

# AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S DIVINE COMMAND THEORY

## Biting the Bullet

Shoaib Ahmed Malik

### ABSTRACT

This article reviews al-Ghazālī's conception of Divine Command Theory (DCT) in light of contemporary philosophical developments. There are two well-known objections against DCT. These include the problem of arbitrariness (PoA), which states that God randomly chose our moral framework for no reason given His capability to choose any moral commands; and the problem of God's goodness (PoGG), which questions God's goodness if morality could be other than what it is. Modern defenders of DCT have attempted to counter these objections through various strategies. This article juxtaposes al-Ghazālī's interpretation of DCT with modern strategies to illustrate how these two issues are untroubling concerns in al-Ghazālī's framework. In doing so, it highlights where and how they differ in their approaches. Additionally, it critiques interpretations suggested by some contemporary thinkers who suggest that al-Ghazālī may not be a strict proponent of DCT.

KEYWORDS: *divine command theory, natural law, morality, al-Ghazālī, Ash'arism, Islam, jurisprudence, maqāṣid al-sharī'a*

### 1. Introduction

Divine Command Theory (DCT) is historically rooted in Plato's well-known dialogue, *Euthyphro*, in which an interlocutor is asked to choose between one of two horns of the dilemma:

A1—Something is pious (*hosion*) because the gods said so.

B2—Something is pious, which make the gods believe it to be pious.

Shoaib Ahmed Malik is Assistant Professor at Zayed University in Dubai. He obtained his BEng in Chemical Engineering as the top graduate in cohort from the University of Bath. He then went on to do a PhD in Chemical Engineering from the University of Nottingham. He recently obtained a PGCE from the University of Nottingham, and a MSc in Philosophy of Science and Religion from the University of Edinburgh. He is currently doing a religious seminary program at Al Balagh Academy. His research has shifted entirely to the realms of atheism, science and religion, and Islamic theology. He has published articles in international journals such as *Zygon* and *Philosophy*. He has book chapters with academic publishers such as Cambridge University Press and Palgrave. He published a short monograph on atheism and Islam with Kalam Research and Media, and has a full monograph out with Routledge's Science and Religion series on the topic of Islam and evolution. He is currently working on another edited volume for Routledge titled, *Eight Classical Perspectives on Islam and Science*. Shoaib Ahmed Malik, shoaib.malik@zu.ac.ae.

While the terms of the dilemma make sense in its historical context, let us be more precise by reformulating these propositions as claims of morality (rather than piety) commanded by a monotheistic God<sup>1</sup> rather than gods, as I will be discussing this dilemma in the Abrahamic context:

A2—Something is morally good because God said so.

B2—Something is morally good, which makes God consider it as good.

In essence, the distinction between propositions A2 and B2 determines whether morality is intrinsic or extrinsic for a particular action. If one deems actions as intrinsically good, then one is expressing a form of natural law theory, which suggests that moral principles can be deduced through rational deliberation rather than society or positive law (Murphy 2019). For example, everyone seems to agree that torturing an innocent person cannot be a morally good thing. However, if there are such immutable moral principles, it implies that there is a moral standard that is independent of God to which God must also conform. This runs in the face of God's omnipotence, as it implies that God is constrained by something external to Himself. This view is problematic for some theologians, as God is usually understood to be an *absolutely* free agent, that is, nothing binds him. For this reason, DCT is a popular option; it keeps the control of morality within the bracketed power of God.

However, this is not an unproblematic position. There are many objections to DCT, but only two are of interest for the purposes of this article. First, if DCT is true, then it implies that it is solely God's will that makes something morally good or bad rather than it having a reason for being good and bad; and since God has no reason to choose one particular moral system over another, it suggests that morality is entirely arbitrary (PoA) (Carson 2012). In other words, the PoA raises concerns about the lack of underlying rationality behind moral commands set down by God if DCT is true, a seemingly fatal objection to DCT.

Second, DCT faces the problem of God's goodness (PoGG). If God does indeed dictate what is morally good and bad, then it is conceivable that there is some possible world in which God could command that torturing an innocent man is a morally good thing. This obviously has intuitive friction and would be a problematic consequence to swallow. More pressingly, if an omnibenevolent God dictates what is morally good and bad, then in what sense is God good, given that God can *equally* command that protecting an innocent person and torturing a person are morally good? Put differently, it is hard to square an omnibenevolent God with the implications of DCT (Chandler 1984).

In this article, I shall attempt to answer these questions through the lens of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), a widely reputed Muslim medieval theologian who belonged to the scholastic school known as Ash'arism. The novelty of this research is that it attempts to juxtapose contemporary philosophical developments of DCT

<sup>1</sup> In Islam, God has no gender. However, God is usually referred to as a He due to artifacts of the Arabic language. To be consistent, I have kept references to God as a He. This should not be taken as not being gender-inclusive.

with al-Ghazālī's ideas to show how differently they approach the problem. As we shall see, al-Ghazālī differs significantly with the authors I will review about the nature of God, what links moral facts to God, and what defines the morally good and bad. I will discuss these ideas, all of which are relevant to DCT, in the course of this article. Furthermore, I will evaluate the views that suggest that al-Ghazālī is not a proponent of DCT based on certain concepts found in his juridical work, which, on the face of it, undermine his commitments to DCT.

### 1.1. *Preliminary concerns*<sup>2</sup>

Before we can entertain the discussion to follow, some preliminary concerns need to be addressed. For one, why is a medieval Ash'arite theologian being used to evaluate modern developments on DCT? The response to this depends on what the questioner actually intends. If the criticism is premised on al-Ghazālī *merely* being a medieval scholar, the emphasis on the historicity of the thinker, then this is simply failing to appreciate a fruitful inquiry. There are several examples that involve taking the ideas of medieval scholars to create interfaces with contemporary issues. For instance, the works and ideas of the revered Thomas Aquinas, a well-known medieval scholastic theologian, have been used to look into contemporary issues on science and religion, such as quantum mechanics and evolution with promising potential (Simpson et al. 2017; Feser 2019). Perhaps the critic has issues with Ash'arism and considers it to be a part of the outdated tradition of "classical theism." If so, this is a mistaken imposition of developments in the West onto Islamic thought (Hallaq 2018). To suggest that Ash'arism is an outdated tradition or a medieval artefact is, in fact, erroneous. Ash'arism may have had its origins in the medieval period, but it was (and has been) widely disseminated, discussed, developed, and adopted by many Muslims right up to the modern period (Halverson 2010; Jackson 2009; Jalajel 2009; Malik 2021; Nagel 2006; Schmidtke 2016; Winter 2014). Either way, both contentions rely on a form of historical reductionism, which has its respective value and place. But if this is the only form of inquiry that is deemed valuable, it *a priori* removes any possibility of a dialogical approach within which ideas from the Islamic tradition can converse with, potentially help, and provide alternative vantage points on contemporary theological and philosophical issues (Farahat 2019, 17–20).

Alternatively, perhaps the issues are with al-Ghazālī himself. Even here, the concern depends on what is being claimed. Is the worry about using al-Ghazālī manifested because he has nothing to offer? If so, then this goes against developments in contemporary scholarship. Various contemporary thinkers have utilized al-Ghazālī's thoughts for modern inquiries such as quantum mechanics (Altaie 2016), information theory (Malik 2019), gender ethics (Ayubi 2019), cognitive

<sup>2</sup> Some readers may not see the need for some of the points raised in this section. These are responses to reviewers who raised objections about the necessity or the rationale of this article. I decided to keep them in the main text rather than a footnote in case others may have similar concerns or objections.

science of religion (Nakissa 2020), and evolutionary biology (Malik 2021). Most famously, Ghazālīan studies reached a new milestone with a two-volume publication which demonstrates the depth and breadth of al-Ghazālī's thoughts (Griffel 2015; Tamer 2015). Alternatively, maybe the concern is about why al-Ghazālī is being singled out specifically from the Ash'arite school for a discussion on DCT. It is perfectly possible for one look to at other Ash'arite thinkers such al-Juwaynī (d. 1085) and al-Bāqillānī (d. 1013) (Farahat 2019).

In spite of these possible criticisms, I maintain the focus of this essay on al-Ghazālī for several reasons. First, while some thinkers have analyzed al-Ghazālī's works on ethics (Hourani 1985; Leaman 2001; Yaqub 2011), their approach has been to apply either textual or historical treatments of singular treatises and they never engage in dialogue with contemporary developments in DCT. This study builds on these works by juxtaposing al-Ghazālī's thoughts on DCT with modern thinkers. Second, this study complements Farahat's comprehensive engagement of certain Ash'arite thinkers with modern developments on DCT. While Farahat's primary focus is not al-Ghazālī, he does make brief allusions to him. Third, Yöney (2019) has recently suggested that Muslims should consider new developments of DCT since substantial challenges have been raised against DCT, which include the PoA and PoGG. If my claims in this article are proven correct, then al-Ghazālī's framework need not necessarily be abandoned. Fourth, in this article, I am not restricting myself to one treatise, which some have previously done, rather I consult several works which are relevant to the discussion of al-Ghazālī's thoughts on DCT. Finally, recent developments in the contemporary literature on al-Ghazālī suggest that it is not, in fact, clear that he is a proponent of DCT (Emon 2010; Al-Attar 2010; 2016). These arguments will be reviewed and critiqued in the course of this article. Given these different strands of development related to al-Ghazālī and DCT, it is hoped that this article offers a timely (re-)engagement of al-Ghazālī's ideas on DCT.

