

THE CLASSIFICATION OF SCIENCES IN GHAZALI'S VIEWS

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Abstract

Because of the significance attached to the study of sciences from the very beginning of the Islamic world, the classification of sciences, from different philosophical and religious perspectives, has always been of specific concern to the Moslem scholars. In addition to what has been said in this regard either in specific books of scattered here and there in some chapters of publications on philosophy or on religion, there have appeared certain distinguished articles on this issue as well. Among the existing classifications of sciences, one is the famous attempt made to classify sciences first into theoretical and applied ones, and then to ramify the theoretical sciences into three main branches of natural sciences, mathematics and theology.

The applied sciences have then been divided into three main categories of ethics, house hold economy and the management of countries.

The above classification, which has its basis in Aristotle's and his Greek followers' publications,⁽¹⁾ and which has apparently been referred to by Ya'qub-Ibne Shiq kandy ⁽²⁾ (185-260 A.H.) more than other other Moslem scholars, and later by Farabi (258-339 A.H.) in Ihsa'ol-olum and by Aviceina (370-428 A.H.) in Aqşam-el-olum-el *Aqliah*, has been approved by the majority of Islamic philosophers. They, in turn, have expanded this classification system and have postulated its ramification.⁽³⁾

Besides this philosophical and Aristotelian classification system, in the Islamic circles and away from the philosophical centers, sciences have been ramified into sub-categories on the basis of other specific considerations. Among the theologians, Traditionalists, and gnostics who in their publications and according to their religious backgrounds have engaged in the classification of sciences, except for a

limited group who have been influenced by philosophers, the majority of them have heavily relied on the Holy Scripture, Tradition and on the Precedents of the Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him). although this ramification has its roots and bases in «the Islamic view on the classification of sciences» as implied by the Tradition and by the precedents of the prophet (PBUH) and by His early followers and mystics, its development is nevertheless influenced by certain other factors such as the rise of different sects, and their subsequent recognition by other sects, and the dominance of the Ash'ri Sect and Traditionists over E'tezal Sect (Mo'tazele Sect), and finally by the spread of sufism.

It is only in the fifth and sixth centuries A.H. when one observes the advanced forms of these views on the classification of sciences; one of these distinguished views is that of Imam Mohammed Ghazali, offered in *Ehya' -ol-olum-ed-Din*.

In Imam Ghazali's view, like in the views of most gnostics and scholars, the classification of sciences is based on his educational beliefs in self-purification and

soul-edification and in leading the God's way. On this basis, he has called «improper» those sciences, even religious sciences, which do not lead people properly and religiously. He has denounced as mere *ignorance* the anti-religious sciences.⁽⁴⁾ The basis of this notion rests on the prevalent idea in the Islamic culture that a science is related to one's Faith on the one hand and to «action» from the other.⁽⁵⁾ This close relation among science and Faith and action, which is specifically stressed by sufism and which is vividly depicted in their works, is the basis for the mystical views on science and sciences, which has manifested itself in one way or the other. Ghazali's classification of sciences, which originates from the Islamic mysticism, is one of these classifications.

In his ramification of sciences, Ghazali has primarily classified science as *Individual* duty and collective duty. And this latter, the acquisition of which is the task of the elite and not of the common men, includes various sciences. The basis for this classification of sciences is the now-famous Tradition narrated by Anas Ibne Malik from the Great Messenger of God (PBUH), who declared, «The acquisition of knowledge and science is the duty for all Moslems.» This Tradition has initiated the discussion of the following issues: which sciences are required for Moslems? which are considered among *individual duties*? And which ones are among *collective duties*?⁽⁷⁾ Ghazali has delved into this topic and has concluded that only «The knowledge of one's actions» is compulsory and its knowledge acquisition is among one's private duties. The rest of sciences belong to the category of «collective duties».

