

## An Examination of Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Thought: Building the Path to Spiritual Perfection

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the philosophical thoughts of Imam Al-Ghazali and relate them in the modern era to build a path to human spiritual perfection. This research is a qualitative type with a library research approach, accompanied by primary sources in the form of books and secondary sources of several journal articles. Research data were collected through various books and journals as sources of information and then analyzed using content analysis techniques. The result of this research is to achieve spiritual perfection through the integration of ethics, Sufism, philosophy, and epistemology. Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of ethics as a basis, where humans are expected to imitate divine traits, such as compassion and wisdom, to approach self-perfection. Through naturalizing the view that God is the active creator who governs the universe, Al-Ghazali invites humans to adopt a position of humility and resignation, realizing that everything comes from God's will. Overall, Al-Ghazali combines the elements of reason, ethics, and intuition in a harmonious path towards God, providing humans with a way to achieve deep spiritual balance as well as awareness of divine reality in everyday life.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, Imam Al-Ghazali, Perfection, Spiritual.

### INTRODUCTION

Al-Ghazali is one of the greatest *mutakallimin* in Islamic History, the most prominent proponent of Ashariyah theology and Ahlus Sunna. In the philosophy of science, many figures were born, both from the western world which developed many schools of philosophy, such as idealism, realism, perennialism, progressivism, essentialism. And the eastern world. Imam Al-ghazali is one of the Islamic figures who helped color the theory of philosophy which is famous for its Islamicity. He is a Sufi as well as a theologian who earned the nickname *Hujjah al-Islam*. Imam Al-Ghazali was born in Tus, Persia. In 1058 AD. Al-Ghazali has made significant contributions in various fields, including theology, philosophy, and tassawuf.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad Atabik, *Telaah Pemikiran Al-ghazali Tentang filsafat*, 2, no. 1 (2014): 19–40.

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Especially in the field of Philosophy Imam Al-Ghazali tried to dissect and reconstruct the thoughts of Western philosophers and Islamic philosophers who are oriented towards Western philosophers.<sup>2</sup>, to try to reexamine the mistakes that occur regarding theories that cannot be justified if only using rational. Al-Ghazali is a very unique figure in the world of thought. His wanderings gave birth to many works that have become interesting research objects reviewed to date. Starting from among lovers of knowledge and academics, both from Islamic and orientalist circles. Al-Ghazali's comprehensive approach to issues of philosophy and spirituality offers deep insights into the relationship between reason and faith, as well as integrating science and spirituality.<sup>3</sup>

In his intellectual journey, Al-Ghazali experienced a fairly drastic transformation. At first, to find a truth, Imam Al-Ghazali emphasized rationality like the Asy'ariyah school in understanding religious teachings. But after 4 years of serving as rector at the nizamia university, Imam al-Ghazali experienced a spiritual crisis, in self-skepticism which included faith and all types of ma'rifat. Then Imam al-Ghazali decided to leave his position and all worldly affairs to meditate and seek answers to where he was uzlah looking for truth through the path of tassawuf.<sup>4</sup> The purpose of this writing is also oriented towards the formation of akhlakul karimah as an effort to help humans realize their return to fitrah by empowering faith / spirit, reason / fiction and the will / gift that Allah SWT has given him to learn the demands of Allah SWT and His Messenger, so that the fitrah in individuals develops correctly and firmly according to the guidance of Allah SWT.<sup>5</sup>

This study aims to develop a systematic, integrative-holistic analytical framework by unifying the five dimensions of Al-Ghazali's thought ethics, naturalization, philosophy, epistemology, and Sufism into a unified whole oriented toward building a path toward human spiritual perfection (*kamal al-rub*) in the context of modern life. Unlike previous studies, which generally address only one dimension of Al-Ghazali's thought separately and partially, this study takes a different approach by making spiritual perfection the focal point of analysis and demonstrating how each element of Al-Ghazali's thought complements each other and forms a cohesive and synergistic path toward God.

For example, Wesilah (2009), in her study of the Concept of Knowledge and Truth in Al-Ghazali's Thought (*A Study of Epistemology*), focuses solely on one dimension of Al-Ghazali's epistemology, namely the distinction between mu'amalah and mukasyafah sciences, without organically integrating this dimension with ethics, Sufism, or philosophy as a unified spiritual path. Similarly, Atabik (2014) in his "Review of Al-Ghazali's Thought on Philosophy" discusses Al-Ghazali's philosophical aspects, particularly his critique in Tahafut al-Falasifah (*Theology of Philosophy*), but does not develop an integrative framework connecting this philosophy with Sufism and epistemology in the context of spiritual perfection. Meanwhile, Kusuma and Rahmadani's (2023) study in "Imam Al-Ghazali and His Thought" remains descriptive-historical in nature and fails to systematically synthesize the various dimensions of Al-Ghazali's thought, as this study does.

