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Ghazālī and Rāzī on Miracles and the Occult

Miracles, according to some Muslim thinkers, cannot verify the prophets' claim to receiving Divine guidance. In fact, miracles have no evidentiary status at all. It serves only to persuade people by the sheer display of otherworldly power that the performer is telling the truth. But power has only an incidental relation with the truth, unless it can be that the two are essentially related, in which case the former does not on its own terms guarantee the latter. This paper will examine the relationship between miracles and prophets in the thought of Abū Ḥamīd al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), two theologians who argued against the evidentiary status of miracles. One of the important considerations they had for this position, but which is rarely discussed, is that both thinkers affirm the naturalistic basis of occult phenomena, such as magic and thaumaturgy. The impression that a miracle has happened is something that can be manufactured by a skilled practitioner of the magical arts or one invested with occult powers. Furthermore, I will examine why Ghazālī and Rāzī held instead that the veracity of the prophets' claim to receiving Divine guidance should be judged on their skill as the physicians of the heart, whose teachings lead to human perfection. Finally, I shall show that miracles are best conceived within an Avicennian framework as the effect of the actualized prophetic soul, which can be taken as a physiognomic sign (*āya*) of this special status, but which does not constitute its substance.



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Muhammad Fariduddin Attar received his PhD from the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, in 2023 with a dissertation on cosmology and metaphysics in Avicenna and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. He now holds a postdoctoral fellowship from the FRQSC (Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture) and is based in Carleton University, Canada. His present research deals with the interaction between metaphysics, theology, and the occult sciences in Islamic philosophical thought. He is co-author of *A Comprehensive, Annotated, and Indexed Bibliography of the Modern Scholarship on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (544/1150–606/1210) (Brill, 2023).