CHAPTER 17

Al-Ghazālī’s Esotericism According to Ibn Taymiyya’s Bughyat al-Murtād

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Many of the simplistic images of the Damascene theologian Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) circulating nowadays are grave distortions of his ideas, both in the domain of politics and in Islamic thought, particularly in regard to Sufism and falsafa. Much time will probably be needed for these images to be corrected, especially among certain Islamist groups and mediocre neo-Orientalists. Several recent publications nevertheless have already paved the way towards a more accurate understanding of his ideas;¹ also, works like his magisterial Dar’ at-ta‘āruḍ² have begun to receive the attention which they deserve as first-hand sources for the history of intellectual, religious and spiritual debates during the classical period of Islam.

In earlier articles, I have presented a number of Taymiyyan texts relating to, or commenting on, al-Ḥallāj, the Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafāʾ, Avicenna, and Naṣīr ad-Dīn aṭ-Ṭūsī.³ What about Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī? The Damascene theologian's

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remarkably extensive knowledge of the Ghazālian *corpus* is striking; the titles that he quotes, as surveyed by R. Y. ash-Shāmī, exceed two dozen. Yet, impressive as ash-Shāmī's list appears, on its own it does not fully convey the depth of Ibn Taymiyya's engagement with the works of his predecessor. Ash-Shāmī's survey is unfortunately not exhaustive; moreover, it does not reveal that the Damascene theologian sometimes quotes lengthy excerpts from a number of al-Ghazālī's works verbatim, and comments on them in various ways. In fact, Ibn Taymiyya's information about, and grasp of, Abū Ḥāmid's corpus is far better than that of the latter's most famous challengers among the *falāsifa*, Ibn Ṭufayl and Averroes. It is accordingly the more astonishing that, in Ghazālian studies, Ibn Taymiyya has not been more often taken into consideration.\(^5\)

In a paper presented at the International al-Ghazālī Symposium held in Isparta, Süleyman Demirel University, in May 2011, I translated and examined several pages of different Taymiyyan works relating to specific topics addressed in four prominent books of al-Ghazālī, offering evaluations of the latter's thought as a whole, or discussing its sources and influence. In the present paper, I take this exploration of the Damascene theologian's views on the

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\(^6\) Greek logic in the *Mustasfā*, philosophy and causality in the *Iḥyāʿ*, intercession and prophethood in the *Maḍnūn*.