The next novelty lies in its contribution to bridging the gap between Al-Ghazali's classical thought, which emerged in the 11th century CE, and contemporary realities and challenges. Azizah and Abidin's (2025) study on the Concept of Islamic Education Based on

<sup>2</sup> M. Sukamdani, 'Urgensi Filsafat Islam Dalam Kurikulum Pta?', *Didaktika Religia* 3, no. 2 (2015): 113–32, <https://doi.org/10.30762/didaktika.v3i2.165>.

<sup>3</sup> Fu'ad Zaini et al., 'The Perspective on Islamic Education Is Examined Through The Book "Nahwa Tarbiyah Islamiyah" By Hasan Muhammad Al- Syarqawi', *Jurnal Ilmiah Profesi Pendidikan* 9, no. 1 (2024): 229–41, <https://doi.org/10.29303/jipp.v9i1.2048>.

<sup>4</sup> Khudori Sholeh, *Skeptis Al-Ghazali* (2009).

<sup>5</sup> A. Heriyanto, H., Tamam, A. M., Rahman, I. K., Sastra, A., & Alim, 'Strategi Pendidikan Akhlak Pada Fase Tamyiz', *Al-Liqo: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (2023): 185–99. <https://doi.org/10.46963/alliqo.v8i2.809>

Imam Al-Ghazali's Perspective, published in *Al-Munawwarah: Journal of Islamic Education*, does indeed incorporate Al-Ghazali's thoughts within the context of modern Islamic education, but its scope is limited to formal education and character building, and has not yet reached the formulation of a holistic and comprehensive spiritual path. Similarly, Husni and Hasib (2025) in 'The Importance of Balancing Fardhu'ain and Fardhu Kifayah Knowledge According to Imam Al-Ghazali, which is relevant, discusses the balance of knowledge, but does not build a comprehensive synthesis between all dimensions of Al-Ghazali's thought, which is the core of this study. This is where the true novelty of this research lies. It does not merely describe one aspect of Al-Ghazali's thought, but rather synthesizes ethics as a foundation, naturalization as a cosmological perspective, epistemology as a hierarchy of knowledge, Sufism as a method of purifying the soul, and philosophy as a bridge between reason and faith. It then weaves all of these together into a single argumentative construct that answers the question: How can modern humans achieve spiritual perfection through Al-Ghazali's thought? This framework has not been explicitly formulated in previous literature.

This research is crucial because humans in the modern era face an increasingly apparent spiritual crisis as a result of the dominance of materialism, secularism, and value disorientation. Amidst rapid technological advances and the unstoppable flow of globalization, many individuals have lost their spiritual grip and the profound meaning of life. Al-Ghazali's thought, which integrates reason, ethics, and spirituality within a harmonious framework, offers a highly relevant and applicable solution to address the spiritual needs of 21st-century humans. Thus, this research is present not merely as a historical-philosophical study, but as a real contribution to the development of humankind as a whole.

## METHOD

This research uses a library study approach to examine Imam Al-Ghazali's philosophical thought in depth and systematically.<sup>6</sup> Through this approach, the entire process of data collection, selection, and analysis is based on textual sources, both primary and secondary, relevant to the themes of ethics, epistemology, naturalization, Sufism, and philosophy in Al-Ghazali's thought.<sup>7</sup> The document search and collection process was carried out in stages using several structured search strategies. First, the researcher explored primary sources in the form of Imam Al-Ghazali's direct works, such as *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, *Taba'at al-Falasifah*, *Maqasid al-Falasifah*, and *Al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal*, which serve as primary references for authentically understanding his thought. Second, a search for secondary sources was conducted through a database of scientific journals, both nationally and internationally, using keywords such as "Al-Ghazali," "Islamic philosophy," "Islamic epistemology," "Sufism," and "spiritual perfection." Platforms used in this search included Google Scholar, accredited journal portals, and university repositories.<sup>8</sup>

The documents found were then filtered based on predetermined inclusion criteria: (1) the document specifically discusses Al-Ghazali's thought from one or more dimensions relevant to the research theme; (2) the document was published by an indexed scientific journal or published by a credible academic publisher; (3) the document is fully available and

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<sup>6</sup> Anggito A and Setiawan J, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (CV Jejak, 2018).

<sup>7</sup> Z. Dkk Arifin, 'Teori Belajar Sosial Dalam Perspektif Hadits-Hadits Akidah Akhlak', *Al-Liqo: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 1 (2024): 52–68 <https://doi.org/10.46963/alliqo.v9i1.1107>.

