

## Conceptualizing Society in the Thought of Imam Ghazali: Social Life, Justice, and Human Progress

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Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Ghazālī (1058–1111) was an Islamic theologian, jurist, philosopher, cosmologist, psychologist and Sufi mystic of Persian origin, and remains one of the most celebrated scholars in the history of Sunni Islamic thought. He is considered a pioneer of methodic doubt and skepticism, Ghazali has sometimes been referred to by historians as the single most influential Muslim after the Prophet Muhammad. His work that successfully changed the course of Islamic philosophy. Al-Ghazali's approach to resolving apparent contradictions between reason and revelation was accepted by almost all later Muslim theologians. Ghazali began the successful introduction of Aristotelianism or rather Avicennaism into Muslim theology.

He always illustrated the moderate approach to Sufism within the framework of the sharia. His knowledge was not compartmentalized and although he was deeply involved with Sufism. He did not devote a single work to it exclusively, preferring instead to suffuse many of his writings with a mystical dimension. He remained to the end as Aalim convinced of the all-important role of the sharia in the Islamic community. In later life, he was viewed as the renewer (mujaddid) of the faith in a period of turmoil and indeed much of his underlying intension was to avoid division within the Islamic community, to stress its common Islamic heritage and to harmonize differences of approach to the truth.

### **Morality (Ethics) in human life**

In 1091 Nizam al-Mulk appointed al-Ghazali to the prestigious Nizamiyya Madrasa in Baghdad, and became confidante of the Seljuq Sultan and his court in Isfahan. Undoubtedly, he was the most influential intellectual of his time, when in 1095 he suddenly gave up his posts in Baghdad and left the city. Under the influence of Sufi literature al-Ghazali had begun to change his lifestyle two years before his departure. He realized that the high ethical standards of a virtuous religious life are not compatible with being in the service of sultans, caliphs and other official dignitaries. Benefiting from the riches of the military and political elite implies complicity in their corrupt and oppressive rule and will put at risk one's prospect of redemption in the after life.

In the "Revival of Religious Sciences" (Ihya 'ulum al-din) attacks his colleagues in Muslim scholarship, questioning their intellectual capacities and independence as well as their commitment to gaining reward in the world to come. This increased moral consciousness brings al-Ghazali close to Sufi attitudes, which have a profound influence on his subsequent works such as The Niche of Lights (Mishkat al-anwar). In the "Revival of Religious Sciences" he teaches an ethic that is based on the development of character traits (akhlaq).

Al-Ghazali was one of the first Muslim jurists who introduced the consideration of a "public benefit" (maslaha) into Muslim jurisprudence. In addition to developing clear guidance of how to gain redemption in the afterlife, religious law (shari'a) also aims at creating an environment that

allows each individual wellbeing and the pursuit of a virtuous and pious lifestyle. Al-Ghazali argues that, when God revealed divine law (shari'a) he did so with the purpose (maqsad) of advancing human benefits in this world and the next. Al-Ghazali identifies five essential components for wellbeing in this world: religion, life, intellect, offspring, and property. Whatever protects these "five necessities" (al-daruriyyat al-khamsa) is considered public benefit (maslaha) and should be advanced, while whatever harms them should be avoided. The jurisprudent (faqih) should aim at safeguarding these five necessities in his legal judgments.

### Educational Motivations

During the 12th century Ghazali was one of the major sources of encouragement for the study of sciences in the Islamic world. He conveys his attitudes and approach to the knowledge through the numeral works as he said in his famous work *The Revival of Religious Sciences* (إحياء علوم الدين). He writes:

"Sciences whose knowledge is deemed fard kifāyah comprise all sciences which are indispensable for the welfare of this world such as: medicine which is necessary for the life of the body, arithmetic for daily transactions and the divisions of legacies and inheritances, as well as others. These are the sciences which, because of their absence, the community would be reduced to narrow straits".

Ghazali's writings are believed to have been a source of encouragement for the study of medicine in medieval Islam, particularly anatomy and dissections. In *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, he classified medicine as one of the praiseworthy (mahmud) secular sciences, in contrast to astrology which he considered blameworthy (madhmud). In his discourse on meditation (tafakkur), he devoted a number of pages to a fairly detailed anatomical exposition of the parts of the human body, advocating such study as a suitable subject for contemplation and drawing nearer to God.

In the autobiography Ghazali wrote towards the end of his life, *The Deliverance From Error* (Al-munqidh min al-ḍalāl;) Ghazali expressed support for mathematics as an exact science, but argues that it cannot be used as a form of proof for religious or metaphysical doctrines due to their non-physical nature. In this book, he classified the mathematics and medicine of medieval Islam as praiseworthy (mamdūh) sciences and considers them to be a community obligation (fard kifāyah)

Ghazali expressed support for a scientific methodology based on demonstration and mathematics, while discussing astronomy. After describing the scientific facts of the Solar eclipse resulting from the Moon coming between the Sun and Earth and the Lunar eclipse from the Earth coming between the Sun and Moon, he writes:

"Whosoever thinks that to engage in a disputation for refuting such a theory is a religious duty harms religion and weakens it. For these matters rest on demonstrations, geometrical and arithmetical, that leaves no room for doubt".

Emilie Savage-Smith and the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy have shown that Ghazali was a source of encouragement for the study of medicine in medieval Islam, and that his support for

the study of anatomy was influential in the rise of dissections carried out among Muslim physicians in the 12th and 13th centuries.