It is also important to distinguish between *metaethics*, *normative ethics*, and *applied ethics*. Metaethics is the study of the nature of morality. It involves understanding the ontological structure of morality and what grounds it. Normative ethics is "the branch of ethics that looks for the underlying moral principles of our moral judgements and the ultimate moral justification or reason that is common to our moral judgements and that connects them to each other" (Yöney 2019, 414). In other words, normative ethics is the study of identifying and justifying underlying moral principles which allow moral judgements to come about. Applied ethics is simply the application of moral principles for a particular context, for example, environmental ethics. The scope of this study is restricted to the metaethical domain, that is, we will be primarily looking at the ontological status of morality when evaluating DCT. The aforementioned terms have their respective counterparts in Islamic thought. The discussion of metaethics has its parallel in the discipline known as *kalām*, which would be labelled as Islamic scholastic theology for

lack of a better term.<sup>3</sup> This is the domain within which classical Islamic theologians would discuss the metaphysics of morality.<sup>4</sup> Normative ethics could align with *uṣūl al-fiqh*, which is the study of identifying legal codes and applicative procedures of the divine law, and applied ethics is simply *fiqh*. These distinctions will be essential to keep in mind when we evaluate al-Ghazālī's thoughts in the course of this article.<sup>5</sup>

The structure of the article is as follows. First, I will review the contemporary developments on DCT by looking at three broad strategies that current thinkers have tried to utilize to deal with the PoA and the PoGG. This section will form the backdrop for introducing al-Ghazālī to the growing discourse on DCT. Second, I will discuss al-Ghazālī's ideas relevant to DCT as well as how his ideas might differ from thinkers and ideas reviewed in the first section. This will also include a rationale for which of al-Ghazālī's works are used. Third, I will argue against the revisionist claims that al-Ghazālī is a natural law theorist of some sort rather than a proponent of DCT. I conclude that al-Ghazālī is indeed a divine command theorist, and that he successfully develops a system within which neither the PoA nor PoGG is problematic.

## 2. Suggested Solutions for DCT

Various thinkers have tried to advance several strategies to bypass the two problems identified earlier with DCT. Here are some of the more interesting ones:

S1—Morality is equivalent to mathematical necessity.

S2—Hybrid theory: God's commands *only partly* ground morality.

S3—God cannot command evil due to His nature.

As an example of S1, consider the work of Morris and Menzel (1986). They attempt to reconcile two different metaphysical systems: Platonism (the realm of necessary existents like numbers and logical relations) and Judeo-Christian theism (absolute creator of everything that distinguishes Him from His creation), which they refer to as *theistic activism*. They contend that while God is ontologically responsible for all contingent and necessary entities, abstract objects are in effect derivatives of God's existence but in a necessary way. To this end, they utilize a distinction between *dependence* and *control*. According to them, while abstract notions are causally dependent on God for their existence, it does not entail that God controls them, that is, God cannot change their intrinsic and essential

<sup>3</sup> Scholastic theology may not capture the full gamut of *kalām*. For nuances on how the discipline of *kalām* was understood, see Hassan (2020, 135–39).

<sup>4</sup> To be clear, *kalām* is a specific discipline that was restricted to the scholastic thoughts of Mu'tazilites, Ash'arites, and Māturīdites. Some groups/thinkers had issues with the *kalāmīc* trend, for example, Ibn Taymiyya.

<sup>5</sup> To be sure, these are not claimed to be exhaustive and exact alignments, and it is possible to identify some grey areas.

necessity. Subsequently, God works only within the framework of these necessities due to their dependence on God. Other entailments need not concern us, but they make a passing comment about Euthyphro's dilemma that is of relevance to us: "On the view of theistic activism, moral truths can be objective, unalterable, and necessary, and yet still dependent on God" (Morris and Menzel 1986, 358). So, in their view, morality is presumed to be objective and necessary, and those necessities constrain God. In other words, God cannot command evil.<sup>6</sup> This allays the PoA and, in response to PoGG, conserves God's goodness. There are several problems with their thesis, but only two are relevant for us. First, they presuppose morality as being necessary. However, why suppose this is true? It is definitely inconceivable to think of a possible world in which  $2 + 2 = 5$  because it lands us in a contradiction, but it is conceivable to think of a possible world torturing an innocent person to be a good thing. As put by Rahimi:

it is odd and problematic to regard the necessity of logical, mathematical, and moral statements in the same way. If there is any necessity in moral truths, it is certainly different from the necessity of logical and mathematical statements; many would argue that the truth of moral judgements depends on human nature and the circumstances of human action, rather than on some abstract eternal truth. M&M [Morris and Menzel], therefore, need to provide an argument for such a claim and simply not assume it. (2012, 7)

Second, if God is an omnipotent being, and given that the conceivability of alternative moral frameworks is plausible, however unattractive to our moral intuitions, it seemingly curtails the omnipotence of God (Morrison 2001).<sup>7</sup> So it seems that presupposing morality as being necessary as in mathematical structures is unwarranted and seems to put constraints on what would otherwise be an omnipotent God.

For S2, I am explicitly referring to the early works of Robert Adams. To be clear, Adams has presented three different versions of the DCT, and it is only the first

<sup>6</sup> A reviewer commented that I might have misrepresented their position here. They refer to an earlier part of Morris and Menzel's (1986, 356) paper where they say: "since God is responsible for the modal status of propositions, it is God who is creatively responsible for the realm of possibility." From this, the reviewer claimed that God could have assigned a different modal status to the necessary moral truths that seem to put constraints on his commands which makes my rendering of Morris and Menzel—that God cannot do evil—simplistic or inadequate. However, just one page later, Morris and Menzel (1986, 357) go on to say: "Of course, the range of God's creative freedom must be constant with his nature as a maximally perfect being. That renders divine freedom interestingly different from human freedom. He could not have done morally otherwise than as he did. He could not have produced a physical universe which was ultimately, on balance, evil." Given this comment, I think my summary can resist the charge of misinterpreting Morris and Menzel. See the following quotation in the main text by Rahimi (2012), who interpreted similarly of Morris and Menzel.

<sup>7</sup> This point has not remained unchallenged. See Mawson (2002), Morrison (2003), and Davis and Franks (2014). A key element with this particular point is how thinkers successfully end up delimiting counterfactuals non-arbitrarily to maintain God's goodness. Lewis/Stalnaker counterfactuals seem to be the most popular option but are not free from problems (see Tooley 2003).

two that I am placing in the category of S2. In his earliest formulation, Adams (1975) provides a modified version of the DCT. In this perspective, Adams seems to define the morally right and wrong with respect to the commands of an all-loving God:

According to the modified command theory, when I say, 'It is wrong to do X,' (*at least part of*) what I mean is that it is contrary to God's commands to do X. 'It is wrong to do X' implies 'It is contrary to God's commands to do X.' But 'It is contrary to God's commands to do X' implies 'It is wrong to do X' only if certain conditions are assumed—namely, only if it is assumed that God has the character which I believe Him to have, of loving His human creatures. If God were really to command us to make cruelty our goal, then He would not have that character of loving us, and I would not say it would be wrong to disobey Him (*italics for emphasis*). (1975, 464)

So, according to this perspective, call it S2A, the chief principle that underlies it is God's love for humankind. Adams (1975, 465) does point out, though, that it is conceivable for God to command an act of cruelty, but in this hypothetical occasion, his usage of right and wrong breaks down—for what would right and wrong mean on such an occasion if they are defined with respect to a loving God who chooses to be angry and shows wrath instead of love? Thus, it would not be wrong to disobey God's commands (as can be seen at the end of the last quoted paragraph).

In the second formulation, call this S2B, Adams maintains the same general makeup of S2A but with one extra clause:

My new divine command theory of the nature of ethical wrongness, then, is that ethical wrongness *is* (i.e. is identical with) the property of being contrary to the commands of a loving God. I regard this as a *metaphysically necessary*, but not an analytic truth or a priori truth. (1979, 76)<sup>8</sup>

Adams (1979, 72) draws an analogy with Kripke's infamous example of water being metaphysically necessarily H<sub>2</sub>O on the one hand and moral wrongness and God on the other. With this tighter link between God and morality established, it then follows that if God did not exist, then nothing could be considered morally wrong (Adams 1979, 77).

Several criticisms have been levied against both positions. First, both S2A and S2B are no longer strictly DCTs. As Jones (1980, 202) points out, if God's commands are only *partially* anchoring morality, then it means there exist extra or external evaluative measures or standards that have the potency to neutralize God's commands if they go against what individuals end up believing are good and bad.

<sup>8</sup> Adams mentions that there is only a slight difference between S2A and S2B: "The difference between this alternative theory and the one I have endorsed should not be exaggerated. On both theories the nature of wrongness is actually constituted by contrariety the commands of (a loving) God. And on both theories there may be other possible worlds in which other properties best fill the role by which contrariety to a loving God's commands is linked in the actual world to our concept of wrongness." (1979, 78–79)

Any mere extra-evaluative measures or attitudinal difference against God's commands by any individual is enough to neutralize DCT (Westmoreland 1996, 27). If anything, it seems to want the best of both sides of Euthyphro's dilemma but one that comes at the expense of God's commanding rule:

[T]he modified view makes it misleading and/or inaccurate to call the position a *divine command* theory of morality. A genuine divine command theory holds that God's commanding an act *makes* it right and that His forbidding an act *makes* it wrong. If other standards make acts right or wrong—and especially if they prevent God's will from being the decisive moral criterion—then God is simply not the source of moral right and wrong. In an effort to avoid objections, the distinctive core of divine command ethics is implicitly abandoned. (Jones 1980, 203–4)

In other words, God's command is no longer the *sufficient* reason for being good or bad, but only *necessary* and potentially *unnecessary* as other evaluative measures have the potency to render God's commands impotent. For this reason, I refer to S2A and S2B as hybrid theories (Carson 2012, 454). The second criticism is the same modal argument we looked at earlier with S1. It is entirely conceivable that God can create a world where God could command torturing an innocent person to be a good thing. Given that God is an omnipotent and unbounded being, saying that God is unable to create such a possible world seems to contradict those assertions. Third, Adams's account defines an all-loving God in very anthropomorphic and anthropocentric terms:

"God is good" must be taken in many contexts as ascribing to God, rather generally, qualities of character which the believing speaker regards as virtues in human beings. Among such qualities might be faithfulness, ethical consistency, a forgiving disposition, and, in general, various aspects of, as well as kindness . . . saying that God is good normally commits one to the position that God has some important set of qualities which one *regards as virtues in human beings* (italics for emphasis). (1975, 471–72)

Granted that a loving God is a central tenet in the Judeo-Christian worldview, it seems as if God is being measured against human standards, which ends up neutralizing a fundamental distinction between creator and creation. Finally, and this is specifically a criticism levied against S2B, it seems that Adams wants to latch onto a hard kind of essentialism that underlies Kripke's water-H<sub>2</sub>O example. It is not inconceivable to think that in a possible world, the liquid that we see to be water (with all its empirical properties known in the actual world) on the *macroscopic* level supervenes on atoms different than H<sub>2</sub>O (van Brakel 2013, 99–118). It could (equally) either involve different configurations of hydrogen and oxygen or, even more radically, it may constitute entirely different atoms. There is nothing to indicate that the water-H<sub>2</sub>O link is necessary as  $2 + 2 = 4$ . Accordingly, the analogy between it and morality and God being all-loving is dubious. If anything, it suggests a pre-existing or independent standard of what makes God all-loving. More pressingly, it seems that that under Adams' purview, before one can understand what is morally good and bad, there needs to an understanding of

an all-loving God, but this seems like circular reasoning if a God only expresses commands which conform to the rubric of an all-loving God (Jones 1980, 203; Morriston 2009, 254; Westmoreland 1996, 28–30; Carson 2012, 454).

