

Al-Ghazālī's Classifications of the Sciences and Descriptions of the Highest Theoretical Science*

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Abstract

The present study offers a comprehensive survey of al-Ghazālī's classifications of the sciences and descriptions of the highest theoretical science, called the "science of un-

* Works by al-Ghazālī are abbreviated as follows: *Arba'īn* = *Kitāb al-Arba'īn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. 'A.'A. 'Urwānī and M.B. al-Shaqfa, Dār al-qalam, Damascus 1424/2003; *Fayṣal* = *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-islām wa-l-zandaqa*, ed. Maḥmūd Bījū, Damascus 1993/1413; *Iḥyā'* = *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 5 vols., al-Maktaba al-tawfiqiyya, Cairo n.d.; *Iljām* = *Iljām al-'awāmm 'an 'ilm al-kalām*, in: *Majmū'at Rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, ed. Ibrāhīm Amin Muḥammad, al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, Cairo n.d., pp. 319-355; *Imlā'* = *al-Imlā' fī ishkālāt al-Iḥyā'*, appended to *Iḥyā'*, V:282-326; *Iqtīṣād* = *al-Iqtīṣād fī al-i'tiqād*, ed. I.A. Çubukçu and H. Atay, Ankara 1962; *Jawāhir* = *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, ed. Rashīd Riḍā al-Qabbānī, Dār iḥyā' al-'ulūm, Beirut 1411/1990; *Kīmiyā* = *Kīmiyā-ye sa'adat*, ed. Ḥoseyn Khadiv Jam, 2 vols., Sherkat-e Enteshārāt-e 'elmī va farhangī, Tehran 1383sh/2004; *Ladunīya* = *al-Risāla al-Ladunīya*, Marāgha MS, facsimile edition in: Nasrollah Pourjavady, *Majmū'e-ye falsafī-ye Marāghe*, Markaz-e Nashr-e dāneshgāhī, Tehran 1380sh/2001, pp. 100-120; *Makātīb* = *Makātīb-e fārsī-ye Ghazzālī be-nām-e Faḍā'il al-anām min rasā'il Ḥujjat al-islām*, ed. 'Abbās Eqbāl, Tehran 1333sh/1954; *Maqāṣid* = *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, ed. M.Ş. al-Kurdī, Cairo 1355/1936; *Maqṣad* = *al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma'ānī asmā' Allāh al-Ḥusnā*, ed. F.A. Shehadi, Beirut 1971; *Mishkāt* = al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, ed. and tr. D. Buchman, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, UT 1998; *Mi'yār* = *Manṭiq Tahāfut al-falāsifa al-musammā Mi'yār al-'ilm*, ed. S. Dunyā, Dār al-ma'ārif, Cairo 1961; *Mizān* = *Mizān al-'amal*, ed. S. Dunyā, Cairo 1964; *Munqidh* = *al-Munqidh min* ↔

veiling” in the *Revival of the Religious Sciences* and the “science of the cognition of God” in the *Jewels of the Qur’an*. The study shows that this theoretical science includes four major components, dealing with (1) God, (2) cosmology, (3) prophetology, angelology, and religious psychology, and (4) eschatology (with a fifth component, principles of Qur’anic exegesis, sometimes added to the list). Al-Ghazālī’s “science of unveiling” is, therefore, primarily a theological discipline. It is, however, superior to *kalām* in that it does not result from ratiocination, but is revealed through Divine Illumination to prophets and “saints” (*awliyā*) who have purified their hearts with ascetic practice. Another key difference between the science of unveiling and *kalām*, according to al-Ghazālī, is that the former operates on the level of True Knowledge, whereas the latter only defends the common folk’s beliefs from the onslaught of heresies, without providing access to True Knowledge. Since the science of unveiling has a pronounced Avicennian component (more fully documented in the author’s other studies), it is a kind of Avicennian-based esoteric theology. Finally, al-Ghazālī’s classifications of the sciences offer a number of interesting insights into the general structure of al-Ghazālī’s thought, also discussed in the present study.

Key Words: Al-Ghazālī, Avicenna, Classifications of the sciences, Science of unveiling, Mystical knowledge.

AL-GHAZĀLĪ’S CONSTANT PREOCCUPATION with classification of the sciences (he has no fewer than seven different classifications in his authentic works!) reflects his deep engagement with the phil-

al-ḍalāl, ed. J. Ṣalībā and K. ‘Ayyād, Beirut 71967 [the paragraph numbers follow R.J. McCarthy’s translation of the text in his *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of al-Ghazālī’s al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazālī*, Twayne Publishers, Boston 1980]; *Tahāfut = Incoherence of the Philosophers / Tahāfut al-falāsifa: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, ed. and tr. M. Marmura, Brigham Young University Press, Provo, UT 2000; *Mustaṣfā = al-Mustaṣfā min ‘ilm al-uṣūl*, ed. M.S. al-Ashqar, 2 vols., Mu’assasat al-Risāla, Beirut 1417/1997; *Qānūn = Qānūn al-ta’wīl*, ed. Maḥmūd Bijū, Damascus 1413/1992. References to chapters and subdivisions of each work are provided where possible. All translations used in this study are my own. An attempt has been made to make this survey as complete and comprehensive as possible, covering all the major discussions of the subject in al-Ghazālī’s corpus. (The division of the sciences in *Faḍā’ih al-Bāḥinīya*, ch. 6 will not be discussed, however, since it does not present a highest theoretical science.)

osophical tradition (*falsafa*), in which this theme originated and developed.¹ In addition, it is a powerful indication of al-Ghazālī's repeated attempts to redraw the map of the sciences in order to make room for his new sciences, the "sciences of the hereafter," at the expense of the traditional religious sciences, notably *fiqh* and *kalām*. We shall see several telling examples of such redrawing in the following pages.

1. Al-Ghazālī's Classifications of the Sciences

1.1. *Maqāsid al-falāsifa*

In order to have a convenient point of departure let us begin with al-Ghazālī's classification of the sciences in his philosophical ex-

1 Nearly all classifications of the sciences that we have in Arabic before al-Ghazālī originate from or are inspired by *falsafa*. See, e.g., al-Kindī's *Risāla fī Kammiyat kutub Aristūṭālīs*, al-Fārābī's *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*, Avicenna's *Aqṣām al-'ulūm*, al-Khwārizmī's *Mafātīḥ al-'ulūm*, and Ikhwān al-ṣafā', *Rasā'il, risāla* 1.7 [7], *Faṣl fī Ajnās al-'ulūm*; for some translations of primary texts see Franz Rosenthal, *Classical Heritage in Islam*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1975, pp. 54ff. For a discussion of the subject generally and in particular authors see Christel Hein, *Definition und Einteilung: Von der spätantiken Einleitungsliteratur zur arabischen Enzyklopädie*, Frankfurt am Main 1985; Louis Gardet and M.M. Anawati, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane: essai de théologie comparée*, J. Vrin, Paris 1948, pp. 94-124; Osman Bakar, *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study in Islamic Philosophies of Science*, Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge 1998; Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works*, Leiden and New York 1988, pp. 149ff.; Michael Marmura, "Avicenna and the Division of Sciences in the *Isagogè* of His *Shifā'*," *Journal for the History of Arabic Science*, 4 (1980): 239-251 [repr. in Michael Marmura, *Probing in Islamic Philosophy: Studies in the Philosophies of Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī and Other Major Muslim Thinkers*, Binghamton 2005, pp. 1-15]; Miklós Maróth, "Das System der Wissenschaften bei Ibn Sīnā," in: B. Brentjes (ed.), *Avicenna / Ibn Sina (980-1036)*, Halle 1980, vol. 2, pp. 27-32; Hans Daiber, "Qosta ibn Luqa (9. Jh.) über die Einteilung der Wissenschaften," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften*, 6 (1990): 93-129. On the classifications of the sciences in al-Ghazālī see Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, Magnes, Jerusalem 1975, pp. 357ff.; Avner Gil'adi, *The Educational Thought of al-Ghazzālī* [in Hebrew], Ph.D. Dissertation, Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1983, ch. 4, pp. 107-160; Richard M. Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School*, Durham and London 1994, pp. 8-9, 22-27; Che Zarrina Sa'ari, "Classification of Sciences: A Comparative Study of *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* and *al-Risālah al-laduniyyah*," *Intellectual Discourse*, 7.1 (1999): 53-77 (not seen).

posé *Intentions of the Philosophers* (*Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*), based chiefly on Avicenna's Persian *Book of Knowledge for 'Alā' al-Dawla* (*Dānešnāme-ye 'Alā'ī*).² This will allow us to examine the ways in which al-Ghazālī's own classifications of the sciences – in the treatises in which he speaks in his own voice – differ from the Avicennian classification presented in the *Maqāṣid*.

In the *Maqāṣid*, in complete conformity with the philosophical tradition, al-Ghazālī divides philosophy (*al-'ilm al-ḥikmī*, Avicenna's *'elmhā-ye* [pl.] *ḥekmat*) into two main branches: practical (*'amalī*) and theoretical (*naẓarī*). The practical branch is that which deals with “the states of our actions.” It provides instruction on the kinds³ of actions that lead to welfare (*maṣāliḥ*) in this world and promise salvation in the hereafter. It is divided into three sciences: the science of governing the community (*al-'ilm bi-tadbīr al-mushāraka allatī li-l-insān ma'a l-nās kāffatan*), the science of governing the household (*'ilm tadbīr al-manzil*), and the science of morals (*'ilm al-akhlāq*), i.e. the Aristotelian politics, oeconomics, and ethics respectively.

The theoretical branch, by contrast, deals with “the states of beings.” Its purpose is to make “the configuration of the universe in its hierarchical arrangement” (*ḥay'at al-wujūd kullihī 'alā tartībihī*) impressed on our souls the way a visible image is impressed in a mirror, making the soul virtuous in this world and entitled to felicity in the next. The theoretical branch too is divided into three sciences: “divine science” or first philosophy (*al-ilāhī wa-l-falsafa al-ūlā*), mathematical science, and natural science, i.e. the Aristotelian metaphysics, mathematics, and physics respectively.

The highest theoretical science is the “divine science” or metaphysics. It is described in the following terms:

[T1] The subject matter (*mawḍū'*) of the divine science is the most general of matters, [namely] being in the absolute [sense] (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*, Avicenna's *ḥastī-ye moṭlaq*), and its goal[s] (*maṭlūb*) are the essential concomitants of being insofar as it is being without [further qualification] (*lawāḥiq al-wujūd li-dhātihī min ḥaythu innahū wujūd*

2 *Maqāṣid*, Metaph., *muqaddima* 1, pp. 3ff.; cf. Avicenna, *Dānešnāme-ye 'alā'ī*, 3 vols., ed. M. Mo'in, Tehran 1952, Metaph., Ch. 1, pp. 1ff. (cf. French tr. Mohammad Achena and Henri Massé (trs.), *Le livre de science*, 2 vols., Paris 1955-1958, vol. 1, pp. 89ff.).

