Debate between the philosophers and theologians -- Al-Ghazali, an Ashʿarite theologian (in one stage of his life), wrote "The Destruction of the Philosophers", directed at Al-Farabi and Avicenna -- Averroes (also spelled “Ibn Rushd”) wrote "The Destruction of the Destruction", directed at Al-Ghazali. Averroes also tried to purify Islamic philosophy of its Neoplatonic component, recognizing that it was not authentically Aristotelian.

Accusation of Al-Ghazali against the philosophers: they were "renegades" (punishably heretical) on the following three issues:

1. The eternity of the world.
2. God's knowledge of particulars (individuals).
3. The resurrection of the body.

But Al-Ghazali also tried to refute the philosophers on their own terms.

The Eternity of the World

Aristotle argues for it thusly:

1. Whatever is in motion must first exist (motion is from one positive to another, whereas change in general is from positive to positive, positive to privative, or privative to positive -- thus motion is a species of change -- change of substance is always privative to positive or positive to privative and thus is never motion - this is because substance has no contrary). Premise.

2. The beginning of the existence of anything comes about through motion. Premise from Physics.

3. Whenever something formerly at rest begins to move, there must have been a prior motion whereby agent and matter are brought into the proper relationship for motion to begin. Premise.

4. All motion other than that of the First Sphere is caused by the motion of the First Sphere. Premise from meteorology, etc.

5. All causality is simultaneous. Premise from theory of knowledge.
in Posterior Analytics.

6. Assume motion had a beginning in general. Assumption for indirect proof.

7. Then the motion of the First Sphere had a beginning, and this was the beginning of the first motion. From 5, 4, 3.

8. The First Sphere either has always existed or began to exist. Logical truth.

9. Assume that the First Sphere had a beginning. Assumption for Conditional Proof.

10. Then, from 2 there was a motion previous to the first motion of the First Sphere, namely that by which the First Sphere came into being.

11. So, if the First Sphere began to be, then there was a motion before the first motion. Conditional Proof, 9-10.

12. Assume that the First Sphere has always existed. Assumption for Conditional Proof.

13. Then it was at rest before it began to be moved. From 12, 7.

14. But then there was an earlier motion by which the First Sphere was brought into the proper relationship with its mover. From 13, 3.

15. Thus, if the First Sphere has always existed, then there was a motion before the first motion.

16. So in any case there was a motion before the first motion (on the assumption that motion began in general.) From 11, 15, 8, Constructive Dilemma.

17. So motion in general did not begin. Indirect Proof, 6-16.

18. So the motion of the First Sphere did not begin. From, 17, 4, 5.

19. So the First Sphere has always existed. From 18, 6, 1.
The eternal existence of the rest must be deduced from a chain or causes which is partly astronomical and partly "meteorological".

Al-Ghazali's attack on the doctrine of the eternity of the world:

The doctrine is renegadism because it implies that God did not create the world. (The philosophers could have replied that God still did "create" the world in the sense of eternal emanation.)

The doctrine is impossible because it implies the existence of an actual infinity (of cycles, and also of individuals of a given earthly species, and of souls), which even the philosophers deny to be possible. (This is a poor objection, because Aristotle denied that the existence of a past infinity -- not all at once -- constituted an infinite multitude in the sense he said is impossible.)

The Existence of God

Aristotle's argument for the unmoved mover:

1. What is eternal is necessary. Premise -- nothing contingent by essence can be accidentally eternal, because the accidental will in the course of time give out.

2. The motion of the First Sphere is eternal. (From previous argument)

3. Thus, the motion of the First Sphere is necessary. From 1, 2.

4. Whatever is moved is moved by another. Premise, from induction on the various types of motion.

5. There cannot be an infinite regress in essentially ordered movers. Premise, probably from the same conclusion concerning deduction in general in Posterior Analytics, since causation corresponds to a possible deduction.

6. Thus, there must be a primary mover in the series of agents which cause the motion of the First Sphere.

7. This mover must be unmoved with respect to its moving power. (From 4)
8. It also must be immovable, even accidentally, since its moving power must be necessary in order to cause a necessary effect, and if it could be moved accidentally, then perhaps it could be changed so as no longer to be the first agent of the motion of the First Sphere.

9. Thus, it cannot be a soul (because soul can be moved accidentally).

10. It cannot be any kind of power in a body. (Because a power in a body must eventually give out.)

11. Hence it is immaterial.

12. Hence it is an intellect. (Because an immaterial power can only be an intellect.)

Al-Ghazali's attack on the philosophers' proofs of God (mostly adaptations of the above reasoning):

1. The only necessity is logical necessity.
2. Hence, there is no causality in nature (because it would be non-logical necessity).
3. Hence, the chains of causality which include non-rational agents, which are necessary for these proofs, do not exist.

Furthermore, the philosophers in their proofs deny the possibility of an infinite regress, while they allow an infinite regress backward in time, a contradiction. (This seems a poor objection, or at least Al-Ghazali did not accept the legitimacy of the philosophers' distinction between accidentally and essentially ordered causes.)

God's Knowledge of Particulars (Individuals)

The Neoplatonists said that, since God knows things only insofar as they are eminently (Descartes' terminology) contained in his knowledge, He knows them "in a universal way".

Al-Ghazali says: this is not enough to amount to God's knowledge as described in the Koran.

Resurrection of the Body
Islamic Neoplatonists said that the sensuous delights of Paradise are figures for intellectual delights.

Al-Ghazali says that is an impermissible interpretation.

Averroes

Known to subsequent Europeans as "the Commentator" from his extensive commentaries on the works of Aristotle.

Responses to Al-Ghazali in the "Decisive Treatise on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy" and "Destruction of the Destruction".

Decisive Treatise:

The Koran divides its passages into clear and obscure and says that the obscure are to be interpreted only be those "confirmed in knowedge" (Surah 3).

Logical discourse, according to Aristotle, occurs on three levels:

Demonstration, or science

Dialectic

Rhetoric

Demonstration proceeds from indubitable premises, while dialectic does not, but rather proceeds from common opinion, or the opinion of the wise, or of the wisest of the wise, etc.

Demonstration and dialectic proceed by abstractions, while rhetoric uses figures (metaphors) to signify those abstractions.

Men differ according to their intellectual gifts.

Only those who master philosophy can comprehend demonstrations.

The Islamic theologians have put forth dialectical arguments as if they were demonstrations, thus confusing the uneducated.

The Koran proceeds by rhetoric, and in its literal interpretation is addressed to the uneducated.
Thus, the philosophers are "those confirmed in knowledge" and only they are authorized to interpret the obscure passages.

The philosophers perceive that the Koran, in its permissible interpretation, is consistent with the cosmology and theology of Aristotle, but Al-Farabi and Avicenna have erred by incorporating Neoplatonic elements into philosophy.

From "Destruction of the Destruction":

On the eternity of the world: Al-Ghazali erred in failing to distinguish between accidentally and essentially ordered causes.

On the existence of God: Al-Ghazali's opinion on causality in general is false and sophistical -- no one can actually believe that there is no causal nexus among motions.

On God's knowledge: we attribute knowledge homonymously to ourselves and God -- thus Avicenna is incorrect to say that God knows in a universal way -- we cannot know the manner of God's knowledge.

On the resurrection of the body: the figurative interpretation is permissible.