

## Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali's Perspective on Authority and Religion

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### Abstract

*This article explores the concept of authority and its relationship with religion, addressing various aspects and theories related to both. This concept is significant as it touches on essential elements of society. In facilitating the research process, the researcher employs a descriptive and analytical method with a philosophical basis. As a result, the study finds a connection between authority in al-Ghazali's view and other concepts, such as justice, which ultimately leads to happiness. Authority is necessary in social life as a means to achieve happiness for both individuals and society. This reflects what can be described as the ideal society concept in al-Ghazali's perspective. Al-Ghazali proposes that an ideal society is a blend of worldly reality and spirituality, where power must be exercised according to religious teachings by leaders who embody magnanimity, in order to achieve happiness and justice within the community.*

**Keywords:** *Imam Al-Ghazali, Religious Authority, Society, Justice, Happiness.*

### Abstrak

*Artikel ini mengeksplorasi tentang konsep otoritas dan hubungannya dengan agama, dengan aspek-aspek dan teori berkenaan dengan keduanya. Konsep tersebut penting, karena menyangkut aspek esensial dalam masyarakat. Dalam memudahkan proses penelitian, peneliti menggunakan metode deskriptif dan analisis dengan basis filosofis. Sehingga,*

*penelitian ini menghasilkan bahwa ada keterkaitan hubungan antara otoritas dalam pandangan al-Ghazali dengan konsep-konsep lain, seperti keadilan yang pada akhirnya membawa kepada kebahagiaan. Otoritas diperlukan dalam kehidupan sosial, sebagai perangkat untuk meraih kebahagiaan baik untuk individu maupun masyarakat. Di sini apa yang dapat disebut sebagai konsep masyarakat ideal dalam pandangan al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali mengusulkan bahwa masyarakat ideal adalah perpaduan antara realitas duniawi dan spiritualitas, di mana kekuasaan harus dijalankan sesuai ajaran agama oleh pemimpin yang memegang nilai kebesaran hati, guna mewujudkan kebahagiaan dan keadilan dalam masyarakat.*

**Kata Kunci:** *Imam Al-Ghazali, Otoritas Keagamaan, Masyarakat Ideal, Keadilan, Kebahagiaan.*

## Introduction

The concept of authority continues to be important in the present time issues. Authority is needed in order to help coordinate, organise and decide in cases of non-trivial conflicts between individuals and to make tradeoffs between different goals.<sup>1</sup> Authority refers to the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience. It plays a significant role in various aspects of society, including governance, law enforcement, education, and professional fields.<sup>2</sup> In governance, authority is essential for maintaining social order and ensuring the functioning of institutions.<sup>3</sup> Governments and leaders exercise authority to create laws, enforce regulations, and provide public services.<sup>4</sup> The concept of authority helps establish a system of accountability and

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<sup>1</sup> Alf Westelius, Ann Sofie Westelius, and Tomas Brytting, "Meaning, Authority, Rationality and Care as MARCs of Sustainable Organisations," *Cross Cultural Management* 20, no. 2 (2013): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1108/13527601311313436>.

<sup>2</sup> SF Marbun, "Pemerintahan Berdasarkan Kekuasaan Dan Otoritas," *Jurnal Hukum IUS QULA IUSTUM* 3, no. 6 (October 25, 1996): 28–43, <https://doi.org/10.20885/iustum.vol3.iss6.art4>.

<sup>3</sup> Jose T.P Silitonga, Lalu Satria Utama, and Dwi Putri Yuliani, *Kepemimpinan Pemerintahan Dalam Penerapan Diskresi Inovasi Daerah*, ed. Alfiatin, 1st ed. (Banyumas: Amerta Media, 2020), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Silitonga, Utama, and Yuliani, 32.

allows for the implementation of policies and decisions.<sup>5</sup>

Islam has a rich history of answering with questions of authority. Islamic societies have traditionally recognized religious authorities (revelation),<sup>6</sup> such as scholars and jurists, who interpret and apply Shari'a to guide personal and public life.<sup>7</sup> These authorities have played a significant role in shaping social norms, governance, and legal systems in present Muslim-majority countries. Hence, the relationship between socio-political authority and Islam has been a subject of ongoing debate and interpretation. Islamic political thought encompasses diverse perspectives, ranging from concepts like caliphate and Islamic state to challenge possess by the ideas of democracy within an Islamic framework.<sup>8</sup> The question of how Islamic principles and values should inform political authority and governance continues to be a topic of discussion and contention.<sup>9</sup>