<sup>8</sup> Mahmud Arif Aulia Azmi Alkhairi, 'Filsafat Pendidikan Islam: Menggali Esensi Pendidikan Multikultural Dalam Konteks Keislaman', *Azka: Jurnal Aktualisasi Pendidikan Islam* 20, no. 1 (2024): 27–39 <https://doi.org/10.46963/alliqo.v9i1.1107>.

accessible for in-depth analysis; and (4) the document is directly relevant to the research question of how Al-Ghazali's thought contributes to building a path to spiritual perfection. Documents that only mention Al-Ghazali marginally or are not directly related to the dimensions being studied were excluded from the analysis.

The collected data that met the selection criteria were then analyzed using the deductive content analysis technique (*directed content analysis*).<sup>9</sup> The deductive approach was chosen because the researcher already had a predetermined conceptual framework, namely the five dimensions of Al-Ghazali's thought: ethics, naturalization, philosophy, epistemology, and Sufism, which were then used as the main analysis categories. Each document was read carefully to identify parts that contain essential meanings that fit these categories, then contextual interpretation was carried out to understand the meaning contained in the text in depth and comprehensively. This process allows the researcher to not only describe the content of the text, but also draw meaningful conclusions about how each dimension of Al-Ghazali's thought is interrelated and forms a unified path to spiritual perfection.<sup>10</sup>

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Biography of Imam Al-Ghazali

Imam al-Ghazali's full name is Abu Hamid Muhammad Ibn Muhammad. Ibn Muhammad Al-Ghazali al-T husi who earned the honorary title of *Hujjah of Islam*. Imam al-Ghazali was born in the city of Thusi in 1052 AD.<sup>11</sup> He died at the age of 55, and was buried in his hometown. Imam al-Ghazali is a scholar who is persistent in studying moving from one city to another. He met and learned from many figures that he found in his wanderings.<sup>12</sup>

Imam al-Ghazali's father was a spinner who sold wool to make ends meet. He was a father who had a high ideology, he would only eat from the results of his own work. He died leaving his children very young. Before his death Imam al-Ghazali's father had told one of his close friends who was a Sufi expert to educate, teach and raise his two sons, hoping that his children would not feel the regret of being late in studying.

Since childhood Imam Al-Ghazali has grown into a child with a personality who likes to study and also has a high curiosity in seeking the truth. Despite having a family background that is less supportive in the economic field it does not shake Imam al-Ghazali to learn to scholars. As a child Imam al-Ghazali studied the basics of fiqh to Muhammad Al-Razakany in Thusia<sup>13</sup>, after he continued his journey of studying to Naisabur to study with Imam Haramain who was famous as a charismatic scholar. The persistence of Imam Al-Ghazali succeeded in becoming a scholar who mastered many fields in his mass.

After Imam Al-Haramain died, Imam Al-Ghazali then continued his wanderings to meet the prime minister Nizam al-Mulk.<sup>14</sup> From the meeting then made Imam Al-Ghazali as a professor at the Nizamiyah college located in the city of Baghdad. Intelligence imam al-ghazali membutanya appointed rector in the field of Islamic religion. The success that imam

<sup>9</sup> Syaiful Rizal, 'Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Islam Nusantara Melalui Mata Pelajaran Aqidah Akhlak', *Al Qodiri : Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Keagamaan* 21, no. 1 (2023): 4 <https://doi.org/10.53515/qodiri.2023.21.1.49-60>.

<sup>10</sup> Zainuddin Muda Z. Monggilo, 'Analisis Konten Kualitatif Hoaks Dan Literasi Digital Dalam @Komikfunday', *Interaksi: Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 9, no. 1 (2020): 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.14710/interaksi.9.1.1-18> <https://doi.org/10.14710/interaksi.9.1.1-18>.

<sup>11</sup> Antony Black, *Pemikiran Politik Islam Dari Masa Nabi Hingga Masa Kini* (Serambi, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Al Halim Kusuma and Laila Rahmadani, 'Imam Al-Ghazali Dan Pemikirannya', *Jurnal Eksbis* 1, no. 1 (2023): 23-31, <https://doi.org/10.59548/je.v1i1.18>.

<sup>13</sup> Nor Azean, *Amar Ma'ruf Nabi Munkar Menurut Perspektif Imam al-Ghazali*, 2018, 16-17.

<sup>14</sup> Dkk Mulyadi, 'Membangun Semangat Mahasiswa Pascasarjana IAIN Madura Dalam Mata Kuliah Filsafat Dan Pemikiran Pendidikan Islam', *Al Qodiri : Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Keagamaan* VIII, no. I (2023): 1-19 <https://doi.org/10.53515/qodiri.2023.21.2.477-491>.

al-Ghazali had achieved seemed to give birth to anxiety and suffering that caused him to experience a spiritual crisis including faith and all types of ma'rifat. His anxiety and curiosity were expressed in a book entitled *al-munqidz min al-dhalal*.<sup>15</sup> The book contains imam al-ghazali's journey in search of the real truth, starting from disbelief in the knowledge obtained with the five senses is often considered a lie, then he looks for the truth. truth through relying on reason, but the process does not entirely bring satisfaction to the heart.

