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Al-Ghazālī and Jehuda Halevi: Speaking of the Ineffable¹

Beate Ulrike La Sala

1. Introduction

It is usually assumed that Jehuda Halevi's (1075–1141) main philosophical and religious work the *Sefer ha-Kuzari* (*Kitāb al-radd wa-'l-dalīl fī 'l-dīn al-dhalīl (al-Kitāb al-Khazarī)/ The book of refutation and proof on the despised faith*)², is also influenced by the conceptions of Classical Islamic thinkers and Sufi terminology.³ The thinker, considered to have had the greatest influence on Halevi's thinking is Al-Ghazālī (1058–1111). This assumption is based upon the fact that there exist striking similarities between the *Sefer ha-Kuzari* and Al-Ghazālī's famous *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (Incoherence of the philosophers)⁴. Above all, Halevi's presentation of the philosophers is said to rely on Al-Ghazālī's depiction and criticism of the *Falāsifa* in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*.⁵ Both accounts have the refutation of three

¹ An revised version of this article is forthcoming under the title "Al-Ghazālī and Jehuda Halevi: divine attributes, metaphors and possible ways to speak about God" in the following volume: Görges K. Hasselhoff/Knut Martin Stünkel (eds.), *Religious Language in Situations of Contact*, Bochum: Winkler, 2014.

² Ha-Levi, Judah, *Kitāb al-radd wa-'l-dalīl fī 'l-dīn al-dhalīl (al-Kitāb al-Khazarī)/ The book of refutation and proof on the despised faith*, edited by David H. Baneth, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977. Hallevi, Judah, *Sefer ha-Kuzari/Book of Kuzari*. Translated from the Arabic by Hartwig Hirschfeld, New York: Pardes Publishing House, 1946.

³ A lot of research has been done on Halevi's general use of Islamic and even more of Sufi terminology. See Wolfson, Harry Austryn, "Hallevi and Maimonides on Prophecy", in: *The Jewish Quarterly Review New Series*, 32.4, 1942, pp. 345–370. Efros, Israel, "Some aspects of Yehudah Halevi's mysticism", in: *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* Vol. 11, 1941, pp. 27–41. Davidson, Herbert, "The Active Intellect in the Kuzari and Hallevi's Theory of Casuality", in: *Revue des études juives*, Vol. 131, 1972, pp. 351–396. Pines, Shlomo, "Shiite Terms and Conceptions in Judah Halevi's Kuzari", in: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2, 1980, pp. 165–251. Lobel, Diana, *Between Mysticism and Philosophy: Sufi Language of Religious Experience in Judah Ha-Levi's Kuzari*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000. Lobel, Diana, "Ittisal and the Amir Ilahi: Divine Immanence and the World to Come in the Kuzari", in: Benjamin H. Hary and Haggai Ben Shammai (eds.), *Esoteric and Exoteric Aspects in Judeo-Arabic Culture*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, pp. 131–173.

⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *The incoherence of the philosophers/ Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. A parallel English-Arabic text transl., introd., and annotated by Michael E. Marmura, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young Univ. Press, 2000.

⁵ The first to unfold this reliance of Halevi on Al-Ghazālī was David Kaufmann in a similarly named chapter "Jehuda Halevi und Gazzali" in his book on the doctrine of attributes in Jewish philosophy. Kaufmann, David, *Geschichte der Attributenlehre in der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie*, Gotha: Perthes, 1877, pp. 119–140. Baneth tried to argue against this approach and to prove, which parts of Halevi's book are genuine products of his own thought in comparison with Al-Ghazālī. See Baneth, David Hartwig, "Jehuda Hallevi und Gazali", in: *Korrespondenzblatt der Akademie für die Wissenschaft des Judentums* V, Berlin: Epstein, 1924, pp. 27–45. Another critic of Kaufmann's approach was Neumark. See Neumark, David, *Jehuda Hallevi's Philosophy in its Principles*, 1908 (Reappeared as: David Neumark, "Jehuda Hallevi's Philosophy": in S. Cohon, ed. David Neumark, *Essays in Jewish Philosophy*, Cincinnati: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1929; repr. Amsterdam: Philo, 1971; p. 219–300.). For a recent detailed comparison see Kogan, Barry S., "Al-Ghazali and Halevi on Philosophy and the Philosophers", in: John Inglis (ed.), *Medieval Philosophy and the classical tradition in Islam, Judaism and Christianity*, Richmond: Curzon, 2002, pp. 64–80. See Solomon, Norman, *Historical Dictionary of Judaism*, Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2006, p. 153. See also Sinai, Nicolai, *Menschliche*

major philosophical assumptions in common, namely the eternity of the world, God's ignorance of particulars, and the non-existence of reward and punishment. Further common features of both books are the refutation of the theory of emanation and of dualism, the negation of the philosophical doctrine of free will, the refutation of the theory on the revolution of the spheres as well as the defense of the doctrines of individual souls and of the resurrection of the dead and a hereafter.⁶ Furthermore, by comparing Halevi's book with Al-Ghazālī's thinking after his turn towards Sufism one can also discover a similarity in the position both authors take towards prophecy, namely as a genuine way of acquiring knowledge that cannot be obtained by other means.⁷

In the following, I shall attempt to examine if the aforementioned influence can be substantiated, on closer investigation of the conception of divine attributes and the way one can speak about them that both thinkers develop. The question that I will therefore address is whether it can be demonstrated that Halevi's concept is an example of a transfer of knowledge from Arabic Islamic philosophy to Judeo-Arabic philosophy⁸. I also aim to show what parts of Al-Ghazālī's thinking became transformed in this transfer process due to the different religious context. To this end, I shall focus on Al-Ghazālī's *Al-Iqtīṣād fī al-i'tiqād* and compare the depiction of divine attributes in this work to that offered by Halevi in the *Sefer ha-Kuzari*. The initial extended delineation of Al-Ghazālī's account serves as a background for the investigation of Halevi's approach, in order to facilitate the comparison of both. I also opt for the mentioned book of Al-Ghazālī, because it contains a more elaborated version of his conception than his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. The accounts of both authors have to be understood within the wider framework of the Islamic and Jewish history of philosophy, in which the debate about the attributes of God plays an important role. Both authors assert in the course of the argumentation that they explicitly want to take an anti-philosophical, rather, non-philosophical standpoint. This means that they want to argue against the *Falāsifa*, such as Al-Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā. The discussion on divine attributes is an important element in the works of these philosophers. This does not mean, however, that the approaches of Al-Ghazālī or Halevi are bare of philosophical content. However, they take a stand against certain philosophical convictions.

oder göttliche Weisheit? Zum Gegensatz von philosophischem und religiösem Lebensideal bei al-Ghazali und Yehuda ha-Levi, Würzburg: Ergon, 2003.

⁶ See Kaufmann, pp. 128–134.

⁷ Lobel (2000), p. 175ff. Lobel compares Al-Ghazālī's attitude towards prophecy in the *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*The Niche of the Lights*, 1106–7) with Halevi's attitude. Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, edited by Abū l-ʿIlāʿ Afīfī, Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyya, 1383/1964.

⁸ For the term Judeo-Arabic philosophical tradition see Fradkin, Hillel, "Philosophy or exegesis: perennial problems in the study of some Judaeo-Arabic authors", in: Norman Golb (ed.), *Judaeo-Arabic Studies. Proceedings of the Founding Conference of the Society for Judaeo-Arabic Studies*, Amsterdam: Harwood, 1997, pp. 103-122.

The investigation of the discussion of divine attributes in the works of both authors shall not only serve to demonstrate the similarities of both when it comes to their indebtedness towards and their criticism of the Neoplatonic-Aristotelian philosophical tradition. It shall also serve to illustrate their understanding of metaphorical and figurative language. Both authors are confronted with the problem that the language, used in the Holy texts to describe God and his attributes and properties alludes to and induces anthropomorphism. Both Al-Ghazālī and Halevi try in equal measure to develop meaningful interpretations for the expressions at hand. In doing so, they underline the meaning of metaphors and the importance of understanding them appropriately.

2. Al-Ghazālī's theological rationalism

Al-Ghazālī, like other thinkers of classical Islamic philosophy such as Al-Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā, both famously criticized by Al-Ghazālī for their philosophical approach, undertakes a *via negativa* argumentation concerning divine attributes. This argumentation is best illustrated in *Al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād* (usually translated as *Moderation in Belief*)⁹. It is a theological work of Al-Ghazālī in which his relation to *Ash'arite* theology is said to come to the fore.¹⁰ It is one of his major dogmatic works and is addressed to students. The work is already foreshadowed in the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, in which he expressed the intention of writing a work of this nature.¹¹ It may thus be considered as a sequel to this work.¹² It was probably written before he left his academic post in Baghdad around the year 1095 and took a strong turn towards Sufism.¹³ The book is in four main parts, of which the first two, but most of all, the second is of relevance for an understanding of Al-Ghazālī's conception of divine attributes.

