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Knowledge of God

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Knowledge of God: A Glance at the Development of Al-Ghazālī's Concept in His Later Works

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ملخص

يولى الكاتب اهتمامه فى هذا البحث عن السؤال المطروح : هل يمكن للانسان ان يصل الى درجة معرفة حقيقة الإله ؟ واذا كان للانسان أن يصل الى هذه الدرجة فما الطريق للوصول اليها ؟ وللإجابة على ذلك السؤال يحلل الكاتب ما كتبه الامام ابى حامد الغزالى فى هذا الشأن خاصة فى مؤلفاته الثلاثة :

١- احياء علوم الدين

٢- إجماع العوام عن علم الكلام

٣- المنقذ من الضلال

فقد عرض الكاتب بشكل ترتيبى تلك الكتب ومن خلال البحث توصل الكاتب الى النتيجة بأن الانسان عند الغزالى يستطيع معرفة الله عن طريق معرفة الانسان بذاته وصفاته تعالى الأزلية والأبدية والكمالية كما أن الانسان يستطيع معرفة ذلك عن طريق مخلوقاته سبحانه وتعالى. ورغم أن لكل من تلك الكتب خصائصها فى البحث عن هذا الموضوع إلا ان الغزالى ملتزم برأيه بأن الذوق الانسانى له دور مهم للوصول الى معرفة حقيقة الإله.

Abstrak

Pertanyaan tentang mungkinkah manusia mencapai pengetahuan (ma'rifat) tentang hakekat Tuhan, dan dengan cara bagaimanakah manusia dapat mencapai ma'rifat itu, dibahas oleh penulis dalam artikel ini. Penulis menganalisis pemikiran "hujjatul Islam" Imam Al-Ghazali tentang permasalahan di atas yang tertuang dalam ketiga bukunya: 1. *Ihya' Ulu'ūm al-Dīn*, khususnya pada kitab al-'ilm 2. *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, dan ; 3. *Iljūm al-'Awāim 'an 'ilm al-Kalām*.

Penulis secara berurutan menguraikan bagaimana Tuhan dapat dipersepsi oleh manusia, sebagaimana tertuang dalam ketiga karya al-Ghazali di atas. Tercakup dalam pembahasan pengetahuan manusia tentang Tuhan adalah zat Tuhan, sifat-sifat Tuhan yang azali, abadi dan sempurna, serta karya-karya Tuhan. Meskipun ada perbedaan penekanan kalimat dalam ketiga karyanya, namun Al-Ghazali cukup konsisten menggarisbawahi peran penting *dhawq* bagi manusia dalam menggapai ma'rifat hakekat Tuhan.

The tendency to portray the unknowability of God has been one of the traditional issues in philosophy or, more properly, philosophical theology, since such a discussion deals with conceptual clarification yet has a theological goal. This is if the issue is viewed on the premise that God is an intentional Creator as described in the traditional account of the Qur'ānic paradigm of *ex nihilo* creation. This account consequently places God outside His creations as the beginning and the end of all things, which also places God beyond any comprehensible characteristics. Seekers of the knowledge of God¹ have been facing this concern, yet, according to Burrel, it is this issue of genuine unknowing which "distinguishes a search for God from lusting after idols."² It is concerning this matter that al-Ghazālī attempted to find a way of proper recognition of divinity, to draw a line linking the un-

¹ Although the phrase "knowledge of God" in English suggests that God is either the subject or the object of knowing, for our present discussion it is more interpreted as man's knowledge of God, including the extent that God may take part in revealing some enlightenment.

² David B. Burrel, "The Unknowability of God in al-Ghazali," *Religious Studies* 5 (1987): 173.

knowable to the perception of knowing.

Under the influence of Neoplatonism, early Muslim philosophers paved the way to make this incomprehensible Divinity intellectually accessible by postulating a scheme of emanation, whereby plurality emerges from the One, or the material world from the immaterial Transcendence, through a purely intellectual process. It is through this way of descent, that the human being's soul, which is always longing to return to its origin, can find its path of access the Transcendent.

What this Neoplatonic theory of emanation offers is "a cosmic ordering which mimicked the powerful Aristotelian syllogistic, so that suitable powerful intellects would be enabled to traverse the path in reverse, and arrive at the One from whom all comes."³ It is upon reflection of this notion that Islamic philosophers such as al-Farābī and Ibn Sīnā proposed the understanding of the Qur'ānic doctrine of creation in the sense of emanation.⁴

The contemporary scholar, S.H. Nasr, tends to see Ibn Sīnā's scheme of emanation as being perceptively Islamic. This assertion was, however, criticized by Morewedge and Netton, on the basis of the fact that there are serious distinctions between the Qur'ānic doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which is "producing something out of nothing," and emanation, which is "producing something by emanation from one's thought."⁵

In al-Ghazālī's point of view the scheme of emanation unavoidably implies a limitation of God's creative power and is, therefore, included within the scope of his severe criticism of the philosophical doctrines.⁶ Thus, the map that al-Ghazālī seems to offer is what Burrel pictures as "developing an anthropology explicit enough to serve as a vehicle for our search of God, and

³ Burrel, "The Unknowability of God," 172. See also his *Knowing the Unknowable God: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 78.

⁴ Burrel, "The Unknowability of God," 173

⁵ Ian Richard Netton, *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotic of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994), 166.

⁶ Burrel, "The Unknowability of God," 174. See also his *Knowing the Unknowable God*, 14. According to Lazarus-Yafeh, however, despite the fact of al-Ghazālī's denial of the Neoplatonic doctrine of emanation, he in fact adopts a similar idea which has been firmly held in Sufi literature. This can be seen from the fact that "whenever this verb (emanate) appears in al-Ghazālī's authentic Sufi writings there is no mention of emanation at all, and only one idea recurs: the granting of divine light and grace unto the purified heart which has been cleaned in order to absorb the light of knowledge which flows from above." Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazālī* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1975), 308.

organizing Qur'anic materials to assemble a cosmos rich enough to provide the setting ground for such a journey."⁷ Hence if the elaboration of the intellection bridge, which functions to provide a way of connection from The One to the multiplicity and vice versa, is unacceptable to al-Ghazālī, one question remains: which part of man's perception can bring his natural desire of returning to its beginning at the end of its journey as a creature to the only Creator? Since al-Ghazālī's concern regarding the issue cannot be separated from his elaboration of various subjects, so that "his thought is a vast ocean in which all but the most skilled navigators are liable to lose their way,"⁸ our search for his assertion in this study will be focused on three of his later works: "Kitāb al-'Ilm" of the *Iḥyā'*, *al-Munqidh*, and *Iljām al-'Awām*.