3 Reading *wujūh* for *wujūd*, as in Dunyā's edition.

faqaṭ), e.g. whether it is substance or accident, universal or particular, one or many, cause or effect, in potentiality or in actuality, similar or dissimilar, necessary or contingent, and the like. ... This science also includes an inquiry into the Cause of the entire existence ..., the oneness of this Cause and Its being necessary of existence (*wājib al-wujūd*), Its attributes, the other existents' dependence on (*ta'alluq*, Avicenna's *peyvand*) and derivation from It. The inquiry into the oneness [of the Cause] (*al-naẓar fī l-tawḥīd*) is that part of this science which is more properly called "divine science" (*al-'ilm al-ilāhī*); it is also called theology (lit. the "science of lordship," *'ilm al-rubūbiya*).⁴

This is the standard Avicennian definition of metaphysics that appears not only in the Persian *Dāneshnāme* – which al-Ghazālī is following here rather closely – but also in Avicenna's Arabic works, notably the *Ilāhīyāt* of the *Book of Cure* (*Kitāb al-Shifā*). Al-Ghazālī's terminology betrays, incidentally, that he used the *Ilāhīyāt* (or some other Arabic work of Avicenna) in addition to the *Dāneshnāme*, since the *Dāneshnāme* does not use the term *maṭlūb* in this context.

Despite the close connection between al-Ghazālī's *Maqāṣid* and Avicenna's *Dāneshnāme*, al-Ghazālī introduced several significant changes into Avicenna's description. Though Avicenna does mention the soteriological significance of knowledge, both the mirror image and the expression "the configuration of the universe in its hierarchical arrangement" are al-Ghazālī's elaborations⁵ (even if the mirror image admittedly appears elsewhere in Avicenna). A parallel case occurs in the logical section of the *Maqāṣid*, where, too, the mirror analogy and the phrase "the universe in its hier-

4 *Maqāṣid*, Metaph., *muqaddima* 2, pp. 6:15-7:10; cf. Avicenna, *Dāneshnāme*, Metaph., Ch. 2, pp. 6:8-8:10.

5 In the *Dāneshnāme* the text reads: "The second [branch] is that which gives us knowledge about the existence of things (*ḥastī-ye cīzhā*) so that our soul may attain its own image and be happy in the world [to come]" (*Dāneshnāme*, Metaph., p. 2:3-4; cf. French tr., vol. 1, p. 89). However, this text seems corrupt, for "so that our soul may attain its own image" (*tā jān-e mā šūrat-e kh^wīsh beyābad*) does not make good sense and furthermore is unlikely to have been al-Ghazālī's *Vorlage*: in al-Ghazālī's *Vorlage* the word *šūrat* most likely referred to the forms of existents. We can thus postulate a lacuna: *tā jān-e mā šūrat-e <...> kh^wīsh beyābad*, which can perhaps be filled as *tā jān-e mā šūrat-e <cīzhā rā andar> kh^wīsh beyābad*, "so that our soul may attain the form of [these] things [? or some other expression] in itself." The lacuna may be due to haplography, since the *-rat* of *šūrat* and the *-dar* of *andar* may look similar in manuscripts.

archical arrangement” (*al-wujūd kulluhū ‘alā tartībihī*), absent in Avicenna, were introduced by al-Ghazālī.⁶

This addition is significant, for al-Ghazālī frequently uses the mirror image as the connecting link between his two sciences of the hereafter – the science of practice and the science of unveiling (on which more below): the practice purifies the heart making it like a polished mirror in which divine realities are then disclosed.⁷ This indicates that al-Ghazālī envisions the same relation between practical and theoretical philosophy as between his own two sciences, making it likely that the latter are modeled upon the former.

1.2. *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn, Book 1 (Kitāb al-‘Ilm)*

We can now move to al-Ghazālī’s own classifications of the sciences, beginning with the most elaborate among them, the classification presented in Book 1 (*Kitāb al-‘Ilm*) of the *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn (Revival of the Religious Sciences)*.⁸ There, al-Ghazālī divides all the sciences incumbent on the community as a whole (*farḍ kifāya*) in two classes: religious (*shar‘īya*) and non-religious (*ghayr shar‘īya*). Non-religious sciences are further divided into praiseworthy (e.g. medicine and arithmetic), blameworthy (magic, science of the talismans, science of trickery and deception), and permissible (poetry and history).

Religious sciences, defined as those “learned from the prophets,” are divided into four categories: sources (*uṣūl*), branches (*furū’*), preliminaries (*muqaddimāt*),⁹ and supplements (*mutammimāt*).¹⁰

6 *Maqāṣid*, Logic, pp. 6:12-7:9; cf. *Dāneshnāme*, Logic, §1 (cf. French tr., vol. 1, p. 25).

7 See my forthcoming monograph *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazālī’s Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation*, Routledge, London 2011, Ch. 1, section on “the Mirror Analogy.”

8 *Iḥyā’*, Book 1, *bāb 2, bayān 2*, I:32ff. A virtually identical classification is presented in the treatise *Fātiḥat al-‘ulūm* ascribed to al-Ghazālī, *bāb 4 (fī aqsām al-‘ulūm)*. The treatise is essentially a reworking of Book 1 of the *Iḥyā’*. See Maurice Bouyges, *Essai de chronologie des œuvres de al-Ghazālī (Algazel)*, Imprimerie Catholique, Beirut 1959, pp. 126-127, No. 195 and M. Asín Palacios, “Un compendio musulmán de pedagogía: El libro de la introducción a las ciencias de Algazel,” *Universidad*, 1 (1924): 3-19.

9 E.g. philology and grammar.

10 The supplements are either to Qur’ānic sciences (sciences of the Qur’ānic readings, *tafsīr*, abrogating and abrogated verses, etc.) or to the sciences of Ḥadīth (e.g. the science of ḥadīth transmitters). *Uṣūl al-fiqh* covers both Qur’ānic sciences and the Sunna.

The sources listed by al-Ghazālī are the Qur'ān, the Sunna, consensus of the community (*ijmā'*), and traditions of the Prophet's companions (*āthār al-ṣaḥāba*). The "branches" are deduced from these sources through exegesis involving reason (*'uqūl*).¹¹

The branches are subdivided into the science of this world (*'ilm al-dunyā*) – which al-Ghazālī identifies with jurisprudence (*fiqh*)¹² – and the science of the path to the hereafter (*'ilm ṭarīq al-ākhirā*). *'ilm ṭarīq al-ākhirā* is then subdivided into a theoretical and a practical part, called the science of unveiling (*'ilm al-mukāshafa*) and the science of practice (*'ilm al-mu'āmala*) respectively. The science of unveiling is defined as follows.

[T2] The science of unveiling [is] the science of the hidden (*'ilm al-bāṭin*), which is the apex of the sciences (*ghāyat al-'ulūm*). ... This is the knowledge of the righteous (*al-ṣiddīqīn*) and the privileged (*al-muqarrabīn*).¹³ ... [The term "unveiling"] refers to a light that appears in the heart when it is cleansed and purified of its reprehensible qualities; many matters are disclosed (*yankashifu*) through this light ... to the point that one achieves:

- (1) True cognition (*al-ma'rifa al-ḥaqīqīya*) of the essence (*dhāt*) of God, His enduring and perfect attributes, and His acts;
- (2) His judgment in creating this world and the afterlife and the way in which He arranged the afterlife in relation to (*'alā*) this world;
- (3) The cognition of the meaning of¹⁴ prophecy and prophet, revelation (*waḥy*), Satan, the term[s] "angels" and "demons," the manner in which demons assault man, the manner in which angel[s] appear to prophets and revelation reaches them; the cognition of the kingdom of

11 *Iḥyā'*, Book 1, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 2, I:33:1-2.

12 The question as to why *fiqh* is called the science of this world is discussed at length in *Iḥyā'*, Book 1, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 2, I:34:1-37:5.

13 The terms *ṣiddīqūn* and *muqarrabūn* are important for al-Ghazālī. In Book 35 of the *Iḥyā'*, the fourth and third levels of *tawḥīd* respectively are assigned to these groups. On *ṣiddīqūn* see *Mishkāt*, Part 1, §62, p. 23:5-6; *Maqṣad*, p. 139:17-18; and esp. the discussion of Abū Bakr "al-ṣiddīq" in *Iḥyā'*, Book 1, *bāb* 5, [*bayān* 1], *waz'ifa* 6 of the student, I:83:2ff. and *Imlā'*, V:309:3-4. It is noteworthy that the term *ṣiddīqūn* is used by Avicenna as well: he calls the ontological proof for the existence of God "*burhān al-ṣiddīqīn*" – see Hermann Landolt, "Ghazālī and 'Religionswissenschaft': Some Notes on the *Mishkāt al-Anwār* for Professor Charles J. Adams," *Études Asiatiques*, 45.1 (1991): 19-72, at p. 51 and n. 125; Toby Mayer, "Avicenna's *Burhān al-ṣiddīqīn*," *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 12 (2001): 18-39.

14 The expression "the meaning of," repeated throughout the following list, will be omitted in translation.

the heavens and the earth (*malakūt al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*);¹⁵ the cognition of the heart and the manner in which hosts of angels and demons clash there; the cognition of the difference between an angel's visit and a demon's visit;¹⁶

(4) The cognition of the afterlife, paradise, hell, the punishment in the grave, the bridge [spread over hell], the balance, and the judgment, ... encountering God and beholding His gracious face, being close to Him and dwelling in His proximity (*al-nuzūl fī jiwārihi*), attaining felicity (*ḥuṣūl al-sa'āda*) through the companionship of the highest assembly (*al-mala' al-a'lā*)¹⁷ and the association with angels and prophets, the variation in ranks of the inhabitants of paradise; ... and other things the explication of which would take too long. ...

