

Al-Ghazali's Philosophy from Rational Demonstration to Intuitive Disclosure: Toward an Epistemological Approach

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Received : 21/12/2025 ; Accepted : 23/04/2026 ; Published : 17/05/2026

Abstract:

Al-Ghazali (505 AH) is rightly considered an encyclopedic figure rarely equaled in the history of enduring human knowledge. He entered many fields of knowledge without hesitation, under circumstances imposed by the Crusades and the Seljuk state, in addition to confronting deviant intellectual currents, foremost among them the Batiniyya. From an early age, he grew up with the feeling that he had a mission, which gave him early brilliance and made him devote his life to the journey of searching for truth, as Sulayman Dunya indicates in his book *Truth in Al-Ghazali's View*. It is necessarily known that he began his scholarly life by engaging in theology according to an Aristotelian rational demonstrative method, as shown by his books in this context, such as *AlMuntakhal fi 'Ilm al-Jadal* and *Iljam al-'Awamm*, as well as in philosophy and logic, such as *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. This created in him a kind of doubt and suffering that led him to judge this type of knowledge as sufficient for the purpose of its people but insufficient for his own purpose, as indicated in his book *Al-Munqidh*. This represented a turning point for him, moving him from the limits of reason to the expanses of the spirit and the heart, when it became firmly established in his conscience that the Sufis were the foremost seekers of truth and that their method was the firmest bond on the path to certain truth.

The study of Al-Ghazali's life and the examination of the abundance of his writings and intellectual production in their multiple contexts undoubtedly lead us to question the status of rational and sensory knowledge in his thought. It allows us to show that he did not marginalize reason or diminish its value; rather, for him, it constitutes the foundation of divinely bestowed knowledge, a knowledge that the knower does not attain completely except after rational grounding. This enabled him to combine the Sufi orientation as an inner spiritual experience moving within a lived subjectivity, to use the expression of Dr. Souad Hakim in her dictionary, with rational knowledge based on analysis and criticism. He combined the depth of the conscience with the rational tendency in examining matters of religion and questions of knowledge, and in defending the correct and pure doctrine from the impurities of the distortions of the Batiniyya and those who followed their path among other sects, as appears clearly in his book *The Scandals of the Batiniyya*. This is a profound epistemological paradox that establishes a comprehensive doctrine forming an integrated unity of knowledge.

Keywords: Rational proof. Emotional revelation. Spiritual experience. Gnosis. Cognitive diversity.

Introduction:

The concept of paradox has remained widespread in intellectual circles since ancient times, passing through the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, where the term was used in different

semantic contexts. It generally referred to contradictory theses, which leads us to different and conflicting conceptions of a single subject. However, this contradiction between the two sides, when we deeply contemplate its essence, makes us judge or accept the validity of each side. This contradiction is sufficient to raise the philosophical problem with which we are concerned, since no one can ignore that, if there were no opposition in visions, there would be no problems at all, and philosophy dies when positions become identical copies.

In this research, we aim to apply this concept to the nature of knowledge in the Arab-Islamic field in order to highlight its depth and comprehensiveness through its ability to bring together many different conceptions and visions, through the figure of Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (505 AH / 1111 CE), a famous personality known for the abundance of his writings and the diversity of his works.

It can be said that reading Al-Ghazali requires familiarity with various kinds of knowledge, the first of which is logic, then philosophy, then Sufism, along with the related religious sciences, mainly the principles of jurisprudence, theology, and the like. It is clear that acquiring this requires understanding and analyzing the historical context and the transformative course in Al-Ghazali's life. It also requires an additional effort to understand the methods governing these fields of knowledge, which in turn constitute an epistemological paradox. We raise a central problem expressed in the question of the nature of the relationship between these distant fields of knowledge: Can they be combined within a comprehensive integrative system that leads us to one ultimate aim, namely the attainment of truth, if we know that the distance between the sources of knowledge lies in that vast space between reason and sense on the one hand, and conscience on the other? It is not hidden that the rational and sensory method depends on external tools, so knowledge comes from outside the self, whereas illuminative knowledge springs from within the knowing self without any need for any tool.

This problem, in turn, leads us to subsidiary issues that guide us to investigate Al-Ghazali's circumstances and the characteristics of the environment in which he grew up and was raised, beginning with the family, then examining his teachers, those under whom he studied and by whom he was influenced, and who played an effective role in strengthening his resolve and arousing within him the passion for research and learning. These are aspects of great importance in understanding the developmental course he followed, beginning with theology, then philosophy, then gnosis and Sufism. This makes it easier for us to study these distinct kinds of knowledge in terms of the multiplicity of the methods governing them, and to identify Al-Ghazali's brilliance in entering into all of them. All of this has enabled us to apply the concept of paradox to Al-Ghazali, which is what we have sought in this effort to clarify and examine according to an analytical method capable of removing much of the ambiguity that has surrounded, and still surrounds, these topics. Al-Ghazali is truly a problematic

personality and an encyclopedia of knowledge that is difficult, in our view, to classify or confine to a specific angle or limited specialization.

