

## AL-GHAZALĪ (1058-1111) IN THE EYES OF CONTEMPORARY INDONESIAN MUSLIM INTELLECTUALS

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### Abstract

Indonesian Muslim intellectuals have positioned Al-Ghazalī differently. Some accuse him of being responsible for the decline of the Islamic civilization, while others regard him as very influential in making the so-called Islamic rationalism. This paper aims to challenge the above two assumptions respectively through in-depth reading and analysis of the major works of each proponent. It is concluded that current studies on Al-Ghazalī in Indonesia have not moved on from the old-fashion studies, which portray him negatively. However, his thought is very significant in directing discourses on theology and Sufism in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** *Indonesian Islam, al-Ghazalī, Religious Literacy, Islamic Philosophy, Islamic Theology.*

### 1. Introduction

Al-Ghazalī was a prominent Muslim thinker with highly complex ideas. Since he was alive until recently, there have been disputes over his designation as *Hujjah al-Islām* (transl. *The Argument of Islam*).<sup>1</sup> Some Muslim intellectuals complimented his works for clearly expressing the authors of Islam, while others bemoaned their excessive entanglement with philosophy, despite his open claim to the opposite.<sup>2</sup> While many observers find Al-Ghazalī's works to be overwhelmingly full of philosophical concepts, his

expertise on the subject was questioned by Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*'s author, who regarded Al-Ghazalī as an amateur philosopher for his use of only dialectical and demonstrative arguments.<sup>3</sup>

Al-Ghazalī's entanglement with philosophy remains debatable. In his seminal monograph on Ibn Rushd and his European followers, Earnest Renan portrayed al-Ghazalī as an opponent of rationalism and an architect of the "war against philosophy" in the Islamic world that emerged since the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Renan dismissed al-Ghazalī as "one of those quirky thinkers who embraced religion only to challenge reason."<sup>4</sup> Renan's allegation about Al-Ghazalī quickly gained traction. Tjitze J. de Boer (1866–1942), in his *History of Philosophy in Islam*, labeled Al-Ghazalī as a person who had vainly thrown away attempts to achieve global scientific knowledge and had, instead, devoted himself to overcoming religious problems.<sup>5</sup> Muhammad 'Abid al-Jābirī (1935-2010) wrote that Al-Ghazalī's thought "has left an acute wound in the Arab reasoning which remains gaping even today."<sup>6</sup> While Majid Fakhry, in his widely referred work, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, regarded Al-Ghazalī's criticism of Islamic philosophy as an inherent conflict between philosophy and dogma. Fakhry assumed that unlike Ibn Sinā (980-1037) and al-Farabī (870-950), who represented the philosophical and rational tradition, Al-Ghazalī represented dogma.<sup>7</sup>

There has been increased research on Al-Ghazalī's denunciation of philosophy, making it a predominating notion in studies on Al-Ghazalī in Indonesia. Some famous Islamicists of the respective country, including Harun Nasution<sup>8</sup> and Amin Abdullah<sup>9</sup>, very much exploit Al-Ghazalī's rejection of reasoning, orthodox mysticism, and causality. It is safe to say that the current studies of Al-Ghazalī in Indonesia are directed at viewing the thinker as an adversary of rational-philosophical thinking. Nearly all journal articles that address Al-Ghazalī's predicament with philosophy, indexed in IPI and Moraref, deem him the "enemy" of philosophy. See, for instance, the works of Ghazalī Munir,<sup>10</sup> Mas'udi,<sup>11</sup> Ahmad Atabik,<sup>12</sup> and Jamhari.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, there is a rapidly growing trend in Western academia of perceiving Al-Ghazalī's stance on philosophy with greater appreciation. Two noticeable articles are "Al-Ghazalī's use of Avicenna's philosophy" by Richard M. Frank (published in 1987) and "The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Sciences in Medieval Islam" by Abdelhamid I. Sabra (1986).<sup>14</sup> Both agree that Al-Ghazalī attempted to appropriate and naturalize Ibn Sinā's philosophy to fit Islamic teachings and values rather than destructively criticizing it. Following these two articles, a new image

of Al-Ghazalī arises; that he never meant to destroy Islamic philosophy, for he was the one who contributed the most to the integration of Greek philosophy into the Islamic one. Hence, it is interesting to study the gap between the emerging image of Al-Ghazalī in Western academia and the situation in Indonesia. One possible explanation is that such studies in Indonesia have been encapsulated by the cynical orientalism stream towards Islamic philosophical traditions. This article aims to shed light on this issue.

## **2. Research Methods**

This paper studies works on Al-Ghazalī written by Indonesian Muslim intellectuals. It meticulously explores them one by one, mapping them according to the authors' backgrounds and analysing the structure of their ideas, as well as their impact on discourses on Al-Ghazalī specifically and on Islamic studies in Indonesia in general.

## **3. Research Objectives**

The main objective of this research is to explore and map the discussions on Al-Ghazalī's thoughts conducted by Muslim intellectuals in Indonesia. These activities are important because Al-Ghazalī's works influence Indonesian Muslims' religious literacy.

