

# The Integration of Rationality and Spirituality: Imam Al-Ghazali's Experience Through Ta'lim Rabbani Approach in Acquiring Knowledge

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## Abstract

This article investigates the integration of rationality and spirituality in the educational philosophy of Imam al-Ghazali, with particular attention to his experience of *ta'lim rabbānī* (divine instruction) as a pathway to *ma'rifah* (spiritual knowledge). Imam al-Ghazali's intellectual crisis and subsequent spiritual transformation reflect a shift from reliance on discursive reason to a higher epistemic state grounded in divine guidance. Drawing on *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* and key insights from *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*, this study analyzes the importance of spirituality or *ma'rifah* in education. This research employed a literature review grounded in a philosophical approach, wherein analysis was conducted by examining written texts. Methodologies utilized encompass critical review, comparison, summarization, and synthesis, adopting a descriptive-analytical approach to assess various dimensions of the proposed theory. The article argued that al-Ghazali's *ta'lim rabbānī* framework is not a rejection of reason, but a reorientation of reason under the authority of divine truth. The findings suggested that this integrated model provided a relevant paradigm for contemporary Islamic education, particularly in addressing the fragmentation of knowledge and the marginalization of spirituality in academic contexts. In contemporary Islamic education, this model challenges the prevalent separation of intellect and spirituality and calls for a reintegration of ethical, spiritual, and rational dimensions of knowledge in the formation of the human self.

Keywords: Al-Ghazali, Ta'Līm Rabbānī, Rationality, Spirituality, Islamic Epistemology, Integration of Knowledge.

## Introduction

*Ta'lim rabbani* represents a methodology for acquiring knowledge that underscores the significance of profound spiritual values. Research conducted by Rusli indicates that spiritual values are pivotal in developing morals and character through knowledge acquisition and are

instrumental in influencing behavior.<sup>1</sup> The comprehension of Allah SWT (*ma'rifatullah*) is most effectively attained through *ta'lim ar-rabbani*. It is posited that *ma'rifatullah* can be achieved not solely through ritual worship, but also through virtuous morals.<sup>2</sup> This methodology aims to cultivate individuals possessing moral integrity, deep spirituality, and extensive, beneficial knowledge.<sup>3</sup> This concept stresses the necessity of integrating knowledge with ethical conduct, thereby ensuring that education yields individuals who are not only intellectually adept but also possess noble hearts.<sup>4</sup>

The study of *ta'lim rabbani* is still a target for researchers due to the lack of in-depth research on this topic, especially with the symptoms in society that indicate the urgency of researching *ta'lim rabbani*. The current social context shows a spiritual void in community life, especially in the educational community. Behavioral development focusing solely on the ritual side with a rational basis marginalizes inner morality, proving the symptoms of minimal spiritual values. Social phenomena such as corruption committed by individuals who behave religiously and uncontrolled scientific development not guided by divine spirituality<sup>5</sup> demonstrate the importance of the concept of *ta'lim rabbani* as explained by Imam al-Ghazali. The lack of spirituality also affects an individual's mental health.<sup>6</sup> Research conducted by Gadjah Mada University shows that individuals with low levels of spirituality are more vulnerable to mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety.<sup>7</sup> When spirituality is neglected, society tends to experience an increase in negative behaviors, such as corruption, violence, and intolerance. According to a survey conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute in 2022, around 40% of respondents admitted feeling a lack of empathy towards others, indicating a spiritual crisis in society.<sup>8</sup>

Spirituality is not only a religious aspect but also influences the psychological well-being of individuals. The impact of the lack of *ta'lim rabbani* is also reflected in materialistic behavior, hedonism, and indifference towards spiritual values. Additionally, environmental degradation continues to increase due to a weak character rooted in spiritual values.

*Ta'lim rabbani* is relevant to be implemented in the current issues. Imam al-Ghazali divided the methods of acquiring knowledge into *ta'lim insani* and *ta'lim rabbani*. Imam Al-Ghazali, a prominent figure in jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, and mysticism, significantly contributed to educational thought in Islam.<sup>9</sup> Through his various works, he emphasized the importance of knowledge directed towards the ultimate goal: to know and draw closer to Allah (*ma'rifatullah*). The philosophy of science, according to Imam al-Ghazali, does not merely emphasize the

<sup>1</sup> Rusli, T., & Prastowo, A. (2023). Imam Al-Ghazali: Implementasi Ta'lim Insani dan Ta'lim Rabbani di PPTQ Mutiara Insan Mulia Yogyakarta. *Tarbiyatuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 16(1), 1–11.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Athaillah As-Sakandari, (1997). *Al-Hikam*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1997), 124

<sup>3</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, I, *"Ihya Ulum al-Din"*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al- Ilmiyyah, 2000), 85

<sup>4</sup> Richard Sosis, "From Ritual to Morality: Where Deeds and Words Meet," *Center for Humans & Nature*, 2017

<sup>5</sup> Transparency International. "Indeks Persepsi Korupsi 2022". Berlin: Transparency International, 2022

<sup>6</sup> Samta P. Pandya, Spirituality and Values Education in Elementary School: Understanding Views of Teachers, *Children & Schools*, Volume 39, Issue 1, 1 January 2017, Pages 33–42

<sup>7</sup> Rulangi, Runi, Jihan Fahera, and Nanda Novira. "Faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi subjective well-being pada mahasiswa." *Seminar Nasional Psikologi dan Ilmu Humaniora (SENAPIH)*. Vol. 1. No. 1. 2021. Baca juga Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). (2021). "Penelitian Kesehatan Mental dan Spiritualitas". Yogyakarta: UGM.

<sup>8</sup> Lembaga Survei Indonesia (LSI). "Survei Empati Sosial di Indonesia". Jakarta: LSI, 2022

<sup>9</sup> Saeful Anwar, Filsafat Ilmu Al-Ghazali (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2007), 39

intellectual aspect, but also the moral and spiritual aspects. He argued that knowledge not accompanied by ethics and manners will become useless and potentially dangerous. Therefore, the concept of *ta'lim rabbani* in the view of Imam al-Ghazali focuses on education that aligns with divine principles and is beneficial for the community's welfare.

By reintroducing *ta'lim rabbani*, Imam al-Ghazali emphasized the urgency of teaching knowledge beneficial for this world and the hereafter. This concept emphasizes that true knowledge brings goodness and brings individuals closer to Allah. Therefore, integrating the concept of *ta'lim rabbani* in education can be an effective solution to address various social phenomena and encourage the emergence of a generation that is moral, responsible, and positively contributes to society.

