

Anthropomorphism according to Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and Maimonides (d. 1204): A comparative discourse



Authors:

Nurhanisah Senin¹ 
 Khadijah Mohd Khambali
 Hambali² 
 Wan Adli Wan Ramli² 
 Mustafa Kamal Amat Misra¹ 
 Nazneen Ismail¹ 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Da'wah and Usuluddin, Faculty of Islamic and Civilization Studies, Selangor International Islamic University College, Kajang, Selangor, Malaysia

²Department of Aqidah and Islamic Thought, Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Corresponding author:

Khadijah Mohd Khambali
 Hambali,
 ijamh@um.edu.my

Dates:

Received: 01 Nov. 2022
 Accepted: 02 Mar. 2023
 Published: 22 May 2023

How to cite this article:

Senin, N., Hambali, K.M., Ramli, W.A.W., Misra, M.K.A., & Ismail, N., 2023, 'Anthropomorphism according to Al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and Maimonides (d. 1204): A comparative discourse', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(1), a8264. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8264>

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The existence of 'human-like' attributes and actions in the Qur'an and Hebrew Bible entails to various interpretations towards anthropomorphic verses among the Muslim and Jewish counterparts. Al-Ghazali and Maimonides in their discourses strongly affirmed the unity of God and refuted anthropomorphism. Therefore, this study expounded al-Ghazali and Maimonides' methods in affirming the incorporeality of God through outlining the similarities and differences in their interpretation. This study was qualitative in nature which analyses writings of al-Ghazali and Maimonides in encountering anthropomorphism. It can be deduced that both scholars were found to be employing allegorical interpretation with different level of interpretations in their attempts to repudiate the corporeal form of God. Alternatively, they both agree on the literalist's approach with conditions that one must not perceive God's essence in a bodily figure. Consequently, believing so will lead one to heresy. In sum, their emphasis on an incorporeal God brought them to similar interpretation despite their different religion and theological or philosophical orientation.

Contribution: This article contributed to comparative theological study in understanding anthropomorphic verses through the discourse of al-Ghazali and Maimonides in Islam and Judaism, respectively.

Keywords: anthropomorphism; al-Ghazali; Maimonides; incorporeality; comparative analysis.

Introduction

The ancient Hebrew biblical concept of God evidently illustrates God in a primitive nature. There are surely transcendent and incorporeal verses, but the anthropomorphic verses certainly outweigh the transcendental forms (Reese 1980). Even the latter classical prophets, namely Second Isaiah and Amos, being committed to the pure and ethical monotheism, do not perceive anthropomorphism as a problem or in contra to a universal monotheistic concept (Shah 1997). God is mentioned as having eyes, ears, mouth, nostrils, hands, face and feet. Among other anthropomorphic view of God for instance, God possesses curly hair, God cries upon the account of storm attacks towards Noah, God laughs, God's jealousy and others. Apparently, the early Israelite traditions attribute a visible human form to God which leads to the understanding of anthropomorphic God.

While on the other hand, Qur'anic anthropomorphism demonstrates the limited capability of human in perceiving the Qur'an as a whole. Qur'anic anthropomorphism is almost similar to the Jewish Bible in depicting God as having face, hand and eye. Other organs such as feet, knee and fingers are also mentioned in Prophetic tradition. His actions that are similar to human are also mentioned in Qur'an such as descend, ascend and angry. Apart from that, actions and emotions such as laughter and happiness are also mentioned in the Prophetic tradition. Evidently, both the Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible contain anthropomorphic verses that attribute human-like features to God.

The discourse of God's monotheism has been the central issue in monotheistic belief (Wyschogrod 1982). Anthropomorphisms can be problematic if we regard them as adequate for depicting God in restricted human features and concepts, which may unwittingly assist to weaken in our thoughts his incomparable and incomprehensible nature. Muslim theologians developed a clear and simple picture of God based on the Quran's assertions that 'God is one' (112:1-4) and 'nothing is like Him' (42:11). They all concur that God is incorporeal and resides outside of space, time and physical boundaries (Noor & Usman 2021). Similarly, in Judaism, being the only creator of all in existence, God is thought to be singular and free from all flaws, inadequacies and defects. He is also regarded to be omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and completely infinite in all of his traits (Lebens 2022).

