Abstract

One of the major themes that characterize the life and work of the prodigious Persian Sufi thinker ʿAyn al-Quḍāt (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, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt, 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 faṭḥ or “opening” from God at the hands of one of his masters, Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 1126). While building on the Tahāfut al-Falāsifa, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt’s Zubdat al-Ḥaqāʾiq, 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, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt insists that his insights are the result of direct recognition (maʿrifā) 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 (ḥādīth) 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 ʿAyn al-Quḍāt’s experientially grounded epistemology that is both a continuation of and rupture from the legacy of the Tahāfut a few decades after its publication.