In this study, briefly and as needed, we have sought to examine some stations that we considered important in Al-Ghazali's life. We then followed this by explaining the nature of knowledge in his thought, which is a branch of the transformative course in his life. We then briefly clarified the meaning of rational and sensory knowledge, before ending with illuminative knowledge, at which Al-Ghazali finally settled, while referring to the method governing each of these kinds of knowledge.

1.The Social Upbringing of Al-Ghazali and Its Impact on His Intellectual Formation

There is no longer a need today to present Al-Ghazali's image in terms of his social upbringing after researchers have transmitted it for more than ten centuries. Accordingly, what we mean by his social upbringing is to identify the most prominent stations in his life, shed light on the most important points of influence and being influenced by the circumstances and conditions he experienced, and then examine whether Al-Ghazali was an image reflecting a reality that he lived and absorbed, or whether he was an intellectual exception untouched by the hand of dark events and unshaken by the harshness of difficult nights.

In biographical works, factors of genius and failure are often traced back to the social circumstances surrounding the individual, and this involves an obvious exaggeration. If the relationship were deterministic, everyone would be equal in genius and distinction under the weight of similar and intertwined circumstances. Objectivity requires acknowledging the relativity of the matter, for the factors of genius usually spring from within more than they are produced by external factors. Therefore, the statement that a person is an accurate image of his time and environment is a relative statement, and the truth often differs from it. From this standpoint, our study of Al-Ghazali proceeds.

In any case, in this context we shall examine some stations within the limits of what serves the subject at hand.

Al-Ghazali was born in 450 AH into a Persian family, represented by a father known for his righteousness and marked by poverty. Yet poverty did not lead him to the forbidden; rather, his aspiration elevated him to eat only from what his own hands had earned. He combined the craft of spinning wool with sitting in the company of jurists and drawing from the gardens of knowledge. Indeed, his reverence for knowledge and its people led him to serve them. These qualities gave him a tender nature, reaching the point of being moved and weeping in their presence. He used to pray to God to grant him a child who would rise in rank to the status of those eminent scholars¹, His prayer was answered, and fate granted him Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid.

The father died while Al-Ghazali was still young, and his care then passed to one of the righteous Sufis, in accordance with his father's will. It is no secret that Sufism has precise and profound methods of education, which make us perceive something of divine care in this upbringing. When fate wills something, causes submit willingly. We must also acknowledge that this righteousness was the fruit of his father's righteousness, as appears first in eating only what was lawful, and in drawing near to the Truth through supplication and humility, and through sitting with the people of knowledge and uprightness.

Second, among the causes for the answering of supplication is the purification of food and drink. Then fate delivered him into safe hands that prepared him spiritually from childhood, as is known in the Sufi educational method.

The nature of this upbringing was the first nucleus that opened Al-Ghazali's talents, strengthened his resolve, and stirred in him the first perceptions of reason. As a result, his soul longed thirstily for the truth², This culminated in his apprenticeship under the great eminent scholars, such as Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Radhakani (535 AH), Abu Nasr al-Isma'ili (d. 405 AH), and al-Juwayni (d. 478 AH). They were among the treasures of knowledge and the pillars of learning. At their hands, brilliance and excellence emerged in Al-Ghazali's personality, and Sulayman Dunya described them as the crystal upon which the totality of colors is reflected³, Al-Ghazali himself, as is evident in some of his works, possessed qualities of boldness and courage that qualified him to enter the depths of knowledge with daring courage. These were qualities that Al-Ghazali derived from al-Juwayni, for he too was not restrained from examination and criticism by shyness or apprehension. It is natural for souls to experience the struggle between advance and retreat, boldness and hesitation; and the passionate person is the one in whom the forces of advance triumph in seeking further acquisition and pursuit of knowledge. Al-Ghazali says in his book *Al-Munqidh*: "I have continued, from the prime of my youth and the freshness of my life, since I approached puberty before the age of twenty until now, when my age has exceeded fifty, to plunge into the depths of this matter, to enter its vastness with the courage of the bold and not with the caution of the fearful coward; to penetrate every darkness, confront every problem, enter every difficulty, examine the creed of every sect, and uncover the secrets of the doctrine of every group."⁴ This stage may be called the stage of comprehensive intellectual foundation in Al-Ghazali's philosophy. It is a true image of the formation of an ambitious scientific mind that leads to boundless passion and ambition. There is no researcher who doubts that knowledge has an attractive magic like the magic of letters; in Al-Ghazali, it reached the level of blood flowing through the veins. In *Al-Munqidh*, there are various expressions that flow into the same stream: boldness in acquisition, courage in seeking knowledge, and rejection of the fears by which the bonds of imitation are broken and the locks of the mind are opened to reflection and scrutiny between the weak and the