Ghazali in his *Ehya'-ol-Olum* relies on Abu Talib Makki's (died in 388 A.H.) Ghowwatol Ghlub. Makki in a chapter has gone into details describing the verdicts of the preceding scholars and gnostics regarding the issue.⁽⁸⁾ Ghazali has been selective in presenting these verdicts, trying to purify these and to offer them in a succinct manner. His notion is basically the same as Makki's in that the compulsory science is the knowledge of the Five Islamic Principles (i.e. *shahadatein* [The Islamic Formula whereby an individual announces his acceptance of Islam], Prayer, Fasting, Religious Tax and Hajj [Annual pilgrimage to Mecca])⁽⁹⁾ except for the fact that Ghazali has expanded his views and has added the attributive of *graduation of time*.

In Ghazali's classification, all those sciences which fall into the category of «collective duties» are divided into the *Divine* and *non-Divine* ones. According to him, the *Divine Sciences* are those which we have directly inherited from the prophets and in which wisdom (as is

used in arithmetic), and experience (as is employed in medicine) and mystic singing (as is used in the language sciences) have no influence whatsoever.⁽¹⁰⁾

This classification of sciences into the *Divine* and *Non-Divine* ones has been common among the Moslem scholars since old times. From the second century A.H., i.e., the area of publication and translation, two sorts of sciences have developed side-by-side. A group of these had their origin in Islam (such as the koranic sciences, Tradition and Jurisprudence); a second group had their bases in the pre-Islamic culture of Moslems (such as poetry, literature and history); and a third group included philosophy and its branch which were translated from Greek and Soriani.

The distinction between the above-mentioned categories of sciences did not merely reflect their origin. Among them there were clear differences regarding teaching them, researching about them and editing them. This is evident in the works of the majority of Moslem scholars (including Ghazali's predecessors: Kharazmi, Ekhwanos-SaFa, Ibne Hazm and Abul Hassan Ameri) who have engaged in the classification of sciences, separating them into two distinct sub-headings. However, they might have used different terminology.⁽¹¹⁾

Having divided sciences into the *Divine* and *Non-Divine* categories, Ghazali finds different sub-categories for each. His intention is not of that of classification only; rather, he evaluates sciences, inserting them into the «proper groups» and «improper ones», in accordance with his own educational standards. In his view, the *Non-Divine* sciences are of three groupings: *desired*, *un-desired* and *permissible*. The *un-desired* group includes witchcraft and jugglery; the *permissible* group includes history and poetry; and by «desired sciences» is meant those sciences «on which the worldly affairs rely», such as medical sciences, mathematics and agriculture.⁽¹²⁾ The acquisition of these sciences is among the *collective duties*. Delving into them beyond the necessary limits is not compulsory any more, but rather is considered as a virtue by itself.⁽¹³⁾

Witchcraft is condemned because of the fact that it is religiously regarded as illegal by all sects of Islam.⁽¹⁴⁾ In the same manner, the origin of the condemnation of poetry and history⁽¹⁵⁾ goes back to the tradition Ghazali does not include philosophy in this category and he offers the following statement as a reason:

«Philosophy perse is not considered as a science.»

«Of the four parts of philosophy, the logic belongs to the scholastic theology; mathematics is among the desired sciences; natural science belong to the area of medical sciences, and some part of the latter is against the *Divine* religion and by itself is considered as

ignorance rather than science»; and final theology which ignorance is among the scholastic theology. This is due to the fact that «theology is concerned», Ghazali continues «with describing God and His attributes; therefore, it belongs to scholastic theology.» If philosophers are distinguished and isolated in their attitudes, this is because of their beliefs, and not because of science *per se*; some of this science may be blasphemy and some of it mere innovation. In the same way, *I'tizal* (separating oneself from the rest) may not be considered as a unique science by itself. Rather, its followers are theologians and proponents of isolated false sects. This is also true of philosophy. (16)

In Ghazali's conception, the Divine sciences are designated as «proper» and «improper», as well. The «desired and proper Divine sciences are of four kinds: the *Principles*, the *Subsidiaries* the *Preliminaries* and the *supplements*.

The Principles include four: the *Holy scripture*, *Tradition*, the *Consensus* and the works of the *Prophet's Companions*.