Studies on Islamic education thought and the philosophy of science have been extensively conducted, including the thoughts of Imam al-Ghazali on the spiritual approach to acquiring knowledge. Hendri Purbo Waseso and others discuss Imam al-Ghazali's approach to education related to social sciences. *Ta'lim rabbani* here is emphasized as an educational method that teaches divine values, where the knowledge learned should lead to a deeper understanding of God.<sup>10</sup> Nadra Taja analyzes how the concept of *ta'lim rabbani* is applied in character education. Imam al-Ghazali emphasized that direct guidance from God is the source of true knowledge, so education must reflect prophetic values.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the literature only examines Imam al-Ghazali's thoughts in general without delving into the specific aspects of I, a divinely-based education encompassing a blend of knowledge, ethics, and spirituality. Existing research also tends to focus more on the interpretation of ethics and morality without deeply linking them to the main goal of the philosophy of science in Imam al-Ghazali's view, which is the attainment of happiness in the hereafter. Therefore, there is a research gap to explore more deeply how the concept of *ta'lim rabbani* is applied in divinely-oriented education, as well as how this concept is relevant and can be implemented in contemporary education. *Ta'lim rabbani* in Imam al-Ghazali's philosophy of science has not yet been widely referenced address the challenges of modern education, particularly in Islamic education. This gap provides space for more focused research in understanding the structure and basic principles of *ta'lim rabbani*, and how this concept can offer alternatives in addressing educational issues oriented solely towards cognitive outcomes without considering spiritual and ethical aspects. This article discusses the concept of *ta'lim rabbani* from the perspective of the philosophy of science of Imam al-Ghazali. The article aims to gain a deep understanding of the goals and essence of education in Islam, particularly in the spiritual aspect, and the relevance of this concept in addressing contemporary educational challenges.

<sup>10</sup> Waseso, Hendri, Maragustam Siregar, and Anggitiyas Sekarinasih. 2024. "Imam Ghazali's Educational Philosophy and Its Relevance to Social Science Learning In Primary School". *EDU-RELIGIA : Jurnal Keagamaan Dan Pembelajarannya* 7 (1), 51-63.

<sup>11</sup> Taja, N., Nurdin, E. S., Kosasih, A., & Suresman, E. (2022, May). Prophetic Character Education Based on Al-Ghazali's Akhlaqi Sufism. In *International Conference of Learning on Advance Education (ICOLAE 2021)* (pp. 903-911). Atlantis Press.

## Research Method

This study employed a qualitative philosophical approach focusing on library research as the primary method. The research is theoretical and interpretative, aiming to construct a conceptual framework by analyzing the epistemological integration of rationality and spirituality in the thought of Imam al-Ghazali, particularly through his experience of *ta'lim rabbānī* (divine instruction) as recorded in his major works.<sup>12</sup> The research was classified as qualitative theoretical research with a descriptive-analytical design. It does not involve empirical fieldwork or quantitative measurement but focuses on philosophical reconstruction through analyzing classical texts and contemporary scholarly interpretations. The central aim is to explore and interpret the epistemological, spiritual, and educational dimensions of al-Ghazali's thought in a way that applies to contemporary Islamic education. The library research method was employed by collecting, reviewing, and synthesizing a wide range of primary and secondary sources. The study bridges classical Islamic epistemology with contemporary educational concerns by employing analytical, hermeneutical, and thematic tools, offering a normative learning model rooted in *divine-centered knowledge* (*'ilm ladunnī*), self-purification, and the harmonization of intellect and heart.<sup>13</sup>

## Discussion

### Sufism and Levels of Knowledge

The study of knowledge, according to Imam al-Ghazali, is closely related to the ultimate goal of a human being in acquiring knowledge and education. Imam Al-Ghazali discusses the ultimate goal of human knowledge in his intellectual journey, which he wrote about in the book *Al-Munkidz min al-Dhalal*. The goal of seeking knowledge is to reach Allah SWT. The type of knowledge is knowledge that reaches the level of *haqqu al-yaqin*.<sup>14</sup>

Referring to the opinion of Prof. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, knowledge that reaches the level of *haqqul yaqin* is called "*ilmu pengenalan*." The value of truth in "*ilmu pengenalan*," according to Prof. Al-Attas, is more perfect and more satisfying than other types of knowledge. The purpose of "*ilmu pengenalan*" is not to accumulate information but to achieve the purpose of life, understand the essence of something, and guide towards the ultimate goal of happiness. "*Ilmu pengenalan*" is the most fundamental knowledge, with its pinnacle being self-recognition and recognition of Allah SWT.<sup>15</sup> Other knowledge is referred to by Prof. Al-Attas as "*ilmu pengetahuan*." The purpose of "*ilmu pengetahuan*" is solely to know something, not to recognize its true essence.<sup>16</sup> "Knowledge" aims to fulfill human needs in the world. Thus, it is rational-empirical.

Imam al-Ghazali has undertaken the journey to achieve the pinnacle of human knowledge. He recounts the story of his scholarly journey in the book *Al-Munkidz Min al-Dhalal*. In this book, Imam al-Ghazali narrates that he studied many sciences and their branches to a deep

<sup>12</sup> Anton Bakker dan Achmad Charris Zubair, *Metodologi Penelitian Filsafat*, (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Kanisius, 1990), 15

<sup>13</sup> Novella Parchiano, *Sejarah Pengetahuan Michel Faucault* dalam Listiyono Santoso, *Epistemologi Kiri*, (Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzzmedia, 2009), 176

<sup>14</sup> Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Kausalitas : Hukum Alam atau Tuhan Membaca Pemikiran Religio-Saintifik al- Ghazali*, (Ponorogo: Unida Gontor Press, 2018), 172

<sup>15</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah Untuk Kaum Muslimin*, (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2014), 52-55

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

understanding.<sup>17</sup> He studied both esoteric and exoteric sciences. Studying natural sciences (*thabi'yyat*), theology, philosophy, educational sciences, and mysticism. In the story of his journey, Imam al-Ghazali explains the purpose of delving into all these sciences. That is to discover the essence of truth. The pinnacle of Imam al-Ghazali's scientific journey is in the science of Sufism.

The distinction between knowledge and *ma'rifah* is also made. Although in some explanations, they are not strictly and rigidly distinguished. He made the analogy that knowledge is like seeing fire, while *ma'rifah* is likened to the light that radiates from that fire.<sup>18</sup> From the description conveyed by Imam al-Ghazali, it appears that the difference between knowledge and *ma'rifah* lies in their objects (*al-ma'lum*). That object is the reality of existence. Meanwhile, the reality of existence in Imam al-Ghazali's thought varies. Even having its levels. Generally, the object of science is in the form of physical objects. Can be perceived. In contrast, the object of *ma'rifah* knowledge is a metaphysical object and beyond the material nature. *Ma'rifah* tends towards knowledge that is intuitive or illuminative.

