

Al-Ghazālī on Reason, Legal, and Sufism: Toward an Integrative Epistemology of Islamic Law in Modernity

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Abstract

This article examines the reconstruction of al-Ghazālī's integrative epistemology of Islamic law through qualitative library research, using *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* as the primary text and employing the analytical framework of bayānī, burhānī, and 'irfānī epistemologies. The study reveals that al-Ghazālī consistently integrates Sufi ethics and burhānī logic into the discourse of fiqh, uncovering the inner meanings behind the formal structures of law. The synergy between bayānī reasoning (scriptural-normative), burhānī reasoning (rational-philosophical), and 'irfānī reasoning (mystical-intuitive) produces an integral epistemological construction of fiqh in which law is inseparable from moral and spiritual dimensions, forming a unified and integrative epistemic system. This article further proposes a reconstruction of modern Islamic legal epistemology through three major agendas: the transformation of bayānī into maqāṣid-oriented ethical guidance, the emancipation of burhānī through critical engagement with modernity, and the humanization of 'irfānī as a transformative spiritual ethic. Such an integrative epistemology enables fiqh to move beyond rigid legalistic dogma and emerge as a liberating and humanistic spirit of Islamic law.

Keywords: *Al-Ghazālī, Epistemology Integrative, Islamic Law in Modernity*

Introduction

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī occupies a unique position in the history of Islamic intellectual thought. Through his monumental work, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, he emerged as a sharp critic of fiqh that had been reduced to merely external legal knowledge preoccupied with conditions, pillars, validity, and invalidity, while neglecting its ethical and spiritual substance.¹ This critique was not merely technical, but reflected a profound philosophical concern that Islamic law should not stop at procedural formalism; rather, it must cultivate transcendental consciousness and moral ethos.²

¹ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, I (Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi, t.t.). 32-33.

² Jalaluddin Rahmat, "Ijtihad Sebagai Sumber Ajaran Islam Ketiga," in *Ijtihad Dalam Sorotan* (Mizan, 1999).

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In this regard, Ebrahim Moosa argues that al-Ghazālī offers an integrative epistemology in the *Ihya'*.³ Consequently, reading al-Ghazālī through the framework of Mohammed 'Ābid al-Jābirī's critique of Arab reason⁴ reveals the complex and progressive dimensions of his epistemological project.

According to al-Jābirī, the Islamic intellectual tradition is structured around three epistemological modes: *bayānī* (textual-linguistic reasoning), *burhānī* (rational-philosophical reasoning characteristic of the Peripatetic tradition), and *'irfānī* (intuitive-esoteric reasoning associated with Sufism and Illuminationist philosophy).⁵ Based on this typology, al-Ghazālī boldly criticized the *sui generis*⁶ character of traditional fiqh, arguing that many jurists had become trapped in legal formalism.⁷ At the same time, he rejected the *burhānī* claims of the philosophers who confined truth solely to rational logic.⁸ Instead, al-Ghazālī formulated a paradigm of Islamic law that was not only normatively valid but also rooted in spirituality and moral ethics.⁹ He constructed an epistemological synthesis by integrating shar'ī reasoning (*bayānī*), philosophical-rational reasoning (*burhānī*), and Sufi-spiritual reasoning (*'irfānī*) into a unified framework of al-fiqh al-bāṭin, or Sufi jurisprudence.¹⁰

However, according to Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, this project remains ambiguous because it simultaneously strengthens the *'irfānī* dimension within Islamic law while restricting forms of mysticism considered to transcend the boundaries of the shar'īa.¹¹ In this context, Ahmed Ali notes that modern thinkers such as Ruhollah Khomeini, Abul A'la Maududi, and Sayyid Qutb tended to reject the connection between moral epistemology and legal theory in order to preserve the absolutism of revelation. By contrast, figures such as Muhammad Abduh, Muhammad Iqbal, and Abdolkarim Soroush developed forms of moral rationalism that were considered insufficiently robust to confront legalism.¹²