sound, guidance and error. This is the climate in which the critical sense grows, through which the mind enters the worlds of knowledge. Al-Ghazali wandered through these domains for a long time until his soul found tranquility in the serenity of authorship and the disturbance of criticism. He exposed the defects of the logicians, the scandals of the Batiniyya, the incoherence of the philosophers, and the pitfalls of the theologians. He even went beyond that by providing us with the secrets and purposes of acts of obedience, which is considered a departure from what was customary among jurists. The jurists, despite their status, remained within the limits of outward forms and confined themselves to the apparent meanings of structures. Al-Ghazali surpassed this by providing us with secrets and purposes that he called a revival, which indicates the burial and deadening of these meanings by the people of outward forms within the limits of formalities that neglect their spiritual dimensions, preventing their effects from being felt in people's reality and the branches of life.

We may also say that Al-Ghazali's life is an example of psychological strength that does not use fate as an excuse, and whose obstacles do not prevent it from attaining its lofty goals. He lived under the shade of a world surging with differences and turmoil, diverse conflicts, and clashing desires, and biographical and historical works are full of the details of this. What concerns us is to conclude from all of this that Al-Ghazali possessed an aspiring soul that difficulties could not discourage in the search for truth according to the rules of inquiry and reflection, and according to a sound mind bold in independent reasoning and in rejecting blind submission.

2. Characteristics of Al-Ghazali's Works:

Dr. Sulayman Dunya wrote about Al-Ghazali's works in terms of their historicity⁵, abundance, and diversity. Their number is a matter of disagreement among researchers. Abd al-Rahman Badawi stated that they number four hundred and eighty books, some of which are firmly attributed to him and others doubtful. Others counted them as two hundred and eight books, while the well-known ones number eighty books. Most of them are in Iran, given that it was his homeland and place of residence. In this context, our aim is not enumeration as much as it is to identify their characteristics and purposes.

Zaki Mubarak wrote in some of his works, referring to their abundance, that he was among the greatest authors, and that the most important of all of them was the book *Ihya'*, followed by *The Forty*, then *Minhaj al-'Abidin*. He quoted al-Zabidi as saying that it is a book attributed to al-Ghazali, and that its true author is Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Ali al-Sabti⁶, and other matters that oscillate between rejection and acceptance. In another place in the same book, he describes him as having a fine method of authorship, as he explains the doctrine he intends to criticize, uses rhetorical discourse in places aimed at reforming hearts, frequently relies on evidence from the noble revelation for what he is explaining,

and then supports it with stories that have an effect on listeners. His works as a whole are suitable for all groups and intended for all Muslim audiences⁷, Thus came Zaki Mubarak's study of al-Ghazali and his works, which, in our opinion, is not firmly established. This is not the place to judge for or against it, because that would divert us from what we are concerned with. On this basis, we can say that extracting the characteristics of al-Ghazali's works requires extensive exploration of them, of what was written in them, and of what was said about them.

Reflection on al-Ghazali's books leads us to the following characteristics:

_ **Precision in selecting titles:** al-Ghazali deliberately chooses titles that attract the reader's attention and appeal to his conscience. Taken as a whole, they suggest to the researcher that there is a new spirit seeking to revive the mind from a heedlessness inherited from what is commonly circulated, and to stir the conscience after the stagnation that the soul acquires from repeated familiarities. Examples include *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, which suggests the death of religion after it had become a kind of attachment to formalities and a heedlessness of its purposes and effects; likewise his famous epistle *Ayyuha al-Walad*, *Maqasid al-Falasifa*, *Tahafut al-Falasifa*, *Mihakk al-Nazar*, *Iljam al-'Awamm*, and the like.

_ **Encyclopedic scope and diversity of knowledge:** it is difficult for the reader to classify al-Ghazali, for he did not remain within one field of knowledge without crossing it toward openness beyond its walls, entering adjacent and complementary fields of knowledge. He wrote on philosophy, theology, jurisprudence and its principles, Sufism, logic, and language. He also devoted a study in which he interpreted the Most Beautiful Names in his book *al-Maqsad al-Asna*, to show us that the Names and Attributes of the Truth are manifestations in the universe, and this will be explained in some detail.

