Intellectual Discourse

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Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	'
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	'
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
◌َ	a		◌َا، ◌َى	an
◌ُ	u		◌ُّو	un
◌ِ	i		◌ِّي	in
◌َا، ◌َ، ◌َى،	ā		◌َوْ	aw
◌ُّو	ū		◌َيْ	ay
◌ِّي	ī		◌ُّوّ	uww, ū (in final position)
			◌ِّيّ	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: http://rotas.iium.edu.my

Metaphysical and Phenomenological Doubt in the Search for Truth: A Comparative Study of al-Ghazālī and Edmund Husserl

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Abstract: This study examines al-Ghazālī's method of metaphysical doubt in light of phenomenological approaches, particularly that of Edmund Husserl. It argues that al-Ghazālī's intellectual crisis and subsequent journey toward certain knowledge reveal a proto-phenomenological attitude, wherein doubt is not an end in itself but a methodological suspension aimed at uncovering indubitable truths. Through comparative analysis, this paper explores their shared commitment to epistemic certainty, the role of intuition, and the transformation of the self in the search for truth. Furthermore, it highlights the interplay between mystical experience and rational method, proposing a novel framework for rethinking religious epistemology in light of phenomenological reflection. The study uses both primary sources and recent scholarship, situating al-Ghazālī within a broader philosophical context that underscores his relevance to contemporary debates in epistemology, phenomenology, and the philosophy of religion.

Keywords: al-Ghazālī, Husserl, doubt, phenomenology, intuition

Abstrak: Kajian ini meneliti kaedah keraguan metafizik al-Ghazālī bersandarkan kepada pendekatan fenomenologi, khususnya yang dikembangkan oleh Edmund Husserl. Ia berhujah bahawa krisis intelektual al-Ghazālī dan perjalanan beliau menuju pengetahuan tertentu memperlihatkan satu sikap proto-fenomenologi, di mana keraguan bukanlah tujuan akhir, tetapi suatu penangguhan metodologi yang bertujuan untuk mendedahkan kebenaran yang tidak dapat disangkal. Melalui analisis perbandingan, makalah ini meneliti

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komitmen bersama mereka terhadap kepastian epistemik, peranan intuisi, dan transformasi diri dalam pencarian kebenaran. Selain itu, ia menyoroti interaksi antara pengalaman mistik dan kaedah rasional, serta mengemukakan satu kerangka baharu untuk menilai semula epistemologi agama dalam cahaya refleksi fenomenologi. Kajian ini menggunakan kedua-dua sumber primer dan kajian terkini, meletakkan al-Ghazālī dalam konteks falsafah yang lebih luas yang menegaskan relevansinya terhadap perdebatan kontemporari dalam epistemologi, fenomenologi, dan falsafah agama.

Kata kunci: al-Ghazālī, Husserl, keraguan, fenomenologi, intuisi.

Introduction

The search for truth has historically been marked by episodes of radical doubt. From the Pyrrhonists and Academic Skeptics in antiquity to Descartes, Kierkegaard, and the existentialists, doubt has often served as the necessary precondition for the clarification of belief and the eventual acquisition of certainty (Moran, 2000; Zahavi, 2005). In the Greek tradition, Pyrrho of Elis and his followers practiced *epoché*—the suspension of judgment—in order to attain tranquility (*ataraxia*). The Academic Skeptics, such as Arcesilaus and Carneades, refined this by arguing that certainty is impossible, but probable judgments can still guide life. These approaches framed doubt as both a therapeutic and epistemic strategy, a conceptual background that would re-emerge in modern and postmodern contexts (Popkin, 2003).

Philosophical skepticism, especially in its Pyrrhonian form, involved suspending judgment (*epoché*) to attain tranquility (*ataraxia*), a move that shaped both ancient and later philosophical traditions. This tradition deeply influenced not only Western epistemology but also Islamic intellectual discourse, particularly through figures such as al-Ghazālī, who inherited the Hellenistic legacy through the Arabic philosophical tradition (*falsafa*) (Griffel, 2009).