1. Ghazālī's concept in the "Kitāb al-'Ilm" of the *Iḥyā'*

The book, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of Religious Science), the encyclopedic work of the author recognized as his most famous composition, is listed by Watt as one of the undeniably authentic works of al-Ghazālī.⁹ There is an inclination among some scholars to refer to the theory that the book seems more likely to have been written and completed in 489-90/1096-97.¹⁰ According to al-Ghazālī's own chronology, the beginning of book was written not before 490/1097 when the author was in Jerusalem. To Hourani's account, however, al-Ghazālī's references alone are not enough to determine the accurate date of the completion of the book. Thus according to Hourani's chronology, the completion of the book "could hardly have been

⁷ Burrel, "The Unknowability of God" 174.

⁸ Watt formulates this expression by adopting al-Ghazālī's own favorite metaphor. W. Montgomery Watt, "The Study of al-Ghazālī," *Oriens* 13-14 (1961): 121.

⁹ W. Montgomery Watt "The Authenticity of the Works Attributed to al-Ghazālī" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1952): 26. Watt asserts that *Tahāfut*, *Iḥyā'*, and *Munqidh* are undoubtedly authentic works of al-Ghazālī, and uses them as the criteria by which he determines the authenticity of other works attributed to the author. Other works which may also be accepted as authentic and which are used as references in the case of determining authenticity are *al-Mustazhirī*, *al-Iqtisād fi 'l-I'tiqād*, *Maqāṣid al-Falāṣifah* (although this book does not present the author's own views), and *Mishkaṭ*. The *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* comprises four quarters, each consisting of ten books. These quarters are on the Act of Worship, the Usage of Life, the Destructive matters of life, and the Saving matters of life. "Kitāb al-'Ilm" (*The Book of Knowledge*) is the first book of the first quarter, and therefore is referred to as *Iḥyā'* I, 1.

¹⁰ See George F. Hourani, "A Revised Chronology of Ghazālī's Writings," *American Oriental Society Journal* 104 (1984): 297.

later than the end of 498/August or September, 1105."¹¹ Since the present focus deals only with the first book, our discussion might not adequately represent the spirit of the *Iḥya'* in its entirety.

The portion of discussion al-Ghazālī offers regarding the knowledge of God in this book blends the knowledge of "the essence of God" together with His eternal and perfect attributes and His works.¹² The access Al-Ghazālī offers to this knowledge, as shown above, is through the science of revelation (*'ilm al-mukāshafah*), which he describes as esoteric and which "becomes the goal of every science." Furthermore, this knowledge is accessible only to "the saints and favorites of God," which includes anyone who is willing to engage in self mortification, discipline, and purify his heart (*mujāhada*, *riyāda*, and *taṣfīyat al-qalb*),¹³ and is the means through which the truth regarding the knowledge of God "becomes as clear as if it were seen by the eye."¹⁴ Due to the esoteric nature of this branch of science, al-Ghazālī restrict its accessibility to only a select group of people. In his own words, "These Divine secrets may not be made public either by writing or by word of mouth, yet they may be discussed with the 'initiated', with those who have also been found worthy and capable of being granted a glimpse of the superior world and who follow the same esoteric path towards the real knowledge of God."¹⁵

Besides his warning against revealing the esoteric subject to other than its specialists, al-Ghazālī also reminds us of the equal obligation not to conceal the secret from the right people. This is because those who conceal truth from those who are capable and worthy of it are as guilty as those who reveal it to those who are incapable of understanding it. In support, al-Ghazālī

¹¹ Hourani, "A Revised Chronology," 296.

¹² Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥya'* I, 1, (Cairo: n.p., 1356/1937), 34; As translated by Nabih Amin Faris in *The Book of Knowledge*, (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1966), 47.

¹³ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥya'* I, 1, 66. According to Al-Ghazālī, every human 'heart,' by morality of the *fitra*, "is capable in principle, of knowing the 'true realities' (*ma'rifat al-haqāiq*) and the 'oneness of God' (*ma'rifat al-tawḥīd*)." See Hermann A. Landolt, "Ghazālī and 'Religionwissenschaft': Some Notes on the *Mishkāṭ al-Anwār* for Professor Charles J. Adams." *Asiatic Studien* 45. 1 (1991): 20. See also Eric. L. Ormsby, "The Taste of Truth: The Structure of Experience in Al-Ghazālī's *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*," in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 150.

¹⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥya'* I, 1, 34-35. See also Faris' trans., *The Book of Knowledge*, 46-48.

¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥya'* I, 1, p. 35, as translated by Lazarus-Yafeh in *Studies in al-Ghazālī*, 361; Cf. Faris' translation in *The Book of Knowledge*, 49.

quotes the following famous poem:¹⁶

Shall pearls be given to herders of sheep,
shall wealth be trusted to their rustic keep?
They would not comprehend nor know its worth,
To give them would be adorning beasts.
But God is kind if His grace He sends
One worthy of my knowledge, of my wit,
To him my goods I'll give and gain his love;
Until such time I will withhold my gifts-
One's learning would be wasted upon fools;
And he doth sin who from the worthy keeps."

According to al-Ghazālī, this secret science takes the heart, which he often symbolizes as a mirror that has to be polished in order to receive divine knowledge or light,¹⁷ as its intermedium. This popular Neoplatonic-style parable, which often appears as a key point both in al-Ghazālī's philosophical and sufistic works, according to Yafeh, "must be of ancient Hellenistic origin, and al-Ghazālī could have found it in many and various versions both in the philosophical and Sūfī literature." This explains the fact that although there is "a slightly different formulation" in the author's presentation on the illustration in his Sufi books such as *Mishkāṭ* than in that of the philosophical writings, such as *Maqāṣid*, "its Neoplatonic background is always clearly discernible."¹⁸

In a later part of the book, al-Ghazālī identifies the symbolism of light as intellect (*'aql*), and calls the knowledge derived from this light "spirit, revelation and life."¹⁹ He explains his use of four different meanings of the term intellect interchangeably.²⁰ First, the original meaning resembling a fountain-head from where the other three meanings spring out, is as a quality which "distinguishes man from other animals and prepares him to understand and grasp the theoretical sciences (*nazarīyah*), and master the abstract

¹⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihya'* I, 1, 97. See also Lazarus-Yafeh's *Studies in al-Ghazālī*, 356-357.

¹⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihya'* I, 1, 35.

¹⁸ Lazarus Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazālī*, 313. See also Binyamin Abrahamov, "Al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way to Know God," *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993): 151 note 47.

¹⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihya'* I, 1, 141.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 145-146.

(*fikrīyah*) disciplines."²¹ The second meaning is as a capability of distinguishing possibility and impossibility identified in necessary knowledge. Third, the term is applied to empirical knowledge. Lastly, he applies it to the well developed instinct that enables its owner to overcome his natural appetites, which can only achieve temporary satisfaction, to attain endless happiness.