Prof. Muhammad Zainy Uthman explains that the difference between knowledge (*ilm*) and gnosis (*ma'rifah*) is that knowledge is general, whereas gnosis is specific.<sup>19</sup> Because knowledge (*ilm*) involves understanding general (*mujmal*) and particular (*mufassal*) matters, whereas gnosis (*ma'rifah*) involves understanding specific matters (*mufassal*). An object in the form of the reality of existence can be reached through the path of knowledge or gnosis.<sup>20</sup>

Ibn 'Arabi divided reality and existence into the reality of absolute existence (the ultimate existence) and the reality of limited existence. The ultimate existence is the existence of the Most High. That is Allah SWT, the essence of all that exists. At the same time, limited existence is the existence of creatures. Characterized by being mortal, perishable, and will return to the Absolute Being.<sup>21</sup> Some Sufis generally mean by *al-wujud* that it is Allah SWT. The attribute of *al-wujud* of Allah SWT is divided into two: *al-wujud adz-dzahiri* and *al-wujud al-bathini*. The external existence is the attribute of Allah's existence in the form of His names. Meanwhile, the internal existence of Allah refers to the essence of Allah's existence.<sup>22</sup> In the thought of Imam al-Ghazali, these two types of existence are objects (*al-ma'lum*) that humans can witness. Therefore, humans have different abilities in perceiving various types of existence. Each human being can accept that type of existence according to the strengths and weaknesses of their soul.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, in the view of Imam al-Ghazali, limited existence is also hierarchical. He divides the existence of creatures into five types: *al-wujud adz-dzati*, *al-wujud al-hissi*, *al-wujud al-khayali*, *al-wujud al-'aqli*, *al-wujud asy-syibhi*. *Al-Wujud Adz-Dzati* is real in human feelings, positioned outside the senses and intellect. For example, the existence of the sky and the earth. The senses

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Raudhatu at-Thalibin wa Umdatus Salikin fi Majmu Rasail al-Imam al-Ghazali*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2013), 28

<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Zainy Uthman, *Al-Attas Psychology*, (Kuala Lumpur: Himpunan Keilmuan Islam [HAKIM], 2022), 57

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

<sup>21</sup> Ibnu, Arabiy, *Al-Futuhat al-Makkiyyah* jilid 2, (Kairo: Al-Hai'ah al-Mishriyyah al-'Ammah lil Kitab), 459

<sup>22</sup> Ashim Ibrahim al-Kayali, *Al-Lathaif al-Ilahiyyah fi Syarhi Mukhtarat min al-Hikam al-'Athaiyyah li Ibni 'Athailah as-Sakandariy*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2003), 240

<sup>23</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *On Quidity and Essence: An Outline of the Basic Structure of Reality in Islamic Metaphysics*, (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1990), 33

and intellect can perceive this existence. *Al-Wujud al-Hissi* is a form formed from the sense of touch and positioned beyond the eye's sight. An example of something envisioned by the Prophet in a state of sleep or wakefulness (*yaqdzah*) in a beautiful image. *Al-Wujud al-Khayali* depicts something real when that thing is no longer perceivable. That is, when the human eyes are closed, in the realm of the mind, there is an image witnessed by the human thought. *Al-Wujud al-Aqli* begins by understanding that everything has a spirit, meaning, and essence. The intellect perceives the singular meaning of existence without a clear image, whether from the aspects of imagination, senses, or reality. The fifth *al-wujud al-syibhi* is existence that, in terms of form essence, and beyond the senses, does not exist. However, that existence is in another form that resembles that existence. Like the form of an interpreter's representation.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, the existence and reality of these different forms have levels or degrees. Humans also have different abilities in grasping the meaning and secrets of existence and reality. Therefore, from the perspective of Islamic education, it is necessary to pay attention to this ontological aspect. Humans who can grasp the reality of the highest existence have the opportunity to elevate their level of knowledge to *ma'rifatullah*. From this aspect, Imam al-Ghazali explains that the highest knowledge is the human ability to grasp the highest reality and existence. It is the pinnacle of someone knowledgeable and educated.

### The Definition and Its Methods of Acquisition

Imam al-Ghazali explains that knowledge (*ilm*) is the expression of the arrival (*wushul*) of the reality of something into the heart.<sup>25</sup> In another expression, Imam al-Ghazali explains that knowledge is the attainment (*husul*) of something in the mind.<sup>26</sup> He also opined that knowledge recognizes something according to its true nature. This understanding implies that a person possesses knowledge if their soul or heart can recognize something down to its essence.<sup>27</sup> If a person's soul or heart does not recognize something's essence, that person is called ignorant. It means that knowledge contains a truth, whereas *jahil* (ignorance) contains a mistake.

This understanding is similar to the definition by al-Jurjani, who argued that knowledge is a firm belief that aligns with reality.<sup>28</sup> This belief is a true belief. A reality becomes a true, firm belief for humans when the human mind has grasped the image of that reality. Ignorance, therefore, is the opposite. That is when the human mind cannot obtain a true picture of reality. Thus, when the human mind is mistaken in depicting the reality of something, it is also called *jahil*.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, seeking knowledge is searching for the truth about the essence of something's reality. Thus, all incorrect or doubtful perceptions are eliminated. Thus, in knowledge, there is no doubt about the reality of something. However, what exists in the human soul is the true conviction about the essence of something's reality.

<sup>24</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Faishalu at-Tafriqah baina al-Islam wa az-Zandaqah*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2013), 79-80

<sup>25</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, jilid 1, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2014), 32

<sup>26</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, jilid 3, (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1992), 12

<sup>27</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, jilid 1 ...33

<sup>28</sup> Ali Muhammad al-Jurjani, *At-Ta'rifat*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1988), 93

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

It means there are two human actions for a person to recognize something. That is *hushul* and *wushul*. *Hushul* is the acquisition of humans regarding the reality of the existence of something. Meanwhile, *wushul* is the arrival of humans, in this case, the soul. Therefore, in this case, Prof. Al-Attas explains the concept of knowledge, which is the arrival (*hushul*) of the meaning of an object or the object of knowledge into the soul, and the attainment (*wushul*) of the soul to the meaning of something or an object of knowledge.<sup>30</sup> In this case, there is no difference in the object of knowledge or the object in the activities of *hushul* or *wushul*. The object or subject of knowledge referred to here is all realities of existence. Therefore, there is no difference between the objects of science (*thabi'yyat*) and the objects of philosophy or kalam. The objects between *thabi'yyah*, philosophy, and *kalam* are all realities of existence.<sup>31</sup>