Al-Faruqi (2008) explains briefly on the emergence of anthropomorphism as the scantiness of human thought in perceiving the Divine. The nature in recognising one's God which was instilled in each individual, leads to the thinking and imagination of God. In perceiving the Divine, the limit of humans' intellect has entailed the degradation of God's quality that is supposedly meant to adapt qualities beyond humans' qualities and imagination. Even the most eloquent person could never equate Qur'anic eloquence or *balaghah* that possesses the Divine presence in it (Al-Baqi 1945). God in Qur'an originates in a Unitarian form and negates other godheads contradict to Judaism that was fused with monolatry in its early emergence (Nasr 1994). Another opinion by Watt who proposes the attribute of anthropomorphism was due to the gnostic influences apart from the literalist. Nevertheless, the majority of Muslim scholars, namely al-Shahrastani, al-Razi, al-Isfaraini, al-Ghurabi, al-Nashsar and many others, argue that the corporeal thought originates from the Jewish circle of Ibn Saba' to the extreme Shiite sects (Shah 1997).

Meanwhile, in Jewish philosophy, according to Wolfson (1979), the discourse of anthropomorphism arose when Jewish intellectuals became concerned during the reign of the Islamic caliphate when the inferiority towards the Muslim scholars arises due to the labelling of the Jewish as anthropomorphists. The understanding of anthropomorphism became more visible in Islam with the rising conversion of Jews, Christians and Zoroastrians into Islam (Al-Faruqi 2008). This is possibly due to their strong convictions towards their previous beliefs that upheld a less monotheistic concept as compared to Islam.

Furthermore, in recent years, critical thinking within the Islamic and Jewish academic worlds has engaged in new methods of thinking about their different religious traditions. A shared interest in a Jewish or Islamic secular hermeneutics that results from research on the structures of religious and other canonical texts is evident despite the differences between the respective political, social and intellectual contexts. The critical engagement with the tradition itself leads to the critique of the political implications of religious beliefs. This is true, at least within a religious avant garde, of modern Jewish and Muslim thought. Thus, the discourse of al-Ghazali and Maimonides serves a pertinent role in preserving the concept of religion as a whole especially in the context of God's incorporeality and divinity.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the theological explanation of anthropomorphism according to al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and Maimonides (d. 1204). Al-Ghazālī and Maimonides were known as spokesmen for their respective religions in discussing the notion of God's unity and incorporeality. Al-Ghazālī attempted to establish Tawhid in such a comprehensive theistic notion that it is extended in most of his works, such as *Ihya'*, *Iqtisad*, *Tahafut* and others. Although earlier scholars like his predecessors al-Ash'arī (873–935), al-Baqillani (950–1013), al-Juwaynī (1028–1085) and others had delineated the *kalām* account, al-Ghazālī nonetheless continued to strengthen

and deliberate the majority of proofs once claimed by al-Ash'arī and his successors.

Maimonides, on the other hand, may be considered the earliest philosopher of Jewish thought (Kraemer 2008; Stroumsa 2009). He established the concept of the unity of God based on Aristotelian arguments and refuted the theological arguments that he termed mere imagination. Maimonides' greatest contribution was in listing the 13 articles of faith that have been widely accepted by Jewish adherents and five of which emphasise that God was revealed in the commandments. This occurs when dogma and creedal doctrine are not used to being central to Judaic belief. Consequently, it becomes customary of many congregations to recite the 13 articles in a slightly more poetic form beginning with the words *Ani Maamin* [I believe] every day after the morning prayers in the synagogue.

Taking into consideration their eminent scholarship in rational interpretation of revelation during the middle age, both sages had contributed extensively in explicating anthropomorphism which exists in the Qur'an and Torah. Al-Ghazali is seen to be less philosophical than Maimonides due to his refutation of Aristotelian logic in his book *Refutation of the Philosophers*. In contrast, Maimonides attempts to incorporate Aristotelian logic into Jewish teachings in order to harmonise religion and reason. Nevertheless, both scholars had contributed vastly in the interpretation of anthropomorphism in explaining God's unity and incorporeality which are considered as the most vital aspect in Islam and Judaism. Although there are several writings (Davidson 2005; Harvey 2001; Pines 1971; Strauss 1965) that have discussed on the possible influence of al-Ghazali towards Maimonides and towards the Jewish medieval philosophy, the present writing specifically analyses their interpretation of anthropomorphic verses. This article elucidates the discourse of anthropomorphism according to al-Ghazali and Maimonides in three parts, namely, the incorporeality of God, allegorical and literal interpretation.

