



METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY OF HUMAN
NATURE IN THE WORKS OF ABŪ ḤĀMID AL-
GHAZĀLĪ

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on al-Ghazali's methodology for the study of human nature. Its primary aim is to shed light on the scholar's methods by which one can get to know about the intricate subject matter of the nature of human being. There is no study that treats this particular aspect of the famous scholar's voluminous work even though a great deal of research has been conducted about similar topics, such as epistemology, psychology and the scholar's contribution to philosophy of science. Since the aim of this study is to restate al-Ghazali's methods, the main characteristic of the study is descriptive, and at times, comparative with the works of contemporary Muslim scholars. As al-Ghazali's methods are numerous and lay scattered in various parts of his work, the researcher has had to use analytical and synthetic procedures so as to present them in as systematic manner as possible. The findings of this study suggest that al-Ghazali used a great number of methods in his *kalāmī*, philosophical and *sufī* works. However, as it is attested by the scholar, the methods used by the Sufis had proven to be the most adequate ones to arrive at an understanding of human nature. Moreover, the findings are presented bearing in mind contemporary Muslim scholars' endeavor in the areas of philosophy of science and psychology.

ملخص البحث

تركز هذه الدراسة حول منهج الغزالي في دراسة الطبيعة البشرية. وتهدف في المقام الأول إلى تسليط الضوء على منهجه العلمي الذي يمكن من خلاله التعرف على موضوع الطبيعة البشرية. ولم تكن هنالك دراسات تعالج هذا الجانب من الأعمال الضخمة لهذا العالم الجليل رغم وجود بعض الأبحاث التي تناولت قضايا مماثلة مثل علم المعرفة، وعلم النفس، وإسهام الغزالي في فلسفة العلوم. وبما أنّ هدف هذه الدراسة هو النظر في منهج الغزالي، فإنّ السمة الرئيسة والمنهج الأساسي لهذا البحث هو المنهج الوصفي، وفي بعض الأحيان المنهج المقارن حيث تتم المقارنة بين منهج الغزالي ومنهج العلماء المسلمين المعاصرين. وبما أنّ مناهج الغزالي عديدة ومنتشرة في أجزاء متفرقة من أعماله، فإنّه كان لزاماً على الباحث أن يستخدم المعايير التحليلية وأسلوب المزج بين الأعمال بغرض عرضها بأسلوبٍ علمي منظمّ قدر المستطاع. وتُظهر نتائج الدراسة أنّ الغزالي استخدم مناهج عديدة في أعماله المتعلقة بعلم الكلام، والتصوّف والفلسفة. وقد تبين أنّ المنهج الذي اتبعه المتصوّف هو أنسب المناهج وأكفأها في فهم الطبيعة البشرية، كما أكّد ذلك الغزالي نفسه. وقد تمّ عرض نتائج هذه الدراسة وتقديمها مع الأخذ في الاعتبار جهود وإسهامات العلماء المسلمين المعاصرين في مجالي فلسفة العلوم وعلم النفس.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to the acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

Baharudin Ahmad
Supervisor

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion, it conforms to the acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and in quality, as a thesis for the degree of Master of Arts.

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This dissertation was submitted to the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), IIUM and is accepted as a fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

Dzemaal Plojovic

Signature

Date

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In the context of Islamic thought and civilization, Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali is widely known as one of the most important scholars whose authoritative works cover a great number of topics in the areas of jurisprudence, theology, philosophy and sufism. Of particular interest for the contemporary scholars have been Al-Ghazali's epistemology and its kindred discipline – methodology. Notwithstanding the fact that there are many works on the various aspects of Ghazalian theory of knowledge (epistemology), rather little has been written about his methodology for the study of human sciences, even less on the methodology for the study of human nature. This feature of Al-Ghazali's *oeuvre* is, however, recognized as one of his most significant contributions in the wide field of Islamic thought. Having mastered many sciences and areas of knowledge Abu Hamid al-Ghazali was in the position to delineate clearly which elements of science are derived from primary sources of Islamic tradition and which ones were brought forward by the Muslim scholars of his time. The intellectual ingenuity to isolate, critically assess and systematize and classify different sciences and highlight their connection to the worldview of Islam is clearly manifest throughout al-Ghazali's *Iḥyā'*. This ingenious feature of al-Ghazali's work is, in my humble understanding, overlooked by many contemporary researchers on al-Ghazali.

