IMAM AL-GHAZALI'S POLITICAL AND SCIENTIFIC POSITIONS IN SUPPORT OF THE ABBASID CALIPHATE

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to understand Al-Ghazali's intellectual and scientific background, the approach he followed in his understanding of Islamic law, and his penetrating mind for memorization and understanding. He was aware of the situation in all its aspects during the Abbasid state, and despite his avoidance of direct relations with the men of authority, he confronted people with the obligation to obey the caliphs, considering them symbols of Islam and Muslims, and the importance of obeying the ruler. The research reached the following conclusions:

1. It can be said that Al-Ghazali succeeded in decisively and effectively confronting the beliefs of the philosophers, by relying on Islamic law as a strong basis for confronting these ideas and exposing their falsity.
2. Al-Ghazali's stances toward philosophers and their ilk were decisive and deterrent, clarifying the dubious ideas that offend Muslims' beliefs and the rulings of Islamic law.
3. Al-Ghazali's goal was to preserve the unity of the Islamic community from engaging in deviant ideas and sciences that cast doubt on Islamic law, and to preserve its cohesion alongside the Abbasid Caliphate.
4. Imam al-Ghazali turned to Sufism with the goal of attaining the pleasure of God Almighty and achieving success and salvation in the afterlife.
5. Imam al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) believed that true Sufism was almost nonexistent in his era due to the small number of people following the correct path of Sufism.
6. Imam al-Ghazali believed that corruption had crept into the ranks of Sufis in his time due to their deviation from the true path of Sufism.
7. Imam al-Ghazali believed that anyone seeking true Sufism needs a teacher and sheikh to guide and direct them, to free them from ignorance and prevent them from falling into error.

Keywords: Imam Al-Ghazali, Islamic law, Sufism, creation of the Qur'an, Abbasid state.

Introduction

Al-Ghazali's scientific and intellectual upbringing, the approach he followed in his understanding of Islamic law, and his penetrating mind for memorization and comprehension, combined with his awareness of the situation in all its aspects during the Abbasid state, were all testament to his ability to understand and memorize. He was also aware of the various aspects of the situation in the Abbasid state, and despite his avoidance of direct relations with men, he confronted people with the obligation to obey the caliphs, considering them symbols of Islam and Muslims. He emphasized the importance of obeying the ruler. He urged people to abstain from worldly pleasures, adhere to the principles of Islamic law, and work for the sake of God Almighty, in accordance with the rulings of Islamic law brought by our noble Messenger Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him.)

Imam al-Ghazali's Scientific Positions in Support of the Abbasid Caliphate
First: Imam al-Ghazali's Position on Kalam

Kalam emerged at the beginning of the Abbasid era and reached its peak in the third century AH, when it was adopted by some Abbasid caliphs, such as al-Ma'mun (198–218 AH), al-Mu'tasim (218–227 AH), and al-Wathiq (227–232 AH), who supported the Mu'tazila and paved the way for their rational debate, particularly regarding the question of the creation of the Qur'an. This trend provoked widespread reactions among scholars, particularly among the scholars of Hadith, who viewed

kalam as a deviation from the texts of revelation and adhered to mere submission and faith without delving into rational details. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal's (164–241 AH) position was similar[i]

The ordeal of the creation of the Qur'an is one of the most prominent positions of opposition to theology. It was later supported by Caliph al-Mutawakkil (232–247 AH), who abolished the theological inquisition and restored the prestige of monotheists. Thus, theology became a controversial topic between scholars and the authorities, with its acceptance varying from one era to another according to the caliphs' religious and scientific orientations, the public interest, and political and intellectual contexts[ii] ..

Imam al-Juwayni, al-Ghazali's teacher, is considered one of the greatest supporters of theology, and he was one of the imams of the Ash'ari school [iii] .

In his time, he adopted theology as a necessary methodological tool for establishing Islamic faith and responding to heretics. In his book, Al-Irshad, he highlights the role of reason in establishing the foundations of Islamic faith and demonstrates how the speaker must be armed with logic and evidence to dispel doubts. He is one of the scholars who established what can be called "defensive theology," which relies on both Islamic texts and reason.[iv] .

As for the scholar Abd al-Qadir al-Jurjani (d. 471 AH), he was not a theologian in the direct sense, but his influence by Ash'ari theology was evident in his rhetorical books, especially "Dala'il al-I'jaz." He employed theological concepts in his interpretation of the eloquence of the Qur'an, and for him, eloquence was linked to correct belief. He believed that a correct understanding of the Qur'an was inseparable from a correct understanding of the fundamentals of faith. This led him to accept theology as an intellectual pillar, even if it was not part of his direct work.[v] .

Likewise, Al-Mazari, one of the leading Malikis in Kairouan, did not oppose theology, but rather leaned toward Ash'arism and was a defender of its use against esoteric and anthropomorphic trends. In his commentaries on hadith books, he demonstrated that reason is not an enemy of transmission, but rather a servant to it if placed in its proper place. He was known for his criticism of the anthropomorphists . ‹[vi]He said that knowledge Speech is necessary in a time when innovations and sects are widespread.[vii] .

While Abu Ishaq al-Shirazi was not known as a theologian, he expressed his respect for theology in his fundamentalist writings, particularly in the context of defending the Shafi'i-Ash'ari creed. He did not delve into the intricacies of theology, but he did not oppose it, considering it a legitimate science when it is regulated by Islamic law.[viii] .

In the fifth century AH, Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (450-505 AH) lived in a period of intellectual and religious turmoil, amidst the rise of theological and philosophical movements, which initially prompted him to study and teach theology, especially after his appointment as a teacher at the Nizamiyya School in Baghdad in 484 AH. Al-Ghazali was distinguished by his sharp intelligence and ability to debate, but he soon realized the limitations of this science, especially in achieving certainty of the heart and spiritual tranquility, so he began to criticize it publicly[ix] ..