Previous research has explored various dimensions of authority within Islamic contexts. For instance, Nikmah Lubis researched about "Intersection of Traditional Religious Authority and New Authority in the Digital Space of Indonesia".<sup>10</sup> This paper concludes that traditional and online authority are not separate entities; rather, traditional authority can adapt to and coexist within the online domain by incorporating digital practices, styles, and innovations. With its established legitimacy, traditional authority can effectively present itself in the online space, being repackaged

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<sup>5</sup> Even Fontaine Ortiz, Ion Gorita, and Victor Vislykh, "Series on Managing for Results in the United Nations System," in *Delegation of Authority and Accountability* (Geneva: Joint Inspection Unit, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Moh Muhtador, "Pergulatan Otoritas Dan Otoritarianisme Dalam Penafsiran (Pembacaan Hermeneutis Khaled Abou El Fadl)," *Qof* 2, no. 1 (2018): 69.

<sup>7</sup> Rumadi, "Islam Dan Otoritas Keagamaan," *Walisono* 20, no. 1 (2012): 29.

<sup>8</sup> Muhammad Iqbal and Amin Husein Nasution, *Pemikiran Politik Islam Dari Masa Klasik Hingga Indonesia Kontemporer* (Jakarta: Kencana Prenada Media Group, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Helmiati, *Islam Dalam Masyarakat Dan Politik Malaysia: Analisis Kebijakan Pemerintahan Terhadap Islam Pada Masa Pemerintahan Mahatir*, 1st ed. (Riau: Suska Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> Nikmah Lubis, "Intersection of Traditional Religious Authority and New Authority in the Digital Space of Indonesia," *Fikrah* 11, no. 1 (2023): 135, <https://doi.org/10.21043/fikrah.v11i1.19678>.

and represented in ways that align with contemporary and modern trends.

Zulkifli researched about the title “The Ulama In Indonesia: Between Religious Authority and Symbolic Power”, this paper has published at journal of *Miqot* (2013).<sup>11</sup> This article concludes that the role of ulama and symbolic power in Indonesia’s Muslim society uses Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of praxis, showing that the religious authority of ulama is fragmented and increasingly pluralized due to global media and technology, with competition between traditionalists, reformists, radicals, and newcomers for recognition.

Another paper about “Power and Authority in Organized Religion: Disaggregating the Phenomenological Core” researched by Richard A. Schoenherr in the journal of *Sociology of Religion*.<sup>12</sup> This paper explains that power and authority in organized religion manifest through two opposing forces: one seeks to preserve the definitiveness of religious experience through centralized control, while the other supports the radical internal dispersion of religious power. The author advocates for a phenomenological approach, integrating positivistic, dialectical, and phenomenological theories to analyze how symbols and systems of power affect social structures and emphasize the role of clergy as key culture bearers. The findings and conclusions are extended beyond religion to the study of power and beliefs in other complex organizations.

The dynamics between state authority, society, and Islam vary across different contexts. Muslim-majority countries exhibit a wide range of governance models, from secular republics to constitutional monarchies.<sup>13</sup> The level of state involvement

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<sup>11</sup> Zulkifli Zulkifli, “The Ulama in Indonesia: Between Religious Authority and Symbolic Power,” *Miqot: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Keislaman* 37, no. 1 (June 2, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.30821/miqot.v37i1.79>.

<sup>12</sup> Richard A. Schoenherr, “Power and Authority in Organized Religion: Disaggregating the Phenomenological Core,” *Sociological Analysis* 47 (March 1987): 52, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3711652>.

<sup>13</sup> Haula Noor, “Dinamika Otoritas Keagamaan Di Indonesia,” *Jurnal Indo-Islamika* 2, no. 2 (2012): 311–16, <https://doi.org/10.15408/idi.v2i2.1188>.

in religious affairs, the influence of religious institutions on policymaking, and the protection of individual rights and freedoms within Islamic frameworks are critical issues in state-society relations.<sup>14</sup>

The researchers want to research about the concept of authority as presented by Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali. Imam al-Ghazali is known as a prolific Muslim polymath with wide range of expertise. The aim of the endeavor is highlight how his concept of authority intersects with other science or theories in his works.

## Understanding Religious Authority

Religious authority is a complex and challenging concept to define, as highlighted by Max Weber. It refers to the ability to have one's rules and judgments followed without resorting to coercive power. The absence of coercion distinguishes authority from power.<sup>15</sup> However, in the context of religion, it is not always easy to distinguish between authority and power. Religious authority can take on various forms and functions, such as defining correct beliefs and practices, shaping the views and behavior of others, and identifying and dealing with deviance and heresy.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, religious authority involves the composition and definition of authoritative texts and legitimate methods of interpretation.<sup>17</sup>

Brian K. Smith's research examines how power and authority in religion involve two opposing forces: one seeks to maintain the

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<sup>14</sup> Mohammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (California, United States: Stanford University Press, 2013); Helmiati, *Islam Dalam Masyarakat Dan Politik Malaysia: Analisis Kebijakan Pemerintah Terhadap Islam Pada Masa Pemerintahan Mahatir*.

