Ghazali's Argument from Creation. (I)

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INTRODUCTION

One achievement of the philosophy represented by Ghazâlî is disentangling the creation argument for the existence of God from rival forms of design argument which allow or assume the eternity of the world. From its earliest expressions as an isolated insight which might easily be explained away as myth, the notion that the universe had been brought to be out of what is not was gradually transformed under pressure of severe Aristotelian criticism into a precise concept, and the argument implicit in such a notion metamorphosed into an elegant and sophisticated demonstration. Backed up by the closely reasoned philosophy of being into which it was now integrated, the argument from creation might confidently hope to be proof against attack.

The chief line of attack was the perennial Stratonician alternative to theism, the belief that the world is self-sufficient and has no need of a transcendent God. From Ghazâlî's point of view, such a position is tantamount to atheism. If, as Strato supposed,[1] the world is its own God, then there is no God. But atheism is not the only contrary to Ghazâlî's theism. An eternal world, Ghazâlî argues, will have no more need of God than the world of Strato. In Ghazâlî's belief, the assumption of the world's eternity renders all theistic arguments impossible. If so, the argument from creation is placed in a unique position, and its crucial premiss, that what is has come to be, becomes doubly important: Not only this argument, but theism itself stands or falls with the doctrine that being once emerged from nothingness.

The brunt of Ghazâlî's effort in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* and roughly half the bulk of the work are given over to working out the consequences of his belief that acceptance of the eternity of the world is inconsistent with belief in the existence of God, compatible only with atheism. Even if this claim is disallowed, it does force an examination of the relative strengths of the argument from creation and its Aristotelian rivals in combatting atheism. Ghazâlî's sustained effort to disprove the eternity of the world is more than a campaign 'to discredit the philosophers', and more than a diatribe against one of the most unwelcome beliefs of the Aristotelians. If eternalism is tantamount to atheism, it is the argument from creation alone which can prove that God exists. Ghazâlî is using the pages of the *Tahâfut* to argue the most difficult premiss of the creation argument, that the world has not existed forever.

[1] For Strato's position see Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, vol. I, part xiii, p. 35; cf. Seneca *apud* Augustine, *The City of God*, VI, 10.

Plainly his attempt to reduce the Aristotelian theists to atheism is no more to be accepted than a modern gloss dismissing Ghazâlî along with the Islamic neo-Platonists as a wool-gathering theist. There are three positions here, and the divergence among them is the result of human reaction to a deep ambiguity in being itself. The same realities that suggest an intelligent and benevolent 'government' also allow or demand its absence. It would be dishonest to ignore that the situation allows radically different interpretations, but negligent to evade the responsibility to assess the conflicting approaches to the exegesis of the world and come to some judgement. The response of Ghazâlî is to affirm the existence of a transcendent God. The response of the atheist is to deny it. The response of the Aristotelian is to affirm, but so as to 'save the phenomena', leaving open the ambiguity. For the same phenomena can be accounted for (less beautifully, but perhaps more economically) without the hypothesis that God exists. There would be little difference it seems—and so it seemed to Strato and Laplace and Hume—between the Peripatetic Universe and an identical Universe in which things bear within themselves the principles of their working. It is against the Peripatetics' seeming unwillingness to assign concrete implications to the existence of God that Ghazâlî's rancor toward eternalism and his charges of atheism are directed. The beauty of the Aristotelian world is its reason and regularity, the extent to which it cannot have been otherwise, its god-likeness. But if the world cannot have been otherwise, what possible argument is there for the existence of God? Ghazâlî's charges are not idle. He himself is prepared to take a stronger stand. Creation itself will be the test of God's existence. If the world's eternity is incompatible with the existence of God and if creation is an argument for God's existence, then there are concrete events the occurrence of which would tend to confirm, the non-occurrence of which, to disconfirm that God exists. The offer of such verifiability is a rare phenomenon in sophisticated theological discussion. But the creation argument allows Ghazâlî to make an exception. Ghazâlî's readiness to offer verifiability and his disappointment with the Muslim philosophers at their failure to do so are indicative of his awareness that the meaning of God's existence in relation to human understanding is determined by the active role God is to play in the world. Ghazâlî will not be satisfied with a God whose principal task might easily seem simply to keep things as they would be if there were no God at all.

I. GHAZÂLÎ'S PROOFS OF THE EXISTENCE OF GOD: THE CREATION ARGUMENT

Religious knowledge begins, Ghazâlî writes, outlining the fundamentals of theology for the people of Jerusalem,[1] with awareness of God's existence. To

[1] *Iḥyâ 'Ulûm ad-Dîn*, vol. II, part iii (Cairo, A.H. 1326), vol. I, p. 78; cf. Maurice Bouyges, *Essai De Chronologie Des Oeuvres de Al-Ghazali*, ed. Michel Allard (Beirut: Catholic Press, 1959), no. 25, where important marginal notes are cited.

establish the existence of God, Ghazâlî invokes three lines of argument:[1] (*a*)
From the Qur'ân he draws instance after instance of classical design argument.
The stability of earth and heavens, the sunlight and rainwater, the provision of
night for rest and day for work, the sea for sailing and two sexes for companion-
ship, the 'resurrection' of the earth in spring, the proliferation of all forms of life
and the miracles of growth and regeneration—all argue the existence of God.[2]
'How can even the lowest mind, if he reflects at all on the content of these words
and considers the marvels of earth and sky, the brilliant fashioning of plants and
animals, remain blind to the fact that this wonderful world with its settled order
must have a Maker to design, determine and direct it.'[3] Ghazâlî will not allow
arguments from order, the beauty of the cosmos and the 'fitness of the environ-
ment' to be claimed as a monopoly of the philosophers. All these are to be found
in the Qur'ân, and, as Ghazâlî reminds his readers, the Qur'ân is to be consulted
first for enlightenment in all religious matters.[4] But the remark that such
reasonings as the Qur'anic design argument should be transparent to the densest
sensibility, taken together with his praise of the Qur'ân for its facility in finding a
level of argument and imagery that will sway very ordinary minds and hearts,[5]
indicates that for him these 'obvious' forms of design argument may lack im-
pact at a higher level of rigor. Such arguments, he carefully notes, establish
the existence of a Maker (a 'Demiurge', or craftsman, to revert to Plato's
Greek), not a Creator; they do not explicitly rule out the eternity of the
world. They may be thought to assume it, as the phrase '*settled* order' seems
to warn. If so, they run up against the monotheist critique of eternalism
which reaches a crescendo in Ghazâlî. He prefers to concentrate his reliance on
other proofs.

