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Rational Necessity in Hermeneutics: Exploring Al-Ghazali's Hermeneutics Theory

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Abstract

This study explores interpretation as a pivotal element in early Islamic thought, particularly examining Al-Ghazali's perspective on its role in shaping epistemological frameworks and rational traditions. Al-Ghazali's views on interpretation, especially its interaction with theologians, Sufis, and philosophers, are central to understanding the relationship between reason and religious texts. The study also delves into the interpretive theory he proposed, along with the methodological principles he associated with it. It addresses the challenges of using reason to interpret religious texts amidst doctrinal and theoretical complexities, with Al-Ghazali attempting to create a theoretical balance between traditionalism and rationalism, influenced by his Sufi inclinations. The study finds that Al-Ghazali advocated a cautious approach to interpretation, stressing its necessity when texts appeared contradictory, and emphasizing rational evidence, although inconsistencies in his works suggest a blending of rationalist and mystical thought.

Keywords: Interpretation, Al-Ghazali, Hermeneutic law, Islamic thought, Philosophy.

Introduction

One of the well-known concepts in the fields of knowledge related to modern human and social sciences and their philosophies, as well as religious sciences, is the concept of Hermeneutic and its synonym, from which Hermeneutic is inseparable. It is a methodological technique that researchers adopt to clarify the meanings of texts, uncover their multiple connotations, and reveal the truth at various levels. This is especially important when Hermeneutic pertains to religious texts and their relationship with philosophical discourse, which relies on rational and evidential tools. The dispute over truth at the heart of meaning between religious and philosophical discourses in the realm of Hermeneutic can be seen as beneficial to the truth itself, despite the apparent differences in the ways these schools of thought approach and utilize Hermeneutics.

The nature of the era and the cognitive frameworks it encompasses determine the nature of Hermeneutic and shape its methods and techniques. Hermeneutic, as the interpreter's work on texts, is not bound by a limit of cessation, completion, or end except when the entire human experience ends. The purpose of Hermeneutic is tied to understanding texts produced by human experience. It seeks to uncover what lies behind texts by interrogating them and clarifying their meanings within the limits of linguistic rules and traditions.

In the context of ancient Islamic thought, particularly during the early period of its cognitive formations and rational traditions in the first centuries of Islam, it is clear that the topics of this thought have multiplied and expanded across various Islamic sciences. It is natural that Hermeneutic has found its way into these sciences, leading to a multiplicity and expansion of

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meanings and connotations that sometimes align with the concept of Hermeneutic, and at other times diverge from it, particularly in the fields of Qur'anic sciences and the purposes of Sharia.

Hermeneutic has been employed by jurists, Sharia scholars, theologians, philosophers, and even Sufis since the early days of Islam. Faced with disagreement, conflict, and religious sectarian division, they found in Hermeneutic a means to access the precise possible meanings in sacred religious texts, derive rulings, analogies, and proofs, and allow their minds to transcend the apparent meanings of these texts. This was especially necessary when the apparent meanings did not directly indicate the intentions of the religious texts, prompting interpreters to rely on the rules of the language, word placements, and the custom of the Arabic tongue.

In the Western philosophical field, the term interpretation is often used in English as opposed to the term hermeneutic. The former has become more widely used and is closer in meaning to explanation and translation than to interpretation in its traditional sense. Historically, the word encompasses meanings of interpretation, explanation, and translation. In theological contexts, particularly concerning divine revelation, there has always been a need to clarify meanings related to divine intention to facilitate understanding and interpretation. When examining the methods of Western researchers, it is evident that they have become accustomed to using the concept of hermeneutics in its specific sense, referring to the science of interpretation, particularly in relation to interpreting the Holy Bible.

