PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS JUSTIFICATION OF PROPHECY: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND MAIMONIDES' ACCOUNTS OF PROPHECY

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Abstract

This study examines ideas of two scholars from a different philosophical and religious background. Each of them attempts to provide philosophical and religious justifications for the possibility of prophecy. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) views the notion of prophecy from the Islamic philosophical perspective while Maimonides (d. 1204) discusses it from the Jewish tradition. Modern philosophical and religious studies on the concept of prophecy tend to establish supremacy of certain religious tradition over others. This article presents a comparative account of religious and philosophical contexts in which such tendency of superiority occurs, at the same time, a shared basis of mutual understanding exists. While al-Ghazālī and Maimonides have disagreements on who has the right of the office of prophecy based on the interpretation of their respective religious scriptures, they have an agreement regarding the capacity of human beings in reaching the prophethood. Both employ a philosophical justification to arrive at the conclusion stating that human beings can reach the office of prophecy by using their rational and imaginative faculty. This philosophical exploration and confidence on human reason are both interesting and important for building

a solid foundation of respectful dialogue and mutual understanding.

Keywords: al-Ghazālī; Maimonides; imaginative faculty prophecy; intellectual prophecy; Muslim; Jewish.

Khulasah

Makalah ini mengkaji pemikiran dua ilmuwan yang berasal dari latar belakang falsafah dan keagamaan berbeza. Masing-masing berusaha untuk menyajikan justifikasi filosofis dan keagamaan bagi kemungkinan konsep kenabian. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) melihat konsep kenabian dari perspektif falsafah Islam sementara Maimonides (d. 1204) mendiskusikannya dari tradisi Yahudi. Kajian keagamaan dan falsafah moden tentang konsep kenabian cenderung mengukuhkan supremasi tradisi keagamaan tertentu atas tradisi keagamaan yang lain. Artikel ini menyajikan kajian perbandingan atas tradisi falsafah dan keagamaan yang di dalamnya tendensi superioriti tersebut biasa terjadi, tetapi pada masa yang sama, kesamaan asas bagi persefahaman juga berada. Sementara al-Ghazālī dan Maimonides tidak sepakat tentang siapa yang lebih berhak mendapatkan kenabian berdasarkan penafsiran atas kitab suci masing-masing, mereka bersependapat dalam hal kapasiti manusia untuk mencapai kenabian. Keduanya menggunakan justifikasi filosofis untuk sampai pada kesimpulan bahwa manusia dapat mencapai kenabian dengan menggunakan fakulti imaginasi dan rasional mereka. Eksplorasi filosofis dan kepercayaan pada akal manusia ini menarik dan sekaligus penting untuk membangun asas yang kuat bagi dialog dan persefahaman yang saling menghargai.

Kata kunci: al-Ghazālī; Maimonides; fakulti imaginasi; kenabian; kenabian intelektual; Muslim; Yahudi.

Introduction

My first encounter as a Southeast Asian Muslim with Jewish community and its scriptural tradition was when I attended Noah's Ark Interfaith Meeting between Muslim and Jewish Community in Bloomington, Indiana, USA, in 2012. I was invited to present about Muslim's holy scripture, al-Qur'an, while my Jewish colleague, Jeremy Shere, was speaking about Jewish's canonical scripture, The Hebrew Bible or Tanakh (Torah, Nevi'im, and Ketuvim). The meeting was fruitful because each community could learn commonalities and differences of both religious traditions.

However, the challenge was when each community returned to their respective fellow Muslim and Jewish congregation. A few members of Muslim congregation criticized the Muslim interfaith participants by invoking Jewish's deviation from the teachings of Prophet and their rejection and treason of the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina. The similar situation also happened in Jewish congregation when the Jewish interfaith participants were criticized for their willingness to meet Muslims whose religion distorted Jewish sources and contained 'Judaizing heresy.'[1]

This challenge of interfaith conversation also occurred in a scholarly setting. Some studies comparing the notion of prophecy in Muslim and Jewish tradition are unable to provide an objective portrayal and opinion of each tradition. Scholars who try to do so tend to establish the supremacy of one tradition over another.[2] In the

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[1] Islam is viewed as the religion that diluted and twisted the authentic materials from Israelite tradition. See Bernard W. Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), 70.

