

Al-Ghazālī's Sūfism: A Critical Appraisal

Abdullahi Hassan Zaroug*

Abstract: *This paper aims at investigating al-Ghazālī's ideas on ṣūfism, including his epistemological, ethical, philosophical and spiritual views. It analyses and evaluates al-Ghazālī's views on kashf, ecstatic utterances, the criteria for judging ecstatic utterances, virtues and vices, free will, fate and divine decree, seclusion, intention, states and stations such as asceticism, love and contentment. The paper also discusses the question of which methodology is appropriate for investigating mystical phenomena, and whether it is possible for a non-ṣūfī to have access to the ṣūfī world. Furthermore, the paper attempts to show that much can be gained from Sunnī taṣawwuf, which al-Ghazālī may be considered to represent, since he emphasizes the importance of spiritual deeds, and that worship must be accompanied by internal states such as good intentions and sincerity. Al-Ghazālī also emphasises the importance of morality, contributes greatly to moral psychology i.e., mechanism of the soul, and shows remarkable insight into the diagnosis and treatment of the illnesses of the soul.*

The study of *taṣawwuf* (Islamic mysticism) is of vital importance because *taṣawwuf* represents a significant part of Islamic heritage, and also represents the way many Muslims understand and practice Islam. Besides this, *taṣawwuf* has some influence, in one way or another, upon many Muslims who do not consider themselves to be followers of *taṣawwuf*. *Taṣawwuf* is considered by many Muslims to represent the spiritual aspect of Islam. In addition, *taṣawwuf* not only stresses *‘ibādah* (acts of worship) and *dhikr* (remembrance), it also emphasizes the esoteric aspects of Islam such as good intentions, sincerity, trust in God, patience, gratitude, fear, hope and contentment. *Taṣawwuf* is also

Dr. Abdullahi Hassan Zaroug is Associate Professor, Department of Uṣūl al-Dīn and Comparative Religion, International Islamic University Malaysia, P.O. Box 70, Jalan Sultan, 46700 Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. Fax: (603)7576045

considered to represent the moral aspect of Islam. It deals with virtues such as truthfulness, charity, temperance and patience, and vices such as arrogance, envy, selfishness, pomp and hypocrisy. *Fiqh* generally concerns itself with the external aspects of Islam (i.e., rules that govern our actions); philosophy and *kalām* (theology) are concerned with the rational aspect of Islam. We also need to study *taṣawwuf* in order to expose some of its deviant teachings and to refute theories such as the Theory of Incarnation, and the Theory of the Unity of Existence, which have been propagated in the name of *taṣawwuf*. Some schools of *taṣawwuf* are also considered to advocate a withdrawal from general life and the *ibtilā'* (tribulation) that is associated with the latter. It is the belief of some *ṣūfīs* that mixing with people puts one in danger of committing sin, and leads to wasting time which can be otherwise utilized in *'ibādah* (worship). Therefore, the study of a major figure like al-Ghazālī¹ may help us understand many ideas and concepts associated with *taṣawwuf*, and may also help us in resolving many of its issues and problems.

Before discussing al-Ghazālī's *ṣūfism*, we must mention that al-Ghazālī was not only a *ṣūfī*, but also a philosopher who, in his famous book *Tahāfatul al-falāsifah* (The Incoherence of Philosophers), criticized Greek and Muslim philosophers. He was also a theologian, a logician, and a jurist, having written an important and influential book on Islamic jurisprudence entitled *al-Muṣṭasfā*. The scope of his writings extended even to natural science. This paper, however, will confine itself to al-Ghazālī's major works on *taṣawwuf* in an attempt to discuss and evaluate them. The following are some of the concepts that we propose to discuss with reference to al-Ghazālī:

1. The concept of the science of "unveiling" of Divine Knowledge (*'ilm al-mukāshafah*);
2. The concept of *shath* (ecstatic utterances);
3. Free will, fate and divine decree;
4. Virtues and vices;
5. Seclusion (*'uzlah*);
6. The concept of states (*aḥwāl*) and stations (*maqāmāt*), such as asceticism, love, contentment, and sincerity.

METHODS OF STUDYING ŠUFĪSM

The methodology followed in this study of al-Ghazālī's *taṣawwuf*, involves reading the works of ṣūfīs, listening to their conversation, observing their behaviour, and then deliberating upon what is read, listened to or observed; and judging their beliefs and practices by the Qur'ān, the *Sunnah*, principles of reason and facts of experience. A possible objection to this method may be that mystical truth can only be known, judged and evaluated by mystical experience and by possessing a certain taste. As the famous ṣūfī saying goes, "The one who tastes is the one who knows" (*man dhāqā 'arīf*).

Al-Ghazālī tells us that knowledge of this kind can only be gained by renouncing the world and its pleasures through discipline, self-mortification, purification of the soul and heart, by being in a continuous state of *'ibādah* and by observing the principles of *akhlāq* (morality). The problem with this approach is that a person may want to know about *taṣawwuf* without willing to follow the ṣūfī way. Is there an independent method that may enable one to judge the truth of mystical propositions? Can one have access to the world of the ṣūfī, or is access to this world possible only through mystical experience? Al-Ghazālī seems to suggest in some of his works that mystical ideas cannot be communicated, they can only be experienced. He seems to argue in his book *al-Munqidh min-al-dalāl* that a person can have belief in the existence of mystical states and experiences, or some understanding of the objects of ṣūfī knowledge, even if he does not possess ṣūfī tastes. He can get this understanding by listening to ṣūfīs, by accompanying them, by what he calls "concatenation of circumstance," and through experience. Although what al-Ghazālī says here is very important, he neither elaborates on this statement nor does he give examples. We shall come to this issue later. Coming back to the question of the methodology employed in studying *taṣawwuf*, I would say that I do not possess special taste or mystical faculties, neither have I been in prolonged company of ṣūfīs who have these special faculties. I only read their works, listen to their conversation, and observe some of the behaviour of their followers.