The statement can be understood to mean that interpretation, as a methodological cognitive activity concerning the subject of understanding texts, traces its foundational origins back to religious knowledge. It is practiced in the reading of religious texts, stemming from ancient cognitive traditions, delving into the ontology of the text. Hence, it has always been said that “with the text, especially the sacred text, it cannot be considered sacred if it is not interpretable (Safdi, 1988, p. 1). Modern hermeneutics, as articulated by Foucault, dates back to the sixteenth century and is associated with its role in interpreting sacred religious texts, (Foucault, 1988, pp. 34-35) particularly leaning towards theological interpretive engagement in general. In the traditions related to theological religious studies, hermeneutics began to denote a set of rules and standards that hermeneutics must adhere to understand the religious text (the Holy Scriptures). The term dates back to 1654 CE in referring to this meaning, and it remains in use today in Protestant circles (Abu-Zaid, 2005, p. 14).

Hermeneutics today is considered a method and approach in dealing with texts, whether philosophical, religious, literary, or other texts in various fields of knowledge. According to Dilthey, although the term has been historically associated with the science of interpreting religious texts and sacred symbols since its inception, its meaning has expanded to encompass most cognitive domains. It has thus evolved into a general science of human understanding and a method for interpreting phenomena in the humanities and social sciences (Tawfiq, 1995, p. 84).

Hermeneutics (Ta'wil) in Language and Terminology

Hermeneutics in Arabic Language.

The hermeneutics called in Arabic is “Ta'wil” and the interpretation is “Tafsir”. Islamic literature has historically given significant attention to the term “Ta'wil”, sometimes conflating it with “Tafsir”. This focus has extended to Arabic lexicons, where “ta'wil” is often defined in similar ways across different sources. In the Lisan al-Arab dictionary, “Ta'wil” is traced back to its root meaning: to manage, to estimate, and to explain (Ibn-Manzur, 1999, p. 32). In Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad's Kitab al-Ayn (170 AH), the meaning is given as: to return to (Al-Farahidi, 786 p. 359).

In Al-Azhari's *Tahdhib al-Lugha* (370 AH), it is also defined as returning (Al-Azhari, 1967, p. 135). Thus, it appears that the interpreter brings the speech back to its potential meanings. This is affirmed in Ibn Faris's *Maqayis al-Lugha* (395 AH), which adds another meaning: its outcome or what it ultimately leads to (Ibn-Zakaria, 1968, p. 164).

It's noteworthy that the word "Ta'wil" in Arabic is sometimes understood as synonymous with "Tafsir." Ibn Manzur (630-711 AH) mentioned that "Ta'wil" means interpreting speech with differing meanings (Ibn-Manzur, 1999, p. 33). Al-Jurjani (400-471 AH) noted that "Tafsir" originally means revealing and clarifying (Al-Jurjani, 1991, p. 71). Al-Zarkashi (745-794 AH) pointed out that "Tafsir" is broader than "Ta'wil" in meaning and that "ta'wil" is used in divine books, whereas "Tafsir" is used in other contexts (Al-Zarkashi, 1957).

Hermeneutics "Ta'wil" in Terminology

The meanings of "Ta'wil" have varied and differed in early Islamic thought. The term "Ta'wil" was used by the early Islamic scholars as synonymous with "Tafsir". However, among later scholars, a clear difference in the definition of the term emerged. Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri (456 AH) considered "Ta'wil" to be the transfer of a word from its apparent meaning and from what it was originally assigned in the language to another meaning (Al-Andalusi, 2007). The Ash'ari theologians among the theologians note that their definitions of hermeneutics follow a similar course. Al-Juwayni al-Ash'ari (478 AH) defined it by saying, hermeneutics is directing the verse to a meaning that corresponds to what precedes and what follows it, which the verse accommodates (Al-Juwayni, 1992, p. 166).

Al-Ghazali (505 AH) defined interpretation as follows: hermeneutics is an assumption supported by evidence, through which one leans towards the likelihood of a meaning that corresponds to the apparent indication. Al-Jurjani, in "Al-Tarif," mentioned that hermeneutics in Sharia law means diverting the word from its apparent meaning to a plausible meaning, if the plausible meaning aligns with al-Qur'an and the Sunnah (Al-Jurjani, 1991, p. 71). Ibn Taymiyyah (661-728 AH) noted that this definition differs from the interpretation as understood by the early generations, who held two possible meanings: firstly, explaining the speech and clarifying its meaning, and secondly, the intended meaning of the speech itself (Taymiyyah, 1327, pp. 32-33).

