

# Al-Ghazālī and the Rationalization of Sufism

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By rationalization<sup>1</sup> I mean the cognitive process of making something consistent with or based on reason. In keeping with this definition, the mystic uses his reason to understand the nature of religion and its commandments, norms and secrets; to verify his way and experiences; and even to experience contact or unity with God. The opposite of rationalization is to think of existence or of religious matters in terms of sacred texts, traditions, sayings of the ancestors, mysteries, magic, etc. In al-Ghazālī, rationalization is not pure but mixed with elements of its opposite.

It seems to me that the use of the present title is preferable to “Philosophizing of Sufism,” because generally<sup>2</sup> the content of al-Ghazālī’s mystical stations and experiences is not philosophical and philosophy cannot account for them.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, for al-Ghazālī, as we shall see, reason exists in the mystical process and even explains or judges it. The word “Intellectualization” could also be placed in the title, because it means to supply a rational structure or meaning for the themes with which we are dealing, however; it seems that in rationalization the element of logic is more prominent, and logic plays an important role in al-Ghazālī’s mystical writings.<sup>4</sup>

1 In modern times this term was coined by the German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920); cf. Sung Ho Kim, “Max Weber,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/weber/> (accessed June 27, 2012).

2 Of course, there are exceptions, such as the love for God.

3 Gideon Freudenthal, “The Philosophical Mysticism of Maimonides and Maimon,” in *Maimonides and His Heritage*, ed. Idit Dobbs-Weinstein et al., New York: State University of New York Press, 2009, p. 116. Madkour (*La Place d’Alfarabi dans l’école philosophique musulmane*, Paris, 1934) characterized al-Fārābī’s teachings as intellectual mysticism, while Gardet (*La pensée religieuse d’Avicenne*, Paris, 1951) typified Ibn Sīnā’s thought as intellectual mysticism; cf. also D. R. Blumenthal, *Philosophic Mysticism: Studies in Rational Religion*, Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2006, p. 44. The question of whether philosophy serves as a bridge to mysticism or contains mysticism is a much debated issue; *ibid.*, pp. 21–48.

4 In his book on Ibn al-‘Arabī’s exegesis of the Qur’ān, Nettler (*Sufi Metaphysics and Qur’ānic Prophets*, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2003, p. 13) speaks of the intellectualization of Sufism. In his introduction to *Philosophic Mysticism: Studies in Rational Religion*, Paul

The word “Sufism” raises the question of whether al-Ghazālī regarded himself as a Sufi. In his writings he frequently refers to the Sufis as a group without affiliating himself with them; for example, in *Kitāb at-Tawakkul* he counts four groups, ascribing to each a different view with respect to God’s unity. The fourth group holds that to see only one entity in existence means to adhere to God’s unity: “this is the witness of the righteous and the Sufis call it annihilation in God’s unity” (*wa-tusammīhi aṣ-ṣūfiyya al-fanā’ fī t-tawḥīd*).<sup>5</sup> Had he considered himself a Sufi, al-Ghazālī would not have related to this group in the third person, but would have said, “we call it” instead. If this were the case, instead of Sufism, I would have used the term “Mysticism” in the title. Because there is no clear-cut proof that al-Ghazālī did not affiliate himself with the Sufis, however, and because he refers objectively to Sufis, Sufi conduct, and Sufi sayings, I prefer the present title.

In its early phases, Sufism did not incorporate reason and rational enquiry into its thought and practice.<sup>6</sup> For example, the early mystic al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857/242) wrote a book entitled *Kitāb Māhiyyat al-‘aql* (*The Book on the Essence of the Intellect*). Though this title seems to promise an investigation into rational discussions of mystical values, in fact, reason plays no role in his mysticism; al-Muḥāsibī’s main concern was the improvement of one’s morals through psychological considerations. His eloquence seems to stem from his knowledge of the vocabulary used by the Mu’tazila.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, very probably following the Mu’tazila, he regards reason as a device to attain knowledge of God and to know benefit and damage in human acts. He even asserts that adults should accept rational arguments. The perfect knower of God is whoever carries out the commandments, fears God and believes firmly in God’s promise and threats.<sup>8</sup> However, all these ideas had no impact on the mystical way as elaborated in his main work, *Kitāb ar-Ri’āya li-ḥuqūq Allāh* (*The Book of Keeping What God Deserves*).

An examination of the Sufi stations (*maqāmāt*) appearing in al-Kharrāz (d. 899 or 900/286–287), as-Sarrāj (d. 988/377), al-Kalābādhī (d. 990/380 or

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Fenton points out that Georges Vajda applies the concept of intellectual mysticism to Jewish thought; David Blumenthal, *Philosophic Mysticism: Studies in Rational Religion*, Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2006, p. 14.