## **4. Literature Reviews**

Before delving into the main topic of this article, it is necessary to explore the development of the discourse on Al-Ghazalī worldwide. Early studies of modern Western academia focused on the history of Islamic civilization, especially the decline of Islam after its glory days. These studies primarily address the abrupt cessation of Islamic development and the gradual decline of Islamic glory, which was once the axis of the world civilization. This reality piqued the interest of many Western academics, prompting them to conduct further studies on the subject. Among the first Western scholars to meet Al-Ghazalī directly when studying Islamic civilization was Solomon Munk (1803-1867), the author of the first comprehensive history of Arabic and Islamic philosophy in the modern Western world. In his 1844 work, he stated unequivocally that Al-Ghazalī held the utmost responsibility for the death of philosophy in the Islamic world. He insisted that Al-Ghazalī's *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* had destroyed Muslims' affection towards philosophy.<sup>15</sup>

Munk's judgment of Al-Ghazalī was echoed by Ernest Renan in his *Averroes et l'averroïsme*. Renan's admiration for Ibn Rushd leads him to dismiss Al-Ghazalī, blaming him for being the

mastermind behind the 12<sup>th</sup>-century Muslims' "war against philosophy". The author also characterized Al-Ghazalī as an "eccentric thinker who embraced religion only to challenge reason."<sup>16</sup> In 1883, Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921), an exceptionally authoritative Islamist, reaffirmed this notion, albeit in a different tone. He argued that during al-Ghazalī's time, philosophical thought in Muslim society had reached a state of despair and impoverishment. Thus, Al-Ghazalī's criticism of Philosophy in *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* ended the miserably contemptible practice, and any philosophical works after him would have been nothing more than piles of firewood.<sup>17</sup>

In 1962, appeared William M. Watt, an exemplary historiographer of Islamic thought. Unlike his predecessors, he believed that Al-Ghazalī had integrated philosophy and theology while simultaneously introducing the rules of syllogism into Islamic theology. Even so, after his death, Watt still regarded Al-Ghazalī's *Tahāfut* as the reason behind the lack of exceptional Muslim philosophers<sup>18</sup> and blamed him for the death of philosophy in the Islamic world. In subsequent developments, the views that Al-Ghazalī opposed philosophy began to receive serious resistance.<sup>19</sup> Richard M. Frank and Abdelhamid I. Sabra wrote the first two important articles that strongly challenged this view.<sup>20</sup> In his article, Sabra stated that after translating Greek thought into Islamic languages (known as a period of appropriation of Greek science) led by Ibn Sina, Greek philosophy was naturalized into Islamic theology. In this new emerging form of Islamic theology, philosophical rationalism found a new home in the Islamic world,<sup>21</sup> It was operated widely by the *mutakallimun* from the Mu'tazilah, Sunni, Shi'a, and especially the Ash'ari. Hence, making any attempts to blame al-Ghazalī for the death of philosophy in the centuries following his death is highly problematic.

Richard M. Frank echoed Sabra's idea in his article that asserted Al-Ghazalī's continuation of the incomplete ambitious project of Ibn Sina to naturalize Greek philosophy into the Islamic one.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, in 1992 Frank raised the idea that Al-Ghazali had abandoned the cosmological system developed by the Ash'arism, the Islamic theological school that he adhered to, and adopted Ibn Sina's cosmology instead. Frank also mentioned that Al-Ghazali did not believe anymore that God created every event in the world directly and instantaneously, as Ash'ari theologians would say. According to Frank, Al-Ghazalī believed in the philosophical explanation that God's creative power reaches the object of creation through a series of intermediaries and secondary causes. The celestial intellect in the ninth circle mediates God's creative activity in the sublunary sphere, in which the chain of secondary causes and effects unfolds. These causes of creation change according to their natural order and make

God's doing of prophetic miracles impossible, at least in the theologians' understanding.<sup>23</sup>

Frank's eccentric opinion was challenged by Michael E. Marmura, who published his work before and after 1992. This thinker believed that the relationship between Al-Ghazalī and the fundamental principles of Ash'ari theology, such as the principle of miracles, was never broken.<sup>24</sup> Marmura believed that al-Ghazalī had rejected the causality theory of the philosophers and instead strongly held to the Ash'arian occasionality.<sup>25</sup> Frank Griffel positively responded to the dispute between Frank and Marmura. Through his book entitled *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, Griffel eloquently tried to end the polemic between the two opposing viewpoints. According to him, Al-Ghazalī's theory of causality can affirm two different opinions of each philosopher and the Ash'ari theologians. Griffel highlighted Al-Ghazalī's view that the opinions of both camps were equally viable as long as humans did not know the possibilities of the certainty of God's performance. In his view, Al-Ghazalī believed in the '*bi-lā kaifa*' doctrine of the Ash'ari, while accepting the causality (although without certainty). Following Sabra's theory, Griffel saw Al-Ghazalī's theology as a form of philosophical theology.<sup>26</sup>

