

## Forgotten Thinkers: Al-Ghazali and Averroes

Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī  
Abū l-Walīd Muḥammad ibn 'Aḥmad ibn Rušd



600-500 B.C. Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Democritus

470-322 B.C. Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle

129-200 A.D. Galen

570-632 A.D. Muhammad

750-1258 A.D. Abbasid Caliphate

872-950 A.D. Al-Farabi

980-1037 A.D. Avicenna

1058-1111 A.D. Al-Ghazali

1126-1198 A.D. Averroes

The source of their unbelief is in their hearing high-sounding names such as "Socrates," "Hippocrates," "Plato," "Aristotle," and their likes and the exaggeration and misguidedness of groups of their followers in describing their minds; the excellence of their principles, the exactitude of their geometrical, logical, natural and metaphysical science . . . (Al-Ghazali The Incoherence of the Philosophers)

The laws of phenomena must be constant, or there could be no such thing as science; but it is a great error to mistake the slaves for the master. As long as this difference in the perceptive faculty of observers exists, disputes must necessarily go on [Blind Men Elephant Story] . . . For instance, if a man ceases to take any interest in worldly matters, conceives a distaste for common pleasures, and appears sunk in depression, the doctor will say, "This is a case of melancholy, and requires such and such a prescription." The physicist will say, "This is a dryness of the brain caused by hot weather and cannot be relieved till the air becomes

moist." The astrologer will attribute it to some particular conjunction or opposition of planets. "Thus far their wisdom reaches," says the Koran. It does not occur to them that what has really happened is this: that the Almighty has a concern for the welfare of that man, and has therefore commanded His servants, the planets or the elements, to produce such a condition in him that he may turn away from the world to his Maker. The knowledge of this fact is a lustrous pearl from the *ocean of inspirational knowledge*, to which all other forms of knowledge are as islands, in the sea. Al-Ghazali *Alchemy of Happiness*

We may say the same of inspiration, which is one of the branches of intuitional knowledge. Further, the perception of things which are beyond the attainment of reason is only one of the features peculiar to inspiration, which possesses a great number of others. The characteristic which we have mentioned is only, as it were, a drop of water in the ocean, and we have mentioned it because people experience what is analogous to it in dreams and in the sciences of medicine and astronomy. These branches of knowledge belong to the domain of prophetic miracles, and reason cannot attain to them.

As to the other characteristics of inspiration, they are only revealed to adepts in Sufism and in a state of ecstatic transport. The little that we know of the nature of inspiration we owe to the kind of likeness to it which we find in sleep; without that we should be incapable of comprehending it, and consequently of believing in it, for conviction results from comprehension. The process of initiation into Sufism exhibits this likeness to inspiration from the first. There is in it a kind of ecstasy proportioned to the condition of the person initiated, and a degree of certitude and conviction which can not be attained by reason. This single fact is sufficient to make us believe in inspiration. Al-Ghazali *Confessions*

We maintain that the business of philosophy is nothing other than to look into creation and to ponder over it in order to be guided to the Creator -- in other words, to look into the meaning of existence. For the knowledge of creation leads to the cognizance of the Creator, through the knowledge of the created. The more perfect becomes the knowledge of creation, the more perfect becomes the knowledge of the Creator. The Law encourages and exhorts us to observe creation. Thus, it is clear that this is to be taken either as a religious injunction or as something approved by the Law. But the Law urges us to observe creation by means of reason and demands the knowledge thereof through reason . . . Now, it being established that the Law makes the observation and consideration of creation by reason obligatory -- and consideration is nothing but to make explicit the implicit -- this can only be done through reason. Thus we must look into creation with the reason. Moreover, it is obvious that the observation which the Law approves and encourages must be of the most perfect type, performed with the most perfect kind of reasoning. As the Law emphasizes the knowledge of God and His creation by inference, it is incumbent on any who wish to know God and His whole creation by inference, to learn the kinds of inference, their conditions and that which distinguishes philosophy from dialectic and exhortation from syllogism. This is impossible unless one possesses knowledge beforehand of the various kinds of reasoning and learns to distinguish between reasoning and what is not reasoning. This cannot be done except one knows its different parts, that is, the different kinds of premises. Averroes *The Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*