Al-Ghazālī begins this book with a four-fold introduction preceded by a statement clarifying his own intentions and project. He praises all authors who are capable of

⁹ For quotations from the Arabic original, I refer to the edition of Atay and Cubkcu. Al-Ghazālī, Abū-Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ibn-Muḥammad, *Al-Iqtisād fī l-i'tiqād*, edited by H. Atay and I. Çubukçu, Ankara: Nur Matbaası, 1962. For the English translation, I rely on the following edition: Ghazzali, Abū-Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ibn-Muḥammad, *Al-Ghazali's moderation in belief: al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād*, translated, with an interpretive essay and notes by Aladdin M. Yaqub, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 2013.

Frank Griffel translates the title *Al-Iqtisād fī l-i'tiqād* with *Balanced Book on What-to-Believe*. See: Griffel, Frank, *Al-Ghazālī's philosophical theology*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009, p. 9.

¹⁰ See Frank, Richard M.: *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1994, p. 4; Marmura, Michael E.: "Al-Ghazālī", in: Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (eds.) *The Cambridge companion to Arabic philosophy*, Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 2004, pp. 137–154, here p.141.

¹¹ Watt, William Montgomery: *Muslim Intellectual. A study of al-Ghazali*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963, p. 140.

¹² See Marmura, Michael E., "Translator's Introduction", in: Al-Ghazālī, *The incoherence of the philosophers/ Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. A parallel English-Arabic text transl., introd., and annotated by Michael E. Marmura, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young Univ. Press, 2000, pp. xv–xxvii, here pp. xxiii–xxv.

¹³ Hourani, George F., "A revised chronology of al-Ghazali's works", in: *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 104, No. 2. (Apr. – Jun., 1984), pp. 289–302. Griffel argues that it might have been drafted already before his stay in Baghdad. See Griffel, p. 35.

reconciling reason and revelation and who, as a result, are neither literalists nor philosophers. The middle way between the two extremes is the deserved “Moderation in Belief”, a rationally justified belief in revelation, as it were. He actually asks for an interpretation of revelation that is guided by reason, saying:

For the one who forsakes the intellect, relying only on the light of the Qur’ān, is like the one who dwells in the sunlight with his eyelids shut, so that there is no difference between him and the blind. Reason together with revelation is light upon light. He who tries to observe one of them specifically with his blind eye is hanging from an illusory rope.¹⁴

Rationalism plays an important role also in the further development of his argumentation in the book.¹⁵ The first introduction contains a clarification of the aim of the book, namely of gaining knowledge about God and truth. In the next introduction, Al-Ghazālī describes four classes of believers and their possible intellectual errors. In the third introduction, he adopts a critical stance towards *kalām*.¹⁶ He describes the exegetical method or science of *kalām* as being an important method, but not as important as canonical law. The fourth introduction consists of a disquisition about logic and reasoning. Al-Ghazālī discusses here the demonstrative methods that underpin his approach, thereby proving to stand in the Neoplatonic-Aristotelian tradition. In the introduction, he reveals a skeptical attitude towards language and terminology in general, which underpins his whole account in the book, and calls for some kind of idealism. This conviction is repeatedly expressed in the following chapters of the book.¹⁷ He claims that a person seeking knowledge and truth will fail to find them if this person only focuses on terms and words instead of taking the ideas behind them into consideration. The terms for the same thing might differ and change over time, but this change does not initiate a change in the ideas.¹⁸ In this introduction, Al-Ghazālī also proves to be a rationalist, who is critical of traditional theological doctrines and methods of investigation and argumentation. He actually criticizes *kalām* by saying that it consists of nothing beyond a method of theoretical reflection consisting of thought and investigation.¹⁹ Thus, theological methods do not reach any further than philosophical methods for Al-Ghazālī. With his criticism, he apparently posits himself here in the camp of philosophical

¹⁴ Yaqub, 4.

¹⁵ For a general discussion of the relation of reason and revelation in the works of Al-Ghazālī and specifically on his rule of interpretation that makes room for a rational interpretation of the revelation, if certain criteria are fulfilled see Griffèl, pp. 111–116.

¹⁶ See also Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash’arite School*, pp. 28–31. For Al-Ghazālī’s criticism of *kalām* in general see Marmura, “Ghazali and Asharism”, p. 91ff.

¹⁷ This might be taken as a sign for the assumption that Al-Ghazālī’s metaphysics is clearly borrowed from Neoplatonism as already Ibn Rushd famously remarked. See Coplestone, Frederick, *Religion and the One : philosophies East and West*, London: Continuum, 2002, p. 101.

¹⁸ Yaqub, 19 and 39.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 18f.

methodology. While developing a hierarchy of gaining knowledge he actually even seems to attribute a higher standing to pure intellect than to revelation. In the first instance, he places them on an equal footing.²⁰ However, he then qualifies this by saying that pure intellect and revelation only lead to truthful insights for people who actually believe in the revelation. In contrast, pure intellect leads to universally accepted insights for all human beings:

Then know that they differ in how widespread their usefulness is. The intellectual and perceptual apprehensions are common to all mankind except those who have no intellect or no sense. The principle that is known through a sense that one lacks has no value for him, such as a principle that is known through the sense of sight when it is presented to a congenitally blind person [...].²¹

With this approach, Al-Ghazālī apparently stands in the tradition of Aristotelian Epistemology, which he re-interprets in a specific way. At least as far as theoretical knowledge is concerned, he places intellectual inquiry and revelation on an equal footing.²²

Before Al-Ghazālī goes on to explicitly state, in the second part of the book, which attributes one might actually ascribe to God, Al-Ghazālī devotes the first part of the book to a preliminary discussion about those things that cannot possibly be said about God. As already noted, his way of argumentation follows a deductive pattern of logical exclusion. By starting from a consideration of the existing world, he arrives at negative statements about God. In the first proposition of his main approach concerning the essence of God, Al-Ghazālī tries to define all terms that are relevant for his argumentation, such as body, substance, and accident. He starts his undertaking by focusing on one of the major philosophical questions of his time concerning the temporality or eternity of the world.²³ He argues that all temporally existent and by that contingent things necessarily must have a first eternal cause that brings them into existence. All bodies are considered as temporal, because they undergo changes like movement and rest, which count as signs of temporality. According to Al-Ghazālī, the same consideration is true for substances. They are also subject to motion or to rest, which are both stages that necessarily annihilate each other. Consequently, substances cannot be eternal and must be considered as temporal beings, because nothing eternal can ever be annihilated.²⁴ According to Al-Ghazālī's argumentation, substances also occupy a place. Nevertheless, they can be conceived of independently of the place. In contrast, an accident always relies on the

²⁰ Ibid, 21.

²¹ Ibid, 22.

²² However, the relation of revelation and reason is quite different when it comes to practical reasoning and human action. In the third part of the *Iqtīṣād*, Al-Ghazālī argues that the rules of action are to be arrived from the revealed law in the first place. Human beings are only allowed to reason when interpreting the revealed law. See Hourani, George F., *Reason and tradition in Islamic ethics*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985, pp. 143–165.

²³ Al-Ghazālī actually states that the philosophers wrongly assume the eternity of the world. Yaquub, 31.

²⁴ Ibid, 32.

existence of a substance and can never be thought of independently of a substance. Furthermore, a substance never has only one accident, but always multiple ones. One difference between bodies and substances is that bodies are subject to sense perception. Since the world consists of bodies, which are subject to motion and rest, it can itself not be eternal, but must be originated.²⁵ This consideration leads him to the claim that God is the first existent cause, a way of reasoning that is already famously undertaken by Al-Fārābī in *Ārā' ahl al-madīnah al-fāḍilah* (The ideal state/the virtuous state).²⁶ In contrast to all things existing due to His existence, He is not to be conceived of as being corporeal or being a substance occupying space or an accident nor as being accessible to sense perception. Thus, the only possible approach towards Him could be by the way of reason.²⁷ This remark is astonishing insofar as one might have expected that Al-Ghazālī would claim that God is at least accessible by reason and revelation in the same way. However, the formulation in this chapter rather hints at a preference for rational investigation.²⁸

In the second proposition, Al-Ghazālī establishes the eternity of God as the first cause of all existent things not by saying that God is devoid of motion and rest, but rather by claiming that His existence was not preceded by anything, and definitely not by nonexistence.²⁹ God's eternity also is nothing that poses an addition to His essence. Otherwise, the eternity would be considered as caused, which is necessarily impossible if God is the first cause. Eternity by definition also entails the everlasting existence of God because eternal existence according to Al-Ghazālī cannot result in nonexistence. The cessation of His existence would necessarily require a cause, which is impossible if He is the first cause. He also cannot be annihilated because annihilation requires a destructive power or an opposite replacing it. The first option is not possible because the existence as a positive thing always succeeds over nonbeing. Therefore, nonbeing can never be a positive active power. The idea of God having an opposite is refuted by Al-Ghazālī by relying again on the difference of temporal and eternal beings. To understand this argument one has to bear in mind that opposite is understood in classical Islamic philosophy as a contradictory opposite. In other words, an opposite always excludes the existence of its contrary. Al-Ghazālī argues that the hypothetical opposite of God either would need to be temporal or eternal. The first is not possible because a temporal thing could not destroy an eternal one. The conception of an

²⁵ Ibid, 37.