Underlining Al-Ghazalī's response to causality, Griffel held that Al-Ghazalī was the first Muslim theologian to actively promote the naturalization of the philosophical tradition into Islamic theology. Al-Ghazalī's works, in Griffel's perspective, are attempts to integrate Aristotelian logic into the Islamic theological tradition. Al-Ghazali has tirelessly emphasized the importance of utilizing syllogistic logic and encouraged his colleagues in Islamic theological studies to adopt this rational technique. He was very direct about this project and strongly promoted it through his *al-Munqidh Min al-Dalāl* and *Tahāful al-Falāsifah*. This might probe further questions on how Al-Ghazalī could adopt Aristotelian logic without considering his ontology. In the Aristotelian tradition, logic is closely connected with specific explanations of the most basic elements of the world and their relations to one another, so adopting Aristotelian logic without its ontology is very unlikely. Al-Ghazalī understood this notion very well but instead kept on spreading the teachings of Aristotle's logic. He knew he was asking his colleague to adopt fundamental assumptions that would change their position in ontology and metaphysics. However, Al-Ghazali was seemingly less open about his view in this context. In explaining his views on metaphysics, he replaced his critique of metaphysics, which he had raised earlier, and expressed his appreciation for their teaching briefly.<sup>27</sup>

Griffel never doubts that Ibn Sina influenced Al-Ghazalī's views on ontology. Although *Tahafut* al-Ghazalī called the three

philosophical teachers as infidels, this labeling is part of the naturalization process of Aristotle's philosophy into Islamic theology. These particular Aristotelian elements were, according to Al-Ghazalī, inappropriate by Islamic values. By highlighting them, Al-Ghazalī opened discussions on how Islamic theology can accept other important philosophical positions.<sup>28</sup> Hence, according to Griffel, instead of criticizing philosophy through *Tahāfut*, Al-Ghazalī, in principle, wanted to naturalize Greek philosophy into Islamic philosophy or philosophical theology.

Besides the relation between philosophy and rationality, another topic that has also attracted much attention from researchers on Al-Ghazalī is his understanding of Sufism, regarding which Alexander Treiger proposed an amply thought-provoking review. In his book, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazalī's Theory of Mystical Cognition and its Avicennian Foundation*, Treiger presented new evidence that Al-Ghazalī is indebted to philosophy in his Sufistic theory of consciousness and eschatology, in which he had accepted the philosophical teachings which he pretended to criticize. By carefully examining more than 80 works (written by Al-Ghazalī himself or by researchers on him), Treiger emphasized that Al-Ghazalī had never rejected Ibn Sina's philosophy and even used it as a foundation for his mysticism.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, Georges Tamer described Al-Ghazalī's Sufism as philosophical and his balance between rationality and spirituality as the primary basis of his reform.<sup>30</sup> According to him, the main goal of *Ihyā' Ulūmiddīn* is the integration of orthodoxy and orthopraxy in which rationality is embodied. It should be noted that Al-Ghazalī never considered rationality the highest source of knowledge, a place he reserved for the spiritual sensibility (*dhawq*), which human rationality could never fully grasp. In this very process, rationality stabilizes and protects factors, allowing them to avoid the traps of radicalism and excess. Although Al-Ghazalī criticized philosophy and promoted Sufistic behaviour, he continued to use rational ideas and critical methods adopted from philosophers (such as Ibn Sina) and incorporated them into his epistemological system.<sup>31</sup> Unlike Treiger and Tamer, Jules Jansseus was rather judgmental when he accused Al-Ghazalī of being confused in choosing either philosophy or Sufism while seeking a middle ground between rational philosophy and Sufi's piety in both theory and practice.<sup>32</sup> Despite extensively adopting Ibn Sina's philosophy, Al-Ghazalī never became a true philosopher, according to Jansseus. Al-Ghazalī was merely a thinker who was heavily inspired by a plethora of philosophers (not limited to Ibn Sina).<sup>33</sup>

Another renowned scholar who also studied Al-Ghazālī and his relationship with philosophy was Afifi al-Akiti. In his article entitled "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Falsafa: Al-Ghazālī's Maḍnūn, Tahāfut, and Maqāsid, with Particular Attention to Their Falsafī Treatments of God's Knowledge of Temporal Events," Akiti appreciated Al-Ghazālī's strategy of categorizing philosophy into three types: bad philosophy, ugly (partially bad) philosophy, and good philosophy. *Al-Maḍnūn*, for instance, is where Al-Ghazālī extolled philosophy.<sup>34</sup> Following Akiti's flow of argumentation, saying that Al-Ghazālī is the enemy of philosophy is not entirely correct.

