Ghazālī and Metaphorical Predication in the Third Discussion of the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*

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Abstract. Ghazālī's *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* is an unusual philosophical work for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the author's explicit disavowal of any of the conclusions contained within it. The present essay examines some of the hermeneutical challenges that face readers of the work and offers an exegetical account of the much-neglected Third Discussion, which examines a key point of Neoplatonic metaphysics. The paper argues that Ghazālī's maintaining of the incompatibility of metaphysical creationism and Neoplatonic emanationism should not be viewed as simply a rhetorical or dialectical argument, but rather is best understood, to use Ghazālī's words, as a philosophical "proof." Essential to this proof in the solution to the argument of the Third Discussion is an implicit theory of metaphorical predication that can be pieced together from several of Ghazālī's remarks as well as a *reductio ad absurdum* argument about the very possibility of ethical discourse.

A metaphorical expression is always obscure.
—*Aristotle,* Topics *6, 139b34–35*

In his celebrated polemic, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, the late eleventh- and early twelfth-century Islamic jurist and theologian Abū Hāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī pays out a scathing critique to many Avicennian and Farabian philosophical positions in the same currency used by his opponents.[1] Although his motivations are undoubtedly religious, the

[1]All citations from the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, unless otherwise specified, are taken from *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. Michael E. Marmura, 2nd ed. (Provo, Ut.: Brigham Young University Press, 2000). Marmura's version of the Arabic text is largely the one found in Algazel, *Tahafot al-Falasifat*, ed. Maurice Bouyges, S.J. (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1927), minus the critical apparatus. Hereafter in the notes *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* will designated as *IP*. Citations will be given as chapter (or introduction, preface, or conclusion), paragraph number, and page number. Another complete translation is found in *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, trans. Sabid Ahmad Kamali (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1958), and a partial translation of

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distinguished theologian provides a reproach to his contemporaries that uses the terms and modes of refutation characteristic of philosophy. Three features of Ghazālī's work, however, have made interpretations of its philosophical content a challenging task. First, Ghazālī denies that there is any positive doctrine in his work; his purpose is simply critical and deconstructive.[2] Secondly, since much of the work takes the form of a dialogue between literary interlocutors, the dramatic format hinders attempts to ascribe its content to the historical Ghazālī. Indeed, a well-known example of this problem is whether the robust defense of metaphysical occasionalism espoused in the Seventeenth Discussion of the work can be taken as Ghazālī's own view.[3] Thirdly, unlike most philosophical texts, the book is filled with highly volatile statements of censure and vituperation; at times Ghazālī charges his philosophical opponents with nothing less than insanity and stupidity, even calling them "dimwits" and "devils."[4] Some commentators have suggested that the use of stinging verbal attacks is meant to cover over errors in reasoning in order to strong-arm readers into an uncritical acceptance of certain philosophical positions.[5]

Ghazālī's book thus presents the careful reader with these hermeneutical difficulties. How should one approach the work to find philosophical material despite the author's theological motivation and explicit disavowal of any of the philosophical conclusions? To what extent does the literary or dramatic format hinder one from extracting philosophical content? How does one best see through the rhetorical features of the work to evaluate the rigor of the argumentation? In an attempt to answer these questions and address related difficulties, the present paper offers an interpretation of the first part of the Third Discussion of *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Unlike the work's well-known treatment of occasionalism noted above, the Third Discussion has been largely neglected by commentators. This is surprising, since it examines a key point of Neoplatonic philosophy, namely, whether it is consistent to predicate agency on the part of God while at the same time subscribing to an emanationist metaphysics.

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the work appears in *Averroës' Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, trans. Simon Van Den Bergh (London: Oxford University Press, 1954).

[2]At *IP* Int.3.22.7, Ghazālī explains, "I do not enter into [argument] objecting to them (the philosophers), except as one who demands and denies, not as one who claims and affirms." Elsewhere he writes, "We have not plunged into this book in the manner of one who is introducing [doctrine], our purpose being to disrupt their claims" (*IP* III.79.76).

[3]For a recent survey of the modern debate, see Leor Haveli, "The Theologian's Doubts: Natural Philosophy and the Skeptical Games of Ghazâlî," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002): 19–39. For a concise account of Ghazālī's occasionalist arguments, see Katherin A. Rogers, "What's Wrong with Occasionalism?" *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 75 (2001): 345–69.

[4]See, for instance, *IP* III.3.55, *IP* Pre.7.3.

[5]For a discussion and survey of this position, see H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in Al-Ghazzali* (Jerusalem: Magnus Press, 1975), 84–113.

Ultimately the work argues that a commitment to a metaphysics of emanation is incompatible with the view that God is an agent. The present paper examines Ghazālī's mode of argumentation in this Third Discussion, and suggests that despite its unusual dramatic and rhetorical flourishes, it contains an eminently defensible philosophical argument for the incompatibility of a particular strand of metaphysical creationism and a particular strand of Neoplatonic emanationism. The key elements of Ghazālī's position, I shall contend, are his implicit understanding of metaphorical predication and his deployment of a *reductio ad absurdum* argument about the possibility of ethical discourse.

To the end of showing the properly philosophical character to Ghazālī's argument, the paper is divided into four main parts. First, I analyze Ghazālī's professed motivation for writing *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Secondly, I examine the alleged metaphysical inconsistency that Ghazālī ascribes to his contemporaries in the Third Discussion of the work. Thirdly, I set forth the latent theory of predication that underscores Ghazālī's argument. Finally, I contend that the mode of argumentation of the text should not be considered to be merely rhetorical or dialectical and I show why Ghazālī succeeds in his claim of providing a philosophical "proof."

I.

