



Integration of Kalam, Jurisprudence, and Sufism in Al-Ghazali's Thought: Building a Rational and Spiritual Islam

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Abstract

Al-Ghazali is a central figure in the history of Islamic thought who successfully integrated the three main branches of Islamic sciences—kalam (theology), fiqh (jurisprudence), and tasawwuf (mysticism)—into a unified and harmonious epistemological framework. He viewed kalam not merely as a tool to defend Islamic creed against external threats, but also as a rational foundation for spiritual purification and ethical development. For Al-Ghazali, true Sufism must be firmly rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, while avoiding metaphysical and speculative deviations such as hulul (indwelling), ittihad (union), and emanative cosmology influenced by Neoplatonism. Through his monumental works like Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din and Minhaj al-'Abidin, he demonstrated how the synthesis of disciplines could yield an understanding of Islam that is both rational and legalistic, yet deeply ethical and spiritual. Rejecting extreme forms of Sufism that neglect outward Sharia obligations, he emphasized a balanced path that unites knowledge and practice, aiming ultimately at ma'rifah (gnosis) and true happiness (sa'adah). His integrative vision not only provided a robust foundation for classical Islamic scholarship but also remains profoundly relevant to contemporary Islamic intellectual and spiritual discourse. This article systematically examines Al-Ghazali's integrative thought, while addressing both critiques and appreciations of his position within the broader spectrum of Islamic sciences.

Keywords: *Al-Ghazali, Integration of Knowledge, Kalam Science, Rational Islam, Tasawwuf.*

PRELIMINARY

Al-Ghazali is an important figure in Islamic intellectual history who played a major role in forming a complete, comprehensive and balanced understanding of Islam. He is known as a figure who succeeded in integrating the sciences of kalam, fiqh and Sufism into one harmonious scientific framework. In this context, the science of kalam is not only a tool for maintaining faith, but also a rational basis for purifying the soul and building morals. Al-Ghazali views that true Sufism must be based on the teachings of the Koran and Sunnah, and kept away from deviant philosophical understandings such as Hulul, Ittihad, and the Aristotelian concept of emanative divinity.

According to Al-Ghazali, Sufism is a spiritual path based on sincerity towards God and noble morals in social interactions. He strongly rejected extreme forms of Sufism that disregard external religious law, and rejected speculative and imaginative Gnosticism. For him, the path to knowledge must be taken by combining knowledge and practice, purifying the soul of despicable traits, and drawing closer to God without claiming essential union with Him. The fruit of this journey is true happiness (sa'adah).

Through works such as Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din and Minhaj al-'Abidin, Al-Ghazali demonstrated a model of integrated knowledge encompassing rational, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. He successfully reconciled the three main axes of Islamic scholarship that had previously often been in tension, thus providing a solid foundation for a comprehensive understanding of Islam. While critics have accused Al-Ghazali of leading to the decline of rational thought, figures like Nurcholish Madjid view him as a

reformer who successfully steered theology toward a more constructive and grounded approach. Thus, Al-Ghazali's intellectual legacy remains relevant in addressing the challenges of Islamic scholarship and humanity's quest for true happiness.

METHOD

Types of research

This research is a qualitative, descriptive-analytical library research (Assingkily, 2021). The approach used is historical-philosophical, exploring the background of Al-Ghazali's thought and analyzing the concept of integrating theology, jurisprudence, and Sufism in his works.

Time and place of research

This research was conducted for six months, starting from January to June 2025. The research location is not physically limited, because the data was obtained from various libraries and digital sources, including campus libraries, national libraries, and scientific online repositories.

Research targets and objectives

The primary focus of this research is Al-Ghazali's thought as expressed in his major works, particularly *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, and *al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal*. The research also examines the interpretations and analyses of contemporary thinkers such as Nurcholish Madjid to examine the relevance of Al-Ghazali's thought in the modern era.

Research subjects

The subject of this research is Al-Ghazali's thought, particularly regarding the integration of theology, jurisprudence, and Sufism, as well as the epistemological transformation within theology. This figure was chosen because of his significant contribution to systematically and spiritually unifying the three main Islamic scientific traditions.

Research procedures

The steps taken in this research include:

1. Inventory of Al-Ghazali's primary works.
2. Selection of secondary sources in the form of journals, books, and academic articles discussing Al-Ghazali's thought.
3. Classification of data based on central themes: integration of knowledge, philosophical criticism, and spirituality.
4. Critical analysis of the content and relevance of Al-Ghazali's thought in classical and contemporary contexts.
5. Conclusions and philosophical interpretation of these integrative ideas.

Research data and instruments

Primary data was obtained from authentic works by Al-Ghazali, translated and studied in both Arabic and Indonesian. Secondary data included relevant contemporary scholarly works. The primary instrument in this research was documentary analysis, with the researcher as the primary instrument in reading, interpreting, and constructing the meaning of the text.

Data collection technique

Data collection was conducted through literature searches, both print and digital. Techniques used included recording content, identifying key arguments, and documenting relevant quotations from Al-Ghazali's works and reviews by other thinkers.

Data analysis techniques

The data analysis technique was qualitative-descriptive, using content analysis and hermeneutics. This analysis aimed to uncover the philosophical meaning of the text and examine its logical consistency.

and practical relevance. Furthermore, a comparative analysis of the thoughts of other figures was conducted to test the resilience of Al-Ghazali's thought in facing the challenges of modernity.