Al-Ghazālī seems to believe that this extraordinary nature of the intellect is the single agent that can bring man closer to God,²² since quotes the Prophet's saying, "...men will not advance to a higher degree of proximity to God except in proportion to their intellect."²³ This attitude of placing the intellect in such a significant role may seem a little confusing, for, as we noted previously, al-Ghazālī stands strictly against the concept of approaching Divinity through intellection in the scheme of emanation. In this case, the conception of intellect which al-Ghazālī proposes must be different from the one presented by the philosophers concerning emanation. In the philosophical concept, the role of the intellect in the emanation scheme can be seen as an alternative to revelation in accessing God. In al-Ghazālī's theory of the nobility of the intellect, however, he seems even to identify the intellect as revelation itself. In his words,

²¹ Ibid., 145; Faris, *The Book of Knowledge*, 226.

²² It seems that what al-Ghazālī suggests regarding the matter of accessing Divinity is to be as close as possible to the unveiled reality of this Transcendent world. Nowhere in this book does he provide such a notion as returning to this Divinity in the sense of union, which is popular in sufistic discussion. This is supported by the point, proposed by Watt, that even in explaining his sufistic experience in the *Munqidh* he does not refer to such terms as *ittiḥād* (unification) and *ḥulūl* (inherence). What he actually refers to is nearness (*qurb*). Watt, therefore, noted the absence of the term *qurb* in such an important writing on al-Ghazālī as Jabre's. See Watt "The Study of al-Ghazālī," 128. In his *Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī clearly maintains that these sufistic technical terms *ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl* together with the term *wuṣul* (connection) "as all erroneous." See al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, ed. Farid Jabre (Beirut: Lajnah al-Bayaniyyah li Tarjamat al-Rawai', 1969), 39; This fact is interpreted by Burrell that al-Ghazālī finds the application of these two terms (*ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl*) "theologically unacceptable or philosophically incoherent (or both)." David Burrell, "Naming the names of God: Muslims, Jews, Christians" *Theology today* 47, 1 (1990): 26. Nevertheless, other scholars may have different opinions particularly regarding al-Ghazālī's other works, such as *Mishkāṭ al-Anwār* and *Kimiyāyi Sa'ādāt*, that is, that al-Ghazālī clearly holds these doctrines of *ittiḥād* and *ḥulūl* in the sense that "the soul is identical with God" so that it can access the Divine in the form of unification, and in the same relation "God indwells the soul." R. C. Zaehner, *Hindu Muslim Mysticism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publication, 1994), 164.

²³ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihya'* I, 1, 142; Faris, *The Book of Knowledge*, 223.

As to those things which were revealed to the prophets, some were revealed through the sight and some through the insight, but both were called seeing (*ru'yah*). In short he whose insight is not keen will grasp nothing of religion except its husks and outward forms rather than its pith and truth. These, then are the things to which the word 'aql is applied²⁴

On this point al-Ghazālī introduces the idea that "knowledge of the stages of revelation" does not belong to the Prophet only, for achieving knowledge in this manner does not mean that the person is a "receiver of revelation." In fact, according to al-Ghazālī, there is a possibility to share this knowledge with certain ordinary people, while this does not mean that the person becomes a prophet. "For knowledge is one thing and the existence of what is known is another."²⁵

His practice of placing the prophets and saints in the most elite rank man can achieve before God seems to be closely related to the tradition of the Prophets which says that every person has a degree of intellect according to the gifting of God.²⁶ Along with the above mentioned tradition this seems to be the grounds of al-Ghazālī's assertion that the communication of the knowledge of revelation must be restricted to chosen people only and kept secret from those who are considered incapable of grasping it. At this point, a serious question concerning the contradictory concepts of man's limited capability on one hand, and God's command toward all human beings to know Him, on the other, can be addressed to al-Ghazālī, as was raised in his *Iljām*.²⁷ (We will come to this point again in a later part of this chapter).

Another criticism brought against this theory of differentiation of intellectual capability is that it leads directly to allowing those who are incapable of understanding transcendent reality to blindly follow an authority (*taqlīd*), which, in al-Ghazālī's suggestion, is permitted for one group of people while forbidden to another. This criticism suggests that the theory is in danger of leading to a "crystallization of caste system" which, of course, contra-

²⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihya'* I, 1, 149; Faris, *The Book of Knowledge*, 231.

²⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihya'* I, 1, 234; Faris, *The Book of Knowledge*, 234.

²⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Ihya'* I, 1, 151.

²⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Iljām al-'Awwām 'an 'Ilm al-Kalām*, Muhammad al-Mu'tasim Billāh al-Baghdādī ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1985), 111. See also Abrahamov, "al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way," 142.

dicts the spirit of Islam. However, this seems to somewhat exaggerate the issue, for it is obvious, as seen throughout our discussion, that such a crystallization is precisely not the intention of al-Ghazālī. A reply to this concern can also be quoted from a scholar's response against the modernist's rejection of "the Islamic idea of hierarchy of knowledge and of authorities" as follows,

In respect of the human order in society, we do not in the least mean by 'hierarchy' that semblance of it wherein oppression and exploitation and domination are legitimized as if they were an established principle ordained by God... The fact that hierarchical disorders have prevailed in human society does not mean that hierarchy in the human order is not valid, for there is, in point of fact, *legitimate* hierarchy in the order of creation, and this Divine Order pervading all Aeration and manifesting the occurrence of justice",²⁸

Besides, al-Ghazālī's ideas of the hierarchy of knowledge allows for the achievement of salvation and basic pleasure for the common people's level of knowledge. This is elaborated in his theory of 'salvation and torment' with regard to different classes of man mentioned in *K. al-arba'īn*, recognized as the summary of the *Iḥyā'*. Corresponding to his concept of the three ways leading to knowledge of God presented in the *Iljām*, which we will be deal with later, al-Ghazālī illustrates his view as being close to that of al-Farābī's in *Perfect State*, taking the parable of different classes of a city's inhabitants in their relation to the ruler:

When a ruler conquers a city its inhabitants may be graded according to three conditions which correspond to the three types of persons (the common people, the knower of the proofs and the knower of the secrets): a. those who escape killing and torment. They are saved although the ruler removes them from the city. b. those whom the ruler gives the possibility of remaining in the city. c. those whom the ruler gives a share in his rule.²⁹

Above all, considering the credit that al-Ghazālī gives to the function of the faculty of intellect in the knowledge of revelation, it seems that in this

²⁸ Osman Bakar, "The Meaning and Significance of Doubt in al-Ghazzali's Philosophy" *Iqbal Review* 27 (1985): 33.

²⁹ Abrahamov, "Al-Gazālī's Supreme Way," 149.

