

Averroës

The Book Of The DECISIVE TREATISE Determining The Connection Between The Law And Wisdom

Translated by Charles E. Butterworth

*In the name of God, the Merciful and the Compassionate.
May God be prayed to for Muhammad and his family,
and may they be accorded peace.*

[I. Introduction]

(1) The jurist, imam, judge, and uniquely learned Abu al-Walid Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Rushd (may God be pleased with him) said: Praise be to God with all praises, and a prayer for Muhammad, His chosen servant and messenger. Now, the goal of this statement is for us to investigate, from the perspective of Law-based¹ reflection, whether reflection upon philosophy and the sciences of logic is permitted, prohibited, or commanded — and this as a recommendation or as an obligation — by the Law.

[II. That philosophy and logic are obligatory]

[A. That philosophy is obligatory]

(2) So we say: If the activity of philosophy is nothing more than reflection upon existing things and consideration of them insofar as they are an indication of the Artisan — I mean insofar as they are artifacts, for existing things indicate the Artisan only through cognizance² of the art in them, and the more complete cognizance of the art in them is, the more complete is cognizance of the Artisan — and if the Law has recommended and urged consideration of existing things, then it is evident that what this name indicates is either obligatory or recommended by the Law.

That the Law calls for consideration of existing things by means of the intellect and for pursuing cognizance of them by means of it is evident from various | verses in the Book of God (may He be blessed and exalted).³ There is His statement (may He be exalted), "Consider, you who have sight" [59:2]; this is a text for the obligation of using both intellectual and Law-based syllogistic reasoning.⁴ And there is His statement (may He be exalted), "Have they not

reflected upon the kingdoms of the heavens and the earth and what things God has created?" [7:185]; this is a text urging reflection upon all existing things. And God (may He be exalted) has made it known that one of those whom He selected and venerated by means of this knowledge was Abraham (peace upon him); thus, He (may He be exalted) said, "And in this way we made Abraham see the kingdoms of the heavens and the earth, that he might be ..." [and so on to the end of] the verse [6:75].⁵ And He (may He be exalted) said, "Do they not reflect upon the camels, how they have been created, and upon the heaven, how it has been raised up?" [88:17]. And He said, "And they ponder the creation of the heavens and the earth" [3:191] — and so on, in innumerable other verses.

[B. The case for syllogistic reasoning]

(3) Since it has been determined that the Law makes it obligatory to reflect upon existing things by means of the intellect, and to consider them; and consideration is nothing more than inferring and drawing out the unknown from the known; and this is syllogistic reasoning or by means of syllogistic reasoning, therefore, it is obligatory that we go about reflecting upon the existing things by means of intellectual syllogistic reasoning. And it is evident that this manner of reflection the Law calls for and urges is the most complete kind of reflection by means of the most complete kind of syllogistic reasoning and is the one called "demonstration."

(4) Since the Law has urged cognizance of God (may He be exalted) and of all of the things existing through Him by means of demonstration; and it is preferable — or even necessary — that anyone who wants to know God (may He be blessed and exalted) and all of the existing things by means of demonstration set out first to know the kinds of demonstrations, their conditions, and in what [way] demonstrative syllogistic reasoning differs from dialectical, rhetorical, and sophistical syllogistic reasoning; and that is not possible unless, prior to that, he sets out to become cognizant of what unqualified syllogistic reasoning is, how many kinds of it there are, and which of them is syllogistic reasoning and which not; and that is not possible either unless, prior to that, he sets out to become cognizant of the parts of which syllogistic reasoning is composed — I mean, the premises and their kinds — therefore, the one who has faith⁶ in the Law and follows its command to reflect upon existing things perhaps comes under the obligation to set out, before reflecting, to become cognizant of these things whose status | with respect to reflection is that of tools to work.

For just as the jurist infers from the command to obtain juridical understanding of the statutes the obligation to become cognizant of the kinds of juridical syllogistic reasoning and which of them is syllogistic reasoning and which not, so, too, is it obligatory for the one cognizant [of God] to infer from the command to reflect upon the beings the obligation to become cognizant of intellectual syllogistic reasoning and its kinds. Nay, it is even more fitting that he do so; for if the jurist infers from His statement (may He be exalted), "Consider, you who have sight" [59:2], the obligation to become cognizant of juridical syllogistic reasoning, then how much more fitting is it that the one cognizant of God infer from that the obligation to become cognizant of intellectual syllogistic reasoning.

It is not for someone to say, "Now, this kind of reflection about intellectual syllogistic reasoning is a heretical innovation, since it did not exist in the earliest days [of Islam]." For reflection upon juridical syllogistic reasoning and its kinds is also something inferred after the earliest days, yet it is not opined to be a heretical innovation. So it is obligatory to believe the same about reflection upon intellectual syllogistic reasoning — and for this there is a reason, but this is not the place to mention it. Moreover, most of the adherents to this religion support intellectual syllogistic reasoning, except for a small group of strict literalists, and they are refuted by the texts [of the Quran].

(5) Since it has been determined that the Law makes reflection upon intellectual syllogistic reasoning and its kinds obligatory, just as it makes reflection upon juridical syllogistic reasoning obligatory, therefore, it is evident that, if someone prior to us has not set out to investigate intellectual syllogistic reasoning and its kinds, it is obligatory for us to begin to investigate it and for the one who comes after to rely upon the one who preceded,⁷ so that cognizance of it might be perfected. For it is difficult or impossible for one person to grasp all that he needs of this by himself and from the beginning, just as it is difficult for one person to infer all he needs to be cognizant of concerning the kinds of juridical syllogistic reasoning. Nay, this is even more the case with being cognizant of intellectual syllogistic reasoning.

(6) If someone other than us has already investigated that, it is evidently obligatory for us to rely on what the one who has preceded us says about what we are pursuing, regardless of whether that other person shares our religion or not. For when a valid sacrifice is performed by means of a tool, | no consideration is given, with respect to the validity of the sacrifice, as to whether the tool belongs to someone who shares in our religion or not, so long as it fulfills the conditions for validity. And by "not sharing [in our religion]," I

mean those Ancients who reflected upon these things before the religion of Islam.

(7) Since this is the case — and all that is needed with respect to reflection about the matter of intellectual syllogistic reasonings has been investigated by the Ancients in the most complete manner — therefore, we ought perhaps to seize their books in our hands and reflect upon what they have said about that. And if it is all correct, we will accept it from them; whereas, if there is anything not correct in it, we will alert [people] to it.