_ **Summarizing his doctrine in his book al-Munqidh:** it can be said that al-Ghazali's doctrine and his method of reception are summarized in his book *al-Munqidh*, a book in which he presents his transformations from theology to philosophy, and from philosophy to Sufism, which is what he ultimately settled upon and died adhering to. This came after a bitter experience of doubt that al-Ghazali lived through, which led him to seclusion, through which he became one of the principal pillars of Sufism. Indeed, he made contributions to this rich field of knowledge that founded spiritual knowledge and granted it legitimacy, for before him it was dominated by wandering and governed by a kind of ambiguity that made it a source of denial and disturbance on the part of the jurists, or the people of outward meaning, as he puts it; these are the ones whom he described in *Ihya'* as the elite.

_ **Beauty of expression and method:** al-Ghazali's works show his mastery of Arabic composition and command of eloquence, and that he possessed the power of argument. He acquired this power of argument from the breadth of his knowledge of the principles of the doctrines and his deep immersion

in their beliefs, together with profound understanding and comprehensive grasp of their aims. AlGhazali did this after his brilliance in logic; and just as logic protects the mind from the impulses of error and the pitfalls of conjecture, it also grants it discernment and alertness.

3.Sources of Knowledge according to al-Ghazali:

If we wish to know precisely the sources from which al-Ghazali draws knowledge, and which had a direct reflection on his life and made his spirit transparent and yearning for purity, it is well known to acknowledge the foundations of religion, foremost among them the wise Revelation. This was followed by the wealth contained in the heritage of literature and arts, poetry and wisdom, admonitions and pulpit sermons. Zaki Mubarak says: “That was a pure spring from which al-Ghazali drank, and from which he worked while composing his writings on ethics”⁸. This was blended with soundness of reason, freedom of thought, and reflection, through which he was able to free himself from the yoke of imitation and submission. Through it, nothing for him became above scrutiny and criticism, and through it he also acquired “the inclination toward renewal; he departed from the Ash‘ari school in some of his views, and disagreed with the Shafi‘is in some of what they held. Nevertheless, he follows the earlier scholars and does not oppose them when he opposes them except gently and cautiously, as the timid and cautious person does”⁹.

The experience of suffering that al-Ghazali lived through during part of his life, which cast him into the nets of perplexity and doubt, all in pursuit of the truth, was itself no less important than the other sources of knowledge. From it, al-Ghazali learned contemplation, reflection, sound management of affairs, and the rejection of haste in judgments. Therefore, caution remained with him throughout his life, and doubt kindled determination, drove aspiration, stirred the passion for understanding, and moved stagnant minds. Jamil Saliba says: “Hesitation between two opposites, neither of which the intellect gives precedence over the other”¹⁰. The philosopher Descartes resembled al-Ghazali in this journey of doubt, as well as in seriousness, activity, and breadth of knowledge. Therefore, the subjective school was a spiritual and moral reference for the West, and the most embodied image of it is Kant’s philosophy. For the West, it is a reference in times of spiritual crises, for he is the philosopher of ethics, reason, and limits. The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor even authored his book *Sources of the Self* in pursuit of this aim, which may be summarized as the spiritual reference of the West. In it, he dealt with ethical and spiritual topics such as the self in moral space, the sources of morality, self-mastery in Plato, the inner man, and similar matters that flow into this direction. AlGhazali himself dealt with these same topics, with the clear difference of the Islamic reference and the characteristics that distinguish it, foremost among them the criterion of infallible Revelation.

04.The Reality of Knowledge according to al-Ghazali:

In the mind of the philosopher, meanings are born and values are produced, because the philosopher, as we imagine him, is constantly contemplative, addicted to reflection, pursued by questions, and does not believe in stability. Rather, stability for him is an act similar to death. To avoid stumbling down the slope of futility, this must take place according to a method of thinking through which knowledge is realized, and through which the pursuit of truth is undertaken. Therefore, the theory of knowledge—epistemology—today occupies the forefront of Western fields of knowledge. The West has founded a knowledge stripped of ethics, in harmony with its domineering materialistic imperial tendency. Accordingly, Western knowledge in general has come devoid of spiritual values. This tendency, which invaded some trends in Islamic thought and made them no longer see any harm in contradicting the constants and values of religion under various names such as enlightenment, modernity, and postmodernity, due to their dissolution in the atheistic materialistic trend, leads us, from our perspective, to judge them as distorted and discordant.