This is then poured into his work entitled Tahafut Al- Falsafah which contains responses and also refutations to the philosophers. The anxiety felt by Imam Al-Ghazali continued until he took uzlah to find the truth in the way of Sufism which uses more heart. Imam Al-Ghazali died in his hometown of Thus on Monday the 14th of Jumadil Akhir 505 AH (December 19, 1111 AD). Imam Al-Ghazali in 478/1058 AD at the age of approximately fifty-five years. Shortly before his death he uttered the words of Francis Bacon, the English philosopher, namely: "I lay my spirit before Allah and bury my body in the silent folds of the earth. My name will rise again to the mention and lips of mankind in the future".<sup>16</sup>

### Imam Al-Ghazali's Works

Presentation Imam Al-Ghazali was a very productive scholar in writing down his thoughts. The number of Imam Al-Ghazali's works has not been definitively agreed upon by historians. In the book Al-Badawi makes a classification of books that have been authored and suspected of being the work of Imam al-Ghazali into three groups. First, the group of books whose authenticity can be confirmed as the work of al-Ghazali consists of 72 books. Second, the group of books that are doubtful as the original work of al-Ghazali consists of 22 books. Third, the group of books that can be ascertained not to be his work, consisting of 31 books. Among Imam Al-Ghazali's most monumental works are: *First*, Ulum al-Din (reviving the sciences of religion). This book combines several disciplines, including fiqh, tassawuf and. Philosophy. *Second*, Maqashid al-Falasifat (the goals of philosophers). This book also contains the science of philosophy, mantiq, physics and natural sciences. In this book Imam Al-Ghazali explains the three main issues in Greek philosophy (logic, metaphysics, and physics) simply and systematically. *Third*, Tahafut al-Falasifah (the confusion of philosophers' thinking). In this book Imam Al- Ghazali argues about the contradictions that exist in Islamic teachings. He criticizes some of the errors in the thinking of Greek philosophers and Muslim philosophers who follow Greek thought. *fourth*, Al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal. (The Savior from Error). This work of al-Ghazali is an autobiography (life history) that contains his personal intellectual and spiritual development. In this work al-Ghazali also describes his assessment of the methods of truth seekers, types of knowledge and epistemology. Al-Ghazali in the introduction of his book states that the motivation that prompted him to write this book was to fulfill the request of a religious brother (al-akh fi al-din) who asked him to convey his opinion about the truth and fallacy of the sciences he was in and his personal experiences in seeking the truth.

### The Philosophical Thought of Imam Al-Ghazali

#### 1. Ethics

Ethics comes from the Greek word *ethos* (singular) which means: dwelling place, pasture, stable, manners, customs, disposition, attitude, way of thinking. The plural is ta, eta, meaning way. The word ethics has the same meaning as the word morality. Moral comes from the Latin word: *Mos* (singular form) or *moros* (plural form) which are means

<sup>15</sup> Dkk Endin Nasrudin, 'Pengaruh Pembelajaran PAI, Pola Asuh Orang Tua, Dan Budaya Religiusitas Sekolah Terhadap Kedisiplinan Beribadah Siswa Di SMPIT Hayatan Thayyibah Dan SMPITQ AlFath Kota Sukabumi', *Al Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Keagamaan* 21, no. 2 (2023): 6 <https://doi.org/10.53515/qodiri.2023.21.2.492-506>.

<sup>16</sup> Azean, *Amar Ma'ruf Nabi Munkar Menurut Perspektif Imam al-Ghazali*.

habits, manners, behavior, nature, character, morals, way of life.<sup>17</sup> The discussion of ethics in the thought of imam al-ghazali is contained in his work entitled *ulumuddin*. In other words, imam al-ghazali's ethical theory is one of his tassawuf. Regarding the main purpose of ethics, Imam Al-Ghazali stated that the function of ethics is for humans as far as they are able to imitate the temperament and characteristics of the Godhead.<sup>18</sup>

According to imam al-ghazali, god is an active and powerful creator. This contradicts the Greek philosophy which considers that god is the highest good but is passive which means waiting for human approach, and considers material as the base of evil. Al-ghazali says that goodness is spread everywhere. It's just that its use is simplified, namely reducing lust and not overdoing it. Tassawuf is a science that does not stand alone apart from shari'at.<sup>19</sup> This can be seen from the content of the teachings contained in the *ihya* book which is a harmonious blend of fiqh, tassawuf and kalam science which means that religious obligations must be carried out in order to reach the level of perfection.