<sup>15</sup> Max Weber, "On Charisma and Institution Building," *On Charisma and Institution Building*, 1968, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Weber, xix.

<sup>17</sup> Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke, "Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies," in *Speaking for Islam*, ed. Gudrun Krämer and Sabine Schmidtke (Belanda: BRILL, 2006), [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047408864\\_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047408864_002).

definitiveness of religious experience through centralized control, while the other aims to preserve the living relationship with the core religious encounter through the internal dispersion of religious power.<sup>18</sup> Smith proposes that a phenomenological approach, integrating positivistic, dialectical, and phenomenological theories, is necessary to analyze how symbols and systems of power affect social structures and the role of clergy as culture bearers. These conclusions are also applied to the study of power and beliefs in other complex organizations beyond the religious context.

The distinction between authority and power can become blurred, as authority is closely tied to the notions of legitimacy and trust. It can be attributed to individuals, groups, or institutions, and relies on others' willingness to recognize and credit them with religious authority.<sup>19</sup> Religious authority is not a fixed attribute but is based on recognition and acceptance. It is relational and contingent, as emphasized in contemporary scholarship that focuses on narratives, interactions, and contingency rather than rigid definitions. Examining the relational aspect and understanding how religious authority is projected, perceived, and practiced in specific contexts adds complexity to the issue and research agenda.

There are several significance assumptions to make in this context.<sup>20</sup> First, the religious authority originates from the Qur'an and the Sunna. Second, individuals, such as knowledgeable scholars, possess more significant understanding and resource to religious knowledge. Third, religious scholars may wield greater authority than the rules. These assumptions are valid, in order to understand

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<sup>18</sup> Brian K Smith, "Authority, Power, and the Definition of Religion," *Historical Reflections* 25, no. 3 (1999): 413–422, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41299156>.

<sup>19</sup> Mustafa Mansur, Kunto Sofianto, and Dade Mahzuni, "Otoritas Dan Legitimasi Kedudukan Pemimpin Tradisional Di Loloda Maluku-Utara (1808-1958)," *Sosiohumaniora* 15, no. 1 (2013): 65, <https://doi.org/10.24198/sosiohumaniora.v15i1.5240>.

<sup>20</sup> Krämer Gudrun, *Speaking for Islam: Religious Authorities in Muslim Societies, Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia* (Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2006), 3.

the dynamics between religion and authority. The Ulama' possess the traditional inheritance that of the Prophets before. After the cease of revelation, the role of authority is passed to the Ulama'.

However, there are significant areas that require further investigation. For instance, the extent to which knowledge ('ilm) equated to authority in religious affairs. It is crucial to determine who had the privilege of accessing the Qur'an,<sup>21</sup> the sunna, and the authoritative canon within a specific social context, and what criteria were relevant in this regard –such as age, gender, social status, and language proficiency. Additionally, it is important to identify those who possessed or claimed the right to interpret the Qur'an and sunna.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, it is necessary to ascertain who had the authority to compose additional texts of significance and establish the relevant authoritative canon, and whether this right extended to both men and women. Lastly, it is essential to explore the role of reason in the interpretation of scripture and its boundaries.<sup>23</sup>

Imam al-Ghazali's perspective on authority stemmed from his extensive engagement with Islamic jurisprudence and spiritual reflection.<sup>24</sup> For him, authority was not simply a matter of political or religious power; it encompassed a much broader spectrum of influence and responsibility.<sup>25</sup> He emphasized that true authority

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<sup>21</sup> Sucilawati, "The Concept of Shura in Islamic Governance Practice of Shura during the Caliph Umar Bin Khattab," *International Journal of Politics and Sociology Research (Ijobsor)* 8, no. 1 (2020): 19.

<sup>22</sup> Ahmad Maulidizen and Ashilah Raihanah, "The Technique of Determining Ijtihad and Its Application In Life: Analysis of Istihsan, Maslahah Mursalah, 'Urf, and Syar'u Man Qablana," *Al-Abkam Jurnal Ilmu Syari'ah Dan Hukum* 4, no. 1 (2019): 55, <https://doi.org/10.22515/alakhkam.v4i1.1600>.