The Motivations of the Work. In the preface, four introductions, and concluding section that surround the central twenty discussions of *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Ghazâlî articulates the motivations that prompt the production of his book. His account is largely re-affirmed elsewhere in his late autobiographical confession, *The Deliverance from Error*.[6] In both, Ghazālī contends that contemporary philosophers following the thought of Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī have come to espouse positions that stand in a contradictory relation to accepted Islamic teaching. This situation among philosophers is a novel occurrence, Ghazālī claims, for the philosophers of old never contradicted religious principles such as the existence of God and the Day of Judgment.[7] These contradictions admit of varying degrees of seriousness, however, since the entertainment of some positions merely makes philosophers "heretics," whereas

[6]All citations from Ghazālī's *The Deliverance from Error* will be taken from the translation present in *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1953), 19–85, henceforth to be abbreviated as *DE*. For the Arabic text, see *Al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*, ed. J. Saliba and K. Ayyad (Damascus: Maktab al-Nashr al-'Arabī, 1934).

[7]See *IP* Pre.7.3. Although Ghazālī here in the *IP* lauds Aristotle as the philosopher *par excellence*, he does confess in his autobiography that some "heresy" is present within the Aristotelian system. He contends that, while refuting Plato and Socrates, Aristotle "too retained a residue of their unbelief and heresy from which he did not manage to free himself" (*DE* 32).

the acceptance of others turns their endorsers into outright "infidels" worthy of the most severe punishments.[8]

Ghazālī's purpose in the work is not merely the identification of contradictions that may obtain between religious or theological principles and philosophical principles;[9] simply to catalog such oppositions would not be a strictly philosophical endeavor, and Ghazālī does not wish to present a religious work. Rather, he claims to be doing critical philosophy:

> I took it upon myself to write this book in refutation of the ancient philosophers, to show the incoherence of their belief and the contradiction of their word in matters pertaining to metaphysics; to uncover the dangers of their doctrine and its shortcomings.[10]

Ghazālī's language here is useful; the word *tahāfut* or "incoherence," which occurs in this text as well as in the title of the work, highlights both Ghazālī's purpose and methodology. Translating the term has been a matter of difficulty among commentators and translators. Rendered as *destructio* in its Latin introduction to the West, *tahāfut* carries the dynamic sense of "collapse," "disintegration," or even "annihilation." In this sense, the title of the book suggests that the work contains a destruction of the philosophers (or at least their positions). Yet the term *tahāfut* also connotes the logical sense of "inconsistency," "contradiction," or "incoherence."[11] Both senses are likely intended; commentators have noted that Ghazālī uses *tahāfut* to refer to both the philosophers themselves and to the character of their philosophical positions.[12] As noted above, this destruction (or even, deconstruction) of the philosophers does not consist of the mere identification of points of conflict between religious and philosophical principles. Ghazālī is not engaged in religious apologetics, but rather he is doing philosophy, since he restricts himself to identifying alleged internal contradictions between philosophical principles held by the Avicennian and Farabian philosophers, rather than any extrinsic contradictions that may obtain between philosophical and religious principles. Although the latter kind of contradiction may serve as a methodological indication of where to begin one's investigation, the consideration

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[8]See *IP* Con.1–4.226 and *DE* 37.

[9]Ghazālī underscores the distinction between both types of principles, and much of the discussion in the preface and introduction to the work centers on the differences. See *IP* Int.2.15.5, Int.2.21.7, Int.3.22.8, Pre.7.3, III.2.56.

[10]*IP* Pre.7.3.

[11]For a discussion of the meaning of the term *tahāfut*, see Michael Marmura in *IP* xxvi–xxvii; and Simon Van Den Bergh in *Averroës' Tahafut al-Tahafut*, xiii.

[12]See, for instance, M. Sheikh, "Al-Ghazālī: Metaphysics," in *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), 581–642, at 593; and Maurice Bouyges, S.J., "Note sur la traduction du titre de l'ouvrage," in Algazel, *Tahafot al-Falasifat*, x–xi.

of religious principles in themselves stands outside of both philosophy proper and Ghazālī's professed methodology of the work. Throughout the argumentation he observes a strict distinction between the philosophical and religious or theological sciences.[13]

Since pronouncements of consistency and inconsistency are logical designations, it is not surprising that the status of logic for Ghazālī is of no mean importance in his project; indeed, commentators have long recognized the privileged status of logic in the Ghazalian enumeration of the sciences.[14] Separate from both philosophy and theology, logic is applicable to all subject matters; even God himself may be considered subject to its principles.[15] For the very reason for which the philosophers claim that their positions embody a logical rigor marked by necessity, Ghazālī will be successful in his refutation if he can point out that necessity does not attend their positions or that the positions themselves are mutually in opposition. In this way the Ghazalian critique can be successful without any positive pronouncement of doctrine regarding any of the matters at hand.[16]

Ghazālī contrasts the mathematical sciences with the metaphysical sciences to show that only within the former has a high degree of integrity been attained. The necessity and coherence possessed in the mathematical sciences make them paradigmatic for other sciences. Ghazālī explains:

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[13]Even though Ghazālī articulates a strict distinction between the philosophical sciences and religious theological sciences or *kalām* in principle, it does seem that the latter at least assists him in his choice of issues needing examination. The appearance of opposition between a philosophical conclusion and a theological tenet motivates him to search for and discover a difficulty with the argumentation leading to the problematic philosophical conclusion.