[2] In Islamic context, for example, this supremacy tendency can be seen in the work of Maryam Jameelah, *Islam versus Ahl al-Kitab: Past and Present* (Delhi: Taj Co, 1982). Meanwhile, the same tendency can be found in Jewish scholars like Abraham Geiger (and his

context of the discussion of the prophecy, for example, Fred Miller provides 'Islamic perspective' arguing that Muḥammad's prophecy is a culmination of the historical development patterns found in the Hebrew Bible.[3]

Meanwhile, Jeffry Macy presents 'Jewish view' of prophecy by showing the supreme virtuousness of Judaic prophecy compared to the Islamic one.[4] However, there are several scholarships that have been devoted to cultivate respectful dialog between these two religious communities.[5] They emphasize generally on common

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successors) who depicted Islam as inauthentic religion in his book *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (1833). See Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, 68.

[3] Fred Miller, "Prophecy in Judaism and Islam," *Islamic Studies,* 17(1) (1978): 27-44. A similar position appears in recent scholarship that criticizes a certain aspect within Judaism or defends Islamic prophetic practices such as Zohaib Ahmad, "Aspects of Maryam Jameelah's Post-Conversion Understanding of Islam," *Islamic Studies,* 58(1) (2019); Rafia Riyaz, "Comparative Analysis of Gulzar Ahmed and Richard Gabriel on the Military History of the Prophet (Peace Be on Him)," *Islamic Studies,* 55(1-2) (2016).

[4] Jeffry Macy, "Prophecy in Al-Farabi and Maimonides: The Imaginative and Rational Faculty," *Journal Jerussalem Philosophical Encounter* 6 (1985):185-201. Some analogous superiority complex occurred in recent criticism from Jewish perspective towards the prophet of Islam, Muhammad, and his 'violent' legacies or historical authenticity. See Paul Lawrence Rose, "Muhammad, The Jews and the Constitution of Medina: Retrieving the Historical Kernel," *Der Islam,* 86(1) (2011), https://doi.org/10.1515/islam.2011.012; Reuven Firestone, "Muhammad, the Jews, and the Composition of the Qur'an: Sacred History and Counter History," *Religions,* 10(1) (2019); Jacob Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam Modern Scholarship, Medieval Realities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

[5] See Reuven Firestone, "Jewish–Muslim Dialogue," in *Catherine Cornille: The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Malden, Massachusset: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 224-243; Jonathan Magonet, *Talking to the Other: Jewish Interfaith Dialogue with Christians and Muslims* (New York:

aspects, shared aspirations (e.g. peacemaking), or historical precedence of polemics and collaborations (e.g. in Medieval Spain) of these two religions to foster such the intended fruitful dialog.

In this regard, this article aims to add a specific precedence literary study that could enrich and strengthen the existing and future initiatives of religious and civilizational dialog. This study examines the notion of prophecy in Muslim and Jewish context by comparing the idea of prophethood of Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) and Maimonides (1135-1204).

Although al-Ghazālī favors the Islamic prophecy of Muḥammad when using scriptural and other religious forms of reasoning and Maimonides argues for the superiority of Judaic prophecy, Moses, with the same line of reasoning, their view on the adequacy of the philosophical justification of prophecy is analogous. They have a shared opinion on the importance of using ideas of the peripatetic philosophers such as al-Fārābī (870-950) and Ibn Sīnā (980-1037). If al-Ghazālī inherits the intellectual legacy of Ibn Sīnā,[6] Maimonides acquires the philosophical inheritance of al-Fārābī.[7]

I. B. Tauris, 2003); Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite ed., *Interfaith Just Peacemaking Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives on the New Paradigm of Peace and War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Yazid Said and Lejla Demiri, *The Future of Interfaith Dialogue Muslim-Christian Encounters Through a Common Word* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Máire Byrne, *The Names of God in Judaism, Christianity and Islam: A Basis for Interfaith Dialogue* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2011).