Anthropomorphism according to Al-Ghazali and Maimonides

In the discourse of anthropomorphism according to al-Ghazali and Maimonides, two main issues can be deduced, namely the allegorical and literal interpretations.

Allegorical interpretation

Al-Ghazali (1998) defines allegorical interpretation in his book *Ijam al-'Awam*, to denote a method of interpretation that is used to explain a meaning by removing the explicit part of the implicit. In allowing allegorical interpretation, al-Ghazali is aware of the risk in allegorical interpretation. Therefore, he divides three groups of people in encountering *ta'wil*. The first group includes the laymen whom he forbids from *ta'wil*. The second group are the scholars who discuss the issues of *ta'wil* with the laymen who he also forbids. The third group are the scholars themselves who secretly

interpret the verses allegorically. Al-Ghazali (1998) even warns the scholars if they are not certain with the interpretation they are required to leave and perceive it explicitly with purifying God from any absurdities. The people categorised in this group are those who are worried about slipping away from their creedal belief if allegorical interpretation is not being concluded. However, there are regulations in practising allegorical interpretations so as to avoid deviation in understanding the verses from the original meaning. The allegories must be accompanied with precise and exact proofs (Al-Ghazali 1993).

In *Qanun al-Ta'wil*, Al-Ghazali (1992) clearly distinguishes five different approaches of encountering reason and revelation. Firstly, those who at one extreme have confined their studies to scripture. Secondly, those who at the other extreme have confined their studies to reason. Thirdly, those moderates in between who seek to unite and reconcile (reason and scripture). The moderates, in turn, are divided into three groups. Firstly, those who made reason as fundamental and scripture secondary and who consequently were not very concerned with the study of scripture. Secondly, those who made scripture fundamental and reason secondary and who were, therefore, not greatly concerned with the study of reason. Lastly, those who made both reason and scripture equally fundamental and strove to bring together and reconcile the two. Among these five groups, al-Ghazali chooses the last group who he claims as 'following the proper procedure'. Al-Ghazali also suggests three attitudes that one may need to attach himself with. Firstly, one must know that one does not aspire to know all of that in which the Quran (17:85) mentions: 'And you are not given aught of knowledge but a little'. Secondly, one should never deny the testimony of reason for reason does not lie. If reasons were to lie than it might lie in establishing scripture for it is by reason that one knows the truth of the scripture. Thirdly, one must refrain from specifying an interpretation when the various possibilities are incompatible. Al-Ghazali emphasises on the importance of the right and precise interpretation given which does not oppose the law of the scripture and prophetic tradition. Thus, any interpretation that is against the law is considered to be corrupted (Al-Ghazali 1992).

Meanwhile, Maimonides' emphasis on ambiguous interpretation can be understood as an attempt to improve the philosophical approach to the Scripture. He strongly advises an allegorical approach to the Scripture's anthropomorphic sections (Maimonides 1965). Forty-nine chapters, or more than half of the first volume of *The Guide of the Perplexed*, are covered with his thorough allegorical interpretation. So, it illustrates Maimonides' primary goal to distinguish between anthropomorphic and allegorical comprehension. Maimonides appears to be particularly focused on repeating Onkelos' view in his style of interpretation. Only a small number of phrases are used to refer to God in a figurative sense, according to Maimonides, while some are rephrased in Onkelos' Targum, and others are left to literal translation (Maimonides 1965).

Maimonides quotes the verse from Proverbs 25:11 to show a good simile as follows, 'A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in vessels of silver'. Maimonides interprets that 'the deeper sense of the words of the holy law are pearls and the literal apprehension of a figure is of no value in itself' (Maimonides 1965). This also intends to demonstrate the double sense of certain words in which the literal one is similar to the silver and the hidden meaning is as the gold hidden inside.