Historically, al-Ghazali's critical stance on theology coincided with major political upheavals in the Abbasid state, which was beginning to lose its central control. Several groups, including the Mu'tazila and the Ash'arites, were engaged in constant conflict over matters of faith, exploiting the weakness of the caliphs and the corruption of the administration. During this period, al-Ghazali faced significant challenges due

to the intellectual dominance of some of these groups, particularly the Mu'tazila, who relied excessively on rational logic at the expense of religious texts. This negatively impacted the unity of the Islamic community, incited sectarianism, sectarian strife, and division among its members, weakening the legitimate relationship between the individual members of society and the symbols of the state, represented by the Abbasid Caliphate. Al-Ghazali played a significant role in addressing these theological and intellectual trends, leading him to direct sharp criticism at these groups, highlighting their methodological errors and the danger they posed to Islamic doctrine.[x] .

Al-Ghazali's position on theology reached its peak in the year 499 AH, after his isolation that lasted for more than ten years, when he wrote his famous book "Al-Iljam Al-Awam 'an Ilm Al-Kalam" (The Restraint of the Common People from the Science of Theology), in which he attacked attempts to convey matters of faith to the general public through complex dialectical methods, which leads to harm to the unity, cohesion and behavior of society. He considered theology useful in dispelling doubts about faith when necessary, but it is not suitable as a means of education and consolidating faith. He called for strengthening faith through worship and spiritual behavior, especially among ordinary Muslims who do not possess the tools of precise rational analysis[xi] ..

Al-Ghazali's relationship with the Abbasid caliphs was marked by some caution and reserve. He believed that the caliphs of that period did not play an effective role in confronting doctrinal and intellectual divisions. On the contrary, he often found them preoccupied with internal and external political conflicts, which negatively impacted the religious and political stability of the state. Hence, al-Ghazali's criticism of the ruling authority was wrapped in a profound scholarly manner, calling for reform of internal affairs by adhering to the approach of the righteous predecessors and reducing excessive reliance on theological debate .[xii] .

This position was positively received by the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustadhir (487–512 AH), who sought to unify Islamic thought under the umbrella of Islam after the political disintegration of the Abbasid state and the rise of Seljuk influence. He saw in al-Ghazali's writings support for the Caliphate's position in resisting the sectarian fragmentation and philosophical and theological debates that were ravaging Abbasid society at that time[xiii] ..

In short, al-Ghazali's position on theology was not merely a purely scientific one. Rather, it was part of a comprehensive reform project aimed at exposing the falsity of deviant doctrinal trends and calling Muslims to return to the purity of the original faith, free from useless and unproductive debate. This position was directly linked to his critical view of the political situation during the reign of the Abbasid caliphs, who were unable to halt the intellectual and religious decline in Islamic society.[xiv] .

It seems to me that Al-Ghazali likened the Abbasid Caliphs to the necessity of standing up to the deviant religious trends that were trying to establish their words and actions in the Islamic society, and his criticism of the Abbasid Caliphate and his composition of books that favored the aims of the people of theology, the Caliph Al-Mustadhir Billah, to the necessity of unifying Islamic thought and unifying Islamic society in that important period in the history of the Abbasid state.

Second: Imam al-Ghazali's Position on Philosophers

Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali began his journey in the study of philosophy early in his life in the city of Nishapur, when he was a student of Imam al-Juwayni, known as "Imam al-Haramayn," who played a fundamental role in shaping al-Ghazali's early intellectual foundations. He delved deeply into the study of logic and philosophy under

the tutelage of the leading scholars there, absorbing and mastering them in a short period of time, demonstrating clear brilliance in them[xv] ..

After moving to Baghdad in the year 484 AH to teach at the Nizamiyya School, which was one of the most prestigious educational institutions at the time, Al-Ghazali returned to delve deeply into the study of philosophy ‹[xvi] .

This time through his own efforts and extensive reading of the books of great philosophers such as Aristotle‹ [xvii] .And Plato ‹[xviii] Ibn Sina ‹[xix] And Al-Farabi ‹[xx] This phase lasted for about two consecutive years, from 484 AH to 486 AH. His main motivation was to grasp the aspects of philosophical thought and to know the depth of the philosophers' sayings and proofs, until he was able to comprehend their ideas with great precision, sometimes exceeding their knowledge of themselves. This was clearly evident in the depth of his criticism of their ideas and his unique analytical approach .[xxi].

This phase was followed by another phase, lasting for approximately one full year (487 AH), during which al-Ghazali devoted himself to rereading philosophical texts, with the aim of uncovering the doubts and ambiguities within them. He attempted to distinguish truth from falsehood without relying on a teacher or guide, despite his many preoccupations with teaching and managing the affairs of the Nizamiyya School. His primary goal in this process was to find the correct evidence and the strongest methodology to confront the ideas of his philosophical opponents, who were threatening the foundations of Islamic doctrine‹[xxii] .This was confirmed by his saying: "Then, when I finished the science of theology, I began the science of philosophy, and I learned that one who does not understand the extent of that science will not understand the corruption of a type of science until he equals the most knowledgeable of them in the origin of that science, then he increases upon him and surpasses his level, and he learns of what the possessor of that science has not learned of its depths and its consequences[xxiii] ".

Imam Al-Ghazali fought his famous intellectual battle against divine philosophy ‹[xxiv] .