In the history of philosophical inquiry, the problem of doubt has recurrently emerged as a pivotal moment in the pursuit of epistemic certainty and the restructuring of foundational knowledge. Both Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and Edmund Husserl, despite their distinct historical and cultural contexts, engaged deeply with this problem by initiating radical forms of doubt that ultimately served as gateways to a renewed understanding of truth. While al-Ghazālī's metaphysical crisis led him to

a spiritual epistemology grounded in inner certainty (*yaqīn*), Husserl's phenomenological reduction aimed to suspend all presuppositions in order to uncover the pure structures of consciousness. Comparing these two approaches reveals surprising conceptual affinities—such as the role of intuition and the act of epistemic suspension—and opens new pathways for understanding the interplay between religious and philosophical quests for certainty.

It is important to distinguish between radical or skeptical doubt (as in Pyrrhonism or Cartesian skepticism) and methodological doubt, which is employed as a deliberate tool for the refinement of knowledge. While the former often questions the very possibility of certainty and tends toward epistemic suspension, the latter seeks to clear away uncertain beliefs to establish a firmer epistemological ground (Husserl, 1999; Descartes, 1996).

In this sense, al-Ghazālī's approach is more aligned with methodological doubt, even though he begins by entertaining deeply skeptical considerations. His autobiographical *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* reflects a structured process of examining different sources of knowledge—sense perception, intellect, and tradition—before arriving at a state of spiritual certainty grounded in intuitive experience (*dhawq*) (al-Ghazālī, 2000).

It is important not to overlook that al-Ghazālī employed doubt not merely as a tool for intellectual crisis but as the starting point of a systematic scientific method. His intellectual journey, as articulated in *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* and *Miʿyār al-ʿIlm* (The Standard Measure of Knowledge), reflects a methodological quest for certainty. He critically examines the sources of knowledge—sense perception, reason, and traditional authority—in pursuit of a reliable criterion (*miʿyār*, sometimes *qanūn*). This criterion must be indubitable, free from error, and capable of protecting the mind from deception. His skeptical examination of the limits of sensory and rational inference thus leads not to nihilism but to a more solid foundation. In *Miʿyār al-ʿIlm*, he outlines a clear commitment to logical analysis, demonstrative reasoning (burhān), and intellectual certainty (yaqīn), showing that his method is not anti-rational but profoundly methodical. His method, therefore, can be understood as a form of epistemological purification.

Al-Ghazālī's method, though grounded in Islamic spirituality, resonates with the systematic doubt of Descartes and anticipates Husserl's phenomenological epoché. There is evidence in the intellectual history of *falsafa* and *kalām* that classical Islamic thinkers were familiar with skeptical themes inherited from Greek philosophy (Nasr, 1964; Chittick, 2007). Al-Ghazālī's training in logic and philosophy enabled him to creatively adapt these themes, transforming them into a framework for spiritual inquiry. Thus, it is plausible to argue that classical skepticism indirectly inspired his method, not by leading to relativism, but by pushing him toward a more refined and experiential form of certainty (al-Ghazālī, 1328/1967).

Although the name al-Ghazālī evokes both admiration and criticism, careful study shows that his skepticism was not a rejection of reason but a way of grounding it ethically. His *al-Munqidh* includes rational reflections like: "To be certain of a mistake, the knowledge must be so strong that... even miracles cannot shake it" (al-Ghazālī, 1967, p. 15). This passage illustrates his demand for knowledge that is indubitable.

Among the most profound manifestations of this dynamic are the epistemological crises of al-Ghazālī and Husserl. Though separated by centuries and contexts, both thinkers suspended judgment and subjected their systems to rigorous critique (Rustom, 2023; Griffel, 2009). This study explores the intersections between al-Ghazālī's metaphysical doubt and Husserl's phenomenological epoché. Both envision doubt not as annihilation but as a gateway to deeper insight—whether through divine illumination or eidetic intuition.

Phenomenology and the Dynamics of Doubt

Phenomenology, as developed by Edmund Husserl, is not merely a school of thought but a radical reorientation of philosophy toward the things themselves (*zu den Sachen selbst*) (Husserl, 1983, p. 6). Its core claim is that knowledge must begin not from abstract metaphysics nor from empirical generalisation, but from how phenomena give themselves to consciousness. By suspending presuppositions and reducing inquiry to the structures of intentionality, phenomenology seeks to uncover the conditions of possibility for meaning and evidence. In this sense, phenomenology is not the abandonment of the world but its most careful description, one that treats consciousness and world as inseparably correlated. I believe this orientation turns doubt into a

method of purification: by withholding naïve belief in external reality, phenomenology clears a space where the essence of experience can appear with greater clarity (Zahavi, 2005, 14–15).