²⁶ Al-Fārābī, Abū-Naṣr Muḥammad Ibn-Muḥammad, *al-Farabi on the perfect state: Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī's Mabādi' ārā' ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍilah* a revised text with introd., transl., and commentary by Richard Walzer, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, pp. 57–60.

²⁷ Yaqub, 28.

²⁸ For the fact that Al-Ghazālī clearly reserves a realm which is knowable for reason without the assistance of revelation see: Shehadi, Fadlou, *Ghazali's unique unknowable God. A philosophical critical analysis of some of the problems raised by Ghazali's view of God as utterly unique and unknowable*, Leiden: Brill, 1964, p. 56.

²⁹ Yaqub, 41.

eternal opposite is also impossible because, according to Al-Ghazālī, it would be absurd to assume the eternal co-existence of two opposites of which one still has not annihilated the other until now.

He also takes this argument as a proof for the assumption that God is neither a substance nor an accident because, according to Al-Ghazālī, both can be annihilated. Thus, it cannot be said about Him that He is a substance occupying a place because this would be a sign of temporality, which is excluded by having established God's eternity. Al-Ghazālī at this point also does not fail to address the possible claim that many thinkers call God a substance. His solution is again to take recourse to the linguistic argument. He argues that the term 'substance' might very well be used as long as the term itself is understood as a symbol or metaphor. It should simply not be understood in a literal sense. Even if somebody uses it in this way, this person might simply be considered as having "lied about linguistic practice"³⁰, as Al-Ghazālī puts it. Furthermore, he argues that the question as to whether the term 'substance' can be used for God with reference to the revelation is one that should be decided upon by jurists. He further observes that the jurists should take into consideration whether the revealed text explicitly allows or forbids the usage of this term. According to his conviction, it does neither and therefore its usage should not be forbidden because it does not instill false ideas about God, even though this might be subject to different opinions. Precisely these differences make legal prohibitions on this behalf dubitable.³¹ Here, Al-Ghazālī very clearly diminishes the realm of legal theological argumentation and makes room for free intellectual intercourse about the essence of God. Again, he proves to be skeptical of language in general – be it the mere linguistic side of it or be it the language of the revelation. It is expressly "reason"³² which prevails over language and revelation. He defines the task of reason as not to deliver judgments concerning terms, letters or sounds, but to focus on ideas by saying: "If one calls Him body and does not intend this meaning, he might run into a difficulty with respect to the language or the law, but not with respect to reason; for reason does not decree about the use of terms and the concatenation of letters and sounds, which are conventions."³³ Al-Ghazālī goes on in his argumentation to claim in the fifth proposition that God cannot be conceived of as a body because he is not a substance. A body is defined as being composed of minimally two substances. Since he is not a substance, he can consequently also not be a body. This leads to the further conclusion that God cannot be conceived of in terms of quantity, because corporeality is connected with quantity. For the very same reason God cannot be an accident since an accident, according to Al-Ghazālī, is defined as something

³⁰ Ibid, 46. Atay, p. 38. "كذب على اللسان"

³¹ Yaqub, 46.

³² Atay, p. 39. "العقل"

³³ Yaqub, 47.

requiring an essence to subsist in, namely a body. Refuting the idea of accidents does not explicitly entail for him the refutation of God having attributes, provided that the term ‘attribute’ is differentiated from the term ‘accident’. Attributes, according to him, do not require bodies or, rather, an essence to subsist in.³⁴ For Al-Ghazālī, the claim that God is not a body also entails the idea that he is devoid of any aspect of dimension. This means for him that God can be talked of neither as having any kind of dimension nor as being at a certain place or side in reference to any other body. Al-Ghazālī mentions “above, below, front, back, right, and left”³⁵ as the possible sides that one could think of. It is rather evident what kind of argument or expression he is aiming at here and he explicitly names it in the further development of his argumentation, namely considering God as being above or on top. Al-Ghazālī’s counterargument is that all of these terms apply within the realm of the created world consisting of temporal bodies only and thus do not apply to God. Furthermore, this thought would place God in some kind of relation to the world and would try to specify Him, which amounts to the idea that God is caused. This is impossible because He is the first cause.³⁶ In the context of this discussion, Al-Ghazālī also tries to address the problem that believers are required to face certain directions while performing the ritual prayer. According to his explanation, this merely serves the submissiveness of the praying person and has in fact nothing to do with God himself. Nevertheless, the true self-humiliation towards God and reverence for Him has to take place in the heart of the believer. Both the actions of the body and the thoughts in the intellect only assist the direction of the heart towards God. Describing God as being elevated is nothing more than a useful metaphor for assisting human beings in their belief. Nevertheless, it is a very powerful and meaningful tool devised by religion. Thus, metaphorical language is in Al-Ghazālī’s account of great importance for the believers.

Like other classical Islamic authors, who seek to give a rational interpretation of the Holy texts, Al-Ghazālī, has to deal with the problem that the Holy texts use expressions to describe God that can only be rationalized with difficulty because they are too anthropomorphic, and contradict an intellectual conception of God. However, if Al-Ghazālī claims to accept the revelation, he has to account for such expressions and give a meaningful explanation for them. One solution to this problem is his aforementioned skepticism of language and terminology. Another strategy is to limit the interpretation of metaphorical expressions to a circle of properly equipped intellectuals. According to Al-Ghazālī’s explanation, all attributes used in the Holy texts alluding to anthropomorphism are simply metaphors that serve the fragmented understanding of average human beings. However, they do not include any true statement about the nature of God. Intellectuals seeking rational

³⁴ Ibid, 48.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid, 49f.

insight into the divine truth are expected to leave such thoughts aside, as Al-Ghazālī formulates very clearly: “The expression is borrowed metaphorically for that purpose. The one who has intellectual wholeness and linguistic discernment is not overwhelmed by these matters. Rather, he understands their meanings by relying on his intuition.”³⁷ Thus, the truth behind the metaphors is intelligible for the intellectual only, and only he is capable of interpreting them properly. This correlates with statements that Al-Ghazālī also makes in later works, for example, in *Iljām al-'awāmm 'an 'ilm al-kalām* (Warding off the Masses from the Sciences of Theology/Restraining the Ordinary People from the Sciences of Theology) or in *Fayṣal al-tafrīqa bayna al-Islām wa-l-zandaqa* (The Criterion of Distinction between Islam and Clandestine Unbelief), where he focuses on this question. There, he formulates that only intellectuals or well-trained scholars are capable of interpreting the anthropomorphisms of the Holy texts as metaphors and thus of understanding their true meaning.³⁸ What is interesting about this remark in the *Iqtisād* is the fact that intuition builds the basis of the understanding of the intellectual.³⁹

Al-Ghazālī’s example of the interpretation of the expression that ‘God is seated upon a throne’ further illustrates this aforementioned idea. Al-Ghazālī feels the need to elaborate that the fact that God is not corporeal necessarily also includes the idea that He does not reside upon a throne. This discussion is also interesting because he explicitly states here the attributes one could actually mention while speaking about God. In this context, he offers the notion that one should differentiate between common and ‘learned persons’. As regards the former, allegorical interpretations devoid of misleading anthropomorphisms should be given because these people, according to Al-Ghazālī, neither have the intellectual capacity to conceive intelligibles nor do they even understand the proper meaning of different words in the Arabic language.⁴⁰ Thus, their failure is twofold: linguistic and intellectual. According to Al-Ghazālī, ‘learned persons’, on the other hand, should be capable of differentiating between the literal and metaphorical meaning of certain expressions used in Qur’ān or Hadīth to describe God. Thus, the intellectuals should be able to discover the intelligibles. Al-Ghazālī makes this clear by discussing other anthropomorphic expressions, which talk of God as having fingers or a hand, as running and descending, or as having a desire, for example. None of these expressions conveys anything about God’s attributes. They are only metaphorical means to serve the understanding of humans who are not purely intellectual. As for the

³⁷ Ibid, 58. "بديهة" is the term Al-Ghazālī uses in this instance for intuition. Atay, 55.

³⁸ See Griffel, pp. 267-268. For a similar valuation see also Campanini, Massimo, “Al-Ghazzālī”, in: Seyyed H. Nasr and Oliver Leaman (ed.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 1996 (= Routledge History of Philosophies, 1), pp. 258–274.

³⁹ Intuition as a form of acquiring knowledge about the Divine becomes more important in Al-Ghazālī’s later works.

⁴⁰ Yaqub, 56.

expression referring to God as being seated upon a throne, Al-Ghazālī claims that only three metaphoric explanations are possible, namely knowledge, will, and power. The notion of knowledge and will would be incompatible with the meaning of the word. The only possible interpretation, therefore, is that it is a metaphor for divine power, at least for those with the appropriate philological training in Arabic as Al-Ghazālī claims.⁴¹ Thus, it becomes evident that both philological and philosophical education are important requisites in Al-Ghazālī's opinion for the ability to gain knowledge about God through the interpretation of the figurative language of the Holy texts.