Al-Ghazali's methodology for the study of human nature ought to be seen as a corollary of the worldview of Islam. The Qur'an and the Sunnah as principal sources of the Islamic intellectual tradition, guidance and wisdom project a *Weltanschauung*

that encompasses all aspects and stages of the hierarchically arranged realities of man (*al-insān*) and the world(s) (*al-ālam*) as well as their interrelationship. The worldview of Islam as a par excellence traditional view on all existence is thus incomparable to the reductionist and horizontally arranged worldview of modern and postmodern western tradition that draws on and focuses only on the phenomenal and empirico-rational aspects of existence. The ever widening gap between the two worldviews and intellectual traditions, if viewed with lack of tolerance accompanied with a tendency towards intellectual hegemony, may create an atmosphere where dialogue and rapprochement could give way to misunderstandings, stereotypes, labeling and intercivilizational frictions of far reaching consequences. It is however believed that the gap would not be wider and wider were it not for the exclusivist claims of the advocates and proponents of modern secular worldview, scientific method, science and technology. Within this context and in the view of emerging signs of self-questioning and soul searching amongst the western thinkers and intellectuals, it is increasingly important to present clearly and unambiguously the timeless verities of the worldview of Islam and its balanced harmonious along with its universal call for peace between man and God, man and nature and lastly, between man and man.

The *Weltanschauung* of Islam is composed of a number of elements whose underlining principle is unity (*tawḥīd*) as opposed to multiplicity (*takthīr*). Moreover, it is a vision of both this world and the Hereafter and man's proper attitude towards them. Ontologically seen, both existents the man and the world are contingent and only partially *real*. They derive their existence from God's Mercy and emanation, thus a number of Muslim scholars including Ibn Sina and al-Ghazali underline the spiritual similarity of the world to God arguing that, "the real essence of all things emanated from God and the divine world speaking there are two views of classical Islamic

scholarship vis-a-vis God's relation with the world, Muslim theologians maintain the difference between the two, while the philosophers and Sufis emphasize from the viewpoint of ontology, mainstream Muslim scholars agree that the man and the world's existence is given and maintained by God with the purpose of submitting to, serving and worshipping only Him. Since the world is bereft of free will and preordained to serve and submit to Allah (*s.w.t.*) it is only man with his dual spiritual and material nature that can choose the path to either salvation or perdition. The path to salvation or spiritual ascent that features prominently in many classical Sufi writings, may take man up the ladder of spiritual stations closer to God. It is on this spiritual ascent that human being comes to know himself better and, by God's grace, may come as close to Him as to become His friend (*waliyu'llah*). This spiritual ascent although severely criticized and vehemently opposed by certain Muslim quarters, is a part of mainstream Islamic intellectual discourse and, as will be elaborated in chapter four of this thesis, occupies an important position within the Qur'an and Sunnah *Weltanschauung*. Moreover, this ascent and the preparation for it is a key element in the methodology of al-Ghazali. On the other hand, the road to perdition, diametrically opposed to the spiritual ascent, is also explicated by Muslim scholars. It is described as deliberate downward, away from God movement that is accompanied with spiritual misery and ultimate suffering. The interrelationship between the spiritually refined man and the world, additionally, has epistemological and methodological significance as it deals with the sources and modes of knowledge, the issue of subjectivity and objectivity and a variety of methods to arrive at certain knowledge.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A number of the contemporary works on al-Ghazali, both Muslim and Western, contain an underlying drawback that too much attention was devoted to prove that al-Ghazali was a great scholar because some of the methods he used are identical to those utilized by contemporary sciences. Although it is rather hard to establish clear, step by step exposition of al-Ghazali's methodology for the study of human nature, a close reading into and careful analysis of his *Iḥyā'* reveals many aspects of it. These methodological precepts are drawn from the study of the primary sources (The Holy Qur'an and the Sunnah), sayings of the Companions and early generations of Muslims, and Al-Ghazali's own introspection coupled with a wide array of ascetic practices. Contemporary scholars on al-Ghazali have also focused on the contribution by al-Ghazali to major disciplines of islamic intellectual tradition, such as, jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, *ḥadīth*, and the exegesis of the Qur'ān. However, al-Ghazali's contributions to some sub-disciplines, such as, methodology are scarce and sketchy. A number of recent works that deal with al-Ghazali's contribution to epistemology have the tendency to underline the decriptive part of it, which may be called as conventional epistemology or epistemology proper, rather than its normative part that is closely tied to the development of particular sciences. The search for authentic islamic methodology in the works of classical Muslim scholars has started relatively recently as an ofshoot of a larger intellectual enterprise called islamization of knowledge. Both of these intellectual endeavours were preceded by the awareness that modern and contemporary western sciences in general, and those connected to society and humanity in particular, are reductionistic, one-sided and thus unacceptable as the universal sciences.

