

CIVILIZATION SEQUENCE 205

Introduction/Al-Ghazālī (d. 1111)

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1. Monotheism

- Reality's ultimate principle is One God who is Goodness
- This God created the word out of nothing (= *ex nihilo*)
He is:
 - Omnipotent (= All-powerful)
 - Omniscient (= All-knowledgeable)
 - Omnipresent (= present everywhere)
- He is the creative ground of everything other than Himself.
- Monotheism is the view that there is only one such God.

1.1. The Monotheist, Abrahamic Paradigm

- Divinity: A believe in a transcendental divinity - in principle separate from the world, controlling it from above
- Sin: Is the fallen state of humanity. The whole universe is perceived as a theatrical stage of a confrontation between God and his antagonist Satan.
- Covenant: a pact between God and his worshipers; they are to enjoy the blessing and protection of God in return for remaining obedient and faithful.
- Scripture: God addressing human beings and sending down a revelation. The Divinity communicates with us through human language.
- Salvation History: Is a history of redemption of the humankind: It has its beginning in God's creation, is confirmed by God's action and saving signs in time, and is directed towards an ultimate goal (teleological).

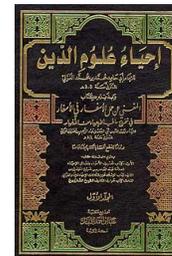
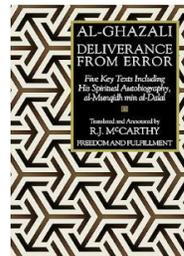
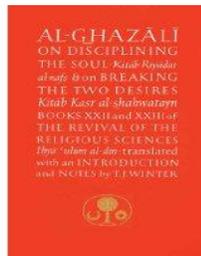
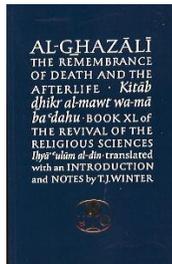
2. ISLAM as an Abrahamic Paradigm

- 2.1. *Qur'ān* (القرآن كلمة الله): the Word of God and *Hadith* (الحديث النبوي), the Prophetic tradition.
- 2.2. *Tawhīd* (التوحيد والشهادتان): the testimony of the Oneness of God, pure monotheism.
- 2.3. *Taklīf* (تكليف/الميثاق): covenant between God and the human being.
- 2.4. Islam is a religion of **ethics and law**. The Qur'ān is concerned with ethical imperatives for human society based on *al-birr* (righteousness), *al-'adl* (justice), and *al-khair* (goodness).
- 2.5. Continuous **striving towards righteousness**, justice, and goodness build the central structural elements of Islam, which is meant to embrace the totality of human life.
- 2.6. Works (العمل) are of great importance.

2.7. Intention (النِّيَّة) focused only on God needs to be rightly directed and firmly maintained by continual, inward striving, and self-examination.

2.8. *The Imām*: Political and spiritual leader. In Shī'ī Islam, the charismatic line of the infallible Imāms (figures of Guidance par excellence, primordial Light, knowledge of sacred science) as the source of salvation.

3. *Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111)*



- A great Islamic Jurist (فقيه), theologian (مُتَكَلِّم), and mystic (متصوّف).
- Born in Tūs (Northern Iran).
- Studies in Tūs, Jurjān, and Nīshapūr.
- 1091, appointed for the Chair of Law at the Nizāmiyya *madrasa* of Baghdād.
- 1095-1100, somber spiritual crisis upon which he left Baghdad, giving up his position and renouncing the world.
- Stayed in Syria and Palestine, wandering and meditating for about two years which he closed by performing the pilgrimage to Mecca.
- 1100 he went back to Tūs where he lived in seclusion dedicated his time to sūfī practices and writing. He also founded a sūfī *khāngāh* (retreat centre and *madrasa*) and a mosque and taught a number of select novices.
- 1105 he resumed his position at the Nizāmiyyah College at Nishapur.
- 1111 he dies in Tūs. Al-Ghazālī is the author of some 84 books.

→ Questions

What is a spiritual crisis?

Why does such a prominent scholar go through a spiritual crisis?

Think of St Augustine!

4. *The Deliverance from Error* (المنقذ من الضلال), an intellectual autobiography (written after 1105)

➤ al-Ghazālī starts off from skepticism questioning whether any knowledge or justification is possible at all.

It is concerned with the question of the reliability of the senses.

➤ al-Ghazālī believes that perception through the senses and through rational data are insufficient to grasp the truth.

➤ Things are not always what they seem to be. Illusions and hallucinations occur in our perception.

➤ Is there any reason at all to trust the senses?

