This is not a futile enterprise, since, given that he got this far, he can be said to have gone as far as one can go in seeking knowledge, and cannot be accused of not going far enough.

¹⁸ Islamic mystics, or Sūfīs, have used various terms to denote a state of proximity to God, one of which is presence (*ḥadrah*), to which Ghazālī here refers.

science of theology, proceeding to philosophy, going on to esoteric instruction, and ending with mysticism.

[91] I began with theology, which I acquired and grasped intellectually by reading the works of the reputable authorities among the theologians and by writing some works of my own. I found it to be a science that fulfilled its purpose but not mine. Its purpose was to preserve the beliefs of the orthodox and to protect them from the misinformation of the heretics. By means of His messenger, God Almighty handed down to His worshippers [92] a doctrine that is the truth, which contains what is needed for their well-being in both religious and temporal matters, and cognizance of which is pronounced by the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. Then the devil insinuated to the heretics certain things that were contrary to orthodoxy, which they eagerly embraced and with which they almost succeeded in confounding the party of the doctrine of truth. So God Almighty gave rise to the theologians and motivated them to advocate orthodoxy with systematic discourse that revealed the deceptions of the heretical innovators and their departures from accepted orthodoxy. That is how the science of theology and its practitioners arose. Some of the theologians have carried out what God Almighty appointed them to do and have defended orthodoxy admirably. They have fought on behalf of the doctrine received through the acceptance of prophecy and have corrected the innovations of the heretics. However, in doing so, they have relied on premises that they took over from their opponents, which their opponents are required to acknowledge either on the basis of conformity to tradition, or consensus of the community, or mere acceptance of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. Most of their endeavors consist in exposing the contradictions of their opponents and in criticizing the implications of their tenets. This was of little use for someone who only accepts necessary truths. Thus, theology was not sufficient for my needs and did not provide a cure for my disease. To be sure, as the art of theology developed and was practiced abundantly over a long period of time, the theologians aspired to defend orthodoxy [93] by investigating the reality of things, and examined substances, accidents, and their principles. However, since that was not the main purpose of their science, their discourse did not attain the ultimate goal in this regard and did not achieve the total elimination of the obscure perplexities to be found in the disagreements among humanity. I am not ruling out the possibility that this may have been achieved for others – indeed, I do not doubt that it was achieved for some – but the achievement will have been

tainted by conformity to tradition with respect to certain things that are not first principles. In any case, my purpose now is to set out my own case, not to deny that others have been cured by theology. Medications differ depending on the disease, and there are many medications that benefit one patient and harm another.

[94] After finishing with the science of theology, I moved on to the science of philosophy. I knew with certainty that one cannot understand the failings of a certain type of science unless one reaches the utmost limit of that science. One must become equal with the most knowledgeable of its practitioners, then exceed them and surpass their level, so that one is acquainted with the intricacies and confusions that even the practitioners themselves are not acquainted with. Only then is it possible to take someone's claims about its failings to be true. I found that none of the religious scholars¹⁹ of Islam had devoted their concerted efforts to that end.

The discourses in the books of the theologians where they busied themselves with responding to the philosophers consisted of some stray convoluted statements, which were clearly contradictory and defective. No person of ordinary intellect would be duped by them, much less someone who claims mastery of the subtleties [95] of the sciences. I knew that refuting the creed before understanding it and becoming acquainted with its underlying nature was like taking a shot in the dark. Therefore, I forged ahead in earnest and exerted myself to acquire that science from books, simply by reading on my own without the help of an instructor. I did so during my free time, when I was not engaged in writing and teaching the religious sciences, for at that time I was charged with teaching and advising three hundred students in Baghdād. Thanks to God Almighty, I was able merely by reading philosophy during these stolen hours to reach the utmost limits of that science in less than two years. Then I devoted another year to further reflecting upon it after having understood it, returning to it, poring over it again, and reexamining its intricacies and confusions. In this way, I managed to acquaint myself indubitably with its ruses, deceptions, justifications, and illusions.²⁰

Let me give you an account of the philosophers and the end result of the philosophical sciences. I found the philosophers to be divided into

¹⁹ The term *‘ālim* (plural *‘ulamā’*), which can simply mean knowledgeable person, is widely used to denote a member of the class of scholars who, in the absence of a clergy, served as a kind of Islamic religious establishment.

²⁰ Literally, imaginative representation (*takhyīl*).

a number of categories, and the philosophical sciences to be split into a number of divisions. Despite their many subdivisions, they all carry the stigma of blasphemy and apostasy. Nevertheless, there are vast variations among the philosophers – most ancient, ancient, later, and more recent – in terms of their distance from and proximity to the truth [96]. You should know that, despite differences among the philosophers and notwithstanding the variety of philosophical creeds, they may be classified into three categories: materialists, naturalists, and theists.

The first type, the materialists, are an ancient faction who renounced the Creator, Governor, Knower, and Almighty. They claimed that the universe has always existed as it is without a creator, and that animals come from seed and seed from animals, and that this has always occurred and will occur forever. These are the atheists.

The second category, the naturalists, are a group of people who actively investigated the natural world, including the wonders of animals and plants. They delved deeply into the science of anatomy, dissecting the organs of animals and discovering there the marvels created by God Almighty and the wonders of His wisdom. This obliged them [97] to admit the existence of a wise Creator who is apprised of the goals of things and their purposes. No one can become acquainted with anatomy and the marvelous uses of organs without acquiring necessary knowledge of the perfection bestowed by the Artisan on the structures of animals, especially the structure of human beings. However, as a result of their intense investigations into nature, it became clear to these philosophers how efficacious a balanced temperament²¹ was in sustaining the animal faculties. They assumed that the rational faculty in humans was also dependent upon the human temperament, and that it would be extinguished when the temperament expired, thereby ceasing to exist. Since, as they claim, it is irrational for the nonexistent to return to life, they concluded that the soul dies and does not return. Thus, they denied the afterlife, heaven and hell, judgment and restoration, and resurrection and reckoning, and they were left with no reward for obedience and no punishment for transgression. Unfettered by that, they proceeded to indulge themselves in sensual pleasures like grazing sheep. These are blasphemers also, since the basis of faith is faith in God and the Day of Judgment, and even though they do believe in God and His attributes, they renounce the Day of Judgment.

²¹ Literally, mixture (*mizāj*); i.e. a balanced mixture of the four humors in the body.

The third category, the theists, consists of the less ancient of the three groups of philosophers, such as Socrates, who was the teacher of Plato, and Plato the teacher of Aristotle [98], and Aristotle himself, who systematized logic for them, organized the sciences, rendered accurate what had been imprecise, and brought to maturity those of their sciences that were still in their infancy. The theists generally responded to the first two categories of philosophers, the materialists and naturalists, and in exposing their shortcomings relieved others of the task. “God spared the faithful from combat” [Qur’ān 33:25] due to the in-fighting of their opponents. Moreover, Aristotle refuted Plato, Socrates, and the other theists before them, in such a thoroughgoing fashion that he ended up dissociating himself from all of them. But he also retained some remnants of their blasphemous and heretical vices, which he was not able to shed. Hence, it is necessary to consider all the theist philosophers blasphemous, including their followers among the Islamic philosophers, such as Ibn Sīnā [99], al-Fārābī, and others. None of the other Islamic philosophers transmitted the knowledge of Aristotle as did these two men. What was transmitted by others is so full of commotion and confusion as to bewilder the heart of the reader and prevent him from understanding – and what cannot be understood can neither be rejected nor accepted. The sum total of Aristotle’s genuine philosophy, as transmitted by these two men, can be divided into three parts: what must be considered blasphemous, what must be considered heretical, and what must not be denied at all. I will show this in what follows.

[100] You should know that, for our present purpose, their sciences have six branches: mathematical, logical, metaphysical,²² physical, political, and ethical.

(1) The mathematical sciences pertain to the sciences of arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy,²³ and none of them is relevant to religious matters, either by way of negation or affirmation. Rather, these are demonstrative matters that one cannot deny once one has understood them and become cognizant of them. Nevertheless, mathematics has given rise to two types of harm.

²² Literally, divine (*ilāhīyyah*) sciences. However, Ghazālī does not mean theology, but rather the reference is to *al-ilāhīyyāt*, the philosophical study of divine matters, which is the term often used to denote metaphysics in general, or an important portion of metaphysics (which is also known more literally as *mā ba’d al-ṭabī‘ah*, what comes after physics).

²³ Ghazālī seems to use *‘ilm hay’at al-‘ālam* to denote astronomy and *‘ilm al-nujūm* to denote astrology in this text.