By the science of unveiling we mean the lifting of the veil to the point that the plain truth in these matters becomes apparent as [in the case of] eyewitnessing (*'iyān*), which is never in doubt.¹⁸

Thus, the science of unveiling covers four broad areas (indicated by paragraph numbers in the quotation above): (1) God, (2) Cosmology, (3) Prophetology, Angelology, and Religious Psychology, and (4) Eschatology.¹⁹

Significantly, following this classification, al-Ghazālī addresses the question of why philosophy (*falsafa*) is excluded from this classification of the sciences. His answer is, first, that *falsafa*, is not one discipline but four: geometry and arithmetic, logic, metaphysics (*ilāhīyāt*), and physics. Geometry and arithmetic, al-Ghazālī argues further, have been included in the above classification as permissible non-religious sciences.²⁰ Logic, according to al-Ghazālī,

15 The term is taken from Q. 6:75 often discussed by al-Ghazālī. It may refer to the angelic hosts.

16 On *lammat al-malak* and *lammat al-shayṭān* (based on a ḥadīth found in al-Tirmidhī's ḥadīth collection) see *Jawāhir*, Part 1, ch. 6, pp. 49-50 and *Fayṣal*, ch. 5, p. 44 (in both cases, in connection with the ḥadīth "The heart of the believer is between two of the fingers of the Merciful").

17 This is a Qur'ānic expression denoting the angelic realm (Q. 37:8, 38:69).

18 *lhyā'*, Book 1, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 2, I:37:8-38:10. I am borrowing this translation from Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, Ch. 2.

19 The cosmological division is not very obvious in this quotation, but is spelled out in other descriptions of the science of unveiling. Sometimes a fifth area, principles of Qur'ān interpretation, is added.

20 This is not entirely accurate, as in the preceding discussion al-Ghazālī mentioned only arithmetic and classified it not as permissible but as praiseworthy.

is properly a part of *kalām*.²¹ Metaphysics, defined as “research into God’s essence and attributes,”²² is also claimed to be a part of *kalām*, since – as far as metaphysical inquiry is concerned – philosophers differ from the *mutakallimūn* only in doctrines (*bi-madhāhib*), some of which are unbelief and others innovation (an obvious allusion to the twenty philosophical theses critiqued in the *Tahāfut*). Just as the Mu’tazila is not a separate discipline but a school within *kalām* that holds false doctrines, so is philosophical metaphysics. Finally, physics, according to al-Ghazālī, is partly “useless” (*lā ḥāja ilayhā*) and partly at odds with true religion and hence is ignorance rather than science.²³

It is even more striking to see that neither is *kalām* a part of this classification of the sciences. Al-Ghazālī argues that the gist of *kalām*’s useful arguments is contained in the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth, and what is not contained therein is an innovation (*bid’a*) and must be avoided with the exception of what is needed to protect the religion and combat heresies. Al-Ghazālī states categorically that the knowledge of God, His attributes, and acts provided by the science of unveiling cannot be acquired through *kalām*. To the contrary, *kalām* is a veil and an obstacle to the acquisition of this knowledge.²⁴ This depreciation of *kalām* and its demotion to religious

21 In *Jawāhir*, Part 1, ch. 4, p. 39, al-Ghazālī speaks of logic (without using the term) as a tool of *kalām*, expounded in his *Miḥakk al-naẓar* and *Mi’yār al-’ilm*. Cf. *Munqidh*, §43, p. 77: in the field of logic the philosophers differ from the *mutakallimūn* “only in modes of expression and technical terms and in a greater refinement in definitions and subdivisions.”

22 The only apparent distinction between *mukāshafa* and *ilāhīyāt* is that *ilāhīyāt* is a “research into” (*baḥth ‘an*), whereas *mukāshafa* is the “cognition of” (*ma’rifā*), God, His attributes, and acts.

23 *Iḥyā’*, Book 1, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 2, I:40:20-41:10.

24 *Iḥyā’*, Book 1, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 2, I:41:19-20. This understanding of *kalām* as a tool that protects religion and combats heresies, but offers no positive insight into the true nature of things goes back to al-Fārābī’s *Iḥṣā’ al-’ulūm*, ed. O. Amine, Cairo 1949, pp. 107-113. It may well have been reinforced in al-Ghazālī’s own time by the power struggle between the Seljūqs and the Ismā’īlīs, and the challenge that the latter posed to Sunnī orthodoxy. See the long discussion in *Iḥyā’*, Book 1, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 2, I:40:11ff. It seems that by heresy (*al-bid’a l-ṣārifa ‘an muqtaḍā l-qur’ān wa-l-sunna*) al-Ghazālī is referring specifically to the Ismā’īliya (note especially the term *da’wa* in I:40:19). For the legal status of *kalām* see al-Ghazālī’s nuanced and detailed discussion in *Iḥyā’*, Book 2, *faṣl* 2, I:146-152. Cf. Ayman Shihadeh, “From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī: 6th/12th Century Developments in Muslim Philosophical Theology,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 15 (2005): 141-179, at p. 144.

polemics and apologetics are typical for al-Ghazālī, even as he himself engaged in *kalām* in a number of works.

1.3. *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān*

In *Jawāhir al-Qur’ān* (*Jewels of the Qur’ān*), al-Ghazālī presents another classification of the sciences.²⁵ There, religious sciences are divided into “sciences of the shell” (*ṣadaḥ*)²⁶ and “sciences of the pith” (*lubāb*). The sciences of the pith are divided into two ranks. The lower among these ranks (*al-ṭabaqa al-suflā*) is divided into three parts: (1) knowledge of the stories narrated in the Qur’ān, (2) *kalām*, and (3) *fiqh* (including *uṣūl al-fiqh*). The upper rank (*al-ṭabaqa al-‘ulyā*) of the sciences of the pith is described in the following terms:

[T3] The noblest [among them] is the science of God and the Last Day (*al-‘ilm bi-llāh wa-l-yawm al-ākhir*),²⁷ for this is the science of the goal. Below it is the science of the straight path (*al-‘ilm bi-l-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) and the manner of progression (*ṭarīq al-sulūk*). This is the knowledge of purifying the soul and removing the obstacles of the qualities that lead to perdition (*al-ṣifāt al-muhlikāt*) and of adorning [the soul] with the qualities that lead to salvation (*al-ṣifāt al-munjiyāt*). We have expounded these sciences in the books of the *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn*.²⁸

In another passage, the science of God and the Last Day is subdivided into the science of the cognition of God (*‘ilm ma’rifat Allāh* or simply *‘ilm al-ma’rifa*) and the science of the hereafter (*‘ilm al-ākhirā*) or eschatology (*‘ilm al-ma’ād*):

[T4] The highest and noblest science is the science of the cognition of God (*‘ilm ma’rifat Allāh*), because all the other sciences are sought for

25 Rational sciences are not included in this classification; in *Jawāhir*, Part 1, ch. 5, p. 26:12ff. al-Ghazālī explains that they are derived from one of the oceans of the knowledge of God, *viz.* the knowledge of His acts: medicine, for instance, falls within the knowledge of God’s acts, for it is the science of disease and cure, both of which are God’s acts.

26 These include philology of the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth and their auxiliary disciplines, including literal exegesis (*al-tafsīr al-zāhir*).

27 The expression “God and the Last Day” goes back to Q. 2:62 (*man āmana bi-llāhi wa-l-yawmi l-ākhir*, cf. Q. 2:228, 9:44-45, etc.). Al-Ghazālī uses this expression a lot, especially as a criterion of orthodoxy: *Mishkāṭ*, Part 3, §4, p. 45; *Tahāfut*, Religious Preface, §7, p. 3:9-10; *Kīmiyā*, ‘*onvān* 4, I:88:11; *Munqidh*, §32, p. 72:7-8 and §83, p. 97:12-13; *Iḥyā’*, Book 36, *bayān* 6, IV:437:18; *Mīzān*, ch. 3, p. 195:4; *Mustaṣḥā*, *ṣadr al-kitāb*, *bayān* 2, I:37 ([T8] below).

28 *Jawāhir*, Part 1, ch. 4, p. 41:10-13.

its sake while it is not sought for anything else. The manner of gradual progression with regard to it is to ascend from [divine] acts to [divine] attributes, and then from [divine] attributes to [divine] essence. Thus there are three stages, the highest among which is the science of the essence, which is beyond comprehension for most people. ... This is the noblest of all sciences. It is followed in excellence by the science of the hereafter (*'ilm al-ākhirā*), i.e. eschatology (*'ilm al-ma'ād*). ... This [science] is connected with the science of the cognition [of God] (*'ilm al-ma'rifa*).²⁹

Thus, the upper rank of the sciences of the pith includes two sciences: (1) the science of God and the Last Day (sometimes subdivided into the science of the cognition of God and the science of the hereafter) and (2) the science of the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*). The former is theoretical, the latter, practical. Although *Ihyā'* and *Jawāhir* use different terminology, there is perfect correspondence between them: *'ilm al-dunyā* and *'ilm ṭarīq al-ākhirā* of the *Ihyā'* correspond to the lower and upper ranks of the sciences of the pith respectively; whereas the theoretical science of unveiling and the practical science of practice of the *Ihyā'* correspond to the science of God and the Last Day and the science of the straight path.

Let us now cite the description of the theoretical science – the science of God and the Last Day.³⁰

[T5] Division I: On the Instruction about the Addressee of prayer (*al-mad'ūw ilayhi*, i.e. God)

(1) This is the explication of the cognition of God (*ma'rifat Allāh*). ... This cognition includes: [a] the cognition of the essence of the Real (*al-ḥaqq*), [b] the cognition of the [divine] attributes, and [c] the cognition of the [divine] acts. ... The cognition of the essence is the narrowest in scope, the most difficult to attain, the most inaccessible to thought, the most intractable for discussion. This is why the Qur'ān contains only glimpses and pointers to it. It discusses it only in referring to [God's] absolute transcendence (*taqdīs*), e.g. in the verse "Like Him there is nothing" (Q. 42:11) and in the *Sūrat al-ikhhlās* (Q. 112), and to [His] absolute supremacy (*ta'zīm*), e.g. in the verse "Glory be to Him, and may

²⁹ *Jawāhir*, Part 1, ch. 4, pp. 42:2-43:2.

³⁰ The two subdivisions of this science – on God and the Last Day – are treated there separately in Divisions I and III. The intervening Division II is devoted to the science of the straight path. I feel justified in grouping Divisions I and III together since, as we have seen above, in *Jawāhir*, Part 1, ch. 4 al-Ghazālī does so himself.

He be exalted above [the polytheists'] descriptions [of Him], the Originator of the heavens and the earth" (Q. 6:100-101).

As for the attributes, they are wider in scope and offer more room for discussion (*nuṭq*). This is why there are multiple Qur'ānic verses that include references to [God's] knowledge, power, life, speech, wisdom, hearing, sight, and other [attributes]. The acts are a far-flung ocean whose limits cannot be exhausted. Indeed, there is nothing in existence but God and His acts, for everything other than He is His act.