## 2. Naturalization

Al-Ghazali chose language that reflects and implies the cosmological principles developed by philosophers, something not found in the works of previous Sunni theologians. In his work "Misykat al Anwar", the teachings he presents seem to contradict his other works, especially "*al- Iqtishad fil-I'tiqad*" (Balanced Book on What-to-Believe).<sup>20</sup>

Al-Ghazali no longer believed that God created all events in the world directly and instantly, as the Asy'ariyah school before him believed. He developed his own cosmology which was a synthesis between the Asy'ariyah cosmology and Ibn Sina's thought. Although Al-Ghazali had a determinist view of the universe, he maintained the belief that God's actions are free and that God is the sole "creator" or efficient causa of the entire universe. Moreover, Al-Ghazali did not object to the theses of philosophers in other fields or to their approaches and methodologies in philosophy in general. He preferred to naturalize the philosophical tradition in Islam rather than undertake a destructive critique of it.<sup>21</sup>

## 3. Philosophy

Imam Al-Ghazali is a figure who wrote a lot about philosophy as he wrote in the book Tahafut Falsafah, which is a book in which there is criticism of the thoughts of philosophers who according to him can shake the joints of one's faith. but on the other hand he also wrote a book entitled Maqashid Al- Falsafah, here he explains problems related to logic, theology, and metaphysics. In the book by Imam Al-Ghazali entitled "*al-munqidz min al-dhalal*", he expresses his opinion and divides philosophers as well as

<sup>17</sup> Dkk Harahap, M. S., 'Eksistensi Motivasi Dalam Meningkatkan Potensi Personal Dalam Perspektif Al-Qur'an Dan Hadis', *Al-Liqo: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 1, no. 3 (2022): 327–46 <https://doi.org/10.46963/alliqo.v7i2.587>.

<sup>18</sup> Sofwatun Nida et al., 'Dynamic Transformation of Islamic Religious Education Curriculum In Indonesia', *Edupedia: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Dan Pedagogi Islam* 9, no. 2 (2025): 192–99 <https://doi.org/10.35316/edupedia.v9i2.5913>.

<sup>19</sup> Sofiatul Husna and Mahmud Arif, 'Abdullah Nasih Ulwan's Philosophy of Islamic Education: A Critical Study of Its Relevance to Modern Educational Challenges', *Adabuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran* 5, no. 1 (2025): 28–39 <https://doi.org/10.38073/adabuna.v5i1.2908>.

<sup>20</sup> Muhammad Fadhil Hadziq and Muhammad Aqil Abror, 'Analysis of Character Education Values in Minhajul Muta'allim by Imam Al-Ghazali', *Al-Munawwarah: Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 2 (2025): 123–40 <https://doi.org/10.38073/almunawwarah.v1i2.3454>.

<sup>21</sup> Dkk. Alfedha, A., 'Implementasi Pembelajaran Akidah Akhlak Pada Masa New Normal Di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah', *L-Liqo: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 8, no. 2 (2023): 249–66 <https://doi.org/10.46963/alliqo.v8i2.854>.

penalizing their disbelief. *First*, the followers of atheism are a group of philosophers who deny God and also they oppose the existence of God, they believe that nature exists without God's intervention, they also have that animals come from sperm and sperm also come from animals, it happens from time to time, according to him they are a group of people who do not know God.

*Secondly*, the followers of naturalism are a group of philosophers who have been researching and observing the wonders of animals and plants for a long time, they witnessed a sign of God's power and in the end they acknowledged its existence, but because of too much research on nature this group has the impression that human thinking power depends on how its biological disposition and if the biological disposition is lost, they also oppose the existence of an afterlife, heaven, hell, harikiamat, and hisab.<sup>22</sup>

*Third*, adherents of divine philosophy, this group of people is a group that believes in the existence of god, namely Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and also Aristotle and those who follow them. *This third* group is largely against the first two groups mentioned, namely dahriyyun and thabi'yyun. But unfortunately in his philosophy Plato still gives room for small things that should still have elements of kufr that he still cannot let go of.