This stage culminated in the publication of his famous book "The Incoherence of the Philosophers" in 488 AH, in which he attacked the philosophy of Ibn Sina and Al-Farabi in particular, and responded to their ideas with three main issues that he considered to be clear blasphemy: the belief in the eternity of the world, the denial of God's knowledge of particulars, and the denial of bodily resurrection. Although he did not declare the philosophers to be infidels in all their issues, he highlighted the contradictions in their arguments and criticized the weakness of their proofs[xxv] ..

Many ancient and contemporary scholars and historians have praised Al-Ghazali's ability to confront philosophers, including Abu al-Hasan al-Nadwi, who described Al-Ghazali's role by saying: "The Islamic world in the fifth century AH was in dire need of a new, strong personality who would restore its belief in the faith, reliance on the original sources of religion, and uprightness in morals, and that personality was Al-Ghazali.""".[xxvi]

In this context, Al-Ghazali also had a primary goal, which was to protect Muslims from false ideas that threatened their faith. His goal was not to completely eliminate natural philosophy, which does not conflict with the principles of Islam. Rather, he focused his criticism on divine philosophy.And its negative impact on the beliefs of Muslims[xxvii] .

From here, Al-Ghazali was able to achieve a major intellectual victory by extracting philosophical thought from the hearts of the masses and redirecting Muslims' attention to the true foundations of religion. This made the accusation of atheism and

heresy that he leveled against the philosophers of his time effective in discrediting their arguments and ideas. Al-Ghazali summarized this vision by stating that the goal was to "treat the skeptics and reassure them‹(xxviii) "".

Al-Ghazali's main goal is to educate Muslims and guide them towards the legal principles and rulings and to follow the example of the Prophet's biography, peace and blessings be upon him, from the biography of the honorable companions (xxix) . Preserving the unity of the Islamic community and not being preoccupied with false and falsified ideas and beliefs that weaken religion and divide societies, and thus lead to a political and intellectual conflict between the public and the institution of the Caliphate, which leads to the collapse and weakness of the political system, especially since the Abbasid Caliphate was going through a difficult period due to the many forces that were trying to weaken it and end its role as a political and religious institution that represents the symbol and strength of Islam(xxx) .Despite the criticisms directed by some Orientalists at Al-Ghazali's failure to completely eliminate philosophy in the East, his influence remained significant in limiting its spread and limiting its power and impact, as his works remained among the main references in the critique of philosophical thought(xxxi) ..

The ultimate goal of Imam Al-Ghazali was to purify the religion and Islamic faith from false ideas. His interest was not directed towards natural philosophers and those like them who had no influence in shaking Muslims, which meant that philosophy was not uprooted. Philosophers appeared after Al-Ghazali's era and their writings spread, because the struggle was with the divine philosophers who changed and distorted religion. The victory he achieved was to extract philosophical thought from the hearts and minds of the public, before he struck it with his final blow, so that it would not leave any trace in the hearts and souls that were confused about their religion, because he saw that this was the correct way to purify hearts from it ‹(xxxii) Al-Ghazali says: "And there is a group who believed in the truth by imitation and hearing, but they were distinguished by their innate intelligence and cleverness, so they became aware of the problems within themselves that cast doubt on their beliefs and shook their peace of mind, or a doubt struck their ears and stirred in their hearts. So these people must be treated gently in their treatment by restoring their peace of mind and removing their doubts with whatever is possible through convincing speech that is acceptable to them, even if it is merely by rejecting and denigrating or reciting a verse(xxxiii) ".He had a good example in the Messenger of God (peace be upon him), who did not attack the gods of the polytheists in Mecca, and did not destroy them until, after eighteen years, he was able to destroy them from the hearts of the people, so that people entered the religion of God in droves without force or coercion. The survival of the philosophers and the continuation of their existence, from the Orientalists to the attack on that violent battle by which Al-Ghazali undermined the falsehoods of the philosophers, and they accused him of not being able to uproot the roots of philosophy, especially in the countries of the East (xxxiv) .

This is what De Boer, one of the Orientalists, said: "It is often said that Al-Ghazali eliminated philosophy in the East and that it never rose again after him. However, this is a false claim that does not indicate knowledge of history or an understanding of the facts of things. The number of philosophy professors and students after Al-Ghazali reached hundreds, even thousands… and there was a share of philosophy in general culture.(xxxv) ".

Al-Ghazali classified philosophers into three main categories, as he clearly indicated in his book "The Deliverance from Error," clarifying the limits of intellectual

engagement with each of them in a manner appropriate to their situation and ideas, out of his keenness to educate Muslims and warn them against intellectual and ideological deviation, as follows:

The Deists are known as one of the oldest intellectual groups that denied the existence of a Creator, Controller, and Omnipotent God. They claimed that the universe is eternal and self-sufficient, without the need for a Creator or Maker[xxxvi] ..

The naturalists were distinguished by their profound interest in the natural world and living organisms. They were deeply involved in the study of the wonders of animals and plants. At the same time, however, they completely denied the idea of resurrection and life after death, thereby denying the afterlife, heaven, and hell. They rejected the concepts of resurrection, resurrection, and judgment. Despite their belief in God and His attributes, Al-Ghazali classified them as heretics because the basic pillars of faith include belief in the Last Day, which they completely denied.[xxxvii] .

The term "theologians" refers to philosophers who focused on the study of theology and issues related to God and His attributes. The most prominent of these later philosophers are Socrates (470-399 BC), Plato (427-347 BC), and Aristotle (384-322 BC), who is considered the actual founder of logic and who organized and arranged the sciences and freed them from the ambiguity that had surrounded them. In the Islamic context, these philosophers emerged, including Al-Farabi (260-339 AH) and Ibn Sina (370-428 AH)[xxxviii] ..