Al-Ghazālī sought to demonstrate the continuing relevance of his project in contexts where law had become excessively formalistic.¹³ His thought also appears to reflect the epistemology of Abd al-Jabbar, particularly the idea that a robust moral rationalism enables critical revision within Islamic law and thus becomes an epistemic prerequisite for the emergence of genuinely alternative legal theories.¹⁴ In this respect, al-Ghazālī's thought remains both relevant and problematic. It is relevant because it opens new possibilities for Islamic law to preserve its spiritual dimension in the

³ Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2005). 209.

⁴ Muḥammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī, *Naqd Al-'Aql al-'Arabī* (Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, 1990).

⁵ Muhammad Abid al-Jābirī, *Bunyab Al-Aql 'Arabī*, (Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥdah al-'Arabiyyah, tt..).

⁶ H. Berg, "Studies in Early Muslim Jurisprudence. By Norman Calder. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.," *Journal of Church and State* 37, no. 1 (1995): 180–81, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/37.1.180>; Norman Calder and Robert Gleave, *Islamic Jurisprudence in the Classical Era*, 1st ed., ed. Colin Imber (Cambridge University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511676574>.

⁷ Ghazālī, *Ihya' Ulum al-Din*, I. 30.

⁸ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfā Min 'Ilm Uṣūl*, I (Pustaka al-Kautsar, 2021). 5.

⁹ Samer Dajani, *Sufish and Shari'a: The Forgotten School of Mercy* (Edinburg University Press, 2022).

¹⁰ Alwi Shihab, *Islam Sufistik* (Mizan, 2001).

¹¹ Moh Fauzi and Aqeel Khan, "The *Quasi* Reform of Islamic Law: A Study on Legal Methodology of Mahmud Shaltut," *Advanced Science Letters* 24, no. 1 (2018): 413–16, <https://doi.org/10.1166/asl.2018.12025>.

¹² Ahmed Ali Siddiqi, "Moral Epistemology and the Revision of Divine Law in Islam," *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion* 10, no. 1 (2021): 43–70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ojlr/rwab006>.

¹³ Akmal Bashori, "Konstruksi Keilmuan Fikih Nusantara: Perspektif Filsafat Sains," *DIKTUM: Jurnal Syariah Dan Hukum* 20, no. 2 (2022): 184–203, <https://ejurnal.iainpare.ac.id/index.php/diktum/index>.

¹⁴ Ahmad Kazemi Moussavi and Hamid Mavani, *Islamic Legal Methodology: A New Perspective on Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2023). 8-13.

face of modernity. Yet it is also problematic because the integration of *ʿirfānī* reasoning into *fiqh* risks distancing Islamic law from the *burhānī* rationality often regarded as essential to the modern project. Consequently, al-Ghazālī's integrative epistemology of *fiqh* continues to generate significant epistemological debates within contemporary Islamic legal studies.

Research by Hasbi Kholili demonstrates that al-Ghazālī did not rely solely on a textual paradigm, but also incorporated rational reasoning into the educational process.¹⁵ Regarding the rational dimension of al-Ghazālī's thought, Sultan Mujahidin argues that by prioritizing revelation over Greek rationalism, al-Ghazālī weakened critical reasoning and skepticism toward foreign ideas, thereby shaping the trajectory of post-*Tabāfut* Islamic theology and philosophy as a lasting intellectual legacy.¹⁶ In *Ethical Teachings of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī*, Sami al-Daghistani examines the relationship between ethics and economic philosophy.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Aprianto argues that al-Ghazālī's epistemology of *uṣūl al-fiqh* is grounded in deductive rationality and rejects non-rational, especially metaphysical, arguments.¹⁸ In contrast, Amani Elshimi's thesis maintains that al-Ghazālī sought to formulate an integrative epistemology rooted in the Qur'an.¹⁹ This view is reinforced by Ahmad Renaldi's research, which contends that al-Ghazālī's epistemology serves as a critique of dominant Western rationalist-positivist paradigms and offers an alternative framework integrating rational and spiritual dimensions in a holistic manner.²⁰