In the ninth proposition, Al-Ghazālī focuses on the metaphorical visibility of God. According to him, the visibility refers neither to the divine acts nor to the divine attributes. Nevertheless, it must be assumed because anything with an existing essence has to be potentially visible by definition.⁴² Al-Ghazālī defines visibility here as the possibility of being cognized. He argues that God, his essence, and attributes can very well be the object of human knowledge and therefore cognizable. Knowledge itself is a form of perception that ranks higher than imagination and, according to Al-Ghazālī, one can also call it "vision"⁴³ if it is marked by clarity and perfection.⁴⁴ Al-Ghazālī brings very clearly religious thinking and Aristotelian epistemology together here. Interestingly enough, according to this account, one can gain knowledge about God and this knowledge ranks higher than imagination. Nevertheless, it can be represented in large part only by the means of figurative language. Al-Ghazālī's discussion in the tenth proposition focuses on the oneness of God. He claims that being one is something superadded to the essence of God, but not one of His attributes.⁴⁵ Oneness signifies the impossibility of speaking about Him in terms of quantity, perimeter, or extension and therefore also in terms of divisibility, because divisibility assumes quantity according to Al-Ghazālī. Furthermore, oneness includes the impossibility of attributing something that equals or complements God.

3. Al-Ghazālī's theory of divine attributes

The second part of *Al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād* is devoted to the detailed discussion of the singular divine attributes one may actually ascribe to God. One can find the underlying doctrine for Al-Ghazālī's notion of divine attributes in *Ash'arite* theology. The *Ash'arite* thinkers considered life, knowledge, will, power, speech, hearing, and seeing to be additional

⁴¹ Ibid, 59.

⁴² Ibid, 63.

⁴³ Ibid, 68. Atay, p. 68 "رؤية".

⁴⁴ As an additional argument, Al-Ghazālī claims that revelation substantiates this understanding, taking Moses as an example. Yaqub, 70.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 73.

(zā'ida) attributes to God's existence, which all exist eternally.⁴⁶ In the first part of the book, Al-Ghazālī had already expressed the idea that the attributes are co-eternal with His existence, by saying that “[...] the Exalted is eternal in His attributes [...]”⁴⁷. In his discussion, Al-Ghazālī focuses on the aforementioned ones as superadded attributes as much as on God's essence, existence, unity and eternity. This non-identity with essence was supposed to support the notion that the world is not eternal, but created, which Al-Ghazālī developed against the philosophical schools.⁴⁸ He starts the discussion by claiming:

We claim that God is knower, powerful, living, willer, hearer, seer, and sayer. These are seven attributes. A consideration of them branches into theoretical reflections on two matters. One of them concerns what is specific to each attribute. The second concerns what is common to all the attributes.⁴⁹

However, Al-Ghazālī does not start his further elaboration of the mentioned attributes with an explication of knowledge but of power. The attribute of power constitutes for Al-Ghazālī the basis of the other six attributes. Consequently, he devotes a much longer discussion to it than to the others and develops an argument that he had already started in the first proposition of the first book. There, he had already discussed God's infinite power to bestow existence upon beings as a divine attribute.⁵⁰ Al-Ghazālī argues that any masterly work has to proceed from a powerful agent. Since the world has to be considered as a masterpiece because it proves to be perfect and well-arranged, one has to assume that it necessarily was brought about by a powerful agent. This bringing into existence cannot, according to Al-Ghazālī, be assumed to take place by God's eternal essence, since anything enacted by the eternal essence would necessarily need to be eternal itself. However, as Al-Ghazālī had already proven previously, one cannot assume the eternity of the world. Thus, the world has to be enacted by an attribute superadded to his essence, namely power. The divine power ranges over everything possible, namely all contingent things: which are substances, accidents, their movements and alike. In contrast, impossibilities do not underlie God's power.

Al-Ghazālī's argumentation on this point has some similarities with considerations about possibility, impossibility and necessity that Ibn Sīnā undertook in his major metaphysical work, the *Ilāhiyyāt*⁵¹. He focuses on these concepts especially in Book I, 4-7 of this work, starting from the assumption that all three condition each other circularly. The necessary brings the possible into existence “because the necessary points to the assuredness

⁴⁶ Marmura, “Al-Ghazali”, p.141.

⁴⁷ Yaqub, 60.

⁴⁸ Marmura, “Al-Ghazali”, p.141f.

⁴⁹ Yaqub, 79.

⁵⁰ Yaqub, 39.

⁵¹ Avicenna, *The metaphysics of The healing/al-Shifā': al-Ilāhiyyāt*. A parallel English-Arabic text translated, introduced, and annotated by Michael E. Marmura, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young Univ. Press, 2005.

of existence”⁵². Here he seems to have unfolded a double concept of possibility.⁵³ For Ibn Sīnā, God as the only necessary being has imagined all possible things during the creation and they become real in the world. Thus, there is a concept of possibility, which is opposed by reality. However, there also exist impossible things. Impossible are all those things that cannot be thought without contradiction, neither by God Himself nor by human beings. This is to say that possibility is opposed, on the other hand, by impossibility. God did not actually necessitate everything to come into existence that one can possibly think of. Thus, there remain three categories of things: the absolute necessary, namely God, the possible things that he necessitates, and the possible things that are not necessitated by him.⁵⁴ For Al-Ghazālī alike, the number of possible beings is infinite, while the number of actual ones is not. A wrong understanding of the ever-enduring divine creative power and of the differences between possible and real objects represents for him again a problem of wrong terminology. It is again the mistake of investigating terms instead of underlying ideas.⁵⁵

Al-Ghazālī clarifies the aforementioned further by defining the term impossibility. According to this definition, impossible are all conditioned things if their condition is missing. Thus, one could not speak of God causing impossible things. One of Al-Ghazālī’s examples is that even God cannot occupy a place with something as long as it is occupied with something else; the prior evacuation of the place constitutes the condition for occupying it with something else.⁵⁶ This ultimately means that God does not act contrary to the perfect, rational order underlying the world, which is a product of his attribute of power. Al-Ghazālī’s explanations on this point can also be understood as contemplation on the relation between the possible and the contingent reality. One may think about all possible things without contradictions, but this is not to say that those are necessarily real. Al-Ghazālī reserves the causative agent power, which he describes here, to God. It has to be differentiated from the power that human beings and to a certain degree also animals, are bestowed with.⁵⁷ Human power and its very objects are contingent possible things, which are caused by God and as

⁵² Ibid, S. 28. "لأن الواجب يدل على تأكيد الوجود", Ibid. Davidson translates the term "تأكيد الوجود" as “certainty of existence”. See Davidson, Herbert Alan, *Proofs for eternity, creation, and the existence of God in medieval Islamic and Jewish philosophy*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987, p. 293.

⁵³ See Schmidt-Biggemann, Wilhelm, „Grund und Urgrund. Zur Metaphysik des Möglichen“, in: Julian Nida-Rümelin and Elif Özmen (ed.), *Welt der Gründe*, Hamburg: Meiner, 2012, pp. 183–200, here pp. 187–188.

⁵⁴ Acar, Rahim, *Talking about God and talking about creation. Avicenna’s and Thomas Aquinas’ positions*, Leiden: Brill, 2005, p. 88.

⁵⁵ Al-Ghazālī writes: “This mistake occurs for someone who looks at the meanings of expressions [...]”. Yaqub, 39.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 101.

⁵⁷ For the question of agent power in Al-Ghazālī see Druart, Thérèse-Anne, “Al-Ghazali’s Conception of the Agent in the *Tahafut* and the *Iqtisad*: Are People Really Agents?” in: *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. by James E. Montgomery (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta), Leuven: Peeters, 2006, pp. 425–40. See also Marmura, Michael E., “Ghazali’s Chapter on Divine Power in the *Iqtisād*”, in: *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, Volume 4, Issue 02, September 1994, pp. 279–315.

such are products of divine power. Their power is only acquired from God. Only he genuinely creates and causes with His power.

Divine knowledge is the second attribute that Al-Ghazālī discusses. This discussion does not focus so much on the question of why one could consider knowledge as a divine attribute but rather on the contents of this knowledge. He argues that divine knowledge includes all possible objects of knowledge, existent and non-existent ones. The existent things include the eternal things, namely God's essence and His attributes, and the contingent things.⁵⁸ The latter ones He knows by necessity, because they are a product of His power. Since this means that He knows things other than Himself, He must necessarily also know His own essence and attributes. While the existent possible might be finite, the non-existent possible is not. Therefore, Al-Ghazālī concludes that God also knows the infinite.

