Thanks to the studies of Madelung and Sherif, since years now the scholarly community knows almost with certainty that al-Ghazālī, in his Mīzān al-amal, used Ibn Sīnā’s Najāt and al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī’s Kūb al-dhāri‘a ilā makārim al-sharī‘a. Both authors offer a general significant outline that at the same time provides a valuable basis for a more detailed analysis. However, one looks in vain for a precise account of the respective influence of these two works. Neither do they state that al-Ghazālī, as usual, not always copies his sources verbatim. Al-Ghazālī is never a slavish follower of whatever source he is using, hence important terminological modifications do sometimes appear. However, a difference in wording does not necessarily imply a difference in thought, and even if the latter is the case, the ‘new idea’ may still have been inspired by a formulation in the source. In what follows, I will try to present an overview of all passages that deserve to be characterized as a ‘source’ for the Mīzān. Of course, a systematic in-depth comparison between all the fragments and their respective sources largely surpasses the limits of the present study since it would clearly require a monograph. I will therefore confine myself to indicating similarities while roughly qualifying their nature.

Before presenting a list of comparison, I would like to stress that the work of Ibn Sīnā that influenced al-Ghazālī in the Mīzān is not really al-Najāt, but rather Ahwāl al-nafs. Despite the close resemblance of the fragments concerned in both of Ibn Sīnā’s works, it is clear that al-Ghazālī’s wording is in most respects much closer to the formulation of the Ahwāl than to the one of the Najāt. Furthermore, special mention has to be made of the recent discovery of a new ethical tract.

of Ibn Sīnā, which turned out to be the direct source of al-Ghazālī’s discussion of the virtues and vices. Before this tract became known, it seemed plausible enough that al-Ghazālī had somewhat modified the ethics of al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, or Miskawayh, while remaining faithful to a Neo-Platonic basis. Finally, it is obvious that al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī and Ibn Sīnā have many ideas in common and that one of them clearly influenced the other in several respects. Since both thinkers were more or less contemporaneous, it is difficult to decide who influenced whom, at least based on the data that we have actually at our disposal. However, for the present research this issue is devoid of any importance, and hence will not be dealt with.

We have not been able to trace any direct source for the first three chapters of the Mizān. After having underlined that no effort is too great in order to reach a happy life in the hereafter (ch. 1), al-Ghazālī mentions four major concepts regarding life in the hereafter: the common religious belief in bodily resurrection; an intellectual interpretation by some of the ilāhiyyūn (divine philosophers), which however leaves room for sensual experiences in an ‘imaginary’—or should one say: imaginally?—way; a purely intellectual interpretation (sufis and the majority of the ilāhiyyūn); the simple denial of life in the hereafter (ch. 2). Then he stresses that for all serious scholars, whatever their ideological background, both genuine knowledge (ʿilm) and action (ʿamal) have to be developed in view of the achievement of true happiness (ch. 3).

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5 R. Wisnovsky, Avicenna’s Metaphysics in Context (London, 2003), pp. 242–3 rightly stresses that in view of the uncertainty of the data of Rāghib al-Isfahānī’s life, one has to remain ‘agnostic’ about the fact whether he influenced Ibn Sīnā, or whether the reverse is the case.

6 There are several editions of this work, see H. Daiber, Bibliography of Islamic Philosophy, i (Leiden, 1999), p. 351, n. 3519. To the ones mentioned there, one may add two other: 1. one by M. al-Ṣabrī, ‘A. Maʿruf and M.H. Nuʿaymī (Cairo, 1328 A.H.); another by ‘A. Shams al-Dīn (Beirut, 1989). When offering a precise pagination, I refer to this latter edition, but I always indicate the number of the chapters so that the reader may easily identify the passages in other editions.

7 For the exact meaning of this notion in Ibn Sīnā’s system, see J. Michot, La destinée de l’homme selon Avicenne (Leuven, 1986), passim.