The previous definitions of interpretation revolve around the doctrinal understanding within religious fundamentals. In this context, interpretation means transforming a word from its literal meaning to a metaphorical one that aligns with sharp indications or religious evidence. The purpose of interpretation is to extract meanings from Quranic texts through explanation and clarification, focusing primarily on al-Qur'an and its understanding. However, Muslim philosophers and Sufis were also engaged in interpretation, seeking to reconcile between religion and philosophy in their various interpretations and explanations.

Hermeneutics: The evidence or indication

It has become clear that the essence of hermeneutics revolves around interpreting speech or texts beyond their apparent meaning to another possible meaning. Most proponents of this approach in Islamic thought are scholars of exegesis, dialectics, theology, as well as Sufis and Islamic philosophers. While some use the term hermeneutics broadly to include any interpretation of meaning without restriction, others restrict hermeneutics and require the presence of evidence or indication. However, these scholars differ on the nature and identity of this evidence. Is the evidence or indication a legal indicator or a rational one?

Ibn Hazm al-Zahiri (456 AH) rejected, based on his doctrinal belief, that any indication should be purely rational, insisting instead that it must be a legal, textual, or traditional indication. He argued that minds differ and are prone to confusion, evidenced by the diversity of beliefs and schools of thought. He considered language to be complete and self-consistent, not needing a search for apparent and hidden meanings. He was convinced that interpreting the text as it stands is what is required, prioritizing textual evidence as the authoritative means to understanding (Abu-Zaid, 2005, p. 46).

On the other hand, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (751 AH) interpreted hermeneutics by stating, 'Hermeneutics that does not contradict what the texts indicate and what the Sunnah presents, and aligns with them, is the correct hermeneutics. Hermeneutics that contradicts what the texts indicate and what the Sunnah presents is corrupt hermeneutics (Ibn-Qayyim, 1987, p. 187).

On the other hand, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (606 AH) defended the validity of rational indication (Qarina in Arabic), affirming the legitimacy of hermeneutics when supported by rational evidence. He argued that altering the literal meaning of words to a metaphorical meaning should only be done through establishing decisive rational evidence that renders the literal meaning impossible to accept rationally (Al-Razi, 1981, p. 140).

As for al-Ghazali, who criticized the interpretations of the Batiniyya sect, many interpretations of theologians and philosophers, and numerous mystical speculations, he believed that diverting the meanings of religious texts or their apparent meanings to hidden meanings does not lead to any benefit in understanding; rather, it leads to great harm, because if words are interpreted without rational evidence, this necessitates undermining confidence in the words (Al-Ghazali, 2005, p. 47).

Interpretation Methodology in Islamic Thought

The question of hermeneutics occupied a significant place in the cognitive frameworks of ancient Islamic thought, which is not surprising, as the concerns of this thought manifested in attempts to understand the meaning within Quranic text. Quran remained a compulsory starting point for those engaged in Islamic thought. Therefore, hermeneutics held the status of a common intellectual method among the various sects and schools within the Islamic world, including the Jabriyya, Qadariyya, Mu'tazila, Ash'ariyya, Batiniyya, as well as philosophers and Sufis

Islamic history reflects a continuous process of interpreting and explaining religious texts, which are fundamental to Muslim beliefs, ethics, and existence. Islamic thinkers have traditionally balanced the understanding of these texts between reason and revelation, sometimes prioritizing reason and other times prioritizing revelation, depending on their beliefs and schools of thought (Muhyiddin, 2010, pp. 16-17). If the foundation that directs the process of hermeneutics among Islamic thinkers is based on the text of revelation (Quran - the word of God), then this purpose guides all paths of interpretation known throughout Islamic thought (Group.of.researchers, 2016, p. 217). Thus, the essence of hermeneutics is centered around the concept of divinity and the necessity of knowledge of religious evidence, without ignoring the role of reason and its essential arguments in that hermeneutical process. Indeed, this has accompanied the trajectories of hermeneutics among Islamic thinkers and their orientations, albeit to varying degrees.