It must also be mentioned that most people who write about *taṣawwuf* are either totally sympathetic, or totally against it; a few take the middle position. I intend to take this middle position, for obviously not all the ideas of *taṣawwuf* are right and in accord with Islamic principles, reason and facts of experience. On the other hand, not all of them are wrong.

KASHF: THE ṢŪFĪ THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

In this part, I shall discuss the ṣūfī theory of knowledge, that is, knowledge by *kashf* (inspiration). In this respect, I shall consider the need for *kashf*, what things the ṣūfī claims to know by means of *kashf*, how the ṣūfī gains such knowledge, how he knows that he knows *kashf* objects of knowledge, and how we (i.e. non-ṣūfis) know that he knows.²

Al-Ghazālī's makes a distinction between *‘ilm al-mukāshafah* (the science of "unveiling" Divine knowledge) and *‘ilm al-mu‘āmalah* (the science of action).³ The science of action has been divided by him into two categories: the exoteric science and the esoteric science. Every action, whether it be worship (*‘ibādah*) or customary action (*‘āddah*), has an external aspect as well as an internal aspect. The ṣūfī deals with and emphasizes the internal aspects of action, such as intention and sincerity. Al-Ghazālī tells us that the external aspects of actions are dealt with by jurists (*fuqahā*) and the internal aspects are dealt with by ṣūfis. It is true that many *fuqahā* at that time paid little or no attention to the internal aspect of *‘ibādah*. Al-Ghazālī realized—as did true *fuqahā* like Mālik, Abū Ḥanifah, Aḥmad and Al-Shāfi‘ī—that both the aspects, i.e. the internal as well as the external, need attention. Al-Ghazālī called the science which deals with internal states of action "the science of the heart." This science also deals with moral virtues such as truthfulness, beneficence and temperance, and with moral vices such as envy, pomp and hypocrisy. The aim of this science is to persuade us to act in accordance with virtues and to avoid acting in accordance with vices. Vices constitute the illness of the heart. The science of the heart also deals with how to cure these illnesses.

What Can be Known Through *Kashf*?

Al-Ghazālī gave a long list in *al-Ihyā’* of the things which can be known through *kashf*.⁴ This list includes knowledge of God, his attributes, his actions and the wisdom behind his creation of this world and the hereafter. This knowledge also includes knowledge of the meaning of prophecy, knowledge of angels and of devils. The ṣūfī knows these things clearly, and in a way that can never be doubted. He knows them as though they are manifest. Al-Ghazālī also mentions, in *al-Munqidh*, things that are known by the ṣūfī through *kashf*.⁵ He says that ṣūfis see things which cannot be described through language. If we try to describe these things in ordinary language, we will fall into

error. In other places, al-Ghazālī mentions that *ṣūfis* can know through *kashf* the secrets of fate and divine decree, and can know what goes on in other people's minds and can have knowledge through telepathy and precognition (instances of knowledge by precognition are usually realized as dreams that come true).⁶ We should note that there are two kinds of objects of knowledge referred to by al-Ghazālī: knowledge of transcendental beings like God, and knowledge of physical objects in the world by extra-ordinary means which are similar to extra-sensory perception (which is studied in the discipline of parapsychology).⁷

Šūfis' Knowledge by *Kashf*

Al-Ghazālī considers *kashf* to be a light which appears in the heart when the heart is cleansed of its undesirable attributes.⁸ It is a kind of inspiration (*ilhām*). *Ilhām* is different from *waswās* (the devil's insinuation). The thoughts we get through *ilhām* are good; the thoughts we get through *waswās* are evil. The problem lies in how to distinguish between *ilhām* and *waswās*. It is interesting to note here that al-Ghazālī distinguishes knowing through *kashf* from other ways of knowing, some of which are:⁹

1. Knowing through learning and studying;
2. Knowing through recollection. He assumes that truth is inherent in us. It is innate and instinctive (a part of *fiṭrah*);
3. Knowledge from revelation (*wahy*), which is given only to prophets;
4. Knowledge through thinking (*fikr*).

In his book *Mī'yār al-ʿilm*, al-Ghazālī lists some more ways of knowing:

1. Knowledge through direct use of the senses;
2. Knowledge through reasoning (intuitive or discursive: deductive, "syllogistic"). This overlaps with 2 & 4 above;
3. Knowledge through *tajrubah* (experience) i.e., water quenches thirst. It is knowledge by causal inference;
4. Knowledge by using analogical reasoning (*qiyās al-tamthīl*) which is sort of induction or causal inference. It may overlap with knowledge by experience;
5. Knowledge through enumerative induction (*al-istiqrāʿ*),

different from causal inference;

6. Knowledge through *khavar* (report, news).¹⁰

The *ṣūfī* gains knowledge through *kashf* by following a certain discipline and by self mortification.¹¹ He also gains this knowledge by renouncing this world and by leading a life of *zuhd* (asceticism), *‘uzlah* (seclusion), and by shunning negative qualities. Knowledge acquired through *kashf* cannot be gained by studying or learning. In order for a person to gain this kind of knowledge, al-Ghazālī tells us, one must sit in seclusion and must cut off relations with his family, children, community and the world, and must try to think of nothing except Allah. He should repeatedly articulate the name of Allah and then pause after some time and think of Him. In addition to this, he has to be sincere to God, he must never be influenced by his desires, and he should free his heart from all worldly concerns. When he fulfils these conditions, he can expect to have an experience of *kashf*.¹²