Imam al-Ghazali took a sharp stance against them, clearly declaring the necessity of declaring them infidels and their Muslim philosophical followers who learned from them infidels. This stance is clearly highlighted in his book "Deliverance from Error.[xxxix] ".

 Al-Ghazali explained the fundamental differences between the philosophy of Aristotle on the one hand, and the philosophy of Socrates and Plato on the other, pointing out that Aristotle himself strongly criticized the ideas of the theologians who preceded him, but he retained remnants of their corrupt ideas, according to al-Ghazali's expression[xl] ..

Al-Ghazali's interest in philosophical criticism was clearly evident in his famous book, "The Incoherence of the Philosophers [xli] ".Which he wrote around the year (488 AH). In this book, Al-Ghazali limited the areas of his criticism of the philosophers to a specific scope, namely the field of theology specifically. Al-Ghazali believes that the corruption of the philosophers' doctrine appears clearly in this field, and not in other scientific fields[xlii] ..

Al-Ghazali focused his criticism of the philosophers on three main themes:
1. The philosophers' plagiarism of certain truths from the sayings of the people of truth and their own false ideas in order to promote them among the people.
2. How these mixed ideas alienate people from pure truth.
3. The necessity of extracting pure truth from their lies and false ideas.

Al-Ghazali also accused the philosophers of a lack of precision and proper scrutiny in the proofs they present, which has led to false conclusions and misleading beliefs, especially in the field of theology. He stated that they rely on conjecture and speculation in matters of faith, while they employ extreme precision in mathematical and logical sciences, which they exploit to attract the minds of the simple-minded. He asserted that if they applied the same precision to theology, they would not have disagreed among themselves on these issues[xliii] ..

At the end of this topic, it can be said that Al-Ghazali succeeded in confronting the beliefs of the philosophers in a decisive and influential manner, by relying on

Islamic law as a strong basis for confronting those ideas and exposing their falsehood. Al-Ghazali also used the sound philosophical method, employing methods of doubt to reach certainty, and also using dialectical evidence and logical proofs, which enabled him to strongly influence the intellectual arena during his era and the eras that followed . (xliv).

Al-Ghazali's stances towards philosophers and their ilk were decisive and deterrent, clarifying the suspicious ideas that harm the beliefs of Muslims and the rulings of Islamic law. He clearly detailed the evidence and proofs of the shortcomings of philosophical thought. With this stance, he provided a great service to Muslims, and gained the satisfaction and admiration of the Abbasid Caliphate, which supported what Al-Ghazali presented through his writings that he composed for the Abbasid Caliphs. The bottom line is to preserve the Islamic community and its unity and prevent it from merging with groups that have strayed from the path of faith and Islam. This is what the Abbasid Caliphate aspired to. It seems that Al-Ghazali's goal was to preserve the unity of the Islamic community from engaging in those deviations and sciences that raise doubts about the Sharia and to maintain its cohesion alongside the Abbasid Caliphate, which expressed its admiration for Al-Ghazali's proposals and writings, who provided great services to the Islamic political system and his resistance to heresies and evils with an Islamic scientific logic that won the admiration of contemporaries and later generations, and a strong relationship was achieved between the Abbasid Caliphs and the members of the Islamic community.

Third: Imam al-Ghazali's Position on Sufism

Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (450-505 AH) grew up in an environment saturated with Sufi thought ( ); his father was influenced by Sufi teachings and close to their sheikhs. After his father's death, a Sufi took care of him and his brother, making Sufism a dominant theme in his life from childhood until his death. The spread of Sufism was encouraged by political instability, the emergence of conflicts between different religious sects, and the support and encouragement of Sufism and its sheikhs by the sultans and ministers of the Seljuk state, especially since the Seljuk state was often described as a state inclined toward Sufism.(xlv) .

Imam al-Ghazali turned to Sufism with the goal of attaining God's pleasure and achieving success and salvation in the afterlife. He read Sufi books for a long time and was influenced by their ideas. He recognized that Sufis are the true followers of God's path, believing that their conduct and morals are derived directly from the light of prophecy. He believed that the minds of rational people and the wisdom of the wise could find no better path or higher morality than what Sufis followed in their practical and spiritual lives. One of the most important pillars of Sufism that influenced Al-Ghazali was the purification of the heart from everything except God Almighty, and the complete preoccupation with remembrance and the complete heart's orientation towards God, reaching the stage of complete annihilation in Him. The environment in which Al-Ghazali grew up was a religious upbringing and his first step towards Sufism. He was influenced by the Sufis and the goal of following this method, and the features of Sufism became clear in the course of his scientific life. Since the first and most important characteristics of the Sufis is asceticism in the world, its pleasures and its ambitions, historical sources did not mention that Al-Ghazali would enter upon the caliphs, princes, ministers and statesmen, but rather his approach made it a method for reaching discussion and preserving the pillars of Sharia and its rulings. This is clear

from his responses, writings and positions towards the people of speech, Sufis and philosophers[(xlvi)] ..

Through his studies, Imam al-Ghazali realized that there are aspects of Sufism that cannot be attained through theoretical study alone, but rather through taste, spiritual struggle, and the replacement of bad traits with good ones, through the direct application of Sufi actions and practices. He pointed out the necessity of direct discipleship under a guiding sheikh, as al-Ghazali considered the paths of religion to be extremely mysterious, while the paths of Satan are clear and obvious. This necessitates the presence of an experienced sheikh to guide the seeker to the correct path[(xlvii)] ..