Book 1 of the *Ihya'*, al-Ghazālī places the intellect in a parallel sense with his concept of *dhawq*, understood as immediate experience (of things divine) or religious intuition, which later on became dominant in his thought. Although the term is not presented yet in *The Book of Knowledge*, the conception of *dhawq*, according to Watt, seems to have grown in attraction for al-Ghazālī during the composition of the *Ihya'*, which must have occupied a considerable time,"³⁰ Watt further states that *K. al-Arba'īn*, taken as a reflection of the *Ihya'*, "follows mainly the *dhawq* line of thought"³¹ In fact, in Book IV of the *Ihya'* al-Ghazālī already asserts that "... reason grasp nothing of the domain of the lord. What is in this domain is known by another light, nobler and higher than reason. This light rises in the world of prophethood and of friendship with God."³²

2. His criticism in the *Munqidh*

Generally, the accounts relate that the *Munqidh*, recognized as one of the undoubtedly authentic works attributed to al-Ghazālī,³³ was written about five years before the author's death. A more detailed and accurate explanation, however, is provided in Hourani's "Revised Chronology of al-Ghazālī's Writings." Hourani places this renowned persuasive autobiography of al-Ghazālī between late 1106 and 1109, which is a period of between 5-2 years before the latter's death. He supports this assertion with the fact that the same chronology is also proposed by Bouyges and confirmed by V.J. Poggi.³⁴

The book, though considered an autobiography of the author, discusses virtually only his spiritual development, rather than his life-story or his autobiographical facts. Hence, the book is strikingly impressive though not in its style as an autobiography, for, in fact, Ibn Sīnā had also written an autobiography much earlier. Rather, the way the author builds his selected facts in a convincing argument is what gives more power to the work. The book's influence has extended beyond the Islamic world in that it has been compared to some celebrated later Western works such as the *Confessions* of St. Augustine, J. H. Newman's *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, and J. Bunyan's

³⁰ Watt, "The Study of al-Ghazālī," 127.

³¹ Ibid., 128.

³² As quoted and translated by Watt see Ibid., 127.

³³ See note 8 above.

³⁴ Hourani, "A Revised Chronology," p. 301.

Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners."³⁵

Al-Ghazālī introduces the book as presenting the results of his investigation into four groups of seekers: the theologian, the Ismā'īlīs, the philosopher and the Sufi³⁶ in his effort to climb "from the plain of naive and second-hand belief (taqlid) to the peak of direct vision." Offering the analogy of the depth of the sea and the depth of knowledge in the path towards God, he prepares the reader with a warning against the danger of the tendency of the majority to drown in various religious observances, while "only a minority reach safety." Along with this, he prepares the reader by illustrating his earnestness in his personal inquiry in that he willingly devotes himself to investigating every method existing in his time. In his own words, he presents himself as: "bravely embarking on the open sea,"³⁷ assuming that the right way must be among these four distinctive approaches.

a. Theologians

Despite the fact that al-Ghazālī himself is recognized as a theologian, particularly as the "mouth-piece of the Ash'arīte doctrine" which was recognized as the orthodoxy of Sunnī Islam³⁸ and on which he himself admitted having written,³⁹ he clearly states in the *Munqidh* that the theological ap-

³⁵ Bakar, "The Meaning and significance of Doubt," 29.

³⁶ Each of these groups of seekers along with their specific systems of thought is pointed out by Ormsby as "embodying a quite specific approach to knowledge." He explains further: "Theology, as proceeding by dialectic and controversy: an adversarial and disputation approach. Ismā'īlī teaching-*ta'līm* is al-Ghazālī's usual designation-as epitomizing sheer authoritarian procedures: acceptance of belief on the authority of a sinless *imām*. Philosophy, as dependent on reason and demonstration. And the Sūfī way, which relies on inner transformation, on inspiration, and illumination, and on reliving these in living practice." Ormsby, "The Taste of Truth," 137.

³⁷ See al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* Farid Jabre, ed., (Beirut: Lajnah al-Banāniyyah li Tarjamat al-Rawāi', 1969), 9-11. See also W Montgomery Watt's translation in *The Faith and practice of al-Ghazālī* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1963), 19-22.

³⁸ Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. by Liadain Sherrad (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1996), 181.

³⁹ Al-Ghazālī's *al-Iqtisād fī al-I'tiqād*, "commonly read as an orthodox Ash'arīte manual," and *R. al-Qudsiyya* both are recognized as basic texts of Kalām. According to R M Frank, however, if the fundamental purpose of theology is to defend the essential creed of orthodoxy, as asserted by al-Ghazālī, then the authors' works such as *Tahāfut al-Falāṣifah*, *al-Mustazhiri*, and *Faysal al-Tafriqah* should be considered, at least in one sense, as theological works. Also, referring to al-Ghazālī's own statement regarding logic as an element of theology and that logic of philosophers is only different in terminology from

proach is not the one which satisfies his thirst for true knowledge. He does admit, however, that theology is a branch of science that attains its own aim, that is, to preserve orthodoxy and defend it from the attacks of heretics, and that it might meet the quest of others.⁴⁰ However, suggesting the similarity of theological case to that of medicine, he states, "How often one sick man's medicine proves to be another's poison."⁴¹

The factor to which al-Ghazālī objected the most from this group of Muslim thinkers is actually their method. He seems to believe that the "the reasoning and the arguments of the school of theology are not rigorous and scientific, but on the contrary are based on superficial sense impression."⁴² In other words, in performing their role, theologians "start with some premises that are not certain in themselves but must be accepted on the authority of scripture or the consensus of the community."⁴³ In this case, the style of debate employed by the theologians is merely dialectical, based on ordinary experience and the authority of leading scholars without access to formal analysis.⁴⁴ This condition is obviously an inadequate approach for al-Ghazālī's quest for certainty of true knowledge of the Transcendence.

Related to this point, moreover, al-Ghazālī criticizes the fanatic disputation applied in the theologians' dialectical method, for it is so potentially misleading that it only rarely arrives at "true intellectual insight into essential realities" and "the real truths that are presented in the Muslim creed."⁴⁵ Even worse, it more often results in condemning other Muslims as unbeliev-

that of the theologians, his works *Mi'yār al-'ilm* and *Mihakk al-nazār* can be included as theological works. R. M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and Asharīte School* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 28-29. Although in the more common account, such as presented by Majid Fakhry, both *Tahāfut* and *Mi'yār* are fruits of al-Ghazālī's "philosophical initiation." Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 222.

⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴² Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and Asharīte*, 84. Moreover, Frank explains that the reasoning meant here is *rasmiyyah* and *wahmiyyah*, applying premises based on "commonly accepted opinions" which place their style parallel with that of the *Fuqaha'*, 133 note 20. Elsewhere al-Ghazālī allows the application of this method in legal discussion, for this field has a different aim.