However, the question that needs to be answered is: how can one distinguish between inspiration (*ilhām*) from God and the insinuation of the devil (*waswās*).¹³ Al-Ghazālī seems to give two criteria for distinguishing *waswās* from *ilhām*. The first criterion is piety. The thoughts (*khawāṭir*) of a pious man are usually inspirations. The second criterion involves judging a thought to see whether it agrees with the principles of *shar‘ah* or not. If it agrees with them, it is an inspiration, if not, then it is the devil’s insinuation. It seems to me that the second criterion is more objective and more reliable than the first, for we can never, as al-Ghazālī reminds us, be sure that the thought is an inspiration and not the devil’s insinuation. A person may feel inspired and, according to the inspiration, he may feel, for example, that he ought to conduct a war in a certain way. He may therefore neglect all rational and empirical evidence. Considering that the lives of other people are affected, is such a decision legitimate? And is the knowledge on which it is based reliable? Furthermore, suppose a disagreement occurs between persons who claim to have been inspired. How could we resolve this disagreement, and how can we distinguish this type of knowledge from illusion? What precautions should we take, and how can we make use of the genuine, extraordinary abilities of individuals gifted with *kashf*. The matter needs further study.

Non-Šūfīs' Awareness of Šūfīs' *Kashf*

The most obvious way for non-šūfīs to be aware of šūfīs' *kashf*, as we have mentioned above, is by acquiring *kashf* ability. This ability is acquired by following the šūfī way. However, not all people are willing to follow it. Fortunately, it seems that there are many things that may make a person believe in the phenomenon of *kashf*. However, what al-Ghazālī said in this respect is not completely clear.¹⁴ We can explicate it in the following way:

1. A person is justified in believing that a šūfī has knowledge through *kashf* if the following conditions are fulfilled:
 - a. The šūfī tells him that he has such knowledge;
 - b. The person has confidence in the šūfī;
 - c. His confidence is justified.
2. Belief in *kashf* may also be justified if, in accompanying a šūfī, one has experiences which convince him that the šūfī possesses extraordinary knowledge—knowledge similar to what is called extra-sensory perception (ESP).¹⁵
3. Al-Ghazālī demonstrates in an argument by analogy that different circumstances may bring on different states of mind. For example, a person who is asleep can be said to be in a special mental state; when he is awake he will be in a different state of mind and hence will have a special kind of knowledge which is more vivid and clear as compared to his mental state when asleep. The Qur'ān also tells us that man will have even more vivid, clear and distinct knowledge when he dies: "Now have we removed the veil, and sharp is thy sight this day" (50:22). So, by analogy, it is possible that the šūfī may have clearer knowledge when he is in a šūfīstic mental state.¹⁶

The Need for *Kashf* and its Uses

Muslim scholars generally agree that knowledge gained through *kashf* must not include matters of faith (*ʿaqīdah*), matters of worship (*ʿibādah*) or matters of transactions (*muʿāmalāt*), that is, acts subject to religious prescriptions. It can include knowledge which may be gained by contacting somebody in another place through telepathy. A person may send to someone a useful suggestion regarding, for example, how to conduct a war. This does not justify the neglect of knowledge gained through experience, i.e., knowledge of the causes of things. We can

expect help through *kashf* only when reason and experience fail us. *Kashf* must not, as we have mentioned, add something new to the sphere of *‘aqidah*, *shar‘ah* or *‘ibadah*, because this would be *bid‘ah* (an unauthorised innovation), which is strictly forbidden in Islam.

Al-Ghazālī gives the following arguments to demonstrate the need for *kashf* and its importance:

1. *Kashf* enhances the certainty of our knowledge about God, his attributes and actions;¹⁷
2. It requires less effort to gain knowledge, as compared to knowledge acquired through learning;¹⁸
3. Since there will be no revelation after Prophet Muhammad (SAS), the main use of inspiration is to remind people from time to time of their duties and obligations.

It seems to me that these arguments are not very strong. Let us consider the second argument first. The argument seems to be inconsistent with his view on how we acquire the power of *kashf*. He says that *kashf* can only be acquired through renouncing worldly pleasures and by refraining from sensual pleasures. It should be noted that according to al-Ghazālī *kashf* happens only to a few people. If this is the case, how can the majority of people be reminded of their duties and obligations? On the other hand, there are simpler ways of achieving these objectives. People can remind each other (it is their duty that they should do so). In addition to this, Prophet Muhammad has said that God will send a person in every century who will revive religion in the lives of people.¹⁹ It seems to me that the strongest argument al-Ghazālī gives is the argument which says that *kashf* strengthens faith and provides knowledge about transcendental beings. There is also the argument which says that *kashf* may be useful in cases where all evidence from the Qur‘ān and *Sunnah* has been considered, but one still cannot make a clear decision regarding the issue in question. In such a case *kashf* may help one reach a decision. The function of *kashf* here is similar to the function of *ijtihād*.²⁰ We must be careful however not to abandon seeking scientific knowledge (i.e. knowledge through reason and experience), and it seems to me that we must rely on *kashf* only when reason and experience cannot guide us.