[6] Frank Griffel, "Al-Ġazālī's Concept of Prophecy: The Introduction of Avicennan Psychology into Ashʿarite Theology," *Journal Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14 (2004), 101-44.

[7] Macy, "Prophecy in Al-Farabi and Maimonides," 185-201.

Islamic Peripatetic Views on Prophecy

Al-Fārābī is the first Muslim scholar who tries to explain the nature of prophecy through a Neo-Platonic perspective. The idea of emanation (*fayḍ*) which is commonly used in neo-platonic tradition is also important in al-Fārābī's elaboration of prophecy. Although al-Fārābī does not devote a specific work to study the notion of prophethood, at least four of his books discuss either prophecy (*nubuwwah*) or revelation (*waḥy*) interchangeably. Jeffry Macy records al-Fārābī's accounts in those books as follows.

First, in *Ārā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah (The Opinions of Inhabitants of the Virtuous City)*, al-Fārābī explains that there are two kinds of revelations; revelation which is received by the rational faculty and by the imaginative faculty through the process of emanation. Whoever acquires such revelation, he can be called as a philosopher or a prophet. He writes:[8]

> "Then, it is this man who receives revelation, and God grants him revelation through the mediation of the Active Intellect, so that which emanates (*yafīḍ*) from God to the Active Intellect is passed on to passive intellect through the mediation of the acquired intellect, and then to the imaginative faculty."

The imaginative faculty in a person endowed with extraordinary imagination like a prophet is not only capable of preserving, combining, and separating images, objects, impressions, or materials received from sense-perception in a sleeping and waking life through 'imitation'. This faculty is also capable of having its own

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[8] Al-Fārābī, *The Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City (Ārā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah)*, ed. F. Deiterici (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 58 ll. 19-22.

activity, including accessing metaphysical truth and translating it into symbols through 'mimesis.'[9]

The revelation in the forms of abstract *intelligibilia* reaches the faculty of imagination through emanation from the Active Intellect. At first, the revelation is received by the passive intellect (i.e. *al-'aql al-hayūlānī* as one form of rational faculties) and preserved as potential *intelligibilia*. Then, the Active Intellect (*al-'aql al-fa''āl*) in the emanation process makes the potential *intelligibilia* in the passive intellect an actual *intelligibilia*. The imaginative faculty receives this actual *intelligibilia* in a visible form as a result of 'imitation' and translates in into comprehensible symbols. A man who reaches the utmost perfection of his imaginative faculty, by means of which he is capable of accessing metaphysical truth and translating it into comprehensible symbols, can be called, in R. Walzer's term, "…a man gifted with prophecy (*nubuwwah*)."[10]

Second, in *The Political Regime*, al-Fārābī only indicates that the recipient of revelation is the individual's rational faculty, without mentioning the imaginative faculty. He says, "The emanation (*ifāḍah*) which proceeds from the Active Intellect to the passive intellect through the mediation of the acquired intellect is revelation (*waḥy*)."[11] However, the recipient of revelation is not identified as a prophet or a philosopher, but as the supreme ruler. He states, "the supreme rule is that all other

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[9] R. Walzer, "Al-Farabi's Theory of Prophecy and Divination," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77, 1 (1957), 144.

[10] *Ibid.*, 147.