⁴³ Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 220, as he translated from al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 16. See also Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and Asharīte*, 17.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

ers when the latter disagree with their approach.⁴⁶

Above all, al-Ghazālī's essential objections to the school of Kalām or Islamic theology is, aside from his personal dissatisfaction with its approach to true reality, is mainly the fatal effect of the method in confusing simple minded people. This concern seems to be a recurring theme in al-Ghazālī's life, for, in fact, during the last days of his life, he composed the *Iljām* specifically to warn common people of the dangers of getting involved in theological disputation, especially with regard to the subject of anthropomorphism.

b. Philosophers

After being convinced of the inadequacy of the method of theology in his personal inquiry, according to al-Ghazālī's own account, he devoted himself to studying philosophy in his spare time, while fulfilling his duty as a professor in Baghdad University (*al-Madrasah al-Nizāmīyah*). He thoroughly comprehended the subject in about two years and then continued reflecting on it critically for almost one year. This qualified him to refute some philosophical doctrines.⁴⁷ Using his exceptional talent so skillfully, as, with no intention of exaggeration, he is described as "one of the most powerful personalities and possessed one of the best organized minds that Islam has ever known,"⁴⁸ he had a great influence on the Islamic world with his refutation against particular philosophical doctrines.

During the period of his philosophical initiation, al-Ghazālī composed two important works. The first, entitled *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa* (*The Intentions of the Philosophers*), is aimed at describing the principles of the philosophers in order to attack them in the next work, as he states in the introduction and the conclusion of the book. Its translation into Latin by Dominicus Gundissalinus, however, did not include the introduction and the conclusion. Thus, the work appeared to present the author as an evidently authentic Neo-Platonist and,

⁴⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islām wa al-Zandaqa*, Sulayman Dunya ed., (Cairo: Dar Ihya' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 1961), 202-203. See also the French translation in Farid Jabre, *La Nation De Certitude Selon Ghazali* (Beirut: The Beirut University Publication, 1986), 488-489.

⁴⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 18. Watt, *The Faith and Practice*, 28-30; Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 221.

⁴⁸ Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 179-180.

therefore, a "philosophical colleague" of al-Farābī and Ibn Sīnā.⁴⁹

Al-Ghazālī's succeeded this work with his famous refutation against the philosophers, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), which aimed at demonstrating the inadequacy of philosophical demonstrations in revealing true reality. Twenty philosophical propositions are presented in the book, sixteen metaphysical and four physical, classified by al-Ghazālī into three irreligious (*kufr*) doctrines and seventeen heresies (*bid'ah*). The main target of his attack in the book is philosophers who inherit a residue of unbelief and heresy from their predecessors, starting indirectly with Aristotle and continuing to Muslim philosophers, particularly al-Farābī and Ibn Sīnā, whose achievements he admits are incomparable to any Muslim philosophers.⁵⁰ He condemns these leading figures as being unbelievers as well as those who follow their attitude in employing the three 'irreligious propositions' which he severely criticizes: the eternity of the world, God's knowledge of the universal only, and the denial of the resurrection of body.⁵¹

In the *Munqidh*, however, al-Ghazālī specifically classifies the philosophical doctrines into three categories: what must be counted as unbelief; what must be counted as heresy; and what is not to be denied at all. He elaborates this point along with his enumeration of the sciences of philosophy into six branches. Three of these branches which he considered irrelevant to the study of religion are mathematics, logic, and natural sciences or physics. One branch, theology or metaphysics, is precisely the problem for Islamic doctrine, especially concerning philosophy's three 'irreligious proportions' attacked in the *Tahāfut* as mentioned above. The last two branches, politics and ethics, he considered to be derived from religious teachings or the "Divine scriptures revealed through the prophets." Regarding the ethical teachings, al-Ghazālī specifically describes them as being borrowed from the mystics, the pious men "whose chief occupation is to meditate upon God, to oppose passions, and to walk in the way leading to God by withdrawing

⁴⁹ Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 221-222; And also Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 180. According to Hourani, this book must have been written during the two years of al-Ghazālī's study of philosophy as described in the *Munqidh*, 18. Hourani, "A Revised Chronology," 292.

⁵⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 20. See also Fakhry, *A History Of Islamic Philosophy*, 223.

⁵¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falasifah* (*Incoherence of the Philosophers*), trans. Sabih Ahmad Kamali (Lahore: The Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1958), 249. Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 223. Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 23-24.

from worldly pleasure."⁵²

Concerning what to accept and what to deny of the philosophical propositions, particularly the ethical teachings, al-Ghazālī goes even further in explaining what he calls "two evil tendencies." One is the tendency of the "slight intellect" to reject all philosophical teachings on the ground that they are mixed with unbelief and heresy, since they all come from the same sources. This, according to al-Ghazālī, is a serious mistake because it is undeniable that some parts of those teachings are true. Total rejection, therefore, means "to leave aside a great number of the verses of the Qur'ān and the traditions of the Messenger and the accounts of early Muslims, and all the sayings of the philosophers and mystics."⁵³ The other one is the tendency to accept the propositions in their entirety since parts of them can be proven correct and convincing. For this reason, al-Ghazālī warns people against reading books that containing these teachings, suggesting as a parable of "poor swimmer must be kept from the slippery banks," or "the boy must be kept from touching the snake." This point shows how al-Ghazālī actually does not refute philosophy or its propositions as a whole; rather, he implies its limited usefulness to a select, chosen people only.

Up to this point, al-Ghazālī gives the impression that he is willing to accept the system of philosophy under certain conditions. At the end of his elaboration, however, he clearly shows his judgment:

By the time I had done with the science of philosophy -acquiring an understanding of it and marking what was spurious in it- I had realized that this too did not satisfy my full aim in full and that the intellect neither comprehends all it attempts to know nor solves all its problems."⁵⁴

c. Ismā'īlīs

According to al-Ghazālī himself, he did not present an opposition to the school of the Ismā'īlīs until after he conducted a thorough research of its teachings through their reference books. He wrote the refutation against the sect by firstly restating their own doctrines in a better arrangement than they

⁵² Al-Ghazālī, *Faith and Practice*, 32-39.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 43-44.

themselves had done.⁵⁵ However, this was denied in a later Ismā'īlī response to al-Ghazālī, suggesting that what al-Ghazālī had done was "simply gathering together all the accusations in the different heresiographers, without ever referring to an authentic Ismā'īlī source."⁵⁶ Were this the case, it would be scandalous, considering al-Ghazālī's great reputation.

The fundamental teaching of the Ismā'īlīs, according to al-Ghazālī is "to acknowledge the need for an instructor and the necessity of his being infallible" in seeking knowledge of the truth. This instructor is called by the Ismā'īlī the Imām, and is said to be hidden. In response, al-Ghazālī pointed out that Muslims already have this sort of infallible Imam, that is, the Prophet himself. To the Ismā'īlīs point of view, however, although admitting the authority of the Prophet, they argued that he, in fact, is dead and consequently, inaccessible. In reply, al-Ghazālī argued that the concept of the infallible Imām does not offers a better solution to the problem of accessibility since the Imām, being secretly hidden, though is not dead, is equally unreachable especially in cases of emergencies far away.⁵⁷

Some scholars seem to believe that al-Ghazālī's attack on the Ismā'īlīs is more or less related to the question of power. According to Corbin, this attack is with regard to the anxiety of the 'Abbasid caliph al-Mustazhir concerning the latter's position against Fatimid Pretenders, that the book al-Ghazālī wrote for this refutation is entitled *Kitāb al-Mustazhiri*.⁵⁸ To some extent, this point seems to make sense since "the Ismā'īlī's hierarchical discipline was designed not only to guarantee the soundness of the secret lore; it was appropriate also to conspirational political purpose."⁵⁹ Related to this issue of al-Ghazālī's political involvement concerning his reaction to the Ismā'īlīs, Jabre even suggests that al-Ghazālī's departure from Baghdad in 1095 was not genuinely for a religious motive, as al-Ghazālī claimed. Rather, it is a "certain sense of political opportunism," or, in other words, he "ran

⁵⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 109-110.