ECSTATIC UTTERANCES (*SHATH*)

Shath is sometimes defined as strange utterances that may apparently

contradict the *shar'ah* or reason. Some believe that the contradiction is real and not merely apparent. Al-Ghazālī was very critical of the phenomenon of *shath*. He makes a distinction between two types of *shath*.²¹ He refers to the first type as being exaggerated claims of passionate love and communion with God, claims of unitive fusion (*Ittihād*), the lifting of the veil, and of seeing and talking directly to God. Šūfīs justify these claims by saying that their claims can be understood only by those who possess an inner light.

The second type of *shath* refers to unintelligible utterances. These utterances may be unintelligible to the speaker himself, or they may be understandable to the speaker but he may not be able to make them intelligible to others. This difficulty may not be because the idea is incommunicable in itself, but because the speaker may not be competent enough to express it adequately. The criteria al-Ghazālī gives for judging *shath* utterances and the persons who utter them are as follows:

1. If somebody attributes, for example, the following statement to Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/865): "I am God and there is no God except me," the first thing we must do is to make sure whether or not this statement has actually been uttered by Abū Yazīd.²²
2. If it is uttered by him, we should then see whether or not the utterance can be interpreted in a way that makes it acceptable in the sense of being consistent with the *shar'ah* and reason. In reference to the example given above, al-Ghazālī says that Abū Yazīd may be reciting the Qur'ān.

We may note that the objections which al-Ghazālī raised against *shath* can be raised about *kashf* itself. For example, it can be said that the inability to communicate to others what is known by *kashf* may prove that such knowledge is non-existent. It is just an illusion.²³

Is mystical experience an illusion? When šūfīs talk about a world which cannot be perceived by ordinary people, that is, a world which has objects different from the objects of our ordinary world, do they talk about something real or an illusion? They claim that their world is the real world, and ours is an unreal world of shadows. They say a person can have access to this world if he follows the šūfī way of life—a life of seclusion, and self-denial. Some people might say that when šūfīs are in a state of seclusion and hunger etc., their thoughts

and feelings are suspended. They may, therefore, be in a state of illusion and not, as they claim, in a state conducive to the perception of deep reality. As a matter of fact, the world of reality for a given person is determined by his state of mind.

FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM

Šūfis are generally considered to be determinists. They believe that real *tawhīd* implies determinism. Al-Ghazālī, in his account of determinism, attempts to refute several arguments for free will, such as the arguments from responsibility, from ordinary use of language, and from agent-causation. These arguments imply that praising, blaming and punishing people is incompatible with determinism. Also, the fact that we feel that we are the creators or originators of our actions is incompatible with determinism. Let us consider what al-Ghazālī says about these matters.

Al-Ghazālī believes that human actions are preordained—determined by God. He says that human knowledge (for example, the knowledge that a certain act is beneficial) is the cause of human motives and will, which in turn, are the cause of body movements, and body movements are the cause of actions.²⁴ This chain of causes is initiated by God. God caused the knowledge, the motives, the bodily movements and the actions. He says: your good actions are gifts from God. God made you do them and He praised you for doing them and his praise is another gift from Him. He is the one who gives and the one who praises.²⁵ God has given some people beauty, made them obedient to Him and praised them, He has made others bad and ugly, blamed and punished them. In explicating this point, al-Ghazālī uses the following analogy.²⁶ A man bathes his servant, dresses him in a beautiful way and then says to him, "what a beautiful thing you are!" Similarly, God praises people, but in reality, He praises Himself because He is the one who has made them praiseworthy. You may have been described, for example, as being grateful, not because you created the act of being grateful, but because you were where the act of gratitude had taken place.

Al-Ghazālī then tries to refute (unsuccessfully, in my opinion) an objection to determinism, which is, what is the point of God asking us to do something and punishing us for not doing it if our actions are predetermined by Him? Al-Ghazālī believes that there *is* a point; this point is that our knowledge that God will punish us if we do not obey

Him, will create in us a belief that will necessarily make us fear his punishment and, therefore, make us obey Him. I believe that this is a weak argument. Several reasons can be given to show its weakness. The argument takes no consideration of the fact that people may possess the above-mentioned knowledge and still not obey God, and that this may be for reasons of weakness of the will, arrogance, obstinacy or other such reasons. The argument seems to support free will, rather than determinism, because it implies that reason may influence one's behaviour. But this does not affect the position al-Ghazālī maintains in defending determinism for, according to him, the whole chain of causation (knowledge, fear and actions) is determined by God.

Al-Ghazālī says that there are people who are led to paradise by a certain chain of causes, i.e., through knowledge, and fear which are kindled in them by God; and there are people who are led to hell by a chain of causes, i.e., inattention, negligence, and conceit, which are also enkindled in them by God. Pious people are led forcibly to paradise while the sinful are led forcibly to hell, and there is no subduer except the One, the Almighty.²⁷ The person who obeys God does so because God enkindles in him the will to obey Him and gives him the ability to do so; action necessarily follows from the existence of will and ability. Similarly, one who disobeys Him does so because God enkindles in Him the will to disobey and gives him the ability to do so. Such a person may yet believe that he is free to do whatever he likes and that the spiritual and unseen world has nothing to do with his actions.²⁸ Al-Ghazālī tells us that someone who entertains such an idea can be likened to the boy who looks at puppets and praises them for their movements. The man who makes the puppets move, stays behind the screen, outside the view of the boy who sees the puppets dance, stand and sit. The wise man understands that the puppets are moved by the man behind the screen. Similarly, people of the world are like puppets before the wise man or before those who are loved by God. They can see the thin thread that is conjoined to men of the world, but is not visible to the naked eye.²⁹

