My aim in this article is twofold. First, I shall interpret two discussions in al-Ghazālī’s main kalām compendium, al-Iqtiṣād fī l-iʿtiqād (The Balanced Book on What-To-Believe), which appear discrepant with the substance dualism espoused in some of his other works, and instead seem to coincide with the materialist ontology and anthropology of classical Ash’arism. Although both discussions have already received a fair amount of attention, the discrepancies have hitherto remained either unresolved or unexplained. The present study shall attempt to resolve an ostensible discrepancy in one discussion and to identify and explain a real and serious discrepancy in the other. By doing so, it will shed light on the main dilemmas and sensitivities that al-Ghazālī’s subscription to substance dualism presented him in a kalām setting.

Second, I will advocate a more general point, namely that interpreting al-Ghazālī’s kalām works—including al-Iqtiṣād and, to an extent, the more advanced Tahāfut—must take account of his views on the objectives and workings of kalām in general. It will be argued that his low view of the discipline of kalām (low, that is, in comparison both to the earlier Ash’arī high view thereof and to his view of his own higher theology), affects his choice of doctrines defended and arguments deployed in al-Iqtiṣād, as well as aspects of his style of presentation. These in turn will explain the incongruence between his views in this work and positions championed in some of his other works.


2 This point follows on from my earlier article, “From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī.” Both the present study and this earlier article concentrate on al-Ghazālī’s kalām output, rather than his theology in general.
I \textit{Iqtiṣād}, Eschatology

Our first problematic passage occurs in the discussion on resurrection (ḥashr) in the eschatological part of \textit{al-Iqtiṣād}, the main context in which the ontology and nature of the spirit (rūḥ, nafs) are normally propounded in a \textit{kalām} source.\footnote{al-Ghazālī, \textit{al-Iqtiṣād}, 213–15. Unless noted otherwise, all references to \textit{al-Iqtiṣād} are to the edition of İ. A. Çubukçu and H. Atay published 1962 in Ankara. On earlier Ashʿarite discussions of the spirit, see Shihadeh, “Classical Ashʿarī Anthropology,” 436–7, 465–74.} Resurrection is treated in the section on doctrines characterised as being affirmed by revelation and confirmed as possible by the mind (otherwise known as the \textit{samʿiyāt}, “matters known through revelation”), which are all eschatological.\footnote{Al-Ghazālī uses the standard label \textit{al-samʿiyāt} in \textit{al-Risāla al-Qudsiyya}, 92–4, 118–22. The text is also part of al-Ghazālī, \textit{Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn}, 2:199–202.} Al-Ghazālī defines resurrection as God’s restoration (iʿāda) of the bodies of the dead on the Day of Judgement.\footnote{al-Ghazālī, \textit{al-Iqtiṣād}, 213.} He affirms the doctrine on the basis of “unambiguous” scriptural evidence, and argues that the restoration of human bodies is possible on the grounds that God was capable of creating them the first time, and hence must be capable of creating them a second time.\footnote{Ibid., 213.} This is the standard, Qurʾān-inspired theological argument.\footnote{Cf. Q 7:29, 21:104, 36:79, 36:81, 50:15.}

Next, he turns to the ontology of restoration, particularly the manner in which the atoms and accidents of bodies are restored.\footnote{al-Ghazālī, \textit{al-Iqtiṣād}, 213–14.} That some accidents of the human body need to be re-created is obvious. For when the body dies, it immediately loses its animate attributes, such as life, knowledge and volition; and as it decays it loses further accidents, such as composition (\textit{tarkīb}), colour and moisture. Less obvious is whether God causes the atoms of the human body (and all other atoms of the world) to pass away as well, and correspondingly whether resurrection involves the re-creation \textit{ex nihilo} of both the body’s atoms and accidents, or the restoring only of its accidents. Both scenarios, al-Ghazālī opines, are rationally possible, and both remain possible since neither is supported by scriptural evidence.\footnote{The suspension of judgment on this point is a standard classical Ashʿarite position. See, for instance, al-Juwaynī, \textit{al-Irshād}, 374.}

Delineating these models of the ontology of restoration leads to the problem of the identity of the entities “restored” (\textit{al-muʿād}): in particular, whether the individual entity re-created in the resurrected body—be the entity an atom or an accident—would be none other than (ʿayn) the individual entity