In the activity of *hushul*, humans make efforts and endeavors through methods and tools. Therefore, if Imam al-Ghazali describes knowledge as seeing fire, then the medium for knowing is the eye. Thus, the eye is the tool for knowing. Besides the eyes, there are all the human senses. When the eyes see fire, a method is required. So there are reasons for acquiring knowledge. Imam Nasafi mentioned three causes of knowledge: healthy senses, truthful news, and reason.<sup>32</sup> Prof. Al-Attas mentioned three sources of knowledge: first, external and internal senses. Second, reason and intuition. Third, the authority of truthful news.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, in the activity of *wushul*, a person interprets the reality of existence to reach the secret of the essence of existence. When humans express an object (object of knowledge) through language, that language becomes an idea in the mind, so the object of knowledge has meaning according to humans. Therefore, human interpretations of the reality of that existence are not the same. Under the nature, ability, and readiness of the human soul or heart. Therefore, the way humans view the reality of existence influences human knowledge. In this case, the human worldview influences knowledge or epistemology. The reality of existence in the view of a Muslim is a reality that is always connected to God. Thus, knowledge in the Islamic perspective is related to theology. Epistemology and theology influence each other. The basis is worldview.

In this regard, Imam al-Ghazali's perspective on nature is always integrated with a theological viewpoint. He said that those who understand the wisdom of the realities of nature will have their faith in Allah SWT firmly rooted. Moreover, by reflecting on the human body, which consists of various body parts, one will find signs of Allah's power. Therefore, for a Muslim scholar, the perspective towards Allah SWT is the most important factor in interpreting the reality of the universe. God becomes the source of scientific values (*aksiologi*). Axiology in the Islamic perspective does not stem from human experience or history, which changes constantly. The values of knowledge in Islam, etiquette, are fixed. Because they are based on divine values. Etiquette in Islam preserves a person's knowledge so that their scholarly activities remain focused

<sup>30</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam dan Sekularisme*, terj. (Bandung: PIMPIN, 2011), 198. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy of the Future*, (London-New York: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1985), 211

<sup>31</sup> Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Kausalitas Hukum Alam atau Tuhan: Membaca Pemikiran Religio-Saintifik al-Ghazali*, (Ponorogo: Unida Gontor Press, 2018), 182

<sup>32</sup> Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Kausalitas Hukum Alam atau Tuhan: Membaca Pemikiran Religio-Saintifik al-Ghazali*, (Ponorogo: Unida Gontor Press, 2018), 182

<sup>33</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam dan Filsafat Sains*, (Bandung: Mizan, 1995), 34-39

on their fundamental purpose: to attain recognition of Allah SWT and eternal happiness in the hereafter. Therefore, in Imam al-Ghazali's view, all knowledge about the natural world (*thabi'iyat*) is acquired solely for worship and service to Allah SWT. Beneficial knowledge is knowledge that instills a sense of fear (*khasyah*) of Allah SWT in the hearts of humans.<sup>34</sup> So, knowledge of natural sciences must first be based on monotheism (*tauhid*). Therefore, a person's conception of tauhid also affects the benefits of knowledge about natural sciences. Therefore, acquiring knowledge about the known must be based on the Islamic worldview (*Islamic Worldview*).

In philosophy, the way to achieve *hushul* towards the reality of existence is called epistemology. Philosophy studies the ways of knowing something and obtaining a truth. Therefore, epistemology is a central study in philosophy.<sup>35</sup> The sources of knowledge in the view of Imam al-Ghazali are the five senses, reason, heart, and intuition. Knowledge obtained through reason and the five senses is called "*mahsus*." Imam al-Ghazali refers to the way of acquiring special knowledge as *at-ta'lim al-insani*.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the concept of knowledge intended by Imam al-Ghazali is knowledge obtained through ordinary means, namely the senses and the intellect. Logic, philosophy, theology, natural sciences (*thabi'iyat*), astronomy, and others referred to as *aqliyyah* sciences fall into the category of types of knowledge. In this regard, Al-Baghdadi mentions that there are three types of knowledge based on how it is acquired, namely *badihi* knowledge (axiomatic), *hissi* knowledge (empirical), and *istidlali* knowledge (inferential). *Badihi's* knowledge is knowledge that is obtained without effort. Humans know without going through reasoning, the establishment of empirical rationality first. Knowledge that is understood by every human being with common sense. *Hissi* knowledge is obtained through sensory perception. Meanwhile, the science of *istidlal* is obtained through reasoning, research, and empirical evidence.<sup>37</sup>

Imam al-Ghazali generally divides knowledge into *nadzari* (theoretical) and *amali* (practical). Practical knowledge includes psychology, ethics, self-discipline, job-seeking skills, body management (*siyasatul badan*), and others. Theoretical knowledge includes fields such as logic and kalam.<sup>38</sup> From the status of knowledge, Imam al-Ghazali divides it into two types: superficial knowledge (*ulum as-shada'f*) and core knowledge (*ulum al-lubab*). Superficial knowledge includes subjects like grammar, morphology, rhetoric, and recitation. Core knowledge has two levels. The first level is the supporting and complementary sciences group (*at-tabaqah as-sufla*). Included in this category are the sciences of the stories of the Qur'an, the science of theology, the science of managing/organizing wealth, and the science of preserving life. The second level (*at-Tabaqah al-'ulya*) is the *sawabiq* and *ushul* sciences group (*ilmu tingkat lanjut dan ilmu pokok*). This knowledge is among the noble and important sciences. Like the knowledge about Allah SWT, His

<sup>34</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Raudhatu at-Thalibin wa Umdatus Salikin fi Majmu Rasail al-Imam al-Ghazali* ...33

<sup>35</sup> Linda Zagzebski, *On Epistemology*, (Belmont-USA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2009), 1. Laurence Bon Jour, *Epistemology Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses*, (New York: Rowman&Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2002), 1. Peter Adamson, *Classical Philosophy: A History of Philosophy Without any Gaps Volume I*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)

<sup>36</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ar-Risalah al-Laduniyyah fi Majmu ar-Rasail al- Imam al-Ghazali*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2013), 67

<sup>37</sup> Abdul Qahir al-Baghdadi, *Al-Farqu baina al-Firaq*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, tanpa tahun), 249

<sup>38</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Mizan al-Amal*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1979), 49-50



essence, the knowledge about the afterlife, the knowledge about the path to happiness, *tazkiyatun nafs*, the knowledge to combat desires and destructive traits.<sup>39</sup>