[11] Al-Fārābī, *The Political Regime (al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah)*, ed. Fauzi M. Najjar (Beirut: Impremiere Catholique, 1964); al-Fārābī, *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Source Book*, trans. Fauzi M. Najjar, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 36.

human rulerships are inferior to it and are derived from it."[12]

Third, in the *Aphorisms of the Statesman*, al-Fārābī distinguishes between theoretical-rational knowledge and practical-rational matters. This former is only attained by means of philosophical reasoning while the latter is attained by means of revelation. Nevertheless, none of the recipients of practical-rational knowledge through revelation is termed as a prophet. Fourth, al-Fārābī's *The Attainment of Happiness* also discusses topics of revelation. However, it does not treat revelation as means of attaining either theoretical-rational or practical-rational knowledge.[13]

The notion of revelation and prophecy in the first book (*Ārā' Ahl al-Madīnah)* sounds more sensible than others. Prophets not only receive revelation in their rational faculty like philosophers but also in their imaginative faculty. They should undergo certain philosophical thinking before receiving prophetic revelation through a direct contact with the Active Intellect.[14]

This philosophical interpretation of prophecy however is not well accepted by al-Fārābī's successors, especially Ibn Sīnā. He differs from al-Fārābī in the case of prophecy in two areas; first, he does not conceive the prophetic revelation as a result of intellectual development as al-Fārābī does, but it is considered as something sudden, "happening with a *coup*".[15] Second, although Ibn Sīnā is widely influenced by al-Fārābī in developing arguments of the possibility of prophecy, he rejects the

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[12] Al-Fārābī, *The Political Regime (al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah)*, 80; al-Fārābī, *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Source Book*, 37.

[13] Macy, "Prophecy in Al-Farabi and Maimonides," 187.

[14] Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Ortodoxy* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1958), 31.

[15] *Ibid.*

idea that the prophetic office is derived from the faculty of imagination. For Ibn Sīnā and his followers, prophethood is rather a function of that part of the intellect which he calls "the holy intellect" (*al-'aql al-qudsī*). [16]

In *al-Shifā'*, section *al-Nafs*, Ibn Sīnā explains about how the revelation comes and the role of the holy intellect (*al-'aql al-qudsī*).[17] For him, the holy intellect is the highest degree of human's capacity called *ḥads* (intuition, divination).[18] If humans in general could come to certain conclusions by using syllogism (*qiyās*), some of them by means of their *ḥads* could reach the same conclusion without establishing the premise of syllogism. According to Ibn Sīnā there are two primary qualities of *ḥads*; first, the ability to immediately find the middle term of syllogism (or to reach a conclusion instantaneously without establishing its premises); second, the ability to arrive at a conclusion with no external aid and without prior learning.[19]

Prophets are endowed with such a high quality of *ḥads*. Therefore, knowledge or prophetic revelation could come instantaneously with the aid of the highest capacity of *ḥads*, which is the holy intellect (*al-'aql al-qudsī*). In this regard, Ibn Sīnā implicitly synthesizes two al-Fārābī's notion of faculty; the rational and the imaginative. On the one hand, Ibn Sīnā maintains that prophets receive the abstract intelligible from the active intelligence by using

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[16] Majid Fakhry, *Al-Farabi: Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism* (London: One World, 2002), 91.

[17] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā': al-Ṭabiʿīyyāt*, vol. Section Six: *al-Nafs*, ed. Ibrāhīm Madkūr (Cairo: Hay'ah Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li al-Kitāb, 1975), 212.

[18] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā': al-Ṭabiʿīyyāt*, Section Six: *al-Nafs*, 219.

[19] Amira Eran, "Intution and Inspiration: The Causes of Jewish Thinkers` Objection to Avicenna's Intellectual Prophecy (*Hads*)," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 14 (2007), 40. It can be found as well at Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā': al-Ṭabiʿīyyāt*, Section Six: *al-Nafs*, 219-220.

their intellectual or rational faculty (*quwwah 'aqliyyah naẓariyyah*).

On the other hand, he accepts the idea that prophets perceive particular images from celestial souls by means of what al-Fārābī calls, "imaginative faculty (*quwwah mutakhayyilah*)."[20] In Ibn Sīnā's account, those two faculties are included in the notion of *ḥads* by which prophetic revelation is acquired in instantaneous way (*daf'atan*).