[14]Michael Marmura writes, "Ghazālī insisted that the philosopher's logic is a doctrinally neutral tool of knowledge and be used to advantage in the defense of religion" ("Ghazâlî's Attitude to the Secular Sciences and Logic," in *Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science*, ed. George F. Hourani [New York: State University of New York Press, 1975], 100–11, at 101). Elsewhere the same author explains, "Ghazālī recognizes formal logic to be philosophically neutral, and hence in no way conflicting with theology" ("Ghazālī and Demonstrative Science," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3 [1965]: 183–204, at 183). R. Shanab likewise agrees, saying, "Logic, contended Ghazālī, was doctrinally neutral, and hence did not conflict with the religious tenets of Orthodox Islam" ("Ghazālī and Aquinas on Causation," *Monist* 58 [1974]: 140–50, at 141–2).

[15]At *IP* XVII.29.175 Ghazālī suggests that God is subject to the principle of non-contradiction: "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." See also *IP* XVII.27.174: "Whatever is impossible is not within divine power."

[16]Ghazālī's view in the *IP* that the practice of philosophy can be essentially destructive, insofar as it identifies contradictions without supporting positive positions, is surely not unprecedented, given some interpretations of the early Socratic method of *elenchus*, or the bulk of techniques set forth in Aristotle's *Topics*, the ancient compilation of argumentative *topoi*.

> We have transmitted this story to let it be known that there is neither firm foundation nor perfection in the doctrine they hold; that they judge in terms of supposition and surmise, without verification or certainty; that they use the appearance of their mathematical sciences as evidential proof for the truth of their metaphysical sciences, using [this] as a gradual enticement for the weak in mind. Had their metaphysical sciences been as perfect in demonstration, free from conjecture, as their mathematical, they would not have disagreed among themselves regarding [the former], just as they have not disagreed in their mathematical sciences.[17]

Here Ghazālī suggests that the philosophers have pretended that necessity attends their metaphysical positions; the purported rigor of their arguments falls short of that found in mathematical disciplines. Although he does not enter into the long-standing debate among philosophers regarding the extent to which the philosophical sciences can approach the high standard of demonstration suggested by the canons of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, Ghazālī nonetheless focuses on the claim of the philosophers to have attained demonstration in practice. Indeed, his refutation can be successful merely by establishing that the philosophers maintain internally inconsistent sets of premises or that they derive unsubstantiated conclusions. The secondary question of whether or not Ghazālī thinks that the philosophical sciences themselves can admit of certainty, coherence, and rigor is another matter, one that appears accidental to the refutation at hand.[18] Ghazālī limits his project to attacking what he sees as merely purported and ultimately unsubstantiated claims of coherence on the part of his philosophical opponents.

II.

Is God a Creator? The Third Discussion of *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* examines two claims held by Ghazālī's philosophical contemporaries. Ghazālī's treatment of the philosophers' positions is facilitated by the literary device of a

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[17] *IP* Int.1.10.4. This view is also repeated in *DE* 37.

[18] On the possible limits or inabilities of reason in some areas of inquiry, see *IP* III.80.77 and *DE* 37. Some commentators, focusing on the mystical aspects of Ghazālī's life and writings, have interpreted him as ultimately espousing varying degrees of anti-rationalism. Massimo Campanini argues that he "considered theoretical certainty as an effect of the highest kind of knowledge, a knowledge which attains its top level by mystical experience and taste" ("Al-Ghazzali," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman [London: Routledge, 1996], 258–74, at 259). William Watt contends that Ghazālī "had come to the conviction that reason is not self-sufficient in either theology or philosophy, but is in a sense subordinate to a 'light from God' shed in the heart which is somehow connected with the light given to men by prophetic revelations" (*Muslim Intellectual: A Study of al-Ghazālī* [Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963], 59).

dialogue, whereby an unnamed dramatic character is presented as espousing a blend of Avicennian and Farabian doctrines. Ghazālī proceeds to debate with this protean character, charging that philosophers hold a set of inconsistent positions. First, as followers of Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī, the philosophers have adopted an account of the world's origin on the basis of a Neoplatonic emanation framework that identifies a divine first cause or One as the source of being. Secondly, the philosophers simultaneously regard the world as the creation, action, or handiwork of God. In brief, the essence of Ghazālī's attack can be distilled into the single contention that the notion of emanation is radically incompatible with the notion of creation; emanationism and creationism are alleged to be mutually exclusive or logically contradictory. Ghazālī contends that one cannot hold at the same time that God creates the world and that the world emanates from God. That the philosophers say that they hold both positions is not in doubt, but Ghazālī maintains that they literally do not subscribe to both. The two titles Ghazālī gives to his Third Discussion capture the departure point of his critique:

> *On showing their obfuscation in saying that God is the world's enactor and maker, that the world is His handiwork and act; showing that with them this is metaphor, not reality.*[19]
>
> *[On] showing their equivocation in saying that God is the maker of the world and that the world is of His making.*[20]

With these titles, Ghazālī suggests that equivocation and metaphor are present in the ascription of agency to God. However, he makes a stronger claim here than just asserting that the philosophers are internally incoherent in calling God a "creator," since he hints at an underlying deceitful motive on the part of the philosophers insofar as he charges them with obfuscation.[21] He will contend later that the philosophers' intention in perpetrating this façade is to "endear [themselves] to the Muslims."[22] Ghazālī does not trouble himself to spend much time discussing the motivations underlying their positions, for the strength of his attack will lie at a philosophical level rather than in an investigation into the alleged duplicity.

That a logical incompatibility obtains between the two philosophical principles of emanation and creation is manifested, according to Ghazālī, in three ways, and each way is treated separately. He outlines his course of argument with the following account:

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[19] *IP* III.0.55.

[20] *IP* Int.4.28.10.

[21] Similarly, in *DE* 30, Ghazālī writes that he has found philosophy to be "deceitful and confusing."

[22] *IP* III.17.59.