The first is that a person who examines mathematics comes to marvel at its subtleties and the compelling nature of its demonstrations, and because of this he takes on a favorable attitude towards the philosophers. He supposes that all their sciences are as clear as this science and that all their demonstrations are just as firm. Then, since he has heard of the philosophers' blasphemy, atheism,²⁴ and slackness when it comes to the religious law, he becomes blasphemous merely by conforming to the philosophical tradition [101]. He says: "If religion were true, it could not have escaped these mathematicians, given the scrutiny they give to their science." Moreover, if he is cognizant of what people say about the philosophers' blasphemy and renunciation of religion, he infers that truth lies in the renunciation and denial of religion. I have seen so many stray from the truth solely on this pretext without having any other grounds for doing so. One may say to such a person: "Someone who is proficient in one art need not be so in every art. Thus, one who is versed in jurisprudence and theology need not be versed in medicine, and one who is ignorant of rational²⁵ science may not be ignorant of grammar. For each art has its practitioners who have attained a degree of skill and distinction in that particular art, and who may well be obtuse and ignorant in other arts. The discourse of the ancient philosophers in mathematics is demonstrative, while in metaphysics it is merely conjectural. This can be recognized only by someone who has experienced it and delved into it." However, if this argument is conveyed to the person who becomes an apostate by conforming to philosophical tradition²⁶ and it is not accepted by him, he will instead be moved by the dominance of passion, vain desires, and a penchant for appearing clever to insist on his favorable attitude towards the philosophers in all the sciences. Because of this great harm, everyone who explores these sciences ought to be restrained. Even though the mathematical sciences are not concerned with religious matters [102], they are among the principal²⁷ philosophical sciences, and the evil and malevolence of the philosophers infects those who study them. Few delve into them without losing their religion and slipping off the bonds of piety.

²⁴ Literally, denial of God's attributes (*ta'ṭīlīhim*).

²⁵ The Arabic term is *al-ʿaqlīyyāt*; presumably, Ghazālī has in mind here the philosophical sciences, including natural science (cf. [133], where these sciences are contrasted with the religious sciences).

²⁶ Omitting *wa* (and).

²⁷ Alternatively, they [supply] some of the principles of their sciences (*mabādi' ʿulūmihim*).

The second harm originates with an ignorant friend of Islam, who supposes that religion must be defended by denying every science attributed to the philosophers. He goes on to deny all their sciences and accuses them of ignorance, to the point that he denies what they say about the solar and lunar eclipses and alleges that it is contrary to religious law. When this comes to the attention of those who have become cognizant of these things by way of absolute demonstrations, they do not come to doubt their demonstrations, but rather come to believe that Islam is based on ignorance and a denial of absolute demonstrations, which just increases their love of philosophy and their aversion to Islam. Anyone who supposes that religion is to be defended by denying these sciences has committed a great offense against Islam. There is nothing in the religious law that either negates or affirms these sciences, nor is there anything in these sciences that concerns religious matters. The Prophet (blessings upon him) said: “The sun and the moon are two of the signs of God, and they are not eclipsed for anyone’s death or life. If you see an eclipse, recollect God Almighty and pray to him in fear” [103]. There is nothing in this to deny the science of arithmetic in particular, which informs us of the orbits of the sun and moon, their conjunction, and their opposition. As for the saying of the Prophet (peace be upon him): “But when God manifests Himself to something, it submits to Him,” this further addition to the above saying is not found at all in authentic collections of Ḥadīths.²⁸ That is the correct judgment concerning mathematics and its harm.

(2) The logical sciences are not in any way relevant to religion, either by way of negation or affirmation. Rather, they are the theoretical investigation of the methods of proof and syllogism, the conditions on the premises of demonstrations and their manner of combination, as well as the conditions on valid definitions and their manner of construction. Knowledge consists either of conception, cognizance of which proceeds by means of [104] definition, or assent, cognizance of which proceeds by means of demonstration. There is nothing here that ought to be denied. Rather, what the logicians say is of the same kind as what has been said about proofs by the theologians and other theoreticians, though the logicians differ in the expressions and terms they use, and they go much further in their

²⁸ It is not clear how this addition pertains to Ghazālī’s present point and why he is keen to deny it. Perhaps this addition to the Ḥadīth, if authentic, would show a more direct link between religion and eclipses.

characterizations and distinctions. An example of their discourse in logic would be the statement: “If it is affirmed that every A is B, then that implies that some B is A,” e.g., “If it is affirmed that every human is an animal, then that implies that some animal is a human.” They express this by saying that the converse of a universal affirmative proposition is a particular affirmative proposition. What relevance does this have to the requirements of religion, that it should be renounced or denied? If it is denied, this will only make logicians take a dim view of the intellect of the person who denies it [105], and indeed of the religion that is alleged to depend on such a denial. To be sure, the logicians are somewhat unfair in practicing their science, in that they assemble the conditions that are known necessarily to endow a demonstration with certainty, but since they are unable to satisfy these conditions when it comes to religious matters, they relax them to a great extent. Likewise, those who examine logic may admire its clarity and may suppose that the blasphemies reported of logicians are supported by similarly clear demonstrations. They might then promptly blaspheme before attaining the study of divine metaphysics. This harm also afflicts logic.²⁹

(3) The science of physics is the investigation of the celestial realm and the planets, as well as what lies beneath them: the simple bodies, such as water, air, earth, and fire, and the composite bodies, such as animals, plants, and minerals. It also investigates the causes of their changes, transformations, and mixtures. As such, it is comparable to medicine, which investigates the human body, its principal and subsidiary organs, and the causes of the transformation of its temperament. Just as it is not one of the provisions of religion to deny the science of medicine, it is also not one of its provisions to deny the science of physics except with regard to the specific issues mentioned in our book, “The Incoherence [106] of the Philosophers” (*Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*). All other issues that should be opposed turn out on further contemplation to be subsumed under these. Our opposition in all these cases is based upon the knowledge that nature is subject to God Almighty and does not function by itself, but is rather an instrument for its Creator. The sun, moon, stars, and other natural entities are subject to His command and none of them acts in and of itself.³⁰

²⁹ That is, as it does mathematics.

³⁰ Alternatively, of its essence and by its essence (*bī-dhātihī wa ‘an dhātihī*).

(4) Metaphysics contains most of the errors of the philosophers, for they are not able to fulfill the conditions on demonstrations that are set down in logic, and they therefore disagree considerably among themselves about metaphysical questions. Aristotle's position in metaphysics is close to that of the Islamic philosophers, as transmitted by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. The sum total of their errors can be reduced to twenty basic ones; they should be considered blasphemous on three counts and heretical on seventeen counts. We have composed the work "The Incoherence" (*al-Tahāfut*) in order to refute their positions on these twenty issues. The three issues on which they have opposed all Muslims are as follows. First, they state that bodies are not resurrected in the afterlife, but rather that reward and punishment are meted out simply to souls and that punishments are spiritual, not [107] corporeal. They are right to affirm the spiritual punishments, which are indeed present, but they are wrong to deny corporeal punishments, and have blasphemed against the religious law with this utterance. Second, they state that: "God Almighty knows universals not particulars," which is also clear blasphemy. Rather, the truth is: "An atom's weight does not escape Him in the heavens nor on earth" [Qur'ān 34:3]. Third, they assert that the world is preeternal and has always existed. No Muslim has ventured to make any of these pronouncements.

As for the other seventeen points besides these, such as their denial of God's attributes, their statement that God knows by His essence not by what is added to His essence, and similar things, their position is close to that of the Mu'tazilites,³¹ who ought not to be [108] considered blasphemous for such things. In our book "Criterion [109] of the Difference between Islam and Atheism" (*Fayṣal al-Tafrīqah bayn al-Islām mal-Zandaqah*) we have made clear that it is a corrupt opinion that rushes to consider blasphemous any creed that is contrary to one's own.

(5) Their entire discourse in the political sciences is derived from the beneficial maxims relating to temporal matters and monarchical rule. They simply took them from the books of God that were revealed to the prophets and the maxims handed down by the precursors of prophets.

(6) In ethics, their entire discourse comes down to the enumeration of the attributes of the soul and its character,³² the genera and species

³¹ An Islamic philosophical and theological movement that originated in the eighth century AD (second century AH) that aimed to provide a rationalistic account of Islamic doctrine.

³² Alternatively, its ethics (*akhlāqihā*).

of souls, and how to treat and tame souls. This is simply taken from the discourse of the mystics, who are preoccupied with the divine and who diligently recollect God Almighty, oppose passion, and tread the path to God by avoiding worldly pleasures. In the course of their spiritual exertion they have uncovered people's characters, defects, and their pernicious actions. Hence, they proclaimed these things, and the philosophers took this and intermingled it with their own discourse, in a bid to revamp and promote their falsehoods. Such groups, who are preoccupied with the divine, existed in the era of the philosophers [110], as indeed in all other eras, since God does not allow the world to be empty of them, for they are the pillars of the earth. Mercy descends upon the people of the earth thanks to their blessings, as has been reported in the Ḥadīth of the Prophet (blessings upon him): "By virtue of them you will have rain, thanks to them you will have prosperity, and from them were drawn the people of the Cave."³³ They have been present in all previous eras, as mentioned in the Qur'ān. Two harms have resulted from the philosophers' blending of prophetic discourse and mystical discourse in their books, one pertaining to its acceptance and the other to its rejection.