The subject of knowledge has had multiple sources since its emergence, manifesting itself in various forms of epistemological paradoxes. It began with the Greek foundational stage with Socrates and Plato in the context of responding to the Sophist trend, refuting their arguments, and affirming the value of reason as a source of knowledge. Plato cast doubt on the senses in terms of their status as a source of knowledge, while Aristotle elevated their status and affirmed their importance in acquiring knowledge. Research in this matter continued through the Hellenistic ages (Stoicism and Epicureanism), which tended toward certainty in sensory matters and made ethics the foundation of philosophy, as is known with Epicurus, while the remaining sciences came as subordinate to it. This was followed by the stage of the Middle Ages, in which philosophy came under the influence of the Christian religion, resulting in the problem of the relationship between reason and the text. Saint Augustine attempted to reconcile the two, while Thomas Aquinas attempted to affirm the limitedness of reason. These are the issues that entered the field of Arab philosophy and led some trends toward understanding the problems of Islamic philosophy as being inspired by philosophies that preceded it, without going beyond the Islamic characteristic and the reference it enjoys to the sacred religious text, in which reason comes as something followed, not following, with a limited interactive function between it and the religious text. And even if there were interpretations outside the legal frameworks in different times, they were very limited and did not constitute an obstacle before the manifest truth among the great majority.

The central question regarding these brief historical contexts of the subject of knowledge must revolve around al-Ghazali's position amid this crowd of contradiction, interconnection, distinction, and integration.

In this context, we can say that knowledge according to al-Ghazali is governed by historical conditionality and the temporal stage. Tracing this sequence leads us to understand the cognitive integration that gives each source of knowledge its own sphere and phase, without excluding reason or surpassing the senses. However, these are not certainties for him that require stopping at them, as is the case with Western methods. This necessarily requires us to clarify rational and sensory knowledge in terms of its nature, limits, characteristics, and the tools on which it is based, then unveiling and affective knowledge as subjective knowledge and its characteristics, and then to clarify the point of paradox between them according to the distinction that appears, in order ultimately to reach the integrative nature among these types of knowledge.

4-1- Reason and Philosophy according to al-Ghazali:

To understand knowledge based on reason, of a demonstrative nature, according to al-Ghazali, it is necessary to clarify—as previously indicated—that his life was formed according to distant and different temporal stages, which made him accused of contradiction in his positions and of committing an offense against rational thought, given his Sufism, which is based on unveiling and experiential knowledge. This is the apparent paradox that, in turn, requires the divergence of the two paths. We can clarify this as follows:

First: the stage of reception and the beginning of the formation of the investigating mind. This is the stage of apprenticeship under the great scholars such as al-Juwayni, al-Radhakani, and others. It is the stage that planted in him passion and love of inquiry. His teacher al-Juwayni—despite his adherence to the Ash‘ari school—rejected Ash‘ari acquisition, supported the freedom of the Mu‘tazila, and had works in theology and dialectics, the most famous of which are *al-Shamil fi Usul al-Din*, *al-Kafiya fi al-Jadal*, *al-Burhan*, *al-Ghunya*, and others. In their entirety, these are works on rational constructions and the principles of reflection, which gave al-Ghazali—in addition to learning—the love of investigation and criticism.

Second: the stage of doubt and teaching. This was doubt concerning intelligibles and sensibles alike, which led him toward seclusion. In seclusion, the spirit is freed from the constraints of others and is sent forth into the world of purity. In it, the veils are removed, and the ties between the Creator and the created vanish, so that one becomes within two bow-lengths of the lights of Truth that overwhelm sight. In this stage, al-Ghazali wrote his book *Ihya’ ‘Ulum al-Din*.

Third: this stage begins after the year 498 AH. In it, al-Ghazali wrote *al-Maqsad al-Asna*, *Jawahir al-Qur’an*, *al-Arba‘un fi Usul al-Din*, *Mishkat al-Anwar*, and *Ayyuha al-Walad*. This is the developmental course that enables us to understand the reality of al-Ghazali and his thought, so that we do not drift behind what is promoted about judging him as contradictory in many places in his

writings. Rather, al-Ghazali—as ‘Abd al-Rahman Badawi indicated—used to arrange his writings logically¹¹ and write according to the stage with which he was living.

From the foregoing, it may be said that al-Ghazali gave reason a broad scope of attention, according to a precise methodology within which its limitation and stage are embedded. He was a jurist of legal theory, a theologian, and a philosopher; and the science of legal theory, theology, and philosophy are forms of knowledge whose foundation is reason. In legal theory, reason is the basis of moral responsibility. Therefore, reason remained an approved source of knowledge for al-Ghazali until the end of his life. Some of his works on rational demonstrative sciences were composed during the stage of unveiling at which he ultimately arrived. Moreover, al-Ghazali’s concern with philosophy was, in our view, a rationalization of philosophy. For this reason, he wrote *The Aims of the Philosophers* before *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, and he opposed the Peripatetic philosophers because they introduced the question of metaphysics into the field of Islamic belief, which led them into the taint of confusion, especially in the three famous issues on which he disagreed with them: the eternity of the world, God’s knowledge of universals rather than particulars, and the denial of bodily resurrection. He therefore strove to refute their opinions, which were essentially derived from Greek thought, showing the fragility of their proofs and the corruption of their conclusions¹².

