

Abstract

One of the major themes that characterize the life and work of the prodigious Persian Sufi thinker ‘Ayn al-Qudāt (d. 1131) is the importance of *dhawq* or “tasting” as a means of acquiring knowledge directly from God. Despite his mastery of the rational sciences at a precocious age, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt, like Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) before him, underwent a period of doubt regarding epistemological certainty that, as he tells us in his works, was fully resolved only after he had received a *fath* or “opening” from God at the hands of one of his masters, Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 1126). While building on the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s *Zubdat al-Ḥaqā’iq*, written after his opening, provides a unique solution to the philosophical debate over divine knowledge of the particulars, an issue that implicates the temporality of the world, God’s attributes of *irāda* (desire/will) and *qudra* (power), and the relationship between temporality and eternity. Though his explanation employs rational and philosophical methods, ‘Ayn al-Qudāt insists that his insights are the result of direct recognition (*ma‘rifa*) of divine reality. In this paper, I analyze his argument that the application of the word “knowledge” to both God and creation, or the eternal (*qadīm*) and the originated (*ḥādith*) is an *equivocation*, since God’s knowledge of a thing gives existence to that thing, whereas created knowledge of a thing is temporally conditioned. I then contrast the linguistic tenor of his argument with the philosophical and technical discussion in the elder Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut* to demonstrate how the underlying structure of the two approaches are essentially different. While the *Tahāfut*, like the *Zubdat*, attacks philosophy, the former uses philosophical methods to do so, whereas the fundamental claim of the latter is that its critique comes from a place “beyond the intellect”. Therefore, a comparative analysis of how each of the two works address God’s knowledge of the particulars allows me to highlight the distinctive features of ‘Ayn al-Qudāt’s experientially grounded epistemology that is both a continuation of and rupture from the legacy of the *Tahāfut* a few decades after its publication.