S3 has been advocated by several authors, including Adams (1999) (his third proposal), Alston (1990; 2002) and Quinn (2006). Due to considerations of space, I shall only evaluate Alston's proposal as all of them hold on to very similar ideas. The fundamental premise of this thesis is that it is not the commands of God that determine morality but ultimately God Himself. In other words, morality is an evaluation with respect to God, the exemplar of maximal goodness, as the moral standard and not to what God obligates.

So how does this respond to the PoA and PoGG? Alston makes his case by arguing for two different ideas. The first is his conceptual division between the morally *good* and moral *obligations*. Recall, the main objection of the PoGG is that we cannot call God good because if we judge God's goodness by His own commands, then it seems to lead us towards a vacuous and circular understanding of His goodness. Alston gets around this by breaking that symmetry between God's commands (obligations set by God) and His goodness by asserting that the latter is *logically prior* to any divine commanding activity (Alston 2002, 290). Furthermore, he argues that it makes no sense to say that God has obligations; instead, it is only His creations that fall under obligations (Alston 2002, 285), which gives rise to the notion that God is supererogatory. With these two points, it follows that His obligations follow from His innate goodness, that is, God is supererogatory and does things for good reasons due to His loving nature, and thus counters the PoA and PoGG in one move. To further bolster his argument, he makes a second claim that relies on dissolving the notion of morality residing in an independent Platonic realm. Since there can be nothing external to God, a Platonic conception is problematic as it otherwise implies an independent standard of morality. Thus, in his view, the only thing that makes the most sense is to make God Himself the standard of good. He gives the example of a table that is a meter long. Since the global standard of a meter is kept as a reference in Paris, anything that concretely resembles that same length individuates the meter length. So it is not a Platonic reality of a meter that makes a table a meter long, but rather, it is the very individuation of an object that is a meter long that gives rise to what a meter is. Similarly, God is the entity that individuates maximal goodness, which is why He is the ultimate standard of goodness. This is how Alston puts it:

I want to suggest . . . that we can think of God himself, the individual being, as the supreme standard of goodness. God plays the role in evaluation that is more usually assigned, by objectivists about value, to Platonic Ideas or principles. Lovingness is a good (a good-making feature, that on which goodness is supervenient) not because of the Platonic existence of a general principle or fact of the effect that lovingness is good, but because God, the supreme standard of goodness, is loving. Goodness supervenes on every feature of God, not because some general principles are true but just because they are features of God. (2002, 291–92)

There are two main objections to this line of thought. First, there are a host of problems with God's actions being supererogatory (Archer 2015). Lombardi (2005) objects that if there is no such thing as an obligation for God, then how can we really say that His actions are supererogatory. To say that someone went beyond their duty is to presume that there was a minimal requirement for them to do something in the first place. So, eliminating obligations problematically entails nullifying supererogation rather than substantiating it. Stump criticizes Alston from another angle. She objects to Alston's position based on the distinction between finite and infinite resources. Humans are limited and therefore restricted by how much good they can do. This is unlike God, who has an infinite well of resources which then renders the notion of God's actions being supererogatory to null (Stump 1992, 478–79).

The other objection against Alston's thesis is that he makes God the standard of goodness. The problem here is that one cannot be a particularist about God and simultaneously say that He is good in virtue of certain qualities, suggesting that certain standards are external and independent of God. Consider a noble knight called Sam. Sam can only be deemed noble because he *manifests* certain characteristics that make him noble, for example, helping the poor. It is because of such acts that we can apply the category of nobility to him. However, if it is said that God is good with respect to Himself, then that makes for a self-referential, and thus vacuous, claim; it does not really explain what good means. By contrast, if Alston says that God is good in virtue of certain qualities, which he does, for example, loving, just, merciful (Alston 2002, 292), then it means there is a standard of goodness independent of God. Accordingly, a major criticism against Alston's thesis is that it either asserts an empty claim of God being good or falls back into the Euthyphro's dilemma (Koons 2012; Morrision 2009).

### 3. Introducing al-Ghazālī

From this very brief survey, we can see that there have been healthy conversations about DCT over the past few decades, but philosophers and theologians have still not reached any consensus. Advocates of DCT still have some outstanding thorny issues. I take the problems associated with these proposals as a cue for (re-) introducing al-Ghazālī to the discussion. Al-Ghazālī wrote extensively on various topics like theology, philosophy, jurisprudence, and spirituality. In the following section, I aim to unpack some of his ideas to illustrate how and why his worldview seems to allay the PoA and the PoGG without falling into the pitfalls that we reviewed earlier.

However, this requires unpacking two distinctive concepts: the modality of God's will, and the meanings of the terms obligatory, morally good, and morally bad. Understanding al-Ghazālī's modality of God's will is important because it reveals what he thinks of God's creating capabilities. In the solutions examined thus far, some have suggested that God cannot create alternate *moral* worlds due to God's all-loving nature. It is important to determine if al-Ghazālī shares the

same assumptions and thus moral possibilities. Al-Ghazālī also defines the terms ‘obligatory’ and ‘good,’ which will be important to recognize as we compare him with the contemporary proposals and see how effectively these definitions support his version of the DCT to deal with the PoA and PoGG.

There are competing interpretations of al-Ghazālī. One camp believes he was an Ash‘arite, whereas another camp believes that he was an Avicennan, while others believe in a hybrid interpretation (see footnote 8 in Malik 2019, 3; Griffel 2009, 147–234). I do not intend to resolve this debate in this essay, but I will be advancing my claim with the (reasonable) reading that al-Ghazālī retained his Ash‘arite ideas but understood its limitations (Malik 2021, 8–10).

My views about al-Ghazālī’s thoughts related to DCT are derived from these sources:

1. *Al-Iqtisād fī-l-‘Itiqād* (*Moderation in Belief*; here on referred to as *Moderation*)
2. *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (*Incoherence of the Philosophers*; hereon referred to as *Incoherence*)

The *Moderation* is al-Ghazālī’s primary theological treatise in which he articulates the principles of Ash‘arite theology, that is, a *kalāmīc* treatise. It consists of four parts: the essence of God, the attributes of God, the acts of God, and discussions related to revelation. The third section is most relevant to my argument here. I rely on the *Incoherence* for some points relevant to discussing the modality of God’s will.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.1. Modality of God’s will<sup>10</sup>

As an Ash‘arite, al-Ghazālī was strongly committed to the idea that God’s omnipotence is unbounded and not constrained unnecessarily (Jackson 2009, 81–82); God can do whatever He wants so long as it does not breach the law of non-contradiction, the most minimal stipulation that was deemed to be rational by al-Ghazālī (2013, 16–17). Thus, as long as this principle is not violated, God can create it or command it:

<sup>9</sup> There is a technical difference between God’s will (*irāda*) and speech (*kalām*) in Ash‘arite theology. Moral commands are revealed through the latter, i.e. revelation or the word of God. However, for the sake of convenience, I have used God’s will as an umbrella term throughout this article.

<sup>10</sup> In this section I have consciously not incorporated other works such as the *Al-Mustaṣfā min ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl* (On Legal Theory of Muslim Jurisprudence; hereon referred to as *Al-Mustaṣfā*), which indeed is one of al-Ghazālī’s later works. This specific work and point are being highlighted for two reasons. First, this is a book on normative ethics (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and not metaethics. It is a manual that guides jurists on identifying, understanding, and applying the rules of the law, primarily the Shāfi’ school of jurisprudence (Moosa 1995). As stressed earlier, the primary scope of this study is to evaluate DCT on the metaethical level. Second, this is the main work from which some thinkers have inferred that al-Ghazālī is not a divine command theorist. This should only be noted for now and will be picked up after reviewing al-Ghazālī’s thoughts from the works listed above.

The impossible is not within the power [of being enacted]. The impossible consists in affirming a thing conjointly with denying it, affirming the more specific while denying the more general, or affirming two things while negating one [of them]. What does not reduce to this is not impossible, and what is not impossible is within [divine] power. (Al-Ghazālī 2002, 175)

This means that an array of *logically* possible worlds, however beyond our actual reality, are all possible, which for al-Ghazālī meant realizable, even if not necessarily actual (Kraft 2016). Accordingly, and while al-Ghazālī does not explicitly say this, this entails that God could create a world with green-headed human beings, one-eyed moons which can speak, universes with vastly different laws to ours, and even universes with no scientific laws (complete chaos), among others. Since it is the law of non-contradiction that defines what God can and cannot do, He is not necessarily constrained to abide by any *physical* or *nomological* possibilities since they are a subset of logical possibilities (Malik 2019, 13). As a case in point, consider his comments in the *Incoherence* where he discusses the ontological status of observable physical regularities or what are known as laws of nature. As an occasionalist, al-Ghazālī believes that God controlled every single entity, everywhere, and all the time. What we perceive as laws of nature, then, are nothing but regular occurrences as per the will of God. However, since al-Ghazālī was committed to the idea that God can perform miracles, that is, a break in the regularity, for him it was logically impossible for God to change the laws of nature to manifest whatever He wills:

The connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not necessary, according to us . . . their connection is due to the prior decree of God, who creates side by side, not to its being necessary in itself, incapable of separation. On the contrary, it is within [divine] power to create satiety without eating, to create death without decapitation, continue life after decapitation, and so on to all connected things . . . (Al-Ghazālī 2002, 166)

In other words, he believed that *physical necessity* does not equate to *logical necessity*. This has implications for understanding morality, too. Again, since al-Ghazālī believes that God is only bound by the law of non-contradiction, God can permit whatever moral system He chooses to manifest under that rubric.<sup>11</sup>

We claim that it is possible for God . . . not to assign obligations to His servants, that it is possible for Him to assign obligations to them beyond their ability, that it is possible for Him to bring suffering upon them without compensating them and through no fault of theirs, that it is not obligatory for Him to care for their well-being, that it is not obligatory for Him to reward obedience and punish disobedience . . . (Al-Ghazālī 2013, 157)

<sup>11</sup> To be clear, this does not entail that God cannot obligate moral contradictions. It is entirely conceivable that God can command contradictory obligations for His creation. The point being made here is that only He Himself cannot manifest a contradiction, for example, God cannot create a square circle.