When these intellectual elements became prominent and caught the attention of Muslim thinkers and intellectuals, Islam was able to attract and achieve them, which contributed to Muslims deriving these intellectual elements from the outset (Basina, 2015). Thus, the contours of Islamic rationalism began to crystallize in the latter half of the first Hijri century. It was incumbent upon

Muslims to strive for the grounding and revitalization of their religious and non-religious sciences within the Islamic cultural sphere. It is not surprising that Quran, as the primary foundational text, served as the starting point for this endeavor, providing them with rational arguments of demonstrative nature (Amara, 2009).

Al-Ghazali and Hermeneutics

It can be said that the theory of interpretation in ancient Islamic thought did not settle on mature ground except with two prominent Muslim thinkers, namely Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd, despite their differences. Regarding Al-Ghazali, he managed to reconcile between representing the theological scholars' trend as Ash'arite and the rationalist trend by incorporating philosophical methods without departing from them.

Al-Ghazali addressed the issue of hermeneutics during his tumultuous era of diverse ideas. He was aware of its significance in the world of Islamic thought and belief, particularly amidst the proliferation of sects and groups among Muslim interpreters who intentionally employed hermeneutics to interpret religious texts for religious, political, and factional purposes.

Al-Ghazali did not adopt an entirely negative stance towards hermeneutics. Rather, he defended its legitimacy in interpreting religious texts. His position oscillated between permitting hermeneutics at times and deeming it obligatory at other times, while advocating for restraint and abstaining from it in cases where the religious text does not tolerate interpretation due to its clear and definitive meaning. He also allowed for the right to engage in hermeneutics among sects and schools of thought, provided that interpreters adhere to its laws and governing principles.

From Al-Ghazali's texts, it becomes evident that hermeneutics for him - much like other Muslim thinkers - is fundamentally rooted in and ends with the sacred religious texts. It is as if, without a sacred text, there is no interpretation. To achieve the ultimate goal in this field, research and effort are necessary through reasoning and inference, as well as through unveiling and experiential knowledge, in order to reach the meanings and purposes conveyed by the Sharia and to deliver them to people (Bazi, 2010, p. 38).

Al-Ghazali believed that when dealing with religious texts, if there is ambiguity in their meaning, hermeneutics might serve as a necessary judgment. This depends on refraining from understanding the apparent meaning of texts, especially when they contradict reason. Therefore, according to him, if texts conform to reason, their apparent meanings are accepted; if they contradict explicit reason, they must be interpreted, believing that their truths are not intended, thus necessitating their interpretation into metaphor (Al-Ghazali, 1973, pp. 242-243). Al-Ghazali did not suffice with those criteria that mandate the necessity or abandonment of hermeneutics. He presented three pieces of evidence that grant the interpreter the right to interpret texts. The evidence could be circumstantial, based on analogy, or the apparent evidence may be strong enough to sufficiently justify interpretation.

From this point, Al-Ghazali found that the interpretive act, which is based on rational intuition or argumentation, must be grounded in a text; otherwise, hermeneutics would be invalid (Al-Ghazali, 1993, pp. 231-232). For Al-Ghazali, the foundation of hermeneutics remains tied to the sacred text. His interpretation hardly extends beyond three uses: hermeneutics that contradicts revelation, hermeneutics as a specific type of interpretation, and finally hermeneutics as a reconciliation between the apparent and the hidden meanings. Because he believed that Quran contains both the apparent and the hidden meanings, the decisive and the ambiguous,

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hermeneutics became necessary to reach the intended meaning within it (Al-Ghazali, 2005, p. 206).