By the *subsidiaries* is meant what is implied by the *principles*. This is of two sorts: «one sort deals with», Ghazali states, «the worldly affairs and is included within jurisprudence, which is the business of Fughaha (experts of Muslim Law); these are considered as worldly scientists. The second sort deals with the Hereafter, and that is the knowledge of what goes on in humans hearts and his proper and improper actions.»

By the *Preliminaries* of the *Divine Sciences* is meant philology and grammar which belong to the «instrumental sciences», i.e., the means for the comprehension of the Holy Scripture and Tradition.

And finally, The *Supplements* to the *Divine Sciences* are found in the Koran or in Tradition. What is in the Holy Koran is related either to the proper pronunciation of the Koran (Tajwid), or to the interpretation of the Koran (Tafsir), or to the *Orders* (Ahkam), such as the recognition of the *abrogating* (nasekh) verses of Koran and the *abrogated* (mansukh) verses of Koran; the distinction between the common and the proper, and between the explicit and implicit. What is included in Tradition is either related to the identification of the narrators (The Science of men = *elmolrejal*) or the recognition of *Orders* (the principles of jurisprudence). (17)

The reason why Ghazali has not mentioned analogy (Ghiyas) along side of the *Principles*, and the reason why he considers the works of the *Prophet's companions* as his fourth principal although it should usually be contained in the *Tradition*, is due to the fact that he, like some *Shafeiye* of khorasan, following Abu Hamid Esferayeni (344-406 A.H.) and in contrast to

Ghaffal Marwazi (327-417) and his Iraqi followers, does not consider *analogy* parallel to the *Holy Scripture*, *Tradition* or even *Consensus*. (18)

Ghazali, in his conception of granting the Jurisprudence a worldly status, presents the following reasoning: «The end-product of the art of jurisprudence is the recognition of the ways of the management and protection (of people)». He adds that Jurisprudence *per se* does not belong to the Hereafter, and that the proverb «The world is the farming-place for the Hereafter, comes true because of the world». According to Ghazali, in praying affairs, it is the task of the experts of Muslim law only to lead people and to issue religious verdicts in an authentic way and not «to excite in the religious people humility and modesty, because this belongs to the Hereafter.» If as expert of Muslim law, Ghazali contends, speaks of humility and the orders related to the Hereafter, he has gone beyond his responsibilities; it is as if he tried to talk about medicine, grammar, or arithmetic. (19)

Ghazali's criticism of the experts of Muslim law (Fughaha) and his granting jurisprudence a worldly status in contrast to mysticism, is not a new phenomenon. Prior to him the gnostics had severely criticized several experts of Muslim law and the expounder of the Mohammadan law who had been after their personal worldly aims, and the scholars who had chosen to blindly obey the governors of the day. Their varied statements could easily be found in the early sufism books.

The previous record of the animosity between mystics (gnostics) on the one *hand* and scholars and experts in Muslim law, on the other, as the contrast between jurisprudence and *mysticism*, goes back to the latter part of the second century A.H. and to the early part of the third century A.H. with the rise of the established social organizations at the Abbasid Era on the one *hand*, and the evolution and development of jurisprudence on the other, some of the experts of Muslim law were appointed as judges and expounder of the Mohammadan law. In contrast to their predecessors at the Era of Rashedin and the *Omawids*, who only benefited from the gifts of the Public Treasury, these judges and expounder for the Muslim law, like the government officials, became the recipients of official salaries and social privilege either at the caliphate organization or at local districts. In this way, they could not naturally escape the *concomitant* corruption of the worldly affairs and the caliph's pseudo-politics. In contrast, the gnostic and sufi scholars denounced the worldly possession, *disobeyed* the governors, and started criticizing the above-mentioned expounder of the Mohammadan law. They considered as fruitless the

science which lacked self *purification*. They, too, considered the science of jurisprudence, which had become the prey of peculiar *orders* and issues,⁽²⁰⁾ as a worldly pursuit. In their views, the ambitious, position-seeking expounder of the Mohammadan law were just worldly scholars. This criticism went so far as Yahyebne Maaz, in condemning these pseudo-scholars, stated:

«O scholars, your palaces are like those of Caesar's, your residents are like those of Kesra's, your garments are like Talut's, your shoes are like Jalut's, your kitchenware are like pharaoh's, your steeds are like korah's, your nourishment are like the Bedouin's, and your religions are satanic; then, where is your Islam?»⁽²¹⁾

Ghazali's criticism of jurisprudence and experts in Islamic Law is a continuation of the attacks the religious scholars levelled against pseudo-scholars. However, some writers, such as Watt, believe that Ghazali's bitter experience with pseudo-scholars has influenced his conception of jurisprudence.⁽²²⁾ The object of his criticism is, of course, his contemporary pseudo-scholars and the *scholars* of the preceding two centuries and their mis-management of jurisprudence-teachings. He, however, mentions the names of the experts of jurisprudence of the first and second *century* A.H., and the names of the Four Imams, especially Imam Shafei (who all belong to the pre-corruption era) with great honor, and then states:

«They meant by science only the satisfaction of the Almighty Allah. They behave as if they were the scholars of the Hereafter.» These genuine scholars, according to Ghazali, were aware of the God's way, but the usurpers of religions have treated them with cruelty.⁽²³⁾

Ghazali does not enumerate theology among the proper religious sciences. But his implied denouncement of theology in his books *Ehya* and *Elmonghazo men az thalal* is not meant to be absolute. He states that theology has failed to carry out its basic objective which is to guard the beliefs of the Sunnite and to drive away their anxieties.⁽²⁴⁾ Ghazali contends that beyond this «arguments are doomed to fail,» «the reasoning are not valid», or «their arguments are irrelevant to religion.»⁽²⁵⁾

Ghazali, who followed the Ash'ari sect and who continued to believe in the same sect up to his last days, 26 in his *El E'teqad Fel E'teqad*, recommended to his followers to delve into theology to the extent that it could be applied to the recognition of religious issues from non-religious ones.⁽²⁷⁾ In his book *Ghawa'edol Aqa'ed Ehya'ol olum*, Ghazali after presenting different attitudes of scholars (either their praise or

denouncement) towards theology states that in theology there are both advantages and disadvantages.⁽²⁸⁾ Its disadvantages include «the exciting of misconceptions, the shaking of beliefs, and the weakening of people's determination toward religion.» Its advantages are not as high as some have assumed it» as a means for uncovering truth and recognizing world affairs.» According to Ghazali, this seldom comes true. He believes that the main advantage of theology is protecting layman's beliefs and faith from anxieties. He continues, by stating since laymen are weak (in their reasoning) and may be misled by innovators' corrupt disputation, scholars whose task it is to protect laymen from the innovators' mis-instruction, should be familiar with theology and true reasoning.⁽²⁹⁾

As we said above, Ghazali's objective is not just to classify sciences. Through this classification of sciences, he intended to mention those sciences which had educational bearings and which the followers of God's way should learn of should abstain from learning. Because of this educational considerations, Ghazali classifies sciences into three categories: those sciences which are *improper*, either is small quantity of large quantity (such as witchcraft); those sciences which are proper and suitable, either in part or as a whole (such as Divine Mysticism and God's ways); and finally those sciences a knowledge of which to a certain extent, as deemed necessary, is proper (like medicine and arithmetic). In this connection, Ghazali has mentioned a number of his own and other scholars' books and publications and has recommended to interested scholars to pay attention to.⁽³⁰⁾

In presenting evidence for denouncing some sciences,⁽³¹⁾ he states, «This *denouncement* is for the damages that these sciences *inflict* upon learners of others.» He further adds, the term *science* (like the terms *jurisprudence*, *monotheism* and *Divine Wisdom*) has deviated from its original meaning and has mingled with corrupt intentions. This has gone so far as to become completely unobserved by the laymen.⁽³²⁾

In Ghazali's conception, the denouncement of certain sciences springs from the fact that he sees a close relation among science, Faith and Action. He attends to the fact that the study of sciences should provide the individual or the whole Islamic nation with profits on their way towards God; this was a fact to which all gnostics and majority of scholars subscribed. 33 In Ghazali's opinion and in the conception of other men of God, *the recognition of hearts* and the *identification of God's ways* is considered the supreme science.⁽³⁴⁾ We should bear in mind, however, that this emphasis on spiritual sciences should not be taken as the negation of material sciences, as some critics of

Ghazali (such as Ibne-el Ghayyen have tried to accuse him of.⁽³⁵⁾On the contrary, he recognizes the Divine law (science) as the foundation of true sciences, and his criticism of material sciences is for other reasons.