Unlike previous studies, this research offers a significant novelty by positioning *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* not merely as a spiritual or ethical text, but as a project of integrative legal epistemology that can be read as a methodological agenda for engaging global realities. This study further reconstructs al-Ghazālī's epistemology through three major dimensions: the emancipation of *burhānī* reasoning, which places critical rationality and empirical science as partners of *ijtihād*; the humanization of *ʿirfānī* reasoning, which transforms spirituality into an ethical force for social justice and ecological sustainability; and the transformation of *bayānī* reasoning through *maqāṣid*-oriented and contextual interpretation of texts. Through this synthesis, Islamic law moves beyond rigid legal formalism toward a humanistic and transformative legal ethic. Islamic law thus becomes not merely an internal normative system, but also an alternative legal epistemology integrating text, reason, and spirituality in responding to the complexities of global modernity.

In addition, the selection of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī as the central figure of this study is based on several considerations. First, he was a Muslim thinker who successfully reconciled Sufism and *fiqh*, two traditions previously marked by intense intellectual tension. Second, his ideas diverged

¹⁵ Kholili Hasib and Neneng Uswatun Khasanah, "The Integration of Rationality and Spirituality: Imam Al-Ghazali's Experience through Ta'lim Rabbani Approach in Acquiring Knowledge," *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 21, no. 1 (2025): 65–83, <https://doi.org/10.18196/afkaruna.v21i1.25377>.

¹⁶ Sultan Mujahidin, "The Supremacy of Revelation over Reason: Al-Ghazali's Critique of Rationalist Philosophy in Tahafut Al-Falasifah," *Islamic Thought Review* 2, no. 2 (2024): 151–62, <https://doi.org/10.30983/itr.v2i2.8838>.

¹⁷ Sami Al-Daghistani, *Ethical Teachings of Abū Ḥamid Al-Ghazālī: Economics of Happiness* (Anthem Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1h0nrb1>.

¹⁸ Muhamad Subhi Apriantoro and Muthoifin Muthoifin, "The Epistemology Of Ushul Fiqh Al-Ghazali In His Book Al-Mustashfa Min Ushuf Fiqh من علم الأصول المستصفى من خلال كتابه المستصفى," *Profetika: Jurnal Studi Islam* 22, no. 2 (2021): 229–36, <https://doi.org/10.23917/profetika.v22i2.16668>.

¹⁹ Amani Elshimi, "Al-Ghazali's Integral Epistemology: A Critical Analysis of The Jewels of the Quran" (Thesis, The American University in Cairo, 2017), <https://fount.aucegypt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2370&context=etds>.

²⁰ Ahmad Renaldi, "Al-Ghazali's Intuitive Epistemology: A Critique of Western Epistemology," *Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Research in Science and Technology* 3, no. 6 (2025): 675–94, <https://doi.org/10.55927/marcopolo.v3i6.78>.

from the established mainstream of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, which generally formulated law through *bayānī* and/or *burhānī* approaches alone, without incorporating the inward-spiritual dimension (*‘irfānī*). Al-Ghazālī, however, integrated this spiritual dimension into the very construction of *fiqh* itself. Accordingly, this study seeks to address two main questions: first, how al-Ghazālī’s integrative epistemology of *fiqh* can be understood within the framework of Mohammed Abed al-Jābirī’s theory of Arab reason; and second, how al-Ghazālī’s integrative reasoning may be reconstructed toward a new synthesis of modern legal epistemology. These two issues reflect both the continuing relevance of al-Ghazālī’s integrative epistemology and its contribution to the reconstruction of Islamic legal thought in contemporary discourse.