⁵⁶ Henry Corbin, "The Ismā'īlī Response to the Polemic of Ghazālī," S. H. Nasr, ed., *Ismā'īlī Contributions to Islamic Culture* (Teheren: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977), 70.

⁵⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, p. 30. See also Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 220-221.

⁵⁸ Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 182.

⁵⁹ Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), 381.

away to avoid being assassinated."⁶⁰

Due to the lack of Ismā'īlī reference texts, Al-Ghazālī's *Mustazhirī*, which was partially edited and analyzed by I. Goldziher in 1916, easily found full agreement with the editor.⁶¹ Later on, after the emergence of a huge response to al-Ghazālī's refutation on the part of the Ismā'īlīs, the situation changed and more criticism was directed back to al-Ghazālī. Corbin, for example, mentions the striking nature of al-Ghazālī's "bitterly *dialectical* attack against a type of thinking which is essentially *hermeneutic*." In his view, al-Ghazālī failed to recognize the Ismā'īlīs' process of esoteric exegesis. As Corbin writes,

He insists on seeing only a 'religion of authority' in what is actually an *initiation* into a doctrine (*ta'līm*), into a hidden meaning which is neither constructed nor demonstrated by means of syllogisms, and which requires an inspired Guide, who is the Imām. He fails to grasp both the actual meaning of the Shi'ite Imāmate, and what it is that conditions 'spiritual birth' (*wilādah ruḥānīyah*), with its metaphysical basis. We referred above to the texts of the Shiite Imāms on the knowledge of the *heart*, which would have satisfied al-Ghazālī had he known them. His book simply illustrates the idea that an orthodox Sunnī theologian may possess of esotericism.⁶²

In a response to al-Ghazālī's criticism in the *mustazhirī*, Corbin claims that al-Ghazālī actually gives the impression that he takes the caliph al *mustazhirī* as the infallible imām.⁶³ In his own account in the *Munqidh*, however, al-Ghazālī admits not going in detail there for he deals with the matter in detail in such books as *Al-Mustazhirī*, *Ḥujjat al-Ḥaq* (the Demonstration of Truth), *Mufaṣṣal al-Khilāf* (The Fundamental Difference (between Islam and

⁶⁰ Watt, "The Study of al-Ghazālī," 129. According to Watt, however, Jabre's idea of the issue of al-Ghazālī versus the Bāṭinīs, to some extent, exaggerates unnecessarily. For instance, he thinks of the *Tahafut* as being "directed against a group of Bāṭinism," or that it was al-Ghazālī's "deep affection" in response to the assassination of Nizām al-Mulk's in 1094 that prompted his concept of prophethood. On this point, Watt asserts that it is inappropriate to pick up only one political aspect as a standard for the elaboration of al-Ghazālī's conversion.

⁶¹ Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 182. See also his "The Ismā'īlī response," 70.

⁶² Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 182-183.

⁶³ Corbin, "The Ismā'īlī response," 73.

Unbelief), *al-Durj, al-Qistās al-Mustaqīm* (The Just Balance).⁶⁴

d. Sufis

Considering the main theme of the book, it is not an overstatement to say that al-Ghazālī's *Munqidh*, although apparently presented as an autobiography, is actually aimed at persuading people to begin traveling down the mystic path. His description of how he investigated the paths of the theologians, philosophers, and the Ismā'īlīs, weighing the strengths and weaknesses of their teachings and how they suited certain people, is merely preliminary to his claim that the only approach leading to the sort of certitude he was searching for is through the Sufi path. In spite of this elaboration, as mentioned in chapter one, he also suggests possibility of various approaches to the truth.

Moreover, after judging that "the intellect neither comprehends all its attempts to know nor solves all its problems" in the case of the philosophical approach, he reasserts the notion of *dhawq*, claiming that this religious intuition or "actual experience of divine things" is the only undoubtedly true perception of the transcendent reality. At this point, he asserts that the only way to really witness mystical truth is not only by recognizing it in terms of theories, but by experiencing it through the path of the Sufis, since it is impossible to describe the taste to those who have never experienced it. In his own words:

It became clear to me, however, that what is most distinctive of mysticism is something which can not be apprehended by study, but only by immediate experience (*dhawq* - literally 'tasting'), by ecstasy and by a moral change. What a difference there is between *knowing* the definition of health and satiety, together with their causes and presuppositions, and *being*, healthy and satisfied.⁶⁵

The first condition for someone entering the Sufi path is complete "purification of the heart" from any influence other than God. In practice, the path demands poverty and withdrawal from worldly life, which means that a person has to give up most demands on his time. In his own case, this meant resigning from his post as professor and leaving behind his students,

⁶⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 33.

⁶⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 35; As translated in *Faith and Practice*, 54-55.

friends, the caliph, and even his family in order to perform a complete surrender to God.

It was at this stage, being confused whether to follow his inner desire to walk down the mystic path and abandon his present 'financially secure' life to seek the face of God, or continue living with financial security and a prestigious position but without inner assurance for his eternal salvation and without taking a chance for a journey to the Divine world, that al-Ghazālī experienced the aforementioned famous six month crisis in his life. The crisis was so severe, reducing him to a state where he could not eat or speak, so that even his doctors gave up on giving him physical treatment⁶⁶. This baffling condition finally led him to the decision to leave the city and live the life of a mystic. During this time, he made journeys to many countries and did not return to his home until after about eleven years.⁶⁷

Al-Ghazālī describes this path of the Sufi that he embarked on as having its beginning in "the sinking of the heart completely in the recollection of God; and the end of it is complete absorption (*fana*) in God," which he describes further:

With this first stage of the 'way' there begin the revelations and visions. The mystics in their waking state now behold angels and the spirits of the prophets; they hear these speaking to them and are instructed by them. Later, a higher state is reached; instead of beholding forms and figures, they come to stages in the 'way' which is hard to describe in language; if a man attempts to express this, his words inevitably contain what is clearly erroneous.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 37.

⁶⁷ It was narrated that al-Ghazālī was seen in the desert while he was on this journey, "clothed in robe of a dervish" holding a water skin, and he was asked "O imam, was not the teaching of learning in Baghdad better than this?" He replied:

... I'm seeking to find permanent dwelling,
I've said good bye to the friends yore,
And softly within my heart is telling,
Forget the place you sought before,
give up the struggle of worldly rebelling
The heavenly home is forevermore.