Some contemporary Muslim scholars have concentrated on al-Ghazali's usage of the *ḥadīth* and to what extent the particular *aḥādīth* he used are authentic. Western and non-Muslim scholars on al-Ghazali of the past carried out research on the authenticity of the works commonly attributed to him, in addition to a number of biographical studies that they wrote. A number of contemporary non-Muslim scholars have produced valuable studies on al-Ghazali's contribution to psychology, philosophy of science and philosophy of religion. These are particularly relevant for my thesis and they are used and listed in the bibliography.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The rationale for choosing this topic is in the fact that Abu Hamid al-Ghazali stands as one of the most prominent scholars in the Islamic intellectual history. Moreover, it is widely recognized that his *magnum opus*, *Iḥyā' ulūm al-Dīn* contains a very detailed exposition of human nature and its various aspects. The intricacies of the human heart, soul and intellect mentioned in the *Iḥyā'* cannot be fathomed by the contemporary methods in the discipline of psychology. Yet, many scholars of diverse religious and intellectual background recognize the intellectual ingenuity of al-Ghazali. On the other hand, Western psychology exudes more and more criticism and skepticism from intellectuals and scholars.

It is generally contended, especially among Muslim scholars, that there is an urgent need for the restatement of the methods for the study of human nature. In this endeavor al-Ghazali's exposition of the human nature in the *Iḥyā'* is a repository for an alternative insightful methodology. This methodology can enable young Muslim scholars in general, and Muslim psychologists in particular, to view this important subject in a more holistic manner. Moreover, scholars from other disciplines will have

a more universal understanding of the complex subject of human nature if they become acquainted with al-Ghazali's methods and practical precepts to deal with various challenges that may arise out of their previously conceived reductionistic view of human being.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this research is to lay bare as many research methods for the study of human nature as possible along with their classification and systematic presentation. A wide variety of arguments that al-Ghazali's methodology for the study of human nature is relevant for our spatio-temporal context will be presented.

This study mainly relies on descriptive and analytic techniques in the use of primary and secondary sources. In the course of analyzing these sources and their relevant parts there emerged a need to categorize al-Ghazali's methodology for the study of human nature into its theoretical and practical aspects. This categorization, however, is utilized mainly for the reason to present, as systematically as possible, the intricate subject matter and to imply that there is a strict division between theory and practice in the traditional Islamic sciences and disciplines. The analytic narrative also compares and contrasts some of the findings with the view of contemporary Muslim scholars on the topic. Al-Ghazali's contribution to the study of human nature ought to be viewed as a scholarly output whose contribution in a number of disciplines is an invaluable source and reference for contemporary Muslim scholars who are increasingly calling for islamization of sciences, or at least an approach towards human sciences that does not view timeless religious verities with suspicion and condescension. Furthermore, al-Ghazali's view of the human nature that is well-supported by the teachings of the traditional sciences that arose around the sciences of

the Qur'ān and the sciences of the ḥadīth may serve as a valuable tool and reference for Muslim scholars who engage in multidisciplinary research.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

