Intellectual Discourse, 20:1 (2012) 1-6

ISSN 0128-4878

Editorial

In 2011, the world scholarly community commemorated the 900th death anniversary of Imam Abū Ḥāmid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazālī (450–505/1058–1111), considered to be one of the greatest minds throughout the Islamic history. What earns al-Ghazālī this unique recognition is his critical thinking guided by Islamic values, which he exhibited throughout his inquiries.

Born in Tūs in Persia, al-Ghazālī was educated in his hometown then in Jurjān and finally in Nishapur located in today's northern part of Iran. He mastered and wrote extensively on various branches of knowledge that have some bearing on religion, including Islamic jurisprudence and legal theory, logic, philosophy, theology, comparative religion and Sufism. His *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) is considered to be his *magnum opus*.

The basic fundamental epistemological question al-Ghazālī addressed concerns the knowledge of *certitude (al-'Ilm al-Yaqīnī)*. To this end, he classified the seekers of truth into four groups: theologians, philosophers, Batinites and Sufis. Convinced that "to refute a doctrine before having thoroughly comprehended it is like a stab in the dark" (al-Ghazālī, 1994, pp. 50-51), al-Ghazālī treaded an intricate path to investigate the truth claim of each group. He found all wanting except Sufism which he considered to be the true science of the Hereafter.

'Ilm al-kalām (science of theology) is primarily a protective science meant to safeguard the Islamic creed against heretical innovations. The emergence of heretics and innovators gave science of *kalām* its legitimate place. Going beyond that, by dwelling into the nature of the reality and divine attributes, is what subjected *kalām* to Ghazālī's criticism. According to him, the theologians' way of argumentation fell short of leading to certainty in faith; even when it does, it entails some elements of doubt and *taqlīd* (blind imitation), as their proofs are not demonstrative but dialectical the premises of which the theologians

adapted from their opponents. He did not deny the efficacy of *kalām* for some categories of people, but for someone who is convinced with none but certainty, *kalām* is of no avail (al-Ghazālī, 1994, p. 49; 1993a, pp. 75-78).

Fiqh (jurisprudence), according to al-Ghazālī, is concerned with exterior bodily rituals and worldly matters, therefore unable to ascertain sincerity, which is the attribute of the heart, necessary for salvation in the Hereafter. However, because this world is closely intertwined with the Hereafter in Islam, observing the religious rituals as expounded by *fuqahā'* (Muslim jurits) is necessary for the spiritual formation of individuals and communities and indispensable for preparing one for the Hereafter. On that basis, al-Ghazālī condemned a number of extremist Sufis who claimed to have reached a state where they were no longer required to perform *ṣalāh* (prayer) and were permitted to drink alcohol and engage in other prohibited activities with impunity. Such an attitude destroys the religion from within (al-Ghazālī, 1993a, p. 65; 2002, pp. 40-41). Other than that, he believes that Sufism is the true science of certainty that can lead to salvation in the Hereafter (al-Ghazālī, 1994; 2002).

Al-Ghazālī leveled his fiercest criticism against the philosophers who adapted Neo-Platonist Greek philosophy to Islamic thought, such as al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) (428/1037). In his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, al-Ghazālī engaged philosophers in intellectual debate over twenty doctrines/counts of their teachings, seventeen of which he judged them as heretics and on three counts as *kuffār* (unbelievers): the assertion that the world is eternal; the denial of God's knowledge of particulars; and the denial of the bodily resurrection. He demonstrated that none of the arguments to support these teachings fulfil the conditions and high epistemological standards of *burhān,* (demonstrative proof). Philosophers merely rely upon unproven, dialectical premises that are conventionally accepted only among themselves (al-Ghazālī, 1980; 1994; Griffel, 2005). He exposed the contradictions and incoherence within the epistemological foundations of the philosophical inquiry into the metaphysical realms. Drawing on the rational conceptual framework, al-Ghazālī exhibited the deficiency of reason in metaphysical realms in order to establish a legitimate space for revelation, just as he had earlier regained trust in reason by virtue of revelation after his period of aporia. It is then expected that the validity of religious assertions,

as entrenched in revelation, should be recognized, especially in areas where demonstrative proofs are simply unattainable.

The compatibility of reason and revelation forms the cornerstone of al-Ghazālī's scheme of Islamic critical thinking. There could be no "real" contradiction between reason and revelation as both are ultimately traced to the same source, Allah the Almighty. It is not plausible that revelation will establish or negate a fact which reason demonstratively holds to be otherwise, just as reason will not validate or deny a fact against what is unequivocally stated in revelation. He was convinced that the result of demonstrative proof would be in conformity with revelation on the ground that truth cannot negate truth.

However, Muslim scholars are divided on which to resort to when there is "apparent" contradiction. Scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728/1328) gave priority to revelation, while others including Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (595/1198) preferred reason. Al-Ghazālī's position is closer to the latter. To uphold the integrity and validity of demonstrative proof, passages of revelation whose literal meaning does not conform to rational demonstrative proof must be interpreted allegorically through different levels of *ta'wīl* (allegory) that he outlined as "*canons of ta'wīl"* (al-Ghazālī, 1993a, p. 47; 1993b). Unless the demonstrative proof of reason is firmly recognised, the credibility of revelation will be at stake, "for it is by reason that we know scripture to be true" (al-Ghazālī, 1993b, pp. 21-24). Nevertheless, he believes that demonstrative proof cannot be established to validate or invalidate metaphysical realms, as that is the prerogative of revelation, the central argument between him and philosophers.