(*b*) Ghazâlî's authority for his second line of reasoning, as for his first, is God
Himself, for, as he observes, God is the ultimate authority, 'Of God's explana-
tion there is no explanation'.[6] It was God who proposed or inspired the design
arguments of the Qur'ân and provided the manifest benefits[7] to which they refer.
Here God's proof of His existence is more direct. Instead of leaving traces of
His work to be read and interpreted by the mind or rediscovered by prophecy,
God testifies to His existence publicly in revelation and privately in man's
awareness. The permanent testimony of God to Himself in the Qur'ân is pre-
sumably what eliminates the need for further prophets after Muḥammad. The

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[1] *Ar-Risâlatu'l-Qudsiyya* ('The Jerusalem Letter'), ed. and trans. A. L. Tibawi,
Islamic Quarterly, vol. IX (1965), pp. 3–4 (= *Iḥyâ 'Ulûm ad-Dîn*, vol. II, part iii), l. 1.
For the importance of the question whether God exists, cf. Philo, *Special Laws*, vol. I,
part vi, p. 32. Logically enough the question of God's existence is the first point of
theology raised by Ghazâlî in the *Iḥyâ*.
[2] Qur'ân, LVIII, 6–16; II, 164; LXXI, 15–18; LVI, 58–83.
[3] 'Jerusalem Letter', ed. Tibawi, p. 80 = trans. p. 97.
[4] *Ibid.* p. 80, l. 1.
[5] *Maḍnûn aṣ-Ṣaghîr*, Q. 6.
[6] 'Jerusalem Letter', ed. Tibawi, p. 80, l. 2.
[7] See *Ma'ârij al-Quds* (Cairo, 1927), p. 2.

permanent intuition of creaturehood, which G̲h̲azâlî claims is built into the human soul, complements God's articulate proclamation of His sovereignty by providing inalienable receptivity to the message.[1] Universal consent, which the Stoics had argued constitutes proof of God's existence, thus arises for G̲h̲azâlî in the interaction of man's innate awareness of God with God's Self-proclamation. It is partly through God's 'Self-revelation' that G̲h̲azâlî claims to have received his certainty of God's existence;[2] and the divine promptings he received came no doubt from deep within. Yet of the two notions he raises here, that man bears within him an innate, unsubornable awareness of God's existence—almost as a facet of self-consciousness—and that an existential proposition, no matter *who* the speaker, can bear its own validation, it is doubtful which is less sound. While he cites Qur'anic reliance on such suasions to establish their respectability,[3] he does not expand on them greatly. He is well aware that, meaning-filled as such propositions may ring in the ears of mystics and fundamentalists, they will be of little use in the arena of debate. They appeal to a shared experience of God's private revelation and a shared receptivity to His public utterance. Thus they convince no one not already convinced. Such divine testimonies, G̲h̲azâlî avers, obviate the need or argument.[4] He is under no illusion, then, that God's 'assertions' of His own existence *constitute* an argument.

One trend in religious thought is to denigrate reasoned argument as inferior to the ontological or epistemological level of divinity, as though the fullness of God's being and the manifestness of His presence rendered His existence *less* susceptible of human knowledge. The plea is that this approach is taken, not in any fear as to the outcome of intellectual investigations into the question of God's existence, but in awareness of some error in applying mind to God: The existence of God is simply too obvious for words; we know Him immediately, passively, by faith. This position demands a certain amount of self-deception. The question *how* we know God would not arise, not as an epistemological matter, unless God's existence had already been denied. Epistemology is the skeptic's domain. Skepticism, against which the appeal to faith reacts, seems to lie at least as close to the root of fideism as does the immediate experience, in which belief takes refuge.

It would be natural to assume that a thinker willing to affirm that revelation, prophetic or immanent, renders argument superfluous would concur in the position expertly caricatured in Gilson's paraphrase, 'since God has spoken to us, it is no longer necessary for us to think'.[5] Surely after placing God's existence on

[1] 'Jerusalem Letter', ed. Tibawi, p. 80, ll. 15 ff.

[2] *Al-Munqid̲h̲ min aḍ-Ḍalâl* ('Deliverance from Error', G̲h̲azâlî's spiritual autobiography), ed. with French trans. Farid Jabre (Beirut: UNESCO, International Commission for Translation of Great Works, 1959), pp. 45–6 = French trans. pp. 108–9 = English trans. of Wm. Montgomery Watt in *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali* (2nd ed., London: George Allen and Unwin, 1963), pp. 68–9.

[3] 'Jerusalem Letter', ed. Tibawi, *loc. cit.*; cf. Qur'ân, XIV, 10; XXXI, 25; XXX, 30.

[4] *Ibid.* p. 80, l. 23.

[5] Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Scribner, 1938), p. 6.

a meta-epistemological pedestal from which it towers over all mere propositions, Ghazâlî will have little use for reason, look askance on the antics of natural theology, cry with Tertullian, 'What indeed is Athens to Jerusalem!'[1] To force Ghazâlî into such a mold is a grave error. God has spoken, to be sure; but interpretations of just what He said conflict. And there are those, Ghazâlî and the Qur'ân agree, who simply haven't heard Him.[2] All men are born with the same nature, runs the tradition—the nature in which Ghazâlî writes, God implanted man's receptivity to religious knowledge; all are capable initially of receiving God's message, but their parents make them Magians, Christians, Jews—and Muslims, he adds.[3] With positive religion and the attempt on man's part to confine and control the religious experience, diversity and contradiction arise. Man's finitude cannot encompass the reality to which he is exposed.[4] It is the limited nature of the human mind which renders fideism impossible. Perhaps, as Gilson speculates, in another life we will see God face to face and all mysteries will be resolved,[5] but while experience is *human,* some less-than-adequate representation must be found. Raw faith has no criterion by which to choose among conflicting representations. It cannot argue, communicate, or even perceive, let alone know. How, then, can faith unaided claim to be *the* foundation of religion? For thinkers it is unthinkable that reason not come first. Reason is the thinker's *I.* Without it he has no criterion of judgement, no point of view, no awareness, not even being. Perhaps for another type of personality, a man of faith, faith takes primacy. But questions remain: Faith in what? By whom? Unaided faith has no criteria for selection of objects; and it cannot, like thought, form the basis of identity. Even divine Self-assertion must be heard and taken in. It can be heard only by an identity; and it cannot be taken in by a human being without limitation and choice. There is no revelation without interpretation.

There is, perhaps, a primitive faith that transcends in its simplicity the supersophisticated response of theology to skepticism. For Ghazâlî, such faith was impossible:

'I said in my heart,' he writes, '...there is no hope of going back to pure faith. To have blind faith you must be unaware of it. Once you see it, the glass is shattered and you cannot patch it up or paste it together—not unless you melt it down and make it over.'[6]

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[1] Tertullian, *On Prescription against Heretics,* vii, quoted in Gilson, *op. cit.* p. 9.

[2] Qur'ân, IV, 154; XVI, 110; XLVII, 18, quoted by Ghazâlî, *Al-Munqidh min aḍ-Ḍalâl,* ed. Jabre, p. 40 = French trans., p. 102 = trans. Watt, pp. 62–3.