Life is the third divine attribute to which Al-Ghazālī devotes his attention. This discussion is very short and just revisits the arguments formulated earlier on. One could consider this a sign for the fact that it was not a matter of debate between the *Falāsifa* and the *Ash'arites* as Al-Ghazālī indicates himself by saying: "No one who accepts that He is a knower and powerful denies this"⁵⁹. Al-Ghazālī defines living as consisting in self-consciousness and knowledge of the self and other. Since this knowledge is already established, God has to be living.

Al-Ghazālī's discussion of will as the fourth attribute is based on the assumption that God's enacting of things is always connected to minimally two different possibilities. It is of great importance for his discussion, because he uses it to argue again against the eternity of the world. Since it cannot be assumed that two opposite things exist concurrently, one has to assume the existence of something that prevails or decides between the options. According to Al-Ghazālī, this prevailing factor can be neither God's essence nor the attributes of power or knowledge. The relation between these and two possible things is always the same. God always has the same power to enact opposites and always knows them in equal measure. The enacting will has by necessity to be an attribute different from God's essence. Would it be part of his essence the enacted world would be eternal. Since this cannot be the case, God's enacting will has with necessity to be a superadded attribute. This will is in itself "eternal and attaches to the occurrents at specific times".⁶⁰ Al-Ghazālī concludes from the above that every contingent thing has to be considered as an object of God's will. This would also include evil and sins. This explanation also answers the question about the relation between possibility and reality, which was already raised in the context of the attribute of power. It is God's will

⁵⁸ This idea was already famously promoted by Ibn Sīnā. For a closer discussion of Al-Ghazālī's reliance on Ibn Sīnā concerning the divine attributes of power, knowledge and will see Frank, Richard M., *Creation and the cosmic system: Al-Ghazālī & Avicenna*, Heidelberg: Winter, 1992, pp. 77–82.

⁵⁹ Yaquub 105.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 109.

that brings into reality the possible things that he knows and has power over. This is one area where Ibn Sīnā and Al-Ghazālī differ significantly, although in general they have much in common on the question of possibility and impossibility. Unlike Ibn Sīnā, Al-Ghazālī emphasizes the role of God's will. Thus, the world is not merely a consequence of God's knowledge, but a result of His will.⁶¹ However, at the end of the third treatise of the *Iqtīṣād*, Al-Ghazālī lays out that even God in His free will has to comply with the constraints of logical possibility. Given the fact, that God wills certain things during the process of creation, this makes other things impossible, even if they might have been possible in an absolute sense.

Against what Al-Ghazālī himself has declared in the introduction of his book, namely that only an argument based on reason is universally applicable, he refers to the revealed text to substantiate his claim for the divine attributes of seeing and hearing. Seeing as much as hearing seem in his account to be separate attributes, but underlie the attribute of knowledge. He claims himself that they are “[...] a form of completion for knowledge and the imagination”⁶². Objections to his argumentation according to his own conviction are “not raised by a believer”⁶³. This ultimately means that belief and theoretical reflection are necessary for one to be convinced of these attributes. Thus, the impression arises that Al-Ghazālī argues for seeing and hearing as attributes because the theological convention requires him to do so. He neither openly wants to contradict the revealed text nor to accept the conclusion of a depiction without these features, namely of an impersonal, philosophical God. Nevertheless, the argumentation is not very persuasive and lacks detail.

Al-Ghazālī explains the attribute of speech in a similar way, relying on traditional theological argumentation. He claims that the tradition of Messengers requires that there be a conceivable message to be transmitted. Nevertheless, he restricts the assumption of God having the attribute of speech by saying that speech can consist either of sound and letters or of inner speech. While all is true for human beings, in the case of God, one can only think of inner speech. Since this inner speech is common to God and humans alike, messengers can conceive and transmit it. It contains nothing more than the capacity to intellectually combine terms and form concepts and thus is a form of knowledge. However, Al-Ghazālī very clearly opts here for a metaphorical interpretation of divine speech.

Al-Ghazālī does not fail to address the question of why it is not permissible to ascribe attributes other than seeing, hearing and speaking to God if all other creatures have more than these attributes. His claim is that such an argument would simply allude to

⁶¹ See Griffel, p. 234. For a discussion of this problem in Al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* see Kukkonen, Taneli, “Possible Worlds in the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. Al-Ghazālī on Creation and Contingency”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38.4, 2000, pp. 479–502.

⁶² Ibid, p. 112.

⁶³ Ibid.

anthropomorphism.⁶⁴ Why this is not true for the other three is a question to which Al-Ghazālī gives no answer. However, if one takes Al-Ghazālī's own declaration seriously that reason prevails over revelation, one gets the impression, that he does not wholeheartedly defend the last three attributes as actual separate attributes. They rather merely seem to function as a further metaphorical description of the attribute of knowledge. Thus, the list of attributes that Al-Ghazālī fully substantiates would include only power, knowledge, life, and will. The addition of the other three attributes looks like an attempt to reconcile the implications of a Neoplatonic-Aristotelian theology with monotheistic thinking.

Al-Ghazālī's discussion ends with a section on common properties of the attributes. This is an interesting passage, particularly with regard to Halevi because it contains arguments that also appear in his account. According to Al-Ghazālī, the seven divine attributes have four common properties. The first property contains the idea that the attributes are superadded to God's essence and are not part of His essence. From his presentation, this claim is mainly directed against the *Mu'tazila* and the *Falāsifa*. Al-Ghazālī's explanation of the second property comprises the concept that all attributes necessarily subsist in God's essence. Eternity presents the third common property of the divine attributes. According to Al-Ghazālī, they necessarily must be eternal because one cannot consider them as contingent and therefore as only possibly existing. Instead, one has to assume that they are necessary because, by definition, a necessary essence cannot have possible attributes. There exist no other eternal attributes. In the discussion of the fourth property of the divine attributes, Al-Ghazālī focuses on the question of the categorization of the divine names. Names of God that might seem to be attributes themselves are only derivations and exist sempiternally, which is to say that they endure forever. Al-Ghazālī differentiates between four categories of divine names according to their derivation. Only the first category points directly to His essence.⁶⁵ The second category consists of names pointing to the essence while entailing a negative addition.⁶⁶ According to Al-Ghazālī, calling God 'eternal', 'one' and 'self-sufficient' would belong in this category. Eternal contains two negations. On the one hand, the term stands for an existence that was not preceded by non-existence. On the other hand, it entails the notion that God is the first existence. The term 'one' excludes the notion that God has any partner or plurality. All names pointing to God's existence plus one of the seven attributes constitute the third category for Al-Ghazālī.⁶⁷ This includes derivations of all seven attributes like "the Living" and "the Powerful". Further examples are "the Commander" and "the Forbidder"⁶⁸.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 113.

⁶⁵ Atay, p. 157 "لا يدل إلا على ذاته".

⁶⁶ Atay, p. 157 "ما يدل على الذات مع زيادة سلب".

⁶⁷ Atay, p. 158 "ما يدل على الوجود، وصفة زائدة إليه من صفات المعنى".

⁶⁸ Yaqub, 154. Atay, p. 158 "كالأمر والنهي".

The fourth category entails all names referring to God's existence in relation to a divine act⁶⁹. "the Bountiful", "the Exalter" or "the Debaser"⁷⁰ are some of Al-Ghazālī's examples for this category. These categories and their contents will be evident in the approach of Halevi as well.

The human inability to speak properly about God, His essence, and His attributes seems in Al-Ghazālī's account mainly to be a problem of the shortcomings, if not to say the deficiency of human language and terminology as well as of the intellectual incapacity of most human beings to understand the metaphorical language of the Holy texts. As such, one can seek insight into God and gain knowledge about Him with the help of reason and revelation if one is a properly trained intellectual. This training must apparently comprise philological as well as philosophical elements. However, it is ultimately intuition that leads to insights about the Divine. Over and beyond that, the way to speak properly about God is limited and may only be possible with the help of metaphors.

4. Jehuda Halevi's understanding of divine attributes

Jehuda Halevi's account in the *Sefer ha-Kuzari* (1140) does not encompass one long description of divine attributes and, in contrast with Al-Ghazālī, is not a very systematic approach. This might be because the whole book is in its very conception intended to be a non-philosophical account. It consists in an imaginary dialog between a king, who searches for absolute truth, and a representative of a philosophical position as well as one representative of each monotheistic religion. Following an elaborated discussion with all representatives, in which the greatest part is assigned to the Rabbi, the king reaches the conclusion that Judaism is the best way of arriving at the utmost truth. While unfolding his argumentation Halevi addresses the major philosophical and theological questions of his time. His line of argumentation makes clear that he aims at proving that only the acceptance of revelation leads to the discovery of truth. One might take this as a sign that Halevi remains more skeptical of philosophical methods than Al-Ghazālī. His attempt does not consist in a reconciliation of philosophical reasoning and Holy texts. Thus, for him there would be no need to search for a "moderation in belief". However, this is not to say that he advocates a completely non-rational concept of religion, since he explicitly lets the Rabbi already say in Part I of the *Sefer ha-Kuzari*: "Heaven forbid that I should assume what is against sense and

⁶⁹ Atay, p. 158 "ما يدل على الوجود مع اضافة الى فعل من افعاله".