(8) Since we have finished with this type of reflection and have acquired the tools by which we are able to consider existing things and the indication of artfulness in them — for one who is not cognizant of the artfulness is not cognizant of what has been artfully made, and one who is not cognizant of what has been artfully made is not cognizant of the Artisan — therefore, it is perhaps obligatory that we start investigating existing things according to the order and manner we have gained from the art of becoming cognizant about demonstrative syllogisms. It is evident, moreover, that this goal is completed for us with respect to existing things only when they are investigated successively by one person after another and when, in doing so, the one coming after makes use of the one having preceded — along the lines of what occurs in the mathematical sciences.

For if we were to assume the art of geometry and, likewise, the art of astronomy to be nonexistent in this time of ours, and if a single man wished to discern on his own the sizes of the heavenly bodies, their shapes, and their distances from one another, that would not be possible for him — for example, to become cognizant of the size of the sun with respect to the earth and of other things about the sizes of the planets — not even if he were by nature the most intelligent person, unless it were by means of revelation or something resembling revelation. Indeed, if it were said to him that the sun is about 150 or 160 times greater than the earth, he would count this statement as madness on the part of the one who makes it.⁸ And this is something for which a demonstration has been brought forth in astronomy and which no one adept in that science doubts.

There is hardly any need to use an example from the art of mathematics, for reflection upon this art | of the roots of jurisprudence, and jurisprudence itself, has been perfected only over a long period of time. If someone today wished to grasp on his own all of the proofs inferred by those in the legal schools who reflect upon the controversial questions debated⁹ in most Islamic countries,

even excepting the Maghrib,¹⁰ he would deserve to be laughed at, because that would be impossible for him — in addition to having already been done. This is a self-evident matter, not only with respect to the scientific arts, but also with respect to the practical ones. For there is not an art among them that a single person can bring about on his own. So how can this be done with the art of arts — namely, wisdom?¹¹

(9) Since this is so, if we find that our predecessors in former nations have reflected upon existing things and considered them according to what is required by the conditions of demonstration, it is perhaps obligatory for us to reflect upon what they say about that and upon what they establish in their books. Thus, we will accept, rejoice in, and thank them for whatever agrees with the truth; and we will alert to, warn against, and excuse them for whatever does not agree with the truth.

(10) From this it has become evident that reflection upon the books of the Ancients is obligatory according to the Law, for their aim and intention in their books is the very intention to which the Law urges us. And [it has become evident] that whoever forbids reflection upon them by anyone suited to reflect upon them — namely, anyone who unites two qualities, the first being innate intelligence and the second Law-based justice and moral virtue — surely bars people from the door through which the Law calls them to cognizance of God — namely, the door of reflection leading to true cognizance of Him. That is extreme ignorance and estrangement from God (may He be exalted).

If someone goes astray in reflection and stumbles — due either to a deficiency in his innate disposition, poor ordering of his reflection, being overwhelmed by his passions, not finding a teacher to guide him to an understanding of what is in them, or because of a combination of all or more than one of these reasons — it does not follow that they¹² are to be forbidden to the one | who is suited to reflect upon them. For this manner of harm coming about due to them is something that attaches to them by accident, not by essence. It is not obligatory to renounce something useful in its nature and essence because of something harmful existing in it by accident. That is why he [that is, the Prophet] (peace upon him) said to the one who complained about having been ordered to give his brother honey to drink for his diarrhea — because the diarrhea increased when he was given the honey to drink — "God spoke the truth, whereas your brother's stomach lied."¹³

Indeed, we say that anyone who prevents someone suited to reflect upon the books of wisdom from doing so on the grounds that it is supposed some

vicious people became perplexed due to reflecting upon them is like one who prevents thirsty people from drinking cool, fresh water until they die of thirst because some people choked on it and died. For dying by choking on water is an accidental matter, whereas [dying] by thirst is an essential, necessary matter. And what occurred through this art is something accidental, [occurring] through the rest of the arts. To how many jurists has jurisprudence been a cause of diminished devoutness and immersion in this world! Indeed, we find most jurists to be like this, yet what their art requires in essence is practical virtue.

Therefore, it is not strange that there occurs, with respect to the art requiring scientific virtue, what occurs with respect to the art requiring practical virtue.

[III. That demonstration accords with the Law]

[A. The Law calls to humans by three methods]

(11) Since all of this has been determined and we, the Muslim community, believe that this divine Law of ours is true and is the one alerting to and calling for this happiness — which is cognizance of God (Mighty and Magnificent) and of His creation — therefore, that is determined for every Muslim in accordance with the method of assent his temperament and nature require.

That is because people's natures vary in excellence with respect to assent. Thus, some assent by means of demonstration; some assent by means of dialectical statements in the same way the one adhering to demonstration assents by means of demonstration, there being nothing greater in their natures; and some assent by means of rhetorical statements, just as the one adhering to demonstration assents by means of demonstrative statements.

That is because, when this divine Law of ours | called to people by means of these three methods, assent to it was extended to every human being — except to the one who denies it obstinately in speech or for whom no methods have been determined in it for summoning to God (may He be exalted) due to his own neglect of that. Therefore, he [that is, the Prophet] (peace upon him) was selected to be sent to "the red and the black"¹⁴ — I mean, because of his Law containing [different] methods of calling to God (may He be exalted). And that is manifest in His statement, "Call to the path of your Lord by wisdom, fine preaching, and arguing with them by means of what is finest" [16:125].

[B. Demonstration does not differ from the Law]

(12) Since this Law is true and calls to the reflection leading to cognizance of the truth, we, the Muslim community, know firmly that demonstrative reflection does not lead to differing with what is set down in the Law. For truth does not oppose truth; rather, it agrees with and bears witness to it.

(13) Since this is so, if demonstrative reflection leads to any manner of cognizance about any existing thing, that existing thing cannot escape either being passed over in silence in the Law or being made cognizable in it. If it is passed over in silence, there is no contradiction here; it has the status of the statutes passed over in silence that the jurist infers by means of Law-based syllogistic reasoning. If the Law does pronounce about it, the apparent sense of the pronouncement cannot escape either being in agreement with what demonstration leads to, or being different from it. If it is in agreement, there is no argument here. And, if it is different, that is where an interpretation is pursued. The meaning of interpretation is: drawing out the figurative significance of an utterance from its true significance¹⁵ without violating the custom of the Arabic language with respect to figurative speech in doing so — such as calling a thing by what resembles it, its cause, its consequence, what compares to it, or another of the things enumerated in making the sorts of figurative discourse cognizable.

(14) Since the jurist does this with respect to many of the Law-based statutes, how much more fitting is it for the one adhering to demonstrative science to do so. The jurist has only a syllogism based on supposition, whereas the one who is cognizant has a syllogism based on certainty. And we firmly affirm that, whenever demonstration leads to something differing from the apparent sense of the Law, | that apparent sense admits of interpretation according to the rule of interpretation in Arabic.