How Al-Ghazālī's philosophical rationality works in his commentary on the Holy Qur'ān has also attracted scholarly attention. In his "Revelation, Sciences and Symbolism Al-Ghazali's *Jawahir al-Qur'ān*", Tamer argued that Al-Ghazālī employed rationality in his symbolic interpretation of the Holy Qur'ān, by which he encouraged readers to be inquisitive about both religious and non-religious knowledge. Tamer's article also presented a special dimension of reasoning formulated by Al-Ghazālī in the *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, including what seems to be Al-Ghazali's main criticism of Ibn Sina's rationality.<sup>35</sup> Like Tamer, Griffel also revealed the dimensions of Al-Ghazali's philosophical rational interpretation. In his article entitled "Al-Ghazālī at His Most Rationalist: The Universal Rule for Allegorically Interpreting Revelation (al-Qānūn al-Kullī fī al-Ta'wīl)", Griffel examined Al-Ghazālī's brief work, which was initially intended to be a letter to his student, Abu Bakr Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1148) as a response to several questions on hadiths. This letter discussed several hadiths, including one that says, "*Satan runs in the veins of one of you.*" Al-Ghazālī clarified that the word "Satan" symbolizes the evil temptations and whispers of the active intellect, which is clearly inspired by some of Ibn Sina's teachings. Furthermore, the concepts concerning the relation between reason and revelation in this letter contradicted in some ways with Al-Ghazālī's other writings, where he had presented himself as an adherent of radical rationalism, a primary opponent of Ash'ari tradition.<sup>36</sup> Like Griffel and Tamer, Scott Michael Girdner stated that Al-Ghazālī adopted a system of rational thought in his interpretation. In his article entitled "Ghazālī's Hermeneutics and Their Reception in Jewish Tradition *Mishkat al-Anwar* (The Niche of Lights) and Maimonides' *Shemonah Peraqim* (Eight Chapters)", Girdner held that al-Ghazālī combined traditional and rational interpretational approaches. This is especially evident, according to Gridner, in his work entitled *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, where Al-Ghazālī clearly adopted Ibn Sina's philosophical psychology that later influenced the Jewish commentary tradition.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from differing perspectives among the contemporary scholars who studied Al-Ghazalī, particularly after Sabra, what they put forward is a fairly significant contribution in portraying Al-Ghazalī. Nowadays, the demonization of discordant voices against Al-Ghazali and philosophy is still widely discussed. In contrast, ideas on the strong nuances of philosophy in Al-Ghazali's thought — whether in terms of Sufism, theology, or Quranic commentary—have lucratively revived the buried classical polemic about the relationship between Al-Ghazali and philosophy. As explained earlier, medieval thinkers, such as Abū Bakr al-Turtūsi (d. 1126), Abū 'Abdillāh al-Mazarī (d. 1141), Abū al-'Arif (d. 1141), and Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) knew Al-Ghazalī for his integration between Sufism and philosophical nuances. On the one hand, Al-Ghazali rejected philosophy and aimed to cleanse Sufism of all philosophical elements, and on the other hand, he brought a philosophical style into Sufism.<sup>38</sup> This classical view on the relation between Al-Ghazali and philosophy is revived by the modern works done on him, leaving behind predominating ideas of people like Munk and Renan.

Their Eastern counterparts do not echo the rising contemporary trend in Western academia. Studies on Al-Ghazali conducted by Middle Eastern scholars are dominant in the view that Al-Ghazalī is the man behind the death of philosophy in the Islamic world.<sup>39</sup> The classical orientalist's influence over them remains strong. They believe that to revive Islamic glory, factors concerning the decline of its citizens must be removed. Muḥammad 'Abid al-Jābirī was among the adherents of the old orientalist fashion. To awaken and modernize the monotone construction of Arab thought, he proposed the tetralogy of "Criticism of Arabic Reason". These series of books served as steppingstones toward mainstreaming critical rationalism, a pre-requisite for catching on to rapid European modernization.<sup>40</sup> There al-Jābirī first explored factors behind the decline of Islam. Following Munk and Renan, al-Jābirī blamed Al-Ghazalī for everything, saying that his thoughts "have left an acute wound in the Arabic Reason which remains gaping even today."<sup>41</sup>

Majid Fakhry, a well-known author on Islamic philosophy's history, expressed a similar sentiment. For him, the suppressive and instinctive reaction to rationalism in general and Greek Philosophy, in particular, had exploded in Al-Ghazalī's attacks on Neo-Platonist Muslims like Al-Farabī and Ibn Sina. Previously, critics of philosophy had contented themselves with opposing rationalism and philosophy based on religious piety. In this regard, Al-Ghazalī argued that only those who had excellently mastered philosophy could challenge the philosophers and, if necessary, outperform them by demonstrating their inconsistent thoughts.<sup>42</sup> Fakhry further enunciated that through his *maqāṣid* and *mi'ya al-'ilm*, Al-Ghazalī

carried on the spirit of Neo-Platonism, although he seems to overthrow philosophy.<sup>43</sup> In other words, Fakhry insisted that Al-Ghazalī was an anti-philosophical rationalist, even though his works were philosophical. Similarly, Fazlur Rahman, Muhammed Arkoun, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid came up with restoring the glory of Islam, beginning with decoding Al-Ghazalī's *Tahāfut*. There, Al-Ghazalī mentioned three categories of disbelievers who tried to eliminate sharī'ah. He declared philosophy heretical and imprudent and the philosophers as infidels and *zindiq*. Soon after his book went public, philosophy was black-listed and classified as unthinkable. Philosophy was then marginalized throughout Islamic history, whereas religious sciences received much more scholarly attention. Since then, Al-Ghazalī has been considered the defender of Islam.<sup>44</sup>

To this point, our literature review shows that Al-Ghazalī's image in the contemporary Middle East did not change even when Western scientific traditions introduced a more favorable way of seeing him by asserting that Al-Ghazalī was the one who naturalized Greek philosophy into the Islamic tradition. For the sake of this research, it is interesting to study how Indonesian academics approach Al-Ghazalī, a topic that will be discussed further in the following section.

## 5. Discussion: Studies on al-Ghazalī in Indonesia

So far, three models of scientific readings towards Al-Ghazalī have been developing in Indonesia. Students from *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools) who pursued further academic studies at renowned Islamic universities introduced the first model. They regularly meticulously read and study Al-Ghazalī's books, especially *Ihya'*, in a gathering known as *halaqah*. They generally view Al-Ghazalī as a Sufī who managed to revive the religious sciences through *Ihyā' 'Ulūmuddīn*. The second group consists of academics from the *Muhammadiyah* (one of the religious mass-organization in Indonesia). They see Al-Ghazalī as an irrational thinker and a destroyer of the philosophical tradition in Islam. The third group belongs to the *Nahdlatul 'Ulamā'* tradition. For them, Al-Ghazalī did not completely abandon rational thoughts, although he criticized philosophy.