⁷⁰ Yaqub, 154. Atay, p. 158 "كالجواد (...) والمعز والمذل".

reason.”⁷¹ Furthermore, in his presentation of the Christian faith at the beginning of Part I one of Halevi’s major criticisms focuses on the irrationality of this belief, which for him comes to the fore in the concept of the trinity. From this, one might conclude that Halevi is convinced that a meaningful religion is in itself rational. Even more, the revelation as such is the utmost expression of rationality. However, he proves to be much more skeptical of philosophical and scientific methods of his day than Al-Ghazālī. He calls demonstration “the mother of heresy and destructive ideas”⁷² and asserts that revelation is more reliable than philosophical thinking by saying: “[...] a prophet’s eye is more penetrating than speculation”⁷³. Furthermore, in Part II of the *Kuzari* in a longer discussion about the determination of the datum line he criticizes astrological methods and reaches the conclusion that all scientific undertakings that divert from revelation and take refuge in speculation are fallible.⁷⁴ Thus, no meaningful thinking outside of the framework of the revelation seems possible for Halevi.

There are certain remarks about qualities attributed to God in different sections of the *Kuzari*. Only one short section at the beginning of Part II explicitly focuses on the question of attributes.⁷⁵ This section is not connected with the previous and following argumentation of the book. It appears more like an insertion.⁷⁶ Halevi takes the opposite approach to Al-Ghazālī. He does not begin by clarifying his premises but by specifying the attributes that are usually ascribed to God. It is only during the further development of the text that one indirectly learns what the fundamental premises for his statements are. Halevi also does not give a detailed description of the individual attributes. Nevertheless, one can find in his approach the same topics and questions expressed as in Al-Ghazālī’s text: God’s power, knowledge, life, will, seeing, hearing, speech, essence, existence, unity, and eternity as much as cause. We shall also see that the categories of attributes that Halevi develops are similar to Al-Ghazālī’s categories of divine names. Thus, the related terminology may be a clear sign of a transfer from Al-Ghazālī’s to Halevi’s account.

Halevi starts his argumentation in Part II with the very question with which Al-Ghazālī had ended his account, namely a discussion about the names of God. He proves to be very much aware of the fact that a rational interpretation of the expressions used in the Bible

⁷¹ All references to the *Kuzari* are by book and paragraph. Hallevi, *Book of Kuzari* I, 89. For quotations from the Judeo-Arabic original text, I refer to the edition of David Baneth. Ha-Levi, Judah, *Kitāb al-radd wa-’l-dalīl fī ’l-dīn al-dhalīl (al-Kitāb al-Khazarī)/ The book of refutation and proof on the despised faith*, edited by David H. Baneth, Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1977.

⁷² Hallevi, *Book of Kuzari*, IV, 3.

⁷³ Ibid, IV, 3.

⁷⁴ Halevi formulates: “Do not quote against me those recent astronomers, the thieves of science, though their theft was unintentional. They found, however, their science in a precarious condition, since the eye of prophecy was stricken with blindness; so they had recourse to speculation, and composed books on the strength of it. In contradistinction to the Torah, they considered China as the original home of the calculation of the days.” Ibid, II, 20.

⁷⁵ Compare Ibid, II, 1–7.

⁷⁶ See also Silman, Yochanan, *Philosopher and prophet: Judah Halevi, the Kuzari, and the evolution of his thought*, Albany, NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995, p. 120.

to describe God is more than problematic. He goes even further than that.⁷⁷ From the very beginning, he makes it clear that a discussion of divine attributes poses a challenge in itself, because it alludes to anthropomorphism. According to him, it cannot be fully justified either from a rational or from a juridical standpoint. Halevi writes:

The first of these questions referred to the names and attributes ascribed to God and their anthropomorphic forms, which are unmistakably objectionable alike both to reason and to law.⁷⁸

Thus, although Halevi claims to rely completely on revelation, he feels the need to account for anthropomorphic expressions and opts for a rational interpretation of divine attributes.

Halevi claims that all but one divine name are predicates and attributive descriptions that human beings ascribe to God because of the way in which they feel affected by him. Only the Tetragrammaton constitutes an exception to this. One cannot truly speak of God as being compassionate or merciful. Such properties are qualities of the human soul only, which is subject to change. In contrast, God is by necessity unchangeable. Therefore, one cannot speak of Him as having such properties. Thus, the human language is misleading here.

According to Halevi, one can divide all attributes ascribed to God into three different categories. Apart from these three explicitly mentioned categories, there is an additional category. This category includes the Tetragrammaton and its meaning. However, Halevi claims to postpone its further description to a later point of the argument and he actually focuses on it in Part IV. The first category he discusses consists in the attributes of action. Halevi calls them “creative”⁷⁹ attributes. This category includes all attributes deduced from divine acts that affect human beings by way of a natural medium. His examples include “‘making poor and rich, exalting or casting down’, ‘merciful and compassionate’”.⁸⁰ These examples are strongly reminiscent of those that Al-Ghazālī had used for the similarly defined category of divine names. However, Halevi emphasizes in his name for this category the effect God’s actions have on human beings, and Al-Ghazālī emphasizes the divine act as such.⁸¹ Nevertheless, both authors have this category and its depiction in common. Therefore, they may indeed be a clear sign of a transfer from Al-Ghazālī’s to Halevi’s account. This

⁷⁷ Halevi has a separate section in Part IV of the book, in which he extensively discusses the divine names. The difference between both passages seems to be that he relies in the second one entirely on the statement of the revealed text and does not argue on the basis of a philosophical method as he does in Part II. See also Schwartz, Dov, *Central problems of medieval Jewish philosophy*, Leiden: Brill, 2005, p. 175.

⁷⁸ Hallevi, *Book of Kuzari* II, 1. Halevi uses here as well as at other instances of the text the Arabic term for law, namely אֱלִישֵׁרִיעָה. Baneth, p. 42 and 43.

⁷⁹ “Creative” is the translation offered by Hirschfeld. Hallevi, *Book of Kuzari*, II, 2. The term Halevi actually uses at this instance is “תַּאֲחִירִיה”, Baneth, p. 43. The term *ta’iṭirī* might be best translated as influence or effect.

⁸⁰ Hallevi, *Book of Kuzari*, II, 2. Baneth, p. 43. Halevi uses at this instance Hebrew words as examples in the Judeo-Arabic text, namely “מְרִישׁ וּמַעֲשִׂיר מִשְׁפִּיל אֶף מְרוֹמִם”, because he directly refers to the biblical descriptions of God. This makes it impossible to compare the terminology of Halevi and Al-Ghazālī directly for this example.

⁸¹ What Halevi calls *ta’iṭir*, Al-Ghazālī had called *fi’l*. However, both terms can denote effect.

possibility is substantiated by a further comparison of the other attributes mentioned by both Halevi and Al-Ghazālī.

Halevi calls the second category “relative”⁸² attributes. These entail all attributes that are based on the way in which God is adored by human beings. He gives the example of expressions like ‘blessed’, ‘praised’, or ‘holy’. In the context of his second discussion of divine names in Part IV of the book, Halevi expresses a similar conviction. Here he says, “Holy expresses the notion that He is high above any attribute of created beings, although many of these are applied to him metaphorically”.⁸³ Thus, also according to Halevi’s account, one has to conceive of certain expressions in the Holy texts as a metaphor. This becomes even more evident upon further investigation of his concept of attributes.

The negative⁸⁴ attributes form the third category according to Halevi and he devotes a longer discussion to them. He has this category in common with Al-Ghazālī – terminologically and in terms of the content. This may be evidence of the transfer of a concept from Al-Ghazālī to Halevi. The very name Halevi uses here indicates the line of argumentation that is used to substantiate these kinds of attributes. They are used to disprove their opposites. According to him, attributes like ‘living’, ‘only’, ‘first’, and ‘last’ belong in this category. These attributes cannot be used for God in the usual sense in which they are used in a worldly context. Halevi’s first example in this context is the attribute of ‘life’. Arguing in an Aristotelian way, he claims that in the world one cannot think of life devoid of sensibility and movement. However, these are both qualities that do not apply to God because He is no body and sensibility and movement only apply to bodies. Nevertheless, one cannot conceive of God as being dead. Thus, He has to be attributed with life. For Halevi, the same is true for the concepts of light and darkness. Moreover, it is with this very example that Halevi underlines that the concept of figurative or metaphorical speech plays an important role for his negative theology. Halevi writes:

Just as a stone is too low to be brought into connexion with learning or ignorance, thus the essence of God is too exalted to have anything to do with life or death, nor can the terms light or darkness be applied to it. If we were asked whether his essence is light or darkness, we should say light by way of metaphor, for fear one might conclude that that which is not light must be darkness.⁸⁵

One cannot attribute God with light because only matter is subject to light and darkness and God is not matter. However, since it would be misleading to call Him darkness, one has to

⁸² “Relative” is the translation offered by Hirschfeld. Halevi, *Book of Kuzari*, II, 2. The term Halevi actually uses at this instance is “אצאפיה”, Baneth, p. 43. The term ‘*azifa*’ might be best translated as ‘approach’ or ‘come near’.