<sup>23</sup> Ahmad Farid Saifuddin and Boma Panji Astha Tulung, "Al-'Aql Wa 'Alaqtuhu Bi Al-Din Inda Thoha Abdurrahman," *Tasfiyah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 5, no. 1 (March 6, 2021): 137–38, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tasfiyah.v5i1.5693>.

<sup>24</sup> Heni Ani Nuraeni, Nibras Mutiara Gahana, and Nabila Rihadatul Aisy, "Human Need for Religion: Imam Al-Ghazali's Perspective," *International Journal of Education, Information Technology and Others (IJEIT)* 6, no. 4 (2023): 196, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10447300>.

<sup>25</sup> Farouk Mitha, *Al-Ghazali and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2001).

must be rooted in knowledge, wisdom, and piety.<sup>26</sup> According to al-Ghazali, an individual's authority could only be legitimate if it was derived from a deep understanding of religious principles, coupled with sincere devotion to the welfare of the community.

## Al-Ghazali's Theory in Relation between Authority and Religion

Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī is a renowned scholar of Islam from the time of emergence until the present day. Holding the magnificent title of Proof of Islam (Ḥujjat al-Islām), he sought the revival of the religious sciences in the fifth century of Hijra. He went through tremendous effort to find the harmony of the sciences as one whole structure of Islamic epistemology. Upon reading al-Ghazālī's works requires one to consider the holistic approach that has been done well throughout the opuses. A reader must consider al-Ghazālī as an accomplished Faqīh, Faylasuf, Mutakallim and Ṣūfī which works extend from each subject, read by a great number of Muslims until present time.

In understanding his political views, particularly in authority, it is important to observe into al-Ghazālī's specific work such as al-Ṭibr al-Masbūk fī Naṣīhat al-Mulūk.<sup>27</sup> There are also works as a whole entity to consider which themes intersect, such as Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl,<sup>28</sup> Misykāt al-Anwār wa Miṣfātun al-Asrār,<sup>29</sup> Mīzān al-'Amal<sup>30</sup> and his magnum opus Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ghazzali and F R C Bagley, *Ghazali's Book of Counsel for Kings (Nasihat Al-Muluk)* (London: Oxford U.P., 1964), 14.

<sup>27</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Al-Ṭibr Al-Masbūk Fī Naṣīhat Al-Mulūk* (Mesir: Maktabah al-Kulliyat al-Azhariyah, n.d.).

<sup>28</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqidh Min Al-Ḍalāl*, ed. Dr Jamil Shaliba (Beirut-Lebanon: Daar Al-Andalus, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, "Misykāt Al-Anwār Wa Miṣfātun Al-Asrār" (Beirut: 'Alam al-Kutub, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Mīzān Al-'Amal*, ed. Sulayman Dunya, 1st ed. (Mesir: Dar Al-Ma'arif, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Iḥyā' Ulūm Al-Dīn* (Jeddah: Dar al-



Another point worth to mention is the theme of unity of knowledge. This theme has been Imam al-Ghazālī's main concern throughout his colossal scholarly enterprise. Following his account in *Munqidh*, Imam al-Ghazālī asserts that the epistemological structures of religious sciences (*Ulūm al-Dīn*) are not separated entities, but they form the architectonic framework of Islamic sciences as whole.<sup>32</sup>

During his time, Imam al-Ghazālī witnesses the political turmoil happened along with the threats emerging from within the Muslim society and without. This leads eventually to a severe intellectual crisis in the society. Through his works, notably in *Ihya'*, Imam al-Ghazālī attempts to demonstrate the existence of harmony within the sciences, that shall bring the spiritual-material harmony in the society –as what politics as a medium to organize the social order. Hence it is apt to say that a thorough, holistic method must be taken in order to delve into al-Ghazālī's views, for one may fall short of the grasp if the mentioned prerequisite is not fulfilled. Thus we would aim to discover the holistic approach found in Imam al-Ghazālī's authority and how it intersects with religion.

Al-Ghazālī maintains that authority could only be realized under the just ruler.<sup>33</sup> Initially establishing that the world and what within is subject to the Divine sovereignty, al-Ghazālī views authority ontologically as the trust, as how mentioned in the Holy Qur'an al-Aḥzāb 72. Thus authority is in fact extension from the designation of khalīfah. Moreover, ruler's authority is spiritual justice –the ruler must have fulfilled his rights to God before everything else. Thus, authority in Al-Ghazālī's view is spiritual.

Al-Ghazālī regards the authority as a Divine designation of khalifah on earth, that the two classes of Holy Prophets and kings, which the former to guide humanity, and the latter to preserve

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Manhaj, 2011).

<sup>32</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalāl*, 112.