Method

This study is a conceptual research employing a qualitative approach based on library research. The focus of the study is directed toward analyzing the thought of Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī in his major works, particularly *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* and *al-Mustaṣfā min ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*. The *Iḥyā’* is selected as the primary source because it embodies an integrative paradigm that combines *fiqh*, Sufism, and philosophical reasoning, with particular emphasis on the reconstruction of Islamic legal epistemology. Secondary sources include works such as by Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination* Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories*; Sherman Jackson, *Islamic Law and the State* and Felicitas Opwis, *Maṣlaḥa and the Purpose of the Law*. Data were collected through textual study followed by in-depth reading to uncover the argumentative structure and epistemological foundations underlying al-Ghazālī’s integration of normative, rational, and spiritual dimensions.

The data analysis employs both intellectual history and descriptive-analytical approaches conducted through several stages: first, systematically describing key concepts and argumentative patterns within the texts; second, identifying the epistemological character of each argument; third, analyzing the relationships among epistemological elements; and fourth, formulating a conceptual abstraction of the legal epistemology constructed by al-Ghazālī. To examine this epistemological framework, the study adopts the theory of the critique of Arab reason developed by Mohammed Abed al-Jābirī, which classifies the Islamic intellectual tradition into three epistemological categories: *bayānī*, *burhānī*, and *‘irfānī* (intuitive-spiritual). This framework is used operationally as an analytical tool to: (1) identify dominant tendencies within al-Ghazālī’s argumentative structure; (2) assess the relational patterns among the epistemologies; and (3) determine whether the synthesis he constructs is subordinative, hierarchical, or integrative.

Result and Discussion

The Integration of Knowledge in the Discourse of Islamic Science

Contemporary *fiqh* increasingly exhibits what may be described as “law without a soul.” It is preoccupied with reiterating the classical formula *majmū‘at al-aḥkām al-shar‘iyyah al-‘amaliyyah al-mustafādah min adillatibā al-tafsīliyyah*,²¹ a definition long regarded by *fuqahā’* as definitive, yet epistemologically restrictive insofar as it confines the legal horizon to detailed textual proofs alone.²² As a consequence, *fiqh* tends toward positivism, resembling modern Western law as deconstructed by Hans Kelsen in his *Pure Theory of Law*: value-neutral, ethically sterilized, and

²¹ Abd. Wahāb Khallāf, *Ilmu Uṣūl Al-Fiqh* (Dar Khutub al-Ilmiyah, 2010). 11.

²² Noel J. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (Edinburg University Press, 1964). 20-25.

detached from spiritual meaning.²³ Ironically, Islamic law—originally conceived as a living law—has been transformed into what may be termed a “sacralized fossilized jurisprudence”.²⁴

Conversely, *taṣawwuf*, which initially emerged as an epistemological protest against the aridity of textualism, has undergone a process of domestication. It has been narrowed into a form of privatized spirituality and, at times, has drifted into apolitical mysticism. This condition represents an epistemic amputation that has been critically exposed by contemporary thinkers. Mohammed Arkoun characterizes it as the dogmatization of Islamic reason (*taqdis al-afkār al-dīniyyah*),²⁵ Khaled Abou El Fadl describes it as “authoritarianism,”²⁶ while Talal Asad conceptualizes it as a *discursive tradition* maintained by religious authority to ensure social stability.²⁷ The increasing specialization and separation of these two disciplines stem from their divergent epistemic orientations: “*fiqh* tends to rely on ratio and common-sense logic in engaging the Qur’an and ḥadīth to derive legal rulings, whereas mysticism prioritizes experiential knowledge (*dhawq*) in the lived practice of the Qur’an and ḥadīth”.²⁸

Al-Ghazālī emerged as a disruptive force that challenged the prevailing status quo. He rejected this epistemic amputation by integrating the Sufi dimension into the very structure of *fiqh*. Through *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, he incorporated Sufi terminology into the legal framework, uncovered the inner meanings underlying outward legal rules, and articulated a decisive principle: *sharī’a* without *ḥaqīqa* is invalid, while *ḥaqīqa* without *sharī’a* is inconceivable.²⁹ In other words, al-Ghazālī constructed what may be termed Sufi jurisprudence—a new paradigm in which law is not merely a collection of fatwas, but a pathway toward both the purification of the soul and the maintenance of social order.