⁸³ Halevi, *Book of Kuzari*, IV, 3.

⁸⁴ The term Halevi uses at this instance is “מלביה”, Baneth, p. 43. The term *salbī* stands for “negative”.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 2.

attribute Him with light. Halevi proceeds by devolving the argumentation to the attribute of oneness or unity. To him unity would usually include the notion of complexity and divisibility, which is by no means true for God. Nevertheless, one has to use the term ‘one’ for Him in order to avoid the notion of plurality.⁸⁶ Halevi argues that one can call God in a similar manner ‘first’ and ‘last’, in order to exclude from Him the ideas of having an origin or an end. He makes it clear that one cannot confuse the mentioned attributes with God’s essence by saying: “All these attributes neither touch on the divine essence, nor do they lead us to assume a multiplicity”.⁸⁷ Whether this means that they are attributes superadded to the essence or rather not real attributes remains an open question. However, from the rest of Halevi’s argumentation one might infer that all are not actual attributes but rather properties, to use the terminology of Al-Ghazālī.

According to Halevi, the Tetragrammaton and the names connected with it form a separate category. They describe the divine power to create. The creation itself takes place due to God’s will and intention. Thus, will is also one of God’s attributes and Halevi emphasizes that he considers it to be an attribute in contrast to the conviction of the philosophers.⁸⁸ For him as much as for Al-Ghazālī, this attribute grants that the world is created.⁸⁹ In turn, the inherent order of the existing world proves the existence of the divine will. Furthermore, the divine will ensured that Israel could hear the divine speech and wrote the tablets. Halevi does not clearly differentiate between divine will and order, because he says, “You can call it will or order or whatever you wish.”⁹⁰ Halevi’s practice here of reducing the difference to a mere linguistic problem is reminiscent of Al-Ghazālī’s skepticism of terminology. This emphasis on the attribute of the will may be evidence of the transfer of a concept from Al-Ghazālī to Halevi. However, this concept undergoes a substantial change when Halevi combines it and the attribute of power with the Jewish idea of the ineffable name of the Tetragrammaton. Al-Ghazālī equally described the will and power as important attributes next to the other five divine attributes. Even if one were to leave aside the three attributes of seeing, hearing, and speaking as being dependent upon the attribute of knowledge, Al-Ghazālī does not single out power and will among the remaining attributes of power, knowledge, life, and the will. In Halevi’s account, the attribute of the will and power

⁸⁶ Sinai argues that Halevi adopts here an *Ash’arite* conception. However, Sinai does not mention at this point if it is therefore also a similarity between Al-Ghazālī and Halevi, because Sinai’s focus is the comparison of Halevi’s work with Al-Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. See Sinai (2003), 77.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, II, 2.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, II, 5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, II, 6.

⁹⁰ The Judeo-Arabic original for the phrase is: „פסמה אראדה או אמרה או כיה שית“. Baneth, p. 46. Howard Kreisel offers the above quoted translation of the concerned passage. It underlines that the expression *’amr* stands in Arabic for “order”. See Kreisel, Howard, *Prophecy: The History of an Idea in Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001, p. 138. For the theological problems that Halevi’s theory of the *’amr ilāhī* poses see Sinai (2003), 88-90.

receive a special status since they are connected with the Tetragrammaton, which has the status of an actual divine attribute and not that of a predicate or an attributive description. Thus, the will and power seem to become the most important attributes in Halevi's account. Halevi thus also differentiates himself more clearly from the *Falāsifa* than Al-Ghazālī.⁹¹

Halevi's argumentation does not stop at this point. He proceeds by focusing on the question of God as intellect. He argues that God is called 'wise' in the same way that human beings ascribe other attributes to him. However, although God is the essence of intelligence and himself intellect, intellect or wisdom is not an attribute. From this, one is to conclude that, for Halevi, intellect or knowledge are part of God's essence. Nevertheless, he fails to elaborate on this point any further. However, the assumption of God as intellect and the simultaneous negation of divine attributes might be considered as typical for medieval Jewish rationalist thought.⁹² From a remark in Part V, one can gain further insight as to how Halevi envisioned the relation of divine knowledge and divine will. While explicitly putting himself in line with the *Mutakallimūn*, Halevi says:

The Mutakallims considered this matter in detail, with the result that the divine knowledge of the potential is but casual, that the knowledge of a thing is neither the cause of its coming into existence, nor of its disappearance therefore. There is, withal, a possibility of existence and non-existence. For the knowledge of events to come is not the cause of their existence, just as is the case with the knowledge of things which have been.⁹³

Halevi may only explicitly mention the *Mutakallimūn* here. However, one can find in this a deliberation that is similar to that of Al-Ghazālī. It is not God's knowledge of two possible things that decides which of them comes to existence. Thus, God's will decides what is created in the cause of all creation.⁹⁴

Halevi also describes the divine attributes of seeing, hearing, speaking and writing.⁹⁵ According to his depiction, they owe their formulation to the way in which God has a bearing on human beings. Halevi does not explicitly mention, whether this therefore means that they would belong to the category of creative attributes. However, judging from his former description, one could subsume them under this category. This would mean that they are not connected with His essence and they are therefore no actual attributes. This is borne out by

⁹¹ One might even ask here if the fact that Halevi associates the will with the Tetragrammaton can be taken as a sign that those who have access to this divine name, namely "His people" (*Book of Kuzari*, II, 8), also have access to His will. Nevertheless, this claim is only implied in Halevi's text.

⁹² Schwartz (2005), p. 177.

⁹³ Halevi, *Book of Kuzari* V, 20.

⁹⁴ Compare also the following remark: "An instance of the first kind is found in the synthetic arrangement visible in animals, plants and spheres, objects which no intelligent observer would trace back to accident, but to a creative and wise will, which gives everything its place and portion." *Ibid*, V, 20.

⁹⁵ It might be interesting to note that also the Caraites considered those as divine attributes. Kaufmann, p. 150.

the fact that Halevi actually gives a rather metaphorical explanation for them. He claims that God is considered to see and hear, because nothing escapes his attention. One might infer from this that seeing and hearing constitute a part of God's knowledge. Furthermore, according to Halevi, God is considered to speak and write because He forms the writing in the tablets and makes sure that a sound arises in the air, which rings out the Ten Commandments. The sound as well as the writing result from God's will. Again, as with the attributes of seeing and hearing, one might infer that speaking and writing are not separate attributes, but rather products of His will. Halevi does not explicitly say this, but his argumentation leads to this conclusion. Again, as in the case of Al-Ghazālī, one gets the impression that Halevi makes an effort to defend seeing, hearing, speaking, and writing as divine attributes because the theological tradition requires him to do so. These very attributes underline the idea of a personal God, who created the world by His will. Only such a God would correspond to the prayers of believers. If a theory of attributes remains without these, a purely philosophical concept of God is developed. Islamic as well as Jewish doctrines require a personal God, who acts and intervenes for His followers in the history of humankind as well as on the individual level. Halevi as much as Al-Ghazālī appears to promote this conception since both ascribe the mentioned attributes to God and deviate from a merely philosophical conception. Nevertheless, in the end Halevi also opts for a metaphorical reading and by that appears to subsume them under the conceptions of knowledge and will. With this, both his account and that of Al-Ghazālī have much in common with a philosophical theory of attributes as promoted by Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. Thus, one might consider them as transferred knowledge.

In a remark in Part III of the book about the blessings one receives when reciting the two major Jewish prayers, the Shmah and the Amidah, one can find another short indication of Halevi's conception of divine attributes.⁹⁶ According to his description, the recitation assists one in knowing the true promise of divine influence in one's life. He claims that the second blessing of the Amidah alludes to the eternal divine sovereignty over the world. However, then goes on to say that this eternal rule is different from a philosophical concept of eternity. If one considers other philosophical debates from the same period, it is clear that he wants to argue against the eternity of the world. Nevertheless, the way in which Halevi conceptualizes eternity remains unclear. However, it has to be said that the whole philosophical debate about the eternity or creation of the world is already more or less led ad absurdum by Halevi in Part I of the book.⁹⁷ There his main claim is that even if one would want to assume the existence of eternal matter, one would nevertheless need to admit that the

⁹⁶ Halevi, *Book of Kuzari* III, 17.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, I, 67.

currently existing world was created at some point in time. Thus, there is no rational proof for it and the whole debate about it is ultimately pointless. In addition, in the third blessing of the Amidah, Halevi discovers an allusion to attributes. He formulates: “‘Thou art holy’, a blessing which inculcates belief in the attribute of sublimity and holiness commented upon by philosophers”.⁹⁸ This seems to correspond with Halevi’s depiction of relative attributes given in Part II. There he had defined that they describe the way in which human beings adore God. One may infer from this that, for Halevi, recalling divine attributes during prayer serves the process of gaining true insight in God.