The problem of free will and determinism is a complex one. There are several arguments given for determinism. There is the argument from God's foreknowledge, which al-Ghazālī alludes to. There is the argument from God's causation which constitutes the main argument of al-Ghazālī and there are the general arguments such as the argument that actions are determined by the environment (a variation of this

argument is given by behaviourists); or that our behaviour is determined by our desires (a variation of this argument is given by psychoanalysts). There is also what is called the logical argument. Different versions of these arguments have been given by Muslim thinkers in support of determinism.³⁰

Determinism, Trust in God, and *Mujāhadah*

Al-Ghazālī considers belief in determinism to be required by *tawhīd*. *Tawhīd* implies trust in God and reliance and dependence on Him. God should be considered the only Sustainer. Al-Ghazālī believes that *tawhīd*, *tawkkal* and engagement in worship require that one should not occupy himself with seeking things that support his life. He must rely on God to provide him with what he needs by making some people serve him. According to al-Ghazālī, there is a limit to such reliance. If one did not stretch his arm to take food in order to eat, nor put it in his mouth, nor chew it when it is inside his mouth he would be insane.³¹ However, it is better for a person who is engaged in *‘ibādah* not to waste too much of his time in seeking food or other such activities.

VIRTUES AND VICES

Ethics constitute an important part of *taṣawwuf*. Some *ṣūfīs*, such as al-Ghazālī, identify *taṣawwuf* with good behaviour. A *ṣūfī* is reported to have said, "if someone is better than you in his behaviour, then he is better than you in *taṣawwuf*."³² I believe that the most useful and important contribution of *taṣawwuf* is in the field of ethics. In Islamic heritage, most of the important writings on ethics are by *ṣūfīs*. This has led some contemporary scholars to equate ethics with *taṣawwuf*. There are very few writings by jurists on the subject of ethics. By comparison, their works on *fiqh* and *‘aqīdah* are numerous. Ethical issues are discussed by jurists in books of *fiqh*.

Al-Ghazālī's approach to ethics involves studying the virtues, that is, studying man, his character and disposition rather than studying actions, their rightness or wrongness, or studying the goodness of their consequences. He begins his discussion of ethics by pointing out that human character can be changed; if animal behaviour can be changed through training, then it is reasonable to consider the behaviour of rational beings to be subject to change. If character could not change, then preaching and giving advice would be futile. Similarly, if our

behaviour could not change, *mujāhadah* would also be a waste of time. We have already mentioned that it is very difficult to reconcile this position with al-Ghazālī's stance on determinism.

Virtue

Virtue is a permanent disposition of the soul from which actions emanate, simply and easily, without thought or deliberation. If the disposition produces good and praiseworthy actions and if the actions are in accordance with reason and revelation, then the disposition is a virtue; and if it produces bad action then it is a vice.³³ Al-Ghazālī describes virtue as a disposition and not as an accomplished action because a person may be, for example, generous but may not be able to perform a generous act for lack of money.³⁴ Al-Ghazālī describes disposition as being a permanent characteristic because if an action happens to be produced accidentally, then it is not a virtue. A person who has a certain virtue, generosity for example, is likely to act generously in situations which require generosity. The probability that he will act in such a manner may reach certainty. Furthermore, al-Ghazālī tells us that virtue is not knowledge, for knowledge would be knowledge of good or bad. Knowing what is right does not automatically make one do what is right. Doing so requires struggle, effort, resisting one's desires, breaking habits and maintaining the state of righteousness. It must be pointed out that some types of actions require deliberations and calculations or might require reconciling different principles that have a bearing on our moral decisions. Al-Ghazālī's analysis does not consider the phenomena of moral dilemmas. His view of morality, as a jurist, may be different from the view he subscribes to in his capacity as a moralist.

Al-Ghazālī divides virtues into several categories:³⁵

1. Psychological virtues such as having reason (the perfection of which is knowledge), temperance, piety, courage, diligence (*mujāhadah*), justice and fairness;
2. Bodily virtues such as health, power, beauty and long life;
3. External virtues such as honour and wealth;
4. The virtue of being rightly guided.

Some of these virtues can be acquired, while others can not be acquired.³⁶ The discussion of these is beyond the scope of this work.

Mechanism of the Soul (Determinants of Action)

The mechanism of the soul³⁷ depends on four faculties: the faculty of reason, the faculty of anger (or the power of irascibility), the faculty of appetite (or the power of concupiscence) and the faculty of justice. The moral agent possesses reason or wisdom, that is, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, good and bad. The irascible power must be controlled by reason and *shari'ah*. The faculty of justice must restrain the power of anger and appetite. The power of anger and concupiscence should be moderate; when the power of anger is moderate, it is called courage and when the power of concupiscence is moderate, it is called temperance. Al-Ghazālī makes no reference in this action-determinants model (desire-reason model) to environment or education and neither does he make a clear reference to the will. However, he does make reference to these determinants of action elsewhere in his work. He makes reference to environment and education when he discusses child upbringing³⁸ and refers to the will when he discusses the concept of virtue. A virtuous action is necessarily a voluntary action. Furthermore, al-Ghazālī considers *fiṭrah* to be an important determinant of action. Man is created with a *fiṭrah* (good nature). Virtue is innate to him. The seed of virtue is implanted in him. What is needed is to nurture and take care of it. The palm tree is originally a seed and not an actual palm tree, but with nurturing it becomes a palm tree and not an apple tree.³⁹ The human soul is created incomplete but it is possible to attain perfection by *mujāhadah* (strife and struggle), purification (*tazkiyyah*), training and education (*tarbiyyah*). However, al-Ghazālī reminds us that suppressing desires completely is not possible and neither is it recommended because desires of appetite (food and sex) and of anger (self-defence) are necessary for the survival of human race.⁴⁰

Al-Ghazālī advises adults to seek self-knowledge and to seek advice from a *sheikh*, friends and even from enemies in order to improve their behaviour. Al-Ghazālī classifies people, with regard to their commitment to moral behaviour, as follows:⁴¹

1. One class of people consists of those who are inattentive, and who do not distinguish between right and wrong. They are easy to treat. They need a teacher (*murshid*) to monitor their conduct so they can be good;
2. Another class of people knows that certain actions are evil, but they cannot abstain from doing them because they cannot resist

their desires. It is difficult to change the behaviour of such people for they are not habituated to doing good actions;

3. A third category of people believes that what others call bad conduct is not really bad;
4. The fourth category takes pride in doing evil.