> Indeed, it is inconceivable, in accordance with their principle, for the world to be the work of God, in three respects: with respect to the agent, with respect to the act, and with respect to a relationship common to act and agent.[23]

The procedure Ghazālī follows is an examination of agent, of act, and their relation; if each examination shows an incompatibility with emanationist metaphysics, then an inconsistency within the system of the philosophers will have been established.

The two titles of the chapter identify what will be the linchpin in his account of his refutation of the philosophers. Equivocal predications or, more specifically, metaphorical predications will be distinguished from real or literal predications, and the claim will be made that one cannot espouse creationism and emanationism unless one of the positions is entertained on the basis of a metaphorical predication. Ghazālī does not set forth in explicit terms what is meant by the two types of predication, yet the distinction between the two can be determined by a close examination of the texts.[24]

III.

Real and Metaphorical Predication. Ghazālī begins his attack by pointing out that emanationist cosmology accounts for the world in terms of a metaphysical overflow or procession from a first principle. This overflow from the first principle or God is said to be necessary: "Whatever proceeds from Him proceeds by compulsory necessity."[25] Such a cosmology entails that the world issues from God as "a necessary consequence, inconceivable for God to prevent."[26] In contrast,

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[23]*IP* III.1.55.

[24]Although an appeal to metaphorical predication as a species of equivocation forms the basis of much of the argumentation in the first part of the third chapter of *IP*, discussion of it is strangely absent from the antecedent to this work, *The Intentions of the Philosophers*. The *Intentions* was written as a compendium of Greek and Arabic philosophy, and is divided into the thirds of logic, metaphysics, and physics. The first third on logic examines in detail the uses of terms and types of predication, although no discussion of metaphorical predication is present. In the Latin West, the *Intentions* had the (mis?)fortune of circulating in Latin translation under the title *Liber Algazelis de summa theoricae philosophiae*, absent its prologue, and thus the philosophical positions of the work were taken to be Ghazālī's own views. For a short history of the fate of the Latin work, see Terry Hanley, "St. Thomas' Use of al-Ghazālī's Maqāsid al-Falāsifa," *Medieval Studies* 44 [1982]: 247–70, esp. 243–6; and M. Sheikh, "Al-Ghazālī's Metaphysics," 592–3. For the text of the *Intentions*, see *Maqāsid al-falāsifa*, ed. S. Dunya (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿarif, 1961). For the Latin text of the metaphysical section of the *Intentions*, see *Algazel's Metaphysics: A Medieval Translation*, ed. J. T. Muckle (Toronto: St. Michael's College, 1933).

[25]*IP* III.2.55.

[26]*IP* III.4.56.

however, Ghazālī defines a "creator" or an "agent" as "one from whom the act proceeds, together with the will to act by way of choice and knowledge of what is willed."[27] In laying out such a definition, Ghazālī contends that every predication of "agent" (or any of its cognates, such as "creator," "doer," "enactor," or "maker") must be restricted to a cause that exhibits the three features of free will, choice, and knowledge. Given this definition of an agent or creator, how can the emanationist predicate "creator" of God? According to the emanationist philosophers, the world is a necessary consequence issuing from God. In addition to being incapable of preventing this emanation, such a God is wholly self-concerned and hence unaware than any such procession has occurred.

At the heart of the issue is whether a cause that neither wills, nor chooses, nor knows can be regarded as an agent, and Ghazālī answers decisively in the negative.[28] He writes:

> Indeed, whoever says that the lamp enacts the light and the individual enacts the shadow has *ventured excessively in metaphor and stretched it beyond [its] bound*, being satisfied with the occurrence of one common description between the expression borrowed for one thing and that from which it is borrowed, [as in this instance where] the agent is cause *in a general sense*, whereas the lamp is the cause of illumination and the sun the cause of light. The agent however, is not called an agent and a maker by simply being a cause, but by being a cause *in a special respect*—namely, by way of will and choice.[29]

What Ghazālī intends by the charge of metaphorical predication can be gleaned from this passage; the charge is not just another instance of his celebrated vituperation. Rather, Ghazālī lays out—at least implicitly—a theory of

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[27] *IP* III.4.56.

[28] As a precedent one may consider Plotinus's discussion of whether and in what sense the One can be said to have a will (see *Ennead* VI.8).

[29] *IP* III.4.56. The other English translations indicate more explicitly the logical terminology present in the text. Kamali, 64: "He who says the lamp 'does' the light, or that a person 'does' the shadow, will be *extending the sense of the word beyond its definition*. He will be borrowing a word used in a different context, having been too easily contented with the relation between the two things in respect of only one attribute—namely, that an agent is *on the whole* a cause, and the lamp is the cause of illumination, and the Sun is the cause of light. But the agent is not called the agent merely because of his being a cause, but because he is a cause *in a special manner*." Simon Van Den Bergh, 89: "On the contrary, he who says that the lamp makes the light and the man makes the shadow *uses the term vaguely, giving it a sense much wider than its definition, and uses it metaphorically*, relying on the fact that there is an analogy between the object originally meant by it and the object to which it is transferred, i.e., the agent is *in a general sense* a cause, the lamp is the cause of the light, and the sun is the cause of luminosity; but the agent is not called a creative agent from the sole fact that it is a cause, but by its being a cause *in a special way*." All emphases are mine.

predication that is supported by several distinctions. To call the source of a necessary emanation an enactor or creator is on par with calling a lamp a creator of its light or an individual a creator of its shadow. In all three instances, the application of the predicate "creator" to the various subjects is a predication that does not fall within the pre-established definition of creator, namely, an agent that proceeds in virtue of the triad of will, choice, and knowledge. Ghazālī identifies these non-definitional predications to be metaphorical predications, and thus a contrast is set up between definitional/real predications and metaphorical predications.[30] To call God an agent from within an emanationist metaphysical framework is on par with calling a stone, a wall, and an animal equal agents in physics, Ghazālī contends.[31] In both sets of cases, the distinction between a cause and an agent with will, choice, and knowledge becomes obliterated.