The harm pertaining to its rejection is a considerable one, since a group of weak people thinks that the discourse set down in their books, which is mixed with falsehood, ought to be shunned altogether and not repeated, but rather denounced to everyone who repeats it. Since they heard this discourse originally from the philosophers, their weak intellects jumped to the conclusion that it was false simply because those who professed it were dishonest. It is as though someone hears a Christian make the statement: "There is no God but God, Jesus is the prophet of God," and goes on to deny it, saying: "This is the discourse of Christians." Such a person does not pause long enough to consider whether the Christian is blasphemous in virtue of this statement or in virtue of his denial of the prophecy of Muḥammad (blessings and peace be upon him). If he is only blasphemous with regard to this denial, he ought not to be opposed when it comes to something true in itself and different from his blasphemy [111], even though it is also true according to him. This is a habit of weak intellects, who recognize truth on the basis of men, rather than men on the basis of truth. Instead, a rational person emulates the supremely rational

³³ The reference is to Qur'ān Sūrah 18, which relates the story of a small group of righteous men who sought refuge from persecution in a cave and were saved from their pursuers by God.

°Alī bin Abī Tālib³⁴ (may God be pleased with him) who said: “Do not recognize truth on the basis of men; rather, recognize the truth first, then you will recognize the holders of truth.” Thus, the cognizant rational person recognizes the truth, and then examines the statement itself. If it is true, he accepts it regardless of whether the person who made the statement is a liar or an honest person. Indeed, he may even strive to seize the truth from the statements of those who are in error, knowing full well that gold is mined among dirt and sand. The moneychanger is none the worse for having put his hand into the counterfeiter’s bag and extracting pure gold from among the fakes and forgeries, so long as his eyesight is to be trusted. However, the counterfeiter is to be prevented from doing business with the rustic villager, not with the sharp-eyed moneychanger; the clumsy beginner is to be barred from the seashore, not the proficient swimmer; and the boy is to be stopped from touching the snake, not the skilled snake charmer.

Since the assumption that predominates in most people is that of their own proficiency [112], skill, soundness of intellect, and perfect ability to distinguish truth from falsehood and guidance from error, it is necessary to shut the door to restrict the multitude from reading the books of those in error as far as possible. For they will not be safe from the second harm to be mentioned, even if they escape the first.

Some of the passages set down in our works on the secrets of the religious sciences have elicited objections from a group of those who have not inwardly mastered the sciences and have not penetrated the furthest goals of creeds. They have claimed that these passages are taken from the discourse of the ancient philosophers, even though some of them are the innovations of my mind (for it is not unlikely for two footprints to coincide), while others are to be found in religious books, and most coincide in meaning with what is found in the works of mysticism. Still, even if this discourse could be found only in the books of the ancient philosophers, why should it be shunned and discarded, if it is rational in itself, supported by demonstration, and not contrary to the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth? If we were to set the precedent that all truths that had ever occurred to a falsifier were to be avoided, then it would follow that much of the truth would have to be abandoned, including many verses from the Qur’ān, the sayings of the Prophet, the narratives of our [113]

³⁴ The fourth caliph of Islām and son-in-law of the prophet Muḥammad.

ancestors, and the statements of sages and mystics. All these would have to be discarded simply because the author of the work “The Brethren of Purity”³⁵ (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*) mentioned them in his book, citing them in order to win over the hearts of the simple-minded to his falsehoods. This would also enable the falsifiers to wrest the truth from our hands simply by setting it down in their own books.

At the very least, a knowledgeable person should be distinguishable from a common ignorant person. Accordingly, honey should not be eschewed if it is found in the cupping glass and one verifies [114] that the cupping glass does not change the essence of honey. The natural distaste that one feels towards it is based on a widespread misconception that the cupping glass is made only for unclean blood. Thus, it is assumed that the blood is unclean because it is found in the cupping glass, not due to an attribute of its essence. If this attribute does not exist in honey, its presence in that container will not endow it with that attribute, and one ought not necessarily ascribe impurity to it. This is a mistaken illusion that prevails among most human beings. If you make a statement, attributing it to someone they think highly of, they will accept it even if it is false; and if you attribute it to someone they hold in disregard, they will reject it even if it is true. They always recognize the truth by the men rather than the men by the truth, and that is the epitome of error. That is the harm due to rejection.

The second harm is that of acceptance. Those who examine the books of the “Brethren of Purity” and others, on finding that they mix their own discourse with wise prophetic maxims and mystical statements, may approve of them, accept them, and adopt a favorable stance towards them. They will then also hasten to accept the falsehoods that are intermingled with them, due to the favorable stance adopted towards what they have seen and approved of. This amounts to a kind of enticement to falsehood.

On account of this harm, access to their books should be restricted because of the [115] deceit and danger that they contain. Just as one must protect unskilled swimmers from perilous shores, people must be shielded from reading philosophical books. And just as boys must be held back from touching snakes, people must be guarded against hearing the muddled statements of the philosophers. The snake charmer must

³⁵ This philosophical work, a compilation of the teachings of a group of Islamic scholars in the tenth–eleventh centuries AD (fourth–fifth centuries AH), contains a considerable body of cosmological and metaphysical doctrine influenced both by Aristotle and neo-Platonism.

not handle the snake in front of his young son, if he knows that he will emulate him and suppose that he is like him. Rather, he must urge him to be wary of the snake by being cautious and by refraining from touching it while he is in his presence. Those with secure knowledge³⁶ should proceed in a similar fashion. Furthermore, the proficient snake charmer who can handle the snake and distinguish between the antidote and the poison, extracting the antidote and neutralizing the poison, should not withhold the antidote from someone who needs it. Similarly, the astute and sharp-eyed moneychanger who puts his hand into the counterfeiter's bag, withdrawing the pure gold and rejecting the fakes and forgeries, should not deny the good and acceptable coins to those in need. The same applies to those with knowledge. In addition, if someone in need of the antidote finds it repugnant once he knows that it is extracted from the snake, which is the source of the poison itself, he must be made to recognize his mistake. A poor person in need of money who snubs the gold withdrawn from the counterfeiter's bag must likewise be alerted to the fact that his distaste for it [116] is pure ignorance and will be the cause of his being denied the benefit that he seeks. He must be made aware of the fact that proximity between the fake and the genuine does not render the genuine fake, just as it does not render the fake genuine. Similarly, proximity between truth and falsehood does not render the true false, no more than it renders the false true.

That is all that we wanted to say concerning the harms of philosophy and its confusions.³⁷

[130] When I was done with these sciences, I turned my energies to the way of mysticism and came to know that their method is brought about by a combination of knowledge and practice. The objective of their knowledge is to overcome the obstacles found in the soul. They free the soul of blameworthy characteristics and malicious attributes in order to cleanse the heart of everything but God Almighty and adorn it with the recollection of God.

The knowledge associated with mysticism was easier for me than the practice. I began to acquire their knowledge by [131] reading their books, such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's "Nourishment for the Heart" (*Qūt al-Qulūb*), the works of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī, and the selections handed

³⁶ This is a variant of *al-rāsikhūn fil-ilm*, a common Qur'ānic phrase meaning those secure in knowledge, or with thorough mastery of knowledge.

³⁷ A section of the text is here omitted, containing Ghazālī's critique of the Instructionists.

down to us from al-Junayd, al-Shiblī, and Abū Yazīd [132] al-Bisṭāmī (may God sanctify their souls), as well as other masters.³⁸ I did so until I had ascertained the underlying purpose of their science and had acquired what could be acquired of their way through teaching and oral instruction. It became apparent to me that what was most distinctive about them and specific to them was what could not be attained through teaching but rather through “tasting,” the “state,” and a “transformation of attributes.”³⁹ There is a world of difference between knowing the definitions of health and satiety, their causes, and their preconditions, and actually being healthy and satiated. Likewise, there is a world of difference between being cognizant of the definition of inebriation, which denotes a state that comes about as a result of vapors rising from the stomach and overwhelming the sources of thought, and actually being inebriated. Indeed, the inebriated person is not cognizant of the definition of inebriation, for his knowledge while he is inebriated is nonexistent [133]. By contrast, the sober person knows the definition of inebriation and its basis, although he bears no trace of inebriation. Furthermore, a doctor who is in a diseased state knows the definition of health, its causes, and remedies, even though he is lacking in health. There is a similar difference between knowing the reality of asceticism, its preconditions, and its causes, and the soul’s actually being in a state of asceticism and renunciation of the world.