➤ al-Ghazālī denies any necessary connection between cause and effect; as a consequence of his conception of divine omnipotence he believes that, “God is able to produce any effect without any intermediate cause at all.”

➤ There is a state beyond reason which can only be directly and existentially experienced (ذوق); it is the effect of a light which God cast into the breast, and that light is the key to most knowledge.

➤ “Beyond the stage of intellect there is another stage, where in an eye is opened, by which man sees the hidden.”

➤ “Perhaps, this life is only a state of dream; for the Prophet said, ‘men are asleep: then after they die they awake!’ So perhaps this present life is a sleep compared to the afterlife.”

➤ Continuous training, scrupulous observance of one’s undertakings and doings, with obedience and abstinence (ورع), piety and humility (تقوى). A process of self-examination, of training the self should; it is based on **fear** (خوف) and **hope** (رجاء).

→ **Let us think together!**

Are there limits for scientific knowledge?

Are the material and dimensional features of the bodies separable from the bodies?

What is skeptic epistemology? Can we gain data beyond the world of experience? Can we discover the causes of phenomena? Compare with Descartes in CVSP 203.

How can we define faith? And reason? Compare with St. Augustine's ideas on the subject.

5. *Al-Ghazālī's Attack against the philosophers (pagans & Muslims)*

Most of their errors are found in the metaphysical sciences (الالهيات) where they were opposed to the belief of all Muslims in three specific points in which they should be taxed with unbelief (يجب تكفيرهم).

These are those who argue that:

- That human’s bodies will not be assembled on the Day of Judgment, but only disembodied spirits will be rewarded and punished (إن الأجساد لا تُحشر وإنما الأرواح المجردة).
- That God, Most High, knows only the universals and not the particulars.

- Their maintaining the eternity of the world, past and future (قَوْلُهُمْ يَقْدَمُ الْعَالَمُ وَأَزَلِيَّتُهُ), where as Muslims believe in the creation of the world *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) and that it will cease to be on the Day of Judgment.

What the philosophers are arguing is the fact that God's knowledge is universal, i.e. contrary to our human knowledge is not subject to the limitations of time and place. The particulars and accidental qualities which set the individual apart from other individuals are only objects of sense experience.

→ Do you think that theological language is adequate for use in other fields of inquiry, such as sciences and philosophy for example?

6. The Heart

Al-Ghazālī was influenced, among others, by Hārith b. Asad al-Muhāsibī (d. 875). His name is derived from his practice of frequent self-examination—حاسب نفسك قبل أن تُحاسب

THE HEART: al-Muhāsibī regards the heart as the essence of the self, an immaterial principle which has the predominant control of the conscious life of the human being.

The heart is the abode of the hidden, inmost self, the *sirr* or secret, which being itself of Divine origin, can become conscious of the Divine.

Both al-Muhāsibī and al-Ghazālī in their auto-biographical communications, compare the heart to a mirror which should be polished and freed from defacement; for the hearts of men are veiled from God by hardness and rust.

7. Zuhd or Asceticism

The Carnal Soul

النفس

- Or the *carnal soul* is considered as the seat of the vital drives and is therefore the real enemy, the constant irritation and hindrance to becoming detached from the earthly world. It is the very place where egotistical impulses and vital drives find their satisfaction.
- This lustful and insatiable dog needs to be locked up, otherwise it causes damage.
- *zuhhād* as an attempt to train it systematically by means of control and self-examination.
- Zuhd is an act of renunciation (rejection; abandonment) of the world and its goods.
- It entails a gradual and at the same time severe training of the body and the *carnal soul* in order to rein over desires. Through mortification (إِمَاتَة); the soul is punished and chastised for its desires and its excesses in an endeavor to raise oneself above the animal drives.

Zuhd aims at

- The suppression of the vital instincts.
- The struggle against the animal soul and its lust and all the egoistic impulses.
- And generally against all things which one suspects will give any kind of pleasure to the soul.

This is achieved through

- Detachment from earthly things.
- Continuous fasting and praying.
- *Dhikr* (ذِكْر): reading and reciting the Qur'ān and meditating its meanings.
- In face of the ephemeral and deceptive external world, a higher inner world is constructed which is oriented toward piety and righteousness.
- This plan cannot be achieved without a deep trust in God's providence, i.e., *tawakkul* (التَوَكُّل).

Mystical taste (الذوق): An experience of *ecstasy* and immediate tasting of the indescribable joy of the presence of God.

8. Prophecy

“Beyond intellect there is yet another stage. In this another eye is opened, by which he beholds the unseen, what is to be in the future, and other things which are beyond the ken of intellect in the same way as the objects of intellect are beyond the ken of the faculty of discernment and the objects of discernment are beyond the ken of sense.”