(2) Despite this, the Qur'ān contains [references to] His manifest acts falling within the world of manifestation (*'ālam al-shahāda*), such as heavens, stars, earth, mountains, trees, animals, seas, plants ..., which are manifest to the senses.

(3) Yet, the noblest and the most wondrous among His acts, which can best testify to the sublimity of their Maker, are those inaccessible to the senses and belonging to the world of divine kingdom (*'ālam al-malākūt*). These are angels and spiritual beings, as well as the spirit or the heart, namely that part of a human being that cognizes God, for it also belongs to the world of the hidden and the divine kingdom and lies outside the world of possession and manifestation. ... [al-Ghazālī goes on to discuss the different types of angels.]

Division III: On the Instruction about the State at the Time of Attainment (*al-ḥāl 'inda mī'ād al-wiṣāl*)

(4) This [division] includes the reference to the repose and delight awaiting the attainers. Different kinds of repose are known collectively as paradise, the highest among them being the pleasure of beholding God. It also includes the reference to the disgrace and punishment awaiting those veiled [from Him] due to their having neglected the journey. Different kinds of pain are known collectively as hell, the most intense among them being the pain of being veiled and removed [from God]. ... It also includes the preliminary stages of both groups, called the gathering (*ḥashr*), the resurrection (*nashr*), the judgment (*ḥisāb*), the balance (*mīzān*), and the bridge (*ṣirāṭ*).³¹

We can see here roughly the same fourfold sequence of subjects that feature in the definition of the science of unveiling in Book 1 of the *Iḥyā'*, with the exception of prophetology, which is not included.

1.4. *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, Book 21 (*Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-qalb*)

An important discussion of the classification of the sciences is found in yet another book of the *Iḥyā'*, Book 21, entitled *The Mar-*

³¹ *Jawāhir*, Part 1, ch. 3, pp. 25:3-27:4, 30:4-13.

vels of the Heart (*Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-qalb*).³² There, the sciences are divided into two classes: rational (*'aqlīya*) and religious (*shar'īya* or *dīnīya*). By religious sciences al-Ghazālī means sciences “received on authority (*bi-ṭarīq al-taqlīd*) from the prophets ... through studying the Book of God and the Sunna of His messenger and understanding their meanings upon receiving [them] through tradition (*ba'da l-samā'*).”³³ Rational sciences are further divided into necessary (*ḍarūrīya*) and acquired (*muktasaba*). By necessary sciences (or rather knowledges, as the word *'ulūm* can also be translated) al-Ghazālī means axiomatic knowledge of necessary truths, e.g. that “one person cannot be in two places [at one and the same time] and one and the same thing cannot simultaneously be originated and unoriginated, existent and non-existent.”³⁴

Acquired rational sciences are further divided into sciences of this world (*dunyawīya*) (e.g. medicine, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and the rest of the professions and crafts) and sciences of the hereafter (*ukhrawīya*).³⁵ Under the latter, al-Ghazālī lists “the science of the states of the heart and the defects of actions (*'ilm aḥwāl al-qalb wa-āfāt al-a'māl*)” and “the science of God, His attributes, and acts,” i.e. the science of practice and the science of unveiling, to which al-Ghazālī refers explicitly in this context.³⁶

One immediately notices several discrepancies between this classification and that of Book 1 of the *Ihyā'*. The most important one is that the science of unveiling and the science of practice are here subsumed under *rational* sciences, not under religious ones as in Book 1. In order to explain this discrepancy one has to con-

32 This discussion parallels *Mizān*, ch. 26 (*Bayān anwā' l-'aql*), pp. 337-341. On the correspondences between *Mizān* and other works (*Ihyā'*, *Ma'ārij*) see Jules Janssens, “al-Ghazālī and His Use of Avicennian Texts,” in: Miklós Maróth (ed.), *Problems in Arabic Philosophy*, Avicenna Institute of Middle Eastern Studies, Piliscsaba 2003, pp. 37-49 [repr. in Jules Janssens, *Ibn Sīnā and His Influence on the Arabic and Latin World*, Variorum Reprints, Ashgate 2006, Essay XI].

33 *Ihyā'*, Book 21, *bayān* 7, III:24:17-18.

34 *Ihyā'*, Book 21, *bayān* 7, III:23:9-10; on necessary knowledge cf. *Mizān*, ch. 26, p. 337:9-10 where al-Ghazālī mentions that necessary knowledge emanates upon the human intellect after the age of discernment (*ba'da l-tamyīz*) without him knowing its origin (*min ḥaythu lā yadrī*). In *Maqāṣid*, Logic, p. 47 this type of knowledge is called *awwalīyāt* and a definition is provided.

35 Cf. *Mizān*, ch. 26, pp. 339:20-340:1.

36 *Ihyā'*, Book 21, *bayān* 7, III:25:12-14; cf. III:23:6-7.

sider the context and purpose of both classifications. Any taxonomy depends on the purpose for which it is devised, and it is only natural that if the purposes of the two classifications presented by al-Ghazālī are different the classifications should differ as well.

The classification in Book 1 focuses on the *legal* question: the acquisition of which sciences is a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāya*), i.e. an obligation incumbent not on every Muslim individually but on the Muslim community as a whole. The classification in Book 21, by contrast, is essentially *epistemological*: al-Ghazālī is interested in the question of how sciences are acquired. This is why the term “religious sciences” is not to be construed in the same way in Book 1 and Book 21. In Book 1 it refers to the sciences that *have to do with religion* and hence are praiseworthy (*maḥmūda*) in virtue of their subject matter. Clearly, the science of unveiling and the science of practice are both “religious” in this sense of the term. In Book 21, by contrast, the term “religious sciences” refers to sciences *acquired from religious sources alone* and thus “on authority” (*bi-ṭarīq al-taqlīd*). The sciences of unveiling and practice cannot be classified as “religious” in this sense of the term, since reason plays an important role in their acquisition.

1.5. *Mīzān al-‘amal*, Chapter 9

Another classification of the sciences is offered in Chapter 9 of the *Scale of Action* (*Mīzān al-‘amal*). There, sciences are divided into theoretical (*naẓarī*) and practical (*‘amalī*). The practical part is subdivided into three classes, corresponding to the Aristotelian ethics, oeconomics, and politics (ethics being considered the most important among the three).³⁷ The division of the theoretical part is not elaborated. However, al-Ghazālī stresses that some of the sciences subsumed under it (e.g. philological disciplines) are subservient to “the science, which is the goal” (*al-‘ilm al-maqṣūd*). The latter does not vary from period to period and from nation to nation and its objects neither cease to exist nor change. The content of this science is described as follows:

[T6] This amounts to the knowledge of God, His attributes, angels, books and messengers, the kingdom of the heavens and the earth (*malakūt al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*), the wonders of the human and animal souls – insofar as [all] these are connected³⁸ to God’s power, not inso-

³⁷ *Mīzān*, ch. 9, pp. 231:20-232:17.

³⁸ Reading *murtabiṭa* with Shams al-Dīn’s edition, p. 49:16; Dunyā’s edition has *murattaba*.

far as they are what they are.³⁹ The ultimate purpose is the knowledge of God. Yet, one has to know about the angels of God since they are intermediaries between God and the prophets. Likewise [one has to] know about prophecy and prophets since prophets are intermediaries between humans and angels just as angels are intermediaries between God and the prophets.⁴⁰

There is hardly any doubt that “the science, which is the goal” is nothing other than the science of unveiling. Apart from eschatology, which is not mentioned here, all the other subjects treated by this science are present. What is significant about this classification is that it adopts the Aristotelian framework of theoretical and practical philosophy. Thus, it implicitly treats of the science of unveiling as a philosophical science, more specifically as the highest theoretical science.

1.6. *Mīzān al-'amal*, Chapter 27

Another classification is provided in Chapter 27 of the *Mīzān*. Here the sciences are divided into (1) those dealing with language (*al-lafẓ*) insofar as it refers to meaning (philology and its adjuncts), (2) <those dealing with meaning insofar as it is expressed by language>⁴¹ (polemic, disputation, demonstration, and rhetoric), and (3) those dealing with meaning alone. The last class is divided into [a] purely theoretical and [b] practical. The practical category is subdivided in two parts, corresponding to the Aristotelian ethics on the one hand and oeconomics and politics on the other, the latter being identified with *fiqh*.⁴²

39 On God's power as that attribute on which God's acts ultimately depend see *Maqṣad*, pp. 58:7-59:2, cited in Binyamin Abrahamov, “al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way to Know God,” *Studia Islamica*, 77 (1993): 141-168, at pp. 159-160, esp. p. 160n87; *Iḥyā'*, Book 36, *bayān* 8, IV:444:penult. For a general discussion of God's power see Michael Marmura, “Ghazālī's Chapter on Divine Power in the *Iqtiṣād*,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 4.2 (1994): 279-315 [repr. in Marmura, *Probing*, pp. 301-334].

40 *Mīzān*, ch. 9, p. 231:6-15; cf. Gil'adi, *Educational Thought*, pp. 112-114.

41 The words *wa-'ilm yata'allaqu bi-l-ma'nā min ḥaythu yudallu bi-l-lafẓ 'alayhi* are omitted in Dunyā's edition (homoeoarcton) and should be restored (based on p. 352:14: *wa-ammā l-muta'alliq bi-l-ma'nā min ḥaythu yudallu bi-l-lafẓ 'alayhi, fa-*). On the distinction between [1] and [2] cf. *Mi'yār*, Book 1, *fann* 2, p. 89:4-7; Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm*, ch. 2, p. 33: *wa-ammā mawḍū'āt al-manṭiq, wa-ḥiya llatī fīhā tu'ṭā l-qawānīn, fa-ḥiya al-ma'qūlāt min ḥaythu tadullu 'alayhā al-alfāz wa-l-alfāz min ḥaythu ḥiya dālla 'alā l-ma'qūlāt*.

42 *Mīzān*, ch. 27, p. 355:6-9.

The theoretical category is described as follows:

[T7] The theoretical [part] is the cognition of God and the cognition of angels and prophets, i.e. the cognition of prophecy and its ranks, the ranks of angels, the kingdom of the heavens and the earth (*malakūt al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*), the signs on the horizons and in the souls (cf. Q. 41:53), the animals spread upon [the earth]; the knowledge of heavenly stars and celestial phenomena (*al-āthār al-'ulwīya*); the knowledge of the divisions of all existents, the mode of their hierarchical arrangement in relation to one another and of their connection (*irtibāf*) to one another and to the First, the Real [God], who transcends any connection to anything other than Him; the knowledge of the rising from the dead, gathering, resurrection, paradise, hell, the bridge and the balance; the knowledge of *jinn* and demons.