When examined through al-Jābirī’s theoretical lens, al-Ghazālī’s project appears simultaneously problematic and revolutionary. It is problematic insofar as al-Jābirī argues that the dominance of *‘irfānī* reasoning within Islamic civilization contributed to intellectual stagnation by displacing critical *burhānī* rationality.³⁰ Yet it is revolutionary because al-Ghazālī did not remain confined to normative *bayānī* reasoning; rather, he revitalized Islamic law by infusing it with Sufi spirituality and, at times, employed *burhānī* reasoning in his philosophical critiques.³¹ Here, a clear epistemological tension emerges, for al-Jābirī, *fiqh* should be reoriented toward *burhānī* rationality, whereas for al-Ghazālī, *bayānī* reasoning must be illuminated by *‘irfānī* insight. When addressing *ṣalāt*, for example, the outward components—such as conditions and pillars that constitute the formal structure of prayer—fall within the domain of *fiqh*, while issues of inner presence, humility, concentration (*keḥshū*), and reverence belong to the domain of the Sufis.

Accordingly, whereas al-Jābirī advances what may be described as an “epistemic secularization”—the disentanglement of *burhānī* rationality from the constraints of *bayānī* and *‘irfānī*

²³ Hans Kelsen, *Pure Theory of Law*, 1st ed (University of California Press, 2022). 1-10.

²⁴ Akmal Bashori, *Filsafat Hukum Islam: Paradigma Filosofis Mengais Kebenangan Hukum Tuhan* (Kencana, 2020).

²⁵ Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Saqi Books [u.a.], 2002). 45-50; lihat juga Mohammed Arkoun, *Tārikhiyyat Al-Fikr al-‘Arabi al-Islami*, Terj. Hasyim Saleh (Markazul Inma’ al-Qaumi, 1998).

²⁶ Khaled M Aboe el-Fadl, *Speaking in God’s Name: Islamic Law, Authority, and Women* (Oneword Publications, 2003).

²⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993). 27-54.

²⁸ Alwan Khoiri, “The Integration Of Sharī’a And Sufism Practices,” *Teosofia: Indonesian Journal of Islamic Mysticism* 1, no. 1 (2012): 95, <https://journal.walisongo.ac.id/index.php/teosofia/article/view/619>.

²⁹ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, I. 12-15.

³⁰ Jābirī, *Bunyab Al-Aql ‘Arabi*, 230-240.

³¹ al-Jābirī, *Naqd Al-‘Aql al-‘Arabi*. 150-160.

modes—al-Ghazālī instead proposes an “integral sacralization,” namely the reconciliation of *bayānī*, *burhānī*, and *‘irfānī* epistemologies. The contrast between these positions is pronounced; al-Jābirī envisions a form of rational modernity inspired by Ibn Rushd, whereas al-Ghazālī aspires to an inner–outer unity of law and spirituality grounded in the Qur’an and the Sunnah. Within a modern intellectual horizon, al-Ghazālī’s synthesis may be read in parallel with Jürgen Habermas’s concept of communicative rationality, which interrelates norms, reason, and ethics,³² or with Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics as a fusion of horizons between text and interpreter.³³ In this sense, al-Ghazālī’s jurisprudential thought represents an articulation of transcendental rationality, a conception of law that does not terminate in technical calculations of licit and illicit, but rather functions as a moral architecture oriented toward human emancipation.