Intellectual Prophecy

In the aims of the establishing philosophical justification of prophecy, al-Ghazālī and Maimonides cannot escape from the discussion of 'intellectual prophecy'[21] or 'intellectual revelation'[22] introduced by their predecessors. Both discuss the role of the rational faculty and the imaginative faculty in receiving prophetic revelation. In this light, al-Ghazālī is more inclined to Ibn Sīnā whereas Maimonides is more inspired by al-Fārābī. Apart from their different inclination, there are some analogous elements in their arguments for the prophetic justification.

In the beginning they seem to agree with Islamic peripatetic philosophers regarding prophecy which resulted from the process of emanation. Al-Ghazālī's view on the role of imaginative and rational faculty stems from Ibn Sīnā's philosophical tradition.[23] Just like Islamic

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[20] Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Psychological Proof of Prophecy," *Journal of Eastern Studies,* 1 (1963), 51.

[21] Eran, "Intution and Inspiration," 39-71. This term is used by Amira Eran to characterize Ibn Sīnā's notion of prophecy. I use this term interchangeably with 'intellectual revelation' to refer to a kind of revelation or prophecy which relies on the power of human's faculty; either rational or imaginative faculty in receiving revelation.

[22] Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Ortodoxy*, 30. This phrase is used by Fazlur Rahman to designate al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā's conception of prophecy.

[23] Al-Ghazāli says, "We do not deny anything they (philosophers) have mentioned and (agree) that this belongs to prophets." See al-Ghazali,

peripatetic philosophers, al-Ghazālī conceives the imaginative faculty as a prophetic property. According to him, by means of imaginative faculty prophets could see the preserved tablet (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūẓ*) where the forms of future particular events are imprinted.

Regarding the rational faculty, he also assures us that prophets are endowed with the theoretical rational faculty which pertains to the power of intuition (*ḥads*). For him, besides the prophet's ability to foresee future events in the state of wakefulness and his talent for transcending natural laws, *ḥads* is also an exceptional quality of prophets. Intuition (*ḥads*) is a faculty by which prophets can achieve perfect theoretical knowledge without instructions.[24] He writes[25],

> "…the intuition of a holy and pure soul would proceed uninterruptedly (so as to grasp) all intelligible in the quickest of time. The one endowed with such a soul would thus be the prophet who (performs) a miracle relating to the theoretical faculty. He would thus no need of instruction in (attaining) intelligible. It is as though he learns by himself."

The notion of *ḥads* of al-Ghazālī is inherited from Ibn Sīnā. However, al-Ghazālī suspects implicitly a tendency of natural attitude in Ibn Sīnā's opinion. Unlike Ibn Sīnā who considers the highest perfection of *ḥads* (intuition) rendering prophetic revelation, al-Ghazālī regards that prophetic office is not a result of human's effort. In other words, he argues that a prophetic office is not merely a perfection of human's intellectual and imaginative faculty

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The Incoherence of the Philosophers, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 165.

[24] Griffel, "Al-Ġazālī's Concept of Prophecy," 116-117.

[25] Al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 164.

nor human's intuition, but rather 'a divine favor and gift'. Fazlur Rahman quotes al-Ghazālī's *Maʿārij al-Quds*[26],

> "We are also told that prophecy is a divine favor and gift which cannot be acquired by effort—although effort and acquisition are necessary to prepare the soul for the reception of revelation by acts of worship accompanied by exercise in thinking and by pure and sincere deeds."

Thus, al-Ghazālī comes to the conclusion that prophetic office is not a result of natural or intellectual endeavor, but rather a decision made by God. Interestingly, this criticism is not found in *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah,* where he attacks doctrines of philosophers. The only objection that he makes regarding prophetic office is about miracles. He objects to the idea that the prophets' capacity of performing miracle is limited to the change of some accidents within bodies. Prophetic miracles, he argues, also include the change of essential qualities as in the transformation of a stick into a serpent.[27]

Surprisingly, although Maimonides gets more influence from al-Fārābī, he has an analogous tenet with al-Ghazālī regarding the *ḥads* (translated as divination in *The Guide of the Perplexed*). In the beginning, like al-Ghazālī, Maimonides considers *ḥads* as a reliable source for establishing a good justification of prophecy. To Maimonides, all humans are endowed with this faculty in different degrees. The highest quality of *ḥads* is prophetic in a sense that a human can predict and know future events by means of this faculty. Maimonides points out:

This faculty of divination (*ḥads*) is found in all human beings, only in different degrees. It works in particular matters in which a man is intensely interested

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[26] Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philisophy and Ortodoxy*, 96.
[27] Griffel, "Al-Ġazālī's Concept of Prophecy," 116-17.

and round which his mind turns, so much so that you may feel in your own mind that certain person has done or said a certain thing in a certain affair, and it really turns to be so…by means of this faculty, some men can give warning of important impending events.[28]

Then, when the question comes as whether *ḥads* is adequate to be the main vehicle of attaining prophetic office, Maimonides also follows al-Ghazālī's conclusion although through a different way. Maimonides utilizes al-Fārābī's emphasis on the importance of the imaginative faculty. For him, a person cannot be a prophet if he is only receiving revelation from the Active Intelligence in the rational faculty. A prophetic revelation should reach the perfected imaginative faculty by which abstract truth can be presented in concrete images.

Unlike philosophers who utilize abstract-demonstrative expressions, Maimonides argues, prophets employ imaginative similes and symbols in delivering the truth.[29] In this regard, scholars who maintain that Maimonides devalues the role of the imaginative faculty because of its vulnerability to becoming hallucination are misled.[30] In fact, the imaginative faculty is the ultimate destination of emanative knowledge of the Active Intellect. By the time the process of emanation reaches the imaginative faculty, the prophetic office has begun. Maimonides explains this process in *The Guide of the Perplexed*:[31]

"The stream of emanation from the Intellect may flow only upon the rational faculty,

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[28] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. Chaim Rabin (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Companies, 1995), 138.

[29] Julius Guttman, "Introduction," in *Maimonides, The Guide of the Perplexed* (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Companies, 1995), 24.

[30] Eran, "Intution and Inspiration," 61.

[31] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 135.

without any flowing from it upon the
imaginative faculty. The reason for this may be
either because the quantity of the flow is too
small or because some defect in the natural
disposition of the imaginative faculty, so that I
cannot receive the emanation of the Intellect.
Such people form the class of scholars of a
speculative bent. The inspiration may flow
upon both faculties, the rational and
imaginative, as I and other philosophers have
explained, and the imaginative faculty be the
utmost natural perfection. That is a class of
prophets."

One thing should be noted here. Although the role
that the imaginative faculty plays is very important for
Maimonides, he also asserts that a prophet cannot have
prophetic office only by receiving prophetic revelation
through his imaginative faculty. The reception of
revelation should be accompanied by the rational faculty
as well. If a person acquires prophetic knowledge merely
by the imaginative faculty without the rational faculty,
Maimonides believes, he will become a soothsayer, augur,
or prophetic dreamer.[32] Therefore, it is important to
embrace the rational faculty in the process of prophetic
revelation. Maimonides writes:[33]

"After all, this faculty (rational faculty) is the
one which is the recipient of emanation from
the Active Intelligence and which is brought
actuality by it, and only from the rational
faculty does the emanation pass on to the
imaginative faculty."

In this light, mutual cooperation between the rational
and the imaginative faculty in receiving emanative

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[32] *Ibid.*, 136.
[33] *Ibid.*, 139.

knowledge resembles al-Fārābī's notion of revelation and prophecy almost verbatim. Nevertheless, Maimonides moves further. He holds the idea that the perfection of rational and imaginative faculty is insufficient without the decision of God.

Like al-Ghazālī who views prophecy as a matter of God's favor and gift rather than human effort, Maimonides also believes that human's preparation for prophecy must be followed by the divine will. God knows who fits for the prophetic office. He is the only one who can decide and elect someone to become a prophet. In other words, using J. Guttman's term, "the illumination of a prophet can only take place if God wills it."[34] Maimonides differentiates himself with philosophers in the following statement[35]:

> "This is exactly the same as philosophical view except in one respect: we believe that a person who is fit for prophecy and has prepared himself for it may yet not become a prophet. That depends on the divine will, and in my opinion like all other miracles and runs according to their pattern."