Ghazali's classification and evaluation of sciences was accepted not only by the societies of gnostics but by the majority of scholars after him, especially by *shafeians*. All of these have, in their publications, referred to Ghazali's work and have adopted it.⁽³⁶⁾ Thus, naturally, his notions have had a tremendous effect on the educational and instructional systems of Islamic communities. Without doubt, his notion has suffered from certain drawbacks and shortcomings, such as the prohibition of some sciences from making progress.

References

- The classification of the theoretical sciences is the work of Aristotle himself. The Classification of the applied Sciences is done after him. Refer to F. Rosenthal, "Brief Communications", JAOS, 76 (1956), pp.27-29.
- Ibid, p. 27. Also refer to Alfehrest by Ibne Nadim, Tehran: 1393, p.316.
 - Refer to *lththal Olum*, Cairo: 1948; See also its Introduction, written by Othman Amin, esp., pp. 11-19; see *lrshadel Ghased* by Akfani, cal-catta: 1849, p. 26. See as well *Nafaes ol Foonoon* by shamsoddin Amoli, Tehran: 1377 H., 1/pp. 14-15.
 - Ehya-ol Olumeddin, Cairo: 1282 H., 1/19. See the persian translation of Moayyedoddin Kharazmi, Tehran: 1351 H., 1/80. Compare this notion with the idea ascribed to Imam Shafei about theology who said:
«العلم بالكلام جهل والجهل بالكلام علم»
(Tabaghate Sufiyyeh by Ansari, p. 18).
 - The prophetic narrations and the works of the prophet's followers are numerous in this regard: among them are:
«تعلموا، تعلموا فإذا علمتم فاعلموا»
(sonanel Darami, *Almoghaddamah*, chap: 34);
«من طلب العلم لغير الله أو أراد به غير الله فليتبوأ مقعده من النار»
(sonane Ibne Majeh, *Almoghaddamah*, chap: 23, narration no. 258); Sa-hihel Termazi, *Ketabol-elm*, chap: 6, narration no. 2655); and:
«من عمل بما يعلم ورثه الله علم ما لا يعلم»
(Helyatol Oliya 10/p.15).
 - From the authors of *Kotobe Setteh*, only Ibne Majeh has reported this narration (Sonan Ibne Majeh, *Almoghaddamah*, chap: 17, narration "Weak" because of the weak-ino. 224); This narration is considered ness of one of the narrators (i.e, Hafth Ibne soleyman) (*Hashiyat Assandi ala Ibne Majeh*, 1/99). Siuti (Al-jameo-s Saghir, 2/54) has considered Ibne Majeh's narration "Weak"; nevertheless, he considers the narration authentic from other aspects. Khatib Baghdadi has narrated it from Anas, Ali Ibne Abitaleb and Musa Ibne Mojahed (*ketabel Faghih wal mottafagah*, 1/pp. 43-44).
 - Ehya, 1/11-13; Tarjomeh, 1/58-64.
 - Ghowatol Gholub, Cairo: 1961, 1/262-264.
 - Ibid, 1/265.
 - Ehya, 1/13-14; Tarjomeh, 1/61.
 - Kharazmy has called them "Olume Arab, Olum Ajam, Olum Shar'iyyeh and Olum Dakhileh" (*Malatihil Olum*, Translated by Khadiv jam, Tehran: 1347, p. 6). Ekhwannossafa has divided sciences into three branches of Riaziyyeh (mathematical), shar'iyyeh Vaz'iyyeh (religious positional) and Falsafiyyeh haghghiyyeh (real