[3] Tradition quoted by Ghazâlî, *Al-Munqidh min aḍ-Ḍalâl,* ed. Jabre, p. 11 = French trans., p. 61 = trans. Watt, p. 21; cf. Qur'an, XXIII, 55; XXX, 31 quoted by Ghazâlî in his autobiography one page above, *loc. cit.*

[4] For the origins of Islamic diversity see the opening pages of Ashʻari, *Maqâlât al-Islâmiyyîn,* ed. Ritter. For the inadequacy of positive religion see Ibn Ṭufayl, *Hayy Ibn Yaqẓân,* ed. with French trans. Leon Gauthier (Beirut: Catholic Press, 1936) (first edition 1900). A new English translation by the present writer is in the press.

[5] Gilson, *loc. cit.*

[6] *Al-Munqidh min-aḍ-Ḍalâl,* ed. Jabre, p. 15 = French trans., p. 66 = trans. Watt, p. 27.

Having begun his 'quest for truth',[1] the goad to which, like some men's faith, God had implanted in his nature,[2] Ghazâlî could not turn back. This is well, for it would be inauspicious if the man who met and perhaps defeated the philosophers on their own ground were forced to retreat into fideism on the question of God's existence.

For Ghazâlî faith does come first, not the primitive faith of tradition or the pseudo-primitive faith of sophisticated debate, but that of a man who has wrestled with God too long not to know of His existence. Ghazâlî's was an intellectual, not a moral, struggle. It had an intellectual outcome which could be made public. If faith came first, then a progress was necessary, as for Augustine,[3] from faith to reason. The Qur'ân might have the first word, but it must not also have the last.

(c) Thus despite the self-evidence of God's existence and the superfluity of human words where divine testimonies have preceded, Ghazâlî offers a third argument, 'to complement' the others and 'following the example of the most learned thinkers'.[4] This argument does not rely, even indirectly, on revelation. It is a specimen of natural theology. Meant not only to establish a role for God more in keeping with the monotheist tradition, but also to provide more intellectually satisfying grounds for knowledge of His existence than appeals to universal consent (which in theology, as in politics, has a way of melting when too heavily relied on), Ghazâlî's third argument is framed as a syllogism:

'It is an axiom of reason that all that comes to be must have a cause to bring it about. The world has come to be. *Ergo* the world must have a cause to bring it about. The proposition that "What comes to be must have a cause" is obvious, for everything that takes place occupies a certain span of time, yet it is conceivable that it come about earlier or later. Its confinement to the particular time span it actually fills demands some determinant to select the time. The proof of my claim that the world has come to be is that no physical object can exist without being either in motion or in rest. Both motion and rest occur in time, and what depends for its existence on events in time must itself have come about in time.'[5]

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[1]   *Loc. cit.*

[2]   *Al-Munqidh min-aḍ-Ḍalâl*, ed. Jabre, pp. 10–11 = French trans., p. 61 = trans. Watt, p. 21.

[3]   Augustine, Commentary on *St John*, trans. H. Browne, xxix, 6: 'Understanding is the reward of faith. Therefore seek not to understand that thou mayest believe, but believe that thou mayest understand.' Quoted in Gilson, *op. cit.* p. 19; cf. Augustine, *On Free Will*, ii, 2. 6. Gilson notes the need in the 'spiritual family' of Augustine to progress 'from Revelation to reason', pp. 15–21; cf. Gilson's *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* (New York, 1936), ch. 2. The observation fits Ghazâlî perfectly. Cf. Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis*, iii; and Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 2, art. 1. See also A. J. Wensinck, *La Pensée de Ghazzali* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1940), pp. 31–4; George Hourani, 'The Dialogue Between Al-Ghazali and the Philosophers on the Origin of the World', *Muslim World*, vol. xlviii (1958), pp. 183–91, 308–14.

[4]   'Jerusalem Letter', ed. Tibawi, p. 80, l. 23.

[5]   *Ibid.* p. 80, ll. 24–9.

Ghazâlî's use of this argument in his Essay for the people of Jerusalem is a direct challenge to the spirit in which Tertulian wrote 'What indeed is Athens to Jerusalem!' The argument is taken from Plato.[1]

Like all syllogistic arguments, Ghazâlî's proof of the existence of God hinges on the middle term, through which the connection between the extremes, in this case the world and its Cause, is to be established. Whatever comes to be in time requires a cause; the world has come to be, therefore the world needs a cause. 'Coming to be' is the middle term, Arabic *hâdith*, a noun and adjective referring to temporal events, what comes about or has come to be, cognate to the Hebrew *hadash*, 'new', and equivalent to the Greek for 'becoming'. The opposite is *qadîm*, 'old'; in philosophy, infinitely old, eternal *a parte ante*. The concept of 'temporal event' can relate God to the world only on the assumption, which Ghazâlî makes explicit, that coming to be and being brought to be are coextensive. This is what is postulated in the major premiss. Coming to be and being brought to be are coextensive, according to Ghazâlî, through the finitude inherent in time-bound existence. Finite being does not choose its own determinations. It cannot, for among them is its place in time itself, which must have been determined before its existence in time began. Only God transcends the passivity of finitude. Filling time, thus having no limited place in time to which He is confined, God transcends time. Only God can limit the otherwise infinite chain of finite beings.[2] The world's becoming, then, or 'coming about' is creation, which bridges the gap between finitude and infinity. Ghazâlî is passing not by stealth, but by argument based on the metaphysics of finite being, across the thin line of ambiguity in the word *hâdith*, the senses of which are held together by the notion of time-boundedness, from 'happening' to 'becoming' to 'coming to be' and 'being *brought* to be'. The rationale is that what exists in time does not constitute itself, is not self-sustaining. What comes to be requires a cause. What comes to be in the absolute sense requires a Creator. If the world has come to be, then, it must have had a Creator to bring it into being.

But has it? Ghazâlî's argument will work only if he can secure the crucial minor premiss. And this will be difficult. It is neither 'obvious' nor 'an axiom of reason' that the Universe came into being a finite time ago. This Ghazâlî must prove. His argument is straightforward:

'To sum it up,' he writes, 'the world cannot exist without things that come to be in time, so the world itself must have come to be in time. Once this is established, its need for something to bring it into being will be apprehended necessarily.'[3]

The existence of a Creator, he claims, follows logically from the fact of creation. If this is granted, the only difficulty will be in lending credibility to the rather

[1] *Timaeus*, 27–8.
[2] 'Jerusalem Letter', ed. Tibawi, pp. 80, ll. 26–81, l. 7; cf. *Ma'ârij al-Quds*, pp. 201–2.
[3] *Ibid.* p. 81, ll. 18–19.

nebulous argument by which the world's coming to be is proved. This proof makes three claims, Ghazâlî writes:

(1) that a body must be either in motion or at rest,
(2) that motion and rest both come to be,
(3) that what cannot exist without what comes to be itself has come to be.[1]

From here it need only be claimed that the world cannot exist without bodies, and argument falls into place: bodies must be either in motion or at rest, both of which 'come to be', therefore the world has come to be.