No Muslim doubts this proposition, nor is any faithful person suspicious of it. Its certainty has been greatly increased for anyone who has pursued this idea, tested it, and has as an intention this reconciling of what is intellected with what is transmitted. Indeed, we say that whenever the apparent sense of a pronouncement about something in the

Law differs from what demonstration leads to, if the Law is considered and all of its parts scrutinized, there will invariably be found in the utterances of the Law something whose apparent sense bears witness, or comes close to bearing witness, to that interpretation.

Because of this idea, Muslims have formed a consensus¹⁶ that it is not obligatory for all the utterances of the Law to be taken in their apparent sense, nor for all of them to be drawn out from their apparent sense by means of interpretation, though they disagree about which ones are to be interpreted and which not interpreted. The Ash^carites,¹⁷ for example, interpret the verse about God's directing Himself [2:29] and the Tradition about His descent,¹⁸ whereas the Hanbalites¹⁹ take them in their apparent sense.

The reason an apparent and an inner sense are set down in the Law is the difference in people's innate dispositions and the variance in their innate capacities for assent. The reason contradictory apparent senses are set down in it is to alert "those well grounded in science" to the interpretation that reconciles them. This idea is pointed to in His statement (may He be exalted), "He it is who has sent down to you the Book; in it, there are fixed verses ..." on to His statement, "and those well grounded in science" [3:7].²⁰

(15) If someone were to say: "Muslims have formed a consensus that in the Law are things to be taken in their apparent sense and things to be interpreted, and there are things about which they disagree. So, is it permissible for demonstration to lead to interpreting what they have formed a consensus to take in its apparent sense, or to taking in its apparent sense what they have formed a consensus to interpret?" we would say: "If the consensus were established by a method of certainty, it would not be valid [to do so]; but if the consensus about them were suppositional, then it would be valid [to do so]." That is why Abu Hamid [al-Ghazali], Abu al-Ma^cali,²¹ and others from among the leading thinkers²² said that unbelief is to be affirmed of no one for going against consensus by interpreting things like these.

What may indicate to you that consensus is not to be determined with certainty about theoretical matters,²³ as it is possible for it to be determined about practical matters, is that it is not possible | for consensus to be determined about a particular question at a particular epoch unless: that epoch is delimited by us; all the learned men existing in that epoch are known to us, I mean, known as individuals and in their total number; the doctrine of each one of them on the question is transmitted to us by means of an uninterrupted transmission;²⁴ and, in addition to all this, it has been certified to us that the learned men existing at that time agreed that there is not an apparent and an inner sense to the Law, that it is obligatory that knowledge of every question be concealed from no one, and that there is only one method for people to know the Law.

It has been transmitted that many in the earliest days [of Islam] used to be of the opinion that the Law has both an apparent and an inner sense and that it is not obligatory for someone to know about the inner sense if he is not an adept in knowledge of it nor capable of understanding it. There is, for example, what al-Bukhari relates about ‘Ali ibn Abu Talib (may God be pleased with him), saying, "Speak to the people concerning what they are cognizant of. Do you want God and His messenger to be accused of lying?"²⁵ And there is, for example, what is related of that about a group of the early followers [of Islam]. So how is it possible to conceive of consensus about a single theoretical question being transmitted to us when we firmly know that no single epoch has escaped having learned men who are of the opinion that there are things in the Law not all of the people ought to know in their true sense? That differs from what occurs with practical matters, for everybody is of the opinion that they are to be disclosed to all people alike; and, for consensus about them to be reached, we deem it sufficient that the question be widely diffused and that no difference [of opinion] about it be transmitted to us.

Now, this is sufficient for reaching consensus about practical matters; but the case with scientific matters is different.

[C. Whether the philosophers are guilty of unbelief]

(16) If you were to say: "If it is not obligatory to charge with unbelief one who goes against consensus with respect to interpretation, since consensus with respect to that is not conceivable, what do you say about the philosophers among the adherents of Islam like Abu Nasr [al-Farabi] and Ibn Sina [Avicenna]? For in his book known as *The Incoherence [of the Philosophers]*, Abu Hamid [al-Ghazali] has firmly charged both of them as unbelievers with respect to three questions: the argument about the eternity of the world, that the Exalted does not know particulars — may He be exalted above that — and | the interpretation of what is set forth about the resurrection of bodies and the way things are in the next life,"²⁶ we would say: "The apparent sense of what he says about that is that he does not firmly charge them with unbelief about that, for he has declared in the book *The Distinction* that charging someone with unbelief for going against consensus is tentative."²⁷ And it has become evident from our argument that it is not possible for consensus to be determined with respect to questions like these because of what is related about many of the first followers [of Islam], as well as others, holding that there are interpretations that it is not obligatory to expound except to those adept in interpretation."

These are "those well grounded in science" — for we choose to place the stop after His statement (may He be exalted), "and those well grounded in science" [3:7].²⁸ Now, if those adept in science did not know the interpretation, there would be nothing superior in their assent obliging them to a faith in Him not found among those not adept in science. Yet God has already described them as those who have faith in Him, and this refers only to faith coming about from demonstration. And it comes about only along with the science of interpretation.

Those faithful not adept in science are people whose faith in them²⁹ is not based on demonstration. So, if this faith by which God has described the learned is particular to them, then it is obligatory that it come about by means of demonstration. And if it is by means of demonstration, then it comes about only along with the science of interpretation. For God (may He be exalted) has already announced that there is an interpretation of them that is the truth, and demonstration is only of the truth. Since that is the case, it is not possible for an exhaustive consensus to be determined with respect to the interpretations by which God particularly characterized the learned. This is self-evident to anyone who is fair-minded.

(17) In addition to all of this, we are of the opinion that Abu Hamid [al-Ghazali] was mistaken about the Peripatetic sages when he accused them of saying that He (Holy and Exalted) does not know particulars at all. Rather, they are of the opinion that He knows them (may He be exalted) by means of a knowledge that is not of the same kind as our knowledge of them. That is because our knowledge of them is an effect of what is known, so that it is generated when the known thing is generated and changes when it changes. And the knowledge God (glorious is He) has of existence is the opposite of this: it is the cause of the thing known, which is the existing thing.

So, whoever likens | the two kinds of knowledge to one another sets down two opposite essences and their particular characteristics as being one, and that is the extreme of ignorance. If the name "knowledge" is said of knowledge that is generated and of knowledge that is eternal, it is said purely as a name that is shared, just as many names are said of opposite things — for example, *al-jalal*, said of great and small, and *al-sarim*, said of light and darkness.³⁰ Thus, there is no definition embracing both kinds of knowledge, as the dialectical theologians of our time fancy.