[It also includes] critical examination (*taḥaqquq*) of what the literal sense of these terms may suggest to the common minds, causing them to imagine about God such things as His being on the throne, above the world in space and before [the world] in time,⁴³ as well as [critical examination] of their opinions (*mā 'taqadūhu*) about angels and demons and such states of the hereafter as paradise and hell: Are [all these terms to be construed] exactly as [the commoners] opine them to be or are they, rather, images and concepts (*amthila wa-khayālāt*) that have meanings other than those suggested by their literal sense.⁴⁴

Clearly, the theoretical and the practical divisions of the sciences dealing with meaning correspond, respectively, to the sciences of unveiling and practice mentioned in the *Iḥyā'*. The content of the theoretical part corresponds closely to that of the science of unveiling, yet the cosmological section is much expanded to include subjects that in the philosophical curriculum would be treated un-

43 Al-Ghazālī is not suggesting, of course, that temporal posteriority of the world to God, i.e. creation in time, is one of the “imagination” of the commoners. Rather, the meaning of this passage is that like spatial categories, so also temporal categories do not apply to God.

44 *Mizān*, ch. 27, pp. 353:21-354:19. Al-Ghazālī frequently hints that the Qur'anic eschatological descriptions might be “symbols” of ineffable realities. He mentions this possibility constantly whenever the eschatological component of the science of unveiling is discussed. In addition to the present passage see *Jawāhir*, Part 1, ch. 3, p. 30:13-15 (immediately after [T5]); *Iḥyā'*, Book 1, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 2, I:38:2-5 (an omitted section of [T2]). See Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, Ch. 5 for an extended discussion that suggests that al-Ghazālī clandestinely accepted the philosophical view of a non-corporeal afterlife.

der natural sciences, in relation to Aristotle's *De caelo*, *Meteorology* (the expression *al-āthār al-'ulwīya* mentioned by al-Ghazālī is the Arabic title of this work), and *De animalibus*. In addition, the present classification underscores the *exegetical* aspect of the highest theoretical science.

1.7. *Al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl*

In the exordium (*khuṭba*) of the *Distillation of the Science of the Principles [of Jurisprudence]* (*al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl*), al-Ghazālī distinguishes between three classes of sciences: (1) purely rational (*'aqlī maḥḍ*) (e.g. arithmetic, geometry, astronomy); (2) purely traditional (*naqlī maḥḍ*) (e.g. *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr*); and (3) those in which reason and revelation are combined (*mā zdawaja fīhi al-'aql wa-l-sam'*). This last kind is the most exalted among the sciences and it is to this kind that the science of *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* belongs.⁴⁵ Several pages later, in the preface (*ṣadr al-kitāb*), a slightly different division is presented. The sciences are divided into (1) rational (*'aqlīya*) (e.g. medicine, arithmetic, geometry) and (2) religious (*dīnīya*) (e.g. *kalām*, *fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, and *tafsīr*, to which al-Ghazālī adds a pregnant reference to *'ilm al-bāṭin*, defined as the science of the heart and its purification from reprehensible qualities – in all likelihood a reference to the science of practice, or to the sciences of the hereafter in general). It is clear from the examples given that the second, “religious” category encompasses both the purely traditional and the “combined” sciences mentioned in the *khuṭba*.

Al-Ghazālī then argues that each category of sciences is divided into universal and particular. The division of the rational sciences is not specifically mentioned because it is not germane to the purpose of the book and, perhaps more importantly, because al-Ghazālī is deliberately avoiding saying that philosophy (and more specifically metaphysics) is the universal rational science. The universal religious science is, according to al-Ghazālī, the science of *kalām*; all other religious sciences (*fiqh*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *ḥadīth*, and *tafsīr*)⁴⁶ are particular.

The relation between the universal science and the particular sciences is patterned after the Avicennian model of the re-

45 *Mustaṣfā, Khuṭba*, I:32:10-33:9.

46 Note that *'ilm al-bāṭin* is no longer mentioned.

lation between metaphysics, in its capacity as first philosophy, and other theoretical sciences. According to Avicenna, no science can prove the existence of its own subject matter. Therefore, particular theoretical sciences do not prove the existence of their subject matter (*mawḍūʿ*) and the validity of their principles (*mabādiʿ*) but take them for granted from a higher science, i.e. first philosophy, which relegates these principles to them (*yus-allimuhū ilayhī*).⁴⁷ Similarly, according to al-Ghazālī, particular religious sciences have principles (*mabādiʿ*) that in each science are taken for granted on authority (*tuʾkhadhu musallama bi-l-taqlīd*), while their validity is demonstrated in another science, i.e. the science of *kalām*.⁴⁸

Here is al-Ghazālī's description of the science of *kalām*:

[T8] The *mutakallim* is he who studies the most general of matters: being (*al-mawjūd*). After that he divides being into pre-eternal and originated and the originated into substance and accident. Then he divides accident into that which is conditional upon life, such as will, power, speech, hearing, and sight, and that which does not require [life], such as color, smell, and taste. He divides substance into animals, plants, and inanimate objects and clarifies that the difference between them is either in species or in accidents.

After that he studies the Pre-eternal and explains that plurality is not applicable to Him, nor is He divided the way originated things are. Rather He is necessarily one and is distinguished from originated things by means of attributes necessarily applying to Him, matters inapplicable to Him, and characteristics (*aḥkām*) that are neither necessary nor inapplicable but possible with regard to Him.

[The *mutakallim*] then distinguishes between what is possible, what is necessary, and what is impossible with regard to Him and clarifies that the principle of action is possible for Him and that the world is His possible action that requires an originator due to its being possible

47 Avicenna, *al-Shifāʿ: al-Ilāhīyāt*, ed. G.C. Anawati et al., Cairo 1380/1960, Book 1, ch. 1, p. 5:3-4,18-19; Book 1, ch. 2, pp. 14:18-15:6.

48 *Mustaşfā, ṣadr al-kitāb, bayān* 2, I:36:17ff. A similar presentation of *kalām* as a universal religious science is found in Avicenna's *Fī l-Ajrām al-ʿulwīya*, in: Avicenna, *Tisʿ rasāʿil fī l-ḥikma wa-l-ṭabīʿīyāt*, Maḥbaʿat al-Jawāʿib, Istanbul 1298/1880-81, pp. 41-42; English tr. in Dimitri Gutas, "The Logic of Theology (*kalām*) in Avicenna," in: D. Perler and U. Rudolph (eds.), *Logik und Theologie: Das Organon im arabischen und im lateinischen Mittelalter*, Brill, Leiden and Boston 2005, pp. 59-72, at pp. 65-66.

[as opposed to necessary]. [He clarifies] that sending messengers, too, belongs to His possible actions, that He is capable of [sending them] and making their veracity (*ṣidq*) known through miracles, and that this possible thing has actually occurred. Here the discourse of the *mutakallim* and the rule of reason come to an end, for reason proves that the prophet is veracious and then withdraws and acknowledges that it receives and accepts the prophet's account of God and the Last Day, which reason is unable to apprehend independently but does not judge to be impossible either.⁴⁹

This is clearly a heavily Avicennized version of *kalām*. First, like Avicenna's metaphysics it takes being, or more precisely "the existent" (*al-mawjūd*) as its point of departure. Then, also in accordance with Avicenna, it proceeds with its divisions and properties and ends up discussing God, His unity, the manner of origination of the world, and prophetology. The division into substance and accidents and some of the finer divisions, too, are common to al-Ghazālī's presentation of *kalām* in this passage and Avicenna's metaphysics.⁵⁰

Yet, there are differences as well. Al-Ghazālī's most fundamental division of being – into pre-eternal and originated – replaces Avicenna's division into necessary (*wājib al-wujūd*) and contingent (*mumkin al-wujūd*). This reflects al-Ghazālī's view that the world is originated in time and not merely ontologically dependent yet co-eternal with God, as maintained by the philosophers. Furthermore, unlike Avicenna's distinction between the necessary and the contingent, al-Ghazālī's division of being into pre-eternal and originated is not being proven but taken for granted. Another important difference is that *kalām* is presented as a "handmaid of revelation," while Avicenna's metaphysics is in no way subordinate to revelation but, if anything, explains and incorporates it.

The motif of *kalām* as the "handmaid of revelation," that is, as a rational tool that proves the possibility of revelation and then surrenders the lead to it is found in al-Ghazālī's other works. In the

49 *Mustaṣfā, ṣadr al-kitāb, bayān 2, I:37:1-15.*

50 Divisions is the method employed by al-Ghazālī in his summaries of Avicenna's metaphysics: *Maqāṣid* and *Mi'yār*, Book 4 (*Kitāb Aqsām al-wujūd wa-aḥkāmihī*). On this method and its history in Greek and Arabic philosophy see Dimitri Gutas, art. "Fārābī: iv. Fārābī and Greek Philosophy," in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 9, pp. 219a-223b.

Rule of Interpretation (*Qānūn al-ta'wīl*), for instance, he argues that reason must not be rejected in favor of revelation, for reason validates revelation and if it is to be rejected revelation will *ipso facto* have been rejected as well.⁵¹ In his *Fair Approach to Creedal Matters* (*al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād*) the view of *kalām* as a handmaid of revelation is put into practice.⁵²

How is all this related, first, to other classifications of the sciences in which the highest theoretical science is portrayed as an autonomous science of much larger significance and dimensions? How does this tally, second, with the rather disparaging attitude to *kalām* exhibited by al-Ghazālī in the *Iḥyā'* and other works? As we have seen above, in Book 1 of the *Iḥyā'*, *kalām* is described as a religious innovation, permissible only insofar as needed to combat heresies, and as a veil and obstacle to attaining the higher truths of the science of unveiling.

It seems that the answer to these questions lies in the difference of perspective from which the two groups of works are written and in the different audience that they target. The *Mustaṣfā* is written for “a group of experts in jurisprudence” (*ṭā'ifa min muḥaṣṣilī 'ilm al-fiqh*)⁵³ – who are, from al-Ghazālī's perspective, “common folk” (*awāmm*) as far as the science of unveiling is concerned. In a beautiful passage in his last work *Ijām al-'awāmm 'an 'ilm al-kalām*, al-Ghazālī is explicit about whom he considers “common folk” and who constitute the elect, “the [pearl] divers of the sea of cognition”:

[T9] Among the commoners are included the littérateurs, the grammarians, the scholars of Ḥadīth, the commentators, the experts in *fiqh*, and the *mutakallimūn*, indeed all scholars except those totally devoted to learning how to swim in the oceans of knowledge, dedicate their lives wholly to this task, turn their faces away from this world and the desires, pay no attention to money, status, people, and other pleasures, are completely devoted to God in knowledge and in action, observe all the precepts and customs of religious law in performing acts of obedience and abstaining from what is reprehensible (*munkarāt*), empty their hearts completely from everything beside God for the sake of God [alone], despise this world and even the next world and the supreme

51 *Qānūn*, pp. 19:14ff., 21:8ff.