Al-Ghazālī maintains that *hidāyah* (divine guidance)—as the ultimate fruit of knowledge—possesses both a beginning and an end, encompassing outward aspects (such as conditions and pillars) as well as inward (esoteric) dimensions. Not everyone can attain the final stage without first completing the initial one, and no individual can access the inner dimension without mastering the outward form.³⁴ Accordingly, the attainment of knowledge of *ḥaqīqa* necessarily requires the integration of exoteric knowledge (*‘ilm al-zāhir*, namely *fiqh*) and esoteric knowledge (*‘ilm al-bāṭin*, namely *taṣawwuf*). Any *sharī‘a*—understood here as *fiqh*—that is not bound to *ḥaqīqa* is deemed unacceptable, just as any claim to *ḥaqīqa* that is not grounded in *sharī‘a* is destined to fail.³⁵

As the product of a scholar situated within a particular historical context—distinct from both earlier and later periods—it is reasonable to elaborate upon or even reconstruct established theories inherited from the past. Islamic legal discourse permits such endeavors, provided they are grounded in recognized methodological principles. With respect to the acquisition of knowledge, al-Ghazālī identifies two primary sources: revelation and intellection or intellectual intuition. The latter constitutes an immediate and direct form of knowledge that can be perceived and experienced inwardly and spiritually, referred to in the Islamic tradition as *al-‘ilm al-ḥudūrī*.³⁶

Kartanegara argues that, in the derivation of Islamic law, Muslim scholars employ not only demonstrative (*burhānī*) and empirical methods—each relying respectively on sensory observation and rational inference—but also an additional epistemic mode known as the intuitive (*‘irfānī*) approach. As noted by Sham C. Inati, Muslim intellectuals recognize two principal modes of acquiring knowledge (*‘ilm*): first, a movement from known objects to previously unknown ones; and second, knowledge obtained solely through direct illumination from the Divine. The former corresponds to demonstrative or logical reasoning, while the latter operates through the intuitive (*‘irfānī*) path.³⁷

The intuitive approach is presential in nature, insofar as its object is directly present within the knower’s consciousness; consequently, this mode of knowledge is termed *al-‘ilm al-ḥudūrī* (knowledge by presence). Amin Abdullah further elaborates that the relationship between subject

³² Jürgen Habermas et al., *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Nachdr., The Theory of Communicative Action / Jürgen Habermas. Transl. by Thomas MacCarthy, Vol. 1 (Beacon, 2007). 86-100.

³³ Hans-Georg Gadamer et al., *Truth and method*, 2., rev. ed., reprint, Continuum impacts (Continuum, 2011). 305-320.

³⁴ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Minhaj Al-Abidin* (Toha Putra, 2009). 3.

³⁵ Qusyairi Abul Qasim Abdul Karim Hawazin Al-, *Al-Risalah al-Qusyairiyah*, (Pustaka Amani, 2007). 104.

³⁶ Nasr Ḥamid Abū Zaid, *Maḥmūd Al-Naṣ; Dirāsāt Fi ‘Ulūm al-Qur’ān* (al-Markaz al-Tsaqafi al- ‘Arabi, 1994). 135.

³⁷ Mulyadi Kartanegara, “Pondasi Metafisik Bangunan Epestomologi Islam Perspektif Ilmu-Ilmu Filosofis,” in *Menyatukan Kembali Ilmu-Ilmu Agama Dan Umum* (Suka Press, 2003). 28.

and object within this epistemic framework is neither subjective—as is often the case in the *bayānī* tradition—nor purely objective, as emphasized in the *burhānī* tradition, but rather intersubjective. Truth, particularly in matters related to socio-religious life, is therefore intersubjective in character.³⁸