In understanding the anthropomorphic verses, al-Ghazali and Maimonides agree on the importance of substituting other fitting interpretations to God. Both agree that the allegorical interpretation of the verses that describe God's physical attributes must be used to avoid the idea of God's corporeality. With regard to the homonyms in the verses, Maimonides is adamant. Al-Ghazali, on the other hand, was more likely to accept the idea of the verse while also rejecting the bodily figure of God.

It can be observed that Maimonides greatly holds Aristotelian works throughout his discussion earlier on the existence of God. Similarly, in the case of anthropomorphism, his allegorical approach can be seen as part of realising Aristotle's view to acknowledge different forms of expression (Wolfson 1938; Leaman 2003). Maimonides attempts to rationalise the esoteric interpretation behind God's humanly figure although to him there is nothing wrong with the anthropomorphic expressions as they enable the general audience to better grasp the scripture. However, in Maimonides' effort to interpret figuratively, he does not mention the limitation of allegories.

What is the limitation of carrying out allegorical interpretation and what are the factors for it to be carried out? It must be acknowledged that extreme allegorisation may as well lead to heresies. Here, Maimonides does not seem to highlight these issues. There is no adequate philosophical reason or any demonstration of a different side to be found in his discussion (Shatz 2003) unlike his demonstration of the creation and eternity. His predecessor Saadya Gaon appears to be more thorough in explaining the interpretation guidelines. The only argument that can be found similar to that by Maimonides is his remark that any conflict between scripture and reason should be delineated; for instance, any arguments that lead to the denial of miracle should be rejected. It can be deduced, according to Maimonides, that any verses leading to His corporeality are worth interpretation allegorically.

According to Maimonides (1965), there are only two basic approaches to comprehending a particular verse: using a univocal interpretation and an ambiguous one. Unambiguous interpretation suggests that a word's meaning can be given to both God and another being, and Maimonides finds this unacceptable. While in the equivocal approach, a word possesses two meanings. When anthropomorphism is used, the meaning given to God differs from the one given to a person. This demonstrates that Maimonides strongly suggests to use allegorical interpretation in order to avoid God to be likened to human form.

While al-Ghazali in his *Faysal al-Tafriqah* elaborates that, in determining whether a verse requires allegorical interpretation, one must skim through five levels of existence. These are the ontological (*wujud adh-dhati*), sensory existence (*hissi*), conceptual existence (*khayali*), noetic existence (*'aqli*) and analogous existence (*shabahi*). He explains that there is no room for allegory for things with an ontological existence; any rational interpretation of expressions in the Scripture of Hadith which refers to any of these levels other than the ontological is valid and cannot be regarded as telling lies. Allegorical interpretation must go through these five steps of existence and if it reaches the final existence of noetic and analogous, it will only then be permitted to interpret allegorically (Al-Ghazali 1993; Shahrān 2011). This suggests that al-Ghazali also encourages one to interpret on the hidden meaning behind the anthropomorphic verses which cannot be attributed to God in its literal sense. One also has to abide by the process of his allegorical interpretation.

While it is difficult to have a positive conception of God's nature, it is logical to believe that there must be a first cause. As a result, we can learn about the effects of divine activity by studying the created order. Maimonides' negative theology prevents us from attributing anthropomorphisms to God, but it does not prevent us from knowing God's existence or the features of the world God has created. This is a very philosophical view of religion. Fulfilling the commandments, according to it, is the way to develop one's capacities and dispositions in order to come to understand the philosophical truths of the Hebrew Bible.

Al-Ghazali in his *Ihya'* and *al-Iqtisad* interprets *istiwa'* in Qur'an 41:11 with the notion of dominion and power. He emphasises that it does not rest upon body as body constitutes of substance and accidents which are impossible to God. If the position of God is posited in the '*arsy* (throne) as mentioned in the verse of *istiwa'*, it must be concluded that God resides in a specific place which contradicts with other verses in the Quran. Another verse shows that the position of God is undeterminable 'And wherever ye He is with you'. Thus, the verse above denotes the meaning of comprehension and knowledge (Al-Ghazali 2008a, 2008b).

In discussing on the term throne in the verse 'Thus saith the Lord, The heavens are my throne and the earth my footstool'. (Is Lxvi I), Maimonides explains that this verse indicates the rank and dignity which testify his existence, essence and his omnipotence. Meanwhile, his omnipotence that has brought the heavens and earth into existence, regulates their motions and governs the sublunary world by their beneficial influence (Maimonides 1965). His omnipotence positively purifies him from any support of material objects as God is incorporeal.