Thus in al-Ghazālī's framework, God could very well create possible worlds in which torturing an innocent person could be considered a morally good act. Consider Murphy who criticizes DCT because it entails that non-moral facts, for example, natural facts, are impotent as "they are unable to play an active role in the moral necessitation of creaturely action" (2016, 120). To appreciate this remark, consider two equally possible worlds with the same non-moral facts having the same state of affairs but with the only difference that in one world torturing innocent people is a good thing and in another it is not. This entails that non-moral facts are irrelevant for moral prescriptions,<sup>12</sup> and it is strictly the command of God that makes something good or bad. Murphy is worried by this outcome, but al-Ghazālī would be untroubled by this conclusion (see Figs 1 and 2 shown later on).

We can then see how al-Ghazālī differs from the responses discussed earlier. He would disagree with proponents of S1 in that *moral necessity* is not the same as *logical* or *mathematical necessity*. For him, moral commands are entirely dependent on God's will. In the same vein, S2 also would not make much sense in al-Ghazālī's framework. While humans can have morals or make judgements that are independent and different to what God commands, as we shall see in the next section in more detail, what is *essentially* or *ultimately* morally good and bad can only be affirmed by what God wills.

Furthermore, proponents of S2 and S3 are metaphysically constrained by what a loving God would do. How might al-Ghazālī respond given that the Qur'ān states that God loves man conditionally and even refers to God as The Most Merciful (*Ar-Raḥmān*)?<sup>13</sup> These descriptions seem to go against the last quotation we looked at earlier. I shall suffice with explaining the relationship between God's will and His qualities, like the ones just stated, in al-Ghazālī's framework. Al-Ghazālī would not deny that God is loving and caring for His creation, as this is how God has chosen to define Himself. However, *such normative descriptions are metaphysically contingent on His will*, and thus it is not an obligation on Him to be that way. Accordingly, while God has chosen to define Himself in a certain way through scripture, He could have chosen otherwise: "Even the Qur'ānic principle that hints that God accepts to be constrained by values He has determined to be normative of His nature [like God loving and being merciful] . . . cannot overthrow His right to define those values" (Winter 2017, 242). In other words, His will supersedes His ability to define Himself and what moral commands He chooses. Understood this

<sup>12</sup> Irrelevant insofar that non-moral facts have no intrinsic moral value. Non-moral facts are, of course, important in normative ethics (even) in al-Ghazālī's framework.

<sup>13</sup> "You who believe, if any of you go back on your faith, *God will soon replace you with people He loves and who love Him*, people who are humble towards the believers, hard on the disbelievers, and who strive in God's way without fearing anyone's reproach. Such is God's favour. He grants it to whomever He will. God has endless bounty and knowledge." (Qur'ān 5:54)

way, God being a loving entity is not an essential but rather a *performative* trait of God,<sup>14</sup> which differs from how proponents of S2 and S3 understand God's nature.

### 3.2. The meanings of 'obligation' and 'good'

Al-Ghazālī makes interesting distinctions between the terms 'obligation' and 'good' that are relevant for understanding his DCT. He describes obligation primarily as a prudential term.<sup>15</sup> There is a general (or colloquial) sense of the term in which obligation is used to avoid harm. For instance, if an act X leads to harm Y, then it is obligatory for the individual to avoid act X. These kinds of obligations are rationally deducible.<sup>16</sup> In another sense, al-Ghazālī defines the obligatory as that which prevents harm in the next life, that is, avoiding hellfire or God's punishment. This kind of obligation can only come from revelation. What becomes clear is that al-Ghazālī establishes a kind of dualism between reason-based obligation and revelation-based obligation (Al-Ghazālī 2013, 159). This dualism runs through his understanding of the 'good' as well.

Al-Ghazālī defines the good largely in teleological terms. In other words, being good is based on the end purpose. He distinguishes between three kinds of good. In the first kind of good, call it G1, he defines it as an act related to the agent's purpose. So, for instance, if I intend to do work today to get paid, that is, I need to work *for the purposes* of getting paid, then this is considered a good thing. Within the same definition, al-Ghazālī also says that this purpose can be designated externally on the agent. If my boss wants me to work over the weekend to meet a deadline, it is considered a good thing to do so according to the boss's purpose. In other words, G1 is relational and relative:

If it is in accordance with one person's purpose but not another's, it is called "good" for the first and "bad" for the other. For the terms "good" and "bad" are based on whether there is accord or contrariety, and these are relational matters that vary with people. They even vary with the states of a single person, and they vary with the purposes attached to a single state. An act might be in accordance with a person in one way and contrary to him in another way; hence it would be good for him in one way and bad for him in another way. He who has no religion may deem it good to commit adultery with the wife of another and consider winning her a blessing; and he would deem bad the act of the one who exposes his secret and would call him "a slanderous person who has done a bad deed." The devout, on the other hand, would call him [the exposer of the secret] "a righteous person who has done a good deed."

<sup>14</sup> Jackson (2009, 42) defines essential aspects of God's nature (*ṣifat dhāt*) as that which makes them sempiternal; and performative traits (*ṣifat fi'l*) are those that are related to God's actions in relation to creation, that is, that occurred in time and space, for example, the creation of the universe. God's normative descriptions like Him being loving and merciful are of the latter kind.

<sup>15</sup> He introduces another possible meaning of this term, but he deems it irrelevant when discussing morality, which is why I have chosen to ignore it. See al-Ghazālī (2013, 158).

<sup>16</sup> Al-Ghazālī does not say this is necessarily what obligatory actually means; rather, it is how people *seem* to use the word. See footnote 9 in al-Ghazālī (2013, 159).

Each one of them uses the terms “good” and “bad” according to his purpose. Indeed, a king might be killed; all of his enemies would deem the act of the killer good, and all of his supporters would deem it bad. (Al-Ghazālī 2013, 161)

Under the same rubric, al-Ghazālī’s second definition of good, call this G2, is similar but in relation to eschatological (or otherworldly) goals, that is, heavenly rewards or salvation (Al-Ghazālī 2013, 161–62). However, what distinguishes G1 and G2 is that the latter is grounded solely on revelation and cannot be determined by reason. Thus while G1 may be determined by reason alone, that is, in the absence of revelation, G2 is completely unknowable until revelation arrives. To be clear, this does not mean that there is no potential overlap between the two. In the absence of revelation, a person may very well do things that *may* synchronize with revelational commands once they are received, for example, helping your fellow neighbor. Nevertheless, what changes the moral evaluation of an act is the purpose attached to it. This falls in line with the broader understandings of Islam, particularly a well-known ḥadīth that says actions are valued by the intentions behind them.<sup>17</sup>

A key question relevant to unpacking al-Ghazālī’s DCT is how these values of goodness in G1 come about in the first place. After all, there must be something that makes people think that a certain act is good or bad before the act itself. On this point, three of al-Ghazālī’s ideas on the psychology of the human are relevant. First, he believes that human knowledge has two components, each supplying different things but working together. There is *a priori* knowledge or self-evident principles embedded within the soul, for example, the law of non-contradiction, and acquired knowledge developed *a posteriori* (Umaruddin 2010, 111). Second, al-Ghazālī believes that moral principles are not axiomatic but are instead acquired (Griffel 2012, 29), which implies that humans are not born with any innate ideas of morality. Third, given that moral principles are acquired, what humans eventually consider as good or bad are derived from two (appreciably differentiated) human experiences that usually work in tandem. The first is based on the universalization of ideas based on induction, and the second is from predilections. An agent gets accustomed to thinking that a particular act is good or bad due to repetition (implicit or explicit) that can either come from repetitive social inculcation (be it cultural or religious instruction), personal observations and experiences with societal members (Hourani 1985, 159), or hardwired personal preferences. Consider how a mother consistently scolding a child for playing with fire can lead to the impression that fire is bad; or how child sees that fighting leads to being hurt and therefore concludes that it is a bad thing; or how emotional instigations like the tenderness of the heart lead to thinking that killing animals is bad. According to al-Ghazālī (2013, 166), such instances end up crystallizing an

<sup>17</sup> “The deeds are considered by the intentions, and a person will get the reward according to his intention. *So whoever emigrated for God and His Messenger, his emigration will be for God and His Messenger*; and whoever emigrated for worldly benefits or for a woman to marry, his emigration would be for what he emigrated for” (Bukhārī 1). [www.sunnah.com](http://www.sunnah.com).

individual's understanding of the good and bad as per the definition outlined in G1: "The source of all of this is being accustomed to approving or disapproving [of certain things] and acquiring certain morals since early youth."