From this perspective, there is a pressing need to reconstruct and reassess approaches to Islamic legal reasoning that rely exclusively on *bayānī* and *burhānī* modes, and to incorporate *ʿirfānī* reasoning into the epistemology of Islamic *fiqh*. Within such an expanded epistemic framework, religions can be interpreted and rearticulated in a more profound, esoteric, and spiritual manner. A jurisprudential understanding that lacks an *ʿirfānī* dimension will face significant difficulties in engaging the realities of religious plurality, both internally and externally.³⁹ At a more technical and applicative level, Amin Abdullah has schematically illustrated how these three approaches can be integrated coherently and systematically.⁴⁰

Al-Ghazālī: Crisis, Quest, and Intellectual Integration

To discuss Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī within the framework of Islamic legal epistemology is to position him not merely as a historical figure, but as a conceptual architect who constructed an integrative foundation for Islamic intellectual reasoning. Born in Ṭūs, Khurāsān, in 450 AH/1058 CE and passing away in 505 AH/1111 CE, he lived during a period of profound intellectual turbulence marked by tensions among *kalām*, philosophy, jurisprudence, and Sufism. His significance lies in his epistemological response to this fragmentation. Through major works such as *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl*, *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, and *Tabāfut al-Falāsifah*,⁴¹ he emerged as one of the most influential figures in the Islamic intellectual tradition.⁴² Rather than aligning himself exclusively with a single discipline, he reconstructed the relationships among them within a coherent methodological structure.

The epistemological reconstruction he developed was rooted in his personal crisis of doubt. His scepticism toward sense perception and rational certainty did not culminate in nihilism, but instead led to a reordering of the hierarchy of knowledge.⁴³ For nearly two months, he was engulfed in profound uncertainty, approaching what he described as a loss of epistemic grounding. He characterized this phase as a “spiritual illness,” resolvable not solely through human logic but through divine illumination penetrating the heart.⁴⁴ From this experience emerged an epistemological framework that integrates reason, revelation, and mystical experience.⁴⁵ For al-Ghazālī, truth cannot be reduced either to textual authority (*bayānī*) or to logical demonstration (*burhānī*); it must be complemented by spiritual intuition (*ʿirfānī*). In this construction, *bayānī* provides the normative foundation of the Shariʿa; *burhānī* secures logical coherence and argumentative validity; and *ʿirfānī* animates the ethical and transcendental orientation of law.

³⁸ M. Amin Abdullah, *Islamic Studies Di Perguruan Tinggi: Pendekatan Integratif-Interkonektif* (Pustaka Pelajar, 2010). 210

³⁹ Abdullah, *Islamic Studies Di Perguruan Tinggi: Pendekatan Integratif-Interkonektif*. 211.

⁴⁰ Abdullah, *Islamic Studies Di Perguruan Tinggi: Pendekatan Integratif-Interkonektif*. 200-seterusnya.

⁴¹ George F. Hourani, “A Revised Chronology of Ghazālī’s Writings,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104, no. 2 (1984): 289–302, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/602173>.

⁴² Ameer Ali, *The Spirit of Islam* (Navila, 2008). 58.

⁴³ Sulaiman Dunyā, *Al-Ghazālī, Biografi Dan Pemikirannya*, 2nd ed. (Marja, 2012). 34.

⁴⁴ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh Min al-Ḍalāl* (Pustaka Progresif, 2001). 121.

⁴⁵ Hasib and Khasanah, “The Integration of Rationality and Spirituality.”

Together, these three epistemic instruments form an integrative and mutually reinforcing structure within Islamic legal thought.⁴⁶

His most significant contribution to Islamic legal epistemology is evident in his effort to integrate logic into *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Through works such as *al-Mustasfā* and *Mi'yār al-ʿIlm*, al-Ghazālī demonstrated that rational instruments are not a threat to revelation but rather tools for clarifying and systematizing it. At the same time, through *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, he criticized the tendency of jurisprudence to become trapped in legal formalism devoid of moral depth.⁴⁷ In doing so, he repositioned *fiqh* as a discipline that regulates not only outward actions but also cultivates inner ethical consciousness.