### **Economic Philosophy**

Even if it is the analysis of social cost in economic activities is a very recent phenomenon in the conventional economics, the situation of society always reflects in the activities of economics, also have the direct link between them.. Al-Ghazali was writing in the 11th and early 12th centuries which were roughly six centuries before the emergence of Mercantilism and seven centuries before Physiocracy and Adam Smith (1723-1790), that is, roughly six to seven centuries before the beginning of economics as a discipline. Even then, it is interesting to note that al-Ghazali's writings contain a good number of economic ideas, although discussed in the ethical normative perspective.

Underlying every-economic system there is a philosophy, and so is the Islamic economic system. Although economics did not emerge as a system as yet, al-Ghazali's philosophical and intellectual mind did not fail to put Islamic economic thought in its proper philosophical perspective.

The philosophy underpinning al-Ghazali's analysis of economic pursuit is that economic achievement is a means to the end, and not an end in itself. Wealth is a means to the success in the eternal life. Implicit in this is the philosophy of life embodied in the concepts of tawhid (the unity of Allah), akhirah (the hereafter) and risalah (the institution of Prophethood), and also explicitly mentioned elsewhere in his works .

Man needs food to maintain good health without which it is difficult to fulfill moral obligations including seeking of knowledge and its application in actions, which includes service to Allah and humanity. All these would require income and wealth, and hence earning has been encouraged.

Economic activity should be viewed in this perspective, otherwise this activity would lead one to ruin. On this philosophical context, economic agents may be classified into three groups. These are as follows:

1. Those people whose economic involvements occupy them fully so that they forget their place of return, the hereafter. They are among those who will really be ruined.
2. Those whose concerns for the hereafter keep them away from economic activities. These are successful people.
3. Those who get involved in economic activities for the hereafter. They are the nearest to the straight path (middle way).

According to al-Ghazali, one cannot attain the stage of straight path unless he follows the straight path in the seeking of livelihood; and one cannot make the economic achievements as a means to the success in the hereafter until he follows the Islamic norms in their economic pursuits. Al-Ghazali has emphasized that economic achievements should not be at the cost of din (the Islamic code of life), which amounts to say in modern terms that there should not be a trade-off between economics and Islamic values. One should not sell akhirah (the hereafter) for dunya (the world).

According to him, akhirah is the capital which a businessman should protect and develop by profits. If akhirah is traded for dunya the businessman is in a great loss.

As well, al-Ghazali analyses different aspects of the principles of trade, particularly he describes three elements in trade: (1) the two transacting parties, the buyer and the seller; (2) the items of exchange, the goods and services; and (3) the statement of contract. This classification proves his analytical insight and perception of economics. Al-Ghazali discussed the juristic eligibilities of persons for valid transaction. Transaction with any man or woman is valid provided the person is not minor, insane, and blind or slave.

### Psychology

Psychology maintains a high magnitude of space in the development of personal and social life of man. Ghazali also illustrated some precious and unique observations on this area. Ghazali discussed the concept of the self and the causes of its misery and happiness. He described the self using four terms: Qalb (heart), Ruh (spirit), Nafs (soul) and 'Aql (intellect). He stated that "the self has an inherent yearning for an ideal, which it strives to realize and it is endowed with qualities to help realize it." He further stated that the self has motor and sensory motives for fulfilling its bodily needs.

Ghazali was one of the first to divide the sensory motives (apprehension) into five external senses (the classical senses of hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch) and five internal senses: 1. common sense, which synthesizes sensuous impressions carried to the brain while giving meaning to them; 2. imagination, which enables someone to retain mental images from experience; 3. reflection (Tafakkur) which brings together relevant thoughts and associates or dissociates them as it considers fit but has no power to create anything new which is not already present in the mind; 4. recollection (Tadhakkur) which remembers the outer form of objects in memory and recollects the meaning; and 5. the memory (Hafiza) where impressions received through the senses are stored. He wrote that, while the external senses occur through specific organs, the internal senses are located in different regions of the brain, and discovered that the memory is located in the hinder lobe, imagination is located in the frontal lobe, and reflection is located in the middle folds of the brain. He stated that these inner senses allow people to predict future situations based on what they learn from past experiences.

In "Ihya' 'ulum ad-din", he wrote that the five internal senses are found in both humans and animals. However, he later stated that animals "do not possess a well-developed reflective power". He wrote that "the self carries two additional qualities, which distinguishes man from animals enabling man to attain spiritual perfection", which are 'Aql (intellect) and Irada (will). He argued that the intellect is "the fundamental rational faculty, which enables man to generalize and form concepts and gain knowledge." He also argued that human will and animal will are both different. He wrote that human will is "conditioned by the intellect" while animal will is "conditioned by anger and appetite" and that "all these powers control and regulate the body." He further wrote that the Qalb (heart) "controls and rules over them" and that it has six powers: appetite, anger, impulse, apprehension, intellect, and will. He stated that humans have all six of these traits, while animals only have three (appetite, anger, and impulse). This was in contrast to other ancient and medieval

thinkers such as Aristotle, Avicenna, Roger Bacon and Thomas Aquinas who all believed that animals cannot become angry.

Ghazali's exceptional life and works continue to be indispensable in the study of numerous areas of social life of human being, like, Cosmology, astronomy, Atomism, Biology, Medicine, and Logic. The tens of books that he left behind were the result of an inquisitive mind that began the quest for knowledge at a very early stage.

Margaret Smith writes in her book *Al-Ghazali: The Mystic* (London 1944): "There can be no doubt that Ghazali's works would be among the first to attract the attention of these European scholars".

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