5 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm ad-dīn*, Cairo: Al-Maktaba al-Tijāriyya al-Kubrā, n.d., vol. iv, p. 245.

6 Ali Hassan Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd*, London: Gibb Memorial Trust, 1976, pp. 96f.

7 Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1975, p. 54.

8 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb Māhiyyat al-‘aql*, in *Al-‘Aql wa-fahm al-Qur’ān*, ed. Ḥusayn al-Quwwatili, Beirut, 1982, pp. 202, 206, 218–220.

994/384), al-Makkī (d. 996/386) and al-Qushayrī (d. 1074/466) reveals that the concept of *tafakkur*, whether meaning ‘thinking’ or ‘contemplating in a syllogistic manner,’ never occurs.<sup>9</sup> Only later, in al-Anṣārī al-Harawī’s (d. 1089/482) *Manāzil as-sā’irīn* does the station of *tafakkur* appear. Here, the main substance of the term is to think about the marvels of God’s creation and about one’s acts and states. According to al-Anṣārī, and contrary to al-Ghazālī’s teaching, *tafakkur* has no impact on the other stations and it is inferior to *tadhakkur* (remembrance). In any case, al-Anṣārī does not define *tafakkur* in terms of logic.<sup>10</sup> This does not, however, exclude the appearance of theological discussions in the style of *kalām* in Sufi manuals; for example, al-Kalābādhī’s treatment of the possibility of seeing God in the Hereafter corresponds to al-Ash‘arī’s.<sup>11</sup> Generally, the main Sufi manuals are stamped by Ash‘arite theology; this does not turn their Sufism into a rational system, however, because they accept this theology at face value without rational discourse; furthermore, their Ash‘arism does not affect their Sufism.

Until now we have discussed the absence of rationality in Sufism through the argument from silence; that is, rational notions do not appear in early Sufism, neither as a basis of a given theory nor as its explanation. However, there was also a clear opposition to dealing with rationality in Sufism that, on the one hand, pointed out the basis of a theory; on the other, it established a prohibition against dealing with Sufism through rational arguments. This is obviously shown in al-Hujwīrī’s (d. ca. 1071/463) *Kashf al-mahjūb* (*The Revelation of the Veiled*): in chapter 14, which is dedicated to the doctrines of different sects of the Sufis, he writes: “the real essence of Ṣūfism lies amidst the traditions (*akhbār*) of the Shaykhs.”<sup>12</sup>

Al-Hujwīrī clearly distinguishes between *‘ilm* and *ma’rifā*; the first term means “every knowledge which is stripped of spiritual meaning and devoid of religious practice,” while the second is “every knowledge that is allied with (religious) practice and feeling (*ḥāl*), and the knower of which expresses his feeling.” In al-Hujwīrī’s view, the knower (*‘ālim*) relies on himself, while the gnostic (*‘arīf*) relies on his Lord.<sup>13</sup> Thus, *‘ilm* is repudiated in true Sufism.

9 Mohamed Ahmed Sherif, *Al-Ghazālī’s Theory of Virtue*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975, p. 160.

10 ‘Abd al-Mu‘tī al-Laḥmī al-Iskandarī, *Sharḥ manāzil as-sā’irīn*, Cairo 1954, pp. 29–32.

11 Al-Kalābādhī, *Kitāb at-Ta’arruf li-madhab ahl at-taṣawwuf*, Beirut, 1980, pp. 42f.

12 Al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-Mahjūb of al-Hujwīrī: “The Revelation of the Veiled,” An Early Persian Treatise on Sufism*, trans. from the Persian by Reynold A. Nicholson, London: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2000 (rep. of the 1911 edition), p. 176.

13 Ibid., pp. 382f.

Moreover, al-Hujwīrī believes that reason and rational enquiry do not lead to the real knowledge of God. "If reason were the cause of gnosis, it would follow that every reasonable person must know God, and that all who lack reason must be ignorant of Him; which is manifestly absurd."<sup>14</sup> And he adds: "Heretics of all sorts use the demonstrative method, but the majority of them do not know God."<sup>15</sup> Hence, "Reason and the proofs adduced by reason are unable to direct anyone into the right way."<sup>16</sup> He immediately justifies the last statement: "The first step of demonstration is a turning away from God, because demonstration involves the consideration of some other thing, whereas gnosis is a turning away from all that is not God."<sup>17</sup> Al-Hujwīrī notes only one exception to his rule of rejecting reason as a device of Sufism embodied in the Sufis Abū 'Alī d-Daqqāq (d. 1015/405 or 1021/411) and Abū Sahl aṣ-Ṣu'lūkī and his father, who held that the beginning of gnosis is demonstrative, but it ends with intuitive (necessary) knowledge. Al-Hujwīrī, however, rejects their stand.<sup>18</sup>