The connection between philosophical doubt and phenomenology thus lies in their shared gesture of *epoché*—a suspension of judgment not for skepticism's sake but for truth's sake. Just as the Pyrrhonian skeptics practiced *epoché* to achieve tranquility (*ataraxia*), Husserl radicalises this practice by transforming it into a scientific method: doubt is no longer a paralysing impasse but the doorway to eidetic intuition (Moran, 2000,150–152). Al-Ghazālī, too, embodies this dynamic in *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, where he questions sense, intellect, and tradition only to arrive at an indubitable form of inner certainty (*yaqīn*) (al-Ghazālī, 2000). I argue that both Husserl and al-Ghazālī reveal how doubt, when phenomenologically disciplined, becomes not a negation of knowledge but a higher affirmation: it strips away illusion to expose a foundation where truth is both seen and lived.

Methodology

The methodological process involves three main stages: (1) a systematic close reading and philological examination of primary texts by al-Ghazālī and Husserl; (2) the extraction and critical evaluation of epistemological categories embedded in these texts; and (3) a comparative synthesis that aims to trace thematic and methodological parallels without erasing cultural and philosophical particularities.

Primary texts of al- Ghazālī are analysed with attention to historical context, theological nuance, and the author's own autobiographical narrative. On the phenomenological side, central works such as Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*, *Ideas I*, and *Logical Investigations* provide the philosophical basis for identifying the structural elements of the epoché and the theory of intentionality.

In order to strengthen the interpretive framework, this study integrates recent scholarly discourse from both Islamic studies and phenomenological philosophy. Relevant contributions are drawn from contemporary research on Islamic epistemology, spiritual psychology, and mysticism, as well as from phenomenological analyses on subjectivity, intentionality, and the nature of consciousness. The study adheres to the methodological expectations of peer-reviewed scholarship

by incorporating multi-lingual sources, interdisciplinary perspectives, and critical engagement with both classical and contemporary positions.

Result and Discussion

Al-Ghazālī's Metaphysical Doubt

Al-Ghazālī's intellectual crisis, as narrated in *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, marks a pivotal moment in classical Islamic thought. His suspicion toward accepted sources of knowledge—namely, the senses, the intellect, and authority (*taqlīd*)—is not merely rhetorical but existential. He recounts an intense period during which he systematically doubted all that he previously took for granted, including the veracity of his senses and the reliability of logical inference (al-Ghazālī, 2000; 1962). This profound state of doubt ultimately paralyzed his ability to affirm even basic truths and served as a turning point toward an entirely new epistemological framework.(Grasen,2014,13-34).

Crucially, however, al-Ghazālī's doubt was not arbitrary or emotional—it followed a structured method, deeply informed by his training in logic (*manṭiq*), philosophy (*falsafa*), and theology (*kalām*). His methodological awareness is especially evident in works like *Miʿyār al-ʿIlm* and *al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm*, where he engages in a rigorous critique of reasoning and the conditions of valid inference. In these works, al-Ghazālī articulates his criteria for true knowledge, emphasising that certainty (*yaqīn*) must be established through indubitable and logically demonstrable premises. His approach shows clear familiarity with Aristotelian logic and reflects a commitment to *burhānī* (demonstrative) reasoning. Thus, his metaphysical doubt should be seen as a rational suspension of belief aimed at testing and refining the very foundations of knowledge—what Husserl would later conceptualise as *epoché*.(Shihadeh,2011,77).

The crisis described in *al-Munqidh* was not an abandonment of reason but its purification. Al-Ghazālī seeks a knowledge that is immune to doubt, comparing it to the kind of certainty that cannot be shaken even by sensory miracles or metaphysical illusions. This is not a rejection of rationality but an elevation of epistemology toward a level where knowledge is internally self-evident. For al-Ghazālī, the failure of sense perception and rational argumentation was not the end of inquiry but a call to transcend these levels through inner spiritual illumination (*ishrāq*) and intuitive experience (*dhawq*).