#### 4. Al-Ghazali's Epistemology

Epistemology gave birth to a variety of methods and the empirical approach and rationalism is the most famous, apart from these two approaches which are some of the opinions of Western scientists, in Islamic philosophy added with an approach called the intuitive approach or what we commonly know as the irfani approach. This approach is used by Imam Al-Ghazali to state the compatibility between reason and intuition to form epistemology.<sup>23</sup>

In understanding science, Al-Ghazali based his thoughts on the teachings of Islam. Therefore, some experts argue that Al-Ghazali's epistemology is Islamic epistemology. When he compared his basis and mindset with various schools of thought that developed in the Islamic world at his time, Al-Ghazali experienced doubts (*syak*) which made him in a skeptical condition. This was because the arguments put forward by the various schools never fully convinced him in understanding the values of truth. Al-Ghazali thought that these ideas were unable to explain the truth completely, because they only reached the level of human ability.<sup>24</sup>

Even so, Al-Ghazali still recognizes the existence of senses and reason as human instruments in obtaining knowledge, but he considers that their abilities are very limited and cannot reach the ultimate truth. According to Al-Ghazali, truth is not only limited to sensory truth (which is concrete), but there is also an abstract truth that lies behind the visible reality. Concrete truth is referred to as mu'amalah knowledge, which is knowledge that can be systematically written down and learned from others. Meanwhile, abstract truths are referred to as mukasyafah knowledge, which is difficult to explain in words, cannot be reached by the senses, and cannot be fully understood by the intellect.

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<sup>22</sup> Sofwatun Nida et al., 'Pendidikan Agama Islam Berbasis Behaviorisme: Strategi Efektif Membangun Perilaku Positif Siswa Melalui Reinforcement', *Raudhah Proud To Be Professionals: Jurnal Tarbiyah Islamiyah* 10, no. 1 (2025): 566–81 <https://doi.org/10.48094/raudhah.v10i1.847.nida>

<sup>23</sup> Khusnul Nur Azizah and Zainal Abidin, 'The Concept of Islamic Education Based on the Perspective of Imam Al-Ghazali', *Al-Munawwarah: Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 1 (2025): 48–56 <https://doi.org/10.38073/almunawwarah.v1i1.2514>.

<sup>24</sup> Muhammad Husni and Kholili Hasib, 'The Importance of Balancing the Knowledge of Fardhu'Ain and Fardhu Kifayah According to Imam Al-Ghazali', *Al-Munawwarah: Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 1 (2025): 31–38 <https://doi.org/10.38073/almunawwarah.v1i1.2512>.

Al-Ghazali stated that humans have levels of ability and limitations in acquiring knowledge. The senses (*bisyyah*) function as a tool to gain basic knowledge, reason is used to gain intermediate knowledge, and the heart becomes the highest tool with the help of inspiration, which can achieve the highest knowledge, namely the knowledge of the essence (at the level of mukasyafah).<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Al-Ghazali concluded that to reach the essence of truth, one must go through knowledge as a ladder to the truth. The heart, as the door to achieve the knowledge of mukasyafah, and the intellect, as the means to acquire the knowledge of the truth mu'amalah knowledge, both have important meanings in the Qur'an, and cannot be separated from each other in carrying out their functions.<sup>26</sup>

##### 5. Tassawuf

Imam Al-Ghazali has the view that the science of Sufism has two main parts, the *first* of which contains language, matters concerning the science of mu'amalah and the *second* part contains the language of matters concerning the science of mukasyafah. The science of Sufism which has these two elements is then clearly described in the book Ihya 'Ulumuddin, in its discussion there are at least four main chapters of which these four chapters are then each subdivided into ten chapters. As for the four main chapters, *the first* discusses worship, *the second* chapter is about customs, *the third* main chapter is about harmful things, and *then the fourth* is about maqamat and ahwal. When viewed in the opinion of Imam Al-Ghazali, the journey of Sufism is essentially a self-cleaning that is carried out continuously until it is able to reach the stage of musyahadah, and in the opinion of Imam Al-Ghazali also the heart is like a mirror that can capture the ma'rifah of divinity. This ability depends on how clean and clear a person's heart is, if his heart is dirty with dust then he will not be able to capture the light of the realization.

Imam Al-Ghazali, in this regard, outlines at least six maqams that a Sufi must pass through before reaching the level of ma'rifah. The six stations are as follows:

- a. Repentance, is the first step that a Sufi aspirant must take to achieve ma'rifah. Al-Ghazali categorizes repentance into three stages arranged systematically: first, regret for physical sins committed by the limbs; second, regret for mental sins; and third, repentance for negligence in remembering Allah. According to Al-Ghazali, there are three important elements in this repentance, namely knowledge, attitude, and charity, which are interrelated with each other.
- b. Patience is not only related to someone who faces a disaster, but patience is also needed in all situations and conditions of life. Patience includes three aspects, namely: patience in carrying out Allah's commands, patience in avoiding His prohibitions, and patience in facing tests and trials from Him.
- c. In Al-Ghazali's view, poverty means a lack of wealth that is needed by a person. According to him, abundant wealth can encourage a person to commit crimes or make him attached to things other than Allah, which can lead to negligence in worship.
- d. Zuhud, in general, means renouncing the world in order to achieve happiness in the hereafter. Al-Ghazali divided zuhud into three levels: *first*, zuhud to avoid punishment in the afterlife; *second*, zuhud in the hope of getting a better reward in the afterlife; and *third*, zuhud that is completely free from the motives of the

<sup>25</sup> Niki Lisda, 'The Living Qur'an: Pembacaan Surah An-Nashr Sebelum Belajar (Studi Kasus Di SDIT Mujahidul Amin)', *Al-Qodiri: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Keagamaan* 22, no. 1 (2024): 63–70, <https://doi.org/10.53515/qodiri.2024.22.1.63-70>.