Prompted by one of our friends, we have devoted a statement to this question.³¹ How is it to be fancied that the Peripatetics would say that He (glorious is He)

does not know particulars with eternal knowledge, when they are of the opinion that true dream-visions contain premonitions of particular things that are to be generated in the future and that this premonitional knowledge reaches human beings in sleep due to the everlasting knowledge governing the whole and having mastery over it? Moreover, it is not only particulars that they are of the opinion He does not know in the way we know them, but universals as well. For, the uni-versals known to us are also effects of the nature of the existing thing, whereas, with that knowledge [of His], it is the reverse. Therefore, that knowledge [of His] has been demonstrated to transcend description as "universal" or "particular." So there is no reason for disagreement about this question — I mean, about charging them with unbelief or not charging them with unbelief.

(18) As for the question whether the world is eternal or has been generated, the disagreement between the Ash^oarite dialectical theologians and the ancient sages almost comes back, in my view, to a disagreement about naming, especially with respect to some of the Ancients. That is because they agree that there are three sorts of existing things: two extremes and one intermediate between the extremes. And they agree about naming the two extremes but disagree about the intermediate.

One extreme is an existent thing that exists from something other than itself and by something — I mean, by an agent cause³² and from matter. And time precedes it — I mean, its existence. This is the case of bodies whose coming into being is apprehended | by sense perception— for example, the coming into being of water, air, earth, animals, plants, and so forth. The Ancients and the Ash^carites both agree in naming this sort of existing things "generated."

The extreme opposed to this is an existent thing that has not come into existence from something or by something and that time does not precede. About this, too, both factions agree in naming it "eternal." This existent thing is apprehended by demonstration: it is God (may He be blessed and exalted) who is the Agent³³ of the whole, its Giver of Existence, and its Sustainer (glorious is He, and may His might be exalted).

The sort of being between these two extremes is an existent thing that has not come into existence from something and that time does not precede, but that does come into existence by something — I mean, by an agent. This is the world as a whole.

Now, all of them agree on the existence of these three attributes with respect to the world. For, the dialectical theologians admit that time does not precede it — or, rather, that is a consequence of their holding that time is something joined to motions and bodies. They also agree with the Ancients about future time being infinite and, likewise, future existence. And they disagree only about past time and past existence. For the dialectical theologians are of the opinion that it is limited, which is the doctrine of Plato and his sect, while Aristotle and his faction are of the opinion that it is infinite, as is the case with the future.

(19) So it is evident that this latter existent thing has been taken as resembling the existing thing that truly comes into being and the eternally existing thing. Those overwhelmed by its resemblance to the eternal rather than to what is generated name it "eternal," and those overwhelmed by its resemblance to what is generated name it "generated." But, in truth, it is not truly generated, nor is it truly eternal. For what is truly generated is necessarily corruptible, and what is truly eternal has no cause. Among them are those who name it "everlastingly generated"— namely, Plato and his sect, because time according to them is finite with respect to the past.

(20) Thus, the doctrines about the world are not all so far apart from one another that some of them should be charged as unbelief and others not. Indeed, for opinions | to be such that this should happen, it is obligatory that they be excessively far apart — I mean, that they be opposites of each other, as the dialectical theologians suppose they are with respect to this question — that is, that the name "eternity" and that of "generated" with respect to the world as a whole are opposites of each other. And it has already become evident from our statement that the matter is not like that.

(21) In addition to all this, these opinions about the world do not conform to the apparent sense of the Law. For if the apparent sense of the Law is scrutinized, it will become apparent from the verses comprising a communication about the coming into existence of the world that, in truth, its form is generated, whereas being itself and time extend continuously at both extremes — I mean, without interruption. That is because His statement (may He be exalted), "And He is the one Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His throne was on the water" [11:7], requires, in its apparent sense, an existence before this existence — namely, the throne and water — and a time before this time, I mean, the one joined to the form of this existence, which is the number of the movement of the heavenly sphere. And His statement (may He be exalted), "On the day the earth shall be changed into

other than earth, and the heavens also" [14:48], in its apparent sense also requires a second existence after this existence. And His statement (may He be exalted), "Then He directed Himself toward the heaven, and it was smoke" [41:11], requires in its apparent sense that the heavens were created from something.

(22) Nor do the dialectical theologians conform to the apparent sense of the Law in what they say about the world, but interpret it. For it is not [said] in the Law that God was existing along with sheer nothingness; no text whatever to this effect is to be found. So how is it to be conceived that the dialectical theologians' interpretation of these verses would meet with consensus when the apparent sense of the Law with respect to the existence of the world, which we have stated, has already been stated by a faction among the sages?

(23) It seems that those who disagree about the interpretation of these recondite questions have either hit the mark and are to be rewarded or have erred and are to be excused. For assent to something due to an indication arising in the soul is compulsory, not voluntary — I mean that it is not up to us not to assent or to assent as it is up to us to stand up or not to stand up. Since a condition of responsibility is having choice, the one who assents to error because of vagueness occurring in it is excused if he is an adept of science. | Therefore, he [that is, the Prophet] said (peace upon him), "If the judge hits the mark after exerting himself, he will be rewarded twofold; and if he errs, he will have a single reward."

Now what judge is greater than the one who makes judgments about existence, as to whether it is thus or not thus? These judges are the learned ones whom God has selected for interpretation, and this error that is forgiven according to the Law is only the error occasioned by learned men when they reflect upon the recondite things that the Law makes them responsible for reflecting upon.

(24) The error occasioned by any other sort of people is sheer sin, whether it is an error about theoretical or practical matters. Just as the judge who is ignorant of Tradition³⁴ is not excused when he errs about a judgment, neither is the judge about existing things in whom the conditions for judgment do not exist excused; indeed, he is either a sinner or an unbeliever. And if it is stipulated, with respect to the judge about what is allowed and what is proscribed, that he combine within himself the reasons for exercising personal judgment³⁵ — namely, cognizance of the roots and cognizance of what is inferred from these roots by means of syllogistic reasoning — then how much more fitting is it for this to be stipulated with respect to the one who is to

judge about existing things, I mean, that he be cognizant of the primary intellectual notions and how to infer from them.

(25) In general, error with respect to the Law is of two types: There is error that is excused for one who is adept in reflection about that thing concerning which error occurs, just as the skillful physician is excused if he errs with respect to the art of medicine and the skillful judge if he errs with respect to a judgment. But one who is not adept in that concern is not excused.

And there is error that is not excused for anyone whosoever. Rather, it is unbelief if it occurs with respect to the principles of the Law and heretical innovation if it occurs with respect to what is subordinate to the principles.

(26) This error is the very one that comes about concerning the things that all the sorts of methods of indications steer to cognizance of. Thus, cognizance of that thing is, in this manner, possible for everyone. Such, for example, is affirmation of [the existence of] God (may He be blessed and exalted); of the prophetic missions; and of happiness in the hereafter and misery in the hereafter. That is because the three sorts of indications | due to which no one is exempted from assenting to what he is responsible for being cognizant of — I mean, the rhetorical, dialectical, and demonstrative indications — lead to these three roots.