Furthermore, al-Ghazālī does not only describe his doubt in autobiographical or mystical terms. He constructs an epistemological framework that is deeply systematic and conceptually coherent. For instance, in *Miʿyār al-ʿIlm*, he develops what might be described as an early theory of epistemic validity, where he distinguishes between degrees of certainty, types of inference, and the reliability of propositions. He does not indiscriminately accept Sufi intuition but places it at the apex of a hierarchy that begins with logical and empirical verification. This layered model of knowledge combines the rigor of philosophical reasoning with the transformative aims of mystical insight.

Therefore, al-Ghazālī's doubt serves three interrelated functions: epistemological, ethical, and spiritual. Epistemologically, it purges false beliefs; ethically, it cultivates humility and sincerity in the pursuit of truth; spiritually, it prepares the soul for divine illumination. His temporary withdrawal from public life and academic prestige mirrors the internal withdrawal from inherited doctrines and uncritical beliefs. It is a lived *epoché*—a radical reorientation of the self toward a new kind of certainty rooted in divine reality.

This reorientation is neither irrational nor anti-scientific; rather, it exemplifies a higher-order rationality that transcends reductive empiricism and purely deductive logic. Al-Ghazālī's methodology anticipates what can be described as a proto-phenomenological attitude—one in which certainty does not emerge solely from formal syllogistic reasoning but is cultivated through a refined, ethically attuned, and spiritually receptive form of subjective awareness. This awareness is not arbitrary or private opinion, but a disciplined and epistemologically valid mode of perception, rooted in the purification of the soul and alignment with the divine order. His concept of the illuminated heart (*qalb munawwar*) as the locus of true knowledge finds a compelling analogue in Husserl's phenomenological subject, where consciousness functions both as the origin and the horizon of all meaning-constitution. In both frameworks, knowledge is inseparable from the transformation of the knower. Thus, al-Ghazālī's metaphysical doubt emerges as a paradigmatic model of how rigorous rational inquiry and spiritual tradition can converge into a holistic, experiential, and ultimately transformative epistemology—one that integrates logic, intuition, and existential depth into a unified pursuit of truth.

One of the most recent works on this subject is Nabil Yasien Mohamed's *Ghazālī's Epistemology: A Critical Study of Doubt and Certainty*." It offers a systematic and balanced analysis of al-Ghazālī's treatment of *shakk* (doubt) and *yaqīn* (certainty) (Mohamed, 2024). The book resists portraying al-Ghazālī merely as a philosopher or solely as a mystic, instead presenting him as a thinker who genuinely integrates both traditions. Mohamed emphasises how al-Ghazālī's method relies on the interplay between philosophical demonstration (*burhān*) and Sufi practice, framing his epistemology as a dialogue between reason and the heart, between rational inference and intuitive unveiling.

This strongly resonates with the aims of my own study. Whereas Mohamed carefully reconstructs the internal logic of al-Ghazālī's epistemology, my work places this logic in comparative dialogue with **Edmund Husserl's phenomenology**. By aligning al-Ghazālī's metaphysical doubt with Husserl's *epoché*, I highlight the structural role of suspension and intuition across traditions. Mohamed's analysis demonstrates how al-Ghazālī disciplines doubt within Islamic thought, while my approach universalises this insight, showing how rational analysis and intuitive verification converge as methodological tools in both Islamic and Western contexts. In this way, Mohamed's work and mine are complementary: his provides the detailed roadmap of al-Ghazālī's epistemology, and mine situates that roadmap within a comparative philosophical framework that underscores the enduring relevance of doubt as a gateway to truth.

Husserl's Phenomenological Epoché

Husserl's concept of *epoché*—central to his phenomenological method—marks a radical departure from the empirical and naturalistic assumptions of traditional philosophy and science. Derived etymologically from ancient Greek skepticism, *epoché* originally denoted the suspension of judgment in the face of uncertainty. However, Husserl transformed this concept into a methodological tool for accessing the pure structures of consciousness by "bracketing" or setting aside all presuppositions about the external world. This bracketing is not a denial of reality, but a way to reorient attention from what is assumed to be objectively "out there" toward how meaning is constituted in subjective experience (Husserl, 1982).

To properly understand Husserl's *epoché*, one must situate it within his broader critique of the "natural attitude"—the unreflective acceptance of the world as it appears in everyday experience. In works such as *Ideas I* and *Cartesian Meditations*, Husserl argues that this attitude hides the deeper, transcendental conditions that make experience possible. His method calls for a "phenomenological reduction," a return "to the things themselves" (*zu den Sachen selbst*)—not as they exist empirically, but as they are given in conscious intentionality (Husserl, 1999). This reduction leads to the uncovering of the *transcendental ego*, the pure consciousness that constitutes the world of appearances through acts of meaning-bestowal.