<sup>26</sup> Utari Langeningtias et al., 'Upaya Pembentukan Akhlak Santri Melalui Kitab Ta'lim Muta'alim Di Pondok Pesantren', *Al-Liqo: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 1 (2024): 146–65, <https://doi.org/10.46963/alliqo.v9i1.1161>.

world. Anything, be it fear or hope, but simply the view that everything has no value except Allah.

## 6. Kalam

Al-Ghazali explained that what he meant about the science of kalam was to protect and maintain the faith of the sunnah experts from the heretics who felt increasingly misleading. But it is not in accordance with what is expected, it is actually increasingly based on the basis of the opponent's assumptions. Imam al-ghazali is among the fifth generation of al-ashariah figures, imam al-ghazali said that God created human potential. Qodim nature according to philosophers is one of the problems that is strongly opposed by Imam Al-Ghazali even belaiu disbelieved philosophers who consider nature qodim. Because according to imam al-ghazali if the earth is qodim it will be the same nature as god.<sup>27</sup>

### **Analysis of Imam Al-Ghazali's Thought in Building the Path to Spiritual Perfection.**

Imam Al-Ghazali's philosophical thinking is highly relevant in building a path to spiritual perfection as he offers a holistic approach involving ethics, epistemology, philosophy, naturalization, and Sufism. Al-Ghazali integrated philosophy and spirituality, bringing them together within the framework of Islamic teachings, focusing on how humans can achieve a life close to God. The following is an analysis of each element of Al-Ghazali's thought and how it is relevant in building a path to spiritual perfection.<sup>28</sup>

*First*, Ethics as the Foundation of Spiritual Life In Al-Ghazali's view, ethics are not just rules or habits of behavior, but a means to achieve closeness to God. For him, the main purpose of ethics is for humans to imitate God's attributes as far as possible (*takballuq bi akhlaqillah*), such as compassion, kindness, and wisdom. According to Al-Ghazali, man can approach spiritual perfection by cleansing the heart and removing vices such as greed, anger, and pride. He argues that the reduction of passions and self-control are the first steps in achieving self-balance and inner tranquility. Ethics, therefore, serves as the basis that leads one to control the impulses of the passions and act with compassion and sincerity, which are prerequisites towards spiritual perfection.<sup>29</sup>

*Second*, Naturalization and Understanding of God Al-Ghazali also offers a unique view in understanding the relationship between God and the universe. In contrast to the Greek philosophical view that sees God as a passive entity, Al-Ghazali emphasizes that God is an active creator who maintains and controls everything. According to him, the universe operates according to God's will and wisdom, not just the rigid laws of causality. This view provides a deep understanding of human dependence on God. By viewing the world as a creation that is continuously governed by God, humans are led to have an attitude of resignation and humility, realizing that this life is a manifestation of divine will. This understanding invites people to see everything as a rotation of God's love and greatness, leading them to a higher spiritual awareness.

*Ketiga*, In the field of epistemology, Al-Ghazali recognizes that reason and the senses have an important role, but both are limited in achieving ultimate truth. He added a third dimension in acquiring knowledge, namely the heart (*qalb*) which can receive divine inspiration. According to Al-Ghazali, knowledge gained through the heart is called mukasyafah knowledge or revelation, which can only be achieved through soul cleansing and deep spiritual experience. Emphasizing the importance of the heart as a means of attaining

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<sup>27</sup> Kusuma and Rahmadani, 'Imam Al-Ghazali Dan Pemikirannya'.

<sup>28</sup> T. Sulistiyani, 'Pengelolaan Sumber Belajar Oleh Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam', *Al-Liqo: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 7, no. 1 (2022): 40–52 <https://doi.org/10.46963/alliqo.v7i1.501>.