I came to know with certainty that the mystics were the masters of states⁴⁰ rather than statements, and that I had acquired what I could by way⁴¹ of knowledge. All that remained was what could not be attained through oral instruction and teaching, but only through tasting and conduct.⁴² Thanks to the sciences that I had practiced and the various approaches I had taken in the course of my investigation into both the religious and rational sciences, I had acquired certain faith in God Almighty, prophecy, and the Day of Judgment.⁴³ These three foundations of faith had become entrenched in my soul, not [134] as a result of a specific and

³⁸ These are Ṣūfī masters or figures in Islamic asceticism.

³⁹ Ṣūfī terms denoting aspects of the mystical experience.

⁴⁰ The reference is to the mystical state (*ḥāl*, plural *aḥwāl*) of proximity to God.

⁴¹ Alternatively, by the method (*ṭarīq*) of knowledge.

⁴² Alternatively, following the mystical path (*sulūk*).

⁴³ Ghazālī seems to be saying that, in addition to the necessary truths (and sensory truths?) acquired by means of the light from God before his foray into the sciences, he also picked up the basic tenets of monotheism along the way, in the course of investigating theology and philosophy. Notice that they are acquired in a variety of ways and not as a result of one clear source, or on the basis of a single foundation.

explicit proof, but rather due to reasons, indications, and experiences, the details of which do not lend themselves to a brief summary. It had also become apparent to me that I had no hope of achieving happiness in the afterlife except through piety and by barring the soul from passion. The first step is to sever the heart's attachment to this world, by means of aversion to the realm of conceit, devotion to eternal life, and exertion of one's utmost efforts to God Almighty. This can come about only by turning away from fame and wealth, as well as by releasing oneself from all preoccupations and attachments. When I took note of my own situation, I found myself immersed in attachments, which closed in on me from all sides. Then I pondered my professional duties, the best of which were tutoring and teaching, and found that I was engaged in inconsequential sciences, which were of no benefit when it came to the pursuit of the afterlife. After that, I reflected upon the intention behind my teaching and found that it was not done in the service of God Almighty, but rather that its entire motivation was the pursuit of fame and the impetus behind it was the enhancement of reputation. I became certain that I was on the edge of a dangerous precipice and on the verge of hellfire, if I did not devote myself to rectify my situation.

[135] I reflected on the matter for some time, while I was still in a position to make a choice.⁴⁴ One day, I would be determined to leave Baghdād and walk out on my whole situation, and the next I would lose my determination entirely. I put one step forward then took another back. My desire to pursue the afterlife would take hold one morning, only to be dispersed by the forces of appetite by evening. The temptations of the temporal world enchained me and tugged at me to remain, while the voice of faith cried out: "Depart! Depart! You have only a short time left to live, you have a long journey ahead, and your knowledge and practice are all hypocrisy and illusion. If not now, when will you prepare for the afterlife? If you do not sever these attachments now, when will you do so?" At that point, my resolve would be renewed and I would become determined once again to escape and take flight. But then the devil would reappear, saying: "This is a passing phase. Do not succumb to it whatever you do, because it will be quick to lapse. If you give in to it and leave behind this extensive fame, this carefree prestigious position, and a settled situation

⁴⁴ As Ghazālī explains below, after a period of six months, it ceased to be a matter of choice.

that is uncontested by opponents, you may look back one day and find that it is not easy to return.”

[136] For almost six months, starting in the month of Rajab 488 AH [July–August 1095 AD], I swung between the temptations of the temporal world and the call of the afterlife. Finally, by the sixth month, it ceased to be a matter of choice and became one of necessity, for God locked up my tongue and I became incapable of teaching. I would exert myself to lecture for even one day to satisfy the hearts of those around me, but my tongue would not utter a single word, and I would be completely incapable of doing so. Obstruction of the tongue eventually led to desolation of the heart, which in turn brought with it a breakdown of the faculty that digests and assimilates food and drink; I could not even keep down broth or digest a single bite. This led to a weakening of all my faculties and the doctors lost hope for a cure. They said: “This is an affliction of the heart that has spread to the temperament, so the only way to cure it is by revival of the heart and removal of the derangement.”

When I became aware of my incapacity and the choice was really out of my hands, I sought refuge in God Almighty in dire need and utter desperation, and was answered by Him “who responds to the one in need when he calls upon him” [Qur’ān 27:62]. He made it easier for me to turn away from fame and wealth [137], as well as from family, children, and friends. Outwardly, I expressed my resolution to go to Mecca to perform the pilgrimage, while arranging silently to travel to Syria, so that the caliph and all my friends would not be apprised of my decision to take up residence in Syria. To this end, I resorted to all manner of subterfuge when I left Baghdād, resolved never to return to it again. All the imāms of Iraq assailed me, since none of them would allow that there could be a religious reason for my leaving everything behind. They assumed that I had reached the highest religious position. “That is the sum of their knowledge” [Qur’ān 53:30]. After that, people were caught up in conjectures concerning my decision. Those who were far from Iraq assumed that I had received word that I was out of favor with the authorities. However, those close to the authorities noted that they were attached to me and pursued me, while I avoided them and was impervious to their words. Thus, they concluded: “This is a supernatural matter. Its cause can only be a spell cast upon the people of Islam and the community of religious scholars.”

Finally, I left Baghdād, distributing what wealth I had and preserving only a small amount for my subsistence and the sustenance of my children. I was aided in this by the fact that a portion of the wealth of Iraq is earmarked for social welfare in the form of a religious endowment⁴⁵ for the Muslims. Nowhere else in the world have I seen such abundant wealth [138] for scholars to draw upon to support their families. Then I entered Syria and resided there for almost two years, occupying myself exclusively with isolation, solitude, spiritual exercises, and mystical devotion. I was engaged in purifying my soul, moral education,⁴⁶ and cleansing my heart for the recollection of God Almighty, in accordance with what I had read in the books of the mystics. Each day, I would withdraw to the Mosque of Damascus, ascend the minaret, and lock myself up there for the duration of the day. From there, I made my way to Jerusalem, where I would enter the Dome of the Rock every day and sequester myself. Then I was moved by the call to fulfill the duty of pilgrimage, derive blessings from Mecca and Medina, and pay my respects to the tomb of the Prophet (God's blessings be upon him). But first, I stopped to visit the Mosque of Abraham in Hebron (God's blessings be upon him) before proceeding to Ḥijāz.

Eventually, certain concerns and my children's pleas to return pulled me back to the homeland, though I thought that I would never go back. There, I also opted for isolation in an attempt to preserve my secluded state and to keep my heart pure for the recollection of God. Various eventualities, family duties, and the need [139] for subsistence tended to affect the nature of my goal and intrude upon my undisturbed solitude. But even though I could attain the pure state only from time to time, that did not extinguish my hope of achieving it. Obstacles would impede me, but I would always go back to it.

I remained in this state for ten years, and things were revealed to me during my solitary retreats that cannot be enumerated or detailed. This much I will mention, since it may be of benefit to others: I came to know with certainty that the mystics are exclusively the ones who pursue the course that leads to God Almighty. Their conduct is the best, their way is the most correct, and their characters are the most morally refined. Indeed, if one were to gather together the intellect of all rational persons,

⁴⁵ A religious endowment (*waqf*) is an Islamic institution set up to provide for needy individuals, institutions, etc.

⁴⁶ Alternatively, adopting an ethical or moral character (*tahdhīb al-akhlāq*).

the wisdom of the sages, and the knowledge of those religious scholars apprised of the secrets of religious law, they would be unable to find anything in the conduct and character of the mystics that could be changed for the better. All their activity, whether outward or inward, is obtained from the light of the lantern of prophecy, in comparison with which no light on earth is capable of illuminating.

On the whole, what can one say about their way? Purity, which is its first precondition, is the complete purification of the heart from everything but God [140] Almighty. The key to their way, which follows from this first step, just as prayer follows from sanctity,⁴⁷ is the complete absorption of the heart in the recollection of God. The final step is complete obliteration⁴⁸ in God. Or rather, that is the final step relative to these first steps, which can almost be considered matters of choice and acquisition. But upon closer inspection, this is just the beginning of the mystic way and what precedes it is just an entryway for those who pursue the way. From the very first step of the mystic way, enlightenment and visions begin. The mystics even see the angels and the spirits of the prophets when they are awake, hearing their voices and deriving benefit from them. Then the mystical state progresses from the level of visions of images and similitudes to levels about which it is difficult to give utterance. Any interpreter who has tried to articulate such a state has inevitably committed a clear error of expression, which cannot be guarded against. On the whole, it all concludes with a kind of proximity to God, which one group represents imaginatively almost as [141] transfiguration, while another group represents it as union, and yet a third group as attainment.⁴⁹ But all these are erroneous representations, whose errors we have exposed in the work “The Radiant Goal” (*al-Maqsad al-Asnā*). Rather, whoever has managed to attain that state must not say more than the following:

I do not remember what happened,
So assume the best, and do not ask for a report!⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Literally, a state in which certain things are forbidden (*tahrim*).