Unfortunately this involves an equivocation. Ghazâlî's first premiss that bodies must be either in motion or at rest is, as he says, a necessary truth. Provided that 'motion' and 'rest' are adequately defined, to deny that all bodies must be either in motion or at rest is simply to deny the principle of contradiction. The third premiss too, that 'what cannot exist without what comes to be itself has come to be' seems harmless, although just *how* the world's existence depends on things that come to be remains in doubt—surely not in the same way that it depends on God. This premiss seems to say no more than that nothing can exist before it exists. The trouble is in the second premiss, that motion and rest both 'come to be'. If this means simply 'take place' the premisses prove nothing. From the third it is deduced that the world is only as old as process, but the second adds only that process takes place in time. If, on the other hand, 'come to be' means 'came into existence a finite time ago', the second premiss is not as obvious as it appears and must either be proved independently or thrown out as question-begging. Ghazâlî's proof that motion and rest must have originated is that whichever of them came first must have limited the other *a parte ante*, while the earlier cannot have gone on forever or it would never have given way to the later.[2] This line of thought is not without charm. It seems to obviate the rest of the argument and simply say 'Look here, nothing can be infinitely old. If it were, how would it ever reach the present?' But Ghazâlî does not believe that *nothing* is infinitely old. The very line after his argument from creation concludes is an assertion that God is infinitely old.[3] Surely God reaches the present. What Ghazâlî is arguing is not that there is some contradiction in the very idea of a thing's being infinitely old, but that it is contradictory to claim that any time-bound, finite being is infinitely old. Here we come upon an antinomy (Kant's first). For it is true that there is a contradiction in saying that an infinite time has ended today, yet it is equally true that there is *no* contradiction in assuming that some finite object or the world has existed forever. It may be said that the difficulty arises in the conflicting tendencies of the mind—its power to postulate infinite possibility, but only finite actuality. Yet to say so does not solve the puzzle. It does not tell me whether the atoms in my ink or the moons of Jupiter or the world has existed forever or only for a finite time. This is not the sort of question that can be answered by arguments *a priori*. Ghazâlî's argument stands or falls with the finitude of being. Thus it stands dangerously close to its own point of departure,

[1] *Ibid.* ll. 1–11.   [2] *Ibid.* ll. 4–8.   [3] *Ibid.* 2, p. 81, l. 20.

the contrast between finite being and God. What Ghazâlî is saying is that the world cannot be infinitely old unless it is like God. His opponent need not deny this to differ with him as to the world's age.

Conspicuous by its absence from Ghazâlî's arguments in the Jerusalem Letter is the rigorous-looking proof from contingency which he had employed with confidence in combatting the skepticism of the *Bâṭinîs*. Arguing with a brashness that seems to have softened during his crisis and retreat, he compares the reasoning by which we reach knowledge of the existence of God to the proof of a proposition in Euclid: Just as in the first figure of Euclid's first proposition, necessary premises yield a necessary conclusion,[1]

'so, if we wish to demonstrate the existence of a necessary and self-subsistent Being, independent of all other beings and from whom all being derives its existence, we do not apprehend the existence of this Being by necessity, but by reasoning. The gist of this reasoning is that we argue: There is no denying existence itself. Something must exist and anyone who says nothing exists at all makes a mockery of sense and necessity. The proposition that there is no denying being itself, then, is a necessary premiss. Now this being which has been admitted in principle is either necessary or contingent. This premiss too is necessary, by the excluded middle, the same as saying that what exists has either existed forever or come to be in time. This is necessarily true, and so is any disjunction between an affirmation and its denial. What this means is that a being must be either self-sufficient or dependent. Necessity means simply independence of a cause; dependence is contingency. From here we argue: If the being the existence of which is conceded be necessary, then the existence of a necessary being is established. If, on the other hand, its existence is contingent, every contingent being depends on a necessary being; for the meaning of its contingency is that its existence and non-existence are equally possible. Whatever has such a characteristic cannot have its existence selected for without a determining or selecting agent. This too is necessary. So from these necessary premisses the existence of a necessary Being is established.'[2]

Only an argument in which all the premisses are 'necessary' will make Ghazâlî's point: The conclusions of reasoning are as sound as the premises that beget them; and if, as in geometry, an argument can be constructed no premiss of which is less than necessary, that argument will reward its propounder with certainty of its conclusion. To drive home the parallelism between the method of geometry and that of the rest of reasoning, an argument which relies only on 'necessary' premisses must be found. For Ghazâlî the contingency argument was such an argument. The requirements of polemic have dictated his choice of argument. The creation argument would not satisfy these requirements, for one of its premisses is not necessary, the premiss that the world came to be. There is, to be sure, no such contradiction in the notion as was claimed by its opponents. It is perfectly possible to conceive the world's existence after nothingness in a

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[1] *Fadâ'iḥ al-Bâtiniyya* ('The Shame of the Allegorists'), ed. Abdur-Raḥmân Badaw (Cairo, 1964), pp. 80–1.

[2] *Fadâ'iḥ al-Bâtiniyya*, ed. Badawî, pp. 81–2; cf. Ghazâlî's *Maqâṣid al-Falâsifa* ('The Aims of the Philosophers'), ed. S. Dunya (Cairo, 1961), pp. 96 ff. for a fuller exposition of Euclid's first proposition. For the completeness of the disjunction between the world's eternity and its having 'come to be' see *Maqâṣid al-Falâsifa*, ed. Dunya, pp. 56–7.

way that we cannot conceive the manufacture of cubical spheres, or even the existence of nothing. There is, however, equally little conceptual difficulty involved in the assumption that the world has existed forever. So the argument from creation will hardly serve as an example of an argument with all necessary premises. Thus it cannot be used in this context.

But why is the contingency argument not used in the Jerusalem Letter? Ghazâlî still believes that the world is contingent, that God is the only self-subsistent being, and that all other beings depend on Him for their existence.[1] He is still willing, in proving the equivalence of what exists in time with what is created, to rely on the notion of God as a determinant, or selecting agent, needed to choose which among rival possibilities will be actualized. The assignment of such a role to the Creator is, of course, borrowed from the contingency argument, where God tips the scales not at the beginning of time in favor of being over not being, but throughout time in favor of finite actuality over indeterminate possibility. If God maintains the role assigned to Him by the contingency argument, why is the argument itself *not* included among the 'foundations of religious knowledge'?