All relevant books and academic articles by famous scholars brought to my attention have been used and a part of the long list cited in the bibliography. The study is also shaped by useful comments, remarks and suggestions that the author has received from scholars, professors and colleagues. His works can be classified according to several criteria but, for the purpose of our study we will look at them from the viewpoint of subject matter.¹ Since there is a huge number of al-Ghazali's extant works I will mention only the most prominent and influential ones. The most important legal work of al-Ghazali is *Al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl (The Filtered in the Principles [of Jurisprudence])*, which he wrote as a teacher at *Nizamiya* in Nishapur. The book was intended to explain some details of the principles of jurisprudence of Islam to his students. Throughout this book the influence of philosophy and sufi teachings on the author can be easily observed. One of the most significant features of the book are the two classifications of the sciences. The basis for the first classification is the degree to which the sciences related to reason and *Sharī'ah*. In the second classification sciences are divided into two categories, namely, rational (*'aqliyyah*) and religious (*dīniyyah*).² Another important book dealing with legal matters is *Al-Mankhul min ta'līqāt al-uṣūl (The Sifted Notes on the Principles [of Jurisprudence])*.

¹ William Montgomery Watt, "Abu Hamid al-Ghazali", *Encyclopedia of Islam*, New Edition, vol. II. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983., and "Abu Hamid al-Ghazali", *Encyclopaedia of religion*. New York: Macmillan, 1987., See also George F. Hourani: "A revised chronology of al-Ghazali's writings" in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 104, No. 2. (Apr. - Jun., 1984), pp. 289-302., D. B. Macdonald, E. J. Brill's first encyclopaedia of Islam, 1913-1936. Reprint, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987.,

² Abu-Sway, 45-49., For classification of knowledge and sciences of al-Ghazali and different criteria thereby used by him see: Osman Bakar, *Classification of knowledge in Islam: a study in Islamic philosophies of science*, (Cambridge: The Islamic texts society, 1998.) chapters 7, 8, and 9.

It is one of the earliest works of Al-Ghazali and it contains some statements that are in contradiction with his later works. For example, in *Mankhūl* al-Ghazali had criticized harshly Imam Abu Hanifa, while he praised him, and other leading Sunni jurists, in his *Iḥyāʾ*.³

In the field of philosophy two works of al-Ghazali are usually referred to. These are *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* (Intentions of the philosophers) and *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (Incoherence of the Philosophers). *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa* is an exposition of the teachings of the Muslim philosophers (Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina). It does not contain any judgement whether positive or negative. The book served as a prelude to a more prominent work of Al-Ghazali – *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*.

The *Tahāfut* represents one of the most famous and elaborate criticisms of Muslim Peripatetic philosophy. The main aim of the author is to refute the views of the philosophers on twenty matters, three of which were according to Al-Ghazali blasphemous and heretical. It has been, however, suggested by a number of scholars, most recently by Alexander Treiger, that we should exercise prudence when reading al-Ghazali's intellectual verdict on the philosophers as he agreed to at least some of their views.⁴ For instance, al-Ghazali endorsed the views that ultimate felicity is attainable through perfection and cleansing as well as the view that the knowledge needed for the perfection of soul comes upon mastery of intellectual sciences.⁵ Similarly, Ibn Rushd in his response to al-Ghazali's criticism of the philosophers concurred with al-Ghazali on certain points, especially on those put forward in the Sixteenth Discussion of the *Tahāfut*. Ibn Rushd, nevertheless, criticised al-Ghazali on some other issues pertaining to the latter's Both books (*Maqāṣid* and *Tahāfut*) show

³ Abu-Sway, 38-52.

⁴ Alexander Treiger, *Inspired knowledge in Islamic thought: al-Ghazali's theory of mystical cognition and its Avicennian foundation*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 84-85.