That division is based on the necessity or benefit of that knowledge. As explained by Imam al-Ghazali, the highest knowledge is the knowledge of recognizing Allah SWT. Therefore, the position of all the sciences necessary to reach this pinnacle of knowledge is subordinate to the knowledge of recognizing Allah SWT. The sciences of *tawabl'* and *mutammimah* are the knowledge needed to reach the level of *at-tabaqah al-'ulya*. In this context, *Ilmu Kalam* is divided into two levels. First, knowledge to answer heresy and innovation as well as to eliminate knowledge to answer heresy and innovation and eliminate doubts. The discussion on this by Imam al-Ghazali is written in the book *Ar-Risalah al-Qudsiyah*. Second, it is a *kalam* science to protect the beliefs of the common people from the confusion caused by heretics. Imam al-Ghazali discusses this in the book *Al-Iqtishad fi al-I'tiqad*.<sup>40</sup> These two levels of *kalam* knowledge are part of the knowledge that opens the higher level of *ma'rifatullah*. At this level of *kalam*, the scientific argumentation used is reason and sensory observation.

Imam al-Ghazali generally divides knowledge into *ushul*, *furu*, *muqaddamat*, and *mutammimat* knowledge.<sup>41</sup> *Ushul* science is the science of the Qur'an, the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, the consensus of scholars, and the science of the preference of the Companions. The purpose of *ushul* knowledge seems to be the study of the foundations of knowledge or the sources of *Sharia* law, as well as the third source of knowledge thereafter. Meanwhile, the science of *furu'* is the science of the state of the heart, knowledge of praiseworthy and blameworthy morals, actions that are pleasing to Allah SWT and those that Allah SWT dislikes. Imam al-Ghazali explains this knowledge in the book *Ihya' Ulumuddin* in the final section, namely *rub'ul muhlikat* and *rub'ul munjiyat*.<sup>42</sup>

This second type of knowledge is a group of sciences for the needs of outward and inward worship. That is, the laws of outward and inward practices. *Muqaddamat* and *mutammimat* are sciences whose benefits serve as tools and complement all *Sharia* sciences. The preliminary sciences, for example, include language, grammar, morphology, and others. Meanwhile, the complementary sciences are recitation, articulation of letters, exegesis, and the sciences of the Qur'an. Therefore, the five sciences mentioned above are integrated. These five sciences are not separate; rather, they are interconnected.

In conclusion, understanding knowledge in the thought of Imam al-Ghazali has a character. That is, first, it is derived from reason and the senses. In Imam al-Ghazali's view, the senses' potential is of two kinds: external faculties (*al-quwwah al-kharijiyyah*) and internal faculties (*al-quwwah ad-dakhiliyyah*). Within the internal faculties is a sense called *al-hiss al-musyarak* (common sense) whose function is to capture an object's image (*shurah*). *Al-Hiss al-Musyarak* only captures, it does not interpret the object. The image received by *al-hiss al-musyarak* is then stored by another potential of the mind, namely *al-hafidzah*, and the mind then creates certain

<sup>39</sup> Sa'id Abdul Latif Foudah, *Mauqif al-Imam al-Ghazali min 'Ilmi al-Kalam*, (Amman: Dar al-Fath li Dirasat wa an-Nasyr, 2009), 84-89

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Fatihatu al-Ulum*, (Kairo: Al-Mathba'ah al-Hasaniyah al-Mishriyyah, tanpa tahun), 34-35

<sup>42</sup> Ibid

images performed by *al-mutakhayyilah* (imagination). In this imaginative potential, an existence is given a decision, analyzed, and produces a conclusion.<sup>43</sup>

The senses and the mind are closely related and interconnected in acquiring knowledge. The mind and the senses do not work independently in acquiring knowledge. Knowledge is acquired by humans after the senses and intellect work together in interpreting the object of knowledge (*al-ma'lum*). Therefore, the intellect is called *al-quwwah li an-nafs*, which means the potential or faculty of the soul. A faculty that is directly connected, even a function within the internal senses of humans. The intellect can even be interpreted as a potential within the internal senses of humans that receives enlightenment to interpret the object of knowledge and determine its truth.<sup>44</sup> According to Imam al-Ghazali, external senses, known as the five senses, have limitations in capturing the objects of knowledge. Therefore, the intellect provides correct interpretations of the forms captured by the senses, allowing it to produce laws and conclusions. Imam al-Ghazali illustrated that if the moon is viewed with the eyes, it will appear small like a coin. However, humans do not conclude that the size of the moon is the same as that of a coin. Because the human mind acquires knowledge through the method of *istidlal* that the moon is much larger than a coin. The mind employs the method of *istidlal* through reading and receiving truthful reports from trusted sources.<sup>45</sup>

The second characteristic is that Imam al-Ghazali's concept of knowledge is integrative. Imam al-Ghazali does not separate various types of knowledge. Instead, the division of knowledge is based on its rank, position, and source of knowledge. Based on its source, knowledge according to Imam al-Ghazali is divided into rational knowledge and *syar'iyah* knowledge. *Aqliyyah* originates from reason. Or knowledge that largely focuses on the work of reason and the senses. Such as observing, researching, analyzing, concluding, and so on.

Meanwhile, *syar'iyah* is derived from revelation, the Qur'an, and the sayings of the Prophet.<sup>46</sup> According to Imam al-Ghazali, rational knowledge in its scientific activities must refer to *syar'iyah* knowledge as its foundation because the truths concluded by reason and the senses are limited to sensory and apparent truths. Therefore, the truths of reason and the senses must still be based on the truthful reports from the Prophets.

From the aspect of the object of knowledge (*al-ma'lum*), rational knowledge (*aqliyyah*) is obtained from the empirical reality of existence, namely the realm of *as-syahadah*. The realm of *as-syahadah* is the reality of existence that has been captured by the human imagination (*al-khayyaliyah*). In this faculty of *al-khayyaliyah*, an object has formed an image in the human mind. The image formed in this faculty is already in the form of objects whose reality can be sensed. It is this reality of existence that is interpreted by rational knowledge. The mind, senses, and heart work together to understand, conclude, and think about the reality of the realm of *as-syahadah*.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Raudhatu at-Thalibin wa Umdatus Salikin fi Majmu Rasail al-Imam al-Ghazali* ...33

<sup>44</sup> Mohd Zaidi bin Ismail, *Aqal dalam Islam Satu Tinjauan Epistemologis*, (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit IKIM, 2016), 20-21

<sup>45</sup> Suharto, *Epistemologi Islam dalam Laode M Kamaluddin (dkk), On Islamic Civilization*, (Semarang: Unissula Press, ), 144

<sup>46</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulumuddin* jilid 1, ... 72

<sup>47</sup> Endang Saifudin Anshari, *Ilmu, Filsafat, dan Agama*, (Surabaya: PT Bina Ilmu, 1981), 138. Osman Bakar, *Hierarki Ilmu Membangun Rangka-Pikir Islamisasi Ilmu*, (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), 145-147

Whereas the objects of knowledge that originate from the realm of *malakut* (the metaphysical realm) cannot be perceived by the senses. The nature of knowledge derived from the realm of *malakut* is not physical but spiritual or ethereal, as will be explained later in the next chapter.