The contingency argument has been criticized as a thinly disguised ontological argument.[2] If God is a necessary being, then presumably God cannot *not* exist. But the ontological argument is a fallacy. Not only does it presume existence to be a predicate, but assuredly it begs the question. God's existence cannot be both premiss and conclusion. How does the contingency argument become ontological? The fallacy, it is said, creeps in because the argument demands we think in terms of a necessary *being*. Only a judgement, it is urged, can be necessary. It is to Ghazâlî's credit that he does not slip into this pitfall. He is well aware of the philosophical properties which treat modality as a characteristic of judgements.[3] He defines 'necessary' in this context as 'self-sufficient' and opposes it not to 'possible', but to 'contingent', which he defines as 'dependent'.[4] These are predicates of beings or events, not of judgements. The necessity attributed to God, then, is not the logical necessity of a being whose 'essence is to exist' but the metaphysical necessity of a self-sufficient being. Thus Ghazâlî's contingency argument avoids the fallacy of the ontological proof: His argument assigns 'necessity' a straightforward meaning and derives God's 'necessary existence'

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[1] *Iḥyâ 'Ulûm ad-Dîn*, vol. xxxvi, *bayan* iii, 1; cf. *Ma'ârij al-Quds* ('Sacred Progress') (Cairo, 1927), p. 204; cf. also *Mishkât at-Anwâr*, ed. Afifi (Cairo, 1964), pp. 54, 60.

[2] For this line of criticism see Anthony Flew, *God and Philosophy* (London: Hutchinson, 1966), ch. iv, cf. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Transcendental Dialectic, chap. iii, sec. vii.

[3] *Maqâṣid al-Falâsifa* ('The Aims of the Philosophers'), ed. S. Dunya (Cairo, 1961), p. 60.

[4] *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa* ('The Incoherence of the Philosophers'), Bouyges 2nd ed., vols. v, x = ed. Dunya, pp. 146, 182 = Ibn Rushd, *Tahâfut at-Tahâfut*, ed. Bouyges, pp. 288, 417. The translation by Simon Van Den Bergh of Ibn Rushd's work, 'The Incoherence of the Incoherence' (London: E. J. W. Gibb Memorial Series and UNESCO International Commission for the Translation of Great Works, 1954), is keyed to the edition of Bouyges.

not from any preconceived notion of God's essence, but from its premisses: that something must exist, that being is divided into necessary and contingent, and that the contingent depends for its existence on the necessary. From the contingency of the world (or of whatever is conceded to exist—appearance, 'I', this table) it should be possible to infer the existence of a necessary being.

For Ghazâlî it is in the ease of this inference that the difficulty lies. If it is possible to reason from a contingent world to a necessary God, it may equally be thought possible to reason from a necessary God to the contingent world. If the world's contingent existence is attributable to a necessary Being whose nature is to impart being to all that exists besides Him, then it might well be claimed that the world's existence itself is no longer contingent, but necessary in relation to its Cause.[1] The world has always existed and will always exist. It is the *world* that cannot not be. The world's eternity is implied by its ('relative') necessity. And from God's eternity, the world's necessity is seemingly implied. What then becomes of God? He may seem to remain undisturbed. The world's necessity is, after all, only relative to God's existence. But the device can backfire: If God becomes no more than the necessary correlative of a necessary world, divine activity is drastically curtailed; the world's ontological status, extravagantly enlarged. God is the ground of being, but nothing more; the world remains 'dependent' on God, but hangs only by the most tenuous metaphysical thread, vaguely characterized as 'ontological dependence'.

Ghazâlî's suspicion is that 'ontological dependence' may prove a vacuous relation. By Aristotelian standards what always exists must exist: if the world is eternal then, it is its own necessary being. No other being is needed. *Ex hypothesi* there must be some self-sufficient being; but, as Ghazâlî puts it, if the world is eternal, that being has already been reached. There is no need that it be God. The contingency argument, then, is self-undermining. If the argument implies the eternity of the world or the necessity that being be imparted (the necessity of creation, the necessity of contingency!), divinity becomes a dispensable hypothesis. If the world is eternal, it is Ghazâlî's firm belief, neither the contingency argument nor any other argument can establish the need for the existence of God.[2] And in the unvarnished form in which the Islamic philosophers had used it, the contingency argument can readily be made to imply the eternity of the world.

Ghazâlî's hesitancy to employ the contingency argument in the Jerusalem Letter, then, is well founded. The classical first argument of Proclus[3] and after

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[1] See *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, Bouyges 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1962), I, part ii, no. 78; cf. Shahrastânî, *Nihâyatu'l-Iqdâm fî 'Ilmi'l-Kalâm*, ed. with English paraphrase by Alfred Guillaume (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), pp. 6 ff., 20.

[2] *Tahâfut-al-Falâsifa*, x, cf. III, IV.

[3] Proclus' first argument is lost in the Greek original, but its contents are known from Philoponus *apud* Simplicius, and the argument is extant in the Arabic fragments of Proclus, ed. Badawi, *Neo-Platonici apud Arabes, Islamica*, vol. XIX (Cairo, 1955); cf. also Shahrastânî, *Kitâb al-Milal wa-n-Nihâl*, ed. Cureton, p. 338, where the argument is given as the first of 'Proclus' fallacies on the eternity of the world'.

him of Simplicius for the eternity of the world had been based on God's role as an essentially (and therefore eternally) generous Giver. Such generosity, the argument went, could not lack an object. Here the argument preserves the drawback it held for Ghazâlî: God seems to need the world as much as the world needs God. The neo-Platonic conception of God's work as ontological 'bestowing', based on Aristotle's idea of what he preferred to call the actualizing of potential, was the precursor of the Islamic contingency argument. The issue of the need for a 'determinant' was initially, in fact, the neo-Platonists' *reductio ad absurdum* to establish the eternity of the world: if up to a certain time God had created nothing, what can have determined Him to change his mind?[1]

Proclus' appeal to the essential generosity of God is calculated to make a heavy impact on the monotheist sensibility, which like its pagan counterpart in late antiquity was more readily swayed by intuitions as to what would be the most fitting characterization of the Deity than by abstract metaphysical considerations. As for the gambit that if God did create in time there must have been a 'determinant' to make Him make up His mind (but God is unchanging and impassive), Ghazâlî labels this 'their most cogent argument' for the eternity of the world, and places it first in the *Tahâfut* for refutation.[2] Both these ideas, the demand for a determinant and the appeal to God's generosity, are essential elements in the contingency argument. From Ghazâlî's point of view, then, that argument seems to bear the seeds of its own destruction. Containing functional parts of two of the neo-Platonists' most impressive arguments for the eternity of the world, the contingency argument not only subverts itself, but would seem to Ghazâlî to contain sufficient assumptions to destroy theism as well.

The fault of the contingency argument is that it allows or encourages transference to the temporal world of a necessity, a self-sufficiency not its own, and borrowed, as Ghazâlî would see it, on insufficient collateral.[3] The finite world, in Ghazâlî's view, has not the means of its own existence. Nature neither acts nor exists in its own right. The world does receive being from God, and through God nature can function, but it must never be forgotten that the world's existence is not of itself. The world is not, like God, self-sufficient. Being is held—by all things apart from God—by no inherent right, but mortgaged as it were. The holder of the mortgage is God Himself.

To the Peripatetic tradition the world's equity in being seemed much stronger. Existence was inalienable and of right. The Peripatetic faith that even to its lowest level reality was infused with reason made it logical to search for the universals and the necessities of reason even in the contingent world. The notion of the world's dependence on a necessary Cause afforded the welcome oppor-

[1] Proclus' fourth argument for the eternity of the world, English trans. in Thomas Taylor, *The Fragments that Remain of the Lost Writings of Proclus* (London, 1825), p. 39; cf. also the Arabic translation and Shahrastânî cited above.