⁵ Ibid.

that al-Ghazali was well acquainted with the teachings of Muslim philosophers and their predecessors. From the viewpoint of methodology these works are important because they point to al-Ghazali's reliance on the rules of logic, textual analysis and other methods to demonstrate his points. He was also clear in stating that in order for somebody to criticize something it is a must for him or her to be well acquainted with the subject matter and methodology.⁶

In the field of logic al-Ghazali left behind him two important works – *Mi'yār al-'ilm* and *Miḥāk al-naẓar*. What is clear from these books is Al-Ghazali's advocating the use of Aristotelian logic as a methodological means to arrive at sound conclusions. His position on logic as a useful methodological tool was to be criticized by the proponents of Salafī movement, before all Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzi.

Al-Ghazali also wrote on Scholastic Theology (*'Ilm al-kalām*). One of the most prominent work from this genre is *Al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād* whereby the author defended the use of logic in the field of Kalam. In his another work titled *Iljām al-'awām 'an 'ilm al-kalām* al-Ghazali laid down some theoretical precautions for the novices in the field of Kalam. *Fayṣal tafriqa bayna al-islām wa al-zandaqa* is partly polemical work where the author keeps polemical tone by expounding vehement criticism of the

⁶ Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *The incoherence of the philosophers (Tahāfut al-falāsifa): A parallel English-Arabic text translated, introduced, and annotated by Michael E. Marmura*, (Provo, UT: Brigham Young university press, 1997), pp. xv-xxvii. Al-Ghazali's vehement criticism of the Philosophers and refutation of their doctrines prompted many historians of Islamic philosophy to conclude that he dealt a death to the discipline of philosophy and that philosophy among Muslims went into disrepute – a statement that has been rebutted by a number of contemporary Muslim scholars. Although al-Ghazali was an acclaimed jurist, apart from being a theologian and a sufi, and since he pronounced the philosophers as infidels, he declined to issue a legal ruling against the followers of their doctrines: "If someone says: 'you have explained the doctrines of these [philosophers]; do you then say conclusively that they are infidels and that the killing of those who uphold their beliefs is obligatory?'... We, however, prefer not to plunge into [the question] of pronouncing those who uphold heretical innovation as infidels, and which pronouncement is valid and which is not, lest the discourse should stray from the objectives of this book. God, exalted be He, is the One who leads one successfully to what is correct." *The incoherence of the philosophers*, p. 230.

Batiniyya movement. Al-Ghazali's works on Sufism are numerous and of particular importance for our study. His works can be divided into those pertaining to the theoretical aspects and those containing practical prescriptions for the aspirants on the Sufi path.⁷ In the first group of works we can put *Minhāj al-ābidīn*, *Risāla al-laduniyyah*, *Ma'ārij al-quḍs fī madārij ma'rifat al-naḥs* and *Mishkāṭ al-anwār*. In these works we can find many beautiful passages on sufi theory. Another striking characteristic of all al-Ghazali's works on Sufism is his extensive quotation of the verses of the Holy Qur'an and *ahādīth* of the Prophet (s.a.w.s.) along with his use of logic and philosophy to prove and support his points. *Minhāj al-ābidīn* (The Course for the Worshippers) is chronologically one of the last works of al-Ghazali. The tone of the book is similar to *Iḥyā'* and affirms the superiority of the sufi methods. The search for and acquisition of knowledge as an act of worship and as a preparation of believers for the hereafter is a prominent theme of *Minhāj*. Al-Ghazali pointed out that there are seven obstacles on the way to Hereafter (*tarīqah al-ākhirah*) and proceeds with detailed elaboration on them.⁸

Risāla al-laduniya seems to be defending 'knowledge from on high' as the chief source of sufi knowledge. The hierarchy of knowledge is once more reiterated along with a brief but compressed discussion of the sources of knowledge. The sources of knowledge, as represented in this work, are twofold: divine and human, while learning is what brings knowledge into actualization. Al-Ghazali further subdivided divine knowledge into revelation (*waḥy*) and inspiration (*ilhām*). Revelation is a form of knowledge reserved for the prophets only while inspiration can be acquired by any human being provided that he or she is prepared to receive it. Furthermore, revelation

⁷ Watt, "Abu Hamid al-Ghazali", *Encyclopedia of Islam*.