On the basis of Ghazālī's discussion of the lamp and the shadow, it is generally assumed by commentators that Ghazālī uses the term "metaphorical" to designate the use of a term beyond its definition.[32] However, such an inference fails to show how Ghazālī would distinguish metaphorical predications from purely equivocal predications. A more careful consideration of the above-quoted passage reveals that Ghazālī further designates what he means by metaphorical predication. In this particular case he identifies "cause" as a genus that immediately divides into the two species of agent and non-agent. An agent is a member of the genus "cause" where the triad of will, choice and knowledge serves as the specific difference. A non-agent, however, is a member of the genus "cause" where necessary consequence serves as the specific difference. Herein lies the key to Ghazālī's understanding of metaphorical predication. In setting forth these distinctions he suggests that metaphorical predication is not merely the extension of a predicate beyond the use delimited by the definition, but that it involves the application of a predicate belonging solely to one species to another within the same genus.[33]

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[30]For real predication, see *IP* III.9.57, III.33.64.

[31]See *IP* III.4.56

[32]See, for example, Kwame Gyekye, "Al-Ghazālī on Action," in *Ghazali: la raison et le miracle. Table ronde Unesco, 9–10 décembre 1985* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1987), 83–91. Gyekye understands Ghazālī's account of metaphorical predication as attributing to a word "a sense much wider than its definition" or "transferring the concept . . . to contexts where it does not appropriately apply" (85).

[33]The distinction can be rendered by means of a diagram:

Species A: Agent—Cause with specific difference of will, choice and knowledge
/
Genus of Cause
\
Species B: Non-Agent—Cause with specific difference of necessary consequence

To sum up, when the philosophers say that God is an agent, they are misapplying the predicate by fallaciously focusing on a generic identity rather than a difference at the level of species. To predicate agency of non-willing, non-choosing, and non-knowing causes represents an extension of the predicate beyond the specific limitations set out in the definition, and predications that transgress the definitional boundaries in this way are designated as "metaphorical." In other words, the error of the philosophers is not simple equivocation, but a particular kind of equivocation identified as metaphorical, where a predicate belonging to one species within a genus is misapplied to the other species.

Ghazālī's distinction may be more easily understood by noting earlier discussions that distinguish between definitional and metaphorical predications. There are some Aristotelian texts that can be of assistance for comparison. In the *Poetics*, a work considered by Arabic philosophers to be part of Aristotle's *Organon* of logical treaties, [34] Aristotle catalogs several different kinds of metaphors, where one kind is described as follows:

> Metaphor is the application of a strange term . . . from one species to another. . . . An example of transference from one species to another is "drawing off his life with the bronze" and "severing with the tireless bronze," where "drawing off" is used for "severing" and "severing" for "drawing off," both being species of removing.[35]

In this example Aristotle identifies the genus of "to remove," which immediately divides into the species of "to draw off" and "to sever."[36] If one utters the statement, "He drew off his life with the bronze (knife)" one substitutes one species of "to remove," namely, "to draw off," for another, which is "to sever." Similarly, to speak of "severing with the tireless bronze (bowl)" one really means "drawing off with the tireless bronze bowl," for the species of "to sever" has been substituted for "to draw off." In this passage we find metaphorical predications to consist of using predicates definitionally applicable to only one species extended to

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[34]For a discussion of the Alexandrian conception of the Aristotelian *corpus* that considered Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics* to be part of the *Organon*, see Deborah L. Black, "The 'Imaginative Syllogism' in Arabic Philosophy: A Medieval Contribution to the Philosophical Study of Metaphor," *Mediaeval Studies* 51 (1989): 242–67, at 242–4.

[35]*Poetics* 21, 1457b6–18, in Aristotle, *The Poetics*, Longinus, *On the Sublime*, Demetrius, *On Style* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 81.

[36]Although Aristotle does not offer an identification of the specific differences which separate the two divisions of the genus, the distinctions can still be rendered as:

Species A—"to draw off"
Genus of "to remove"
Species B—"to sever"

another species within the same genus. This Aristotelian distinction serves as an enlightening parallel helpful for understanding Ghazālī's account of metaphorical and real predications.[37]

That Ghazālī is concerned with distinguishing distinct types of predications in this work is not surprising, for he often enumerates many more types of predication elsewhere.[38] No doubt the elevated status of the logical sciences in Ghazālī's estimation figures not a little in his attention to these distinctions. Yet these precisions with regard to types of predication are not fundamentally the source of the disagreement that exists between Ghazālī and the philosophers in this chapter of *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Presumably there can be agreement with respect to these logical precisions. That is, presumably one could accept Ghazālī's theory of metaphorical and definitional predication and simply contest the definition of creator that has been postulated.[39] As an amalgam of Avicennian and Farabian philosophies, Ghazālī's interlocutor in the dialogue presumably could be persuaded to assent to the distinction between metaphorical and real predication, for Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī each authored Aristotelian-inspired logical treatises. Even if such agreement were secured, however, Ghazālī's division of the genus "cause" into the two species of agent and non-agent would still be a point of contention. This division is precisely where the interlocutor representing the philosophers next aims his criticism.[40]

IV.

Dialectical or Philosophical Proof? The dialogue between the two dramatic characters, Ghazālī and the unnamed representative of the philosophers, next centers on the proper division of the genus "action." The interlocutor argues that a new division into species is required. It is proposed, contra Ghazālī, that

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[37]Another Aristotelian passage helpful for understanding Ghazālī's division of predications can be found in the *Rhetoric*. At one point Aristotle states that within prose there are two kinds of words: those that are "proper and appropriate" and those that are "metaphorical." See *Rhetoric* 3.2, 1404b33.