[2] See Ghazâlî, *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, Bouyges 2nd ed., I, no. 7, p. 50.

[3] For Ghazâlî's fiscal imagery see *Ma'ârij al-Quds*, pp. 203–4 and *Ihya 'Ulûm ad-Dîn*, XXXV.

tunity of reducing to rule, to necessity and law, the apparent contingency of the world. Just as the task of the scientist was to discover the Universal, the unchanging, the necessary in the particular objects of his study, the task of the metaphysician was to find the necessity underlying all being. The nature of being in the broadest sense is to be, and what *is* strictly cannot not be (although it may not have been or have been to be). Thus in a very real sense it is the Aristotelian who accepts the principle of the ontological argument, and he is saved from fallacy only by his refusal to confine that principle to God: it is being at large and as such (reflecting the self-sufficiency of the divine) which cannot not be.

The contingency argument, then, in the hands of its philosopher propounder, becomes a means of eliminating the world's contingency. From there the world is elevated to relative necessity, and from here to absolute necessity. The shift is one Ghazâlî is not prepared to allow. For him finite being is always the leaseholder, never the owner of existence, and the philosophers, as spokesmen of creation, are guilty of kiting: they credit the world with assets not its own, inflating valid stock and vesting confidence where next to none is justified. By assimilating finite being to the eternity and necessity that belong properly if not exclusively to God, not only is finite being overrated, but the full reality of what it means to be God—that is, what it means to transcend finitude—is sold short.The difficulty with the contingency argument from Ghazâlî's point of view is not that it assumes the necessity of God, but that it implies the necessity of the world.[1] The relationship it postulates between God and the world is too symmetrical to subsist between the finite and infinite. To be a mere necessary correlative alongside what has become a necessary world is, to Ghazâlî's mind, an inadequate conception of God's role. What is it, Ghazâlî is prompted to ask, that distinguishes the world or the bodies in the world from God?[2] In what way does God's role in this world surpass the lethargic role assigned to Him by the atheist materialists?[3]

'A thinker willing to affirm that all physical things have come to be, since they cannot exist apart from temporal events, can make out an intelligible case that the world depends for its existence on a Maker or Cause. But as for you,' Ghazâlî demands of the neo-Platonic philosophers, 'how can you keep your position distinct from the atheist doctrine that, since the world has always been as it is, it needs no Cause or Maker? Causes are for things that come to be in time. If bodies are neither created nor destroyed but only forms and accidents come into being, if bodies include the heavens which are eternal and the four elements that fill the lunar sphere and both the stuff they are made of and the bodies they make up are eternal and exchange their forms only by change of accidents and physical recombination, if the animal and vegetable souls do come into being, but their causes can be traced no higher than the circular motion of the heavens and that motion is eternal and stems from an eternal soul in the sphere, then the world has no Cause and physical bodies have no Maker.'[4]

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[1] See Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Lambda.   [2] See Ghazâlî, *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, IV.
[3] *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, X.
[4] *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, X, no. 1, Bouyges 2nd ed., p. 154. It is the *causa efficiens*, of course, which is in question. Ghazâlî shows little interest in this context in the Aristotelian notion that God is a final cause.

If the world is eternal, then talk of divine causality is meaningless and God does not exist. 'What is the meaning of this claim of theirs that physical objects exist forever yet require a Cause.'[1] To Ghazâlî the philosophers'position seems a flagrant contradiction.

'There are two kinds of people,' he writes. 'There are the theists, who believe the world has come to be and recognize the necessity that what comes to be cannot bring itself into being, but depends for its existence on a Maker. Their position is intelligible in terms of their doctrine of a Maker. And there are the atheists, who believe that the world has always been as it is now and do not affirm that it has a Maker.Their position too is comprehensible, although it can be shown to be false. But the philosophers believe that the world is eternal yet claim it has a Maker. This position is self-contradictory and requires no refutation.'[2]

To the philosopher[3] Ghazâlî's outrageous attempt to equate neo-Platonic theism with materialistic atheism will appear no more than a gross caricature. If Ghazâlî can distinguish his position from theist eternalism, surely the neo-Platonist philosophers are to be allowed their differences with atheist materialism. There are far more than 'two kinds of people', and surely more than two possible positions. The great difference between the theist and atheist worlds of the Greek philosophers and their heirs is the existence in one of a great animating, activating Force that is absent or unavailable in the other. Of this difference Ghazâlî is well aware.[4] Is his charge that the philosophers are atheists simply playing to the gallery? The Muslim exponents of the neo-Peripatetic position do have their doctrine of the world's eternity in common with the atheists, but surely what matters is the existence of God, not such details as whether God's transcendence demands or precludes that his act impinge on time.[5] Ghazâlî is unwilling to concede this. He detects a contradiction in all talk of a contingent world that exists eternally; he is not content to expose it: he wants to *press* it, for in his belief arguments like the contingency argument which assume God's coexistence with an eternal world are talking neither of God nor the world but of two gods, or of none.[6] What concrete distinction can the propounders of the argument suggest between their God and the world? Between their world and the world of the atheist? The philosophers demand God's absolute transcendence of change and of entanglement with the finitude of time. God's concern is solely with universals. If God is a Maker, He will work as a mind, not as a will. If He is first, His primacy will be ontological, not temporal. This is just the position Ghazâlî refuses to accept.

[1] *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, x = Bouyges 2nd ed., p. 182.
[2] *Ibid.* p. 110.
[3] Ibn Rushd, *Tahâfut at-Tahâfut*, III, ed. Bouyges, p. 151.
[4] *Al-Munqidh min-ad-Dalâl*, ed. Jabre, pp. 18–20, cf. pp. 23–4 = French trans., pp. 71–2; cf. pp. 77–8 = trans. Watt, pp. 31–2; cf. pp. 37–8; cf. *Maqâṣid al-Falâsifa*, ed. Dunya, pp. 203 ff., 286 ff.
[5] For an attempt to mediate between creationism and eternalism—and to scale down the gravity of the issue—see Ibn Ṭufayl *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓân*, ed. L. Gauthier, pp. 81–8.
[6] See *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, VI.