⁸ Abu-Sway, pp. 158-159. *al-Laduniya*

is conveyed by Allah (s. w. t.) but inspiration arrives by means of the Universal Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-kullī*).⁹ *Maʿārij al-quḍs fī madārij maʿrifat al-naḥs* is one of the most important works of al-Ghazali on Sufi theory. Some scholars have expressed doubts with regard to authenticity of *Maʿārij* though the content and style of the book are very similar, at times almost identical, with the other works of al-Ghazali, especially the XXI book of the *Ihya*. The very title reveals to us that the content is a form of psychological approach to theology. Starting with the famous *ḥadīth* “Who knows himself – knows his Lord” the relation between soul and body, knowledge of the self or one’s own nature is viewed as the prerequisite for the knowledge of God.¹⁰ How do we know our own self? If this question is analyzed from the position of ‘pure’ epistemology then one might confuse the subject (knower) and the object (known) which is, in this case, the same person. Seen from this perspective the question may appear to be self-contradictory but for al-Ghazali and other classical Muslim scholars it was not. If we analyze the knowing faculties of the human being in detail, as al-Ghazali did in *Maʿārij* and the aspects of our existence or the ontological components of our selves then the question becomes clearer and answerable. The relationship between religion and science is also explained in the book. Human intellect receives knowledge or light from the Divine repository of knowledge. The Divine injunctions and human intellect are in a relation similar to that of a building and its foundations, ray of light and vision, oil and the lamp which utilizes it. Al-Ghazali maintains that the

⁹ Timothy J. Giannotti, *Al-Ghazali’s unspeakable doctrine of the soul: unveiling the esoteric psychology and eschatology of the Ihya*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001.), pp. 183-184. The book contains partial translation of the *Risāla* with notes. Complete translation into english with introduction by Margaret Smith, “Al-Risalat al-Laduniyya”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1938), pp. 177-200 and 353-374. See also: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Intellect and intuition: their relationship from the islamic perspective”, in *Islam and contemporary society*, ed. S. Azzam, (London: Longman group, 1982.), pp. 36-46.

¹⁰ English translation of al-Ghazali’s *Maʿārij* with introduction, analysis and summary by Yusuf Easa Shamma, “Al-Ghazali’s the ascent to the Divine through the path of self-knowledge”, (Ph.D. diss., Hartford Seminary Foundation, 1958, obtained through Michigan: U-M-I, 1987.), pp. lxix-lxxiv.

ultimate purpose of all sciences should be a means for coming closer to God, and if this aim is pursued thoroughly one will achieve bliss in this world and in the Hereafter. If the purpose for seeking knowledge is something else then one's knowledge is not only useless but harmful and destructive. Heart (*qalb*) is defined as spirit that controls the whole body and receives service from all bodily members of faculties.

Mishkāt al-anwār is a shorter book on theoretical sufism written as an answer to the question posed to the author by a friend of his. Unlike *Ihyā'*, *Mishkāt al-anwār* is composed in a very subtle language laden with symbolic parables and metaphors. Al-Ghazali stresses that the real light is only God and whenever light is used to describe other than God it is used a metaphor. Al-Ghazali metaphysics espoused in the *Mishkāt al-anwār* is based on the idea of *tawhīd*. God's knowledge and existence are like light whose rays are shed upon all creation. The second chapter of the book is devoted to the discussion of the purpose of our existence, purification of soul as indispensable method for the acquisition of knowledge about oneself, the world and God and, hierarchical structure of self and the Universe. The world and all things in it are seen as symbols pointing to higher realities. Five similitudes of the Light verse are compared to the five faculties of the soul (senses, imagination, reflection, rational faculty and prophetic faculty). The authenticity of the last chapter has been a subject of debate among the orientalist. However, as Lazarus-Yafeh pointed out the fact that some parts of *Mishkāt* may appear to contradict al-Ghazali's statements in his other works is only because various books of al-Ghazali are meant for different audience or readers.¹¹

¹¹ Lazarus-Yafeh, 42.