Hermeneutics: Seeking Meaning and Truth

It is not surprising that hermeneutics has become an epistemic issue among Islamic sects, and Al-Ghazali found, after deep consideration, that those engaged in hermeneutics hardly agree on a truth or meaning. Therefore, Al-Ghazali's work on hermeneutics was not limited to criticizing hermeneutical approaches and their differing methodologies. Rather, he earnestly investigated the problem and sought what he believed to be correct in the principles and laws of hermeneutics.

Thus, he pursued a path in seeking truth that unified it as indivisible, whether that truth came from religious sources or from rational argumentation. Because the meanings contained in religious texts must be verified by reason, which is entrusted with understanding the essence of wisdom in religious texts based on its principles of inference. Therefore, he viewed it as unacceptable the opinion of those who believe that rational sciences contradict religious sciences, and that combining them is impossible. Such a belief stems from blindness in the eye of insight, and we seek refuge in God from it (Al-Ghazali, 2005, p. 261). And perhaps this acknowledgment of the role of reason in guiding towards truth is the same acknowledgment that Ibn Rushd supported in seeking truth (Ibn-Rushd, 1997, p. 96).

From Al-Ghazali's texts, it becomes clear that he trusts in attaining truth and indeed sought it through various methods. However, he also believed that the path of reason is essential in this regard. He starts with doubt and eventually arrives at certainty. There is no hope of attaining this except through the intellect performing its cognitive role properly, where truth becomes clear through intuition, which is considered direct intellectual insight (Al-Nashar, 1998, p. 13).

Al-Ghazali had resolved the issue of the necessity of hermeneutics and considered that stopping at the apparent meanings of words and concepts does not aid in uncovering the truth. The truths have both an apparent aspect that reveals meanings to everyone effortlessly, as well as an inner aspect whose meanings and truths are only revealed to knowledgeable scholars among people (Al-Ghazali, 1988a, p. 39).

Upon reviewing Al-Ghazali's hierarchy of knowledge, it becomes evident that it is structured into degrees. At the lowest level is narration, with knowledge through the Sufi way (Gnostic experience) positioned above it. Given that this way is accessible only to a highly exclusive group, reason thus assumes the secondary position in the hierarchy of understanding truths (Corbin, 1998, p. 274).

Al-Ghazali's advocacy for seeking truth from religious texts underscores the pivotal role of reason. His critique of blind conformity and skepticism towards the methods of religious imitators highlight his belief that mere imitation does not lead to genuine understanding or truth. However, he acknowledged the necessity of adherence to established practices in matters concerning theology and worship (Al-Ghazali, 1979, p. 72). Al-Ghazali did not assign reason a prominent role in grasping the intricate details of divine wisdom in these areas, suggesting that human intellect may not fully comprehend the profound truths intended by Allah. Moreover, he stipulated that interpreters must abstain from engaging in hermeneutics when faced with ambiguous interpretations of texts, ensuring clarity in religious understanding and interpretation.

It is clear that Al-Ghazali aimed, based on his doctrine in hermeneutics, to construct a rational logic for truth within religious texts. However, he defined the role of reason strictly within the

confines of the text and religious law. He considered reason as a reliable reference in religious and doctrinal matters because, in his view, hermeneutics primarily involves establishing a logical framework for interpreting and rationalizing the sacred text, aiming to establish religion on a solid and certain foundation.

Hermeneutics between Intellect and Tradition

In summary, it has been stated that al-Ghazali adopted a path in hermeneutics that harmonized between reason and revelation, guided by specific rules. He assigned a defined role to reason, wherein it operated within the framework provided by religious texts without exceeding what he deemed appropriate limits. Despite his apparent reliance on reason in hermeneutics, especially in matters related to theology, where he believed that rational argumentation alone could not provide the final word, al-Ghazali did not stray far into rationalist hermeneutics. His view seemed to emphasize that reason remains in service to elucidate the meanings and mysteries of religious texts, yet he did not grant it ultimate authority in this domain. Rather, he suggested that reason should be allowed its due scope but restrained when it reaches a limit beyond which it cannot proceed further (Donia, 1980, p. 38).