The first category of people are illiterate. The second are illiterate and misguided; the third, illiterate, misguided and sinful; and the fourth, illiterate, misguided, sinful and evil.

‘UZLAH (SECLUSION)

Al-Ghazālī notes that there are differences of opinion regarding living in seclusion and living in society.⁴² He points out that the opinion as to whether seclusion is good or bad varies with the circumstances of every person. It is good for some people and bad for others. According to al-Ghazālī, the benefits of seclusion are that:

1. One can get sufficient leisure for worship, contemplation and learning;⁴³
2. Man can avoid committing certain sins. These sins include:⁴⁴
 - i) back-biting;⁴⁵
 - ii) refraining from enjoining good deeds and from prohibiting bad deeds;⁴⁶
 - iii) doing good deeds for the purpose for showing off;
 - iv) entertaining bad conduct and evil deeds;
 - v) imitating bad conduct;
 - vi) quarrelling, disputing and indulging in useless talk;
 - vii) allowing someone to be harmed by other people.⁴⁷

Then al-Ghazālī mentions the benefits of being in society and in the company of other people:

1. By mixing with people one can teach as well as learn;
2. Mixing with other people gives a person the opportunity to do good for them and receive good from them;
3. By mixing in society man can learn the quality of patience through enduring harms and injuries inflicted upon him;
4. Social life can give one the opportunity to love and to be loved;
5. Certain virtues cannot be realized except in society, for the

latter provides opportunity for the person to realize these virtues towards others and, at the same time, enables others to realize such virtues towards him;

6. Seclusion has the disadvantage of depriving a person from realizing the virtue of humbleness;
7. Social life gives a person the opportunity to gain experience from life.

So, to mix with people or to be in solitude depends, according to al-Ghazālī, on the circumstances of a person. But mixing with people is the way of the Prophet and his companions, and it is good if one can avoid sedition (*fitnah*). However, a person must also have leisure time for worship and learning.

STATES AND STATIONS

Asceticism (*Zuhd*)

Al-Ghazālī says that asceticism or renunciation means turning away from a thing in order to attain something higher.⁴⁸ What is renounced must be desirable in one way or another. A person cannot be considered to have renounced something which is generally undesirable.⁴⁹ The real *zāhid* is the one who desires and loves nothing but God (that is, he desires to see Him and be in His company).⁵⁰ He does not desire anything in this world, be it wealth, honour, knowledge, wives or children; he does not even desire the pleasures of paradise.

Al-Ghazālī says that there are degrees of *zuhd* (renunciation).⁵¹

1. *Zuhd* of the first degree involves renouncing something which one desires greatly. But when one renounces it, one feels that he has renounced something of importance (some people enjoy the idea of being called *zāhid*).
2. *Zuhd* of the second degree involves renouncing something and thereafter feeling that one has not renounced something of importance.

According to al-Ghazālī, there are four kinds of *zuhd*:⁵²

1. To renounce what is forbidden (which is obligatory);
2. To renounce things that are doubtful, i.e., it is not certain whether they are permitted or not;
3. To renounce what is permitted;

4. To renounce everything that distracts one from God, i.e., to turn away from everything other than God.

One can however, question whether or not it is possible to turn away from everything other than God? Is it possible to abandon eating and drinking and mixing with or talking to other people? Survival is necessary for being able to renounce the world, turn to God, perform *dhikr* and worship. One cannot survive without eating and drinking. Al-Ghazālī says we should not eat or drink to get pleasure, but in order to have strength to perform *‘ibādah*. Here I have just given an exposition of al-Ghazālī's views on *zuhd* without critical examination of those views. In an earlier work these concepts have been critically analysed.⁵³

Intention and Sincerity

Al-Ghazālī regards "intention" and "will" as having the same meaning. He loosely defines "will" as the movement of the heart towards that which it considers to be in accordance with its aim at present or in the future.⁵⁴ He says it is not enough for someone to know that something is in accordance with his aim in order that he may realize it or do it; he must have a desire that motivates him to do so. The ill person, for example, may see food and know that it is agreeable or useful, but he may not eat it because he may not have the desire or the motivation to do so.⁵⁵ The (necessary and sufficient) conditions for an intention or a will to be realized are:

1. The object of intention should be agreeable and useful;
2. The agent should have a desire for the object;
3. The agent should have the ability to realize the object;
4. The agent must not have a contrary desire.⁵⁶

In considering the value of an intention and an action, al-Ghazālī says that an action may have a single motive or two motives (which may motivate the action jointly or independently).⁵⁷ Good intention without action has value, and both action and the good intention to do it have a value when they occur together.⁵⁸ An action alone has no value because it may be done by an absent-minded person or a person who wants to show off. Bad deeds cannot be good if they are done with a good intention. If a man steals to feed the poor or to build a mosque his good intention will not make such actions good.⁵⁹ On the other hand, good deeds become bad if done with a bad intention, such as the

desire to show off. If a permitted act is done for the sake of God, it has moral worth and will be rewarded.⁶⁰