Another anthropomorphic verse is mentioned in a *hadith* [prophetic tradition] which carries the meaning as such 'The heart of a believer lies between two fingers of the Merciful (God)'. It is impossible to relate fingers to God as it will

consequently associate God to bodily nature. Another *hadith* mentions the hand of God when it states that 'The right stone (*al-hajar al-aswad*) is the right hand of God in earth' which connotes the meaning of veneration and honour (Al-Ghazali 2008a).

In another verse, it is mentioned that 'For my hand is upon the throne of God' (Ex 17:16) which denotes the essence and greatness of God. However, according to Maimonides, this should not be seen as something separate from the God himself or as part of the creation as it entails heresy. Thus, it should be considered as his essence and his greatness (Maimonides 1965).

This Hadith appears to reveal the act of walking for God and closeness of God to human in distance. Nonetheless, in interpreting it, Al-Ghazali (2008b) interprets it as the closeness in terms of his blessings towards humans.

Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger as saying that Allah, the Exalted and Glorious, thus stated: 'I am near to the thought of My servant as he thinks about Me, and I am with him as he remembers Me. And if he remembers Me in his heart, I also remember him in My Heart, and if he remembers Me in assembly I remember him in assembly, better than his (remembrance), and if he draws near Me by the span of a palm, I draw near him by the cubit, and if he draws near Me by the cubit I draw near him by the space (covered by) two hands. And if he walks towards Me, I rush towards him'. (Sahih Muslim, p. 2675)

In his treatise, Maimonides (1965) reiterated Onkelos' interpretation regarding the anthropomorphism in the Hebrew Bible when God declares his descending to the world. Onkelos in his Targum had paraphrased it to manifestation of God instead of the verse saying 'The Lord will come down' which becomes 'And God manifested Himself'. There was also a possibility where Onkelos might signify *Elohim* as angels and not God, because it was the usual practice of the prophets to relate words of angels in the name of God as though God himself spoke to the prophets. Another verse that demonstrates God's movement and indicates space is as follows: 'The Lord is nigh [*karab*] unto all them that call upon him' (Ps 145:18). This is interpreted as an intimate spiritual approach, for instance, the attainment of some knowledge but not the approach in space. The position of God is also mentioned in the Hebrew Bible 'Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place [*mekomo*]' (Ezk 3:12) as the *makom* has the figurative meaning and the verse may be paraphrased as 'Blessed be the Lord according to the exalted nature of His existence'. The expressions such as ascending and descending should not be understood as something related to space, but instead they denote God's absolute existence, greatness and power. Therefore, his position that reflects his existence is incomparable.

Both allegorical interpretations of al-Ghazali and Maimonides appear to acknowledge other verses from the holy text in support of the anthropomorphic verses' incorporeality. Both al-Ghazali and Maimonides agree that humans' intellect is limited in that they cannot perceive God's essence in any form.

Literal interpretation

Besides acknowledging the allegorical interpretation, both scholars also accept the literal interpretation. Maimonides in acknowledging the rabbinic tradition agreed as well with the literal interpretation of the anthropomorphic verses. He stated that Hanbalites and their followers who accept the Scriptures as written and believe that God, unlike other bodies, has a body, are neither polytheists nor corporealists. This is adjacent to the Bible 'There is none like unto Thee' (Jr 10:6). As far as the Bible is concerned, the same goes with the Quran where it mentions 'there is none equal to Him' (112:4). In correspondence to that, al-Ghazali had formulated seven steps in understanding the anthropomorphic verses in its literal sense which comprise of the necessity to purify God from being likened with others. Similarly, al-Ghazali did not label the literalist to be heretic as long as one purifies the notion of weakness from God in understanding the anthropomorphic verses.

The first is the *Salaf* [early period of the companions] way of understanding the verses as it is without interrogating the meaning behind the verses. This is due to the fact that it is not being practised by the Prophet's companions and to question it is impermissible. It is based on the answer by Imam Malik when he was asked regarding *istiwa'* [God being seated upon the throne]; '*Istiwa'* is known, believing in it is compulsory, its way is unknown and asking about it is *bid'ah* [innovation, not being practised by the Prophet]. This group includes laymen (Al-Ghazali 1993).