What makes Husserl's approach particularly novel is his radical redefinition of objectivity: rather than viewing it as an independent property of external things, he demonstrates that objectivity is constituted *within* consciousness through intentional acts. In Husserl's phenomenology, every act of consciousness is inherently intentional—that is, it is always directed toward an object, whether real, imagined, abstract, or emotional. This foundational insight, known as the *principle of intentionality*, challenges the traditional Cartesian separation between subject and object by showing that meaning arises not in isolation but through the lived relation between the two. Consciousness, therefore, is never an inert or empty receptacle; it is an active, meaning-giving process, continually engaged in structuring experience. By performing the *epoché*—the suspension of naturalistic or metaphysical assumptions about the existence of objects—Husserl is able to redirect philosophical attention to the manner in which objects are given to consciousness. This involves uncovering the *noetic* (act-related) and *noematic* (content-related) structures that condition appearance, thereby revealing that the essence of objectivity lies not in its detached presence, but in its *givenness* to a conscious subject. In doing so, Husserl transforms epistemology into a reflective, first-person analysis of how truth, meaning, and knowledge are constituted in and through subjective experience. This methodological shift marks a profound departure from both empiricist realism and abstract rationalism, offering instead a rigorous path toward foundational insight grounded in lived consciousness.

This has profound implications not only for epistemology but also for metaphysics, psychology, and ethics. Husserl's turn to the transcendental ego is not a turn away from reality, but a philosophical deepening of how reality is disclosed to a subject. It opens the possibility

of a rigorous science of experience—a *Wissenschaftslehre*—that can analyse phenomena in their first-person givenness with the same precision as mathematics or logic. In this way, phenomenology aims to be both a science and a philosophy of consciousness.

When read in light of al-Ghazālī's own methodological doubt, Husserl's *epoché* resonates in intriguing ways. Just as al-Ghazālī suspends his trust in the senses, reason, and tradition to arrive at inner certainty (*yaqīn*), Husserl suspends his belief in the objective world to uncover the foundational structures of meaning. While al-Ghazālī seeks knowledge through spiritual purification and divine illumination, Husserl seeks it through eidetic intuition—the grasping of essential structures (*Wesen*) in their apodictic clarity. Both thinkers, though operating in different epistemic traditions, employ a form of suspension to reach a deeper, more original source of certainty.

Moreover, the *epoché* is not a purely intellectual exercise in Husserl—it entails a transformation of the subject. The phenomenologist must cultivate a reflective attitude, a heightened self-awareness that parallels the ethical and spiritual preparation in al-Ghazālī's path of purification (*tazkiyat al-nafs*). In both frameworks, the knower is not merely a passive observer but an ethically and cognitively engaged being. This reorientation of the self lies at the heart of both thinkers' methods and suggests a broader philosophical kinship that transcends cultural and religious boundaries.

Husserl's later writings, particularly in *The Crisis of European Sciences*, also reveal a quasi-spiritual dimension to his philosophy. He critiques the objectivism and fragmentation of modern science, calling instead for a return to the "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*), the pre-theoretical realm of lived experience. In this call, Husserl implicitly echoes the kind of holistic and self-involving knowledge that al-Ghazālī pursued centuries earlier. For both thinkers, the restoration of certainty involves a rehabilitation of the knowing subject, not through external proof alone but through inward transformation and direct access to foundational truth.

Comparative Analysis

Both al-Ghazālī and Husserl employ doubt not as a terminus but as a methodological point of departure, a catalyst that initiates a profound reconstruction of epistemology. Instead of surrendering to skepticism,

they transform doubt into an instrument of intellectual and spiritual purification. This deliberate move subverts the familiar dichotomies often posited between faith and reason, or science and mysticism. In their shared vision, genuine philosophy does not require the exclusion of subjectivity or religious experience; rather, it requires a bracketing of inherited assumptions so that deeper, more foundational modes of knowing may be disclosed.