To conceive of God as Cause when no event is His effect seems to G̲h̲azâlî a great piece of self-deception:

All philosophers, with the exception of the materialists, agree that the world has a Maker and that the Maker and Author of the world is God and the world is His work. But on their own principles this must be a deception. In fact there is no way of conceiving the world as God's work consistent with their premises. The difficulty is threefold: It involves (*a*) the Cause, (*b*) the effect and (*c*) the relation between them. (*a*) The Cause must have a will and free choice and awareness of what He wants to do in order to do it. Yet they believe God has no will, and indeed no attributes at all, and that what emanates from Him issues by necessity. (*b*) The effect must be an event in time, but the world is eternal. (*c*) The world is composed of contraries, yet they believe that God is one in every respect and insist that from what is one will come only what is one in every way. How then can the world emanate from God?[1]

(*a*) G̲h̲azâlî does not deny the Muslim philosophers' *intention* to transcend materialist atheism and the anthropomorphism of early Islam for a higher and purer conception of God, the world and their relation. He denies that they have succeeded. They have rested in the conception of a God that is not God, a relation that is no relation, and a world indistinguishable from that of the atheist. Here is the philosophers' rejection of anthropomorphism as understood by G̲h̲azâlî:

When we say 'The world has a Maker' we do not mean an agent with a will who once did not work but later did, like a tailor, a weaver, or a builder, but the world's Cause, which we call the First Principle in the sense that He is the cause of existence in others while His own existence is uncaused. When we call Him the Author of the Universe, this is what we mean.[2]

God is not an arbitrary agent, but an ontological ground. For the neo-Platonist philosopher, G̲h̲azâlî realizes, no higher role can be conceived.

In saying that God acts we mean that He is the Cause of all that is besides Him. The world subsists through Him; if He did not exist, the world's existence would be inconceivable. Assuming there were no God, there would be no world, just as if there were no sun there would be no light. This is what we mean by God's work. If our opponent refuses to call this work, we won't quibble over words, so long as the idea is clear.[3]

The idea, to G̲h̲azâlî's taste, is all too clear: The philosophers' God 'does nothing'.[4] The notion of action without will is inadequate when applied to God, for actions are said to be undertaken without will only in a figurative sense.[5] The philosophers' idea of ontological dependence amounts to no more than 'empty words'.[6] But if God's work is not voluntary, God's personality is destroyed:

for you the relation between God and the world is like that of cause and effect, as though the world must necessarily be produced and God could not conceivably help it, like a man casting a shadow or the sun shedding light.[7]

[1] *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, Bouyges 2nd ed., III, nos. 1–2.
[2] *Ibid.* IV, no. 2. [3] *Ibid.* III, no. 15.
[4] *Ibid.* no. 16, l. 4. [5] *Ibid.* part i, cf. XVII, 1.
[6] *Ibid.* no. 16, l. 4. [7] *Ibid.* part i, no. 3.

God becomes a metaphysical force. Ghazâlî's fear is that He may have become a metaphorical God.

(*b*) The world, according to the philosophers, is God's work. 'Work', Ghazâlî is quick to specify, means *bringing into being*. How can God bring into being what already exists?[1] The philosophers have a ready answer in terms of ontological dependence: The world is secondary in fact (that is, in being), not in time. The motion of water in a cup is secondary, but simultaneous with the motion of the hand that holds the cup. Such is the world's relation to God.[2] Ghazâlî snatches up the point: The world, then, is not God's work, but only in some tenuous way His effect.[3]

(*c*) Since Plotinus the neo-Platonists had, in fact, envisioned concretely the mechanism by which the tenuous metaphysical relation subsists which they saw between God and finite being. The relation was one not of making, but of emanation, the emergence from the ideal One, which transcends even being, of the embodied many. The motive force of the 'procession' was the overflowing generosity of the One, entering into a dialectic with itself to produce the first being, from which emerged, as if by reproductive generation, without diminution of their Source, all ontologically subsequent beings. The model was impressive to Ghazâlî, and it colored much of his thinking about what he called the divine world.[4] But one corollary Ghazâlî could not allow. The theory held that from one comes only one. Assumption of absolute oneness in God eliminated the divine attributes.[5] Unless the obvious diversity of the world were denied, the corollary meant it must be placed beyond God's knowledge and control. As for the relation between God and the world, God's unity (on the assumption that from one comes only one), apparently implies His inability to generate anything but one monolithic hypostasis. This not only limits God's power but eliminates His will. For will is the capacity to choose among not less than two alternatives.[6] Emanation is a profound conception; but God must not be thought, as Ghazâlî's younger contemporary Shahrastânî put it, to 'entail' the world into being.[7]

Like Ibn Sînâ and Fârâbî, Ghazâlî and his teacher Juwaynî before him had relied on the contingency argument.[8] But Ghazâlî now saw, perhaps in the course

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[1] *Ibid.* part ii, no. 17.   [2] *Ibid.* no. 24.

[3] *Ibid.* no. 25–8.   [4] *Ma'ârij al-Quds*, pp. 201 ff.

[5] See *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, v.

[6] *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, iii, part iii; cf. Van Den Bergh, note 89.2.

[7] See Shahrastânî '*Nihâyatu'l-Iqdâm fî 'Ilmi'l-Kalâm*, ed. Guillaume, p. 21. The reduction of ontological to logical relations is a temptation to which Platonic idealism (with its Pythagorean background) will be particularly susceptible.

[8] For the contingency argument in use, see Fârâbî, 'Book of Gems', opening passage; Ibn Sînâ, *Najât*, vol. iv, part i, p. 6; Juwaynî, *Irshâd*, ed. Luciani, p. 1. For Ibn Rushd's rejection of the argument see *Tahâfut at-Tahâfut*, ed. Bouyges, pp. 54–5; cf. Van Den Bergh's note 32.1. Van Den Bergh claims that the contingency argument is Aristotelian; and to be sure, Aristotle did argue that God must exist as the Actualizor of potential. Avicenna's notion, however, is that finite being must be determinate to be actual; thus a more active role is conceived for God than as Ground of being, a role as determinant of the qualitative and quantitative limitations without which finite being could not exist.

of his intellectual and emotional crisis, that this argument would not work. It implied the world's eternity, and thus robbed God of His action and His will. It demanded acceptance of a notion of the world's dependence on God perhaps too tenuous to be conceived, and too frail to withstand critical scrutiny unbolstered by some stouter support.

Ghazâlî's restatement of the philosophers' contingency argument is remarkably similar to his own prior use of it:

'The existence of a being whose existence is uncaused can be rigorously proved as follows: The world and all the beings in it either have or have not a cause. The same can be said of the cause of the cause. Now this can either go on *ad infinitum*, which is absurd, or it will come to an end. The last term in the series will be the First Cause, the existence of which has no cause. This we call the First Principle. If, on the other hand, the world exists through itself and has no cause, then the First Principle has already been found, for all we mean by this term is an uncaused being, and this we have proved by necessity.'[1]

Ghazâlî's critique is blunt and to the point: Assuming the world to have existed forever, there is no absurdity in an infinite succession of causes and effects.[2] Such, in fact, is the option chosen by the atheists, and it is an alternative not ruled out by the contingency argument. Moreover, merely to prove the existence of a self-sufficient being by no means proves the existence of God. Platonic metaphysics may be wrong in supposing that only the unembodied is self-sufficing. Surely if the physical world or the heavens, as the neo-Platonists would have it, are eternal they too are self-sufficient and self-caused. 'To be consistent with your system,' writes Ghazâlî, 'if the bodies that make up the world are eternal they too should have no cause.'[3] And if the world needs no cause, God can be dispensed with. The contingency argument, then, is inadequate.