Religious Prophecy
From the above explanation, it can be said that al-Ghazālī and Maimonides actually try to reconcile two seemingly contradictory positions, philosophical and religious justification. Apparently, their endeavor is successful in terms of weighing human-natural potency to reach the level of prophecy. Nevertheless, when it comes to answering the question of who the most fit of the prophetic office is both inclines more to the religious verdicts than the philosophical speculation.

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[34] Guttman, "Introduction," 25.
[35] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 127.

As a result, an exclusive attitude, in the sense that the truth is attributed exclusively to their own religion, becomes prevalent in their justification of prophecy. Each of them indeed falls in the exclusive claim saying that prophet from own their tradition is more superior over others. In turn, disagreements between al-Ghazālī and Maimonides take place when their attitude towards prophethood becomes more exclusive. In the beginning both al-Ghazālī and Maimonides share a common opinion regarding the nature of prophecy. Prophecy is a matter of God's decision. Al-Ghazālī names such decision "a favor and gift" of God. Maimonides calls it "the divine will". Later however they choose their own way when they deal with the question of who deserves receiving "the gift" or "the divine will"?

Al-Ghazālī insists that Muḥammad deserves "the favor and gift" from God because he is the most truthful man. Muḥammad's truthfulness (*ṣadaqa*) in all his reports is undeniable.[36] He was known by people at his time as *al-amīn* (truthful). Therefore, when he says that he has reached the highest level of prophecy, affirmation (*tasdīq*) of that claim is necessary. In fact, such claim can be verified through 'the experience (*tajribah*)'.[37] Just like knowing Galen as physician, and Imam al-Shāfiʿī as an Islamic jurist through their works, people can identify Muḥammad's veracity of prophecy through his deeds, sayings, or works.

In this regard, I agree with Frank Griffel; the affirmation (*taṣdīq*) is an important proposition for al-Ghazālī to establish proofs of Muḥammad's prophecy and the truth of his messages.[38] On the basis of the affirmation (*taṣdīq*), a person can be judged as a believer (*mu'min*) or

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[36] Al-Ghazali, "The Deliverance from Error, " in *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali* (Chicago: Kazi Publication, 1982), 71.

[37] *Ibid*.

[38] Griffel, "Al-Ġazālī's Concept of Prophecy," 175.

unbeliever (*kāfir*). Al-Ghazālī mentions the criterion of such religious-moral classification in his book, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah*[39]:

> "*Al-Kufr* (unbelief) is the assumption that the messenger utters falsehood in anything that comes with him. *Al-Īmān* (belief) is the assumption that the messenger utters truth an anything that come with him".

Based on the above elaboration, it can be said that al-Ghazālī tries to attribute peculiarity of prophecy to Islam by using merely Muslims' religious sources.

By relying on religious sources as well, Maimonides comes to a different conclusion. He claims that Moses is the fittest recipient of 'the divine will'. Maimonides indeed labels Moses as "the greatest of all prophets".[40] As summarized by Yehuda Shamir from *The Guide of the Perplexed*, there are some salient characteristics of Moses because of which Maimonides calls him "the greatest". First, unlike other prophets who receive revelation through mediation, Moses receives prophetic mission directly from God. Second, if others were dreaming during the process of receiving revelation, Moses was wakeful. Third, other prophets trembled during revelation, Moses communicated with God without feeling fear. Fourth, while revelation might cease for other prophets, God never ceased communicating with Moses and spoke to him all the time.[41]

Most importantly, according to Maimonides, Moses knows the nature and attributes of God by himself.

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[39] Al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqah Bayn al-Islām wa al-Zanādiqah*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyyah, 1381/1961), 134.

[40] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 43.

[41] Yehuda Shamir, "Allusions to Muhammad in Maimonides' Theory of Prophecy in His Guide of the Perplexed," *Jewish Quarterly Review,* 64(3) (1974), 112.