<sup>29</sup> Niki Lisda, 'The Living Qur'an: Pembacaan Surah An-Nashr Sebelum Belajar (Studi Kasus Di SDIT Mujahidul Amin)'.

ultimate knowledge, Al- Ghazali encouraged people to undergo a process of self-purification so that their hearts would become clean and capable of receiving God's light. This path is relevant for establishing spiritual perfection as it helps humans understand higher realities beyond worldly knowledge.<sup>30</sup>

*Fourth*, Tasawwuf: The Direct Path to God. Tasawwuf is the core of Al-Ghazali's spiritual path, which he laid out in his famous work, *Ihya' Ulumuddin*. According to him, tasawwuf is a way to eliminate all forms of worldliness through spiritual discipline and the exercise of the heart. Al-Ghazali believed that spiritual perfection can be achieved by passing through maqamat (spiritual stages) that include repentance, patience, gratitude, and tawakal, until reaching ma'rifah (insightful knowledge of God).<sup>31</sup> Tasawwuf teaches that the human heart is like a mirror that reflects divine light; however, for this light to be perfectly received, the mirror of the heart must be cleansed of worldly impurities. By cultivating spiritual piety and awareness, a Sufi is expected to reach the stage of musyahadah, which is witnessing God's presence in everything. This approach provides people with practical methods to purify themselves and achieve deep closeness to God.<sup>32</sup>

*Fifth*, Philosophy: Integration of Reason and Faith Although known as a philosopher of philosophy, Al- Ghazali did not completely reject philosophical thought. He even wrote *Maqashid al-* Al-Ghazali used philosophy to expose the positive sides of logic and metaphysics that are useful in understanding Islamic theological concepts. Al-Ghazali succeeded in combining philosophy and theology within an Islamic framework, so that people can use reason as a tool in understanding God without shaking faith. Through philosophy, he built a bridge between reason and faith, allowing one to not only believe in God dogmatically but also understand His existence rationally. This is important in the spiritual quest as it provides a solid foundation for integrating knowledge of reason and revelation in achieving spiritual perfection.

## CONCLUSION

Write Al-Ghazali's philosophical thought provides a comprehensive framework for achieving spiritual perfection through the integration of ethics, Sufism, philosophy and epistemology. Al-Ghazali emphasized the importance of ethics as a foundation, where humans are expected to emulate divine attributes, such as compassion and wisdom, to approach self- perfection. Through naturalizing the view that God is the active creator who governs the universe, Al-Ghazali invites humans to adopt a position of humility and resignation, realizing that everything comes from God's will.

In terms of knowledge, he recognized the limitations of reason and the senses, emphasizing the importance of the heart as the means to attain ultimate knowledge through inspiration. Tasawwuf, as the core of his spiritual approach, taught self-purification through maqamat until reaching ma'rifah, or the understanding of God. Despite disparaging some aspects of philosophy, Al-Ghazali still valued philosophy as a tool to strengthen faith. Overall, Al-Ghazali combined the elements of reason, ethics, and intuition in a harmonious path towards God, providing humans with a way to achieve deep spiritual balance as well as awareness of divine reality in everyday life.

<sup>30</sup> Rusliana, 'Implementasi Dan Problematika Standar Penilaian Pendidikan Dalam Kurikulum Merdeka Sekolah/Madrasah Di Indonesia', *Al Qodiri : Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial Dan Keagamaan* 15, no. 2 (2024): 37–48 <https://doi.org/10.53515/qodiri.2024.22.2.270-289>.

<sup>31</sup> Ahmad Al Hamid et al., 'Konsep Pendidik Dalam Pandangan Imam Al-Ghazali', *Adabuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pemikiran* 2, no. 2 (2023): 77–86 <https://doi.org/10.38073/adabuna.v2i2.929>.

<sup>32</sup> Syaiful Rizal, 'Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Islam Nusantara Melalui Mata Pelajaran Aqidah Akhlak'.

Although this article successfully provides a comprehensive study of Imam Al-Ghazali's philosophical thought, several limitations must be honestly acknowledged to maintain the research's academic integrity. These limitations relate to the methodological approach used, namely library research with deductive content analysis. This approach, while highly appropriate for the study of classical thought, has inherent weaknesses in terms of the objectivity of source selection. The document selection process, based on the researcher's subjective assessment of the source's relevance, has the potential to introduce bias in the representation of Al-Ghazali's thought, especially if important sources are inaccessible or overlooked during the search process.

Despite these limitations, this research has a significant impact on the development of Islamic education curricula and methodologies in Indonesia and the Islamic world in general. Al-Ghazali's thought, which integrates cognitive (epistemology), affective (ethics and Sufism), and spiritual (ma'rifah) dimensions, offers a holistic and balanced educational model, which prioritizes not only intellectual mastery of knowledge, but also character building (akhlakul karimah) and spiritual maturity of students. In the Indonesian context, where Islamic religious education has become an integral part of the national education system, the findings of this study can be an important reference for curriculum designers, educators in Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, and Islamic universities, in building a more meaningful, transformative learning model, and oriented towards the formation of a whole person.

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