Although the first group mostly studied Al-Ghazalī's works orally, their understanding of Al-Ghazalī can still be traced through several writings, including "Tasawuf Al-Ghazali dan Jalaluddin Rumi" by Badarussiyamsi,<sup>45</sup> "Corak Tasawuf Al-Ghazali dan Relevansinya dalam Konteks Sekarang" by Abd. Moqsith Ghazali,<sup>46</sup> and "Pemikiran Al-Ghazali dalam Tasawuf" of Badrus.<sup>47</sup> Although

written in different approaches, they shared the same portrait of Al-Ghazalī, depicting him as a great Sufi.

One of the renowned representations of the second group is Harun Nasution, known as the bearer of Neo-Mu‘tazila in Indonesia. To Harun, Al-Ghazalī was a philosopher who ironically launched a scathing critique against philosophy.<sup>48</sup> Harun divided Islamic philosophy into two schools: rational philosophy, as introduced by al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, and traditional philosophy, as proposed by Al-Ghazalī. Rational philosophy recognizes the great ability of reason, as adhered to by Mu‘tazilite theology. In contrast, traditional philosophy places little emphasis on reason or rationality, as exemplified by Ash‘ari theology.<sup>49</sup> Thus, although Harun Nasution classified al-Ghazalī as a Muslim philosopher, he included Al-Ghazali as a thinker against philosophical rationality and inclined to religion. In addition, regarding Al-Ghazalī’s responsibility for the death of philosophy in the Islamic world, Harun Nasution explicitly said that Al-Ghazalī’s criticism of philosophy in *tahāfut* was not a lethal force for the development of philosophy in Islam as a whole. According to him, Islamic philosophy remains progressive even after the publication of Al-Ghazalī’s works, especially in the Western scientific tradition, as represented by Ibn Rusd. Nonetheless, Harun Nasution also suspected that Al-Ghazali’s teachings on Sufism and Ash‘ari theology ended practices of philosophy in the Sunni Islamic world.<sup>50</sup> Thus, although in a slightly different tone, Nasution believed that Al-Ghazalī had led to the eradication of philosophy in the Islamic world.

Another thinker with a more critical assessment of Al-Ghazalī is Amin Abdullah, the author of *Antara Al-Ghazali dan Kant: Filsafat Etika Islam* and a professor of Islamic philosophy at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. There he defended Kant’s rational ethics and criticized Al-Ghazalī for his ignorance of the role of reason, his orthodox mysticism, and his denial of causality. Abdullah insisted that *Tahāfut* had rejected almost all Aristotelian and Platonian doctrines endorsed by Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi and Ibn Sina.<sup>51</sup> For Al-Ghazalī, reasoning alone cannot lead to the realm of metaphysics only with reasoning. According to Abdullah, the most important aspect of Al-Ghazalī’s rejection of rational metaphysics is its emphasis on the inability of human reason to solve metaphysical and theological problems. Another emphasis is on the reality of a “willing” God, namely God as a wilful doer. Al-Ghazalī hardly talked about the possibility of human subjects attempting to build a body of knowledge to comprehend natural phenomena. Based on this consideration, Al-Ghazalī eventually relied on divine revelation to achieve the realm of metaphysics, throwing away the role of reason.<sup>52</sup> Because Al-Ghazalī rejected causality, he held that necessity has no

place in natural relations. Nature does appear to be endowed with causal ties simply because God chose not to disrupt the continuity of events through miracles. However, God can still intervene, particularly in certain situations and conditions. This Al-Ghazalī's stance, according to Amin Abdullah, can either drive people to skepticism about natural phenomena or lead them to an acute mystical understanding of God's presence in everything.<sup>53</sup>

As two prominent professors of State Islamic Universities (PTKIN) in Indonesia, Nasution and Abdullah's views on Al-Ghazalī have impacted studies on Al-Ghazalī in Indonesia. Following them, many Indonesian observers on Al-Ghazalī shared a similar opinion. To mention some, Ghazali Munir wrote "Kritik Al-Ghazali Terhadap Para Filosof", Mas'udi wrote "Menyingkap Hubungan Agama dan Filsafat: Mereda Kesesatan Filsafat Al-Ghazali, Merespon Keterhubungan Filsafat dan Agama Ibnu Rusd", Ahmad Atabik wrote "Telaah Pemikiran Al-Ghazali tentang Filsafat", and Jamhari wrote "Al-Ghazali dan Oposisi terhadap Filsafat". These articles have depicted Al-Ghazali as an enemy of philosophy because of his criticism of the philosophical tradition.