Al-Ghazali (1998) in his other treatise *Ijma' al-'Awam 'an 'Ilm al-Kalam*, stated that there are seven steps in understanding the anthropomorphic verses of God. The first step is to cleanse God of all physical attachments. The second stage is to affirm and fully believe in Prophet Muhammad's words. The third step is to recognise one's own shortcomings and limits in comprehending and interpreting the verses. The fourth phase is to remain silent and avoid questioning and disputing it, which may finally lead to creed vulnerability. The fifth step is to keep it in the original form without changing the verses through adding or removing the verses or translating it to other languages. The sixth step is to abstain oneself from delving intensely into these verses. The seventh step is to leave the discussion to the scholars in interpreting it as our limit is bounded.

In accordance with this, it is necessary to renounce [*tanzih*] God's essence and attributes from any flaws and deficiencies. Furthermore, any of the six directions, such as above, below, right, left, front and back, must be removed from his essence. As a result, the terms above and below indicate heads, below indicates feet, right indicates stronger than left, and finally front and back indicate movement. These directions are the result of man's creation. As a result, it is impossible to confine God within the human limits that he himself designed. For

whatever the mind imagines is limited to directions, space, substances and accidents. Both substances and accidents coexist in the physical body. (Al-Ghazali 2008a)

As a whole, al-Ghazali is observed to follow more of the *Hanabilah* for the laymen which is to accept the literal meaning of the verse without knowing how [*bila kayf / balkafa*] which apparently can be traced to the statement of Malik bin Anas (d. 995) regarding the *istiwa'* that notes 'God's sitting on the Throne is known, but its modality is unknown, the belief in it is obligatory and the inquiry about it is innovation' (Shahran 2011).

Similarly, to Maimonides, it is suffice for ordinary persons to believe that there is a being existing, perfect, incorporeal, not inherent in a body who is above all kinds of deficiencies and affections (Maimonides 1956). As mentioned also in the book of Prophets namely 'To whom, then, will you liken me?' (Is 40:25) and 'There is none like unto Thee' (Jr 10:6) that refutes the idea of similarity with any of his creatures. God cannot be afflicted with emotions, changes, or nonexistence. According to Maimonides (1956), laymen should also possess a set of beliefs that there is no God or other Gods that in association with God to be worshipped. Maimonides did not mention that these verses should be denied and refuted although he agrees with the Mu'tazilite in refuting attributes to God. Nevertheless, he was as persistent as the Mu'tazilite in interpreting the verses allegorically. Maimonides still believes that people who reject allegorical interpretation yet support God's incorporeality should not be regarded as a heretic. Only when they affirm that God possesses body will they be heretic (Maimonides 1963).

Al-Ghazali (1993) reminds in his *Faysal* not to easily label others as disbelievers. Issues that are not related to the core belief of Islam should not be disputes. People who engage in metaphorical interpretation should not be labeled as disbelievers. Similarly, those hold to the explicit verses should not be labeled as adhering to corporeality. Al-Ghazali strictly highlights prohibition for the laymen to interpret allegorically. It is sufficient for the laymen to adopt abstention from delving further into anthropomorphic verses. However, it must be accompanied with renunciation of any corporeal image of God. The fifth step is to keep it in the original form without changing the verses through adding or removing the verses or translating it to other languages. The sixth step is to abstain oneself from delving intensely into these verses. The seventh step is to leave the discussion to the scholars in interpreting it due to intellectual limitation of the layman.

In understanding heresies in the anthropomorphic sense, Maimonides claimed that those who acknowledge that idol worship is true, even if they do not worship an idol, are committing the sin of reviling and blaspheming the honoured and the revered name of God (Wolfson 1965). Here, acknowledgement must be followed by spoken words. Therefore, one will only be included as heretics once he claims that he believes God is a body. He also mentioned in his *Mishneh Toreh* on the groups of heretics 'anyone who

says that there is one Lord but that He is a body and possesses a figure' (Maimonides 1963). His remark here solidly refers to the corporeality, perceiving God with body just like human. Meanwhile, those who perceive bodily figures of God in an equivocal sense such as saying God is one and is a body unlike other bodies, are not considered as heretics.

