

MAIMONIDES LECTURE ON SCEPTICISM

TUESDAY
9 MAY 2023
18:00

Before al-Ghazālī: Scepticism and Doubt in Early Islamic Thought

Nadja Germann (Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg)

Al-Ghazālī's scepticism is proverbial, at least among specialists. The chief point of reference for this assessment is his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), particularly the Seventeenth Discussion dealing with causality and miracles. The primary message of this text seems to be clear: there is nothing that human beings can know with certainty, for everything utterly depends on God, at once the free creator and the unbound sustainer of everything, with the effect that from one moment to the other, He could change everything: turn an animal into a stone, black into white, or good into evil. The target of this devastating epistemic view likewise seems to be evident: the *falāsifa*, the Greek-inspired Arabic philosophers, first and foremost al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, with their excessive trust in the human capacity to know. However, what is often overlooked in current research is the fact that al-Ghazālī's critique does not come out of the blue. It may primarily react to the *falāsifa*, but in order to fully seize its significance, other approaches, beyond *falsafa*, must be taken into account. This is what I intend to do, with the example of al-Jāhīz and the *adab* tradition sparked by his *œuvre*.

Nadja Germann is a professor of Arabic Philosophy at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg.

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Contact
maimonides-centre@uni-hamburg.de
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