The third group believes that Al-Ghazalī never meant to abandon philosophy and rational thought. However, they still highlighted his criticism of philosophy and reason and blamed him for the death of philosophy in the Islamic tradition. One of the eminent figures of this group is Zarkani Jahja. In his dissertation entitled *Teologi Al-Ghazali: Pendekatan Methodology*, Zarkani highlighted Al-Ghazalī's method of thought in Islamic theology. Jahja stated that Al-Ghazali established three sources of Islamic theology: revelation, reason, and the *kasyf*. In practice, revelation and reason are equivalent subjects that support each other. The reason explains and details what the revelation has determined. Meanwhile, the *Kasyf* is given personally to the wise and must not conflict with the revelation and the reason. Most importantly, the result of *kasyf* is a supra-reasonable and very authoritative knowledge that cannot be achieved by reason.<sup>54</sup> Against those in the second group, Jahja stated that Al-Ghazalī still left room for rationality, at least in terms of his methodology. However, Jahja did not seem to provide a supporting argument for the presence of rationality in Al-Ghazalī's theological content. In viewing *Tahāfut*, Jahja was more inclined to William M. Watt's statement that Al-Ghazalī excessively criticizes philosophy.<sup>55</sup> Unlike Western studies on Al-Ghazalī, which see *Tahāfut* as an attempt to naturalize philosophy, Jahja considered it a strong critique of philosophy.

Another recognized figure of the third group is Aksin Wijaya, the author of *Nalar Kritis Epistemologi Islam: Membincang Dialog*

*Kritis Para Kritikus Muslim: Al-Ghazali, Ibnu Rusyd, Thaha Husein, Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri.* Wijaya depicted Al-Ghazalī as using rational methodology despite his entanglement with Sufism. Wijaya termed Al-Ghazalī's episteme as an "epistemology of doubt". Elsewhere in *al-Munqid*, Al-Ghazalī said: "It is the doubt that can convey the truth. Whoever does not doubt does not make sense and will never be able to see everything. Whoever does not see will remain in blindness and misguidance."<sup>56</sup> On this basis, Aksin then pointed out that Al-Ghazalī's various criticisms and doubts about many things are evidence that he rejected the *taqlīd*, consciously or subconsciously.<sup>57</sup> Even so, in examining *Tahāfut*, Wijaya does not move from what the second group holds, as mentioned above. Following Muhammed Arkoun and Nasr Hamid Abu Zaed, Wijaya believed that Al-Ghazalī's critique of philosophy made many people reluctant to learn philosophy.<sup>58</sup> Wijaya also believed that Al-Ghazalī was responsible for the marginalization of philosophy in the Islamic tradition.

Of the three groups, the most influential and dominant group to set the trend of studies on Al-Ghazalī in Indonesia is the second group, which views the relationship between Al-Ghazali and philosophy negatively. This means that alternative approaches to Al-Ghazalī in the West do not connect with what happens in Indonesia. There are several possible reasons for this contrasting phenomenon: *First*, the gap within the literature of the two worlds. As far as this research is concerned, the main literature that is widely referred to by Indonesian academics is that written by old fashion Western thinkers, such as Tjitze J. de Boer, William M. Watt, and Michael E. Marmura. Scholars such as al-Jābirī, Majid Fahry, Fazlur Rahman, Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, and Mohammed Arkon have been included from the Middle East areas. A heavy reliance on this particular kind of scholarship makes no room for alternative views on Al-Ghazalī to play, including that which was initially introduced by classical thinkers such as Abū Bakr al-Turtushi, Abu Abdullah al-Mazari, Ibn al-Arif, and Ibn Taymiyah.

*Second*, the influence of Harun Nasution and Amin Abdullah. It is undeniable that these two figures are exceptionally influential in the development of Islamic thought in Indonesia. Harun Nasution was the former lecturer on philosophy in the IAIN (now UIN) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta. Even today, his ideas are highly respected and preserved when his neo-Mu'tazili thought gains more acceptance. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the curriculum of studies on Al-Ghazalī in this university adheres to the Nasution's negative view of Al-Ghazalī.

Similarly, Amin Abdullah was the former rector of UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta who designed the, borrowing his term, integrative-interconnective Islamic studies curricula to be implemented there. The two-state Islamic universities where Harun Nasution and Amin Abdullah established their way of thinking are the two most prominent higher institutions in Indonesia. During the rapid transition from IAIN to UIN, Amin Abdullah's thoughts are always referred to as the foundation. Additionally, the alums of these two universities served as lecturers at various private and public Islamic universities in Indonesia.

*Third*, the rise of Muhammadiyah's contemporary thinkers. As Martin Heidegger once articulated, every human being is completely shaped by his culture. He cannot control his social environment and becomes part of a culture, so all his behavior is derived from his culture.<sup>59</sup> In other words, no one is autonomous or free to choose their way of being without being influenced by their culture. Surprisingly, those who labeled Al-Ghazali as the enemy of philosophy are mostly affiliated with a Muhammadiyah background, such as Amin Abdullah. While those affiliated with NU seem to respect Al-Ghazali highly and are eager to study his books, this is certainly not the case in Muhammadiyah circles. Hence, when a person is affiliated with a Muhammadiyah background, his or her perspective on Al-Ghazali will certainly resemble the group's opinion.

## **6. Conclusion**

This article concludes that there are three studies on Al-Ghazali in Indonesia. The first type circulates among *pesantren students* (Islamic boarding schools) who view Al-Ghazali as a mere Sufi figure, emphasizing his teachings on morality. The second type of study, popular among modernist academic circles (Muhammadiyah), views Al-Ghazali as an opponent of philosophy and rationality. The third type is circulating among the academic scholars affiliated with the NU circle, who view the relationship between Al-Ghazali and rational philosophical thought positively, although still considering him responsible for the death of philosophy in the Islamic world.