The intellect as a device which helps humans to distinguish between good and evil acts is found in the writings of al-Ḥakīm at-Tirmidhī (d. between 905/292 and 910/297). At-Tirmidhī, who cannot be regarded as a Sufi<sup>19</sup> but rather as a theosophist, also holds that the intellect paves the way for divine illumination.<sup>20</sup>

In sum, al-Hujwīrī essentially expresses a long tradition of rejecting reason as a method for drawing nearer to and knowing God. The few exceptions which we have brought forth prove the Sufis' generally negative attitude toward rational discussion. Al-Ghazālī states that the Sufis did not instigate their colleagues to learn the sciences; their aim, rather, was to achieve the type of true knowledge of the world that transcends mere information.<sup>21</sup>

14 Ibid., p. 268.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., pp. 268–9.

17 Ibid., p. 269.

18 Ibid., pp. 272f. It is worth noting that in al-Hujwīrī's work the word *'aql* (intellect) appears only once (p. 309); likewise *fikra* (thought; p. 239).

19 The name "Sufi" does not occur even once in his writings.

20 At-Tirmidhī, *Al-Masā'il allatī sa'alahu ahl sarakhs 'anhā*, in at-Tirmidhī's *Thalāth muṣannafāt*, ed. Bernd Radtke, Beirut 1992. Trans. into German by Bernd Radtke: *Drei Schriften des Theosophen von Tirmid*, Beirut: F. Steiner Verlag, 1996, pp. 142f. Here is not the place to delve into a discussion on at-Tirmidhī, who was an extraordinary figure in Islamic mysticism and whose writings deeply influenced the philosophical mysticism of Ibn al-'Arabī, some three hundred years after the former's death.

21 *Mizān al-'amal*, ed. Sulayman Dunya, Cairo, 1965, p. 221.

Thus, against the backdrop of his Sufi predecessors' attitude toward reason, al-Ghazālī's approach to reason and to rational inquiry reaches a high degree of eminence. In this article I would like to deal with his approach in the sphere of mysticism rather than in theology and philosophy. There is no doubt now that his theology is philosophical and hence rationalistic. He accepts demonstration (*burhān*) as the exact and true means to deal with theological issues.<sup>22</sup>

First, one should note al-Ghazālī's admiration of and adherence to the intellect (*'aql*) as seen throughout his mystical writings. As such, his high estimation of the intellect merits closer examination. I shall then continue by identifying some structural and stylistic features in his oeuvre which show his predilection for reasoning and its result, knowledge. In the third phase the function of reason in his mysticism will be introduced.

In *Mishkāt al-anwār*,<sup>23</sup> a prominent mystical treatise, al-Ghazālī devotes a number of pages to the value of the intellect. He compares the intellect to the eye and finds that the former is better than the latter in that it perceives things which the eye cannot perceive, such as distant things, veiled or hidden things, the essences of things and infinite things. In short, all existents may be the objects of the intellect's investigation. As for the judgment of the intellect, al-Ghazālī asserts that when the intellect is devoid of fantasy and imaginations no error can be made.<sup>24</sup> In my view, the climax of al-Ghazālī's attitude toward the intellect is his statement that the ruling authority of the rational faculty is God's balance on the earth (*sultān al-'aql alladhī huwa mīzān Allāh fī arḍihi*).<sup>25</sup>

The intellect brings about one's perfection, which is defined as the attainment of the intelligible things as they really are without taking imaginary forms and sense perceptions into consideration. In al-Ghazālī's opinion, the intellect is the specific characteristic of humans and the sake for which humanity was created.<sup>26</sup> Here, al-Ghazālī creates a correspondence between the logical structure of the world – because the intellect is a divine device which lies at

22 Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 7, 120.

23 For an analysis of some parts of the text, its different versions and the possible influences exerted on it, see Hermann Landolt, "Ghazālī and 'Religionswissenschaft': Some Notes on the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*," *Asiatische Studien* 45 (1991), pp. 19–72.

24 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār (The Niche of Lights)*, A parallel English-Arabic Text, translated, introduced and annotated by David Buchman, Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998, pp. 5–9.

25 Ibid., p. 18, l. 4. In other writings of our author, we find that one's pleasure in rational activity never ends: just as one is happy because one has the faculty of reasoning, so even one who lacks such an ability is also happy, thinking himself nevertheless the possessor of it; *Ihyā'*, vol. IV, pp. 101, 124.