[38]For Ghazālī's extended discussion of predications based on analogical legal reasoning, see "The Correct Balance," in *Freedom and Fulfillment*, trans. Richard Joseph McCarthy, S.J. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 326–32.

[39]In fact, the dramatic opponent in the work will at a later time himself employ the distinction between real and metaphorical predication (*IP* V.34.94, XV.1.149), thus confirming that a theory of predication need not be the central point of contention.

[40]Ibn Rushd proceeds in such a way in his treatment of this Ghazalian argument in his *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*. The Spanish Muslim charges that a better and more traditional definition of "agent" makes no reference to the specific differences of will, choice, and knowledge. Rather, an agent should be defined as "what causes some other thing to pass from potency to actuality" (*Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 89).

the genus "action" more fittingly divides into "by nature" and "by will."[41] With this new division, propositions such as "He acted by nature" and "He acted by choice" represent specific types of act within the same genus.[42] The interlocutor contends that such propositions represent "a clarification of the kind of action."[43] Given these new definitions—that is, given the new specifications of the kinds of action—to ascribe action to inanimate, unwilling causes is no longer a non-definitional metaphorical predication. Because of the new division of the genus into species, the definition has changed.

It is not surprising that Ghazālī resists this new specification of the kinds of causes introduced by the disputant and promptly repeats his previous definitions, dismissing the disputant's constructions with the words, "This naming is false."[44] After re-asserting his division of cause into agent and non-agent, with the specific difference of free will, choice, and knowledge attached to the former, Ghazālī re-examines the two propositions, "He acted by nature" and "He acted by choice," which were proposed by the disputant. The first, according to Ghazālī, embodies a contradiction.[45] One cannot act out of choice and by nature at the same time, for we have seen that Ghazālī identifies natural effects with necessary consequences. If any individual apprehends the proposition and the "contradiction does not impress itself immediately on the understanding, and [our] nature's repulsion does not become intense," the reason is simply that the mind accepts the proposition as a metaphorical utterance and nothing more.[46] With this claim Ghazālī shifts his emphasis to the ways in which individuals converse; he moves away from underscoring definitions that correspond to species and instead begins an appeal to the manner in which most people speak. Ghazālī appeals directly to his tribunal of readers, to their modes of expression, thereby shifting to what one might designate as a dialectical argument. When Ghazālī explains that one must deny agency of the inanimate because "this proposition is one of the most widely accepted and therefore, true dicta,"[47] his procedure is consonant with Aristotle,

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[41] *IP* III.6.57–8. The interlocutor's account can be rendered as follows:

Species A: Action with the specific difference "by nature"
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Genus of Action
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Species B: Action with the specific difference "by will"

[42] *IP* III.6.56.

[43] *IP* III.6.57. The logical terminology of Ghazālī's argument is preserved more clearly in Kamali's translation, which speaks of a "specification" of the kind of act (Kamali, 65).

[44] *IP* III.8.57.

[45] See *IP* III.9.57.

[46] See *IP* III.9.57.

[47] *IP* (Kamali trans.), 65. Marmura renders the line as, "these are among the well-known, true universals" (*IP* III.8.57).

who designated dialectical arguments as those that have as their starting points premises that are held "by everyone or by the majority or by the wise—i.e., by all, or by the majority, or by the most notable and reputable of them."[48] Having begun with philosophical divisions of genera and species, Ghazālī turns to the ways in which ordinary individuals communicate in the hope of setting a basic standard of reference. He next examines the second proposition, "He acted by choice." Given the aforementioned sense of act, the proposition is an outright tautology or "repetition."[49] If the proposition does not impress itself immediately on its listeners as a redundant expression, it is merely because one might utter the expression "to remove the possibility of [taking these expressions as] metaphor."[50]

The disputant in turn makes a series of dialectical claims by shifting attention to other ordinary expressions. After propounding a new bifurcation of the genus of "cause" into the two species of voluntary and not voluntary, he summarizes the issue by stating, "The dispute, hence, pertains to whether or not the term 'act' is truly applicable to both divisions."[51] Indeed, this is the heart of the controversy between the respective positions propounded by Ghazālī and his disputant. While the disputant contends that the predicate of agency is applicable to both species univocally, Ghazālī insists the predicate is applicable only definitionally to one species, namely, that of voluntary cause. The disputant supports his position dialectically by cataloging a wide range of vivid expressions that seem to ascribe agency to inanimate, and therefore will-less, choice-less, and unknowing causes. The disputant points out that it is said commonly that fire burns, swords cut, snow cools, scammony loosens the bowels, bread satiates, and water quenches.[52] All of these ordinary expressions seem to involve *prima facie* predications of agency to inanimate causes. At this point the dialogue between Ghazālī and the disputant has devolved to an examination of ways in which individuals express themselves; both interlocutors are reduced to fighting over whether common parlance favors the set of distinctions of one side over that of the other. Although such analyses of common parlance can be fruitful to inquiry, they are at best dialectical considerations.[53] In fact, when commenting on this

[48] *Topics* 1.1, 100b21–22, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1:167. See also *Topics* 1.1, 101a12–13.

[49] *IP* III.9.58. To use more contemporary language, one might say that the proposition, "He acts by choice" is an analytic statement, for the predicate concept "acted by choice" is already implicitly contained within the subject concept of a rational cause.

[50] *IP* III.9.58.

[51] *IP* III.11.58.

[52] See *IP* III.11.58.