Al-Ghazali studied directly with the great Sufi sheikhs and stayed with them for a long time, which led him to delve deeper into Sufism after completing his studies in rational, theological, and philosophical sciences. Al-Ghazali referred to this by saying: "When I finished these sciences, I embarked on my mission in the Sufi way."[(xlviii)]

On the other hand, Imam al-Ghazali strongly criticized some aspects of Sufism that he viewed as deviant and dangerous, such as the belief in incarnation, union, and attainment. He demonstrated, with rational evidence, that these ideas were false and stemmed from the loss of balance between reason and taste among some Sufis. He believed that true Sufism should be balanced and consistent with Islamic law and its principles[(xlix)] ..

Al-Ghazali succeeded in combining jurisprudence and Sufism, and this integration was clearly evident in his writings, distinguishing him from scholars of his time, for whom jurisprudence was separated from Sufism in methodology and purpose. Perhaps the most prominent example of this integration is his book "Ihya' Ulum al-Din," which combines religious sciences with Sufi spirituality[(l)] ..

Al-Ghazali's major turning point towards Sufism was the assassination of the vizier Nizam al-Mulk in 485 AH. Psychologically affected by this event, al-Ghazali decided to distance himself from public life and immerse himself in a life of asceticism and Sufism. He left Baghdad in 488 AH for the Levant, where he applied the Sufi method based on seclusion, isolation, and spiritual struggle. He spent about two years in Damascus, completely devoting himself to worship and contemplation. He referred to this stage by saying: "Then I entered the Levant, and I stayed there for nearly two years, with nothing to occupy me except seclusion, solitude, spiritual exercise, and struggle. I was occupied with purifying the soul, refining morals, and cleansing the heart for the remembrance of God Almighty. I used to seclude myself in the mosque of Damascus, climbing the minaret of the mosque all day long and closing the door on myself.""[(li)]

After a period of spiritual wandering that included the Levant, the Hejaz, and Jerusalem, Al-Ghazali found that Sufism was the path closest to his heart, and religious factors were the primary motivation for this approach. He became involved in Sufism out of a sincere desire to attain closeness to God Almighty[(lii)] ..

Ultimately, Imam al-Ghazali remained one of the most important figures in Islamic Sufism, and one of the most prominent figures who purified Sufi practices and returned them to the correct legal and spiritual framework. In this context, al-Ghazali, with his penetrating mind and abundant knowledge and logic, presented his views and ideas, critiquing the errors committed by Sufis. His goal was to protect Islamic society from involvement in these heretical paths and achieve a cohesive unity between society and the Abbasid Caliphate. Therefore, the status al-Ghazali enjoyed among the caliphs and ministers was characterized by a high level of acceptance, honor, and satisfaction. Imam al-Ghazali looked at the Sufis and saw that they were steeped in errors in many

different aspects. He therefore turned to criticizing them in various aspects, mentioning their mistakes and highlighting some of them.

Al-Ghazali's role in correcting the approach of Sufism and extremism

Imam Al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) believed that true Sufism was almost non-existent in his era due to the small number of people following the correct path of Sufism. Even if those who did follow this path were generally undisciplined and uncommitted to its rules and principles. Concerning this, Imam Al-Ghazali says: "All religious matters have become corrupt and weak, except for Sufism, which has been completely obliterated and rendered invalid because the sciences have not yet been studied. The scholar—if he is a bad scholar—is corrupt in his conduct, not in his actions. He remains a scholar who does not act upon his knowledge, and action is not knowledge. No matter how corrupt the action, the foundations are lost." In this statement, Al-Ghazali demonstrates the deteriorating reality of Sufism in his era, pointing to the necessity of combining knowledge and action to achieve true Sufism . [liii].

Imam Al-Ghazali believes that corruption had crept into the circles of the Sufis of his time due to their deviation from the true method of Sufism, especially in the period between (478-505 AH), a period that witnessed an increase in the number of those who affiliated with Sufism in form rather than substance. Al-Ghazali criticized them, saying: "Most of the Sufis of these eras, when their inner selves were devoid of subtle thoughts and subtle actions, and they did not attain intimacy with God Almighty and His remembrance in seclusion, and they were idle, unprofessional, and not busy. They had become accustomed to unemployment, found work burdensome, and found the path of earning difficult. They found begging and begging easy, and they enjoyed the ribat built for them in the country and employed servants assigned to serve the people… So they wore patched garments and took up residence in the khanqahs [liv] Parks and perhaps they have picked up ornate words from the people of calamities, so they see themselves and they have resembled the people in their rags and in their travel and in their speech and expression, and in the outward manners of their conduct, so they think well of themselves and think that they are doing well and believe that every black spot is a date, and they imagine that participation in appearance requires participation in the truths, and it is impossible, how abundant is the foolishness of those who do not distinguish between fat and tumor, these are the hatred of God. Here he highlights the phenomenon of deviation in Sufism and the absence of true piety[lv] .

Imam Al-Ghazali believes that anyone seeking true Sufism needs a teacher and a sheikh to guide and direct them, to free them from ignorance and prevent them from falling into errors. Al-Ghazali points out the reason for the spread of ignorance among Sufis, saying: "Based on the fallacies and whispers that Satan deceives them with, because they are busy with struggle before mastering knowledge and without following the example of a sheikh who is proficient in religion and knowledge and is worthy of emulation." He also warned of the danger of arrogance among Sufis, saying: "The fourth category of the arrogant: the Sufis… Among them are the Sufis of this time," referring to those who lived during the same period (478-505 AH) and did not grasp the essence of Sufism but only outwardly imitated it. Al-Ghazali warned Sufis who believe that performing acts of worship of all kinds is permissible to abandon and that they are exempt from obligation due to their concern for faith in the hearts and renunciation of the world, rather than concern for worship..