Another distinctive characteristic central to al-Ghazālī's intellectual inquiry is his passion for objectivity. Knowing that he has nothing to gain in refuting weak arguments, which he deliberatively ignored (al-Ghazālī, 1980, p. 89), he presented strong arguments of his adversaries as objectively as possible. In fact, as Dunyā observes (1980, p. 26-36), al-Ghazālī's presented opposing arguments in a clearer fashion. Similarly, he faced no difficulty in adopting maxims from his adversaries as long as they are rational in themselves, supported with convincing evidence and not contrary to the Qur'ān or Prophetic Sunnah (al-Ghazālī, 1994, p. 65). To him, every word or science must be evaluated on its own merit.

Al-Ghazālī drew many admirers as well as critics from all branches of knowledge in which he wrote. Nevertheless, his scholarship was never seriously disputed. He connected Sufism with *fiqh* and theology and related philosophy to religion, bringing them all into closer contact for mutual recognition. The scope and depth of his inquiry, the methodology he employed, the objectivity he exhibited and the arguments he advanced for or against the sciences he studied, coupled with his analytical mind to simplify the complexities in a grand scheme of Islamic intellectual and critical thinking, have left an enduring Ghazālīan mark in Islamic scholarship. All this has earned him admiration from his supporters and respect from his critics.

Grounded in reason and guided by revelation, this grand scheme of intellectual critical thinking has been the inspiration for the *Intellectual Discourse* since its inception in 1993. The journal has published scholarly articles on issues related to Islam and the Muslim world. As I take over as the editor of the journal, with Professor Abdul Rashid Moten as Editor-in-Chief, I wish to reiterate this guiding principle of intellectual and critical enquiry. I thank my predecessor, Prof. Noraini M. Noor, for her tireless commitment to the journal.

The first article in this issue deals with Sufism and its encounter with colonial rule in Nigeria. The Sufi movements played a considerable role in the spread of Islam in many West African countries, particularly in Nigeria where the Qādiriyyah and the Tijāniyyah movements were preeminent. Drawing upon the declassified records of the British Colonial Office, Olakunle A. Lawal revisits how the British formed a rapprochement with the French, whose colonies bordered Nigeria and had been the source of inspiration for Tijāniyyah movement in Nigeria. He contended that the age-old rivalry and mistrust between the two colonial powers vitiated the extent to which the rapprochement could have achieved.

The second article, by Arzura Idris, explores the rights of forced migrants among refugees and asylum seekers in Malaysia. It attributes the reluctance of the Malaysian government to adopt a clear policy of forced migration to her domestic problems of complex ethnicities. The author believes that Malaysia needs to adopt a sustainable migration management policy that would address issues critical to forced migrants and, therefore, prevent crimes associated with forced migrants the country is currently facing.

In the next article, Md. Mahmudul Hasan reviews misogyny charges levelled against Islam by secular feminist writers in the West and their counterparts in many Muslim societies. These are the charges that have culminated in Islamophobia. In an attempt to disentangle feminism, as a legitimate movement to advance women's causes, from Islamophobia, Hasan argues that Islam accords women many rights, which many contemporary Western women cherish, and which, however, have been sometimes violated due to social or cultural factors. He calls upon feminist writers to address such violations within the Islamic value system as against a secular frame of reference.

Saiyid Zaheer Husain Jafri's article dwells on the intellectual and cultural contact between the Muslim settlers and Hindus and the processes of transmission of knowledge in Medieval India. As the author explains, many Islamic intellectual and spiritual sciences as well as scientific ideas and concepts flourished under the state patronage of successive sultans and Mughal emperors. Though less dependent on the state support, Sanskrit based Hindu studies equally thrived at the temple towns. The study is reminiscent of the cultural encounter between Muslims and Hindus and the role Muslims played in the Indian intellectual history.

In the Research Note, Emad Bazzi identifies two models of engagement with modernity based on the Turkish experience. One is Ataturk's project of wholesale secularization of the Islamic culture and values, and the other is a "conservative democracy" where the democratic system of government is based on the Islamic cultural values and social practices, as embraced by the Justice and Development Party. According to the author, Ataturk's model failed the cultural aspiration of the people and the "conservative democracy" model creates ambiguity. Bazzi calls for a paradigm of multiple modernities in which components of modernization will be coherently pursued and harmonised with the Islamic values.

Reference

Al-Ghazālī, A. (1980). *Tahāfut al-falāsifah* [The incoherence of the philosophers] (6th ed.). Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif.

Al-Ghazālī, A. (1993a). *Fayṣal al-tafriqah bayna al-Islām wa-al-zandaqah* [The decisive criterion for distinguishing Islam from clandestine unbelief]. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī.

Al-Ghazālī, A. (1993b). *Qānūn al-ta'wīl* [Canons of *ta'wīl*]. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī.

Al-Ghazālī, A. (1994). *Al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* [Deliverance from error]. Damascus: Al-Ḥikmah.

Al-Ghazālī, A. (2002). *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* [The revival of the religious sciences]. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah.

Al-Qaraḍāwī, Y. (1994). *Al-Imām al-Ghazālī bayna mādiḥīh wa-nāqidīh* [Imam al-Ghazālī between his admirers and critics]. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risālah.

Dunyā, S. (1980). Muqaddimat al-ṭaba'ah al-thāniyyah [Introduction to the second edition]. In Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifah* [The incoherence of the philosophers] (6th ed.). Cairo: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif.

Griffel, F. (2005). *Taqlīd* of the philosophers: Al-Ghazālī's initial accusation in his *Tahāfut*. In S. Günther, (Ed.), *Ideas, images, and methods of portrayal: Insights into classical Arabic literature and Islam* (pp. 273-296). Leiden: Brill.

Abdul Kabir Hussain Solihu
Editor