[53] Aristotle holds that investigations which examine what is held by all or most people are prior to demonstration, for "dialectic is a process of criticism wherein lies the path to the principles of all inquiries" (*Topics* 1.2, 101b3–4, Barnes trans., 167). For a discussion of the role of dialectical

section of the argument, Ibn Rushd minimized its significance, saying that it "is dialectical and of no importance."[54]

Ghazālī, however, changes the terms of the discussion by introducing an important new precision. He explains:

> Real action is that which comes about only through will. Proof of this is that if we suppose that a temporal event depends for its occurrence on two things, one voluntary and the other not, reason relates the act to the voluntary. [It is] the same with language.[55]

It is notable that by speaking of "proof" (*dalīl*) Ghazālī indicates that he is changing the course of the argument; the preceding dialectical argumentation is supplanted by philosophical proof. In explanation of his proof, Ghazālī describes a rather unusual scene where one individual kills another by throwing him into a fire. Were such an event to occur, he contends, no one would go so far as to treat the fire as an agent or murderer, despite the fact that the fire is undoubtedly "a more proximate cause of the killing."[56] One cannot predicate agency or murder of both the "willer and nonwiller in the same way" in this case.[57] This argument is a powerful one, for it underscores the specificity of acts that are attended by will, choice, and knowledge. Such acts, of course, are those that fall under the domain of ethics. To place the volitional and the non-volitional on the same level would be a denial of the ethical potencies of human nature. At the very basis of ethics lies the principle that some events are volitional in origin. The existence of volitional acts is recognized not only in the discipline of ethics but is also acknowledged socially as the ground of the judicial systems that involve rewards and punishments. To claim that no specific difference attends causes that are volitional implies a denial of freedom, ethical analyses, and any foundation for punishments. In the example under consideration, the disputant has removed the fundamental distinction that will allow one to assign culpability to the individual harming the victim. Since the disputant's specification of causes fails to account for the existence of culpable acts, it must therefore be defective.

In short, Ghazālī employs a *reductio ad absurdum* argument in the Third Discussion which shows that a denial of the division of cause into agent and natural cause entails the impossibility of ethical judgments. He claims that "language, custom, and reason" jointly resist the attempt to deny the distinction

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premises in the context of Aristotle's theory of demonstration, see M. V. Dougherty, "Aristotle's Four Truth Values," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 12 (2004): 585–609.

[54] *Averroës' Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 94.

[55] *IP* III.13.58.

[56] *IP* III.13.59.

[57] *IP* III.13.59.

between willing and non-willing causes.[58] Since the disputant's position entails this unacceptable result, it must be defective.

Thus, any application of the predicates "agent" and "murderer" to both the fire and the perpetrator must be done equivocally, for a difference must be preserved between the voluntary and the involuntary. The only univocal predication that could treat of both the fire and the perpetrator is at the level of genus, for they both can be considered as causes in a generic sense. Yet the matter at hand is not a generic one, as the issue of who committed the murder must be resolved at a more precise level. If the predicates "agent" or "murderer" are applied to both fire and perpetrator, then doing so is an instance of a type of equivocity, with "[o]ne of them being the basis [and] the other derived as a metaphor from it."[59] Ghazālī succeeds in showing that a difference obtains between willing and non-willing causes, where only the former is described as the agent. Any application of the term "agent" to a non-voluntary cause is an extension of the use of the term beyond the definition, beyond common parlance, and most importantly, beyond the philosophical and ethical senses of the term. Metaphorical predication is thus confirmed to be a non-definitional application of a term to another species within the same genus. Metaphorical predication is not purely equivocal, for there is a primary sense of a word and secondary senses that are inter-generic extensions beyond the primary sense. In these texts, therefore, Ghazālī defends the conceptual distinction between metaphorical and real predications, and also defends its application to the matter at hand, namely, the necessity of distinguishing between natural causation and agent causation when discussing ethical acts and, by extension, the origin of the world from a first principle.

Aristotle almost certainly anticipates Ghazālī's proof based on the distinction between an agent/murderer and fire, as well as the distinction between related types of predication. In a passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that "to do" is "said in many ways," using his formulaic expression indicating that a term can be said in a non-univocal manner.[60] He explains that a murder can be said to be done by a number of things, and four possible contestants are set forth: an inanimate object (that is, a weapon), a hand, a slave acting under orders, and finally a master giving the order. Although "to do" is predicated of all of these items, there is only one that is the "principle [or foundation, basis, primary sense] of the action."[61] That, of course, is the man who acts voluntarily: the master who gives the order. The predication of "to do" of the other three contestants is only a derived predication. The point is that one cannot predicate "to

[58]See *IP* III.13.59.

[59]*IP* III.13.59.

[60]See *Nicomachean Ethics* 5.9, 1136b27–32.

[61]The term *archē* seems to carry all of these senses in the passage.

do" univocally of all four contestants. This is not to say that "to do" is predicated purely equivocally of all four, but rather that there is an extension of meaning from the primary sense of the predication to three other more removed senses. In *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Ghazālī identifies secondary-sense predications as "metaphorical," which are all related to or dependent upon the primary or "definitional" sense. Even though fire may seem to be doing something more than a weapon insofar as fire exhibits motion, motion alone is not a specific difference sufficient to specify a cause into an agent.

The theory of predication and the various distinctions between genera and species of causes and acts championed by Ghazālī are not merely dialectical exercises or quibbles about words. Although the disputant replies that the foregoing has been a "squabble about names,"[62] it is clear that the definitions have not been arbitrary but that evidence has been marshaled in support of them. Ghazālī had stated back in the second introduction of this work that, although men of religion and philosophers often argue about names, such "purely verbal" disputes will not be of concern in the book.[63] The extended arguments and distinctions have been in the service of philosophical argumentation and proof. Ghazālī contends that the existence of ethical agents demonstrates the distinction between willing and non-willing causes. Agency can be predicated properly only of causes that are accompanied by the specific difference of will, choice, and knowledge. Ghazālī finishes his refutation of the disputant concerning this point by stating, "Hence, if God, according to the [philosophers], has neither will nor choice, He would be neither an agent nor a maker except in a metaphorical [sense]."[64]

V.