<sup>33</sup> Ghazzali and Bagley, *Ghazali's Book of Counsel for Kings (Nasihat Al-Muluk)*, 22–23.

them from one another. The holders of authority are entrusted with welfare of their subjects, and conferred high rank by Divine decree, making them God's delegate over the creation.<sup>34</sup>

Quoting the Qur'anic surah Al-Nisā':49 "*Obey Allah, and obey The Holy Prophet, and those among you who hold authority*". Al-Ghazālī calls to obedience to the rulers without reserve, although advised, moreover to the scholars, that the holders of authority are in perpetual need of their counsels and advices, and even admonishments. Al-Ghazālī views the authority in a fashion of Divine-mandate, Hereafter-oriented, optimistic way. While other European political philosophers like Hobbes, Machiavelli see the authority as less noble, not even Divine, yet, full of motivations fueled by base needs of human.

The Sultan, in Al-Ghazālī's view, in reality is he who awards justice and does not perpetrate injustice and wickedness among God's slaves; for the unjust Sultan is *ma 'syūm*, and will have no endurance, because the Prophet stated that sovereignty endures even when there is unbelief but will not endure when there is injustice. Al-Ghazālī optimistically sees the burden of leadership and authority as a form of worship. This notion later on heavily influences his political philosophy. Unyielding from the history of man's kingship—which sometimes drenched in political drama, even long-time history of violence, he believes that true authority is spiritual-based.

## The Spiritual Authority

Realizing that authority is ontologically God-given, Al-Ghazālī sets firm requirements for the holder, both spiritual and mental standard in order for him to carry the designation entrusted. Thus, the state should never fall into false theocracy, nor stuck in secular state which either separate religion from the ruling or, worse, to negate and deny religion at all.

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<sup>34</sup> Ghazzali and Bagley, 45.

In order to establish the initial understanding, al-Ghazālī emphasizes the tenets of ‘Aqīdah before everything else:

‘You should understand O King, that you are a creature and that you have a Creator and that you have a Creator who is the Creator of the entire universe. All that exists in the universe is from Him, and He is one, for He has no equal. He has always existed, for His being has no commencement; and He will always exist, for His being has no end. His existence since eternity and in perpetuity is axiomatic, because non-existence cannot be predicated of Him and because His existence is of Himself. He needs no cause, but there is nothing which does not need Him; while His being is through Himself, the being of all things is through Him.’<sup>35</sup>

Understanding the balance that should be kept in check between religion and state, Al-Ghazālī sets measures on the notion of authority and state. Without falling into utopianism, Al-Ghazālī attempts to balance the worldly affair under the vast scope of religion that everyone’s life is rooted from.

One may be able to observe that Ghazālīan state is what evolves from al-Farabi’s al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah. Without having the prerequisites of philosopher-king, in order for the state to reach its peak of achievement, Ghazālīan authority is distinct from philosophy. Yet, al-Ghazālī highlights the unity of religious sciences –with a vivid reference to *Iḥyā’*,<sup>36</sup> and that the title of *Ṣāhib al-Iḥyā’* is enough proof of his commitment to unification of the religious sciences in his teaching and writing– we may designate the holder of authority in Ghazālīan state as *Ṣūfī-king*. Considering his spiritual journey into the apex of *Ṣūfism*, which al-Ghazālī sees as the highest level of knowledge, it is imperative for him, that this science should blend into Muslim’s life in order to, including state and authority.

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<sup>35</sup> Ghazzali and Bagley, 15.

<sup>36</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Iḥyā’ Ulūm Al-Dīn*, 2nd ed. (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2013).

A true Ṣūfī possesses in himself innately the four cardinal virtues of justice, modesty, courage and wisdom. For as those virtues are paragon in humanity, a Ṣūfī thus either having trained himself in series of *riyāḍah* or attained Divine gift, to reach the epitome of humanity, as the one characterized in, for example, al-Jīlī's Perfect Man (*Insān Kāmil*),<sup>37</sup> or any true Ṣūfī. This would be the right match for a leader or holder of authority, who stand as epitome of his people. Thus when these two qualities meet in one person, that is, Ṣūfī-king, on one side he would constantly attain Divine guidance (*ilhām*), while the other he would remain benefitting his subjects through policies, decrees and rules he established during his tenure. In al-Ghazālī's view, there is no better model for authority than that.