52 See, e.g., *Iqtisād*, *quṭb* 3, *da'wā* 7, pp. 104ff., where al-Ghazālī proves that God is capable of sending prophets.

53 *Mustaṣfā*, *Khuṭba*, I:33:18-19.

paradise in comparison to the love of God. They are the [pearl] divers of the sea of cognition, and even so, they too face a danger so great that nine out of ten of them perish, and only one comes out⁵⁴ [of the sea alive] with the hidden pearl and the cherished mystery. These are those whom a good lot (*al-ḥusnā*) from God awaits and who are the rewarded (*al-fā'izūn*).⁵⁵

Thus, the *mutakallimūn* are included among the “common folk.” Although in line with al-Ghazālī’s disparaging attitude to the *kalām* in the *Iḥyā’*, this leaves one wondering what he means by the title of the work: *Iljām al-‘awāmm ‘an ‘ilm al-kalām, Restraining the Commoners from the Science of Kalām*. If the *mutakallimūn* are to be included among the commoners the title would *prima facie* suggest that they are prohibited from engaging in their own science!

Such an interpretation of the title of the *Iljām* is clearly untenable. Hence the conclusion seems unavoidable that al-Ghazālī does not use the term *kalām* consistently. *Kalām* can mean, depending on the intended audience, anything from what we now call *kalām* as a *terminus technicus* (this type of *kalām* is depreciated and disparaged) to the “higher theology” (using Richard M. Frank’s term), i.e. al-Ghazālī’s science of unveiling. The “*kalām*” of the *Mustasfā* stands midway between the two extremes. On the one hand, it is defined as a handmaid of revelation and hence does not include the more esoteric truths of the science of unveiling: one merely accepts wholesale “the prophet’s account of God and the Last Day.” On the other hand, as we have seen above, it is a heavily Avicennized version of *kalām*. Even more importantly, the contours of the science of unveiling are already visible in it: we notice the same sequence of the knowledge of God, His creation of the world, and sending prophets that we have seen fleshed out in other discussions of the highest theoretical science.

Yet, since the work is written for the “commoners,” al-Ghazālī refrains from discussing the science of unveiling. A pregnant yet

54 *yaṣ’adu* my emendation : *yaṣ’udu* edition. The image is that of a pearl diver rising up with the pearl from the bottom of the sea.

55 *Iljām, bāb 1*, pp. 326:28-327:7. This passage occurs in a discussion that prohibits the (true) scholar from disclosing non-literal interpretations of the Qur’ān (*ta’wīlāt*) to the commoner. Clearly, the same prohibition applies to the science of unveiling in general, which is concerned, *inter alia*, with exegesis.

passing reference to *'ilm al-bāṭin* as part of the religious sciences (which later disappears from the classification) and an equally passing reference, in the *khuṭba* of the *Mustaṣfā*, to his books on *'ilm ṭarīq al-ākhirā wa-ma'rīfat asrār al-dīn al-bāṭina* is all that he deems appropriate to mention in this context.⁵⁶

1.8. *Al-Risāla al-Ladunīya*

To these seven classifications, which are undoubtedly by al-Ghazālī, we may add an eighth one, originating from a work of doubtful authenticity, the so-called *Epistle on the Knowledge from On High* (*al-Risāla al-Ladunīya / fī Bayān al-'ilm al-ladunī*).⁵⁷ This classification is presented here for completeness' sake, without implying that the work is authentic.

The author of *al-Risāla al-Ladunīya* divides the sciences into two classes: religious (*shar'ī*) and rational (*'aqlī*). The former is divided into two categories: the theoretical (*'ilmī*) dealing with foundations (*uṣūl*) and the practical (*'amalī*) dealing with branches (*furū'*). The theoretical category is called *'ilm al-tawḥīd* and identified with *kalām*. The content of this science is described as follows:

[T10] This science studies the essence of God and His pre-eternal attributes, both⁵⁸ His attributes of action (*ṣifātihī l-fi'līya*) and His essential attributes, pluralized by the [divine] names as mentioned. It also studies the states of the prophets, the *imāms* after them,⁵⁹ and the compan-

56 *Mustaṣfā*, *Khuṭba*, I:33:15.

57 The recent study by Che Zarrina Sa'ari, *Al-Ghazālī and Intuition: An Analysis, Translation and Text of al-Risālah al-Laduniyyah*, Department of Aqidah and Islamic Thought, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur 2007 was not accessible to me. G. de Callatay, *Ikhwān al-ṣafa': A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam*, Oneworld, Oxford 2005, p. 109 suggests, to my mind somewhat hastily, that "*Risalat al-laduniyya* [sic!] is modeled on, or at least inspired by, the general classification of sciences adopted by the Brethren in Epistle 7." For *Ikhwān al-ṣafa'*'s classification of the sciences see references in n. 1 above.

58 Reading *min* with 'Āṣī's edition (Ḥ. 'Āṣī, *al-Tafsīr al-Qur'ānī wa-l-lughā al-ṣūfiyya fī falsafat Ibn Sīnā*, al-Mu'assasa al-Jāmi'iyya li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī', Beirut 1403/1983) : *wa-* Marāgha manuscript.

59 The reference to the *imāms* may suggest some Shī'ī influence on this work, but the evidence for this is too slim (the blessing upon the family of the Prophet at the beginning of the work, p. 100:7 is too common in Sunnī sources to be able to prove anything; 'Alī is mentioned twice: *amīr al-mu'minīn* 'Alī b. Abī Ṭalīb, *karrama llāhu wajhahū* [ch. 4, p. 116:2-3] and *wa-qāla* 'Alī, *raḍīya llāhu 'anhū* [ch. 4, p. 116:7]).

ions. It studies the states of death and life, the states of rising [from the dead], resurrection, gathering, judgment, and beholding God.⁶⁰

The author argues that the *mutakallimūn* adopted the principles of syllogistic reasoning from the “proponents of philosophical logic” (*aṣḥāb al-manṭiq al-falsafī*) but failed to use much of their technical vocabulary correctly (*wada‘ū akthar al-alfāz fī ghayr mawāḍī‘ihā*).⁶¹ Two other sciences – *tafsīr* and *‘ilm al-akhbār* – are mentioned as providing support for *‘ilm al-tawḥīd*. Philology (*‘ilm al-lughā*) and its disciplines are mentioned as prerequisites for them. *‘ilm al-tawḥīd* is described as the only means to attain salvation in the afterlife.⁶²

The practical category dealing with branches is divided into three “respects” or “dues” (*ḥuqūq*): (1) what is due (*ḥaqq*) to God, i.e. the principal acts of worship (*arkān al-‘ibādāt*), (2) what is due to the neighbor, subdivided into transactions (*mu‘āmala*) (buying, selling, etc.) and contracts (*mu‘āqada*) (marriage, divorce, etc.), and (3) what is due to the soul (or oneself), i.e. ethics.

The rational sciences are divided into three ranks: (1) mathematics and logic, (2) physics, and (3) [metaphysics] (the latter term is not explicitly used). The latter science, which seems to partially overlap with the *‘ilm al-tawḥīd* mentioned above, is described as follows:

[T11] This is the study of the science of being (*al-nazar fī ‘ilm al-wujūd*), its division into necessary and contingent, the study of the Creator, His essence, and all His attributes and acts, His command, judgment, and decree, and the hierarchy of the emergence of existents from Him (*tarīb zuhūr al-mawjūdāt ‘anhu*), the study of celestial beings,⁶³ discrete substances, separate intelligences, and perfect souls, the study of the states⁶⁴ of angels and demons, which leads to the science of prophecies, miracles (*mu‘jizāt*) and wonders (*karāmāt*), the study of the sanctified souls (*al-nufūs al-muqaddasa*),⁶⁵ sleep and wakefulness,

60 *Ladunīya*, ch. 3, pp. 107:21-108:2.

61 *Ladunīya*, ch. 3, p. 108:3-5.

62 *Ladunīya*, ch. 3, p. 110:2-4.

63 Reading *al-‘ulwīyāt* with the *Majmū‘at Rasā’il* edition : *al-ma‘lūmāt* Marāgha manuscript.

64 The frequently repeated word *ḥāl* (and its pl. *aḥwāl*) will be omitted in translation in what follows, since rendering it as “the state(s) of” would be overtranslating.

65 Cf. the term *al-naḥs al-qudsī* (*sic!*) in a later passage – *Ladunīya*, ch. 4, p. 114:7. This is an Avicennian term with an Ismā‘īlī background.

and the stations of dreams (*maqāmāt al-ru'yā*). One of its branches is the science of talismans, amulets (*'ilm al-tilismāt wa-l-nāranjīyāt*), and related things.⁶⁶

Finally, the author mentions that there is another, composite science, originating from the rational category of sciences but combining the qualities of both the rational and the religious category. This is the science of the *ṣūfīs* (*'ilm al-ṣūfiyya*), which deals with a variety of concepts, all of them of *ṣūfī* provenance (*ḥāl, waqt, samā', wajd, shawq, sukr, ṣaḥw*, etc.).⁶⁷

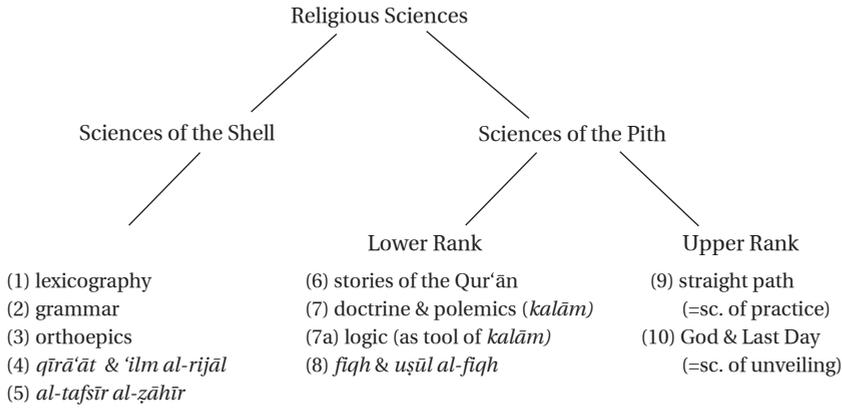
2. *Al-Ghazālī's Treatises in Light of His Classifications of the Sciences*

The above analysis of the classifications of the sciences offers a rare opportunity to reflect on the general structure of al-Ghazālī's thought, a question only seldom raised, let alone answered, as most studies look at one or another aspect of his thought without paying attention to its overarching structure.⁶⁸ What we need to do is to characterize al-Ghazālī's own works in terms of his classifications of the sciences, adopting one such classification as a point of reference. In what follows, I will be using the classification of the *Jawāhir*. This classification is especially convenient for our purposes, as it is relatively comprehensive and, moreover, in discussing it al-Ghazālī himself provides examples of his works, assigning them to the relevant categories. Similar examples are also found in al-Ghazālī's *Book of the Forty* (*Kitāb al-Arba'in*) and in the *Mustaṣfā*. The data can be presented in the following table.