Data validity

To ensure validity, source triangulation techniques were used, comparing information from primary texts with interpretations by modern researchers. Furthermore, critical studies were used to verify the authenticity of the manuscripts and the consistency of Al-Ghazali's arguments across his various works.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali (1058–1111 AD), known as Imam al-Ghazali, was one of the most influential figures in Islamic intellectual history. Born in Thus, Khurasan (now Iran), al-Ghazali was known as an encyclopedic thinker who mastered various scientific disciplines, including kalam, fiqh, philosophy and Sufism. He received his initial education in his hometown before continuing his studies in Naysabur under the guidance of Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni, a great scholar in Ash'ariyah theology and Shafi'i school of jurisprudence (Nasution, 2002).

Al-Ghazali is known as a figure who successfully integrated three main disciplines in Islam: kalam, fiqh, and Sufism (Hourani, 1984). According to him, these three sciences should not be separated because they complement each other. Kalam serves to strengthen faith, fiqh regulates human relationships in society, and Sufism perfects the inner aspects and relationship with God (Al-Ghazali, 1991). This integration is clearly illustrated in his work *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din*, where he combines rational argument and spiritual experience. With this approach, Al-Ghazali addressed the tension between overly rationalistic kalam scholars, legalistic jurists, and extreme anti-sharia Sufis (Al-Attas, 1970).

Al-Ghazali reoriented theology. Previously, it had been widely used as a polemical tool against groups such as the Mu'tazilah or Muslim philosophers. However, for Al-Ghazali, theology should not only defend creeds but also shape ethics and deepen faith. He stated that rational argumentation should lead one to *ma'rifatullah* (knowledge of God) and not merely to win debates (Al-Ghazali, 2000). Through this approach, he took theology in a more constructive and spiritual direction. Al-Ghazali even stated that knowledge without purification of the soul can be dangerous, as it can lead to scientific arrogance (Nasr, 1968). His high spirit earned Al-Ghazali the appreciation of his teacher, "Al-Juwayni," and the admiration of many contemporary scholars (Niamah, 2021).

One of Al-Ghazali's major contributions was his critique of philosophy that was considered contrary to Islamic teachings. In *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, he attacked 20 doctrines of Muslim philosophers, and declared them infidels on three points: (1) the belief that the universe was not created, (2) that God does not know particular things, and (3) that there is no physical resurrection in the afterlife (Al-Ghazali, 2000). With this critique, Al-Ghazali attempted to protect the faith of the people from thoughts that were considered destructive, while still taking the rational elements of philosophy that did not conflict with religion. He was not totally anti-philosophy, but rejected metaphysical philosophy that contradicted revelation (Fakhry, 2004).

A more in-depth discussion reveals that although Islamic Theology and Islamic Philosophy differ in their methodological approaches, both utilize reason as the primary means of acquiring knowledge. As a theological discipline, Islamic Theology seeks to uphold the truth of religious teachings through a rational approach. Islamic Philosophy, on the other hand, employs deductive and logical methods to explain the nature of nature and divinity. The thoughts of Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd demonstrate philosophy's efforts to integrate rationality to understand the existence of God and the reality of nature. However, philosophy does not fully emphasize the mystical experience, which is a crucial element of Sufism. Sufism emphasizes that higher knowledge is obtained through direct spiritual experience with God, as emphasized by al-Ghazali in several of his works (Maghriza & Nursikin, 2024).

Al-Ghazali views Sufism as the main path to *sa'adah* (true happiness) (Fitridah, 2023). According to him, true happiness can only be achieved by knowing God deeply and cleansing the heart of despicable qualities. In this process, a person must undergo *mujahadah* (spiritual struggle) and *riyadhah* (soul training) with the guidance of sharia knowledge (Siddiqi, 1965). According to Al-Ghazali, Sufism cannot be separated from the Koran and Sunnah. Therefore, he strongly rejects extreme forms of Sufism that ignore the Shari'a or emphasize unverifiable personal spiritual experiences. He also strongly rejected the teachings

of Hulul (God resides in humans) and ittihad (unification of the essence of God and creatures), which he considered deviating from the teachings of monotheism (Al-Ghazali, n.d.).

Al-Ghazali's thoughts remain relevant today, especially in the context of the search for integration between reason and faith. Thinkers such as Nurcholish Madjid believe that Al-Ghazali did not stifle philosophical reason, but rather saved Islam from the dangers of wild metaphysical speculation, while guiding reason along a spiritual and ethical path (Madjid, 2000). In the context of the modern world filled with materialism and a crisis of meaning, Al-Ghazali's ideas about the purification of the soul, morality, and inner happiness provide an important solution. He offers a foundation for Islamic thought that is not only logical and systematic, but also down-to-earth and touches the deepest side of humanity (Al-Ghazali, 2005; Zarkasyi, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Al-Ghazali is a central figure in the history of Islamic thought, successfully uniting three main disciplines—kalam, fiqh, and Sufism—into a harmonious and functional framework. He reformulated kalam so that it served not only as a tool for theological debate but also as a means of ethical development and strengthening faith. Through his critique of metaphysical philosophies that contradicted revelation, Al-Ghazali sought to maintain the purity of faith without completely rejecting rationality. His spiritual approach, emphasizing the importance of sharia-based Sufism, served as a bridge between reason and the heart in achieving true happiness. Thus, Al-Ghazali's thought not only saved Islam from intellectual and spiritual deviation but also offered a relevant Islamic scientific paradigm to address the challenges of the times, both classical and modern.

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