⁴⁸ Obliteration (*fanāʾ*) is a common Sūfī term to denote the experience of losing oneself in God.

⁴⁹ Transfiguration (*hulūl*), union (*ittiḥād*), and attainment (*wuṣūl*) are all metaphorical ways used in the Sūfī literature to describe the ultimate mystical experience. As Ghazālī explains, he finds fault with all three since they carry erroneous implications.

⁵⁰ Line from the poet Ibn al-Muʿtazz (d. 908 AD).

Generally speaking, anyone who has not been granted the taste of this state apprehends [142] the reality of prophecy in name alone. Upon verification, it transpires that the exalted states of those who are close to God are in fact the beginning of prophecy. That was the initial state of the Prophet (the blessings of God upon him) when he first approached Mount Ḥirā', where he would isolate himself and worship so devotedly that the Arabs said: "Muhammad has fallen in love with his Lord."

This state can be verified by anyone through direct tasting once they have pursued the mystical road. As for those who have not been granted the taste of it, they can become certain of it through experience and testimony if they frequent the company of the mystics, and they will come to a certain understanding of these states by means of evidence. Those who frequent their company will acquire faith from them – for they are the group whose companions will never be damned. As for those who are not granted their companionship, they can come to know of the possibility of this state with certainty by means of demonstrative indications, as we have mentioned in one of the sections of the book "The Revival of the Religious Sciences" (*Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*), which is entitled "The Wonders of the Heart."

Verification by means of demonstration is knowledge. Taking on the state itself is tasting. Acceptance based on testimony and experience based on trust⁵¹ is faith [143]. These are three degrees, for "God ranks in degrees those of you who have faith and those to whom knowledge is granted" [Qur'ān 58:11].

Behind these mystics is a group of ignorant people, who deny the basis of this and wonder at these words. They listen, mock, and say: "How strange, they're babbling deliriously!" They are the ones of whom God Almighty said: "Some of them will listen to you and after they leave you, they will say to those to whom knowledge has been granted: 'What did he just say?' They are the ones whose hearts God has sealed and they have followed their passions" [Qur'ān 47:16], for he has made them deaf and blind.

Among the things that became clear to me with necessity as a result of practicing the way of the mystics was the reality of prophecy and its properties. Next, I must point out the basis of prophecy, for there is a dire need for that.

⁵¹ Literally, experience based on favorable presumption (*al-tajribah bi-ḥusn al-ẓann*).

[144] You should know that the human substance in its original natural state is created blank, innocent, and without any information concerning the domains⁵² of God Almighty. These domains are many in number and cannot be enumerated by anyone but God Almighty. As He has said: “No one knows God’s legions but He” [Qur’ān 74:31]. Human beings gather information about these domains simply by means of apprehension, and each type of apprehension was created for humans to be apprised of some domain of existents, where by “domains” we mean the genera of existents.

The first sense to be created in the human being is touch, by means of which he apprehends a genus of existents: heat, coldness, wetness, dryness, softness, hardness, and so on. Touch is absolutely incapable of apprehending colors and sounds, which are as though nonexistent in relation to touch [145]. Next, the sense of vision is created in the human being, which enables him to apprehend colors and shapes; and this is the most extensive realm of perceptibles. After that, hearing is imparted to him, and he hears sounds and pitches. Then, taste is created, and so on, until he transcends the sensory world and is endowed with discrimination. This occurs when he approaches the age of 7, at which point he enters a new stage of his existence. In this stage he apprehends things that are additional to the sensory world, which do not exist in the sensory world. Then he enters yet another stage, when the intellect is created in him, and he apprehends necessity, possibility, and impossibility, as well as other matters that were not present in the previous stages.

Beyond the stage of the intellect, there is another stage in which another eye is opened, by means of which he is able to see supernatural⁵³ things, the future, and other matters from which the intellect is isolated, just as the faculty of discrimination is cut off from apprehending the intelligibles, or the sensory faculty is from the objects of discrimination. Just as the person who is capable of discrimination will reject and shun the objects of the intellect, so also some persons of intellect have rejected and shunned the objects of prophecy. That is the height of ignorance, since their only [146] grounds for doing so is that it is a stage that they have not attained and does not exist for them. Thus, they assume that it does not exist in itself. If the blind person did not know about colors and

⁵² Literally, worlds (*‘awālim*).

⁵³ The Arabic term (*al-ghayb*) literally means the absent, but here and elsewhere it carries the connotation of supernatural or occult matters.

shapes through recurrent⁵⁴ testimony, and were they not reported to him from an early age, he would not have understood them nor would he have approximated them. God has given his creatures an approximation of the properties of prophecy by providing them with an exemplar, namely sleep. The sleeper apprehends the supernatural, whether explicitly or clothed in similes that can be uncovered through interpretation. If a person did not experience this for himself, he would have denied it. If he were told: "Some people fall in a dead faint, losing all sense of touch, hearing, and vision, and apprehend what is absent," he would have devised a demonstrative proof to show that it was impossible, saying: "The sensory faculties are the causes of perception. Whoever does not perceive things when these faculties exist and are present will be even less able and fit to perceive when they are suspended." This is a species of reasoning⁵⁵ that is belied by what actually exists and can be observed. Thus, just as the intellect is a stage for the human being, in which he acquires an eye that can see types of intelligibles that are isolated from the senses, so also prophecy denotes a stage in which he acquires an eye that sheds light upon the supernatural and other things that the intellect cannot apprehend.

One may doubt the very possibility of prophecy, or its [147] actual existence and incidence, or its occurrence to a particular person. The proof of its possibility is its existence. The proof of its existence is the existence of things that can be cognized in the world, such as the sciences of medicine and astrology, which cannot conceivably be obtained through reason.⁵⁶ Whoever investigates these sciences will come to know with necessity that they can be apprehended only by means of divine inspiration and assistance from God Almighty, and that there is no way to acquire them by experience. Some astrological predictions⁵⁷ pertain to things that happen only once every thousand years. How are such things to be obtained from experience? The same may be said for the properties⁵⁸ of medications. This demonstration makes clear that it is possible that there is a means of apprehending those things that cannot be apprehended by reason, which is what is meant by prophecy. It is not that prophecy is solely a way of denoting this means, but rather that apprehension of this

⁵⁴ The Arabic term (*tamātur*) often indicates a process whereby testimony is recurrently corroborated by numerous sources, especially in authenticating a Ḥadīth.

⁵⁵ Alternatively, analogy (*qīyāsī*). ⁵⁶ Alternatively, the intellect (*al-ʿaql*).

⁵⁷ Literally, judgments (*aḥkām*).

⁵⁸ Ghazālī later dwells on the properties (*khawāṣṣ* or *khāṣṣīyyāt*, singular *khāṣṣah* or *khāṣṣīyyah*) of medications that are allegedly unknowable by reason; see [162].

kind of thing, which lies outside the things that reason can apprehend, is one of the properties of prophecy. It has many other properties; what we have mentioned is a mere drop in the ocean. But we mentioned it because you have an exemplar of prophecy in what you apprehend during sleep, and you have sciences of the same kind as prophecy in medicine and astrology. These are the miracles of the prophets (God's blessings upon them), for there is no way that persons of intellect can attain them by dint of reason alone.

As for the other properties of prophecy, they can be apprehended only by tasting as a result of following the mystical way. You can understand the first property of prophecy only by means of an exemplar that you have been granted, namely sleep, without which you would not have believed in it. However, if the prophet has another property of which you do not have an exemplar, you would not even understand it, so how could you believe in it? Belief only comes after understanding, and this other exemplar of prophecy [148] occurs only after the early stages of the mystical way, when tasting occurs, according to the degree attained. At that point belief takes place of a kind that was not acquired through syllogism. Still, the first property of prophecy is sufficient for you to have faith in the basis of prophecy.

If you are in doubt as to whether a specific individual is a prophet or not, you cannot be certain unless you know his circumstances either by first-hand observation or by recurrent testimony. If you are cognizant of medicine and jurisprudence, you can recognize the jurists and doctors by observing their circumstances and listening to their statements even if you are not able to observe them directly. Also, you are capable of recognizing that al-Shāfi'ī (may God have mercy upon him) is a jurist and that Galen is a doctor. You can recognize this in reality [149], not just by conforming to a tradition handed down by others, but simply by learning something about jurisprudence and medicine, and reading their books and works. That way, you can gain necessary knowledge about their circumstances. Similarly, if you understand the concept of prophecy and examine closely the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, you will gain necessary knowledge that the Prophet Muḥammad (God's blessings upon him) is in the highest rank of prophecy. You may confirm this by experiencing what he has said concerning worship and its effect on cleansing the heart, as well as the validity of the following sayings: "Whoever practices what he knows will be endowed by God with what he does not know," "Whoever aids an

unjust person will be overpowered by him, by God's will," and "Whoever reduces all his cares to a single one [i.e. worship of God], will be relieved by God of the cares of this world and the next." If you experience these things a thousand times or more, you will obtain necessary knowledge of Muḥammad's prophecy and will not doubt it.