For al-Ghazālī, this process begins with a suspension of reliance upon theological and philosophical authorities—*mutakallimūn*, *falāsifa*, and even Sufis—in pursuit of a certainty that is both indubitable and transformative. His temporary withholding of assent mirrors Husserl's suspension of the "natural attitude," where the phenomenologist sets aside unexamined belief in the external world to investigate how consciousness constitutes meaning. Both thus employ suspension (*taʿlīq* or *epoché*) not to destroy knowledge but to purify its sources and refine its grounds. Truth, in their accounts, emerges only once the mind is liberated from the veils of custom, habit, and dogma (Hourani, 1958, pp. 183–191).

At the centre of both projects lies intuition as the decisive faculty for accessing genuine knowledge. For al-Ghazālī, *dhawq*—literally, "tasting"—is a spiritual-intuitive apprehension that transcends rational syllogism. Rooted in the purified heart (*qalb*), this form of knowing is not irrational but supra-rational, the fruit of ethical and spiritual cultivation (al-Ghazālī, 2010; Rustom, 2023). Husserl's *Anschauung*, by contrast, is the immediate givenness of essences to consciousness—an eidetic grasp of invariant structures beyond empirical particulars (Husserl, 1982). Despite their distinct content—divine illumination for al-Ghazālī, eidetic reduction for Husserl—both elevate intuitive immediacy above abstract deduction, signaling a paradigmatic shift from formal logic to lived clarity.

This turn destabilises rigid philosophical dichotomies—subject versus object, rationalism versus empiricism, theology versus phenomenology. In both traditions, intuition does not abolish reason but completes it, integrating the epistemic with the existential, knowledge with transformation. What emerges is a transformative epistemology, a model in which knowing is inseparable from the moral and ontological development of the knower.

Their projects are thus inseparably tied to self-transformation. Al-Ghazālī's metaphysical journey requires moral purification through asceticism, ethical discipline, and detachment from prestige. Only by this path does he become worthy of intuitive disclosure through divine illumination. Husserl's transcendental reduction likewise restructures consciousness, opening access to the essential conditions of experience. In both cases, knowledge demands that the knower undergo a conversion of subjectivity in order to perceive a different order of truth.

Accordingly, both thinkers redefine knowledge not merely as justified belief but as existentially grounded certainty. For al-Ghazālī, certainty (*yaqīn*) dwells in the illuminated heart (*qalb munawwar*), made receptive to truth through divine grace and inner refinement. For Husserl, certainty appears as apodictic self-evidence, indubitable once disclosed to reflective consciousness. This shift—from external validation to internal illumination—questions the dominant paradigms of both analytic philosophy and scholastic theology, compelling us to reconsider the subjective conditions of truth.

By emphasising intuition, both thinkers sketch the contours of what may be called a phenomenological theology: a horizon where religious truths are not dogmatically accepted but experientially unveiled. Here truth is not merely revealed or deduced; it is inhabited and lived. Such an epistemology is profoundly holistic, resisting modern fragmentation by centring the subject as the locus where divine and eidetic realities converge (Zahavi, 2005; Rustom, 2023).

Thus emerges the possibility of a phenomenology of faith. Faith, in this sense, is not blind submission but a structured experiential awareness rooted in lived certainty. For al-Ghazālī, faith (*īmān*) matures through self-examination and purification, culminating in *yaqīn*—a certainty invulnerable to doubt because it is existentially embodied. For Husserl, faith may be read as the phenomenologist's radical commitment to uncovering meaning through intentional reflection and intuition. In both cases, faith unites the noetic and the existential, affirming that truth is not merely asserted but dwelt within. As William C. Smith (1991) reminds us, belief without personal engagement is incomplete; al-Ghazālī and Husserl show that certainty requires the whole self's participation.

Ultimately, both thinkers converge on a profound insight: truth is not simply a proposition to be verified but a mode of being to be

realised. Whether through divine illumination or eidetic intuition, the highest knowledge is a form of presence—a unity of knowing, being, and meaning. Their legacies invite us to rethink the very foundations of philosophy and theology, directing us back to the depths of subjectivity where the search for truth truly begins.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both al-Ghazālī and Husserl utilise doubt not as an endpoint, but as a rigorous method for navigating the complexities of knowledge, certainty, and the transformation of the self. Their respective projects emerge from a shared dissatisfaction with uncritical belief—whether in theological dogma or naturalistic assumptions—and both thinkers initiate a radical suspension of these inherited convictions to reach more secure epistemic foundations. Al-Ghazālī's metaphysical doubt, grounded deeply in Islamic spirituality, represents not a negation of reason, but its elevation and refinement through spiritual purification. His method shows that certainty (*yaqīn*) is not merely a cognitive achievement but the fruit of an existential and moral struggle, culminating in a mode of intuitive knowledge (*dhawq*) that transcends rational demonstration.