Collectively, these ideas lead al-Ghazālī to believe that there is no objective or universal morality, that is, there is nothing that is intrinsically good or bad. He gives several reasons for making his case, but I shall outline only a few. First, morality fails to pass the test of universality (Hourani 1985, 155). What human agents end up conceiving of as universal rules are, in fact, incomplete inductions. By taking individual instances as moral ontological units in and of themselves, humans mistakenly end up identifying them as universal moral rules. Al-Ghazālī expresses this using the example of lying (though this can work by universalizing any principle, for good or bad):

For example, he might deem that lying is absolutely bad in all cases, and that its badness is due to its essence alone as lying, and not due to an additional notion. The reason [for this judgment] is his unawareness of how many beneficial matters depend on lying under certain circumstances. Even if such circumstances take place, he might be, by nature, averse to considering lying good because he is fully accustomed to considering it bad. For his nature, since early youth, is averse to lying due to discipline and good upbringing; he is taught that lying is bad in itself and that he should never lie. Lying is bad, indeed, under a certain condition, which always accompanies lying except in rare cases; because of this he has not been made aware of that condition. Thus the badness of lying and his absolute aversion to it become rooted in his nature. (2013, 164)

In other words, al-Ghazālī would reject the notion of categorical imperatives as developed by Immanuel Kant (Abdullah 1992). It is because of this reason that we sometimes see clashes between G1 and G2. Say that a person adopts a universal moral principle of not-lying. However, while lying is *generally* not permitted in Islamic thought, Islamic scripture allows a person to lie in certain circumstances, for example, to make peace between people or to avoid a war. Alternatively, consider the issue of drinking alcohol or eating pork. Under G1, they may be considered perfectly normal consumables. However, Islamic scripture strictly prohibits both of them, but allows exceptions, for example, they can be consumed in life-and-death situations where they are the only options available. Hence the general rules and exceptions are grounded in revelation, either of which may clash with G1 depending on what is being compared (Al-Ghazālī 2016a, 34).

Second, and this is closely linked to the previous point, al-Ghazālī believes that morality is not indubitable (Hourani 1985, 155; Griffel 2012, 29). Morality is completely dependent on externally fed social circumstances and personal temperaments, as discussed earlier, and thus subjective, as they can vary from one community to another. If a person was born in the absence of society, his understanding of good and bad would be somewhat different and would not consider certain moral stances definite, which otherwise would be thought of as such in certain communal settings. Hourani makes the following point on this issue:

[I]f you were to come into existence fully rational but without experience of society or instruction, having only sense experiences and images, you would be able to doubt such premises such as “killing a man is evil,” or at least hesitate about them, but you could not doubt “negation and affirmation cannot be true of the same thing” or “2 is great than 1.”<sup>18</sup> (1985, 155)

Consider another example but of predilections. Individuals are emotionally, culturally, and biologically wired differently, leading to different temperaments. One individual might be emotionally softer than another. In such a scenario, the softer individual might believe that killing animals is bad because he may empathize with the animal (Hourani 1985, 155; Al-Ghazālī 2013, 166). This is another instance where G1 and G2 could clash. Al-Ghazālī points out how Islamic scriptures permits killing animals (for food) that may conflict with someone who believes otherwise under G1. In other words, both examples intend to illustrate how moral principles are not necessary and sturdy as are logical axioms.

Collectively, al-Ghazālī’s understanding of the good and human nature has interesting implications for morality, which has been eloquently summarized by Jackson under the Ash‘arite banner:

[T]he Ash‘arites insisted that (1) prior to revelation, humans were morally bound by nothing; (2) outside the dictates of revelation, there was no reliable, objective index of morality; and (3) even with the scope of revelation, it was the divine address and not any inherent qualities, either in acts themselves or in the human psyche, that established the moral status of human deeds. (2009, 84)

So unlike S1, moral acts are not equivalent to mathematical or logical necessity; and unlike S2, it is ultimately God’s will that grounds what is ultimately the morally good and bad.

Finally, the third definition of good, which I shall call G3, refers to the acts of God: “An act of God is good”<sup>19</sup> no matter what it is, although God has no needs.’ The meaning of this is that there are no repercussions to God or blame of Him because of the act, for He is the agent in His kingdom, in which no one else has a share” (Al-Ghazālī 2013, 162). Since al-Ghazālī’s understanding of the good is firmly rooted in teleology, in al-Ghazālī’s framework, God is an unbounded being, which entails that God has no deficiency. There is nothing that He needs nor wants; He does things without purpose because He does not need reasons to do things. Furthermore, God cannot be attributed with senses of good as in G1 and G2 because He is sovereign and ontologically independent. He cannot be harmed for failing to do something and has no adverse consequences awaiting Him for His

<sup>18</sup> It should be pointed out that this position may not be taken seriously against the position of moral nativism that has some substantiation from evolutionary psychology. See Malik (2021, 237-263).

<sup>19</sup> I agree with Yaqub’s observation of al-Ghazālī’s insistence on using good here: “As we will see, al-Ghazālī thinks that in a certain sense it is correct to say that the acts of God are all good, but this sense has nothing to do with the moral good . . .” (2011, 171). I can only guess, but I believe that al-Ghazālī is saying this more out of respect than anything. As we shall see shortly in the following passages in the main text, it is very clear that al-Ghazālī sees God as beyond good and bad. Also see Farfur (2010, 126).

actions (Qur'ān 21:23).<sup>20</sup> So God is always doing good things regardless of what He chooses to do. In other words, His goodness is invariant no matter what He commands and manifests (Yaqub 2011). Accordingly, al-Ghazālī would not have a problem with the PoA. For him, it would be the inevitable outcome of an unbounded being, which is what God is. To summarize the three definitions of good as highlighted by al-Ghazālī:

G1—an act that relates to the agent's purpose;

G2—an act that gets an agent heavenly rewards and eschatological salvation;

G3—an act of God no matter what it is.

A critic could raise two objections at this point. First, the Qur'ān itself mentions purposes mandated by God. Consider the following two verses: (1) "We were not playing a pointless game when We created the heavens and earth and everything in between" (Qur'ān 44:38); and (2) "I created jinn [demons] and mankind only to worship Me" (Qur'ān 51:56). Second, the way al-Ghazālī has defined good when predicated on God is actually meaningless and vacuous. It does not really explain good the way we intuitively understand it. How would al-Ghazālī respond to these two objections?

As for the first objection, one needs to understand the placement of teleology in those verses carefully. The first verse is implicit but elicits the reader to ponder over the purpose of life (and thus suggesting there is one). By contrast, the second verse is clearly explicit in mentioning that the purpose of man is to worship God. While these may seem like apparent objections to al-Ghazālī's thesis, they are not substantial. There is a fundamental difference between having a *creation for a purpose* (*gharad*) and having a *purpose for creation* (*maqṣād*). The former is a reason for the creator to create his creation, that is, *intrinsic* teleology; and the latter is the purpose assigned to the creation, that is, *extrinsic* teleology. Consider the following analogy. If I wanted to make a board game to make money, that is my purpose in creating the game. However, the players' purpose in playing the

<sup>20</sup> This aligns with Messer's observations who cautions us of the dangers of treating God as an accountable one from a Christian standpoint:

If we attempt such judgements, we are in effect assuming that God is an agent of the same kind as us, only greater. Now if we find ourselves speaking of God in that way, we will no longer be speaking of the God of Christian theology. At best we might be speaking of the greatest being in the universe, not the transcendent Creator of the universe. This reduced 'god' can be more than a participant in the processes of physical cause and effect in the universe, albeit the greatest and most powerful participant . . . Furthermore, the language of 'theodicies' and 'defences' makes clear what kind of judgement about God we have in view. Our moral evaluation of God has a forensic aspect to it: we are in a courtroom drama in which God stands accused of culpable negligence, wanton cruelty or worse. Theologians who develop theodicies and defences within such a frame of reference act as God's counsel, trying to get God acquitted of all charges. It is worth nothing the oddness of this way of speaking from the perspective of the Christian tradition, which is more accustomed thinking of God as our Judge. Even if it is sometimes necessary engage on its own terms with the kind of God-talk on trial . . . we need to remain constantly aware that this is not Christian theology's characteristic mode of speaking—and at the very least, it has significant intellectual and spiritual dangers. (Messer 2009, 145–46)

game is to win it. Thus the players' purpose in the game is not the same as the creator's purpose for making the game. Similarly, God created the world but with the difference being that He has no purpose for the reasons outlined earlier. As an unbounded being, there is nothing that He needs, and thus He has no reasons for doing things. Nevertheless, God created the world with the purpose for its inhabitants to attain salvation in the eschaton, and He has outlined how this is possible through His moral commands (as He deems fit to choose). The verses above discuss the latter type of purposes and not the former. Thus, this objection does not defeat al-Ghazālī's thesis. As counter-intuitive as it may seem, al-Ghazālī accepts the consequence of PoA because of God's nature.

As for the second objection, we need to re-visit al-Ghazālī's theological worldview. The fundamental axiom in the Ash'arite paradigm is God's omnipotence. God is the *absolute* free agent and has total sovereignty, and this trumps any axiological considerations. Anything that limits God's capability raises an immediate red flag in the Ash'arite framework. So when it is said that God cannot mandate cruel commands like torturing an innocent person, al-Ghazālī could respond by saying that this objection is premised on a frail human perspective (Winter 2017, 242; Farahat 2019, 27–65). God is utterly transcendent (*tanẓīh*), is not bound by any moral duty towards His creation, and therefore does as He pleases according to His Wisdom.<sup>21</sup> So unlike Alston's thesis (recall S3), which rests on a *vacuous* understanding of God being good, al-Ghazālī is saying God, in fact, transcends the human categories of the morally good and bad (Campanini 2019, 62–63). One way of seeing this is by the analogy of a computer designer and the games she makes. A designer could create a game where a particular action is evaluated as a good thing. However, she could equally recreate the same action in another game as a bad thing. The "moral framework" of either game is not something that the computer designer herself comes under. She assigns the framework as she sees fit according to the purposes of the game that she has instilled, but she is not bound to or by it. So it would be incorrect to call the designer good or bad from the internal framework of either game. Keeping these points in mind, Winter (2017, 242) summarizes the Ash'arites' (and thus al-Ghazālī's) position aptly:

God is . . . not "morally good" in any human sense but habitually and validly acts according to wisdom . . . Divine acts are unlike human acts, not least because they are not axiologically shaped by the values of obedience and disobedience. On this conclusion, divine omnipotence includes the capacity to impose suffering that by human measuring is certainly unjust or unbearable, but this cannot compromise the principle of divine wisdom. (Winter 2017, 242)

In effect, al-Ghazālī's proposal also deals with the PoGG, but not in the way that some of the thinkers we looked at earlier would like. For them, it seems that God is good *by virtue* of having qualities like loving, being merciful, kind, etc., whereas

<sup>21</sup> For al-Ghazālī's understanding of God's attribute as All-Wise (*Al-Ḥakīm*), see al-Ghazālī (2015, 116–18).

al-Ghazālī's understanding of the matter differs on this point. In al-Ghazālī's worldview, God is not obligated in any way to have duty, care, or consideration for His creation except *if* He wills it upon Himself (Al-Ghazālī 2016b, 32); There is nothing God ought to do.<sup>22</sup> While there are some schools of thought in Islamic history, such as the Mu'tazilites, that have had similar affinities to the contemporary strategies looked at earlier, this is not the case with either al-Ghazālī or the Ash'arites (Jackson 2009, 47–74; Farfur 2010; Campanini 2019, 61–62).<sup>23</sup> In sum, the response to the PoGG is simply that God does not come under moral evaluative frameworks, He is transcategorical. Accordingly, the PoGG is not really seen as a problem in al-Ghazālī's perspective.<sup>24</sup>

#### 4. But is al-Ghazālī Really a Divine Command Theorist?

Having analyzed al-Ghazālī's thoughts, we are now in a better situation to evaluate the ideas of some thinkers who claim that al-Ghazālī's affinity towards DCT should be reassessed. These include Anver Emon (2010) and Mariam Al-Attar (2010; 2016). As stated earlier, both of these thinkers primarily rely on *Al-Mustaṣfā* for suggesting a reassessment of al-Ghazālī as a divine command theorist.