Al-Ghazali did not direct his hostility toward philosophy itself, but rather toward the philosophers. He revealed the inconsistency of philosophical thought and the internal defects it contained within its theoretical structure, as represented in the Greek system, and its repercussions on the Islamic field of knowledge. Therefore, the title of his work was *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, not *The Incoherence of Philosophy*. The secret of this hostility lies in the fact that al-Ghazali had a critical rational tendency that refused to dissolve into others without proof. He saw that other philosophers before him were products of Greek philosophy. This led to a belief spreading among some researchers, the essence of which is that al-Ghazali was the one who dried up the sources of philosophical thought in the Islamic East, froze reason, and killed creativity. What we see is the opposite of this, for it is unreasonable that al-Ghazali should have had such power of influence. It is known that any philosophy and any thought are based on foundations and are formed under circumstances and contexts according to the law of the development of ideas. Moreover, al-Ghazali’s refutations were based on sufficient knowledge of the contents and components of this philosophy, and on familiarity with logic, which protects the mind from error.

Al-Ghazali distinguishes between logic, natural sciences, and theology. He does not appear to object to natural sciences and logic, because this type of knowledge contains nothing that contradicts religion. Rather, the relation of religion is connected to metaphysics, which is what led him to declare

the Greeks and their followers among Muslim philosophers, such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, to be unbelievers¹³.

It may be said that al-Ghazali's works are pregnant with rational philosophical thought within the limits of what does not contradict religion. Indeed, reason, for him, is a light by which things are perceived, and through it one becomes prepared to grasp theoretical sciences. It is the means of attaining happiness in both abodes, and it is the tool for understanding revelation. This allows us to elevate al-Ghazali to the rank of the founders of legal rationalism governed by the frameworks and meanings of the text. It is also part of the basis upon which his takfir of the philosophers rested, and his judgment that they had contradicted reason and rationality¹⁴.

This rational knowledge led al-Ghazali to doubt traditional beliefs, then sensory perceptions, for he came to see that there was no security in them. He advanced proofs for this that denied their certainty, and presented evidence showing that such knowledge did not fulfill his purpose. He said, for example: "You look at the star and see it as small as the size of a dinar, but geometrical proofs show us that it is larger than the earth in size. You look at the shadow and find it motionless, then after a while it moves to another place, so you know that it is not motionless... Thus, the senses are not safe from error"¹⁵.

-2- Al-Ghazali and Unveiling Knowledge: The Turning Point

Prolonged examination of al-Ghazali's works shows us his mastery of the sciences of theologians and philosophers alike, and even his deep knowledge of the sciences of religion, both in their branches and foundations, as well as issues of thought and reflection. However, those sciences were not, for him, a repository or final resting place at which he arrived. Rather, he realized that beyond rational and sensory things there is a hidden world whose walls must be breached and whose secrets must be understood. Indeed, his beginnings with reason and the senses led him only to doubt them. What was certain at the beginning became, in the end, a matter of disturbance and bewilderment. He said: "I then turned with great seriousness to contemplating sensory perceptions and necessary truths, and I considered whether I could make myself doubt them. Prolonged doubt finally led me to a point where my soul no longer allowed me to grant security to sensory perceptions either"¹⁶.

This is the essence of al-Ghazali's doubt, which led him to judge these kinds of knowledge, which do not remain stable, as lacking certainty. The picture becomes clearer if we understand that al-Ghazali was a revolution of thirst for investigation and the search for truth, and this was his habit, to which he devoted his life in aspiration of attaining it. How strange, then, is a doubt that leads him to another doubt, namely doubt in his sensory existence. Al-Ghazali paused in contemplation of the experience

of dreaming during sleep and began to question himself: Does it not seem to a person, while sleeping and dreaming, that he is living a reality similar to sensory reality? Yet he soon realizes that what he had believed to be truth was nothing but a dream, and is no more than mere imagination in relation to the world of wakefulness. This led him to doubt what comes after wakefulness itself, since there is nothing to prevent it too from being imagination in relation to another world, for which this world would be an illusion with no real existence¹⁷. All these reasons were sufficient to bring about a transformation in al-Ghazali's life toward the mystical and experiential path. This is the point of paradox between two distinct methods, which drives us to investigate the nature of the relationship between them in al-Ghazali: whether this transformation that occurred in him represents a complete transcendence of the rational demonstrative method, or whether the two should be combined according to what epistemological complementarity requires within a comprehensive and inclusive feature.