There is no coincidence for a keen observer to witness the al-Ghazālī's work in political philosophy, namely al-*Tibr al-Masbūk fī Naṣīhat al-Mulūk*, filled with anecdotes of lessons from previous kings and authority holders, resembling richness of anecdotes found in Sufi works and hagiographies. We may not, then, dismiss the significance of its inclusion, since it has been absent in a work like al-Mawardi's *al-Aḥkām al-Sulṭāniyyah*.<sup>38</sup> Imam al-Ghazālī, being an expert in the science of heart, what the modern science calls it psychology, realizes that stories may convey instructive notions, something to inspire the readers –here being the kings and holders of authority– without being overtly instructive like an ordinary manual book. Reading those anecdotes may entice the subconsciousness of readers, even the inattentive ones. Knowing that those leaders of men, due to such high rank, might be stubbornly obstinate to common instructive method, al-Ghazālī deliberately chose those *nukat* to point out what makes the best of rulers and instigate them to live up to the values learned.

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<sup>37</sup> Abdurrahman Badawi, *Al-Insān Al-Kāmil Fī Al-Islām*, 2nd ed. (Kuwait: Fahd al-Salim, 1976).

<sup>38</sup> Al-Mawardi, *Al-Aḥkām Al-Sulṭāniyyah Wa Al-Wilāyah Al-Diniyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1978).

Another notion worth to point out is the similitude of the tree of faith, which one could not help but sensing the resemblance to the account found in *Mishkat al-Anwar*. The tree is supported chiefly by the root, while the branch consists of seven limbs of justice and piety.<sup>39</sup> When the root of faith is weak, the tree will fall. The roots of faith, as al-Ghazālī illustrates, as of two, refraining from everything that is prohibited and performing every prescribed duty. The duty then falls into two categories: between him and God; and between him and mankind –one that manifest in justice. Thus Al-Ghazālī is intentional in driving the goal of this work of particular genre ‘Mirrors of Princes’, to the acknowledgement and blend of Ṣūfism, even in implicit way.

In the term in the rules of conduct for a ruler, it is to show the man of power which route to take to exercise his authority with the greatest justice possible, he asks him to return to the “heart of the faith” which is nothing else than the intimate relationship with God. This is the peak spirituality that man could achieve. While God forgives easily a breach of duty that we have to Him, the injustices committed against the creatures must one way or another be repaired.<sup>40</sup>

Al-Ghazālī later provides the man of power ten recommendations that are all benchmarks for the practical exercise of power.<sup>41</sup> While, the three most important recommendations are: *First*, Placing oneself in the place of one’s subjects and not imposing what one does not wish to have imposed.<sup>42</sup> *Second*, The man of power must be able to surround himself with men of religion of great quality and urging his subjects to follow their advice. Religious men that Ghazālī has in mind here are mostly men

<sup>39</sup> Ghazzali and Bagley, *Ghazali's Book of Counsel for Kings (Nasihat Al-Muluk)*, 12.

<sup>40</sup> Ghazzali and Bagley, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Mitha, *Al-Ghazali and the Ismailis: A Debate on Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam*, 17.

<sup>42</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Faḍāiḥ Al-Bāṭiniyyah*, ed. Abd ar-Raḥmān Badwī (Kuwait: Mu’assasah Dār al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, n.d.), 202.

who are completely detached from the honours and with a deep mystical and spiritual life. He quotes, among others, the example of the relationship of the caliph al-Rashid with the Sufi Shaqīq al-Balkhī and the one with Ibn al-Fudayl Ibn ‘Iyād.<sup>43</sup>

*Third*, The man of power must be able to show greatness of soul and magnanimity. Ghazālī points out that the princes are generally arrogant, prone to anger and revenge. However, forgiveness is a necessary quality to safeguard the unity of society. Thus, Ghazālī points out that the Prophets Peace Be Upon Them and the Ṣūfī saints are always magnanimous with their community. The above recommendations are certainly not easy to achieve. Ghazālī is aware of the difficulty of what he calls the leaders of his time to live this ideal. That is why he devotes an entire chapter to the Ṣūfī aphorisms that can help a man of power to be able to meditate on the exercise of political authority.<sup>44</sup>

## Al-Ghazali on Justice and Human Nature

As the previous discussion took place, the notion of authority in al-Ghazālī's state is rooted from justice. Imam al-Ghazālī explains the justice that the authority must be established upon. Before delving into the subject, al-Ghazālī in an Ash‘arite manner elucidates the Divine Justice, that everything exists in the universe is created by God and no one shares in His creative activity, He is the sole Proprietor of the universe. Injustice, al-Ghazālī argues, is intrinsically impossible in Him, for the unjust man (□ ālim) is one who takes possession of the property of another, while He is the only Proprietor, thus injustice from His side never exists.<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, al-Ghazālī insisted that although the leader may fell short in justice, thus he must uphold it highly, since anything

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<sup>43</sup> Al-Ghazali, 22.