Al-Ghazali viewed reason not merely as a conventional path to truth but as a tool that comprehends and judges all existences with certainty and truthfulness, stating, All beings are within the domain of reason, which exercises its judgment over them, revealing hidden meanings (Al-Ghazali, 1964, p. 46). This perspective likely reflects his Sufi inclination, where reason is employed to affirm esoteric knowledge that Sufis delve into, based on his mystical experiences characterized by symbolic language, signs, metaphors, and a departure from empirical proofs or sensory perceptions (Al-Ghazali, 1964, p. 25).

It is clear that al-Ghazali's aim in emphasizing the importance of rational inquiry was to achieve confirmation of divine law. Just as divine law indicates the truth, so too does rational inquiry confirm that Shariah is the truth. Therefore, it can be said that his critique of philosophers does not outright reject reason; rather, when reason is freed from illusion and opinions derived from blind imitation, it aligns with correctness and cannot err. Despite experiencing a state of epistemic doubt, he ultimately relied on necessary rational truths. However, this trust was not attained through systematic evidence or organized discourse but through divine illumination that occurred within his heart (Al-Ghazali, 1979, p. 58).

Conversely, he vehemently opposed the interpretations of the Mu'tazilites, who granted reason a lofty stature in their discussions of religious issues. Al-Ghazali argued that they had overly elevated the importance of reason (Al-Ghazali, 1993, p. 6). This position underscored his view on the role of reason in understanding within the context of Shariah, emphasizing that reason is the origin, starting point, and basis of science and knowledge (Al-Ghazali, 2005, p. 98).

It should be clarified that al-Ghazali's cognitive framework assigns the intellect the task of interpreting or extrapolating from religious texts, necessitating the interpreter to rely on reason to derive rulings when there is no explicit text. This involves using methods of analogy and other forms of reasoning, and resorting to interpretation where it is plausible, particularly when it conflicts with rational necessities (Al-Ghazali, 2005, pp. 230-232).

Al-Ghazali's perspective on reason initially suggests a balanced approach alongside revelation. He affirms that clear religious texts often align with clear rational arguments, which he examines to understand their apparent meanings. However, he firmly asserts the primacy of religious texts as the foundational starting point in all discussions. He believes reason's role lies in supporting and

confirming what the religious texts establish, emphasizing that while reason can elucidate and argue, it must ultimately defer to the infallible nature of divine revelation and prophethood. This hierarchy is justified by the belief that religious law encompasses truths that reason alone cannot fully comprehend or independently ascertain (Al-Ghazali, 1960, p. 6).

The rituals and divine laws, as delineated by the prophets, make understanding their wisdom and implications through reason difficult. Therefore, it is obligatory to suffice in following the prophets who comprehended their nuances through the light of prophethood, not merely through the faculties of reason (Al-Ghazali, 1960, p. 135).

Al-Ghazali pointed out two types of cognitive matters: those attainable by reason alone or hidden from it. The first type involves objectives and meanings that minds can reach and comprehend, yet remain obscure to most people, exceeding their mental grasp. The second type includes matters that no human reason can attain or comprehend, no matter how sharp or powerful it may be (Al-Ghazali, 1985, p. 94).

In this context, al-Ghazali categorized knowledge into three divisions. The first involves knowledge attainable by reason alone, independent of religious texts. The second involves knowledge derived solely from religious texts, without reliance on reason. The third category comprises knowledge acquired through both reason and religious texts together (Al-Ghazali, 1993, pp. 230-231).

Al-Ghazali's Approach to Hermeneutics

Examining the history of the tradition of interpretation and hermeneutics in Islam directs us to various categories including jurists, scholars of Islamic law, theologians, Sufis, and philosophers. They all agreed that the texts of revelation encompass both the apparent and the hidden meanings, necessitating interpretation for precise understanding. However, the points of disagreement among them extended to the purposes and goals intended through interpretative actions.