So the one who denies things like these, when they are one of the roots of the Law, is an unbeliever who resists obstinately with his tongue but not his heart, or [who resists obstinately] due to his neglecting to expose himself to cognizance of what indicates them. For if he is an adept of demonstration, a path to assenting to them has been placed before him by demonstration; and if he is an adept of dialectic, then by dialectic; and if he is an adept of preaching, then by preaching. Therefore, he [the Prophet] (peace upon him) said, "I was ordered to combat people until they say, 'There is no god but God,' and have faith in me" — he means by whatever one of the three methods of bringing about faith that suits them.

(27) Concerning the things that are known only by demonstration due to their being hidden, God has been gracious to His servants for whom there is no path by means of demonstration — either due to their innate dispositions, their habits, or their lack of facilities³⁶ for education — by coining for them likenesses and similarities of these [hidden things] and calling them to assent by means of those likenesses, since it is possible for assent to those likenesses to come about by means of the indications shared by all — I mean, the

dialectical and the rhetorical. This is the reason for the Law being divided into an apparent sense and an inner sense. For the apparent sense is those likenesses coined for those meanings, and the inner sense is those meanings that reveal themselves only to those adept in demonstration. These [likenesses and meanings] are the four or five sorts of existing things that Abu Hamid [al-Ghazali] mentioned in the book *The Distinction*.³⁷

(28) If it happens, as we have said, that we know something in itself by means of the three methods, there is no need for us to coin a likeness for it; and, as long as it is in its apparent sense, it does not admit of interpretation. If this manner of apparent sense refers to the roots [of the Law], the one who interprets it would be an unbeliever — like someone believing that there is no happiness or misery in the hereafter and that such a statement is intended only to safeguard people from one another in what pertains to their bodies and physical senses, that it is a stratagem, and that a human being has no end other than sensual existence.

(29) If this has been determined for you, | then it is apparent to you from our statement that there is an apparent sense of the Law that it is not permissible to interpret. To interpret it is unbelief when it has to do with principles and heretical innovation when it has to do with what is subordinate to principles. There is also an apparent sense that it is obligatory for those adept in demonstration to interpret, it being unbelief for them to take it in its apparent sense. Yet for those not adept in demonstration to interpret it and draw it away from its apparent sense is unbelief or heretical innovation on their part.

(30) Of this sort is the verse about God's directing Himself [2:29] and the Tradition about His descent.³⁸ Therefore, he [the Prophet] said (peace upon him) with respect to the black woman, when she announced that God was in heaven: "Set her free, for she is one of the faithful." For she was not one of those adept in demonstration. The reason for that is that for the sort of people who come to assent only due to the imagination — I mean, those who assent to something only insofar as they can imagine it — it is difficult to come to assent to an existing thing that is not linked with something imaginable.

This also applies to those who understand the link only as [God having] a place — they are the ones who in their reflection have moved somewhat beyond the rank of the first sort's belief in corporeality. Therefore, the answer to these people about verses and Traditions like these is that they pertain to the verses that resemble one another and that the stop is at His saying (may He be exalted), "None knows their interpretation but God" [3:7].³⁹ Even though there

is consensus among the people of demonstration that this sort admits of interpretation, they disagree about its interpretation. And that is according to each one's rank with respect to cognizance of demonstration.

(31) There is a third sort [of verses and Traditions] with respect to the Law, one wavering between these [other] two sorts and about which there is doubt. One group of those who occupy themselves with reflection attach this sort to the apparent sense that it is not permissible to interpret, and others attach it to the inner sense that it is not permissible for the learned to take according to its apparent sense. That is because this sort [of verses and Traditions] is recondite and abstruse. One who commits an error with respect to this is to be excused — I mean, one of the learned.

(32) If it were said, "Since it has become evident that, in this respect, there are three ranks in the Law, then in which of these three ranks, according to you, belongs what is set forth with respect to descriptions of the next life and its conditions?" we would say, "With respect to this question, it is an evident matter that they belong to the sort about which there is disagreement." That is because we see | a group who pretend to demonstration, saying that it is obligatory to take these descriptions in their apparent sense since there is no demonstration rendering that apparent sense preposterous; and this is the method of the Ash^carites. Yet another group, who also occupy themselves with demonstration, interpret these descriptions; and they disagree greatly among themselves in their interpretation. Among this sort are to be counted Abu Hamid [al-Ghazali] and many of the Sufis. And some combine both interpretations, as Abu Hamid [al-Ghazali] does in some of his books.

(33) It seems that the learned person who commits an error with respect to this question is to be excused and the one who hits the mark is to be thanked or rewarded — that is, if he acknowledges the existence [of the next life] and gives a manner of interpretation of it not leading to the disavowal of its existence. With respect to this [question], denying its existence is what is unbelief, because it is one of the roots of the Law and something to which assent comes about by the three methods shared by "the red and the black."

(34) For anyone not adept in science, it is obligatory to take them [the descriptions of the next life] in their apparent sense; for him, it is unbelief to interpret them because it leads to unbelief. That is why we are of the opinion that, for anyone among the people whose duty it is to have faith in the apparent sense, interpretation is unbelief because it leads to unbelief. Anyone

adept in interpretation who divulges that to him calls him to unbelief; and the one who calls to unbelief is an unbeliever.

(35) This is why it is obligatory that interpretations be established only in books using demonstrations. For if they are in books using demonstrations, no one but those adept in demonstration will get at them. Whereas, if they are established in other than demonstrative books with poetical and rhetorical or dialectical methods used in them, as Abu Hamid [al-Ghazali] does, that is an error against the Law and against wisdom.

Yet the man intended only good. That is, he wished thereby to make those adept in science more numerous. But he actually made those adept in wickedness more numerous, yet not without some increase among those adept in science. In that way, one group came to slander wisdom, another group to slander the Law, and another group to reconcile the two. It seems that this was one of the intentions of | his books.

An indication that he wished thereby to alert people's minds⁴⁰ is that he adhered to no single doctrine in his books. Rather, with the Ash'arites he was an Ash'arite, with the Sufis a Sufi, and with the philosophers a philosopher — so that he was, as it is said:

One day a Yamani, if I meet a man from Yaman, And if I meet a Ma'addi, then I'm of Adnan.⁴¹

(36) What is obligatory for the imams of the Muslims is that they ban those of his books that contain science from all but those adept in science, just as it is obligatory upon them to ban demonstrative books from those not adept in them. Yet the harm befalling people from demonstrative books is lighter, because for the most part only those with superior innate dispositions take up demonstrative books. And this sort [of people] is misled only through a lack of practical virtue, reading in a disorderly manner, and turning to them without a teacher.