Of the three groups, the second group is the most dominant in Indonesia. Three factors influenced the dominance of the negative view on Al-Ghazali in Indonesia: the out-of-date literature consumed by the Indonesians, the mighty influence of Harun Nasution and Amin Abdullah, and the Muhammadiyah's modernist movement. Along with the developing transmission of religious and other scientific knowledge in Indonesia, it is possible that the understanding

of Al-Ghazālī's position and his thoughts might change. However, until that happens, Al-Ghazālī's picture will remain as negative as it used to be.

### Notes and References:

<sup>1</sup> Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 61–95, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195331622.001.0001>, Jules Janssens, "Al-Ghazālī between Philosophy (Falsafa) and Sufism (Taṣawwuf): His Complex Attitude in the Marvels of the Heart ('Ajā'ib al-Qalb) of the Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn: Al-Ghazālī between Philosophy (Falsafa) and Sufism (Taṣawwuf)," *The Muslim World* 101, no. 4 (October 2011): 614, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2011.01375.x>.

<sup>2</sup> As Akasoy notes, al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* is seen by many such as Abu Bakr al-Turtushī (d. 1126), Abu Abdullah al-Mazari (d. 1141), Ibn al-Arif (d. 1141), and Ibn Taymiyah (d. 1328), as heavily dependent on philosophy, Anna Akasoy, "El Sirag Al-Muluk de al-Turtushiy La Antropolgia Almohade," in *Ques Es I Home? Reflexions Antropologiques a La Corona d'Arago*, Eds J. Corco, A Fidora, J. Olives Puig J. Pardo Pastor (Barcelona: Prohom Edicions, 2014), 17–20.

<sup>3</sup> M. Afifi al-Akiti, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of *Falsafa*: Al-Ghazālī's *Madnūn*, *Tahāfut*, and *Maqāsid*, with Particular Attention to Their *Falsafī* Treatments of God's Knowledge of Temporal Events," Catarina Belo, "Y. Tzvi Langermann, Ed. Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy. Cultural Encounter in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, vol. 8. Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Griffel, "... and the Killing of Someone Who Upholds These Convictions Is Obligatory!" Religious Law and the Assumed Disappearance of Philosophy in Islam," in *Das Gesetz - The Law - La Loi*, ed. Andreas Speer and Guy Guldentops (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014): 214–26, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110350081.214>, Frank Griffel, "Preface" in the book, Frank Griffel, *Islam, and Rationality: The Impact of al-Ghazālī Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*, Islam and Rationality 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), X.

<sup>5</sup> Griffel, "... and the Killing of Someone Who Upholds These Convictions Is Obligatory!" Religious Law and the Assumed Disappearance of Philosophy in Islam."

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri, *Takwin Al-'Aql al-'Arabi* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahdat al-'Arabiyyah, 1989), 290.

<sup>7</sup> Majid Fakhry, "A History of Islamic Philosophy, 3d ed.: By Majid Fakhry (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. 430 pages.)," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 23, no. 4 (1 October 2006): 223–39, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v23i4.1592>.

<sup>8</sup> Harun Nasution, *Islam Rasional* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> M. Amin Abdullah, *Antara Al-Ghazali dan Kant: filsafat etika Islam* (Bandung: Mizan, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Ghazali Munir, "Kritik Al-Ghazali Terhadap Para Filosof," *Teologia* 25, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>11</sup> Mas'udi, "Menyingkap Hubungan Agama Dan Filsafat: Mereda Kesesatan Filsafat Al-Ghazali, Merespon Keterhubungan Filsafat Dan Agama Ibnu Rusd," *Jurnal Penelitian* 7, no. 2 (2013).

<sup>12</sup> Ahmad Atabik, "Telaah Pemikiran Al-Ghazali Tentang Filsafat," *Fikrah* 2, no. 1 (2014).

<sup>13</sup> Jamhari, "Al-Ghazali Dan Oposisi Terhadap Filsafat," *Jurnal Ilmu Agama* 16, no. 1 (2015).

<sup>14</sup> Griffel, *Islam and Rationality*, ix.

<sup>15</sup> Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> Griffel, “... and the Killing of Someone Who Upholds These Convictions Is Obligatory!” Religious Law and the Assumed Disappearance of Philosophy in Islam,” 214–26; Frank Griffel, “Preface” in the book., *Islam and Rationality*, X.

<sup>17</sup> Griffel, *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical Theology*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy & Theology* (New Brunswick [N.J.]: AldineTransaction, 2009), 117; W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith, and Practice of Al-Ghazali, Serie XIII of Ethical and Religious Classics of East and West* (London: George Allen and Unwin; Ltd, 1953), 11–12.; W. Montgomery Watt, “The Authenticity of the Works Attributed to Al-Ghazali,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 84, 1-2 (1952): 24–25.

<sup>19</sup> Before William M. Watt, a researcher tried to argue his reasoning after the paralysis of Al-Ghazali philosophy in the Islamic world, namely Shlomo Pines. In 1937, Pines said that rational thought and philosophy did not decline after Al-Ghazali’s time in the Islamic tradition. What happened was that rational thought and philosophy became an inherent part of Islamic science. After Al-Ghazali, there had been an increasing trend of syncretization in Islam, which united the elements of kalam, philosophy, and Sufism; Griffel, *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical Theology*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Griffel, *Islam and Rationality*, ix.