Al-Ghazali's approach to hermeneutics represented a distinct method in which he articulated theoretical frameworks, establishing laws and rules that he elaborated upon in his various books, particularly in "The Principles of Interpretation." The purpose that motivated his efforts was to prevent hermeneutics from predominantly relying on conjectures and beliefs lacking solid evidence, and without seeking definitive proof, which hermeneutics permits or mandates based on the explicit indications found in religious texts. While he acknowledged the legitimacy of interpretation, he strongly advocated refraining from engaging in it except when necessary. Therefore, he mandated abstaining from interpreting the literal meaning of texts unless evidence was available. According to Al-Ghazali, interpreting the apparent meaning of texts should be avoided unless there is clear proof, setting limits for desires and establishing a recognized position for reason that should not be exceeded.

He has previously outlined the features of his methodology in hermeneutics in his book *The Law of Hermeneutics*. Al-Ghazali aims to establish a law for hermeneutics in order to achieve a unified understanding of Quran and its exegesis, and to set standards and rules for interpretative practice and refine its approaches (Al-Ghazali, 2008, pp. 227,229,261).

This stance from Al-Ghazali indicates that he adopted a rational approach in his interpretive methodology. This is evident in his occasional tendency to interpret religious terms with philosophical ones. He seemingly felt compelled to use philosophical terminology as much as necessary to approach religious meanings or texts (Badawi, 1961, p. 234). Indeed, it can be said

that he relied on a rational approach in all his views, even though he eventually turned to the path of mysticism in the later years of his life. He maintained a position of respecting reason and regarded it as a reliable criterion for judging anything that contradicts the evidence leading to the truth (Al-Nashar, 1998, p. 112).

Although reason, in its cognitive achievements, may not reach the level of mystical knowledge, it possesses a legitimate logical authority to judge this mysticism when it concerns rational impossibilities or when reason determines that they are logically contradictory

As the gap widened and the times became distant, leading to differences in belief and thought, various sects and schools emerged within the Islamic cultural context. Al-Ghazali identified five of these sects, denying four of them and considering their paths far from the truth, while acknowledging the correctness of the fifth sect, which adopts a moderate approach between reason and religious law (Al-Ghazali, 1940, pp. 9-10). Therefore, those who relied solely on reason were mistaken, as were those who relied exclusively on text (Al-Ghazali, 1988a, p. 39).

The essence of this moderation in methodology according to Al-Ghazali does not mean subjecting the religious text to the judgment of reason. Al-Ghazali, in his Ash'ari belief, is far from such a conception. Rather, it involves subjecting the results of hermeneutics to the judgments of reason. The role of reason in relation to the text is limited to uncovering what appears as ambiguity or difficulty in the apparent meaning of the text. In such cases, it becomes necessary to interpret the apparent meaning in a metaphorical sense, which is what Al-Ghazali intends.

Discussion of Al-Ghazali's Views: Summary and Conclusions

Hermeneutics has become a methodology that encompasses various paths and approaches within Islamic thought, represented by its currents, sects, and schools. Its core issue has always been the oscillation between reason and transmission (narration), knowing that transmission has been the foundation upon which the minds of Muslim interpreters have worked. Thus, the value and function of reason are linked to this fundamental element, namely the religious text.

How can we situate the role of reason in Al-Ghazali's interpretive framework? And how does Al-Ghazali define the role of reason in religious law? It is clear that Al-Ghazali unhesitatingly prioritizes religious law over reason when a contradiction arises between them. When the contradiction is resolved, he returns to the arguments of reason, employing them to support and advocate for religion or law. Therefore, his interpretive theory remains committed to revelation as a necessary starting point, as the aim of hermeneutics is to strive to uncover meaning and truth in religion

From this, it becomes clear that Al-Ghazali maintained a relatively stable position regarding the interpretation of truth and the means to attain it concerning the relationship between reason and transmission. The law (Sharia) is the foundation, while reason, as an act of the intellect and its subject, is secondary. However, the rational intermediary remains a necessity for any understanding, without implying a concession of the primacy of the religious text in all circumstances. Even when the meaning is ambiguous, reason remains in service of the religious text. Its role can be enhanced in specific textual contexts within limits that should not be exceeded. Al-Ghazali seems to aim, on one hand, to demonstrate the value of reason and the error of ignoring it by relying on a traditionalist approach, and on the other hand, to harness it in service of the religious text, producing interpretations that indicate meanings or truths that can be

rationality justified, while adhering to the authority of the text based on the belief that the meaning it contains is the truth, with the role of reason being to clarify this meaning.