66 *Ladunīya*, ch. 3, p. 111:11-17.

67 *Ladunīya*, ch. 3, p. 111:19ff. Some of these terms are explained by al-Ghazālī in *Imlā', muqaddima*, glossary of *ṣūfī* terms, V:285-289.

68 A notable exception is Afif al-Akiti, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of *Falsafa*: al-Ghazālī's *Maḍnūn, Tahāfut*, and *Maqāṣid*, with Particular Attention to their *Falsafī* Treatments of God's Knowledge of Temporal Events," in: Y.T. Langermann (ed.), *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, Brepols, Turnhout 2009, pp. 51-100 (I am grateful to Lukas Muehlethaler for referring me to and kindly providing a copy of this study).



| | Examples provided by al-Ghazālī (<i>Jawāhir</i> , Part 1, ch. 4, pp. 38ff.; <i>Arba'īn</i> , Part 1, <i>khātima</i> , pp. 38-40; <i>Mustaṣfā</i> , <i>Khuṭba</i> , I:33-34) | Additional examples |
|------|--|---|
| (7) | <i>Qudsiya</i> , <i>Iqtiṣād</i> , <i>Tahāfut</i> , <i>Faḍāih</i> , <i>Hujjat al-ḥaqq</i> [lost], <i>Qawāṣim</i> , <i>Musfaṣṣal al-khilāf</i> [lost] | <i>Qistās</i> (polemical sections), <i>Munqidh</i> (polemical sections) |
| (7a) | <i>Mihakk</i> , <i>Mi'yār</i> | <i>Mustaṣfā</i> (introduction), <i>Qistās</i> |
| (8) | <i>Basīṭ</i> , <i>Wasīṭ</i> , <i>Wājiz</i> , <i>Khulāṣat al-mukhtaṣar</i> , <i>Tahdhīb al-uṣūl</i> [lost], <i>Mankhūl</i> | <i>Mustaṣfā</i> |
| (9) | <i>Ihyā'</i> , <i>Kīmiyā</i> | <i>Mizān</i> , <i>Arba'īn</i> |
| (10) | <i>Ihyā'</i> (sections, esp. Books 32, 35, 36), <i>Kīmiyā</i> (introduction and other sections), <i>Jawāhir</i> , <i>Maqṣad</i> , an unpublished esoteric work | <i>Mishkāṭ</i> , <i>Arba'īn</i> (sections) |

What emerges out of this table is that, first, al-Ghazālī did not bother himself with “sciences of the shell.” All his works fall within what he calls “the sciences of the pith,” either within its lower or within its upper rank. As for the lower rank, al-Ghazālī composed at least seven works on *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, numerous works on *kalām*, both expository (*Qudsiya*, *Iqtiṣād*) and polemical (*Tahāfut*, *Faḍā'ih*, and others), and several works on logic, defined as the tool of *kalām*.

Other works are devoted to the higher rank of the sciences of the pith: namely, the science of the straight path and the science of God and the Last Day (the science of practice and the science of unveiling respectively). It might be useful to examine al-Ghazālī's own testimonies on these works.

[T12] The noblest in the upper rank of the [sciences of] the pith is the science of God and the Last Day (*al-'ilm bi-llāh wa-l-yawm al-ākhir*), for this is the science of the goal. Below it is the science of the straight

path and the manner of progression. ... We have expounded these sciences [i.e. the science of the straight path and the manner of progression] in the books of the *Iḥyā' ulūm al-dīn*. ... The highest and noblest science is the science of the cognition of God ('ilm ma'rifat Allāh). ... We have expounded a portion of its principles and units (*min awā'ilihī wa-majāmi'ihī*), granted to us, despite our short life, the amount of occupations and obstacles, and the scarcity of assistants and associates, in one of our books (*ba'd al-taṣānīf*).⁶⁹ We did not publish it (*lam nuḥrihu*) however, for most minds would be overwhelmed and the weakminded would be harmed by it, among them the majority of those who parade as scholars (*al-mutarassimīn bi-l-'ilm*).⁷⁰

[T13] If you wish to get a whiff of the scent of cognition, you will find a small amount of it scattered in the “Book of Patience and Thankfulness,” the “Book of Love,” and the chapter on God’s oneness at the beginning of the “Book of Reliance on God,” all these being parts of the *Iḥyā'* [Books 32, 36, and 35 respectively]. You will find a decent portion of it that will teach you how to knock on the gates of cognition (*kayfiyat qar' bāb al-ma'rifa*) in the treatise *al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī ma'ānī asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*, especially in the [discussion of] names derived from verbs/actions. But if you wish [to hear] explicit teaching (*ṣarīḥ al-ma'rifa*) on the true realities of the [Islamic] creed (*ḥaqā'iq hādhihi l-'aqīda*), without equivocation or guardedness, you will not find it except in one of our books to be withheld from the unworthy (*fī ba'd kutubinā al-maḍnūn bihā 'alā ghayr ahlihā*).⁷¹

[T14] After [composing works on *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*], I turned to the science of the path to the hereafter ('ilm *tarīq al-ākhirā*) and the cognition of the inner mysteries of religion (*ma'rifat asrār al-dīn al-bāṭina*). In this field, I composed [works of different lengths]: extensive works such as the *Iḥyā' ulūm al-dīn*, compendious works such as the *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān* [probably with its sequel *Arba'in*], and intermediate works such as the *Kīmiyā' al-sa'āda* [i.e. the Persian *Kīmiyā-ye sa'ādat*].⁷²

Clearly, the first two testimonies ([T12] and [T13], from the *Jawāhir* and its sequel *Arba'in* respectively) are closely related. Both mention an unpublished book (*ba'd al-taṣānīf*, *ba'd kutubinā*) on higher theology, which is to be withheld from those unworthy

69 *Ba'd* in Classical Arabic usually means “one of” (not “some” as in Modern Standard Arabic).

70 *Jawāhir*, Part 1, ch. 4, pp. 41:10-43:8 (partly overlapping with [T3] and [T4]).

71 *Arba'in*, Part 1, *khātima*, p. 39:9-15.

72 *Mustaṣfā*, *Khuṭba*, I:33:14-17. The same three works are mentioned in al-Ghazālī's Persian letter, *Makātib*, p. 22:12.

of it.⁷³ Other books said to deal with higher theology are sections of the *Iḥyā'*, in which only a "small amount" is to be found, and the *Maqṣad*, which teaches "how to knock on the gates of cognition," i.e. is in some way introductory to higher theology.⁷⁴ In these works, however, the teaching is only found in a "scattered" way and not explicitly.

The third testimony ([T14], from the *Mustaṣfā*) mentions three works on "the science of the path to the hereafter (*'ilm ṭarīq al-ākhirā*) and the cognition of the inner mysteries of religion (*ma'rifat asrār al-dīn al-bāṭina*)" (the science of practice and the science of unveiling respectively), classified according to length: the *Iḥyā'* is mentioned as the most extensive treatment, the Persian *Kīmīyā* as the intermediate, and the *Jawāhir* as the compendious.⁷⁵

To evaluate now al-Ghazālī's literary output as a whole, most of his works seem to fall into the following three classes:

(1) works on the lower rank of the sciences of the pith (*fiqh*, *kalām* [including both doctrine and polemics], and logic as a tool of *kalām*);

(2) works on the science of the straight path (the science of the practice) and *semi-esoteric* works on the science of God and the Last Day (the science of the unveiling);

(3) *esoteric* works on the science of God and the Last Day.

Of course, some of al-Ghazālī's works may not fall into any of these categories or breach the boundaries between categories. However, it is useful to know that this is the way that al-Ghazālī himself saw (or at least presented) the structure of his own corpus.

73 This book has been equated with the so-called *al-Maḍnūn bihī 'āla ghayr ahlihī*, but the authenticity of this work is open to question. There is also another *al-Maḍnūn bihī 'āla ghayr ahlihī*, preserved in a manuscript from Marāgha (copied 596-97/1200-01), facsimile edition in Pourjavady, *Majmū'e*, pp. 1-62; edition and analysis in M. Afifi al-Akiti, *The Maḍnūn of al-Ghazālī: A Critical Edition of the Unpublished Major Maḍnūn with Discussion of His Restricted, Philosophical Corpus*, D.Phil. Dissertation, University of Oxford, 2007 (not seen; abstract available online: <http://www.ghazali.org/dissertation/Abstract-al-Akiti.pdf>). I am grateful to Frank Griffel for referring me both to Pourjavady's study and al-Akiti's dissertation.

74 For a similar expression see *Iḥyā'*, Book 32, *bayān* 3, IV:119:27: *qar' bāb min al-ma'ārīf*.

75 This parallels al-Ghazālī's trilogy on *fiqh*: the extensive *Basīṭ*, the intermediate *Wasīṭ*, and the compendious *Wajīz*. This parallel is probably not accidental in a work written for specialists in *fiqh*.

His œuvre seems therefore to have the structure of a pyramid. The majority of works constitute the wide base of the pyramid. These works are written to the broad audience of religious scholars and intellectuals. The following layer, with fewer works, is devoted to al-Ghazālī's own religious project: the science of the hereafter. These are works on the science of the straight path (the science of practice) and his *semi-esoteric* works on the science of God and the Last Day (the science of unveiling). Finally, the apex of the pyramid consists of an *esoteric* work on al-Ghazālī's higher theology, the science of God and the Last Day (the science of unveiling).