<sup>44</sup> Ghazzali and Bagley, *Ghazali's Book of Counsel for Kings (Nasihat Al-Muluk)*, 135–48.

<sup>45</sup> Ghazzali and Bagley, 10.

involving injustice to mankind will not in any circumstance be overlooked at the resurrection day; therefore the danger is very great. This goes without exception to any ruler or authority holder.

Further, Al-Ghazālī summarises all the negative possibilities of the human soul to four fundamental skills: (1). The first and most serious dark tendency of the soul is the temptation to attribute oneself the *rubūbiyya*, sovereignty that actually belongs to God alone. A related tendency is pride, vanity, the love of power and the desire to be above everyone. For Ghazālī, the best example of this tendency is the personification of Pharaoh who declared his self-proclaimed deity. (2). The second negative possibility of the soul is the properly satanic tendency that gives rise to many vices like jealousy, manipulation, the betrayal love of deviant and perverse innovations, etc. (3). The third negative possibility of the soul is bestial characters. Ghazālī means by that all manifestations of animality that is in man: gluttony, greed and sexual immorality in all its forms. (4). The fourth and final negative possibility of the soul is aggression. The latter gives rise to various attitudes such as anger, hatred, cruelty by words or actions, etc. We just saw the four negative possibilities of the soul in the order in which Ghazālī presents them. However, it should be noted that this does not match the order they appear in the psychological development of man and mental maturation.

In addition to the core beliefs of Islam, al-Ghazālī distinguishes between four fundamental beliefs without which right conduct is not conceivable: (1). The first of this knowledge and these beliefs the man of power must assimilate is that the world is not a place of permanent residence but a simple fleeting path. From birth to death, life is a preparation for installation in the Hereafter. However, this is only possible by preparing one's spiritual luggage, which is nothing else than piety. (2). The necessary piety for this journey sits within the heart, the man of power must thus begin with reforming it. Only a reform of the heart is able to make the reform of the organs of action possible. Knowledge of the

transience of the world, when it is deep and real, anchors in the heart detachment from earthly life.<sup>46</sup> (3). It should be noted that the spiritual reform must be based on dual compliance with religious law (*sharʿ*) and intellect (*ʿaql*). For Ghazālī this dual compliance is the only way to manage to control one’s passions, especially anger. This default is a trap even more dangerous than believing that the power held is great. In this perspective, self-control is the only way to exercise an authority that is not tyrannical. This is the reason why Ghazālī writes: “No one can reform the people of his country, if he is not able to reform his own house. But no one could reform its own house if he is not capable of reforming himself”.<sup>47</sup>

(4). The power holder must know, and also perceive in himself, that man is torn between two major tendencies: the angelic nature and the bestial nature. Man thus occupies an intermediate position between the angel and the beast. According to his ideas and his life choices, man approaches the one or the other. However, the bestiality of the man of power will have all the more serious impacts since his possibilities of acting are great.<sup>48</sup> However, Imam al-Ghazali warns against the holders of leadership of the dangers that could befall upon them,<sup>49</sup> and condemns those who intentionally seek leadership for his own ends, not for the goodness of society.<sup>50</sup> Imam al-Ghazali asserts the two elements of society which decide its quality, the Ulama’ and the leaders.

## The Authority, Social Order and Happiness

Imam al-Ghazali mentions the three classes of that establish the existence of society, the fundamental class is of four professions: farming to provide food; garment industry to provide

<sup>46</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Faḍāih Al-Bāṭiniyyah*, 198.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Ghazali, 94.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Ghazali, 201.

<sup>49</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Iḥyā’ Ulūm Al-Dīn*, 2013, 4:382.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Ghazali, 1:48.



clothing; construction to establish homes building; polity (*siyāsah*) to provide order and organization for the society.<sup>51</sup>

While emphasizing on the merit of knowledge upon every Muslim, Imam al-Ghazali establishes the profound significance of social order. For there could no religious order without social, worldly order –one could never perform the religion fully in a chaotic situation, thus the necessity for social stability.<sup>52</sup> Imam al-Ghazali deploys the analogy of human anatomic system to illustrate the society: (1) fundamental, as in the heart, the liver, and the brain; (2) supporting organs, as stomach, veins, arteries, and sinews; and (3) ornamental complementary as nails, fingers, and eyebrows. The fundamental organ in society is the polity system which manifests in four elements: (1) 'The Prophets Peace be Upon Them; (2) Caliphs, kings and sultans; (3) the ulama'; (4) the preachers.<sup>53</sup>

This would ultimately lead to the perfection of society, which in the situation where spiritual-social-material balance is achieved in a harmonious manner. As the revelation has ceased, polity of the Prophets could only be manifested and learned in Al-Qur'an and Sunnah, hence the polity effectively fell into the rulers and the 'Ulama'. As what we discussed before, authority and justice are complementary entities, which the former is required to fulfill the latter, while the latter is the aim of the former. But further than that, justice is required for man and society to reach happiness, the spiritual *raison d'être* of man. This will bring discussion to the relation between authority and happiness.