26 *Mizān al-'amal*, pp. 196, 210, 331.

the basis of everything – and the structure of the human being. If we can use the argument from silence, it is very interesting to see that our author does not say that humans were created for the purpose of receiving revelation. To account for this absence I suggest that, in al-Ghazālī's view, revelation and unveiling of divine matters pertain only to prophets and saints (*awlīyā'*), while rational thinking applies to the majority of people. Moreover, he also admonishes the Sufis for their conviction that revelation may come as a result of the Sufi practice alone, without the help of reason.<sup>27</sup> He often refers the reader to his treatise on logic, *Mī'yār al-ʿilm* (*The Standard of Knowledge*), which teaches the demonstrative proofs through which truth is disclosed and whereby certainty is attained.<sup>28</sup> Al-Ghazālī emphatically states that one should not weaken one's favorable attitude toward the sciences because of the Sufi way, for the Sufis do not view the sciences as despicable; their way, rather, refers to prophets and saints.<sup>29</sup>

As mentioned above, reason is the device by which knowledge and the sciences may be attained. When classifying the sciences, al-Ghazālī distinguishes between religious sciences, which are attained through *taqlīd*, and rational sciences. The rational sciences are divided in turn into necessary sciences<sup>30</sup> and acquired sciences; the latter are attained through learning or inspiration and underlying them are included the sciences of this world and the world to come. While the sciences of this world are such as medicine, arithmetic, different kinds of crafts, the sciences of the next world include the practical science (*ʿilm al-muʿāmalā*) and the science of revelation (*ʿilm al-mukāshafa*), a metaphysical science dealing with the knowledge of God, His attributes and His names. Indeed, al-Ghazālī states that human beings need both kinds of science just as they need both medicines and food.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the fact that the mystical sciences – that is, both the practical and the metaphysical – are reckoned among the rational sciences proves the position of reason in his eyes. It is worth noting that even knowledge caused by inspiration (*ilhām*) is considered rational, although its source is external.

27 Ibid., pp. 223f.

28 Ibid., pp. 243, 254f. Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064/456) preceded al-Ghazālī in putting Greek logic at the service of theology and jurisprudence; cf. Anwar G. Chejne, "Ibn Ḥazm of Cordova on Logic," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1984), pp. 57–72.

29 *Mizān al-ʿamal*, p. 361.

30 By necessary sciences (*ʿulūm ḍarūriyya*) al-Ghazālī means necessary knowledge (*ʿilm ḍarūrī*) which one knows without learning. See my "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20 (1993), pp. 20–32.

31 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press of the Hebrew University, 1975, pp. 358–363, 396, n. 21.

The importance of knowledge is also attested in the structure of the *Ihyā'*, which, like the structure of *kalām* summae, begins with the Book of Knowledge. Furthermore, many discussions in this voluminous work are imbued with the dialectical character of *kalām* works, which are written in the style of question and response.

Al-Ghazālī's attitude toward rational inquiry as a means of attaining knowledge has already been discussed in scholarship. As I have demonstrated in my article "Al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way to Know God," our author holds two ways to arrive at the knowledge of God: the way of revelation and the way of rational investigation. Contrary to what I wrote in this article, I now think that he espouses both the way of revelation and the way of rational inquiry to attain knowledge of God. However, the fact that in some of his works the rational way heads the list of ways proves that he inclines very strongly to this way.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the notion that the rational faculty is God's balance reminds one of a view of some scholars, introduced by al-Ghazālī, who claim that one should know the sciences before indulging in the Sufi way in order to know whether that which is revealed to one is true revelation or false imagination. These thinkers regard this system as the nearest and safest device to reach the target.<sup>33</sup> In my article "Al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way to Know God," I proved that this is the view of al-Ghazālī himself as elaborated in *Mizān al-'amal*.

Answering the question concerning the proportional value of the mystical or the intellectual ways, al-Ghazālī states that it is suitable for most people to study in order to know how to carry out devotional acts according to the Sufi system. Only an intelligent person (*dhakī*) who was aware of his intellectual ability in his youth and was taught by a wise person who was not committed to any opinion is ready to exercise both ways. After studying all the demonstrative sciences (*al-'ulūm al-burhāniyya*) it is unobjectionable that such a person withdraw from the community and become an ascetic and then expect that through this way (of abstinence), what was confused to other followers of this way (the Sufis) may be revealed to him.<sup>34</sup> Thus the supreme way to know God

32 Binyamin Abrahamov, "Al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way to Know God," *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993): 141–168, p. 142 (referring to *Iljām al-'awāmm 'an 'ilm al-kalām*). See Martin Whittingham's *Al-Ghazālī and the Qur'ān: One Book, Many Meanings*, London and New York: Routledge, 2007 (i.e., Ch. 6) for a criticism of Davidson's view and mine regarding al-Ghazālī's supreme way to know God.

33 *Ihyā'*, vol. III, p. 20.