##### 4.1. General remarks

There are some general points that need to be clarified before I continue with my discussions of Emon and Al-Attar. First, *Al-Mustaṣfā* is a book on normative

<sup>22</sup> In response to this point, a reviewer questioned how the commands of such a God is possible to understand within human categories. This is a conflation of understanding God himself through religious language versus the commands of God. Both are intelligible, but the former is linguistically and conceptually inexhaustible since God is an infinite and transcendent being. It is al-Ghazālī's point entirely that God Himself can never be completely reduced to humanly expressed terms.

<sup>23</sup> As a further qualification, while God being all-loving is central to the Christian paradigm, I do not mean to imply that all Christians hold this position. Some Christian theologians come very close to al-Ghazālī's position, for example, William of Ockham (Osborne 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Winters summarizes the point well:

Human minds cannot, then, adequately evaluate God's actions or even His legislation. True, the habits of Divine wisdom in practice tend to converge with mentally graspable patterns of appropriateness, allowing the cautious practice of *ta'tīl* [explanation], but the immensity of the divine-human gulf ensures that this cannot be guaranteed. Hence the argument. Hence the argument that demonstrates the non-existence of God on the grounds that He has failed various tests finds no purchase in an Ash'arite context . . . God is free to administer suffering that is neither punishment nor a trial, to give pain to children and animals and to torment His prophets, and still His justice, His "appropriate placement of things," is not compromised. The "semitic" conception of a sovereign personal God here trumps the . . . notion of God as a "cosmic justice machine," a deity bound to deliver moral outcomes and a just world whose principles are, at least in theory, fully knowable via human cognition. (Winters 2017, 242–43)

It is precisely for these reasons that arguments for God's existence based on objective morality, which are popular in the contemporary discourse of philosophy of religion, simply do not make sense in the Ash'arite paradigm.

ethics (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) as stressed earlier. This means it takes revelation as expressed by God as a given which then can be used to construct a legal framework to determine moral evaluations. Second, and somewhat related to the first point, al-Ghazālī mentions in *Al-Mustaṣfā* that *kalām* is the highest of all sciences, and he explains that *kalām* is the prior discipline on which all other disciplines like *uṣūl al-fiqh* rest (Al-Ghazālī 2000, 6–7; also see Moosa 1995, 70). This is important to highlight because it licenses and stresses the importance of his *kalām*ic work, namely the *Moderation*, which we looked at earlier. Third, at the very start of *Al-Mustaṣfā*, al-Ghazālī recapitulates the entire discussion on the nature of “good” and “obligation” which we reviewed earlier from the *Moderation* (2000, 45–51). Since *Al-Mustaṣfā* is one of al-Ghazālī’s later works, at least in comparison to the *Moderation*, this observation makes it clear that he never abandoned nor changed his Ash‘arite commitments. Collectively, these comments should immediately make one wary of the idea of judging al-Ghazālī solely on selective sections of this work and in the absence of his other treatises.

#### 4.2. *Anver Emon*

Emon establishes two categories which he then uses to characterize classical Muslim jurists. These are hard natural law (HNL) and soft natural law (SNL). HNL theorists believe that because God is just he can only do good and not evil. This means that his creation was made with goodness, and since this is for the benefit of humanity, he infused nature with values that can be extrapolated by reason (Emon 2010, 25–27). SNL theorists believe that God is not obliged to do good, but He does so out of his grace. Accordingly, he benefitted humanity by infusing nature with values that can be rationally determined (Emon 2010, 31–33). SNL is a *normative* position<sup>25</sup> Emon attributes to proponents of DCT (which he calls voluntarism in his book) who stress God’s omnipotence and believe that God can never come under reasoned determinations of the morally good and bad. Since only God defines good and bad *via* scripture, nature is morally impotent (Emon 2010, 27–31). For simplicity, these differences are summarized in Table 1.

Within this schema, Emon asserts that al-Ghazālī is a proponent of SNL, which seems to run counter to what has been argued for in this article, at least if read cursorily. As highlighted by March (2010, 678), the setup of this classification is sometimes confusing and, at times, imposing rather than elucidating. For instance, Emon himself states that SNL theorists believe that “nature is neither determinative of the good nor normative.” He then continues to say:

Soft Naturalists recognised as an empirical and scriptural fact that creation benefits humanity. This is not to suggest, they argued, that God is obliged to do good. Instead, relying on the *correlation between scriptural references about the world’s bounties*, and the actual experience of such bounties in the world, they could reasonably posit that nature benefits humanity [*italics for emphasis*]. (Emon 2010, 193)

<sup>25</sup> This is in reference to juridical or legal theories in the context of Emon’s work.

Table 1: Summary of Emon's definitions of HNL and SNL

| Metaethical position | Normative ethics position | Must God do good? | Is nature fused with values? | Reason                              |
|----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Natural law          | HNL                       | Yes               | Yes                          | God's justice                       |
| DCT                  | SNL                       | No                | Yes                          | God is omnipotent but also graceful |

In light of these comments, it becomes difficult to see what makes SNL a kind of natural law theory seeing that this account is compatible with DCT. Apart from stressing the point that the consonance between nature and revelation is due to God's grace, which proponents of DCT would not necessarily deny, SNL seems somewhat of a redundant category (March 2010, 678). Keeping this crucial point in mind, we can now make some comments on al-Ghazālī relevant to Emon's work.

Al-Ghazālī has two different ideas of *maṣlaḥa* and *maqāṣid*, terms which are relevant for our discussion. He defines *maṣlaḥa* in general terms as that which causes benefit or repels harm in creation (*khalq*). Additionally, he identifies the more technical meaning of the *maṣlaḥa*, which is supporting the divine law by upholding the *maqāṣid al-sharī'a* (purposes of the law; al-Ghazālī 2000, 170). This is al-Ghazālī's famous teleo-juridical theory. Al-Ghazālī makes it clear that it is necessary (*ḍarūrī*) for the divine law (*sharī'a*) to preserve five basic things: religion (*dīn*), life (*naḥs*), reason (*ʿaql*), lineage (*naṣl*), and property (*māl*). Emon claims that these can be determined from non-*sharī'a* sources:

Importantly, the basic aims of the *sharī'a* are not derived from scriptural source-texts. Source-texts, at most, confirm and corroborate them. For al-Ghazālī, these values are intuitively known. They are the kinds of values that any society or legal tradition would uphold if it values the preservation and flourishing of society. (2010, 135)

However, what is happening here is that the general *maṣlaḥa* known by people from what brings them benefit and harm in creation is overlapping with the *maṣlaḥa* of divine law. *This is not a causal connection*. Al-Ghazālī makes it clear that the *maṣlaḥa* of nature leads to the aims of creation for fulfilling their human goals (*ṣalāḥ al-khalq fī taḥṣīl maqāṣidihi*; Al-Ghazālī 2000, 170). However, this in itself does not give it normativity. The *maṣlaḥa* of creation becomes normative only when the divine law legislates it, and this overlap, which did not have to be there, is by divine grace: "So . . . when *maṣlaḥa* in nature falls in accordance with the law it is because that is the aim of the Lawgiver and it is not the identification of that *maṣlaḥa* [of nature] that makes it law" (Koujah 2015, 6).<sup>26</sup> I have summarized this in Fig. 1.

In short, in his particular reading of al-Ghazālī, Emon seems to err because of the terminological overlap used for creation and the divine law. Moreover, his insistence on describing SNL as a form of natural law can result in serious confusion

<sup>26</sup> This seems better suited to what March (2010, 679) calls "complex purposivism."