A person, al-Ghazālī tells us, may fast to improve health, or he may go for pilgrimage to escape an enemy or to avoid some evil or he may visit an ill person in order that he may be visited when he is ill.⁶¹ These motives make an action easier.⁶²

Al-Ghazālī thinks that every person is impelled by certain motives, whether the motive is to get a reward in this world or in the hereafter. Being not motivated by anything at all is a divine attribute.⁶³ Al-Ghazālī raises questions about the status of an action which is done from mixed motives, that is, from a motive to get worldly reward and, at the same time, seek the pleasure of Allah.⁶⁴ Will such an action be rewarded by Allah or will He punish its doer? Or will it be neither punished nor rewarded by Allah? Al-Ghazālī thinks that actions must be classified into three categories and then assessed accordingly. The first category of actions includes those performed from the motive of *riyā'* (showing off). This kind of action is hated by God and He will punish its doer. The second type of action is done for the sake of Allah. This type of action will be rewarded by Him. The third is done from mixed motives. In this case, we must look at the strength of each motive; if the religious motive is stronger, then it will be rewarded; if the motive of *riyā'* or worldly gain is stronger, then its doer will be punished; if the motives are equal, then the person will be neither punished nor rewarded.⁶⁵

Love

Al-Ghazālī says that love is the ultimate station that the *ṣūfī* tries to reach.⁶⁶ Man naturally tends to love pleasurable things.⁶⁷ The first object of man's love is himself; he may love others for the sake of himself. The second object of his love are his children and then his relatives and friends. He loves them because he sees them as an extension of his existence and because they give him strength.⁶⁸ Man loves the person who does him good.⁶⁹ Therefore, the first thing man should love is God because He is the cause of his existence.⁷⁰

Al-Ghazālī quotes a *ṣūfī* as saying, "I don't worship You because I fear your hell or desire your paradise, I worship You because I love You and respect You and because You are worthy of love."⁷¹

According to al-Ghazālī, the child in his early years finds pleasure in play and when he gets older, he finds pleasure in sex and, as a

result, despises the pleasure he used to get from playing; when he gets even older, he finds pleasure in dominance and leadership. Those who experience the pleasure of knowing God prefer it to everything—even to the pleasure of paradise. Seeing God in the hereafter is the most pleasurable thing man can attain.

Contentment (*ridā*)

Ridā is a state of contentment or satisfaction with one's lot, with misfortune and tribulation. Some people say we can never be satisfied with something which is a misfortune, a tribulation or something which conflicts with our desires. We can endure misfortune or pain and accept it patiently, but we can never be contented or satisfied with it. It is paradoxical to say that *x* is satisfied with what one does not like. But al-Ghazālī does not consider the concept of *ridā* to be paradoxical. He explains what seems to be paradoxical about the concept by saying that there are two senses of the word *ridā*.

First, the person who is in a state of *ridā* may not feel pain when something painful befalls him. He is like a warrior who is wounded in a battle and does not feel the pain of his wound while fighting, or like the women who unconsciously cut their hands when they saw Prophet Yusuf (AS).

Second, *ridā* may be likened to the case of a person who feels pain but still desires and wants it and is satisfied with it although he may naturally dislike it. An example of this is when a person endures the pain resulting from cutting his leg in order to save his life. If we consider a tribulation or test as something painful and undesirable, then we can only be contented with it if it leads to consequences that offset the pain and the undesirability of the experience. The wounded warrior and the women who cut their hands never experienced pain. A test or tribulation is meant to be painful for if the experience is not painful, it is not a test. However, something which is painful to many people may not be painful to certain people. It is because of this that Prophet Muhammed said that persons who are subjected to the most difficult tests in life are prophets, followed by those who are next in status, and then by those who are lower in rank (but still of a high status). It is natural that one should desire to be relieved from distress and misfortune. Prophet Muhammad himself asked God on many occasions to relieve him of distress and pain and to protect him from illness, poverty, etc. Prophet Muhammad also says that a believer should ask God not to test him (for he may not be able to pass the test).

However, al-Ghazālī reports a ṣūfī as saying, "I love everything that God loves. If God loves that I should enter hell, I would be glad to do so."

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have tried to show that the world of the ṣūfī is possible and may be accessible, and that the paradigm of *taṣawwuf* is not completely different from the scientific paradigm (some empirical tools can be used to verify some of its claims). However, it is not appropriate to use the methodology of physical sciences to assess the truth of all propositions of the ṣūfī paradigm. According to Roger Trigg, "...It may be irrational to go against the findings of science but it does not seem to be rational to be restricted by its limitations."⁷²

On the other hand, we can use methods for investigating mystical phenomena similar to what is known as qualitative methods (besides a limited use of quantitative methods). Using qualitative methods means getting close to the data and trying to describe ṣūfī reality from the perspective of the ṣūfī. This ultimately means adopting the ṣūfī way of life. The problem with this suggestion, as we have mentioned previously, is that the researcher may not be willing to do so. Furthermore, in becoming part of the ṣūfī world he may lose his objectivity. His research results may, therefore, not be of use to other non-ṣūfī persons because of the problems of communication that initially impelled him to become part of the ṣūfī world.