The required existence of authority in required in the fulfillment of happiness –in either social or individual level. Imam Al-Ghazali deploys the analogy of kingdom that the body is illustrated with the soul as its king, senses and faculties as its army, and intellect as prime minister.<sup>54</sup> The base faculties such as desire

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<sup>51</sup> Al-Ghazali, 1:12-13.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Ghazali, 1:12.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Ghazali, 1:13.

<sup>54</sup> Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness, The Alchemy of*

and anger play the role of revenue collector and police which both must be kept in check. Here, soul is the authority of the body. The same analogy goes to that the leader is the soul of the society.

Imam al-Ghazali however warns that when the lower faculties dominate reason, the desolation of the soul would ensue infallibly. Thus, the reason must be the dominant factor to guide the soul –as how the knowledgeable scholars must guide the kings and leaders.<sup>55</sup> The purpose of authority is to realize the happiness in the society –where justice thrives and happiness spread. We may declare that this is the best society in Imam al-Ghazali’s view. This society is collection of individuals obedient to religion, loyal to their guided ruler, living within adequate prosperity under protection of the just polity, while each contributing to the sustainability of community.

The happiness is more than mere mental state –it is the spiritual state of a soul which al-Ghazali declares could be met only through Ma’rifah –knowing God. The seeker would attain the Ma’rifah of God, after he know himself in its entirety, as al-Ghazali quotes frequently that one who truly knows himself, should know his God. The quest for happiness is likened to the process of alchemy which transforms the base metals into the gold –hence the soul is transformed in the end of endeavor. This Ma’rifah is also enjoined with the other knowledge required for the seeker, respectively of self, of world and of hereafter.<sup>56</sup>

For man to know of himself means to recognize the physical functions of the body and the spiritual functions of heart. We have covered this in the analogy of kingdom. This recognition would lead ultimately to the gratefulness and obedience towards God.<sup>57</sup> Knowledge of God refers to the recognition of perfection of

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*Happiness* (Routledge, 2015), 129, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315700410>. See also at Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Kimīyā’ Al-Sa’ādah*, ed. Najāh ‘Iwād (Cairo: Dār al-Maqtam, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 125.

<sup>56</sup> Al-Ghazali, 123.

<sup>57</sup> Al-Ghazali, 124.

God's creation in oneself; recognizing His Mercy upon one's needs; and performing worship and remembrance out of Divine Love.<sup>58</sup>

Knowledge of the world relates to one's capability to take care of the worldly life, protecting one's soul and isolating himself from overt dependence toward worldly belongings, and striving to give alms and assistance to those in need.<sup>59</sup> Knowledge of the hereafter regards one to view the demise and hereafter in positive way –which results in optimism in dealing with life matters. This would yield to contentment, remembrance of the transience of worldly life, the impending demise and eternity of hereafter. In turn, it would isolate one from overt attachment to the physical aspect of worldly life.<sup>60</sup> All these knowledge and their immersion to one's soul would bring him to the transformation of the self –that is of the alchemy of happiness.

The soul which know itself would holds authority upon its matters and affairs –and seek the spiritual perfection that is happiness. It is all coming to the full circle that the ideal society could only be achieved through souls of individuals who recognize their God. From these individuals, the authority that leads the society could flourish.

## Conclusion

Thus, in al-Ghazalian manner, the state manifests as something attached to reality while firmly rooted to spirituality –counting in the Hereafter aspect. According to Al-Ghazali, the authority of the Ummah is not exclusive to certain lineage, as how the Shiites force the idea of *Ta'lim*. In al-Ghazali's state, when one is mandated with authority, he thus must behave in specific rule of engagement with the power, accordingly work under the guidance of religion. Al-Ghazali maintains that magnanimity and nobility of

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<sup>58</sup> Al-Ghazali, 16.

<sup>59</sup> Al-Ghazali, 28–32.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Ghazali, 33.

kings and those who hold the authority possess an importance one could not never dismiss. Al-Ghazali offers the idea of the spiritual society, starting with the spiritual leader that emerges as the state leader as well. Eventually, this spiritual society could bring forth happiness and justice, two quintessential entities that nowadays we could only find it scarce in so many parts of the world.[]

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