This is the way to seek certainty in prophecy, not in the turning of a stick into a serpent or the cleaving of the moon. For if you rely only on such things, and do not assemble innumerable pieces of evidence, you may one day come to assume that they are magic or fantasy, or even that they might be confusion sent by God Almighty, who "confuses whom he wishes and guides whom he wishes" [Qur'ān 16:93, 35:8] [150]. Thus, the whole issue of miracles will be thrown back at you. If your faith in prophecy is based solely upon statements supported by the evidence of a miracle, then that faith will be broken by statements designed to render that miracle dubious and suspect. Let such exceptional occurrences be just one of the proofs and indications that figure in the totality of your theoretical speculation, so that you will come to have necessary knowledge whose grounds cannot be narrowly specified. You will be like someone who has heard a report recurrently corroborated by a whole group of people. The certainty associated with the report cannot be said to derive from a single specific statement, but rather in an indefinite way. Although it does not derive from anyone outside the group, it cannot be traced back to any single individual. That is robust knowledge-based faith. As for tasting, it is like firsthand observation⁵⁹ and is found only in the mystical way. This much concerning the truth of prophecy suffices for my present purposes. I will now go on to relate why there is a need for it.

[151] After dedicating myself to isolation and solitude for close to ten years, it became clear to me with necessity, due to innumerable reasons (tasting, demonstrative knowledge, and faith-based acceptance) that human beings are created with a body and a heart. By "heart" I mean the reality of a human's spirit where his cognizance of God is located, not the flesh and blood that he shares with corpses and animals. In addition, just as the body has health, which leads to its happiness, and disease, which leads to its ruin, so also the heart has its health and soundness, for he only is saved "who comes to God with a sound heart" [Qur'ān 26:89]. Moreover, the heart has its own disease that leads ultimately to its eternal

⁵⁹ The term Ghazālī uses is the same used for the mystical vision (*mushāhadah*), see e.g. [140].

otherworldly destruction; as the Almighty has said: “A disease is in their hearts” [Qur’ān 2:10]. Ignorance of God is the heart’s destructive poison and disobedience of God through the pursuit of passion is its diseased affliction. Cognizance of God Almighty is its revivifying antidote and obedience to God by opposing passion is its therapeutic medicine. The only way [152] to effect a treatment that eliminates the disease and restores health is by administering medications, just as in the case of the body. The body’s medications bring about the restoration of health by virtue of a property they have, which cannot be apprehended by the people of intellect by dint of reason, but must be acquired by conforming to the tradition of the doctors, who in turn take it from the prophets, who ascertain the properties of things on account of a property of prophecy. Likewise, it became clear to me with necessity that the effects of the medications of worship, in the proportions and measured quantities that have been set down by the prophets, are not to be apprehended by the people of intellect by dint of reason. Rather, in this case too, they must be taken by conforming to the tradition of the prophets who apprehended these properties thanks to the light of prophecy, and not by means of reason. Moreover, medications are combined in various combinations according to type and quantity – sometimes one ingredient is double another by weight – and the differences in quantity hold secrets pertaining to their properties. So also the acts of worship, which are medications for the afflictions of the heart, are composed of actions of various types and quantities. For example, in prayer there are twice as many prostrations as bows, and the morning prayers are half the afternoon prayers in quantity. These matters also hold secrets that pertain to their properties, which cannot be ascertained without the light of prophecy. It is sheer folly and ignorance to try to discover a kind of wisdom in these things by means of the intellect, or else to assume that they are arbitrarily given and not based upon a divine secret that specifically dictates them. Medications have certain basic ingredients as well as additional components that complement them and influence [153] the actions of their basic ingredients in specific ways. These latter correspond to the supererogatory acts and customary practices that complement the effects of the basic elements of worship.

Generally speaking, the prophets (peace be upon them) are the physicians of the diseases of the heart. The only benefit and function of the intellect is that it informed us of that fact. The intellect vouched

for the truthfulness of prophecy and admitted its own inability to apprehend what is apprehended with the eye of prophecy. It led us by the hand and delivered us to prophecy, as blind people are delivered to their guides or the bewildered sick are delivered to their benevolent doctors. That is the extent of the progress and advancement of the intellect, for it is barred from going further, though it can understand what the doctor prescribes. These are things of which I became cognizant with a necessity comparable to that of direct observation during my period of isolation and solitude.

Meanwhile, I witnessed the weakening of belief in the very basis of prophecy, in the reality of prophecy, as well as in practicing what prophecy explains. I verified that these trends were widespread among [154] people and looked into the reasons for this apathy and weakening of faith, concluding that there were four such reasons: (i) a reason due to those who follow the Instructionist path; (ii) a reason due to those who delve into mysticism; (iii) a reason due to those who delve into the science of philosophy; and (iv) a reason due to the conduct of those considered by most people to be religious scholars.⁶⁰

For a while, I pursued individual human beings in order to question those who fell short of observing religious law, asking them about their doubts and searching for their beliefs and deepest convictions. I would say: "Why has your observance lapsed? If you have faith in the afterlife and are not preparing for it, but are rather trading it for this life, then that is folly. You would not sell two things for the price of one, so why should you trade an infinite time for a limited number of days? Moreover, if you do not have faith in the afterlife, then you are a blasphemer, and had better seek faith. Look to the reason for your covert blasphemy and your overt defiance, namely your inward creed – though you do not proclaim it out of courtesy for the faith and respect for the religious law."

One would reply: "If I were really obliged to observe this aspect of religious law, [155] then it would be all the more fitting for the religious scholars to do so. But one renowned learned man does not pray, another drinks wine, and a third appropriates the funds allocated to religious endowments and to orphans. Moreover, one religious scholar accepts money from the ruler without regard to what is forbidden according to religion, and another takes bribes for being a judge and a witness." He would go on to multiply such examples endlessly. Another would claim to

⁶⁰ (i) and (iii) have been switched around, to conform to the order of exposition at [161].

have mastered the discipline of mysticism, alleging that he had attained a level that transcends the need for acts of worship. A third would appeal to other doubts commonly cited as pretexts by the profligate. These are the ones who have strayed from the path of mysticism. A fourth person, who had met with the esoteric Instructionists, would say: "Truth is manifold, the road is strenuous, and disagreements are rife. No creed is more worthy than another, for the proofs of the intellect are in conflict, there is no confidence in the opinions of the men of opinion,⁶¹ and those calling for instruction judge haphazardly without supporting arguments. So how can I replace doubt with certainty?" A fifth would assert: "I do not do this on the basis of conformism but because I have read the science of philosophy and have apprehended the reality of prophecy, which [156] simply comes down to what is wise and beneficial. The purpose of the rituals of worship is to keep the multitude in check by preventing them from clashing and quarreling, and to restrain them from overindulgence of the appetites. Since I am not one of the ignorant multitude, there is no need for me to be confined by such legal constraints. Instead, I am one of the wise who follow wisdom and are enlightened by it, and this enables me to do without conformism." This is the utmost limit of the faith of those who study the creed of the theist philosophers, who learn this from the books of Ibn Sīnā and Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī. They are Muslims in appearance only. You may see one of them reading the Qur'ān, attending communal prayers, or paying lip service to religious law, while at the same time continuing to drink wine and indulging in all kinds of depravity and debauchery. If one says to such a person: "If prophecy is invalid, why do you pray?," he may reply: "For bodily exercise, in keeping with the custom of the land, and to preserve property and family." Alternatively, he may say: "The religious law is valid and prophecy is true." If you ask: "Why do you drink wine?," he will respond: "Wine was forbidden only because it leads to aggression and enmity, but my wisdom protects me against that and I drink only in order to sharpen my wits." Indeed, Ibn Sīnā even wrote [157] in a will that he would promise God Almighty to undertake a number of tasks, including extoling the greatness of religious regulations, observing the ritual acts of worship, and refraining from drinking for entertainment but

⁶¹ The phrase "men of opinion" (*ahl al-ra'y*) may be used here to refer to the theologians (cf. *ahl al-naẓar*, the men of theory or speculation, a phrase often used to refer to the philosophers). Alternatively, it could be a reference to a school of religious law or jurisprudence that privileges individual judgment over the authority of tradition.

doing so only for medicinal and therapeutic purposes. This is the furthest that he has gone as regards purity of faith and commitment to worship, namely that he reserved wine-drinking for therapeutic purposes! This is the faith of those among them who claim to be believers. Some people have been deceived by these philosophers, and their deception has been aggravated by the weakness of those objecting to the philosophers, for they have objected strenuously to geometry, logic, and the other necessary sciences, which is a problem that has already been elaborated above.