Of al-Ghazali's works on Sufi practice *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* is by far the most important judging by both: the size and comprehensiveness of the book and the multiplicity of the methods used. The work is divided into forty books arranged into four quarters. The detailed study and analysis of this masterpiece would require years of study and voluminous commentary which is far beyond the scope of my study. For the purpose of my thesis I have mostly relied on the following books of *Iḥyā'*: Book I or The Book of Knowledge, which treats various aspects involved in the acquisition of knowledge along with the sources of knowledge, book XXI on the wonders of the Heart where the author presents a detailed exposition of the meaning of the heart and related terms coupled with the valuable data of the methodology for his study, the following two books of the same quarter - On the Disciplining the Soul and Breaking of the Two Desires as important methodological requirements for the study of human nature, and XXXVIII book on Self-Examination and Self-Accounting as unavoidable preparatory actions preceding any search of knowledge. The whole work is composed after al-Ghazali's crises and intellectual conversion. The existence of a kind of knowledge higher than rational is proven by various kinds of examples. However, the nature of this knowledge is not discussed for two reasons: even the prophets had not revealed it and inability of language to convey its meaning. In order to attain to this certain knowledge one has to live in a highly disciplined manner with ascetic practices of self-mortification and purification of soul. In conjunction with this, *Iḥyā'* is written as a comprehensive manual of Sufi practice whereby the science of action (*Ilm al-mu'āmalah*) is an important condition for the attainment of the divine knowledge.

The other works of al-Ghazali on Sufi practice are largely similar to *Iḥyā'* in terms of content but not the size. *Bidāyat al-hidāyah* (The Beginning of Guidance) is a

brief discussion on the rules of daily life of devout Muslims.¹² In accordance with his other works, al-Ghazali repeats the primacy of the sufi method for the acquisition of knowledge. In *Maqṣad al-asnā fi sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā* al-Ghazali claims that the knowledge he acquired treading the sufi path is different from the previous scholars' understanding. The customs and believes of people or community are seen as impediments to intellectual conversion and progress but a man who has witnessed the truth should not be held back and should convey the knowledge he has acquired.

¹² Abu-Sway, 124.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPT OF METHODOLOGY AS ELABORATED BY CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM SCHOLARS VIS-A-VIS THE LIFE AND WORKS OF ABŪ ḤĀMID AL-GHAZĀLĪ

2.1 A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE BIOGRAPHY OF ABU HAMID AL-GHAZALI

Before we proceed with discussion on Al-Ghazali's methodology it is useful to say something about the life and works of this great scholar; the meaning and importance of methodology as well as its position within a larger structure of organically related concepts and terms. Much has been already written about the life and works of Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, so we will mention only briefly some salient and relevant biographical information.¹

Abū Ḥamid ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Al-Ghazali was born in Ṭus, the province of Khurasān near the city of Mashhad which is situated in today's Iran in a family of artisans and scholars. His elder brother Ahmad and paternal uncle Ahmad ibn Muhammad were both famous sufis in the region. The city of Ṭus was the birthplace of many other famous personalities such as Abu Ali al-Hasan ibn Ishaq better known as Nizam al-Mulk, Firdawsi who authored the famous collection of poems – *Shahnāma*, and Ummar Khayyam who lived at the same time as Al-Ghazali.²

¹ There are many works about the life and works of al-Ghazali in English, Arabic and other languages, to mention a few: Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazali the mystic: a study of the life and personality of Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Tusi al-Ghazali, together with an account of his mystical teaching and an estimate of his place in the history of Islamic mysticism*, (London: Luzac & Co., 1944)., D. B. Macdonald, "The life of al-Ghazali". *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. 1899., Samuel M. Zwemer, *A muslim seeker after God: showing Islam at its best in the life and teaching of al-Ghazali, mystic and theologian of the eleventh century*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1920)., William Montgomery Watt, *Muslim intellectual: a study of al-Ghazali*, (Edinburgh, 1963), Mustafa Abu-Sway, *Al-Ghazzaliyy: a study in islamic epistemology* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1996). Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazali*, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, the Hebrew University, 1975)., Of the works in Arabic scholars usually refer to: Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfi'iyah al-Kubrā* (Cairo: 'Isa al-Bābi al-Ḥalabi & Co., 1964).

² Smith, 9.