Imam Al-Ghazali strongly criticized a group of Sufis who said that religious obligations were waived, meaning that they believed they had reached a stage of knowledge at which they no longer needed to perform acts of worship. In this context, Imam Al-Ghazali says: "A group assumed that the purpose of acts of worship was to strive so that the servant could attain knowledge of God Almighty. Once knowledge was attained, he had arrived, and after arriving, he would no longer need means or tricks. So they abandoned striving and worship, claiming that their status in knowledge of God Almighty had risen above being subjected to obligations. Rather, obligations are imposed on the common people. Behind this lie false doctrines and tremendous misguidance, too numerous to list, amounting to more than seventy sects. Only one group is saved from this, and that is the one who follows what the Messenger of God (peace and blessings of God be upon him) followed, which is that he neither abandons this world completely nor suppresses his desires completely. As for this world, he takes from it as much as he can, but as for his desires, he suppresses those of them that go beyond obedience to the Sharia and reason." These ideas came during Al-Ghazali's stay in Baghdad and then his isolation in Damascus and Jerusalem between (488-499 AH / 1095-1106 AD)[lvi] ..

It can be said that Imam al-Ghazali considered Sufis to be the closest people to understanding divine truth, provided they fully adhere to Islamic law. He viewed Sufism as the highest path to knowing God through self-discipline and drawing closer to Him through asceticism and piety. Despite his criticism of some Sufi sects that deviated from the fundamentals of Islam, he supported moderate Sufism based on the Qur'an and Sunnah. In short, al-Ghazali was not merely a Sufi; he was a great reformer who sought to purify Sufism of its impurities and connect it to the true Islamic approach[lvii] ..

Al-Ghazali's upbringing in a family that followed the path of Sufism had a clear impact on his genius and his intellectual and scientific responses to the people of Sufism, and his clarification of the path of true Sufism and his attempts to purify Sufism from the obsession and deviant errors that harmed the image of true Sufism. He detailed in his writings and opinions the truth of Sufism and the importance of religion and considered it the best and closest sect to reach God Almighty. His criticism of Sufism and his extraordinary positions had an impact on those who followed the path of Sufism and attributed to the errors of the Sufis that the foundations of true Sufism contributed to the rejection of these errors from the Islamic society and the tolerant Sharia. Thus, Al-Ghazali added another mark to the unity of the Islamic society on the one hand, and on the other hand, the bond between society and the Abbasid Caliphate was strengthened. This indicates the status and presence of Al-Ghazali among the Abbasid Caliphs and the Seljuk Sultans due to his clear efforts in the field of Sufism and his rejection of the superstitions it brought.

Conclusion

After completing this research, the following conclusions were reached:

1. It can be said that Al-Ghazali succeeded in decisively and influentially confronting the beliefs of philosophers, relying on Islamic law as a strong foundation for confronting these ideas and exposing their falsity. Al-Ghazali also employed the sound philosophical approach, employing methods of doubt to achieve certainty, as well as dialectical evidence and logical proofs. This enabled him to strongly influence the intellectual arena during his own era and subsequent eras.

2. Al-Ghazali's stances towards philosophers and their ilk were decisive and deterrent, and they clarified the suspicious ideas that offend Muslims' beliefs and the rulings of Islamic law. He clearly detailed the evidence and proofs of the shortcomings of philosophical thought. With this stance, he provided a great service to Muslims, and gained the satisfaction and admiration of the Abbasid Caliphate, which supports what Al-Ghazali presented through his writings that he composed for the Abbasid Caliphs. The bottom line is to preserve the Islamic community and its unity and prevent it from merging with groups that have strayed from the path of faith and Islam. This is what the Abbasid Caliphate aspired to.

3. Al-Ghazali's goal was to preserve the unity of the Islamic community from involvement in the heresies and sciences that cast doubt on the Sharia. He also sought to preserve its cohesion alongside the Abbasid Caliphate, which expressed its admiration for al-Ghazali's theories and writings. Al-Ghazali provided significant services to the Islamic political system and his resistance to heresies and abominations with an Islamic scientific logic that won the admiration of contemporaries and modern scholars. A close relationship was established between the Abbasid Caliphs and members of the Islamic community.

4. Imam al-Ghazali turned to Sufism with the goal of attaining the pleasure of God Almighty and achieving success and salvation in the afterlife. He read Sufi books for a long time and was influenced by their ideas. He recognized that Sufis were the true followers of God Almighty.

5. Imam al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH) believed that true Sufism was almost nonexistent in his time due to the small number of people following the correct path in Sufism.

1. .6 .6Imam al-Ghazali believes that corruption had crept into the ranks of the Sufis of his time due to their deviation from the true path of Sufism.

2. Imam al-Ghazali believes that anyone seeking true Sufism needs a teacher and sheikh to guide and direct them, to free them from ignorance and prevent them from falling into error..

(i)Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal: He is Abu Abdullah Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Hanbal al-Shaybani, one of the most prominent imams of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah, and the founder of the Hanbali school of Islamic jurisprudence. He was born in Baghdad in 164 AH and died there in 241 AH. He was famous for his vast knowledge, asceticism, and steadfastness in the ordeal of the creation of the Quran, as he refused to say that the Quran was created despite being tortured, which made him a symbol of steadfastness in the faith. Among his most prominent works is the book "Al-Musnad", which is considered one of the most extensive books of Prophetic Hadith in terms of the number of narrations. He had a profound influence in the fields of Hadith, jurisprudence, and creed. See: Al-Dhahabi, Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', vol. 11, p. 177; Ibn Khallikan, Wafiyan al-A'yan wa Anba' Abna' al-Zaman, vol. 1, p. 40; Al-Suyuti, Tabaqat al-Hanabilah, 1st ed. Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah (Cairo, 1992), vol. 1, p. 20.