It appears that Al-Ghazali's hermeneutics ultimately leads to a mystical inclination rooted in the unity of the apparent and the hidden. At its core, hermeneutics focuses on understanding the relationship between these two aspects, meaning it does not reject apparent interpretation but serves as a means to grasp the truth as it is.

Al-Ghazali's intellectual transformations, driven by doubt and epistemological anxiety, prompted him to explore various paths in the quest for truth, leading him to different methodological approaches. However, does his method in hermeneutics conclude with the judgments and necessities of reason, or does it lean toward the logic of mystical intuition? Alternatively, was he aiming to support mystical truth by utilizing reason and its judgments to affirm a truth that is difficult to measure, given that it is a personal or subjective experience that cannot be shared with others

Al-Ghazali's texts leave the researcher in a position of uncertainty regarding his final stance on reason and its role in uncovering truths. This position can be inferred by tracing Al-Ghazali's views. In his book 'The Mishkat,' when exploring the foundations of knowledge, it seems he was still expanding the authority of reason, aiming to extend it over everything (Al-Ghazali, 1964, p. 44). However, in 'The Mishkat' itself, after attributing to reason an unlimited authority over all matters, whether worldly or religious, he then limits the capabilities of reason and constricts its domains, stating: 'It creates doubt in our minds about the ability of reason to grasp religious truths (Al-Ghazali, 1964, p. 78).

In his book "Al-Ahya", Al-Ghazali confines the function of reason and its activities to understanding the truth of prophethood. He then separates it from all other truths of religion, stating: 'The benefit of reason is sufficient for you in guiding you to the truth of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and understanding the sources of his indications. After that, isolate reason from further action, and adhere to following it; do not accept anything except through it (Al-Ghazali, 2008, p. 41).

In his book 'Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal,' he limits the role of reason in religion to bearing witness to the truth of prophethood, as its function does not extend beyond that. 'The prophets are the healers of the ailments of the hearts, and the benefit of reason lies in refraining from grasping what cannot be perceived through prophethood (Al-Ghazali, 1979, p. 86).

In any case, it seems that Al-Ghazali's perspective on rational interpretation adopted an approach that interprets texts in a way that aligns with meanings not constrained by preconceived judgments. In this approach, reason serves as a regulator and guide for the stages of interpretive action, ensuring consistency and avoiding the imposition of meaning outside the logic of language and its usages, while also not contradicting the explicit statements within the text.

However, what is clear is that Al-Ghazali, with his renewed certainty in the necessity of rationality and considering it a path to be followed in issues of hermeneutics and reasoning in religious matters, went on to assign functions to reason, most of which serve the religious belief and seek evidence for the truth of this belief. Therefore, it was essential for him, in light of this role of reason, to assert the unity between transmitted knowledge (naql) and rational knowledge (aql), based on the idea that the truth of transmission or law requires rational support, as well as clarifying and interpreting the Sharia to eliminate contradictions with reason. Moreover, he went

further when he encountered difficulties in interpreting the data of mystical experience, wanting to give reason a role in accepting.

Observing Al-Ghazali's intellectual and doctrinal trajectory reveals that his foundational aspects were integrated to varying degrees within these four epistemological domains that were thriving in the Islamic world and its communities. Moreover, Al-Ghazali's intellectual and doctrinal horizon regarding the issue of hermeneutics was not narrow compared to the complexities that contemporary hermeneutics seeks to address. He exerted himself in an attempt to define a specific problem, which is divine speech in relation to human understanding (Al-Ghazali, 1988b, pp. 9-18).

This is something that he found could only be achieved by establishing a governing law or rules for the interpretive practice.

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