Still, totally forbidding demonstrative books bars from what the Law calls to, because it is a wrong to the best sort of people and to the best sort of existing things. For justice with respect to the best sort of existing things is for them to be cognized to their utmost degree by those prepared to be cognizant of them to their utmost degree, and these are the best sort of people. Indeed, the greater the worth of the existing thing, the greater is the injustice with respect to it — namely, ignorance of it. Therefore, He said (may He be exalted), "Associating [other gods with God] is surely a major wrong" [31:13].⁴²

Note to the Translator's Introduction of the *Epistle Dedicatory*

1. See Muhsin Mahdi, "Averroës on Divine Law," 118 and also 117-23. According to Mahdi, Leon Gauthier hesitated momentarily about the proper appellation for this little treatise; see *ibid.*, n. 17, and Gauthier, *Traite decisif*, vi and 49.

Notes to the Translation of the *Decisive Treatise*

1. Unless otherwise indicated, the term translated throughout this treatise as "Law" is *shari'ah* or its equivalent, *shar'*. In this treatise, the terms are used to refer only to the revealed law of Islam. Elsewhere, however, Averroës uses the term *shari'ah* to refer to revealed law generally. Because the term "legal" may be misleading for modern readers, even when capitalized and rendered "Legal," the adjectival form of *shari'ah*—that is, *shar'i*—is rendered here as "Law-based."

In his justly famous manual of law, Averroës explains that the jurists acknowledge the judgments of the divine Law to fall into five categories: obligatory (*wajib*), recommended (*mandub*), prohibited (*mahzur*), reprehensible (*makruh*), and permitted (*mubah*). Here, however, he groups the first two under a more comprehensive category of "commanded" (*ma'mur*) and — perhaps since it is not applicable to the present question — passes over "reprehensible" in silence. See *Biddyat al-mujtahid wa nihayat al-muqtasid*, ed. °Abd al-Halim Muhammad °Abd al-Halim and °Abd al-Rahman Hasan Mahmud (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha, 1975), vol. 1, 17-18. The alliterative title, pointing to the work's character as a primer on Islamic Law, can be rendered in English as *The Legal Interpreter's Beginning and the Mediator's Ending*.

2. *Ma'rifa*: Similarly, °*arafa* is translated as "to be cognizant" and °*arif* as "cognizant" or "one who is cognizant." °*ilm*, on the other hand, is translated as "knowledge" or "science," °*alima* as "to know," and °*dlim* as "knower" or "learned." It is important to preserve the distinctions between the Arabic terms in English — distinctions that seem to reflect those between *gignoskein* and *epistasthai* in Greek — because Averroës goes on to speak of human cognizance of God as well as of God's knowledge of particulars (see below, §§4, 17).

3. In this treatise, Averroës uses the terms "book of God" and "precious Book" to indicate the Qur³an. The numbers within brackets refer to chapters and verses of the Qur^oan. All translations from the Qur^oan are my own.

4. Normally the term *qiyds* is translated as "syllogism," this being an abridgment of "syllogistic reasoning." Here and in what follows, I translate it as "syllogistic reasoning" in order to bring out the way Averroës seems to be using the term.

5. The rest of the verse reads, "... one of those who have certainty."

6. *Al-mu'min*: Throughout this treatise, *amana* is translated as "to have faith" and *imdn* as "faith," while *i' taqada* is translated as "to believe," *mu taqid* as "believer," and *itiqad* as "belief."

7. *Al-mutaqaddim*: Comes from the same verb that has been translated heretofore as "set out"—namely, *taqaddama*.

8. Actually, if the diameter of the earth is used as the unit of measure, it is about 109 times greater.

9. *Munazara*: Has the same root as *nazar*, translated throughout this treatise as "reflection."

10. That is, the western part of the Islamic world — North Africa and Spain.

11. As is evident from the subtitle of the treatise, *hikma* (wisdom) is used interchangeably with *falsafa* to mean "philosophy." Nonetheless, the original difference between the two is respected here in that *hikma* is always translated as "wisdom" and *falsafa* as "philosophy."

12. That is, the books of the Ancients referred to above.

13. The reference is to the Qur³an 16:69 where, speaking of bees, it is said, "There comes forth from their innards a drink of variegated colors in which there is healing for mankind."

14. That is, to all human beings — the red (or white) and the black.

15. *Ikhraj daldlat al-lafz. min al-dalala al-haqiqiyya ila al-dalala al-mujdziyya*: The language here is somewhat ambiguous and reads, literally, "drawing the significance of an utterance out from its true significance to its figurative significance." Heretofore, the term *dalala* has been translated as "indication."

16. *Ajma^ca*: From it is derived the noun "consensus" (*ijma^c*). Consensus is accepted in some schools of Islamic Law as a root or source of Law after the Qur'an and Tradition (*hadith*). Its validity as a root of the Law comes from a Tradition that reports the Prophet to have declared, "Indeed, God would not let my nation form a consensus about an error."

17. Those who follow the theological teachings of Abu al-Hasan ^cAli al-Ash^cari (260/873-324/935). He was a pupil of the Mu^ctazilites (see below, §43 and n. 44). When two sets of dates are given and are separated by a slash mark, as here, the first set refers to the dates of the *Anno Hejirae* (that is, the Islamic calendar that starts with the Prophet's flight to Medina) and the second set to the common era.

18. The verse reads, "He it is who created for you everything that is in the earth; then He directed Himself up toward the heavens, and He made them congruous as seven heavens; He is knowledgeable about everything." The Tradition in question is, "God descends to the lower world."

19. Those who follow the teachings of Ahmad ibn Hanbal (164/780-241/855). A strict literalist, he was opposed to the Mu^ctazilites.

20. The whole verse reads: "He it is who has sent down to you the Book; in it, there are fixed verses — these being the mother of the Book — and others that resemble one another. Those with deviousness in their hearts pursue the ones that resemble one another, seeking discord and seeking to interpret them. None knows their interpretation but God and those well grounded in science. They say, 'We believe in it; everything is from our Lord.' And none heeds but those who are mindful."

The distinction between the "fixed verses" (*dyat muhkamat*) and those that "resemble one another" (*mutashbihdt*) is that the former admit of no interpretation, whereas the latter are somewhat ambiguous or open-ended and do admit of interpretation — the question being, interpretation to what end? As will become evident in the sequel, there is some question as to where the clause explaining who "knows their interpretation" ends. Some hold that it ends after "God," so that the remainder of the verse reads, "And those well grounded in science say, 'We believe in it....'" Others, like Averroës, hold that it reads as presented here. See below, §16.

21. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (450/1058-505/1111) was a famous theologian who, as Averroës observes below, attacked the philosophers. In *Faysal al-tajriqa* (Arbitrator of the distinction), al-Ghazali explains the limits to be placed on charging others with unbelief and notes in particular that going against consensus is not to be considered unbelief. He gives two reasons for this: first, consensus usually concerns the branches of faith rather than the roots; second, it is very difficult to

determine what there is consensus about. The roots of faith are three, according to al-Ghazali: faith in God, in his messenger, and in the hereafter. See *Al-qusur al-ʿawdli min rasa'il al-Imam al-Ghazali* (Cairo: al-Jundi, n.d.), 161-68, especially 165-66.

Abu al-Maʿali al-Juwayni (419/1028-478/1085), who is also known as Imam al-Haramayn, was an Ashʿarite theologian and also al-Ghazali's teacher.

22. *Aimmat al-nazar*: Literally, "leaders of reflection."

23. *Al-nazariyyat*: Literally, "reflective matters." Unless otherwise noted, all future occurrences of the term "theoretical" are to translate this adjectival sense of *nazar*.

24. A transmission is deemed to be uninterrupted when we know that one person has related the particular doctrine to another through the ages so that it comes down to us with no break in the chain of authorities attesting to its authenticity. This is one of the criteria for judging the soundness of Traditions about the Prophet; see the next note.

25. Muhammad ibn Ismaʿil al-Bukhari (194/810-256/870) is the author of one of the six canonical collections of Tradition — that is, accounts of things the Prophet and his companions said and did. ʿAli ibn Abu Talib (d. 41/661) was the fourth orthodox caliph.

26. The charge is brought by al-Ghazali at the very end of his book, but he deftly sidesteps the question associated with it of whether those who accept such beliefs are to be put to death; see *Tahafut al-faldsifa*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1927), 376.2-10; also 21-94, 223-38, and

344-37. In addition to attempting to defend the philosophers here, Averroës wrote a detailed refutation of al-Ghazali's charges in the *Tahafut al-tahafut*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique, 1930), 4—117, 455—68, and 580—86; see also 587. The English translation by Simon Van Den Bergh, *Averroës' Tahafut al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954), has Bouyges's page numbers in the margins. Abu Nasr al-Farabi was born in 257/870 and died in 339/950; Abu ʿAli al-Husayn ibn Sina, or Avicenna, was born in 370/980 and died in 428/1037.

27. See *Faysal al-tafriqa*, 168-71. Averroës thus reads this subsequent passage as modifying the earlier assertion (pp. 163-64) that the philosophers are to be charged with unbelief for what they say about God's knowledge of particulars and their denial of the resurrection of bodies and punishments in the next life.

28. See above, §14 and n. 20.

29. That is, the verses of the Qurʾan; and this becomes clear in what follows.

30. In his *Middle Commentary on Aristotle's Categories*, Averroës explains Aristotle's account of homonymous names as follows:

He said: things having homonymous — that is, shared — names are things which have not a single thing in common and shared, except for the name alone. The definition of each one which makes its substance understood according to the way it is denoted by that shared name is different from the definition of the other one and is particular to what it defines. An example of that is the name "animal" said of a depicted man and of a rational man.

See Averroës' *Middle Commentaries on Aristotle's Categories and De Interpretatione*, trans. Charles E. Butterworth (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 1998), section 3, from which the above translation comes. The term "shared" can also be understood as "ambiguous"; see sections 57-58.

Though *al-jalal* is usually used to speak of something that is momentous or magnificent, it can also be used to signify what is paltry or petty. The basic sense *oial-sarim* is that of cutting; thus, it is used to speak both of daybreak or dawn as though cut off from the night and of night as though cut off from the day. See E. W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (1877; reprint, London: Islamic Texts Society, 1984), 1684 col. 3.

31. Namely, the *Epistle Dedicatory*. For an explanation of the title of this work and of its subtitle, *The Question the Shaykh Abu al-Walid Mentioned in the Decisive Treatise*, as well as of its place with respect to the *Decisive Treatise* and the third part of the trilogy — the *Kashf °an mandhij al-adillafi °aqa'id al-milla* (Uncovering the methods of proofs with respect to the beliefs of the religious community)—see the introduction to the *Epistle Dedicatory*.

32. *Sabab fa°il*: Unless otherwise noted, *sabab* is always translated as "reason" in this treatise. However, to render the term *sabab fd°il* as "reason agent" here would make no sense.

33. The term *is fa°il* and, were it not for the declaration at the end of the next paragraph, might better be rendered here as "Maker."

34. That is, the Traditions concerning what the Prophet said and did (*al-sunna*); see above, n. 25. This is one of the roots or sources of the divine Law, along with the Qur^Dan and consensus.

35. *Ijtihdd*: Refers to personal judgment about an interpretation of the Law.

36. *Asbdb*, sing, *sabab*: See n. 32 above.

37. Existing things are identified by al-Ghazali as: *dhati* (essential), *hissi* (sense-perceptible), *khiydli* (imaginary), °*aqli* (intelligible), and *shibhi* (figurative); see *Faysal al-tafriqa*, 150-56. Though al-Ghazali definitely enumerates these five sorts or ranks of existing things and explains them with respect to interpretations, Averroës' uncertainty here about how many sorts or kinds al-Ghazali actually enumerated implies that the account is not obvious. He may be referring to the way al-Ghazali excludes the first rank — essential — from being interpreted or, alternatively, to the way al-Ghazali brings together the sense-perceptible and imaginary ranks.

38. See above, §14 and n. 18.

39. See above, §§14 and 16 and nn. 20 and 28.

40. *Tanbih al-fitar*: Literally, "alert the innate dispositions."

41. The verse is by °Imran ibn Hittan al-Sadusi, a poet who lived in the seventh century. South Arabian tribes were considered to be Yamanites, whereas north Arabian tribes — among them the Ma°addi — were considered to be Adnanites.

42. The verse is part of Luqman's instruction to his son by way of preaching and reads in full, "And thus Luqman said to his son, while preaching to him, 'Oh, son, do not associate [other gods] with God, for associating [other gods with God] is surely a major wrong.'" Averroës uses it to illustrate how great the injustice or wrong can become when the learned, prohibited from reading

demonstrative books, are led to ignorance of the greatest of all beings, God, and thus to polytheism.

[Epistle : Damima] 198

THE QUESTION MENTIONED BY THE *SHAYKH*

ABUL-WALID IN *THE DECISIVE TREATISE*

[We shall try to solve your problem about God's Knowledge.]