When I observed that all types of people had had their faith weakened to this extent for these reasons, I found myself devoting myself to dispelling these doubts. Exposing these people was easier to me than drinking water, since I had delved extensively into their sciences and methods, namely the methods of the mystics, philosophers, Instructionists, and those considered to be religious scholars. I became convinced that this activity on my part was destined to occur at this particular time. What use were solitude and isolation when the disease had become so widespread, the doctors were sick, and the people had almost perished? But then I said to myself: "If you occupy yourself [158] with exposing this affliction and combating this darkness in this time of laxity and period of dishonesty, calling people to abandon their ways and pointing them to the truth, then all the people of your time will become hostile towards you. Since you can barely resist them, how can you live with them? This endeavor could succeed only if you lived in a more auspicious time in the reign of a more forceful and pious ruler."

Thus, I asked permission of God Almighty to continue in my solitude, on the pretext that I was unable to reveal the truth by way of argument. But God decreed that the ruler of the time was internally motivated, not externally induced, to issue an order requiring me to move to Nishapur to tackle this religious laxity. The ruler's resolve was such that, had I insisted on defiance, it would have led to a rift. It then occurred to me that the reason behind the permission that I had asked of God had been undermined. One's motive for maintaining solitude should not be laziness, relaxation, the preservation of one's dignity, or protection from harm by others. Why permit myself to be excused from the difficulty of dealing with humanity, when God Almighty has said: "In the Name of the Merciful and the Compassionate. Alif Lām Mīm. Did people suppose that they would be given leave to say, 'We have faith,' without being tested? But we have tested those who preceded them . . ." [Qur'ān 29:1–3]. Moreover, God

Almighty has addressed His Messenger [159], who is the most beloved among his creatures, saying: “Messengers before you have been accused of lying, but they persevered through accusations and injuries until we sent them help. God’s words cannot be changed, and you have been sent reports of the other messengers” [Qur’ān 6:34]. The Almighty also states: “In the name of God the Merciful and Compassionate. Yā’ Sīn. By the Wise Qur’ān . . . Only warn those who heed the reminder and fear God in the absence”⁶² [Qur’ān 36:1–11]. Then I consulted a group of people about this matter, among whom were the masters of hearts and possessors of visions.⁶³ They all agreed in advising me to end my isolation and to leave the *zāwīyah*.⁶⁴ To this were added many corroborating dreams from righteous people, all attesting that this move would constitute an auspicious and reasonable beginning, and that God had ordained it for the turn of the century. My hope was strengthened as a result of these testimonies and I took on a more favorable attitude towards the move. God Almighty has vowed to revive his religion at the beginning of each century, and He facilitated my move to Nishapur in order to carry out this important mission in the month of Dhū al-Qa‘dah 499 AH [July–August 1106 AD]. I had first left Baghdād in 488 AH [1095 AD], so my period of isolation lasted eleven years in all. This move was ordained by God and was one of His marvelous decrees, for it had not even entered my heart during the period of isolation, just as the [160] possibility of my initial departure from Baghdād and of walking out on my circumstances had never even occurred to me. God Almighty effects the conversion of hearts and circumstances, for “the heart of the faithful is between two fingers of the Merciful.”⁶⁵

I know that even though I returned to spread knowledge, I did not really return, for to return is to go back to what was. In earlier times, I had spread the knowledge that brings fame. That is what I called for in both word and deed, and it was my purpose and intention. But now, I spread the knowledge that brings about the rejection of fame, and by means of which one becomes cognizant of its insignificance. God knows, this is now my intention, purpose, and hope. Moreover, I aspire to reform myself and others, though I cannot tell whether I will reach my aim or whether I will perish before attaining my goal. However, I am certain of my faith and

⁶² Alternatively, the unknown or occult (*al-ghayb*).

⁶³ This is a clear reference to the Ṣūfīs.

⁶⁴ A Ṣūfī hospice or retreat.

⁶⁵ A Ḥadīth attributed to the prophet Muḥammad.

vision that there can be no ability and no power without God the Exalted and Magnificent. I was not the one who made the move, but rather God moved me; and I did not act but rather He acted through me. I ask Him to reform me first, then to reform through me; to guide me and then to guide through me. I also ask Him to show me the real truth and to grant me to follow it, as well as to show me falsehood for what it is and to grant me avoidance of it.

[161] Let us return to the reasons for the weakening of faith, and let us mention the ways of guiding the weak and delivering them from their own destruction.

(i) Those who claim perplexity among the esoteric Instructionists may be cured by what we have written in the work *The Correct Balance* (*al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm*), which will not be elaborated further in this epistle.

(ii) The illusions of the party of profligacy have been narrowed down to seven types of doubt and these have been dispelled in my work *The Alchemy of Happiness* (*Kīmyā' al-Sa'ādah*).

(iii) As for those whose faith has been spoiled by the method of philosophy, to the point that they have denied the reality of prophecy, we have already asserted the truth of prophecy and its existence by necessity, and have cited as proof the existence of the sciences of the properties of medications, astrology, and others. Indeed, that was the purpose of the previous section. We used the properties of medicine and astrology as proof of prophecy because these are the philosophers' own sciences. We demonstrate prophecy to all those who have knowledge of some science or another by using examples drawn from their own science, whether it be astrology, medicine, physics, magic, or the science of talismans.

Moreover, those who affirm prophecy verbally and equate the principles of religious law with what is wise, are upon closer inspection blasphemous when it comes to prophecy. Instead, they have faith in a wise judge, born under a special ascendant star, who must be followed.⁶⁶ This bears no relation to prophecy at all. Rather, to have faith in prophecy [162] is to admit the affirmation of a stage beyond the intellect⁶⁷ in which an eye is

⁶⁶ It is not clear which doctrine Ghazālī is referring to here. Perhaps he is parodying the “proof of prophecy” offered by some philosophers, who make prophecy out to be a special rational ability on the part of some to derive through intuition (*hads*) what others infer using the intellect (see e.g. Ibn Sīnā’s “Proof of Prophecy”).

⁶⁷ Alternatively, reason (*al-ʿaql*).

opened that apprehends specific things from which the intellect is barred, just as hearing is barred from apprehending colors, vision from apprehending sounds, and all the senses from apprehending the intelligibles. If such a person does not admit this possibility, we have offered a demonstrative proof of its possibility, indeed of its existence. If he does admit it, then he has effectively affirmed that there are things called properties,⁶⁸ about which the intellect is unable to reason⁶⁹ at all. Indeed, the intellect all but denies them and rules that they are impossible. For example, the weight of one *dāniq* of opium is a lethal poison because it coagulates the blood in the veins due to its extreme coldness. Those who claim to know physical science contend that compounds have a cooling effect only by virtue of containing two elements, water and earth, which are the cold elements. However, it is well known that many *raṭls* of water and earth are insufficient to cool the inside of the body to this extent.⁷⁰ If a physicist who had not experienced this were informed of this fact, he would have said: “That is impossible. The proof of its impossibility is that opium contains the elements of fire and air, which do not increase coldness. Moreover, even if opium were entirely composed of water and earth, it would not necessitate such a strong cooling effect. Thus, if two hot elements are added to it, there is even less reason to think that it will.” This is considered a demonstrative proof! Indeed, most of the philosophers’ demonstrations in physics and metaphysics are based on this kind of reasoning. They conceive of things as they find them and [163] grasp them by the intellect, and whatever is unfamiliar to them is considered impossible. If veridical supernatural visions were not familiar [i.e. from dreams], and someone were to claim that the future⁷¹ can be known when the senses are inactive, those deemed to have such intellects would deny this. To take another example, if one of them were told: “Could there be something in the world that is the size of a grain, which, if released in a town would devour the entire town and all its contents, eventually consuming even itself, that

⁶⁸ Also known as “sympathetic qualities” (*khawāṣṣ*, singular *khāṣṣah*), these properties are a “recurring theme in magic and occult sciences indicating the unaccountable, esoteric forces in animate and inanimate Nature.” This conception developed during the Hellenistic period and was taken up by some Arab and Islamic thinkers in the medieval era. (*EL* entry on “*khāṣṣa*”).

⁶⁹ Alternatively, around which the intellect is unable to function at all (*lā yadūr taṣarruf al-‘aql ḥawālayhā aṣlan*).

⁷⁰ The weights mentioned in this example are difficult to specify exactly, since they varied at different times and different places in medieval Islam. To the nearest order of magnitude, a *dāniq* was a fraction of a gram, while a *raṭl* was a kilogram.