34 *Mizān al-'amal*, pp. 221–228 and esp. p. 228.

is a blend of wisdom or philosophical reasoning and asceticism. Abstinence alone as a means of obtaining the truth is rejected.<sup>35</sup>

In *Kitāb al-ʿIlm*, the first book of the *Iḥyāʾ*, the seventh chapter is entitled "On the intellect, its eminence, essence and parts." The intellect is highly estimated, because it is the device leading to knowledge and to happiness in this world and the world to come. According to a tradition, it is the first created entity, the noblest in God's eyes and the means by which God bestows favors, rewards, and punishments.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, in the section on the essence of the intellect and its parts, al-Ghazālī divides the parts of the rational faculty in keeping with the philosophical division beginning with the material intellect without, however, mentioning the philosophical terms.<sup>37</sup>

In al-Ghazālī's view, knowledge is the human being's aim and the special attribute for which he was created; in pursuit of this, humans attain knowledge only by means of syllogistic reasoning. Knowledge serves as the primary instrument in the attainment of perfect happiness, and as such it is an essential part of one's life.<sup>38</sup> Al-Ghazālī's opinion of knowledge and its attainment accounts for his total rejection of imitative obedience (*taqlīd*), whether of treatises or scholars.<sup>39</sup> His criticism of *taqlīd* is general, applying to traditional scholars, theologians and philosophers.<sup>40</sup>

The intellect also has the function of verifying prophecy; likewise, it demonstrates that prophets are the healers of souls and admits its inability to perceive what prophecy can perceive; in other words, the intellect leads people to prophecy.<sup>41</sup> Revelation cannot verify itself and be the source of its own authority; hence reason is an indispensable tool for this purpose.<sup>42</sup>

Al-Ghazālī's concept of causality also proves his rational approach to the phenomena in the world. In the theory of causality found in his non-philosophical works, al-Ghazālī creates a combination of philosophy and

35 Abrahamov, *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993), pp. 151f.

36 *Iḥyāʾ*, vol. I, p. 83.

37 Ibid., p. 85.

38 Ibid., pp. 149f (referring to *Iḥyāʾ*, vol. III, p. 13f.). *Iḥyāʾ*, vol. III, pp. 22, 283; cf. Sherif, *Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue*, p. 12.

39 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Some Notes on the Term 'Taqlīd' in the Writings of Al-Ghazzālī," in *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, pp. 488–502.

40 Richard M. Frank, "Al-Ghazālī on *Taqlīd*: Scholars, Theologians, and Philosophers," *Zeitschrift Für Geschichte Der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften* 7 (1991/92), pp. 207–252.

41 *Al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*, Dimashq 1934, p. 146. Richard Joseph McCarthy, *Deliverance from Error: An Annotated Translation of al-Munkidh min al-dalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazālī*, Louisville, Kentucky: Fons Vitae, 1980, p. 88.

42 Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics*, Cambridge, 1985, ch. II, p. 166.

religion, claiming that all parts of the world act in a rational way which can be anticipated; consequently, one can attain knowledge of the world. God's predetermination does not mean the absence of rationality. It should be noted that this theory appears in the *Iḥyāʾ*, *Kitāb al-Arbaʿin fī uṣūl ad-dīn* (a compendium of the *Iḥyāʾ*), and *Al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā*.

As is natural, al-Ghazālī could not enthusiastically embrace Aristotle's logic without being influenced by Aristotle's metaphysics and the teachings of the latter's commentators.<sup>43</sup> This phenomenon is manifest in al-Ghazālī's discussion of divine love:

Intellectual efforts play an important role in al-Ghazālī's theory of love. In that, he expresses a naturalistic stand which resembles the philosophers'. Advocating the possibility of happiness in this world, he emphasizes, however, that the highest happiness man can achieve is in the world to come. The last happiness takes the form of a continuous love for God which never comes to an end because man's knowledge of God increases forever. In combining love for God in this world and the world to come, al-Ghazālī seems to reconcile the Aristotelian position of mundane happiness and the Neoplatonic position of the happiness of the soul. Al-Ghazālī expresses the *eros* motif in Islamic dress. Man always has to aspire to perfection which is stated in terms of knowledge and spiritual pleasure.<sup>44</sup>

Needless to say, divine love (*maḥabbat Allāh*) is one of the stations in the fourth volume of the *Iḥyāʾ*, and one has to emphasize that this is the ultimate goal of all stations. The other stations serve either as its preliminaries (repentance, forbearance and asceticism) or its results (longing, intimacy and contentment).<sup>45</sup>

The most significant book of the *Iḥyāʾ* relevant to our thesis of the rationalization of Sufism is *The Book of Syllogistic Thinking* (*Kitāb at-Tafakkur*). In the beginning of the section "The explanation of the real meaning of thinking

43 Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 7. Leor Halevi, "The Theologian's Doubts: Natural Philosophy and the Skeptical Games of Ghazālī," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002), p. 20. Ayman Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī: 6th/12th Century Developments in Muslim Philosophical Theology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 15 (2005), p. 149, n. 29.