May God prolong your power, continue to bless you, and keep you out of sight of misfortunes! 199

By your superior intelligence and Abundant talents you have surpassed many of those who devote their lives to these sciences, and your sure insight has led you to become aware of the difficulty that arises about the eternal, Glorious Knowledge,' 200 on account of Its being connected with the things originated by It. It is therefore our obligation, in the interests of truth and of ending your perplexity, to resolve this difficulty, after formulating it; for he who does not know how to tie a knot cannot untie it. 201

[The problem: How can God be aware of a change in reality without a corresponding change occurring in His eternal Knowledge?]

The difficulty is compelling, as follows. If all these things were in the Knowledge of God the Glorious before they existed, are they in their state of existence [the same] in His Knowledge as they were before their existence, or are they in their state of existence other in His Knowledge than they were before they existed? If we say that in their state of existence they are other in God's Knowledge than they were before they existed, it follows that the eternal Knowledge is subject to change, and that when they pass from nonexistence to existence, there comes into existence additional Knowledge: but that is impossible for the eternal Knowledge. 202 If on the other hand we say that the Knowledge of them in both states is one and the same, it will be asked, 'Are they in themselves', i.e. the beings which come into existence, 'the same before they exist as when they exist?' The answer will have to be 'No, in themselves they are not the same before they exist as when they exist'; otherwise the existent and the non-existents 203 would be one and the same. If the adversary admits this, he can be asked, 'Is not true knowledge acquaintance with existence as it really is?' If he says 'Yes', it will be said, 'Consequently if the object varies in itself, the knowledge of it must vary; otherwise it will not be known as it really is'. Thus one of two alternatives is necessary: either the eternal Knowledge varies in Itself, or the things that come into existence are not known to It. But both alternatives are impossible for God the Glorious.

This difficulty is confirmed by what appears in the case of man: His knowledge of non-existent things depends on the supposition of existence, while his knowledge of them when they exist depends <on existence itself>. For it is self-evident that the two states of knowledge are different; otherwise he would be ignorant of things' existence at the time when they exist.

[God's foreknowledge of all change does not solve the problem, as the theologians think, for the actual occurrence of the change presumably adds something new to His Knowledge.]

It is impossible to escape from this [difficulty] by the usual answer of the theologians about it, that God the Exalted knows things before their existence as they will be at the time of their existence, in respect of time, place and other attributes proper to each being. For it can be said to them: 'Then when they come to exist, does there occur any change or not?', with reference to the passage of the thing from non-existence to existence. If they say 'No change occurs', they are merely being supercilious. But if they say 'There does occur a change', it can be said to them: 'Then is the occurrence of this change known to the eternal Knowledge or not?' Thus the difficulty is compelling. In sum, it can hardly be conceived that the knowledge of a thing before it exists can be identical with the knowledge of it after it exists. Such, then, is the formulation of this problem in its strongest possible form, as we have explained it to you in conversation. 204

[Nor is Ghazali's solution satisfactory. He regards God's Knowledge as a term in a relation, which does not change in itself when that to which it is related, the known object, changes its relation to it. But knowledge is a relation, not a related term.]

The [full] solution of this difficulty would call for a lengthy discourse; but here we shall only go into the decisive point of the solution. Abu Hamid in his book entitled *The disintegration* wanted to resolve this difficulty in a way which carries no conviction. 205 He stated an argument the gist of which is as follows. He asserted that knowledge and the object known are related; and as one of two related things may change without the other changing in itself, this is just what seems to happen to things in the Knowledge of God the Glorious: they change in themselves, but the Knowledge of God the Glorious about them does not change. A parallel case of related things would be if a single column were first on the right of Zayd and then came to be on his left: meanwhile Zayd 206 would not have changed in himself. But this [argument] is not correct. For the relation has changed in itself: the relation which was a right-handed one

has become a left-handed one, and the only thing which has not changed is the subject of the relation, i.e. its bearer, Zayd. If this is so, and knowledge is the relation itself, it must necessarily change when the object known changes, just as, when the column changes [its position], the relation of the column to Zayd changes, coming to be a left-handed relation after having been a right-handed one.

[The correct solution is that the eternal Knowledge is the cause of beings, not their effect as originated knowledge is. Therefore It does not change when they change.]

The way to resolve this difficulty, in our opinion, is to recognize that the position of the eternal Knowledge with respect to beings is different from the position of originated knowledge with respect to beings, in that the existence of beings is a cause and reason for our knowledge, while the eternal Knowledge is a cause and reason for beings. If, when beings come to exist after not having existed, there occurred an addition in the eternal Knowledge such as occurs in originated knowledge, it would follow that the eternal Knowledge would be an effect of beings, not their cause. Therefore there must not occur any change such as occurs in originated knowledge. The mistake in this matter has arisen simply from making an analogy between the eternal Knowledge and originated knowledge, i.e. between the supra sensible and the sensible; and the falsity of this analogy is well known. Just as no change occurs in an agent when his act comes into being, i.e. no change which has not already occurred, so no change occurs in the eternal Glorious Knowledge when the object of Its Knowledge results from It.

Thus the difficulty is resolved, and we do not have to admit that if there occurs no change, i.e. in the eternal Knowledge, He does not know beings at the time of their coming into existence just as they are; we only have to admit that He does not know them with originated knowledge but with eternal Knowledge.

For the occurrence of change in knowledge when beings change is a condition only of knowledge which is caused by beings, i.e. originated knowledge.

[The philosophers hold that God knows particulars with eternal Knowledge, not that He does not know them at all. Indeed, they consider that His knowledge is the cause of their coming into existence, also that It sends premonitions of particulars in dreams.]

Therefore eternal Knowledge is only connected with beings in a manner other than that in which originated knowledge is connected with them. This does not mean that It is not connected at all, as the philosophers have been accused of saying, in the context of this difficulty, that the Glorious One does not know particulars. Their position is not what has been imputed to them; rather they hold that He does not know particulars with originated knowledge, the occurrence of which is conditioned by their occurrence, since He is a cause of them, not caused by them as originated knowledge is. This is the furthest extent to which purification [of concepts] 207 ought to be admitted.

For demonstration compels the conclusion that He knows things, because their issuing from Him is solely due to His knowing; it is not due to His being merely Existent or Existent with a certain attribute, but to His knowing, as the Exalted has said: 'Does He not know, He who created? He is the Penetrating, the Omniscient! 208 But demonstration also compels the conclusion that He does not know things with a knowledge of the same character as originated knowledge. Therefore there must be another knowledge of beings which is unqualified, 209 the eternal Glorious Knowledge. And how is it conceivable that the Peripatetic philosophers could have held that the eternal Knowledge does not comprehend particulars, when they held that It is the cause of warning in dreams, of revelation, and of other kinds of inspiration? 210

[Conclusion]

This is the way to resolve this difficulty, as it appears to us; and what has been said is incontestable and indubitable. It is God who helps us to follow the right course and directs us to the truth. Peace on you, with the mercy and blessings of God.