<sup>21</sup> Griffel, *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical Theology*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Griffel, *Islam and Rationality*, ix.

<sup>23</sup> Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī & Avicenna: Vorgelegt Am 27. April 1991*, Abhandlungen Der Heidelberger Akademie Der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Jahg. 1992, 1. Abhandlung (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1992), 20.

<sup>24</sup> Griffel, *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical Theology*, 179–82.

<sup>25</sup> Michael E. Marmura, “The Logical Role of The Argument from Time in The Tahafut’s Second Proof for The World’s Pre-Eternity,” *The Muslim World* 49, no. 4 (October 1959): 306–14; Michael E. Marmura, “Ghazali and Demonstrative Science,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (1965): 183–204, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hph.2008.1685>; Michael E. Marmura, “Al-Ghazali’s Second Causal Theory in the 17th Discussion of his *Tahāfut* Parviz Morewedge, ed., *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, 1st ed (Delmar, N.Y: Caravan Books, 1981), 85–112.

<sup>26</sup> Janssens, “Al-Ghazālī between Philosophy (Falsafa) and Sufism (Taṣawwuf),” 615. Furthermore, dialectics as occurring between Ricard M. Frank, Michael E. Marmura and Frank Griffel, as abovementioned, have also taken place in several other works related to Al-Ghazali. Some of those works are Lenn Evan Goodman “Did Al-Ghazali Deny Causality?,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 47 (1978): 83, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595550>; Ilai Alon, “Al-Ghazālī on Causality,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100, no. 4 (October 1980): 315–24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/602085>; George Giacaman and Raja Bahlul, “Ghazali on Miracles and Necessary Connection,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 9, no. 1 (March 2000): 39–50, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1057060800091039>; Stephen Riker, “Al-Ghazali on Necessary Causality in “The Incoherence of the Philosophers,” *The Monist* 79, no. 3 (1996): 315–24; Massimo Campanini, “Al-Ghazali” in Sayyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (ed.), *Ensiklopedi Tematis Filsafat Islam*, the first book, (Bandung: Mizan, 2003), 326.

<sup>27</sup> Al- Ghazali, *Al-Munqid Min al-Dalal*, n.d., 18–20; Ghazali, 25–27.

<sup>28</sup> Griffel, *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical Theology*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> Alexander Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought: Al-Ghazālī’s Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation*, 1. issued in paperback, Culture, and Civilization in the Middle East 27 (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>30</sup> Georges Tamer, ed., *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of Al-Ghazali: Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*, Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science, v. 94 (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2015), xii.

<sup>31</sup> Tamer, xii. Compare with Kenneth Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and His Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

- <sup>32</sup> Janssens, "Al-Ghazālī between Philosophy (Falsafa) and Sufism (Taṣawwuf)," 7–11.
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- <sup>35</sup> Georges Tamer, "Revelation, Sciences and Symbolism Al-Ghazali's Jawahir al-Qur'an," in *Islam and Rationality* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 49–88.
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- <sup>39</sup> Tamer, *Islam and Rationality*, ix.
- <sup>40</sup> Irwan Masduqi, "Kritik Nalar Arab Dalam Perspektif Abid Al-Jabiri," *Tribakti: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman* 20, no. 1 (2009); M. Faisol, "Struktur Nalar Arab-Islam Menurut Abid al-Jabiri," *TSAQAFAH* 6, no. 2 (November 30, 2010): 335, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v6i2.124>.
- <sup>41</sup> 'Abid al-Jabiri, *Takwin Al-'Aql al-'Arabi*, 290.
- <sup>42</sup> Majid Fakhry, *Sejarah Filsafat Islam* (ed.) Mulyadi Kertanegara (Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya, 1987), 309.
- <sup>43</sup> Fakhry, 311.
- <sup>44</sup> Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi, 2002), 9; Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, *Al-Khithab Wa al-Ta'wil* (Beirut: Markaz al-Tsaqofi, 2000), 19–27; Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, "The Discourse of Ibn Rushd Between Knowledge and Constraint," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 16 (1996): 6–35; Fazlur Rahman, *Islam, and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3,7,152.
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- <sup>49</sup> Nasution, 375.
- <sup>50</sup> Nasution, 383–84.
- <sup>51</sup> Amin Abdullah, *Antara Al-Ghazali Dan Kant* (ed.) Hamzah (Bandung: Mizan, 2002), 39.
- <sup>52</sup> Abdullah, 65.

<sup>53</sup> Abdullah, 71.

<sup>54</sup> Zurkani Jahja, *Teologi Al-Ghazali: Pendekatan Metodologi* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1996), 257.

<sup>55</sup> Jahja, 268.

<sup>56</sup> Aksin Wijaya, *Nalar Kritis Epistemologi Islam: Membincang Dialog Kritis Para Kritikus Muslim: Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rusd, Thasa Husein, Muhammad Abid al-Jabiri* (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2014), 16.

<sup>57</sup> Wijaya, 52.

<sup>58</sup> Wijaya, 49.

<sup>59</sup> Eric Lemay and Jeniffer A. Pitts, *Heidegger Untuk Pemula* (ed.) P.Hardono Haidi (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2001), 44.