philosophical), (Rasael Ekhwannossafa, Cairo: 1/p. 202); Abol Hassan Ameri has classified sciences into two branches of shar'i (religious) and Falsafi (philosophical), (*Al a'lam be managhebel Islam*, Cairo: 1967, p. 84). Ibne Hazm has classified sciences into seven groups, three of which (i.e, Religion, history, and language) differ among Moslem nations, and the other four branches (i.e, philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy) are common among Moslims, (*Maratebol Olum: Rasael Ibne Hazem Andolosi*, research by Ihsan Abbas, Cairo, p. 78). This classification is also observed in *Alfehrest* by Ibne Nadim, the first six articles of his are about literary and religion sciences, and the last four articles are on philosophy and Olum Dakhileh.

- Ehya, 1/14; Tarjomeh, 1/64.
- Ibid, 1/14; Tarjomeh, 1/65. Research and deliberation on these sci- is considered aslences which is considered as a Virtue by Ghazzali "Nall" or "Nadb" by later authors and is considered a third kind of science (*Almajmu' sharhel Mohazzab*, Annnavi, p. 27; *Addaralmokhtar*, Al-Hasaki, 1/p. 30; *Jame'ol Osul Ibnel Athir*, 1/36).
- It is to be noted that the great Jurisprudent of Shate'i, Mohyeddin Navavy in *Almajmu' SharhelMohazzab* (Cairo: 1344 H., 1/p.27) has considered philosophy together with withch craft and astrology among for bidden sciences.
- There is a narration from God's Messenger (May God Bless Him) who said about a literary man:
«هذا علم لا ينفع وجهل لا يضر»
(Jame' BayanJl elm by Ibne abdol Barr, 2/p. 23).
- Ehya, 1/19; Tarjomeh, 1/80.
- Ehya, 1/14-15; Tarjomeh, 1/65-67.
- I. Goldziher, the *Zahiris* (Leiden: 1971), p. 167.
- Ehya, 1/15-16; Tarjomeh, 1/68-70.
- This criticism on sticking to the subsidiaries and details and ignoring the principles has been levelled against scholars by gnostics since second century: in this regard Abol atahiyeh has said:
«ولها باطراف الفروع واغفلوا علم الاصول»
(Alanvarel Zahiah Fi Divan Abel atahiyah, Beirut: 1886, p. 207).
- Ehya, 1/54.
- W. M. Watt, *Muslim Intellectual* (Edinburg: 1971), pp. 115-116.
- Ehya, 1/21; Tarjomeh, 1/84.
- Almenghaz, p. 35; Ehya, 1/35; Tarjomeh, 1/pp. 126-127.
- Ehya, 1/19; tarjomeh , 1/79.
- Watt, p.119.
- Ehya, 1/36; Tarjomeh, 1/127.
- Ehya, 1/85-86; Tarjomeh, 1/276.
- Ehya, 1/87; Tarjomeh, 1/277.
- Ehya, 1/34-36; Tarjomeh, 1/122-127.
- Ehya, 1/25-26; Tarjomeh, 1/101-103.
- Ehya, 1/28-29; Tarjomeh, 1/105-109
- It was only the followers of rational sciences and groups such as Ekhwannossafa who considered science distinct from Faith; See F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant* (Leiden: 1970), pp. 105-108.
- It is said:
«العلم علمان فعلم في القلب فذلك العلم النافع وعلم على اللسان فذلك حجة الله على ابن آدم»
(sonanel Darami, p. 102)
- Ghazzali in his work, *javaherol Quran* (Cairo: 1933, pp. 18-25) has considered gnosticism as the most valuable science. Ghaazli in *Javaherol Quran* has divided the religion sciences into "Gheshr and Sada" (Surface and deep), and "Lobab sciences". The Gheshri sciences deal with the discussion on words of Quran. "Lobab sciences" are divided into two branches "Lower" and "upper". The "Lower" level includes the stories of history, dialectical theology and jurisprudence; and the "Upper" level includes mysticism.
- Athafossadatol Mottaghin, by Morteza Azzobeidi, p. 36.