In Sum. We began our inquiry by suggesting that while *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* contains a number of interesting features that cause it to stand apart from most philosophical works, these features can be impediments to its interpretation. Some precisions, however, can guide the careful reader. Ghazālī is able to philosophize while maintaining his wholesale disavowal of positive doctrine insofar as he chooses refutation as his method of philosophizing. Not all commentators have recognized the positive or beneficial features of such a method.[65] Ghazālī's technique of refutation does not require him to put forth

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[62]*IP* III.15.59. Such a complaint is raised elsewhere by the disputant who states, "there is no need for dispute about names" (*IP* III.43.67).

[63]See *IP* Int.2.13.5.

[64]*IP* III.13.59.

[65]Majid Fakhry speaks of Ghazālī as one who wears a "metaphysical mask," although he contends that he "casts [it] off" at some points in the *IP*. See *Islamic Occasionalism* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), 68. Yet in the same book Fakhry downplays the advantageous

a positive claim, since the mere identification of inconsistency on the part of the philosophers is enough to secure victory. The dramatic dialogue form thus enables Ghazālī to exercise a philosophical hygiene that allows him to debate vigorously with his opponents, show inconsistencies of their principles, and yet proceed unscathed without the taint of positions he would not accept outside the discussion. Indeed, perhaps the most remarkable feature of this technique is illustrated by the fact that Ghazālī's proof of the distinction between agency and necessary causation in the Third Discussion examined above requires the implicit assumption of the existence of secondary causes, and it is precisely Ghazālī's occasionalist denial of secondary causes in the later Seventeenth Discussion for which he is best known. The refutative or elenctic orientation Ghazālī exhibits within the twenty discussions of *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* does not require a parallel consistency on the part of the dramatic character representing him. We noted also the concern on the part of some commentators that the verbal attacks which are characteristic of many of Ghazālī's writings could serve as an impediment to evaluating the strength of the argumentation. This concern, however, can be minimized for this work when one observes that the most significant instances of vituperation, cited above, are nearly all restricted to the introductory and concluding sections, which stand apart from the twenty discussions. The name calling largely subsides in the actual discussions themselves.

A limitation, however, of Ghazālī's use of the dramatic form of the dialogue as a vehicle for his philosophizing may be the role assigned to the interlocutor. His status as a placeholder for a mixture of Avicennian and Farabian philosophical positions makes him a rather generic metaphysical Neoplatonist. This worry is recognized by Ibn Rushd. In his commentary on the Third Discussion, he notes the concern among some Neoplatonic thinkers whether human attributes such as willing, choosing, and knowing can be ascribed to the divine, and he questions the appropriateness of analogies that "infer from the empirical to the divine."[66] Indeed, earlier forms of Neoplatonism are quite critical of the possibility of true predications about the first cause.[67] Thus, Ghazālī's criticisms of the incompatibility of creationism and emanationism, based as they are on his theory of metaphorical predication and division of the genus of cause into willing and natural causes, may not apply to all versions of Neoplatonic emanationism and creationism. The strength of Ghazālī's critique of any particular Neoplatonic world-view will be contingent upon the degree to which that particular

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nature of the philosopher's use of such literary devices, for he writes, "Throughout this whole polemic . . . al-Ghazâlî has obviously been arguing at a disadvantage. For he has been fighting the Peripatetic philosophers on their own territory. This he keenly perceives is bound to entail metaphysical concessions which he is only too reluctant to make" (68).

[66] *Averroës' Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 87–8.

[67] See, for instance Plotinus, *Ennead* V.13–14.

Neoplatonic world-view allows an analogy between human action and divine action, as well as the possibility of language applying to the divine.[68]

Despite Ghazālī's insistence in the Third Discussion that metaphorical and real predications must be distinguished, one should not conclude that for Ghazālī metaphors are devoid of cognitive value or cannot provide insights about reality. Metaphorical predications are not rejected as *per se* errant or harmful, but they are injurious when they are accepted within philosophical discussions as literal predications. In other works Ghazālī praises the use of metaphorical predications as an essentially rational enterprise.[69] In *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, however, he rightly holds that it is illegitimate for philosophers in the Avicennian and Farabian tradition to employ metaphorical predications when professing to have met in metaphysics the standard of scientific demonstration patterned upon mathematical models. Ultimately Ghazālī argues that the discipline of ethics presupposes the existence of a class of acts caused by agents who act voluntarily, so that the genus of cause must contain a species consisting of acts attended by free will, choice, and knowledge. The causality of the first principle in a Neoplatonic metaphysical framework in producing the world is said by the philosophers to proceed by compulsory necessity, and hence Ghazālī proves that any predication of the word "creator" (and its cognates) of the first principle must minimally be metaphorical. To predicate agency both of causes that proceed of compulsory necessity and of causes that are attended by the triad of free will, choice, and knowledge is to engage in equivocation, and thus involves an inconsistency of principles.[70]

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[68]Ibn Rushd questions Ghazālī's unqualified application of characteristics of human willing and knowing to the first cause. See *Averroës' Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 87–8

[69]For a discussion of the positive role of metaphor in other words of Ghazālī, see the fifth chapter of Salim Kemal's recent book, *The Philosophical Poetics of Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroës: The Aristotelian Reception* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), titled "Prelude to Truth: Ghazali, Interpretation, and Metaphor," esp. 211–14.

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