44 Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of al-Ghazālī and al-Dabbāgh*, London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003, pp. 84f.; cf. T. J. Gianotti, *Al-Ghazālī's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of the Iḥyāʾ*, Leiden: Brill, 2001, pp. 12, 121.

45 Abrahamov, *ibid.*, p. 42.

and its fruit" (*bayān ḥaḳīqat al-fikr wa-thamaratihi*), al-Ghazālī plainly defines thinking as bringing together two pieces of knowledge (premises) to conclude from them a third piece of knowledge. This syllogistic procedure is exemplified by the following syllogism: (1) that which is eternal is worthy of being preferred; (2) the world to come is eternal; (3) hence, it is worthy of being preferred. No doubt, this way is better than the way of *taqlīd*, that is, acceptance of the authoritative person's view without rational discussion.<sup>46</sup> Naturally, the third knowledge may serve as the basis of another syllogism and hence the process may advance infinitely. Another significant notion is the way of the occurrence of syllogism; it sometimes occurs through divine light illuminating the heart by means of the inborn trait (*fiṭra*) of the human being. This is the way of the prophets; hence it is very rare. Generally, the process takes place as a product of study. At the end of *Mishkāṭ al-anwār*, our author introduces Ibrāhīm, the patriarch, as using the gradual way of attaining syllogism and the Prophet Muhammad as doing so in one stroke.<sup>47</sup>

In al-Ghazālī's view, *tafakkur* is the key to and foundation of all good things, because its fruit is knowledge. When knowledge exists in the heart, the state of the heart changes and as a result the acts of the limbs also change. Consequently, al-Ghazālī states that all depends on syllogistic thinking, which is preferable to remembrance (*tadhakkur*); the latter is defined as bringing about only two premises, while syllogism includes remembrance and more than that, that is, the final result. In like manner, remembrance of the heart is better than the acts of the limbs. Hence, *tafakkur* is better than the sum of all acts.<sup>48</sup> Now, since *tafakkur* is the foundation of all good things, it is the basis of all the stations. One should note that every station (*maqām*) is composed of knowledge, state and act (*ʿilm*, *ḥāl* and *ʿamal*). This is a revolutionary idea which ascribes to syllogistic reasoning the foundation of mysticism both in theory and in practice. Al-Ghazālī plainly expresses this idea.

In the section entitled "The explanation of the application of syllogistic thinking" (*bayān majārī l-fikr*), al-Ghazālī states that this kind of reasoning applies both to matters regarding religion and matters which have no connection with religion. Naturally, he deals with the first part, which concerns the relationship between the human being and God. *Tafakkur* applies to two issues regarding God: (1) His essence, attributes and names; and (2) His acts, rule and

46 *Iḥyāʾ*, vol. iv, p. 425.

47 Ibid., p. 426. Abrahamov, "Al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way," pp. 161–165.

48 *Iḥyāʾ*, vol. iv, pp. 426f.

kingdom and all that is in the heaven and on the earth and in between.<sup>49</sup> In the human being *tafakkur* also applies to two issues: (1) what God loves, that is, good human attributes and acts; and (2) what God detests, that is, evil human attributes and acts. In other words, this thinking applies to the divine commandments and prohibitions and to destructive attributes (*ṣifāt muhlikāt*) and to rescuing attributes (*ṣifāt munjiyāt*).<sup>50</sup> Consequently, one can safely conclude that the whole *Iḥyā'* – composed of *ʿibādāt* (acts of devotion), *ʿādāt* (manners), *muhlikāt* and *munjiyāt* – is founded on *tafakkur*.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, when reading the Qurʾān one should use the device of *tafakkur*, because the Qurʾān contains all stations, all states, and healing for all people; behind every verse lay infinite mysteries (*taḥta kull kalima asrār lā tanḥaṣir*). The same procedure applies to the Tradition.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, syllogism, which is a natural part of the human process of thinking, appears in the Qurʾān, as al-Ghazālī proves in *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm*. Hence, two consequences arise: a. the justification for using this device in theology because it is found in the Qurʾān; and b. no contradiction arises between reason and revelation, inasmuch as the Sacred Book contains both. Applying syllogistic methods enables humans to discover hidden meanings contained in the Qurʾānic text, and also syllogistic thought patterns promote spiritual ascent, which in turn brings about closeness to God.<sup>53</sup> Speaking from the standpoint of hermeneutics, in *Fayṣal at-tafrīqa bayn al-islām wa-z-zandaqa*, al-Ghazālī mainly uses syllogistic logic as the basis of his arguments.<sup>54</sup> Also, it is important to note that rational considerations, not always syllogistic, which arrive at rational impossibilities in the apparent meaning of a verse (*ẓāhir*), allow deviation from this meaning, thus enabling metaphorical interpretation (*majāz*).<sup>55</sup>

Finally, the highest aim of *tafakkur* is to build the innermost part of the mystic (*ʿimārat al-bāṭin*) so that he will be worthy of coming close to God and even to the point of being annihilated in Him (*fanāʾ*). No doubt, al-Ghazālī

49 Al-Ghazālī devotes a long chapter (ibid., pp. 435–448) to explaining how to contemplate God's creation (*bayān kayfiyyat at-tafakkur fī khalq Allāh taʿālā*). This chapter can be subsumed under the title of al-Ghazālī's argument from design.