Dwight M. Donaldson, "Mohammed al-Ghazzālī" *The Moslem World* 11 (1921): 383.

⁶⁸ al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 39 as translated in *Faith and Practice*, 61.

Here, it seems that al-Ghazālī holds to a secret doctrine concerning the highest level of knowledge of God achieved by the mystics, or at least, that his concept of *dhawq* as the true perception in "tasting things divine" is actually not "directly statements about reality," as for instance, the scheme of emanation proposed in the intellection. Rather, it only functions as a "vehicle for self-becoming," which is presented by al-Ghazālī as a bridge to the world of *malakūt* as "the goal and native home of the searching heart." Al-Ghazālī's assertion of the concept of *dhawq* is, according to Burrel, more likely a suggestion, saying "take these steps and discover the outcome for yourself." In this sort of journey, it is up to wayfarers to discover its geography."⁶⁹

3. His final position in the *Iljām*

A colophon discovered by Bouyges⁷⁰ and affirmed by Hourani in 1984⁷¹ which shows how the *Iljām al-'Awām 'an 'Ilm al-Kalām* (The restraining of the Commonality from the Science of Theology) is undoubtedly the last work of al-Ghazālī, invalidates Watt's classification of the *Iljām* into the group of the earlier works of al-Ghazālī.⁷² The *Iljām* deals with the issue of anthropomorphism in relation to simple-minded people. It is presented as a response to a request for his supervision concerning "traditions that give the rabble and the ignorant amongst errant religious simpletons the impression that the pious ancestors understood descriptions of God which speak, for ex-

⁶⁹ See Burrel, "The Unknowability of God," 178

⁷⁰ M. Bouyges, *Essai de Chronologie des Oeuvres de al-Ghazālī* (Algazel), M Allard ed., (Beirut: n.p., 1959), 80-82.

⁷¹ Hourani, "A Revised Chronology," 302.

⁷² Watt's classification of al-Ghazālī's work is based upon the criterion of a perceived development in the latter's thought. These periods are (1) early dogmatic works, where there is no mention of the *Ilhīyā'*; (2) The *Ilhīyā'* and works with similar ideas; (3) later dogmatic works, which mention the *Ilhīyā'* but do not express the term *dhawq* which is a sphere above reason; (4) works presenting the conception of *dhawq*. Since the *Iljām* does not express the concept of *dhawq*, which is clearly stated in the *Munqidh*, Watt classified the *Iljām* as al-Ghazālī's later dogmatic work, earlier than the *Munqidh*. Watt, "The Authenticity," 30-31. Nevertheless, Watt admits the impossibility of rejecting Bouyges' discovery of the actual date which places the *Iljām* as al-Ghazālī's latest work and therefore admits "a change in the position" of his 1952 chronology. Watt, "The study of al-Ghazālī," 124. It is therefore acceptable, given this background explanation, to make a small correction to Abrahamov's account of pointing to Watt as an exception in admitting the *Iljām* as al-Ghazālī's latest work. See Abrahamov's "Supreme Way," 142.

ample, of His shape, His hand, His foot, His descending, moving, sitting on the throne, etc., literally."⁷³ For this reason, al-Ghazālī organizes the book in three main parts: (1) explaining the actual teaching of *salaf* (the pious ancestors), (2) demonstrating the validity of the teaching of the *salaf* and that those who disagree with them are heretics, and (3) illustrating some other beneficial matters appropriate to the issue. The emphasis that al-Ghazālī tends to assert, as elaborated in the first part of the book, is his defense of the correctness of the *salaf*'s perspective, the school of the Prophet's companions and their followers (*al-ṣahāba wa-l-tābi'īn*) which he himself follows. Together with this, the author also suggests that common people should be prevented from dealing deeply with the anthropomorphic references to God and leave the subject to those who are given the capability of comprehending such matters (*al-taslīm li-ahl al-ma'rifah*). These are, besides the apostle of God and the other Prophets, the truthful (*al-ṣiddīqīn*) and the saints.⁷⁴

However, it is important to add a note of explanation regarding what al-Ghazālī means by common, or simple minded, people (*'awām*). They are specifically identified by al-Ghazālī as those who do not experience in the *kashshaf*, including grammarians (*naḥwīyūn*), traditionalists (*muḥaddithūn*), interpreters (*mufasssīrūn*), jurists (*al-faqīh*) and theologians (*mutakallimūn*).⁷⁵ Based on his contention that everything is created for a purpose and that all creatures vary in form and rank, whether mineral, plants, animals, human beings or angels, al-Ghazālī describes the common man as those who lack "either the ability or the will-power necessary to raise himself to higher ranks."⁷⁶

⁷³ Al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*, 51-52, as translated by Frank in *Al-Ghazālī and Asharīte*, 80. See also W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazali* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1963), 148.

⁷⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*, 54.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 67. See also Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and Asharīte*, 83. The ignorant person is not that one who is lacking in formal instruction, rather, it includes the official '*ulama*', especially the '*Mutakallimūn*', whose conception of religion and doctrine al-Ghazālī considered to be only external, as belonging to this category. According to al-Ghazālī they are as good as ignorant in matters regarding the true meaning of faith, world and tradition, but are distinguishable from other ignorant people by their skills in debating and polemicizing. ... Nevertheless, these '*ulama*' do not really understand religion and their faith is only superficial. *Ibid.*, 355.

⁷⁶ See Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazālī*, 352-353; Moreover, al-Ghazālī describes such a man as being no better than an animal for his unwillingness to seek "the light of higher knowledge" and his unwillingness "to occupy himself with that knowledge for

We have already referred to the dilemma of man's intellectual limitation versus God's demand concerning the issue of knowledge of God which, in al-Ghazālī's concept, equals belief in God. Hence, al-Ghazālī was questioned: "if a common person is prevented from pursuing inquiry and reflection (*al-baḥṭh wa'l-nazar*), he will not know the proof (*dalīl*), and whoever does not know the proof will not know the thing proved (*madlūl* i.e. God), whereas God orders all human beings to know Him."⁷⁷ Al-Ghazālī answers by stating that "the belief in these elements of the knowledge of God is obligatory on all human beings. This belief means absolute acceptance of these elements as true."⁷⁸

Furthermore, al-Ghazālī proposes six ways accessing divinity, ranging from the highest to the lowest. The first, showing that it is the possible "to achieve a comprehensive and certain rational knowledge of God and of the truth contained in the revelation," is attained "through demonstration (*burhān*) that has been fully carried out, whose conditions (*shurut*) are completely fulfilled, and whose foundations (*uṣūl*) and premises (*muqaddimat*) have been reviewed step by step and term by term until there remain no room for ambiguity and no opening for confusion."⁷⁹ Although he does not mentioned it directly, it is obvious that what al-Ghazālī means by the procedure he describes above is actually philosophical reasoning. This fact may be a little bit puzzling, for previously in the *Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī clearly declares the inadequacy of the philosophical system in proposing a proper way to access Divinity. He proposes, rather, the concept of *dhawq* as a sphere higher than reason or intellect and as the only scheme that is suitable to his personal thirst of accessing the Divine. One possible answer to this problem, as proposed by Abrahamov, is that considering some of al-Ghazālī's writings in different periods of his life which suggest that "al-Ghazālī held the

which he was created." Even More strictly, al-Ghazālī suggest that "such a man should commit adultery or steal rather than study ideas which he neither understood nor deserved." Ibid., 354; The *ammī* also, according to al-Ghazālī is potentially "tempted by the devil to believe in his capacity and worthiness to deal with the hidden truths." Ibid., 355.