Although reason and the senses are tools of knowledge to understand *asy-syahadah*, Imam al-Ghazali believes that the search for truth should not be limited to sensory, outward, or empirical aspects. However, a servant of Allah, the Exalted, must continue the pursuit of the essence of truth to a higher level. Thus, until the discovering of the secret of the reality of *Malakut*. In this context, Prof. Al-Attas argued that "the science of recognition" should be the foundation of "knowledge." With "the science of recognition," a person can discover the essence of truth (*al-haq*) to the highest level. That is *ma'rifatullah*.

### ***Ma'rifah and the Approach of At-Ta'lim ar-Rabbani***

*Ma'rifah* in the thought of Imam al-Ghazali is knowledge free from doubt. Therefore, *ma'rifah* in the view of Imam al-Ghazali is knowledge itself. Because the secret of the essence of existence is understood without doubt or error. In the view of the Sufi scholars, the object of *ma'rifah* is existence in the realm of *malakut*, and existence in *ma'rifah* is a higher existence.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, knowledge in *ma'rifah* is the true belief about the reality of the highest existence. In line with that, Dzun Nun al-Mishri said that someone who has not reached *ma'rifah* does not yet know the essence of knowledge.<sup>49</sup> Plato, an ancient Greek philosopher, thought knowledge is a true belief about logos.<sup>50</sup> The object in *ma'rifah* is an object of an inner nature. For Imam al-Ghazali, *ma'rifah* can unveil the secrets of the essence of the reality of existence without any doubt, accompanied by no errors, and free from mistakes. Thus, *ma'rifah* is both the pinnacle and the foundation of all knowledge in the view of Imam al-Ghazali.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, the way to attain *ma'rifah* is not the same as the way to attain knowledge. The nature of *ma'rifah* is illuminative (*isyraqiyyah*), obtained through the path of intuition. His knowledge comes through the arrival of light into a person's heart.<sup>52</sup> For Prof. Al-Attas, such *ma'rifah* refers to the knowledge of wisdom. *Ma'rifah* is information obtained directly from Allah SWT in the form of light that enters the pure and clean heart. Therefore, it is this light that unveils the secrets of the essence of truth up to the level of *haqqul yakin*, which is the level of certainty obtained directly without requiring rational proof or empirical explanation.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, the levels of trust in knowledge are hierarchical. As for the degree of belief in the essence of existence in *ma'rifah*, it reaches the level of *haq al-yaqin*. Meanwhile, the belief in the essence of the reality of existence obtained by theologians, scientists, and philosophers reaches.

<sup>48</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Raudhatu at-Thalibin wa Umdatus Salikin fi Majmu Rasail al-Imam al-Ghazali* ...28

<sup>49</sup> Abu Abdilrrahman as-Sulamiy, *Tabaqat as-Sufiyyah*, ...27. Abu al-Qasim Abul Karim Hawazan al-Qusyairi, *Ar-Risalah al-Qusyairiyah*, (Kairo: Dar al-Khair, tanpa tahun), 14

<sup>50</sup> As-Sayyid Abu Dhaif al-Madaniy, *Dzun al-Mishri wa al-Adab As-Sufiy*, (Beirut: Dar as-Syuruq, 1973), 44

<sup>51</sup> Hugh H Benson (ed), *Blackwell Companions to Philosophy: A Companion to Plato*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 112. Dan O'Brien, *An Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge*, (Cambridge-United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2006), 11

<sup>52</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin*, (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2014), 50

<sup>53</sup> Abu al-Qasim Abul Karim Hawazan al-Qusyairi, *Ar-Risalah al-Qusyairiyah*, ...85

The level of *ilm al-yakin*. A belief that still requires proof by reason and explanation from sensory experience. They believe in something after it has been proven through rational and sensory evidence. Therefore, Imam al-Ghazali described *ma'rifah* as a light emanating from fire, while knowledge (*ilm*) is seeing the fire itself. *Ma'rifah*, therefore, is a light that directly enters the soul and influences it.<sup>54</sup>

In Imam al-Ghazali's view, *ma'rifah* is knowledge that no longer requires proof by reason and senses because *ma'rifah* is obtained through direct experience at the level of *haq al-yaqin*, as the object of knowledge is none other than the Absolute Truth (*al-Haq*). In this context, *Haq* is also hierarchical. There is *haq* at the level of reason, *haq* at the level of senses, and the highest *haq* is Allah SWT, called *Al-Haq al-Amin*.

If the goal of knowledge is to attain truth, then *ma'rifah* is the attainment of true truth. In this context, Dzun Nun Al-Mishri argues that to obtain a truth from knowledge, one must first study Sharia and rational sciences. After delving into Sharia and rational sciences, humans acquire truth according to the methodology used. However, one should not stop at these sciences, for the secrets of truth are not obtained from the methodology of these sciences. One must purify the heart, practice asceticism, and deeply contemplate. So that one receives a direct outpouring of the light of *ma'rifah* from Allah SWT.<sup>55</sup> Imam al-Ghazali divides the two ways of obtaining truth, first through the knowledge of *mu'amalah* and second through the knowledge of *mukasyafah*. *Mu'amalah* is the understanding of the diseases of the heart, the ways to purify the heart, and the knowledge of praiseworthy attributes. A person has not attained *ma'rifah* through the knowledge of *mu'amalah*. He attains *ma'rifah* through *mukasyafah*. However, the beginning of *mukasyafah* is knowledge about *tazkiyatun nafs*, and the method of cleansing the heart from impurities.<sup>56</sup>

Since *ma'rifah* is Allah SWT, the Absolute Truth (*al-Haq*), its acquisition is not ordinary. Imam al-Ghazali divided the methods of seeking knowledge into two: the method of *at-ta'lim al-insani* and *at-ta'lim ar-rabbani*. The true knowledge about Allah SWT can be perfectly obtained through *at-ta'lim ar-rabbani*. Meanwhile, *at-ta'lim al-insani* can also acquire knowledge about Allah SWT. However, the knowledge about Allah SWT through the method of *at-ta'lim al-insani* aims to prove *al-Haq* rationally. In comparison, human reason has limitations in recognizing the secrets of God, the Truth.