50 Ibid., pp. 427–430.

51 Cf. Sherif, *Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue*, p. 121.

52 Ibid., p. 431; cf. Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 115 and also Nicholas Heer, "Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's Esoteric Exegesis of the Koran," in *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn, vol. 1, Oxford: Oneworld, 1999, p. 244.

53 Whittingham, *Al-Ghazālī and the Qurʾān*, pp. 81–101.

54 Ibid., pp. 16, 26. For the rational impossibility of Qurʾān 16:40, see ibid., pp. 58f.

55 Ibid., pp. 33f. As Whittingham rightly states there are two other meanings of *majāz* (ibid., pp. 34f); however, these are not relevant to our discussion.

sees reason as being the principal means of the mystics. In the context of dealing with the famous dictum “whoever knows his soul (self) knows his Lord,” al-Ghazālī obviously connects reason with mystical experience and revelation saying “if you are among the people of reason (or intellect, *baṣīra*),<sup>56</sup> you enter among the people of mystical experience and revelation” (*ahl adh-dhawq wa-l-mushāhada*).<sup>57</sup> He reiterates this notion in *Kitāb al-Imlāʾ fī ishkālāt al-ihyāʾ* (*The Book of Dictation Regarding the Difficulties in the Ihyaʾ*), which was written as a response to criticism raised against the *Ihyaʾ*, saying, “as for the traveling and the way, we mean by them the traveling of the heart through the device of discursive reasoning (*ālat al-fikr*) in the way of the intelligibles (*fī ṭarīq al-maʿqūlāt*).”<sup>58</sup> Al-Ghazālī believes that in comparison to other devices “rational knowledge is capable of giving a better and more objective account of the spiritual experience.”<sup>59</sup>

It is clear that this is the way of the elite as shown in *Kitāb ash-Shukr*, in which al-Ghazālī plainly states that there are two ways to know that which God loves. The first is the way based on Qurʾānic verses and traditions and the second rests on reason (*baṣīrat al-qalb*) and is explained in terms of contemplation of creation in order to know God’s wisdom and hence His will; knowing His will, one knows that which God loves or hates. The second way is open only to the elite, and therefore God bestows the Sacred Text and the

56 Al-Ghazālī calls the intellect by several names: *qalb* (literally: heart), *rūḥ* (literally: spirit), *nafs* (soul) and *ʿaql* (intellect). Although these four terms have different denotations, they all share one idea, which is the subtle power of perceiving things as they really are. *Ihyaʾ*, vol. III, pp. 3–5. For the appearance of *baṣīra* in the meaning of intellect see, for example, *ibid.*, vol. I, p. 88; Gianotti, *Al-Ghazālī’s Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul*, p. 125.

57 *Kitāb al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl ad-dīn*, Cairo, 1925, pp. 143f.

58 *Ihyaʾ*, vol. V, p. 15, l. 3 from the bottom. Most of *Kitāb al-Imlāʾ* deals with the beginning of *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd wa-t-tawakkul*, in which al-Ghazālī enumerates the four kinds of people who unify God.

59 Sherif, *Al-Ghazālī’s Theory of Virtue*, p. 107. For the reaction of Muslim scholars to al-Ghazālī’s rational approach to mysticism see, *ibid.*, n. 4. For example, the greatest mystic of Islam, Muḥyī d-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī states in his *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, Beirut, 1999 (vol. V, p. 116): “The opponents of the Folk of the Real hold that the servant’s reason can give him knowledge of some – though not all – of the ways to gain nearness (*qurba*) to God. But there is nothing true in this statement, since no one knows the path which brings about nearness to God and bestows endless felicity upon the servant except him who knows what is in the Self of the Real. And none of God’s creatures knows that except through God’s giving knowledge of it” (*The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination*, trans. by William Chittick, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989, p. 171).

traditions on those who cannot exercise rational thinking.<sup>60</sup> Loyal to his elitism,<sup>61</sup> al-Ghazālī states elsewhere that the stratum of the believers is inferior to that of the knowers, because the name “believer” applies to the one who blindly follows others (*muqallid*). In light of what we have said above, it is thus no wonder that knowledge is the first favor God bestows on the human being for which he should thank Him.<sup>62</sup>

To sum up, there are a variety of positions: there is the idea that reason occupies the first place in al-Ghazālī’s mystical teachings; in contrast, one may believe that he espouses two ways in dealing with mystical notions, the traditional and the rational; it is also possible to believe that he vacillates between the two ways, sometimes inclining toward the traditional and other times toward the rational way. Whatever the case, it is obvious that rational thinking, more precisely discursive reasoning, occupies a significant place in his writings in contrast to the position of reason in the writings of the earlier Sufis.