Maimonides mentions these salient characteristics because of which Moses becomes "the greatest prophet" in the following:[42]

> "…first and greatest of all thinkers, our teacher Moses, of blessed memory, made two requests and both requests were granted. His first request was when he asked God to let him know his essence and nature; and the second, which was the first in point of time, was when he asked Him to let him know His attributes."

Maimonides' claim of the supremacy of Moses, however, seems to be a reaction to Muslims assertion that Muḥammad is the last and the greatest among the prophets.[43] Although he agrees with Muslim philosophers on the position of prophets as a law giver, he disagrees with them if the office of prophecy is established by merely philosophical justification and if Muḥammad is considered to be the greatest prophet. Instead, he argues that the office of prophecy must be determined by the decision of God and the most qualified person for that office is Moses.

The major difference of philosophical or intellectual explanation of prophecy from the scriptural or biblical one occurs in the role of human endeavor and of God's decision. The philosophical or intellectual accounts of prophecy emphasize on the role of human faculties, either the rational, the imaginative, or the intuitive faculty, in terms acquiring the office of prophecy. This opens a wider possibility of prophecy in the sense that everyone can be a prophet if he or she trains and maximizes his or her faculties. This kind of explanation in fact is unacceptable for both al-Ghazālī and Maimonides.

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[42] Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 71-72.
[43] Guttman, "Introduction," 25.

Therefore, they invoke the Divine role, instead of human endeavor, in establishing the prophetic office by means of which the intellectual prophecy can be distinguished from the religious one. Here is the beginning of both al-Ghazālī and Maimonides to resort to the scriptural or religious conception of prophecy. If the philosophical or intellectual explanation cannot specify who the real and the best prophet is (because, every human is considered having an opportunity to be a prophet), the scriptural or biblical leaning explanation can easily point who the best and the greatest prophet is.

At this point, al-Ghazālī and Maimonides disagree. Al-Ghazālī firmly believes that Muḥammad is the most deserved person of the prophetic office; meanwhile, Maimonides insists that Moses is the greatest prophet ever, who is also the best preserver of the Divine law. The selection of either Muḥammad or Moses as the prophet cannot be made by fellow human beings, but it must be made by God.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above discussion, al-Ghazālī and Maimonides come from different religious backgrounds and philosophical references. Nevertheless, it does not hamper them from reaching an analogous conclusion related to the justification of prophecy. In the beginning, they trust the power of imaginative and rational faculty in receiving prophetic revelation. Al-Ghazālī, who is clearly more inspired by Ibn Sīnā, insists that the highest form rational faculty, *ḥads* (intuition) is more adequate in acquiring the level of prophecy. Meanwhile, Maimonides, who is mainly influenced by al-Fārābī, argues that prophetic revelation should reach the imaginative faculty after passing rational faculty.

In the later development, however, both are not satisfied with the philosophical justification of the prophetic office, especially in aims of justifying the

supremacy of prophethood by either Islam or Judaism. Therefore, they cling themselves to a scriptural authority by which their notion of prophecy becomes more exclusive. Furthermore, philosophical or intellectual explanation cannot provide a specific preference or a name of who the most deserved person to be the prophet while the religious-scriptural or biblical can. Al-Ghazālī in turn refers the right of prophecy to Muḥammad whereas Maimonides to Moses.

From the above discussion, we can conclude that the philosophical justification of prophecy provides a wider room for an inclusive and universal claim of prophecy, rather than a scriptural-religious explanation. The religious considerations from any religions tend to establish the supremacy of prophecy of their own tradition while the philosophical inquiry provides a more universal and 'objective' exploration of ways in justifying prophecy.

This discussion of the office of prophecy provides us with a lesson: while religious scholars from diverse religious traditions should acknowledge and embrace their doctrinal and theological differences, at the same time, they should continue fostering an intellectual, philosophical, and scientific dialog in order to build a more objective and fruitful conversation now, next, and beyond.

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