<sup>54</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Raudhatu at-Thalibin wa Umdatus Salikin fi Majmu Rasail al-Imam al-Ghazali* ...28

<sup>55</sup> As-Sayyid Abu Dhaif al-Madaniy, *Dzun Nun al-Mishri wa al-Adab as-Sufi*, ... 44

<sup>56</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulumiddin* jilid 1, ...36

*Ma'rifah* is described as the guidance of Allah. Its form is like light. In Sufis, light is a critical concept. *Ma'rifah* is obtained through unveiling the veil (obstacle), so that after the veil is lifted, the reality of existence becomes illuminated, which was previously dark.<sup>57</sup> The light here means uncovering the secrets of the reality of existence. Imam al-Ghazali stated that the light that unveils the secrets of existence is in the heart. Not all humans receive this light in their hearts, and *ma'rifah*.<sup>58</sup> Imam al-Ghazali explains that this light is only obtained by the Prophets and the chosen ones known as *khawas al-khawwas*, righteous people who have reached the degree of *shiddiq*. Imam al-Ghazali explains that the function of this light is to unveil the secrets of existence, understand the essence of humanity, deduce the nature of causality occurring in reality, the origin of the creation of reality, the essence of God, and recognize one's own shortcomings.<sup>59</sup>

Building upon the philosophical synthesis presented theoretical, it holds practical significance for reshaping Islamic educational institutions today. Al-Ghazali's paradigm insists that the end goal of knowledge is *adab*—putting everything in its proper place, especially with God. Therefore, assessment in Islamic education should include affective and spiritual dimensions, not merely cognitive output. In line with al-Ghazali's view, the teacher is a transmitter of knowledge (*mu'allim*) and a *murabbī*—a mentor who guides the student's heart and character. Teachers must be selected and trained to model spiritual integrity and guide students toward self-awareness, humility, and submission to divine truth. By reimagining the curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and teacher roles through the lens of *ta'lim rabbānī*, educators can reclaim the soul of Islamic learning, where knowledge is understood, lived, internalized, and directed toward divine reality. This harmonization of intellect and spirit ensures that learners are not only intelligent minds but also purified hearts, equipped to navigate the challenges of the modern world with clarity, character, and consciousness of God.

### Characteristics of *Ma'rifah*

Based on the explanation above, *ma'rifah* in the thought of Imam al-Ghazali has several characteristics that distinguish it from the concept of *ilm*. First, *ma'rifah* depends on the highest level of *tauhid*. Imam al-Ghazali says the highest *tauhid* level is the *shiddiqun's* *tauhid*.<sup>60</sup> A person who has reached the level of *tauhid shiddiqun* means they have attained *ma'rifah*. At this level of *tauhid*, a servant of Allah SWT receives direct enlightenment from Allah SWT about His existence. Nothing appears in his heart's consciousness except Allah SWT's existence. The servant of Allah SWT who reaches this level understands that the Oneness of Allah SWT is in three aspects: His attributes, essence, and actions. He directly witnesses that no creature's attributes are comparable to His. There is no Perfect Essence except His. Therefore, all the actions of creatures depend on His actions. The true *Ma'rifatullah* (knowledge of Allah Swt) is at this level of *tauhid*.

The second characteristic, viewed from the aspect of the method of attainment through intuition, known as the method of *at-ta'lim ar-rabbani*. This method of acquiring knowledge is not

<sup>57</sup> Franz Rosental, *Keagungan Ilmu Terjemahan Knowledge Triumphant*, (Selangor: Percetakan Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992), 177

<sup>58</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Misykatu al-Anwar fi Majmu' Rasail al-Imam al-Ghazali*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2013), 5

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, jilid 4, ... 256

obtained through rational reasoning and sensory research. This knowledge is only obtained by the Prophets and the friends of Allah, the Exalted. Through this path of intuition, the servants of Allah SWT receive the enlightenment of light entering their hearts, revealing all the secrets of *Malakut*. Thus, God's existence is known through intuition. Therefore, what is known about God through the proofs of *kalam*, logic, and philosophy has not truly unveiled the secret essence of existence. Thus, people recognize Allah SWT at different levels. Allah SWT can be known through *kalam*, logic, and natural sciences. However, the recognition through *kalam* and logic aims to reject the incorrect methods of recognizing Allah SWT practiced by the people of innovation. With *kalam*, human beliefs about Allah SWT can be preserved. Humans can also recognize Allah SWT through natural sciences.<sup>61</sup> However, the recognition method is through rational reasoning, research, and observation.<sup>62</sup> All of this knowledge has not yet been able to unveil the true essence of Allah SWT's existence.

Therefore, with the integration of knowledge, the foundation of Islamic education, the understanding that reaches the rational and sensory level must be perfected with intuition.<sup>63</sup> Imam al-Ghazali did not differentiate between outward knowledge (*dzahir*) and inward knowledge (*batin*) dichotomously.<sup>64</sup> Someone who studies external knowledge to its deepest aspects, should not feel satisfied with their achievements. Especially believing that one no longer needs inner knowledge. However, one must continue delving into inner knowledge after studying outer knowledge. Once inner knowledge has been attained, outer knowledge must stand upon inner knowledge.

The third characteristic, the object in *ma'rifah* is not the physical realm but the malakut realm. The reality of existence that is not visible to the naked eye. Not felt by the organs of the body and the senses. The existence that becomes the object in *ma'rifah* is the absolute and eternal existence of Allah Swt. Therefore, the *ma'rifah* referred to here is knowing Allah Swt through His guidance. Allah SWT introduces it to His servants whom He wills. Thus, *ma'rifah* is a type of *wahby* knowledge. The servant who receives this outpouring of divine grace is only the one whose heart is free from despicable traits. When Allah SWT introduces Himself to that chosen servant, the servant focuses all their life's attention solely on Allah as if he does not recognize any other beings besides Allah SWT.