Did al-Ghazālī’s approach influence later Sufis? In Ayman Shihadeh’s view, there are some similarities, skepticism being among them, between al-Ghazālī’s acceptance of Sufism and Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī’s (d. 1210/606) turning to Sufism at the end of his life.<sup>63</sup> For our purposes, the following is instructive: “In the *Maṭālib*,<sup>64</sup> al-Rāzī indicates that spiritually advanced individuals should seek guidance in rational theology to interpret, contextualize and assess their spiritual experiences critically, which otherwise could lead into serious error.”<sup>65</sup> This paragraph is reminiscent of al-Ghazālī’s approach to the function of the intellect as indicated above.

Also, ar-Rāzī introduces four kinds of individuals who seek the spiritual way: (a) those who seek the spiritual experience through delving into metaphysical contemplation; (b) those who have an inborn inclination toward mysticism; (c) those who combine a natural tendency with metaphysical discussion; and (d) those who adhere to the mystical way through learning from others.<sup>66</sup> It is very significant that the first seekers are those who engage in rational

60 *Ihyāʾ*, vol. IV (*Kitāb ash-Shukr*), pp. 90f.

61 Al-Ghazālī clearly states that God’s wisdom is found in prophets, scholars and righteous rulers – all the rest are barbarians who cannot have wisdom; *ibid.*, p. 98.

62 *Ibid.*, p. 99.

63 Ayman Shihadeh, “The Mystic and the Sceptic in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh, Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 118.

64 Ar-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī as-Saqqā, Beirut, 1987, vol. I, part 1, p. 58.

65 Shihadeh, “The Mystic and the Sceptic in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” p. 115.

66 Ar-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ishārāt wa-t-tanbihāt*, Cairo, 1907, vol. II, p. 111. Shihadeh, *ibid.*

thinking. Moreover, in what corresponds to al-Ghazālī's theory of divine love,<sup>67</sup> ar-Rāzī sees knowledge and the love of God connected as a cause and an effect, respectively.<sup>68</sup>

We also encounter some parallels between al-Ghazālī and another eminent scholar: the greatest mystic of Islam, Muḥyī d-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240/637).<sup>69</sup> Although Ibn al-ʿArabī censures al-Ghazālī for adhering to the notion that knowledge of the sciences should precede the mystical way,<sup>70</sup> he seems to adopt some of al-Ghazālī's ideas regarding the use of reason. Ibn al-ʿArabī views the cosmos as structured in keeping with rational considerations; hence, in order to know the world, and in order to know God – whose existence, unity and attributes are proven by signs in the cosmos – one should use reason.

Reason also affirms the authority of religion and God's transcendence. Using rational arguments, Ibn al-ʿArabī rejects the Ashʿarite concept of attributes which are added to God's essence, claiming that the attributes are relationships. That God is the necessary existent by virtue of Himself is also proven by rational arguments.<sup>71</sup> In sum, Ibn al-ʿArabī's reliance on reason is very similar to his reliance on revelation, and the two devices, when joined together, produce a full picture of knowledge of the cosmos.

These two examples of possible Ghazālīan impact on later mystics are inconclusive and only point to the probability of finding parallels between al-Ghazālī's teachings and the teachings of others. As for al-Ghazālī himself, he undoubtedly formulated a new kind of mysticism whose ingredients are rational contemplation (including philosophical and theological notions), revelation, and tradition. Al-Ghazālī produces not only a compromise between orthodox Islam and Sufism, but also between Sufism and rational thinking. In so doing, he seems to pave the way for later generations.

67 Abrahamov, *Divine Love*, pp. 42–86.

68 Ar-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ishārāt wa-t-tanbihāt*, Cairo, 1907, vol. 11, pp. 108f. Shihadeh, "The Mystic and the Sceptic in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," p. 117.

69 Abrahamov, "Ibn al-ʿArabī's Attitude toward al-Ghazālī," in *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, ed. Y. Tzvi Langermann, Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2010.

70 Ibid., pp. 113–115.

71 Abrahamov, "Ibn al-ʿArabī's Theory of Knowledge," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabī Society* 42 (2007), 11, pp. 9–22.

# Islam and Rationality

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*Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*

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