(ii)Ibn al-Athir, Al-Kamil fi al-Tarikh, vol. 5, p. 212; Hallaq, Wael, History of Jurisprudential Theories in Islam, 1st ed., Center for Arab Unity Studies, (Beirut, 2007), pp. 132–135.

(iii)The Ash'ari imams are scholars and thinkers who adopted the Ash'ari doctrine, a school of theology founded by Imam Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari in the fourth century AH as a response to the Mu'tazila, with the aim of defending the beliefs of Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jama'ah using rational and logical tools. This school was distinguished by its attempt to reconcile religious texts with reason, giving primacy to texts in the event of conflict. Among the most prominent Ash'ari imams are: Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari (d. 324 AH), Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni (d. 478 AH), Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 505 AH), Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 606 AH), and al-Baydawi (d. 685 AH). They had a widespread influence in the Islamic world in the fields of doctrine, jurisprudence, and interpretation. See Ibn Khallikan, Wafiyat al-A'yan wa-Anba' Abna' al-Zaman, vol. 2, p. 447; Al-Nashar, Ali Sami, The Emergence of Philosophical Thought in Islam, 3rd ed., Dar Al-Maaref, (Cairo, 1991), Vol. 2, p. 181.

(iv)Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din Muhammad ibn Umar al-Khatib, The Compendium on the Principles of Religion, ed. Taha Abd al-Ra'uf Sa'd, Al-Azhar Colleges Library (Cairo, 1980), p. 145; Al-Juwayni, Abu al-Ma'ali, Guidance to the Conclusive Evidence on the Principles of Belief, 1st ed., Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi (Beirut, 1995), pp. 7-10.

(v)Abdul Qahir Al-Jurjani, Abu Bakr Abdul Rahman bin Muhammad (d. 471 AH/1078 AD), Evidence of the Miracle, ed. Mahmoud Shaker, 4th ed., Al-Khanji Library (Cairo, 2004 AD), pp. 32-34. Al-Suyuti, Jalal Al-Din, Classes of the Hadith Masters, p. 389.

(vi)The Mujassima (anthropomorphists): They are a group of theologians or those affiliated with Islam who are accused of believing that God Almighty has an image or a body, or that He has attributes similar to the attributes of created beings, such as having a hand, a face, or spatial position, meaning occurrence or direction. Sunni scholars from the Ash'ari and Maturidi schools of thought rejected these statements, considering them anthropomorphism and likening God to His creation. A number of scholars confronted them in their books of creed, emphasizing that God Almighty "is not like anything" and that His attributes are to be understood in a manner befitting His Majesty,

without likening or denying Him. Among the most prominent of those who responded to them was Imam Al-Mazari, who considered the science of theology a necessary means to refute the innovations of the Mujassima (anthropomorphists) and the Batiniyya. See: Iyad, Judge Iyad bin Musa Al-Sabti (d. 544 AH), Tarteeb Al-Madarik wa Taqreeb Al-Masalik li Ma'rifat A'lam Madhhab Malik, ed. Abd Al-Qadir Al-Sahrawi, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah (Beirut, 1970), vol. 4, p. 112. Al-Mazari, Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Ali ibn Umar al-Tamimi (d. 536 AH/1141 AD), The Teacher of the Benefits of the Muslim, ed. Muhammad al-Shadili, 2nd ed., Dar Sahnun, (Tunis, 1992 AD), vol. 1, pp. 77-79; Ibn Fawrak, Muhammad ibn al-Hasan (d. 406 AH/1015 AD), The Problematics of Hadith and Its Explanation, ed. Musa Muhammad Ali, 1st ed., Alam al-Kutub, (Beirut, 1985), p. 112.

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(viii) Al-Baghdadi, Al-Khatib, History of Baghdad, Vol. 8, p. 276. Abu Ishaq Al-Shirazi, Al-Lama'a fi Usul Al-Fiqh, 2nd ed., Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiyyah (Cairo, 1994), pp. 12-14.

(ix) Badawi, Abdul Rahman, Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 2nd ed., Arab Foundation for Studies and Publishing, (Beirut, 1984), Vol. 2, p. 372.

(x) Al-Shahrastani, Al-Milal wa al-Nihal, Vol. 1, p. 62; Musa, Muhammad Yusuf, Between Religion and Philosophy in the Views of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd, 1st ed., Dar Al-Kitab Al-Arabi, (Cairo, 1998), pp. 142-143.

(xi) Al-Ghazali, The Restraint of the Common People from the Science of Theology, edited by Sulayman Dunya, 3rd ed., Dar al-Ma'arif, (Cairo, 1986), pp. 14–35.

(xii) Al-Ghazali, The Scandals of the Batiniyya, p. 54; Badawi, Al-Ghazali's Works, p. 45.

(xiii)Al-Zarqani, Muhammad Abd al-Azim. History of Islamic Schools of Thought. 2nd ed., Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi (Cairo, 2003), vol. 1, p. 255.

(xiv)Al-Masoudi, Ali bin Al-Hussein (346 AH/958 AD), Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems, trans. Qasim Wahb, Ministry of Culture Publications (Syria, 1989 AD), Vol. 3, p. 112. Al-Nashar, The Emergence of Philosophical Thought in Islam, Vol. 2, pp. 234-235.

(xv)Badawi, Al-Ghazali's Works, pp. 35–38.

(xvi)Al-Ghazali, The Incoherence of the Philosophers, trans. Sulayman Dunya, 6th ed., Dar Al-Maaref, (Cairo, 1997), p. 42.

(xvii)Plato (427–347 BC) is a Greek philosopher, a student of Socrates and a teacher of Aristotle. He is considered one of the greatest thinkers in Western philosophical history. He founded the Academy of Athens. See: Al-Shahrastani, Al-Milal wa al-Nihal, Vol. 2, p. 146; Karam, Youssef. History of Greek Philosophy, 5th ed. Dar Al-Qalam, (Beirut, 1991), p. 119.