In knowledge, *ma'rifah* can be applied by placing *tauhid shiddiq* at the center of all knowledge. Knowledge is all branches, whether natural, social, humanities, or religious sciences. As branch sciences, these fields of knowledge develop and move from their foundation (*ushul*), *ma'rifah*. Therefore, *ma'rifah* must be the foundation of all types of knowledge. The development and scientific work must be guided by *ma'rifah* or *tauhid shiddiq*. This principle requires a scientist to become a Sufi in natural sciences, social sciences, or humanities. Thus, the demand for this

<sup>61</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Al-Iqtishad fi al-I'tiqad*, (Kairo: Syirkah al-Quds li An-Nasyr wa Tauzi", 2012), 19

<sup>62</sup> Rather Mohammad Iqbal. *Gnosis of Allah (Ma'rifatullah): Some Insights from Said Nursi's Risale-i Nur*. Department of Arabic, University of Kerala: 217

<sup>63</sup> Mohd Yusof Othman, *Connection of Science Knowledge in the Revelation Knowledge System*, Journal of Personalized Learning 3(1), 2020

<sup>64</sup> Zailan Moris, *Revelation, Intellectual Intuition and Reason in the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra: An analysis of the "al-Hikmat al-arshyyah"*. 1994. PhD Thesis, American University

principle results in acquiring knowledge requiring the internalization of *tauhid shiddiq* in modern knowledge theories.

Therefore, the perspective on success in seeking knowledge, natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, and so on, is based on *ma'rifah*. Pursuing all types of knowledge yields piety and devotion in the heart towards Allah SWT.<sup>65</sup> If that is the perspective, then studying natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities can be considered an act of worship to Allah SWT. If *ma'rifah* is a noble knowledge, because its result is the recognition of Allah Swt, then knowledge can become noble if it makes *ma'rifah* the foundation of knowledge. Science can occupy a high degree if, through this natural science, a person can achieve *tauhid shiddiq*. Thus, the degree of nobility of a science in Imam al-Ghazali's view is determined by its purpose, object, and the outcome of knowledge.

The purpose of seeking knowledge determines the value of the usefulness of knowledge. Therefore, seeking social and natural sciences must be based on the hereafter, with no other intention except to gain the pleasure of Allah SWT in this world and the hereafter, so that the scholar is granted the title of *al-faiz*.<sup>66</sup> In the epistemology of natural and social sciences, the purpose of research and its examination is to assist human life because natural and social sciences are developed and studied to meet human needs and make it easier for humans to carry out their work. Of course, this goal cannot be denied. Even so, science, technology, and social sciences must continue to be developed. However, Imam al-Ghazali's perspective is on the fundamental aspects of the philosophy of knowledge development. If these sciences increasingly distance one from the knowledge of Allah SWT, then this development cannot be continued and must be stopped. In this context, what is meant is that, in addition to fulfilling human needs in the world and facilitating once those needs are met, their work must lead to *ma'rifah*. Even the fulfillment of worldly needs is solely intended for serving Allah, not serving humans. Such science and social science are believed to be beneficial knowledge.

If the intention is such, then the main object of knowledge should be the realm of *asyahadah* and the metaphysical reality. The development of natural and social sciences does not stop at the research and discovery of the realm of *asy-syahadah*. However, natural and social sciences become noble when that research and discovery reach the realm of *malakut* through intuition, as will be explained in detail in chapter four. The scientific results are discovering the laws of cause and effect in *asy-syahadah* and directly recognizing the true cause of all causes, which is God, the Most Truthful. Thus, in Imam al-Ghazali's view, no perspective distinguishes between knowledge (*ilm*) and gnosis (*ma'rifah*).

Imam al-Ghazali's synthesis of rationality (*'aql*) and spirituality (*rūḥ*) offers a rich epistemological paradigm that remains highly relevant in addressing the contemporary crisis of knowledge, especially in reconciling secular rationalism and religious spirituality. Al-Ghazali's intellectual journey—from formal mastery of dialectical reasoning and theology to a transformative spiritual experience rooted in *ta'lim rabbānī* (divine instruction)—illustrates an integrated model of knowledge acquisition that balances reason, revelation, and inner purification.

<sup>65</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Raudhatu at-Talibin wa Umdatu as-Salikin*, ... 47

<sup>66</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad bin Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Raudhatu at-Talibin wa Umdatu as-Salikin*, ... 47

In today's context, this integration manifests as a corrective to the fragmentation of modern education, where cognitive intelligence is often divorced from ethical and spiritual dimensions. Al-Ghazali's approach suggests that rational inquiry must be embedded within a spiritual framework that prioritizes *ma'rifah* (spiritual knowledge), *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul), and *taqwā* (God-consciousness). Rationality, in this sense, is not rejected but realigned, functioning as a tool to discern truth when guided by divine light and spiritual discipline.

This epistemic model challenges contemporary education's purely materialistic and utilitarian goals by reintroducing metaphysical and moral objectives. For instance, the *ta'lim rabbānī* approach encourages humility before divine knowledge, the refinement of intention (*niyyah*), and a conscious orientation toward the purpose of learning: to know oneself and, through that, to know God, as encapsulated in the Sufi maxim, "*Man 'arafa nafsahu faqad 'arafa Rabbahu.*"

Today's integrated model can be applied through character education (*tarbiyat al-akhlaq*), curriculum design that connects reason with revelation, and spiritual mentoring in higher education settings. It also calls for rethinking the role of the teacher, not merely as a transmitter of information but as a guide (*murabbī*) who facilitates intellectual and spiritual growth.<sup>67</sup>

## Conclusion

The integration of rationality and spirituality in the thought and personal experience of Imam al-Ghazali represents a comprehensive Islamic epistemology that transcends the dichotomy between reason and revelation. Through his transformative encounter with *ta'lim rabbānī*—divine instruction—al-Ghazali demonstrates that true knowledge (*'ilm*) is not merely the product of discursive reasoning but the fruit of inner purification, divine guidance, and spiritual awareness. His intellectual crisis and subsequent spiritual revival reveal that when detached from spirituality, rationality leads to uncertainty. Still, when harmonized with the heart's sincerity and the soul's purification, it becomes a path to *ma'rifah* (gnosis) and *yaqīn* (certainty). In today's context, where education often prioritizes utilitarian and secular aims, al-Ghazali's model offers a paradigm shift: knowledge must aim at intellectual mastery, ethical transformation, and divine proximity. It demands an educational approach that reorients the learner's purpose—from self-centered accumulation to God-centered realization.

Therefore, the *ta'lim rabbānī* approach provides a critical framework for rethinking contemporary Islamic education: integrating cognitive excellence with spiritual depth, reason with revelation, and learning with becoming. Ultimately, al-Ghazali's legacy reminds us that the highest form of knowledge brings about *tazkiyah al-nafs* (soul purification), *taqwā* (God-consciousness), and a deeper connection with the Divine. This integration remains a historical contribution and a timeless guide for Muslims seeking holistic knowledge in a fragmented world.

<sup>67</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin*, (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2014), 57



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