Unveiling and experiential knowledge, in its general sense, is a form of inner devotion attained by the knower after spiritual struggles. At that point, knowledge arises from the self, and its locus is the heart. It is an inward personal experience related to the self of the knower, and it is difficult to transmit to others. Sufis in general became known for what they said about it—as transmitted from them by al-Qushayri in his Epistle—namely that it is difficult to convey to others, only because the vessels of language are too narrow for it, or speech is unable to express it, because it springs from states and is not embodied in forms and shapes. Al-Ghazali summarized this in his saying: So what occurred was what occurred, which I shall not mention; so think well of it and do not ask about the news.

In this context, we do not wish to speak about Sufism or gnosis in al-Ghazali, because that is not hidden from any researcher, and frankly speaking, there is nothing new in it. It is widespread in many of his works, such as *Ihya'*, *Jawahir al-Qur'an*, *Mukashafat al-Qulub*, *al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad*, and others. These are books whose style contains a tenderness that helps revive hearts, and they are books to be withheld from those who are not qualified for them, because living the experience is different from understanding it from the outside. It can be said that they are closer to psychology, with the difference that knowledge in psychology is of a material nature, whereas tasted knowledge is spiritual and inward, and is sought—according to al-Ghazali's expression—for the unveiling of the known¹⁸. Therefore, judging it in the courts of reason is an injustice that provoked denial against him by the people of outward forms, like others before and after him. What we want to focus our attention on in al-Ghazali's unveiling knowledge is rather the inquiry into the universe, the manifestations of the names and attributes in it, and how the gnostic understands the secrets of existence and lives with them. In our view, this is an inquiry of epistemological value for researchers in the paths of thought and philosophy, for the one who contemplates the secrets of existence lives an inner dialogue with the

attributes of the Truth: the Merciful, the Compeller, the Provider. He also interacts with the inquiries of philosophy and their contents according to this conception, which al-Ghazali embodied in his book *al-Maqsad al-Asna*, in which it is sincerely manifested how the experience of plunging into the depths of spiritual tasted knowledge elevated him to understand existence or the universe in a Sufi manner, this existence being a speaking indication of the names and attributes. At that point, living with its diverse manifestations becomes living with these names through sensing them within the self and seeing the Truth in them. Here lies the locus of creativity in al-Ghazali's gnostic method.

It is worth knowing in this context that al-Ghazali reached this stage of knowledge, declaring his stability upon it after acknowledging the limitation of reason and the limitation of sensory knowledge, to announce clearly his precedence at this level of understanding the secrets of existence. He says: "This matter in itself is rare in aim, difficult to attain, obscure in apprehension; for it is elevation to the highest summit and the furthest goal before which intellects become bewildered and the sights of minds fall short of its beginnings, let alone its ends. How can human powers tread the path of research, examination, and investigation into the attributes of Lordship? And how can the eyes of bats endure the light of the sun?"¹⁹. He also says more clearly: "Disclosing the true essence of the truth in it almost contradicts what the masses and the order of creation have preceded to, in terms of habits and familiar doctrines"²⁰.

This book, in which al-Ghazali was creative, despite its classification within unveiling knowledge and its deep immersion in the secrets of existence according to a tasted method, nevertheless carries within it the methods of the rational approach and ways of inference. An example of this is his discussion in its first chapter, in the context of explaining the difference between the name, the named, and naming. He presents previous understandings, then demonstrates from the depth of reason what is more preponderant to him according to the measures of reason and methods of deduction. For example, he says: "The attributes of God are not to be said to be God Himself, nor are they other than Him"²¹. After prolonged reflection on this book, it becomes clear to us that al-Ghazali deals with the Most Beautiful Names and the Sublime Attributes according to a gnostic method that, in some of its aspects, is coupled with a rational demonstrative method. This is based for him on two foundations:

The first: that the attributes of the Truth require adopting them as moral qualities. They are relative in the creature and absolute in the Creator. Among these are the attributes of mercy, power, knowledge, etc. All of them are qualities that the servant must model himself upon so that they may appear in him in a limited form according to what suits his deficient nature. Al-Ghazali considers this a necessity of faith, and it is the basis of the function entrusted to the servant, which falls within the general context

of the concept of servitude, which is the purpose of creation and bringing into existence. This is what al-Ghazali placed under the title of assuming the character traits of God ²².

“And I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me” — Surat al-Dhariyat, verse 56.