This spiritual epistemology contrasts with more formalist or discursive accounts of knowledge by emphasising the necessity of internal transformation. Knowledge for al-Ghazālī is neither purely propositional nor detached; it is personal, embodied, and participatory. Certainty, in this sense, is not simply known—it is *lived*. His thought challenges modern assumptions that draw strict boundaries between reason and revelation, or between subjectivity and truth, by demonstrating that mystical experience and intellectual integrity need not be mutually exclusive.

Husserl, while working within a secular and phenomenological tradition, arrives at surprisingly similar insights. His concept of *epoché*—the bracketing of the natural attitude—allows the philosopher to step back from the external world and explore the intentional structures of consciousness. This reduction is not a retreat from truth, but a methodological return to the conditions that make experience and meaning possible. Through *eidetic intuition*, Husserl uncovers the essential forms of phenomena, privileging direct experiential evidence over empirical or abstract theorisation. His transcendental project

suggests that certainty is located not in the objectivity of the world, but in the reflective clarity of the subject.

In both frameworks, **intuition** is not an optional supplement to rational knowledge but the core through which truth is accessed in its most authentic form. Al-Ghazālī's *dhawq* and Husserl's *Anschauung* share a commitment to immediacy, clarity, and interior certainty. These concepts reconfigure epistemology to include the moral, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of knowing. This convergence challenges inherited dichotomies between subject and object, between faith and reason, between metaphysics and experience. It suggests that the truth is not merely about correspondence to external facts, but about coherence with the inward light of purified perception.

Moreover, both thinkers insist on the transformative dimension of knowledge. For al-Ghazālī, knowledge that does not morally or spiritually elevate the soul is incomplete. Similarly, for Husserl, true philosophical reflection alters the structure of the ego, leading to a heightened awareness of how we constitute meaning. In both cases, the knower becomes transformed in the very act of knowing. This shared emphasis places the subject—not as a neutral observer, but as an ethically and existentially involved participant—at the centre of the epistemic enterprise.

From this comparative horizon, a new framework begins to emerge: a phenomenology of faith. This is not faith reduced to dogma, nor reason emptied of spiritual depth, but an integrated model in which belief arises as an existential, intuitive certainty lived out in the purified self. For al-Ghazālī, faith (*īmān*) is an experiential response to divine truth that emerges only after intense intellectual and spiritual struggle. For Husserl, faith may be seen in the philosopher's disciplined commitment to intentional structures that transcend mere empirical observation. In both cases, faith is a mode of *dwelling within* the truth—a lived realisation rather than passive acceptance.

This study thus offers a path for rethinking contemporary epistemology through the integration of phenomenological and religious insights. It challenges us to reconsider the role of subjectivity, intuition, and transformation in our understanding of knowledge. Far from being relics of pre-modern metaphysics, thinkers like al-Ghazālī and Husserl point toward a renewed vision of inquiry in which intellectual clarity

and spiritual depth are mutually reinforcing. By placing the knower—
not merely logic or empirical data—at the heart of the epistemological
process, they remind us that the search for truth is also a search for the
self.

Ultimately, this comparative analysis invites further research into
how Islamic thought and phenomenology can enrich one another. It
opens the door to interdisciplinary conversations between theology,
philosophy, psychology, and cognitive science. In an age marked by
both epistemic relativism and spiritual disorientation, the synthesis
of al-Ghazālī and Husserl offers a timely and profound response: that
knowledge, to be truly transformative, must involve not only thinking
but being—and not only believing, but becoming.

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Alias (2009)

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Alias, A. (2009). Human nature. In N. M. Noor (Ed.), *Human nature from an Islamic perspective: A guide to teaching and learning* (pp.79-117). Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.

Journal Article
In-text:
Chapra (2002)

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Chapra, M. U. (2002). Islam and the international debt problem. *Journal of Islamic Studies, 10*, 214-232.

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In-text:
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(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:
The glorious Qur'ān. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

Ḥadīth
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(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)
(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:
(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.
(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

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