Overall, the similarities between both the scholars concern their rejection of literal interpretations of God's figurative verses. Both the scholars affirm his oneness and divinity, which must be separated from corporeality. Furthermore, both believe that parables are included in the sacred text to aid human comprehension. Nonetheless, allegorical interpretations must be done correctly and supported by other Qur'anic and Hebrew Bible verses. It can be deduced that both scholars attempted to find a happy medium between literalistic and allegoric interpretations. This is to address the various needs of individuals who may be laymen or learned men.

Conclusion

In sum, it can be observed that although al-Ghazali and Maimonides represent different theological or philosophical orientation, both have some converging points in refuting anthropomorphism which serve as a guide in understanding anthropomorphism through multiple approaches. They both agree in affirming the anthropomorphic verses without having to totally disprove the verses. This can be demonstrated through their acceptance of the literal understanding for the laymen. Nevertheless, both emphasise the great necessity of renouncing God from corporeality.

Next in the allegorical discussion, al-Ghazali took a very cautious step in permitting *ta'wil*. While Maimonides can be seen taking extra steps with regard to allegorical interpretation, he extensively emphasises equivocation in the attempt of harmonising reasons and revelation. Whereas, al-Ghazali is observed to be more traditionalist or preserved in this matter. He emphasised the risk of using excessive allegorical interpretation and demonstrates the limits and boundaries of *ta'wil*. On the other hand, both al-Ghazali and Maimonides accept the literalist approach for the laymen. This, however, must be accompanied with strong repudiation of the corporeality which will safeguard one from falling into anthropomorphic apprehension which both Islam and Judaism refute. Their effort in striking a balance between two extremes of literalism and rationalism can be applauded in embracing his transcendence.

Both rejected anthropomorphism due to their respective reasons. Al-Ghazali's discourse on anthropomorphism focuses more on safeguarding the fundamental beliefs of Islam. This is demonstrated through refuting the *hasyawiyyah* or *mujassimah* thought that conforms towards anthropomorphism. This is done through developing the Ashairite's thought while at the same time maintaining the Hanabilite literalist approach. Meanwhile, Maimonides' tendency towards rational interpretation of the scriptures

undertakes the Aristotelian approach in philosophising the scriptures and partly due to the influence of the Almohad's strict monotheism. Despite his rationalisation attempt, Maimonides still maintains the rabbinic approach of accepting the explicit meaning of the verses. Besides, his commitment towards the religious tradition can also be seen in his reiteration of the Onqelos in allegorical interpretation. Generally, both al-Ghazali and Maimonides represent the main theological and philosophical movement in the encounter of reason and revelation. Al-Ghazali's endeavour towards safeguarding the belief can be observed in his writing where most of his points were referring to renouncing God from anthropomorphism without allegorical interpretation. Even towards the scholars, al-Ghazali emphasises not to fall into the limitless and destructive interpretation. On the other hand, Maimonides in his more philosophical intended readers of Guide to prefer an allegorical approach in safeguarding one's belief. Nevertheless, his rabbinical approach in Mishneh Torah maintains anthropomorphic verses but is guarded with the renunciation of a corporeal God. Above all, despite different orientations of al-Ghazali and Maimonides in encountering the anthropomorphic verses, both demonstrate their attempt in striking a balance between reason and revelation.

Acknowledgements

This manuscript entitled, 'Anthropomorphism According to al-Ghazali and Maimonides' is submitted collectively under Dr. Abur Hamdi Usman as part of output for THIQAH seminar (see Sahlawati Abu Bakar, Farhah Zaidar Mohamed Ramli, Phayilah Yama, Zaidul Amin Suffian Ahmad, Abur Hamdi Usman, 2022, 'Apresiasi Ketokohan Ulama Tafsir Dan Hadis Sepanjang Zaman', viewed 11 November 2022 @ <http://conference.kuis.edu.my/thiqah/images/Docs/Thiqah22.pdf?>)

Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Authors' contributions

N.S., contributed to the original draft. M.M., and N.I., contributed to the review and editing of this article. K.H., and W.R., performed the formal analysis and supervised article to its completion.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the authors.

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