(xviii)Aristotle (384–322 BC) was a Greek philosopher, a student of Plato, and the teacher of Alexander the Great. He is known as the founder of formal logic and made influential contributions to natural philosophy, ethics, politics, psychology, and rhetoric. Karam, A History of Greek Philosophy, p. 186.

(xix)Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi (d. 339 AH/950 CE) was a Muslim philosopher born in Farab (present-day Kazakhstan). He is considered a prominent figure in Islamic philosophy. He sought to reconcile religion and philosophy, particularly in his book, Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City. See: al-Dhahabi, Siyar A'lam al-Nubala', vol. 15, p. 416; Madkur, Ibrahim. al-Farabi: His Philosophy and Its Influence. 1st ed. Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi (Beirut, 1944), p. 73.

(xx)Ibn Sina: Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn Abdullah ibn Ali ibn Sina, known as Sheikh al-Ra'is, died in 428 AH / 1036 AD. Ibn Sina was born in Aqshnah, a village in Bukhara. He then worked with his father in Bukhara during the Samanid rule. In Bukhara, Ibn Sina received his education, learning the Qur'an, literature, jurisprudence, the principles of religion, and logic. Later, Ibn Sina studied the natural and divine sciences and medicine, excelling in all of them. See: Ibn Abi Usaibia, Uyun al-Anbaa fi Tabaqat al-Atibbaa, p. 437; al-Qifti, Ikhbar al-Ulama bi-Akhbar al-Hukamaa, p. 303; Fakhri, Majid. History of Islamic Philosophy, 3rd ed. Dar al-Mashreq, (Beirut, 2000), p. 227.

(xxi)Hussein, Taha, The Great Fitna and Al-Ghazali, 1st ed., Dar Al-Maaref, (Cairo, 1962), pp. 92-96.

(xxii)Al-Subki, The Great Classes of Shafi'is, Vol. 6, p. 196.

(xxiii)Al-Ghazali, The Deliverer from Error, p. 16.

(xxiv)Divine philosophy: A branch of philosophy concerned with the study of issues related to God, His existence, attributes, actions, and relationship to the world. It is also known as "higher metaphysics" or "rational theology." This philosophy aims to use reason and speculative thought to understand issues related to God, such as monotheism, creation, divine providence, prophecy, and the afterlife. It was a fundamental focus of Greek philosophical thought, especially with Plato and Aristotle, and then developed in Islamic philosophy with al-Kindi, al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina, who sought to reconcile philosophy and religion, based on the concept of the Necessary Being, the intellects of the heavens, and others. See: Fakhri, Majid, History of Islamic Philosophy, 3rd ed., Dar al-Mashreq (Beirut, 2000), p. 191.

(xxv)Al-Subki, The Great Classes of Shafi'is, Vol. 6, p. 193; Al-Ghazali, The Deliverer from Error, pp. 135-138; Ibn Khaldun, Introduction, p. 412.

(xxvi)Al-Nadwi, Abu al-Hasan Ali bin Abdul-Hay bin Fahr al-Din, Men of the Call and Thought in Islam, Dar al-Qalam, (Kuwait, (n.d.)), pp. 179-180.

(xxvii)Al-Asqalani, Lisan al-Mizan, Vol. 5, p. 22; Al-Ghazali, The Incoherence of the Philosophers, p. 309.

(xxviii) ذكري، مواقف مع الغزالي، ص7.

(xxix)Al-Ghazali, Ihya' Ulum al-Din, Vol. 1, p. 31.

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(xxxi)Marwa, Hussein, Materialist Tendencies in Islamic Philosophy, 3rd ed., Dar Al-Farabi, (Beirut, 1981), Vol. 1, pp. 312–316.

(xxxii)Al-Ghazali, Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din, vol. 1, p. 50; Al-Ghazali, The Incoherence of the Philosophers, p. 20.

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(xxxiv)Al-Ghazali, The Incoherence of the Philosophers, pp. 45-50; Al-Ghazali, The Revival of the Religious Sciences, Vol. 1, pp. 35-40.

(xxxv)History of Philosophy in Islam, trans. Muhammad Abd al-Hadi Abu Rabdah, Dar al-Ma'arif, (Cairo, 1938), p. 231.

(xxxvi)Al-Ghazali, The Rescuer from Error, p. 31; Al-Subki, The Restorer of Blessings and the Destroyer of Misfortunes, 1st ed.,

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(xxxvii)Al-Ghazali, The Deliverance from Error, p. 88. Ibn al-Jawzi, The Prey of the Mind, Ibn Taymiyyah Library (Cairo, 2002), p. 214.

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(xli)Ibn Khallikan, Deaths of Notable People and News of the Sons of the Time, Vol. 3, p. 354; Al-Zubaidi, Ithaaf al-Sadat al-Muttaqin, Vol. 1, p. 56.

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(liv)Khanqahs, also known as khanqahs, are Sufi religious institutions founded in the 4th century AH/10th century CE as centers for Sufi worship, remembrance, and spiritual education. They included residential quarters, remembrance halls, and often libraries for teaching Islamic sciences. They played a social role by receiving the poor and providing shelter and food, in addition to their educational and cultural role. They flourished in the late Abbasid era. See: Al-Khatib Al-Baghdadi, Tarikh Baghdad wa Dhayuluh, vol. 5, p. 411; Al-Sam'ani, Al-Ansab, vol. 5, p. 234; Ibn Kathir, Al-Bidayah wa al-Nihayah, vol. 12, p. 174.

(lv)Al-Ghazali, Ihya' Ulum al-Din, p. 250.

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