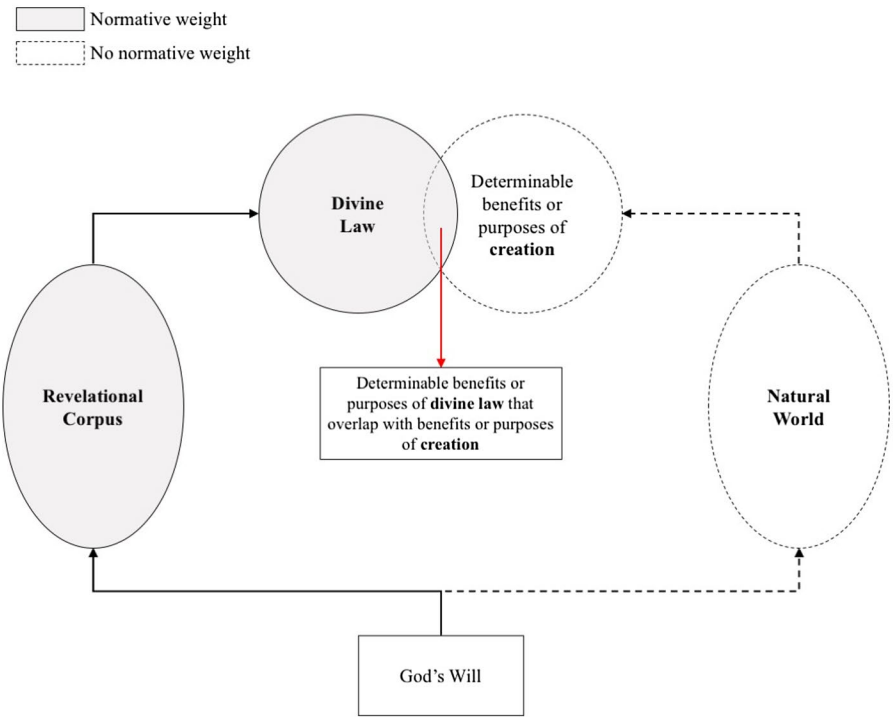


Figure 1. Schematic of al-Ghazālī’s understanding of the normative world, the natural world, and their alignment. The divine law is extracted from the revelational corpus, and determinations can be made of the natural world. The divine law has some aspects which are determinable that overlap with those of creation. However, all of this is contingent on the will of God. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](#)]

if it is not clearly stated that it is a position of *normative ethics* that rests on the *metaethical* position of DCT; it runs the serious risk of incorrectly masking a thinker such as al-Ghazālī as a proponent of natural law theory when he is, in fact, a divine command theorist. In *Al-Mustaṣfā*, al-Ghazālī clearly does not theologically support any kind of natural law theory nor contradict his commitment to DCT (Moosa 1995, 183–220; Reinhart 1995, 70–75; Al-Ghazālī 2000; Opwis 2010, 65–88; Koujah 2015; 2016; 2019).

4.3. *Mariam Al-Attar*

In the same vein, Al-Attar argues for a reassessment of al-Ghazālī (and the whole later Ash‘arite tradition in fact) because of *maqāṣid al-sharī‘a*. She makes a very brief remark relevant to our discussion:

The purposes of the *sharī‘a*, as perceived by al-Ghazālī entail the essential purposes of human beings and set the priorities of human purposes. These are certainly

not derived from divine commands, they are derived from the reasons behind divine commands, the reasons that make divine commands purposeful rather than arbitrary—reasons that are stated or implied in the Qur'an, and well articulated by human intellect. (Al-Attar 2010, 139)

Elsewhere she suggests that al-Ghazālī might indeed be a secret natural law theorist of sorts: "Al-Ghazālī and the late Ash'arites . . . maintained that divine regulations and the interests of man lie side by side or exist together, yet they did not admit of a causal relationship between them, that is, they did not say that the interests of man cause divine commands, *since that must have been considered blasphemous*" [italics for emphasis] (Al-Attar 2016, 323). It is then no surprise that she describes al-Ghazālī's position as the divine *purposes* theory instead of DCT (Al-Attar 2016, 322).

Given these two statements, we can raise two questions. Is al-Ghazālī not a divine command theorist because he is a secret natural law theorist, as suggested in the second comment?<sup>27</sup> If so, then it has already been shown that this is not the case as demonstrated when evaluating Emon. If the *maṣlaḥa* and *maqāṣid* of creation are confused with *maṣlaḥa* and *maqāṣid* of the divine law, and if *Al-Mustaṣfā* is read in a very selective fashion, then one can mistakenly read al-Ghazālī as a natural law theorist. Al-Attar (2016, 322; 2017, 46), at times, references Emon in her work, and it seems that she has confused SNL as a metaethical position instead of a normative one. If so, then what Emon calls SNL is clearly compatible with DCT and therefore does not warrant a reassessment of al-Ghazālī as a natural law theorist as I have shown earlier.

Alternatively, is Al-Attar suggesting that al-Ghazālī is not a divine command theorist because of determinable purposes of the law as suggested by the first comment? Having purposes that ground the divine law is entirely unproblematic and is perfectly compatible with DCT. This point is related to the previous section in which we look at how God can create the universe infused with purposes even though He himself has none, that is, the distinction between *creation for a purpose (gharad)* and having a *purpose for creation (maqṣād)*. In this account, God can give us the mental capacity that can discern the *maṣlaḥa* and the *maqāṣid* of creation and the divine law, which may overlap due to his grace. Thus, to use this as an argument for a revisionist program is a stretch. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, *Al-Mustaṣfā* is a work of normative ethics (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) within which moral rules and processes for applying them are developed, and through which purposes of the law are identified. This much can be conceded to Al-Attar. However, al-Ghazālī states that *kalām* is the highest of the sciences which other sciences like *uṣūl al-fiqh* rely on, and thus these moral rules and purposes are entirely contingent on the will of God (see Fig. 1). God

<sup>27</sup> This is in reference to her assertion that al-Ghazālī did not make a causal connection because of the potential charge of blasphemy. It needs to be pointed out that this is merely asserted and never actually backed up with any arguments and references.

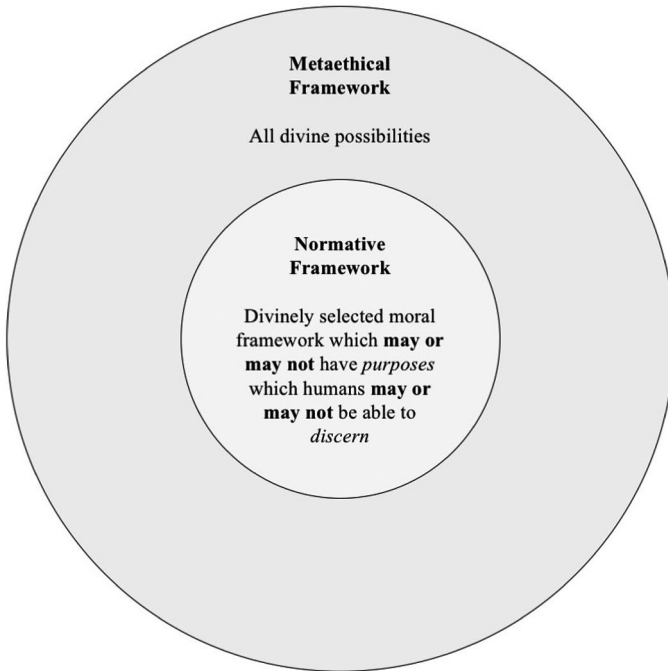


Figure 2. Relationship between al-Ghazālī's metaethical and normative framework. This shows how the normative framework is a subset of the broader metaethical framework.

did not have to create an overlap between the *maṣlaḥa* and *maqāṣid* of creation and divine law. If God wanted to, He could easily change the moral framework to whatever He pleases because His will is the source of the law expressed to humankind through revelation. He could have also willed a universe with infused purposes that humans could never discern or even a universe without infused purposes. All of these scenarios are entirely possible for God in al-Ghazālī's broader *kalām*ic (metaethical) framework (see Fig. 2). Al-Attar, however, does not see these to be compatible with DCT:

The Ash'arite theory of good and evil is definitely consistent with the rest of the Ash'arite theories in *kalām*, but it is not indispensable in the principles of jurisprudence *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Admitting and acknowledging human agency in formulating and establishing the 'five universal necessities' or *maqāṣid* requires a different meta-ethical foundation. (2017, 47)

It seems then that Al-Attar may have misinterpreted Emon (perhaps due to the terminological issue that was highlighted earlier); or perhaps she does not realize the compatibility between DCT and *maqāṣid al-sharī'a*; or she does not appreciate or fails to see the hierarchal relationship between *kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* in

al-Ghazālī's thought. Despite Al-Attar's observations about *maqāṣid al-sharī'a*, al-Ghazālī is squarely a divine command theorist given my arguments.

In short, Al-Attar makes the categorical mistake of judging al-Ghazālī solely and selectively through his *Al-Mustasfā*, a work on normative ethics (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), without giving any consideration to his larger *kalām*ic framework that contains his ideas on metaethics, which are licensed and repeated in *Al-Mustasfā* itself.

## 5. Conclusion

In this essay, I have demonstrated the ways that al-Ghazālī's ideas can contribute to the growing contemporary discourse on DCT. There are two main hurdles that stand in the way of those who advocate for a DCT; the PoA and the PoGG. Al-Ghazālī's ideas help us to see that these hurdles are inevitable but unproblematic. Al-Ghazālī's theology has no problem accepting that God does things for no reasons. As an unbounded being, God has no deficiency, He has no needs, no purposes, nor reasons to do things. Consequently, whatever He does, He does without reason. As stressed before, however, this does not entail that creation itself does not have purposes. God can legislate moral frameworks for humans to achieve success in the eschaton while simultaneously having no reasons to do so for Himself. In other words, God has no intrinsic teleology but may have an extrinsic teleology. As a result, the PoA is not an issue in al-Ghazālī's framework.

As for the PoGG, al-Ghazālī has no issue accepting any kind of possible world as long as it does not violate the law of non-contradiction. Accordingly, God can command anything to be good or bad, as He transcends any moral categories. These views make al-Ghazālī's perspective on morality a bit difficult to swallow, which puts him into stark contrast with contemporary developments on DCT.

Finally, against how others have presented al-Ghazālī as a natural law theorist of sorts, I have tried to show that this is not the case. In sum, al-Ghazālī is, in fact, a proponent of DCT and bites the bullet with it. That said, al-Ghazālī is still not out of turbulent waters. There is the well-known problem of divine deception (El-Rouayheb, 2014). If al-Ghazālī strongly believes that God can do anything that is logically possible without moral constraints, it lends open the possibility of God being able to lie. A possible implication of this is that God can send down scripture that may not end up being true, that is, He does not live up to the divine promises that He has mentioned in scripture. How would al-Ghazālī deal with this problem? This inquiry will be addressed in a future work.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> I am grateful to Sarah Lane Ritchie, Jamie Collins, and Safaruk Chowdhury for giving me their comments on earlier drafts of this work. The three reviewers from the *Journal of Religious Ethics* also helped improve the quality of this paper by offering several constructive comments, particularly the third reviewer. I am extremely thankful to David Solomon Jalajel and Nazif Muhtaroglu who went through several revisions of this article.

# REFERENCES

Abdullah, M. Amin

- 1992 *The Idea of Universality of Ethical Norms in Al-Ghazālī and Kant*. Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı.