Notes

1. Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (450/1058—505/1111), an eminent theologian, an outstanding *faqīh*, and a profound critic of Greek philosophy, was born in Tūs, Iran, studied at Nishāpūr, taught and wrote at the Nizāmīyah College, Baghdad, and eventually turned to ṣūfism and interpreted Islam and ṣūfism so as to bring them together. His major works include *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*, and *Mizān al-'amal*. For further details see M. 'Umaruddīn, *The Ethical Philosophy of al-Ghazzālī*, (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1988).

2. For a more detailed discussion of al-Ghazālī's theory of knowledge, see A.H. Zaroug, "Nazariyyat al-ma'rifah 'inda al-Ghazālī," *al-Muslim al-Mu'āsir* 48 (1987): 27-51.

3. Abu Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (Beruit: Dār al-Ma'rifah, n.d.)

- 1: 19-20.
4. Ibid., 19.
5. Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl* (Beruit: Dār al-Andalus, 1981), 140-141.
6. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 3:25.
7. For a more detailed discussion of the possibility of *kashf*, see Abdullahi Hassan Zaroug, *Qadāya al-tasawwuf al-Islāmī* (Khartoum: Dār al-Fikr, 1985).
8. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 3:19-20
9. *Majmu'at rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, vol.3, *al-Risālah alladuniyyah*, ed. Ahmed Shams al-Dīn (Beruit: Dār al-Kutub, 1988) 102
10. Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mī'yār al-'ilm* (Beruit: Dār al-Andalus, 1990).
11. Ibid., 20, al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 30.
12. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 3:19.
13. Ibid., 3:26-41.
14. al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh*, 142.

15. Some examples of ESP are telepathy, clairvoyance and pre-cognition. This type of knowledge is accepted as true in the discipline of parapsychology. In scientific circles, however, such phenomena are considered to be outside the purview of scientific inquiry or verification. The situation has changed recently. It may be pointed out that if an inquiry is made about the abilities of psychics and if the results of these inquiries are made public, then the power of their performance tends to decrease. The same happens if their behaviour is examined or criticized. It is also possible that subjecting paranormal phenomena to experimentation and observation may affect the results of the experiment. In addition to this, these phenomena are very rare. They cannot be repeated at will, and they may appear only at certain times in history or only in certain communities (primitive communities, for example).

Knowledge gained through ESP cannot be fortuitous; extra-sensory abilities, which may be inherited, are universal phenomena. The Prophet Muhammad said that these abilities are universal and were to be found even in communities before Islam. He said, "Among the nations before you there used to be people who were inspired (though they were not prophets) and if there is any such person amongst my followers, it is 'Umar" (*Saḥīḥ al-Bokharī*, "Kitāb faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba"). For more details regarding recent work in this area, see C.E.M. Hansel, *E.S.P. and Parapsychology* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1980), and Arthur Koestler, *The Roots of Coincidence*, (London: Pan Books, 1974).

16. Al-Ghazālī supplied other arguments using analogies in a chapter entitled: "On the Wonders of the Heart." However arguments by analogy are usually

considered to be weak. Their function is not to prove the claim in question but to stretch the imagination, and to give a clearer and more lively picture of the issue under discussion. See al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 3:20-23.

17. Ibid., 1:20.

18. *Majmū'āt rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, vol.3, *al-Risālah al-laduniyyah*, 107

19. *Sunan Abū Dā'wūd*, "Kitab al-malāḥim."

20. Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'ah* (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1986), 79-80.

21. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 1:36.

22. Ibid.

23. For more elaborate criteria for evaluating such utterances see A.H. Zaroug, *Manhajīyya li-dīrāsāt al-taṣwwuf* (Khartum: Omdurman University Press, 1983), 43-47.

24. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 4:89.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., 96.

27. Ibid., 89.

28. Ibid., 159.

29. Ibid., 98.

30. For a more detailed discussion of this problem, see A.H. Zaroug, "Mushkilāt al-jabr wa al-ikhtiyār fī tarikh al-fikr al-Islāmī," *Ādāb* 5 (1983):14-25. .

31. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 4:267.

32. Ibid., 3:52.

33. Ibid., 3:55.

34. Ibid., 53-54.

35. Ibid., 54.

36. al-Ghazālī, *Mizān al-'amal*, 97.

37. Ibid., 97-102.

38. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 3:54.

39. Ibid., 3:71-78.

40. Ibid., 56.

41. Ibid., 71.

42. Ibid., 2:222-226.

43. Ibid., 2:227.

44. *Ibid.*, 2:228-233.
45. *Ibid.*, 2:228.
46. *Ibid.*, 2:228.
47. *Ibid.*, 2:232.
48. *Ibid.*, 4:216.
49. *Ibid.*, 217.
50. *Ibid.*, 217.
51. *Ibid.*, 225.
52. *Ibid.*, p.229.
53. Abdullahi Hassan Zaroug, *Qaḍayā al-taṣawwuf al-Islāmī* (Khartoum: Dār al-Fikr, 1985).
54. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 4:365.
55. *Ibid.*, 4:365.
56. *Ibid.*, 4:365.
57. *Ibid.*, 4:365.
58. *Ibid.*, 4:366.
59. *Ibid.*, 4:368.
60. *Ibid.*, 4:376.
61. *Ibid.*, 4:379.
62. *Ibid.*, 4:380.
63. *Ibid.*, 4:380.
64. *Ibid.*, 4:384.
65. *Ibid.*, 4:384.
66. *Ibid.*, 4:294.
67. *Ibid.*, 4:296.
68. *Ibid.*, 4:297.
69. *Ibid.*, 4:300.
70. *Ibid.*, 4:301.
71. *Ibid.*, 4:306.
72. Roger Trigg, *Understanding Social Science* (London: Blackwell, 1993), 91.