⁷¹ Literally, the hidden or absent (*al-ghayb*).

is, leaving nothing in the whole town, not even itself?” He would respond: “That is impossible, a mere fable.” But that is precisely the case with fire, and whoever had not seen fire would deny that this could take place if he were told about it. Most of the denials of the wonders of the afterlife are of this kind. We say to the physicists: “You have been obliged to admit that opium has a cooling property that is not within the realm of the possible, according to physics. Why not admit the possibility of properties among the religious principles that are capable of healing and purifying the heart, which cannot be apprehended by the wisdom of the intellect, but can be seen only by the eye of prophecy?” Indeed, they have admitted the existence of stranger properties in their books, for example the strange properties associated with the following figure, which has been tested in treating pregnant women who have difficulty in labor:

2	9	4
7	5	3
6	1	8

This is inscribed on two pieces of cloth, untouched by water, and the pregnant woman looks at them directly. Then she places them under her feet and the infant emerges immediately from the womb. They have admitted this and mentioned it in the works concerning wondrous properties. This figure consists of a square with nine compartments, each inscribed with a special number [164], in such a way that each row, column, and diagonal adds up to fifteen.

Who could believe that and not be broad-minded enough to believe that the fact that the morning prayers contain two prostrations, the noon prayers four, and the evening prayers three, are due to properties not known through philosophical speculation,⁷² and that the prayers are different because of the difference in the times of day? These properties can be apprehended only through the light of prophecy. The strange thing is that if we had expressed these things differently, as astrologers do, their intellects would have grasped the difference made by the differences in the times of day, for example if we had said: “The astrological judgment

⁷² Alternatively, through the speculation of wisdom (*bi-naẓar al-ḥikmah*).

concerning the ascendant differs depending on whether the sun is in the middle of the sky, in ascension, or in declension.” In preparing their horoscopes,⁷³ they base different medical treatments, lifespans, and times of death, on such differences. Moreover, there is no difference between the meridian and the sun’s being in the middle of the sky, or sunset and [165] the sun’s being in declension. Do they have any reason for believing such things besides the fact that they hear them expressed in an astrologer’s terms? They continue to believe the astrologer even after experiencing his lies one hundred times. An astrologer might say to such a person: “If the sun is in the middle of the sky, a certain planet is in opposition to it, and a certain constellation is in the ascendant, then if you wear a new cloak at that time, you will be killed in it.” That person would then refrain from wearing the cloak at that time, perhaps subjecting himself to extreme cold as a result, even though he has received this advice from an astrologer with whose lies he has been acquainted many times. How can someone be open-minded enough to accept such marvels and be obliged to admit that they concern properties of which some prophets are miraculously cognizant, yet deny similar things reported by an honest prophet, who is supported by miracles and has never been recognized to lie? Why will his intellect not allow the possibility?

A philosopher who denies the properties of the number of prostrations in prayer, the throwing of stones during the pilgrimage, the basic elements of the pilgrimage, and other rituals of religious worship, will be unable to discern any difference at all between these things and the properties of medications and stars. That philosopher might say: “I have experienced something of astrology and medicine, and have found parts of them to be valid. Thus, my mind was moved to assent to them and my heart lost all tendency to reject and resist them. As for the other thing [i.e. prophecy], I have not experienced it, so I do not know that it exists and cannot verify it, [166] though I do admit its possibility.” I respond: “You do not restrict yourself to assenting to what you have experienced, since you also accept the reports of those who have experienced things and then you go on to conform to them. Listen, therefore, to the statements of the prophets,

⁷³ The term used is *tasyīrāt* (singular *tasyīr*), which is “a procedure used in astrology of artificial continuation of a planet or of an astrological house or any other definite part of the heavens to another star or its aspects, or other houses with the object of ascertaining the equatorial degree situated between these two places, the figure of which is used, by converting it into a definite period of time, to prognosticate the date of a future happening, either good or evil” (*EI* entry on “*tasyīr*”).

who have experienced and had a vision of the truth in every aspect of the religious law. If you follow their path, you will apprehend some of that through direct vision.”⁷⁴

I would add that even if you do not experience it for yourself, your very intellect rules that you absolutely must assent and follow their lead. Suppose that there is a man who has reached adulthood and the age of reason without having experienced disease, and that the man then comes down with a disease. Suppose also that he has a benevolent father who is proficient in medicine and whose reputation concerning cognizance of medical matters has been familiar to him ever since he attained the age of reason. Then consider that the father has concocted a medication for the son, saying: “This is suitable for your disease and will cure your illness.” What would his intellect dictate in this case, even if the medication is bitter-tasting and repugnant? Should the patient take the medication, or should he rebuff him, saying “My intellect has not ruled this medication to be appropriate for curing this disease, and I have not experienced it”? If he did the latter, you would doubtless consider him to be a fool, just as those who have vision consider you a fool to reject prophecy. If you say “How do I know⁷⁵ that the prophet is benevolent and is cognizant of this science of medicine?,” I reply “How do you know that your father is benevolent, for it is not something you can perceive through the senses? Rather, you are cognizant of it by necessity and without a doubt, through indications of his circumstances and evidence of his actions in all his comings and goings.”

Whoever looks into the sayings of the Prophet and the reports that have been related about him will acquire necessary knowledge that his benevolence towards his community is greater than the benevolence of the father towards his son. This can be seen in his keenness to guide people, his diligence to persuade people using affectionate, gentle, and kind means, to improve their morals, to resolve [167] their conflicts, and generally to do whatever will be of benefit to them in both religious and temporal matters. Moreover, if he considers the marvels apparent in his actions, the supernatural wonders that have been related of him in the Qur’ān, his utterances in the Ḥadīth,⁷⁶ and what he has said about

⁷⁴ Alternatively, through observation (*mushāhadah*).

⁷⁵ Literally, how am I cognizant of . . . (*fima a’rifu*); but here and in the next sentence, loosely, know.

⁷⁶ Reading *wa ‘alā lisānihi fil-akhbār* instead of *‘alā lisānihi wa fil-akhbār* (in his utterances and in the Ḥadīth).

the distant future – which has turned out as he predicted – he will come to know with necessity that the Prophet has attained a stage beyond the intellect, and that an eye has been opened that can reveal the supernatural that can only be apprehended by a select few, and those things that cannot be apprehended by the intellect. This is the method of acquiring the necessary knowledge by which to assent to the Prophet. If you experience the Qur’ān and contemplate it, and peruse the Ḥadīth, you will become cognizant of it firsthand. This much is sufficient to warn the so-called philosophers; we have mentioned it here because there is a dire need for it in these times.

(iv) As for the fourth reason for the weakening of faith, which has to do with the evil lifestyle of the religious scholars, it can be remedied in three ways.

First, we say: “You claim that the religious scholar eats forbidden things, though he is cognizant of the fact that they are forbidden. Meanwhile, you are cognizant of the prohibition on wine, pork, usury, slander, dishonesty, and defamation, yet you go ahead and do these things. You do so not because you do not have faith that they are transgressions but rather [168] because your appetites overwhelm you. His appetites are like yours and have overwhelmed him, just as your appetites have overwhelmed you. Moreover, what distinguishes him from you is his knowledge of things beyond these, which is irrelevant to the stringent restrictions against specific forbidden things.” Similarly, many of those who have faith in medicine do not desist from fruits and cold water, even though the doctor has restricted them from having them. That does not prove that these things are not harmful or that faith in medicine is misplaced. The same applies to the transgressions of the religious scholars.⁷⁷

Second, the common person can be told: “You ought to believe that the religious scholar considers that his knowledge will earn him credit in the afterlife and assumes that it will save him, on the grounds that the virtues of his knowledge will gain him leniency when it comes to his deeds. Though his knowledge may actually argue against him, it is indeed possible that it might elevate his rank. That is, even though he has neglected practice, he has his knowledge to vouch for him. However, if you

⁷⁷ In other words, religious scholars who commit transgressions are like doctors who follow an unhealthy diet. They do so not because they know something about the effects of food on the body that the rest of us do not, but simply because they are overwhelmed by appetite. Therefore, there is no reason to follow their lead.

model yourself after him, being a nonscholar,⁷⁸ you will have neglected practice while being devoid of all knowledge, so your practice will doom you and will be unable to intercede on your behalf.”

Third – which is the true response – the real religious scholar does not commit a transgression except as an oversight, and he would definitely not persist in transgressions. For real knowledge is cognizance that transgressions are a lethal poison and that the afterlife is better than this life. Whoever is cognizant of that would never trade what is better for what is worse.

Such knowledge is not acquired from the types of sciences with which most people are preoccupied. That is why their knowledge only increases their willingness to defy God Almighty by transgressing against him [169]. Real knowledge, by contrast, makes one more reverent, fearful, and hopeful, and empowers one not to commit transgressions, apart from occasional oversights, which no one can escape from time to time and which do not indicate weakness of faith. The faithful person is subject to seduction and is repentant, but is far from persistence in and devotion to wrongdoing.

This is all I intended to mention by way of censuring philosophy and esoteric Instructionism, as well as their faults and the faults of those who deny them without method. We pray to God Almighty to number us among those he prefers and chooses, those he guides to truth and enlightens, those who are inspired to recollect Him to the point that they do not forget Him, those who are protected against their own evildoing to the point that they are not influenced by anyone but Him, and those he selects for Himself so that they do not worship anyone but Him.

⁷⁸ Literally, common person (*‘āmmī*).

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