From Halevi’s argumentation, one can infer that, for him, God explicitly has the attributes of power and will. Furthermore, one can speak of God’s intellect and knowledge. However, knowledge is not an attribute but seemingly part of His essence, although Halevi never explicitly says this. Moreover, it is clear that, as far as God is concerned, one can speak of eternity, whereas the world is not eternal. Eternity as such is not an attribute in itself. Whether God’s attributes are co-eternal with His existence is a question that Halevi does not address. Furthermore, Halevi does not elaborate in what way one could talk about eternity in relation to God. One might get the impression that the process of thinking about divine attributes might lead to some knowledge about God. However, if one takes a closer look at Halevi’s discussion of the Tetragrammaton in Part IV, it becomes evident that only revelation and not rational contemplation leads to an insight of God’s being. Halevi argues that God revealed Himself with this name to His people, giving only them access to its meaning. He admits that rational considerations lead to certain insights about God, but real insight is reserved to prophetic revelation. Halevi writes:

Philosophers compared the world to a great man, and man to a small world. If this be so, God being the spirit, soul, intellect and life of the world – as He is called: the eternally Living, then rational comparison is plausible. Nay, a prophet’s eye is more penetrating than speculation. His sight reaches up to the heavenly host direct, he sees the dwellers in heaven, and the spiritual beings which are near God, and others in human form.⁹⁹

Thus, all rational attempts to understand God are in the end fruitless, if one compares them with the insights that revelation offers.¹⁰⁰ However, the language of the revelation can also only be understood as a metaphor and ought to be interpreted appropriately.

⁹⁸ Ibid, III, 17.

⁹⁹ Ibid, IV, 3.

¹⁰⁰ Amira Eran has explained that this proceeding of Halevi constitutes the separation of a theory about intellectual prophecy (*ḥads*), which Halevi probably took over from Ibn Sīnā via the works of Al-Ghazālī. In the theories of the latter intellectual prophecy consists of two phases: of forming a syllogism and of inspiration. The two phases lead to genuine knowledge about God. Eran argues that Halevi appears to leave behind syllogism as part of human reasoning and only focuses on divine inspiration. Compare Eran, Amira, “Intuition and Inspiration

Some authors claim that Halevi uses some philosophical methods and convictions while refuting others because this serves his main aim to show that the philosophical approach as such is self-contradictory¹⁰¹ and therefore useless.¹⁰² However, this seems to be a very one-dimensional evaluation of his approach.¹⁰³ For sure, Halevi wants to argue against the philosophical speculation concerning God.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, he obviously wants to confirm something positive about God and His attributes in the end. To do so he does not rely on philosophical speculation but on Scripture. Religious experience ranks higher than speculative knowledge and only prophets have insight into God's being.¹⁰⁵ In other words, for Halevi it does not seem possible to comprehend God by means of philosophical methods. One can rather gain further insight in Him with the assistance of revelation.

5. Conclusion

The expressions used in the Holy texts to describe God pose a problem – for Al-Ghazālī as much as for Halevi. For both of them, human language is inappropriate to describe the divine, and related expressions at best serve as metaphors. Thus, not the realm of language provides true knowledge but rather some form of intuitive or prophetic vision. Nevertheless, language remains the realm to speak about God. An in-depth comparison of both accounts demonstrates that both occasionally consider the very same expressions to be critical and these similarities in terminology and content can be taken as a strong indication of a transfer of knowledge from one author to the other. However, Halevi proves not to be as critical of language and terminology as Al-Ghazālī. Also, the solutions both authors offer for this problem are sometimes very similar. Both try to develop categories to classify the numerous divine names and their metaphorical meaning. Only few things can possibly be said about God or reach to his essence. Al-Ghazālī and Halevi have at least, two, if not three of four categories of divine

– The Causes of Jewish Thinker's Objection to Avicenna's Intellectual Prophecy (Ḥads)", *Jewish Studies Quarterly* (14.1), 2007, pp. 39–71, here pp. 41–49.

¹⁰¹ Halevi, *Book of Kuzari* I, 13.

¹⁰² The main representatives to whom this is addressed would be Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. See Schwartz (2005), p. 177.

¹⁰³ Julius Guttman had argued that Halevi had rather wanted to integrate two different conceptions of God into his approach but had remained undecided in the end. For a similar position see also Howard Kreisel, "Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*: Between the God of Abraham and the God of Aristotle", in: R. Munk and E. J. Hoogewoud (ed.), *Joodse Filosofie tussen Rede en Traditie*, Kok-Kampen, 1993, pp. 24–34. Also Diana Lobel argues similarly. See Lobel, Diana, "'Taste and See that the Lord is Good': Ha-Levi's God Re-Visited", in: Jay M. Harris (ed.), *Be'erot Yitzhak: Studies in Memory of Isadore Twersky*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2005, pp. 161–178.

¹⁰⁴ Langermann has argued that Halevi is willing to accept the value of a philosophical approach in general as long as it is not applied to gain knowledge about God. See Langermann, Y. Tzvi, "Science and the *Kuzari*", *Science in Context* 10, 1997, pp. 495–522.

¹⁰⁵ Tanenbaum, Adena, *The Contemplative Soul: Hebrew Poetry and Philosophical Theory in Medieval Spain*, Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002, p. 177–178.

names in common. However, the order of the listing of these categories is different. Both have the category of attributes of actions and both consider these not to be real attributes, but only ascribed ones. They classify similar attributes in this category – thus, they make use of the same examples. One can consider Halevi’s example of God as being attributed with “‘making poor and rich, exalting or casting down’, ‘merciful and compassionate’” as corresponding directly with Al-Ghazālī’s “‘the Exalter’” or “‘the Debaser’”. The same is true for the category of negative attributes that both authors have in common as well. Both subsume oneness or unity under this category. Furthermore, both assign the idea that God is called the ‘first’ or ‘last’ or ‘eternal’ to this category. In addition, one can also note that both authors talk about a category of divine names that point to God’s essence. In Al-Ghazālī’s case, this is category one; in Halevi’s account, it is category four, which is constituted by the Tetragrammaton.

Another important feature that both accounts have in common is the ascription of the attribute of will to God. Both authors make use of this attribute in order to argue against the traditional philosophical assumption of the eternity of the world. Al-Ghazālī explains the eternity of God as an existence with no pre-existence, while the divine attributes are considered to be superadded and co-eternal with God’s existence. Halevi says nothing concrete concerning this question of divine eternity. Furthermore, Halevi ascribes as much as Al-Ghazālī the attribute of power to God. As far as the question of divine intellect and life is concerned, one can notice a difference in the argumentation of both authors. For Al-Ghazālī, life is a divine attribute. Halevi wants rather to subsume it under the category of what he calls ‘negative attributes’. Furthermore, knowledge constitutes for Al-Ghazālī a full attribute. Halevi ascribes intellect to God. However, it remains unclear as what he would consider it, namely as part of God’s essence or an attribute. The approaches of both authors also have in common that they mention seeing, hearing, and speaking as divine attributes. Both rely only on the revealed text to substantiate this claim. Halevi adds to this list the attribute of writing because it is obviously important to him to account for the conviction that God wrote the tablets. However, Halevi also appears to be the one who subsumes these attributes under divine knowledge and will the more strongly.

Furthermore, both authors promote a metaphorical reading of the Holy texts. The terminology of the revealed text is considered to be potentially misleading, if the words are taken literally. Thus, in the first instance religious language and expressions appear to be a hindrance to truthful insights into the Divine because they delude. Only upon proper interpretation can the text be seen to speak to the believer. However, for both authors there is also a positive side to the metaphorical language when it comes to prayer, for example. Here the metaphors, if understood rightly, serve as a tool that assists human beings in reaching closer to God. Unlike Al-Ghazālī, Halevi does not explain whether there are educational pre-

requisites to understanding the metaphors and what these pre-requisites would actually be. Thus, one might in conclusion claim that Halevi's argumentation on divine attributes has much in common with that of Al-Ghazālī. This is not to say that Al-Ghazālī was the only intellectual who influenced Halevi's thinking concerning the doctrine of divine attributes.¹⁰⁶ However, his works seem to have been one important source of inspiration for Halevi's account. Furthermore, given the context of Judaism, Al-Ghazālī's ideas are turned into a genuine concept in its own right. One can therefore speak of a transfer of knowledge here. Due to the different religious context, the original concepts were transformed in this transfer process. This is most obvious when one considers Halevi's conceptual link of divine will and divine power with the Tetragrammaton.

¹⁰⁶ One might also consider the works of Saadia Gaon as a possible influence. Kreisel points out that Saadia's discussion of divine power, life and knowledge in his *Emunot ve-Deot* (*Kitāb ul- 'amānāt wal-i 'tiqādāt*/ The Book of Beliefs and Opinions, 933) has certain similarities with Halevi's account. Kreisel also mentions that Halevi's conception is similar to other Islamic and Jewish discussions of divine attributes without explicitly stating them. See Kreisel (2001), p. 114.

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