⁷⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*, 111, as translated by Abrahamov in "Al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way," 142.

⁷⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*, 111-12, as translated by Abrahamov in "Al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way," 143.

⁷⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*, 112, as translated by Frank in *Al-Ghazālī and Asharīte*, 8. See also Abrahamov's "al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way," 143.

idea that philosophical reasoning is the best way to attain knowledge of God," the term *dhawq*, together with terms like *al-ruḥ al-fikrī*, *al-ruḥ al-Qudsi al-Nabawī*, sometimes refer to the faculty of reasoning and sometimes to the action of this faculty.⁸⁰

Following the system of demonstrative truth, al-Ghazālī proposes the second level of approach which is "achieved through using Kalam presumptive proofs (*adilla wahmiyya kalāmiyya*) built on premises which people accept as true on account of their being widespread among great scholars."⁸¹ Next to this level, the third stage advocates that the "way to achieve absolute belief is through proofs which one usually applies in discussions and speeches (*al-muḥāwarat wa'l-mukhaṭabat*). Most of the proofs in the Qur'ān are of this sort. The fourth is "reached through accepting the views of one who is praised by people such as a man's father or teacher. This kind is known as *taqlīd*."⁸² The fifth concerns "quick acceptance of things as true because of a combination of circumstances and indications which seem to tell a true fact." The lowest level "is reached through man's hearing of something suitable to his character and qualities."⁸³

Accordingly, by the end of the book al-Ghazālī suggests three ways leading to the knowledge of God, derived from the Qur'ān *sūra* 16, verse 125, and interpreted by Abrahamov as the system of disputation, the system of admonition, and the system of philosophy.⁸⁴ The first way, the system of

⁸⁰ Ibid., 166.

⁸¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*, 112; Translated in "Al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way," 144.

⁸² See al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*, 113-114; Abrahamov's translation in "Al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way," 114.

⁸³ An example of the fifth level is illustrated by al-Ghazālī by the case of a person who hears from many sources about the leader of a city being ill, then later on hears crying and shouting from the leader's house and the latter's servant tells the person that his lord died, "the 'ammī (common people) tends to hold this story as true without taking into consideration that the crying and shouting may have another reason." As for the lowest level of belief in Divinity, which we mentioned equals knowledge of Divinity, he takes the example of the ordinary case, that is, "one quickly accepts a slight rumor about his enemy's death as true, but refuses to accept a rumor concerning his friend's death as true." Concerning the 'ammī, al-Ghazālī specifically limited the highest rank that can be attained on the third level, that is, the proofs of the Qur'ān. Al-Ghazālī, *Iljām*, 114-115, as translated by Abrahamov in "Al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way," 144.

⁸⁴ Abrahamov, "al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way," 145. The verse reads: "Call to the way of your lord through wisdom and Good admonition, and dispute with them through the better way..."

disputation, is what corresponds to the system of debate, that is, "what man learns from his parents, teachers and fellow citizens and adheres to and boasts of stubbornly." The second way, the system of admonition, is "what man says privately when he guides and instructs someone who seeks knowledge and direction" according to one's ability and understanding. As for the third way, it is what is translated by Abrahamov as "what man believe in his heart, that is, what is disclosed to him through reflection," (*mā ya'taqiduhu al-insān fī nafsīhi mimma' n'kashafa lahu min al-naẓariyyāt*) or, as translated a slightly differently by Watt, as "what in his heart he believes on speculative questions as a result of his personal experience."⁸⁵ More specifically, al-Ghazālī identifies this system as:

what man believes between himself and God. Only God knows it. He speaks of it only to his fellow who shares his knowledge or has reached the stage in which he can assent to and understand this knowledge. That will be the case when the inquirer is wise and an inherited creed, on which he grew up and to which he adheres obdurately, has not taken firm root in him.⁸⁶

In Watt's conclusion, what is presented by al-Ghazālī in the third way is mystical experience, while the second comprises what man knows intellectually. However, due to his different interpretation from that of Watt regarding the above phrase, Abrahamov arrives at the conclusion that what al-Ghazālī refers to as the third way, which is the highest way to attain the truth of divine reality, is the system of the sages or the philosophers, which is "pursued through reflection by a wise person who is not committed to any early dogma."⁸⁷

It is further suggested by Abrahamov that "an examination of the *Iljām* proves that al-Ghazālī believes in the superiority of philosophical reasoning as the best means to attain belief in God, which is equal to the knowledge of God, even if he admits that this way pertains only to the elect."⁸⁸ Referring

⁸⁵ The phrase is quoted from al-Ghazālī's *Mīzān* which according to Abrahamov suggests the three ways leading to the knowledge of God correspond to those presented in the *Iljām*.

⁸⁶ Abrahamov, "al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way," 146.

⁸⁷ Abrahamov, "al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way," 147.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

back to al-Ghazālī's position in the *Ihya'*, where he proposes the nobility of the intellect and refers to the knowledge of revelation as the one that is attained through intellect, Abrahamov's assertion seems to offer a sound argument. And considering the fact that this assertion is concluded from an elaboration of al-Ghazālī's various works which were written in different periods: *Mizān* (1091-1095), *Qisṭās* (1095-1106), and *Iljām* (completed in the author's last days), Abrahamov's assertion that "al-Ghazālī held the idea that philosophical reasoning is the best way to attain knowledge of God"⁸⁹ seems accurate. And if this point is acceptable, then it should follow that "al-Ghazālī's supreme way to know God is not Sufic, although he gives the impression that it is so. It is a philosophical system which sometimes appears in Sufic disguise."⁹⁰

For the present discussion, however, it seems more appropriate to refer back to Watt's position concerning the issue. That is, considering the fact that al-Ghazālī has clearly declared the sphere of *dhawq* as a higher sphere above the sphere of intellect, it seems unreasonable that al-Ghazālī would then refer the latter as the highest form of perception with regard to the knowledge of God in his latest and final position. The fact that the term *dhawq* is not mentioned at all in the *Iljām* does not mean that al-Ghazālī does not preserve his earlier doctrine concerning this matter.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 166

⁹⁰ Ibid., 167