3. *The Science of Unveiling*

So what is the science of unveiling? Two diametrically opposed positions have been proposed. According to Richard M. Frank, the science of unveiling is al-Ghazālī's "higher theology," which is Avicennian and demonstrative in nature, and is thus frequently at odds with the traditional Ash'arite theology, which is merely dialectical.⁷⁶ In his detailed review of Frank's *al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School*, Ahmad Dallal attempts to refute this position. He argues that Frank's interpretation of certain key texts is erroneous and observes:

It is thus clear that, according to al-Ghazālī, *'ilm al-mukāshafa* has to do with purifying the heart by following the example of prophets. It should be added that prophets ... do not arrive at certain knowledge through the systematic application of the rules of logic, but through intuitive knowledge and with the aid of revelation. Unlike Aristotelian demonstrative proof (*'ilm al-burhān*), the rules of the science of *mukāshafa* are not written in books because it is a practical science not a theoretical one, and because it depends on worship, self-discipline and supplication. ... Frank's interpretation of *mukāshafa* as a higher theology grounded in Aristotelian logic and Avicennan epistemology seems to be unwarranted. A more likely meaning, which, incidentally conforms to the conventional use of the term in Arabic, is the spiritual mystical knowledge of the Sufis.⁷⁷

Dallal is certainly justified in taking Frank to task for certain inaccuracies of translation and interpretation. Most importantly,

⁷⁶ Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School*, pp. 21-22.

⁷⁷ Ahmad Dallal, "Ghazālī and the Perils of Interpretation," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 122 (2002): 773-787, at p. 779a-b.

he is absolutely correct in rejecting Frank's interpretation of the science of unveiling as a demonstrative science. However, Dallal's own reading of al-Ghazālī is also open to criticism. First, contrary to Dallal's view, the science of unveiling *is* a theoretical, not a practical science. Al-Ghazālī himself explicitly says as much.⁷⁸ Moreover, as proven by Avner Gil'adi, the very division of the "sciences of the hereafter" into the science of unveiling and the science of practice is modeled after the Aristotelian division of philosophy into theoretical (contemplative) and practical; thus the science of unveiling corresponds to theoretical philosophy.⁷⁹ Second, the supposition that there is something about practical sciences that prevents them from being recorded in books is also unwarranted. The practical "science of practice" (*ilm al-mu'āmalā*) can be, and indeed has been committed to writing: the *Ihyā'* itself is nothing but a grand codification of this science! The science of unveiling is not to be committed to writing not because it is practical (it is not) or because it "depends on worship, self-discipline and supplication" (it does so only indirectly, insofar as it depends on the science of practice), but because it is an esoteric science.

Next comes Dallal's assertion that since the science of unveiling "has to do with purifying the heart by following the example of prophets" and prophets "do not arrive at certain knowledge through the systematic application of the rules of logic, ... Frank's interpretation of *mukāshafa* as a higher theology grounded in Aristotelian logic and Avicennan epistemology seems to be unwarranted" and the science of unveiling is nothing but the "spiritual mystical knowledge of the Sufis." This is a complex claim and in order accurately to assess it we need to distinguish between several aspects of the science of unveiling: (1) its designation (the term *mukāshafa*), (2) its method of acquisition, (3) the theoretical analysis of its method of acquisition (i.e. of the noetic mechanism that makes its acquisition possible), and finally (4) its content (the knowledge acquired through it). Dallal's claim focuses on the first two aspects, and its force is therefore limited to these. Hence, though his point is well taken (as mentioned above he is certainly correct to point out that the science of unveiling is *not* demonstra-

78 *Ihyā'*, *Khuṭba*, I:11:11-13. I discuss this passage in *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, Ch. 2.

79 Avner Gil'adi, "On the Origin of Two Key-Terms in al-Ġazzālī's *Ihyā'* 'ulūm al-dīn," *Arabica*, 36 (1989): 81-92; cf. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies*, pp. 357ff.

tive), Dallal's observations do not touch *on the other two aspects* of the science of unveiling and are insufficient to evaluate the nature of this science as a whole.⁸⁰

Thus, even though the science of unveiling is designated by a term of ṣūfī provenance (aspect 1) and the method employed in its attainment is “mystical” rather than philosophical (purification of the heart rather than systematic application of syllogistic reasoning) (aspect 2), the noetic mechanism behind it may be understood and interpreted philosophically (aspect 3), and its content, too, may be philosophically inspired (aspect 4). On close scrutiny of al-Ghazālī's works, this indeed turns out to be the case. Due to limitations of space, this claim cannot be fully documented here. I am therefore referring the reader to my forthcoming monograph *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, which documents how al-Ghazālī's noetics is grounded in Avicenna's theory of prophecy, and to my earlier study “Monism and Monotheism in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-anwār*,” which shows that even the apex of al-Ghazālī's science of unveiling – the monistic realization that “there is nothing in existence but God” – is rooted in Avicenna's metaphysics of necessary and contingent being.⁸¹

80 When Dallal does discuss the *content* of the science of unveiling, his criticism of Frank seems to me to be overstated. For example, Dallal is correct to criticize Frank's omissions in his translation of al-Ghazālī's definition of the science of unveiling ([T2] above): “Removing references to Satan, and the clashes of the ‘soldiers [*sic!* read ‘hosts’ for the Arabic *junūd* – A.T.] of angels and devils’ in the heart ... reorient[s] the argument of al-Ghazālī and give[s] the impression that he is referring to the hierarchical order of being” (Dallal, “Ghazālī and the Perils of Interpretation,” p. 779a; cf. Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School*, p. 23). However, Dallal's overall conclusion that “it would indeed be hard to read a cosmology into the above passage when it is read in its totality” is somewhat hasty. The science of unveiling does have an important cosmological component, which is alluded to in [T2] and is much more pronounced in [T5] and other texts examined above. True, the science of unveiling is not *exclusively* cosmological, and Dallal is right to point this out. Yet, neither does Frank claim that it is: he speaks of a “higher metaphysics with its integrated *psychology* and cosmology” (Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School*, p. 23, emphasis added). Thus he implicitly acknowledges that references to Satan and the clashes of angelic and demonic hosts in the heart, omitted in his translation, are part and parcel of al-Ghazālī's science of unveiling. Frank can perhaps be said to be guilty of de-emphasizing this aspect of the science of unveiling but not of neglecting it altogether.

81 Alexander Treiger, “Monism and Monotheism in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-anwār*,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, 9.1 (2007): 1-27, at pp. 8-10. Though such a monistic outlook is taken up by post-Ghazālīan ṣūfism (where it is sometimes anachronistically ascribed to pre-Ghazālīan authorities), it

I am therefore inclined to see the science of unveiling as a kind of Avicennian-based esoteric theology, revealed, according to al-Ghazālī, to select non-prophets (“saints,” *awliyā*) endowed with quasi-prophetic powers (and including, one assumes, al-Ghazālī himself). Both sharp acumen (including philosophical training) and rigorous religious and ethical preparation (based in part on *ṣūfī* methods) are prerequisites for the acquisition of this science.⁸² Al-Ghazālī employs Avicenna’s theory of prophecy as a powerful tool to explain the noetic mechanism underlying “unveiling.” The content of the science of unveiling is deeply rooted in Avicennian philosophy (as interpreted by al-Ghazālī), though it may have other unacknowledged sources as well.⁸³ Dallal’s remark that the science of unveiling is tantamount to “the spiritual mystical knowledge of the Sufis” implies that pre-Ghazālīan *ṣūfī*m was already focused on the acquisition of such mystical knowledge and had developed a full-fledged revealed esoteric metaphysics comparable to the science of unveiling. In my view, by contrast, al-Ghazālī is the key figure *in the transition* from “practical *ṣūfī*m,” which was not yet oriented towards such knowledge, to “theosophical *ṣūfī*m,” which was oriented towards it. This transition from (to put it in Persian) *taṣavvuf* to *‘erfān* was achieved precisely through al-Ghazālī’s infusion of Avicennian ideas into Islamic theological thought in general and the *ṣūfī* tradition in particular. Al-Ghazālī’s highest theoretical science, the science of unveiling, played a key role in this development, being the chief locus where this deliberate (though always covert) “infusion” of Avicennian ideas was made.

Özet

Gazālī'nin İlimler Tasnif(ler)i ve En Üst Teorik İlme Dair Tanımlamaları

Bu çalışma, Gazālī'nin çeşitli ilim tasnif ve tasvirleri ile *İhyâu ulûmi'd-dîn*'de “mükâşefe ilmi” ve *Cevâhiru'l-Kur'ân*'da

seems likely that the shift toward it in the *ṣūfī* tradition was prompted by al-Ghazālī himself.

82 This is clear from the criteria laid out by al-Ghazālī for the perusal of his unpublished esoteric work. See *Jawâhir*, Part 1, ch. 4, p. 43:8-13 (following [T12]); *Arba'în*, Part 1, *khâtima*, pp. 39:16-40:8 (following [T13]).

83 The influence of Ismâ'îlî thought (and the *Rasâ'il Ikhwân al-ṣafâ*) on al-Ghazālī's science of unveiling, for example, is a promising avenue of inquiry.

“marifetullah ilmi” olarak isimlendirdiği en üst düzeydeki teorik bilime dair kapsamlı bir araştırma ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma, sözkonusu ilmin dört temel unsurla ilgili olduğunu göstermektedir: (1) Tanrı, (2) kozmoloji, (3) nübüvvet teorisi, melekbilimi ve dinî psikoloji, (4) Âhret hayatı (bazen bu listeye beşinci bir unsur olarak Kur’ân tefsirinin ilkeleri de eklenmektedir). Dolayısıyla Gazâlî’nin “mükâşefe ilmi” öncelikle bir teolojik disiplindir. Ancak o, akıl yürütmenin bir neticesi olmaması, bilakis kalplerini zâhidâne uygulamalarla saflaştırmış peygamberler ve velilere İlahî Aydınlanma yoluyla vahy/ilham edilmesi açısından *kelâm* ilminden daha üstün bir konuma sahiptir. Mükâşefe ilmiyle *kelâm* arasındaki bir başka anahtar farklılık ise şudur: Gazâlî’ye göre mükâşefe ilmi Hakikî Bilgi düzeyinde iş görürken *kelâm*, Hakikî Bilgi’ye ulaşmayı sağlamaksızın sadece halkın inançlarını sapkınların hücumlarına karşı korumaktadır. Mükâşefe ilmi belirgin bir İbn Sînâci unsur da içerdiğinden (ki bu husus makalenin yazarının diğer çalışmalarında ayrıntılı bir şekilde ortaya konmuştur), bu ilim bir açıdan bir İbn Sînâci bâtinî teolojidir. Son olarak Gazâlî’nin ilimlere dair muhtelif tasnifleri, genel olarak onun düşüncesine dair çok sayıda ilginç unsurun farkına varılmasını da sağlamaktadır ki, bunlar da bu çalışmada tartışılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gazâlî, İbn Sînâ, Bilimler Tasnif(ler)i, Mükâşefe İlmi, Mistik Bilgi.