All this argument shows is that the chain of causes must end. But for the atheist it ends before it starts, for he says: 'Physical bodies have no causes, and as for forms and accidents, these are caused reciprocally, ultimately by the circular movement of the heavens, just as in the system of the philosophers, only this motion is the first link in the chain.' If you study what I have said, you will see that no one who accepts the eternity of

The notion of God as a Determinant, although related to that of God as Actualizor (and, for that matter, to the notion of God as Creator, or even as prime mover), is conceptually distinct, and its development as an argument for divine existence may well be Islamic. For in Greek philosophy, as we have seen, the issue of a determinant arises in the context of a *reductio ad absurdum*. For a brief history of the determinant argument, see Herbert Davidson, 'Arguments from the Concept of Particularization in Arabic Philosophy', *Philosophy East and West*, vol. XVIII, part 4 (October, 1968), pp. 299–314. The contingency argument considered here by Ghazâlî is the philosophers' generalized version, where being at large rather than its particularization is the object of determination. As Ghazâlî rightly urges, the argument cannot be based on any notion that God is somehow (logically?) 'necessary', while the world is in the same sense 'possible'; the only remotely workable reading of the argument is in terms of a necessary (i.e. self-sufficient) God and a contingent world, i.e. a world incapable of establishing its own limitations *a fortiori* not its own existence.

  [1] *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, Bouyges 2nd ed., IV, no. 3.
  [2] *Ibid.* no. 6.   [3] *Ibid.* no. 5.

physical things can at the same time claim that they have a Cause. Any such person is forced to admit that the implications of accepting the eternity of the physical world are materialism and atheism, as one group who have surrendered themselves to the dictates of such intellects has frankly done.[1]

Nothing can prevent the atheist from claiming for physical bodies the necessity meant to be reserved for God;[2] and pleas for the ontological priority of the whole will be coldly met, Ghazâlî points out, by the materialists' equally authoritative metaphysical judgement, that indeed the part is prior and the atom ultimate.[3]

Thus the contingency argument not only elevates the world and unduly deflates the meaning of divinity, but also, by relying on a conception of God's relation to the world that would make sense only to a confirmed neo-Platonist, fails to clear the hurdle, Ghazâlî emphatically believes, between theism and atheism. He is anxious to preserve God's will and the world's subordination to it. But his reason for omitting the contingency argument from the elemental propositions of the Jerusalem Letter goes deeper than a desire to preserve metaphysical protocol. He believes not only that no argument that implies the eternity of the world can establish a fitting conception of the world, the Deity and the relation between the two, but also that no argument which allows the eternity of the world can succeed in proving the existence of God. By dint of their commitment to the eternity of the world, the philosophers of the Aristotelian tradition are rendered 'impotent to prove the existence of an Author of the Universe'.[4] Their position is tantamount to atheism.[5] And their claims that the world is God's work are 'figurative language having no real force'.[6]

Must the contingency argument then be discarded? By no means. The insight it shows is valid. God is, for Ghazâlî, the necessary ground of contingent being. The world does derive its existence from Him. Even the role of determinant can be salvaged, provided it be clearly understood that God's determining is done by will, not by any manner or means of necessity. To salvage the dependency relation, the argument must simply be purged of eternalist assumptions. The introduction of will is a help in this direction, for it eliminates the impossibility that many will arise from one. But will must have a scope for choice. There must be real alternatives, alternatives of time, place and character. And if the world is to be contingent it must not be possible to claim that the world without God is indistinguishable from the world with God. The contingency argument, then, should read *not* 'From the existence of anything it is possible to infer to the existence of a self-sufficient being. Therefore God exists', but 'Unless God had willed it, the world as we know it would not have come into being.' In other words, the only form of contingency argument compatible with the requirements of Ghazâlî's monotheism will be the argument from creation. Here will is introduced and given real scope of choice. The occurrence of a definite event distinguishes the theist from the atheist world. And the eternity of finite being by which

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[1] *Ibid.* x, no. 3.   [2] *Ibid.* no. 5.   [3] *Ibid.* no. 6–7.
[4] *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, iv.   [5] *Ibid.* x.   [6] *Ibid.* iii.

creation might be elevated to a self-sufficiency that might rival or obviate the necessity of God is explicitly ruled out.

The insight of the contigency argument, from Ghazâlî's point of view, is not that it makes God and the world correlatives, but that it heightens the contrast between the two. This insight is to be preserved, but what starts out contingent must remain so. The trouble with the contingency argument in the form exploited by the Aristotelian philosophers is that it makes the path of inference from world to God and from God to the world too much a two way street. How can a more fitting equilibrium be restored? Plainly by the creation argument.

In the creation argument the role assigned to God is active. He determines not merely being over not being, but the time, place, and character which specifically limit finite being. This He does not by necessity—for there are choices to be made, often among equivalent alternatives which could never be made by any mechanical process of necessitation.[1] The world, then, retains its contingency in the creation argument and cannot be elevated to a borrowed necessity. For creation implies passivity and limitation; it rules out self-sufficiency. And the act of creation implies will; it rules out appeals to 'essential' generosity. The creation argument *is* the contingency argument for radical monothesists.

In refuting the skeptical ploys of the *Bâtinî*s, Ghazâlî compares argument in general to a road. His criteria are pragmatic. We can be sure we know the way if we follow it and it takes us where we want to go. The same is true of argument. We know argument can bring us knowledge of God's existence because we try it and it works.[2] Ghazâlî's example was contingency proof of God's existence. But that proof demands modification to comply with the standards of radical monotheism. Ghazâlî had taken the road, but it had led him to the wrong God. The God of the contingency argument was not superior enough to a finite being to be truly self-sufficient. He was not alive. He was operationally indistinguishable from the dead God of materialism. And the world of the old contingency argument was *too* self-sufficient, as if somehow animated by a life of its own.

It is the creation argument, then, on which Ghazâlî must rely for proof of the existence of God. The Qur'anic design arguments, to be sure, give poetic expression to the inference from a divine plan to a divine Mind, and this inference will re-echo in the common mind until it reaches the pitch of certainty. But rigor should not be sought in the *Qur'ân*. Until the design argument is purged of presumptions of or concessions to eternalism it will be of little use in rational theology. The contingency argument too must be restored to explicit recognition of the due subordination of contingent to Necessary. And this will best be done by making a contingency a synonym of creation. Even the old Stoic argument from universal consent must bow to creation, for that consent is reached and felt in man's divinely created primitive nature.[3]

[to be continued]

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[1] *Tahâfut al-Falâsifa*, Bouyges 2nd ed., I, part i, b = ed. Dunya, pp. 90 ff. = *Tahâfut at-Tahâfut*, ed. Bouyges, p. 41.   [2] *Fadâ'ih al-Bâtiniyya*, ed. Badawi, p. 80.
[3] 'Jerusalem Letter', ed. Tibawi, p. 80, l. 23.