Second: understanding existence or the universe in a gnostic Sufi manner that goes beyond the superficial vision predominant among the common people, and beyond the scientific vision adopted by the people of evidence and demonstration, who, in his view, are attached to the common people according to the scale of the people of taste and gnosis. This understanding makes existence speak of the attributes of the Truth and indicate them. Al-Ghazali dwelt at length on these names, enumerated them, and assigned to each one of them the form that embodies it in the universe. The narrowness of this context does not allow us to encompass what al-Ghazali mentioned, nor does it allow us, basically, to turn away from it, which makes us pause over what it contains in terms of unveiling the intended meaning.

Among these is the name al-Salam. In relation to it, al-Ghazali explains that it refers to the One whose essence is free from defects, whose attributes are free from deficiency, and whose actions are free from harms, since there is no soundness in existence except that it returns to Him and proceeds from Him ²³. In this manner, harmony occurs between existence and the human being, considering him part of it.

In our view, al-Ghazali is creative in what he advanced. He removed superficiality from the understanding of the attributes of the Truth and the secrets of existence, which commentators before him had habitually explained. This agrees with the indications of the noble revelation and provides us with an extremely precise image of this existence by urging reason to exercise its function toward it, namely the function of reflection as a human characteristic by which the human being rose above the world of grazing animals and beasts: reflection on the sensory existence around us, as in the Almighty’s saying: “Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day, and the ships that sail through the sea with what benefits people, and what Allah sends down from the sky of water, by which He gives life to the earth after its death, and disperses therein every kind of creature, and in the changing of the winds and the clouds subjected between the heaven and the earth, are signs for people who reason” — Surat al-Baqarah, verse 164; and on moral existence or revelation, as in the Almighty’s saying: “Do they not then reflect upon the Qur’an? Had it been from other than Allah, they would have found in it much contradiction” — Surat al-Nisa’, verse 82.

And on the self, considering it part of the universal existence, as in the Almighty’s saying: “So let man look at what he was created from” — Surat ‘Abasa, verse 15. These three worlds are mutually harmonious, aiming at knowing the Truth. Therefore, we find that al-Ghazali’s acknowledgment of

epistemology—the theory of knowledge—ends in the goal of knowing the Truth. Reason, the senses, and the heart are tools governed by paradoxes from a superficial perspective, but the depth of alGhazali’s vision and insight bestowed upon them the character of complementarity and unity of purpose.

Conclusion.

The ultimate conclusion that can be drawn in this context is the following:

Al-Ghazali’s mastery in combining the rational demonstrative method with the unveiling gnostic method, through a comprehensive and balanced vision that removed the distinction between the two methods and affirmed their complementarity, is evident in the depth of al-Ghazali’s acknowledgment of reason while defining its field, as a theologian, and his acknowledgment of the senses while limiting the scope of their function, as a philosopher. This limitation in the function of both reason and the senses is what made him question them and consider them deficient tools for attaining truth. Above reason and beyond the perceptions of the senses, there are secrets that are not revealed in the heart of the gnostic except through the gnostic method and what it requires in terms of emptying, adorning, purification, and spiritual struggles.

Al-Ghazali granted tasted knowledge its legitimacy and established its structure after it had, before him, been predominantly prone to disappearance. Therefore, his philosophy had a profound extension among those who came after him, whether in the field of Islamic knowledge, as is clearly evident in the Sufism of Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi (d. 638 AH), one of the great Sufis of Islam, or at the level of Western philosophy, as manifested in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1804 AD), despite some expressions found in Ibn Arabi’s words whose apparent meaning carries denial of al-Ghazali because of his deep involvement in philosophy, and his accusation that he swallowed the philosophers and was unable to vomit them out, as Qutb al-Din al-Rawandi (d. 537 AH) later imitated him, and in a similar manner Khwaja Zadeh (d. 893 AH) followed, among others. This makes us acknowledge that al-Ghazali was truly an intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual project with integrated foundations, and his works reveal his systematic analytical ability, the breadth of his intellect, and the purity of his spirit, which made him an epistemological authority whose flame has not been extinguished throughout time.

In addition to the foregoing, al-Ghazali was skilled in the sciences of logic and deeply versed in its rules, to the extent that he introduced it into the theological and jurisprudential structure, considering them sciences based on logic and reason. Therefore, he stated that his book *Mi‘yar al-‘Ilm* was a complement to his book *al-Tahafut*, which indicates to us that the latter book was not intended to encompass all philosophical issues, but rather to summon what preserves the soundness of thought

and protects correct Islamic belief. The ultimate conclusion that can be drawn is that al-Ghazali, in our view, was not merely a philosopher who transmitted knowledge, but, in addition to that, a sage who lived with its rich and diverse issues.

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