Adams, Robert M.

- 1975 "A Modified Divine Command Theory of Ethical Wrongness." In *Religion and Morality*, edited by Gene H. Outka and John P. Reeder, 318–47. Garden City, KS: Anchor Press.
- 1979 "Divine Command Metaethics Modified Again." *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7.1 (March): 66–79.
- 1999 *Finite and Infinite Goods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Al-Attar, Mariam

- 2010 *Islamic Ethics: Divine Command Theory in Arabo-Islamic Thought*. London: Routledge.
- 2016 "The Ethics and Metaphysics of Divine Command Theory." In *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, edited by Richard C. Taylor and Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, 315–24. London: Routledge.
- 2017 "Meta-ethics: A Quest for an Epistemological Basis of Morality in Classical Islamic Thought." *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 1.1–2: 29–50.

Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid

- 2000 *Al-Mustaṣfā min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl*. Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-ʿIlmiyya.
- 2002 *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Translated by Michael E. Marmura. Provo, UT: Brigham University Press.
- 2013 *Moderation in Belief*. Translated by Aladdin M. Yaqub. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- 2015 *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*. Translated by David Burrell and Nazih Daher. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society.
- 2016a *Kitāb Qawāʿid Al-ʿAqāʾid: The Principles of the Creed—Book 2 of the Ihyaʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*. Translated by Khalid Williams. Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae.
- 2016b *The Forty Principles of Religion*. Translated by Nasir Abdussalam. London: Turath Publishing.

Alston, William P.

- 1990 "Some Suggestions for Divine Command Theorists." In *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy*, edited by Michael D. Beaty, 303–26. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame.
- 2002 "What Euthyphro Should Have Said." In *Philosophy of Religion: A Reader and Guide*, edited by William Lane Craig, 283–98. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Altaie, Basil

- 2016 *God, Nature, and the Cause: Essays on Islam and Science*. Abu Dhabi: Kalam Research and Media.

Archer, Alfred

- 2015 "Divine Moral Goodness, Supererogation and the Euthyphro Dilemma." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 79.2 (April): 147–60.

- Ayubi, Zahra  
2019 *Gendered Morality: Classical Islamic Ethics of the Self, Family, and Society*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Campanini, Massimo  
2019 *Al-Ghazālī and the Divine*. London: Routledge.
- Carson, Tomas L.  
2012 "Divine Will/Divine Command Theories and the Problem of Arbitrariness." *Religious Studies* 48.4 (December): 445–68.
- Chandler, John  
1984 "Is the Divine Command Theory Defensible?" *Religious Studies* 20.3 (September): 443–52.
- Davis, Richard Brian, and W. Paul Franks.  
2014 "Counterpossibles and the 'Terrible' Divine Command Deity." *Religious Studies* 51.1 (March): 1–19.
- El-Rouayheb, Khaled  
2014 "Must God Tell Us the Truth? A Problem in Ash'arī Theology." In *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone*, edited by Asad Q. Ahmed, Behnam Sadeghi, Robert G. Hoyland, and Adam Silverstein, 411–29. Leiden: Brill.
- Emon, Anver  
2010 *Islamic Natural Law Theories*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Farahat, Omar  
2019 *The Foundation of Norms in Islamic Jurisprudence and Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Farfur, Muhammad Salih  
2010 *The Beneficial Message and the Definitive Proof in the Study of Theology*. Translated by Wesam Charkawi. London: Azhar Academy Ltd.
- Feser, Edward  
2019 *Aristotle's Revenge: The Metaphysical Foundations of Physical and Biological Science*. Neunkirchen-Seelscheid: Editiones Scholasticae.
- Griffel, Frank  
2009 *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
2012 "Al-Ghazālī's use of 'Original Human Disposition' (*Fitra*) and Its Background in the Teachings of Al-Farābī and Avicenna." *The Muslim World* 102.1 (January): 1–32.  
2015 *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of al-Ghazali Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*, Vol. 2. Leiden: Brill.
- Hallaq, Wael  
2018 *Restating Orientalism: A Critique of Modern Knowledge*. Columbia, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Halverson, Jeffry R.  
2010 *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam: The Muslim Brotherhood, Ash'arism, and Political Sunnism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Hassan, Laura  
2020 *Ash'arism Encounters Avicennism: Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī on Creation*. Athens, GA: Georgia Press.
- Hourani, George F.  
1985 *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jackson, Sherman A.  
2009 *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jalajel, David Solomon  
2009 *Islam and Biological Evolution: Exploring Classical Sources and Methodologies*. Western Cape: University of the Western Cape.
- Jones, Hardy  
1980 "Concerning a New Version of the Divine Command Theory of Morality." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11.3 (September): 195–205.
- Koons, Jeremy  
2012 "Can God's Goodness Save the Divine Command Theory from Euthyphro?" *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 4.1 (March): 177–95.
- Koujah, Rami  
2015 "A Critical Review Essay of Anver M. Emon's Islamic Natural Law Theories." *UCLA Journal of Islam and Near Eastern Law* 14: 1–28.  
2016 "Divine Purposiveness and its Implications in Legal Theory: The Interplay of Kalām and Uṣūl al-Fiqh." *Islamic Law and Society* 24: 171–210.  
2019 "Maṣlaḥa as a Normative Claim of Islamic Jurisprudence: The Legal Philosophy of al-ʿIzz b. ʿAbd al-Salām." In *Locating the Sharīʿa Legal Fluidity in Theory, History and Practice*, edited by Sohaira Z. M. Siddiqui, 127–52. Leiden: Brill.
- Kraft, András  
2016 "A Nominalist Deliverance from Error: On al-Ghazālī's Concept of Modality." *Czech and Slovak Journal of Humanities: Philosophica* 1: 26–36.
- Leaman, Oliver  
2001 *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lombardi, Joseph  
2005 "Against God's Moral Goodness." *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 79.2 (Spring): 313–26.
- Malik, Shoaib Ahmed  
2019 "God, Information and the World: The Metaphysics of William Dembski and al-Ghazālī." *Philosophy* 94.4 (September): 547–76.  
2021 *Islam and Evolution: Al-Ghazālī and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm*. London: Routledge.
- March, Andrew  
2010 "Islamic Natural Law Theories. By Anver Emon. Oxford University Press 2010. Pp. 200. \$80.00. ISBN: 0-199-57900-8." *Journal of Law and Religion*, 26.2 (April): 675–83.

- Mawson, T. J.  
2002 "Are Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection Compatible? Reply to Morriston." *Religious Studies* 38.2 (June): 215–23.
- Messer, Neil  
2009 "Natural Evil After Darwin." In *Theology after Darwin*, edited by Michael S. Northcott and R. J. Berry, 145–6. Milton Keynes: Paternoster.
- Moosa, Ebrahim E. I. 1995 "The Legal Philosophy of Al-Ghazālī: Law, Language and Theology in Al-Mustasfā." Ph.D. Diss., University of Cape Town.
- Morris, Thomas V., and Christopher Menzel  
1986 "Absolute Creation." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 23.4 (October): 353–62.
- Morriston, Wes  
2001 "Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are they Compatible?" *Religious Studies* 37.2 (June): 143–60.  
2003 "Are Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection Compatible? Reply to Mawson." *Religious Studies* 39.4 (December): 441–49.  
2009 "What if God Commanded Something Terrible? A Worry for Divine-Command Meta-Ethics." *Religious Studies* 45.3 (September): 249–67.
- Murphy, Mark C.  
2016 *God and Moral Law: On the Theistic Explanation of Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
2019 "Natural Law Tradition in Ethics." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia for Philosophy* (Summer), edited by Edward N. Zalta. July 19. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/natural-law-ethics>.
- Nagel, Tilman  
2006 *History of Islamic Theology*. Translated by Thomas Thornton. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers.
- Nakissa, Aria  
2020 "Cognitive Science of Religion and the Study of Islam: Rethinking Islamic Theology, Law, Education, and Mysticism Using the Works of al-Ghazālī." *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 32.3 (September): 1–28.
- Opwis, Felicitas  
2010 *Maṣlaḥa and the Purpose of the Law Islamic Discourse on Legal Change from the 4th/10th to 8th/14th Century*. Leiden: Brill.
- Osborne, Thomas M.  
2005 "Ockham as a Divine-Command Theorist." *Religious Studies* 41.1 (March): 1–22.
- Quinn, Philip L.  
2006 "Theological Voluntarism." In *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*, edited by David Copp, 63–90. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rahimi, Simin  
2012 "Divine Command Theory and Theistic Activism." *The Heythrop Journal* 53.4 (December): 551–59.
- Reinhart, Kevin A.  
1995 *Before Revelation: The Boundaries of Muslim Moral Thought*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Schmidtke, Sabine,ed.

2016 *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Simpson, William M. R., Robert C. Koons, and Nicholas J. Teh,eds.

2017 *Neo-Aristotelian Perspectives on Contemporary Science*. London: Routledge.

Stump, Eleonore

1992 "God's Obligations." *Philosophical Perspectives* 6: 475–91.

Tamer, Georges

2015 *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of al-Ghazali Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*, Vol. 1. Leiden: Brill.

Tooley, Michael

2003 "The Stanlaker-Lewis Approach to Counterfactuals." *The Journal of Philosophy* 100.7 (July): 371–77.

Umaruddin, M.

2010 *The Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazālī*. New Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors.

van Brakel, Jaap

2013 *Philosophy of Chemistry: Between the Manifest and the Scientific Image*. Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Westmoreland, Robert

1996 "Two Recent Metaphysical Divine Command Theories of Ethics." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 39.1 (March): 15–31.

Winter, Tim,ed.

2014 *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Winter, Tim

2017 "Islam and the Problem of Evil." In *The Problem of Evil*, edited by Chad Meister and Paul J. Moser, 230–48. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yaqub, Aladdin M.

2011 "Al-Ghazālī's Ethical Egoism and Divine Will." In *Monotheism & Ethics: Historical and Contemporary Intersections among Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, edited by Tzvi Langermann, 163–96. Leiden: Brill.

Yöney, Ferhat

2019 "Islam, the Divine Command Theory, and Religious Fundamentalism." *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 30.4 (December): 413–33.