Conceptually, this synthesis produced a non-reductionist model of Islamic legal epistemology. Legal truth is not reduced either to textual literalism or to the autonomy of reason alone.⁴⁸ Rather, law is understood as the product of a dialectical interaction between the normativity of revelation, methodological rationality, and ethical consciousness.⁴⁹ This model opens the possibility for contemporary reconstruction: the *bayānī* paradigm can be transformed through a *maqāṣid*-oriented approach; *burbānī* reasoning can be emancipated through engagement with modern science and social theory; and the *ʿirfānī* dimension can be humanized as a foundation for public ethics.

In *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, al-Ghazālī sought to restore the integrity of *fiqh* by recovering its moral and spiritual essence. Jurisprudence, in his view, must not remain confined to formal legality but should be oriented toward the purification of the soul and the realization of human welfare (*maṣlaḥah*).⁵⁰ In *al-Mustasfā*, he demonstrated remarkable methodological depth in *uṣūl al-fiqh* by employing logical instruments systematically and rigorously.⁵¹ This synthesis establishes him not merely as a critic of philosophy or a defender of Sufism, but as an architect of Islamic legal epistemology capable of bridging Sharīʿa, reason, and spirituality. In this regard, M. Amin Abdullah observes that al-Ghazālī was critical of nearly all intellectual traditions of his time, yet ultimately arrived at a more comprehensive and integrative synthesis.⁵² He demonstrated that epistemic crisis can generate intellectual creativity, and that the integration of jurisprudence, philosophy, and Sufism constitutes a pathway toward a living, rational, and spiritually grounded Islamic law.⁵³ It is this legacy that has positioned al-Ghazālī as a central figure in the development of Islamic legal epistemology up to the modern era.

Al-Ghazālī and the Reformulation of an Integrative Epistemology of Fiqh

⁴⁶ Mila Maulida Barrotuzzahro and Agus Khunaiḥi, "Integration of Kalam, Jurisprudence, and Sufism in Al-Ghazali's Thought: Building a Rational and Spiritual Islam," *Cendekiawan : Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Studi Keislaman* 4, no. 2 (2025): 695–98, <https://zia-research.com/index.php/cendekiawan/article/view/344>.

⁴⁷ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, I. 30.

⁴⁸ Ahmad Agus Ramdlany, "Law Changes in Islamic Law (Review of Concepts, Principles and Methodology)," *Technium Social Sciences Journal* 50 (November 2023): 157–66, <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v50i1.9884>.

⁴⁹ Mohd Zuhdi Marsuki, *Al-Ghazālī's View on The Role of Ethics in Islamic Jurisprudence* (MAZ Publications, 2024). 84-85.

⁵⁰ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, I. 12-15.

⁵¹ Ebrahim EI Moosa, "The Legal Philosophy of Al-Ghazali: Law, Language and Theology in al-Mustasfa" (Disertasi, University of Cape Town, 1995), <https://open.uct.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/a2f0e892-dafe-4988-826d-46d48863164e/content>.

⁵² Amin Abdullah, *Studi Agama: Normativitas Atau Historisitas?* (Pustaka Pelajar, 1996). 266.

⁵³ Hava Lazarus Yafeh, "Philosophical Terms as a Criterion of Authenticity in the Writings of Al-Ghazzali," *Studia Islamica*, no. 25 (1966): 111, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595165>.

Al-Ghazālī's integrative reasoning did not seek to escape the established framework of imitative reasoning; rather, he exercised independent *ijtihād* in formulating religious legal knowledge. This intellectual project is profoundly explored in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (*The Revival of the Religious Sciences*), a work that represents al-Ghazālī's epistemic endeavor to reconstruct the foundations of Islamic legal knowledge. According to al-Ghazālī, knowledge had become fragmented, *fiqh* had stagnated in literal normative formalism, as noted by Robert Gleave;⁵⁴ philosophy had become trapped in speculative rationality detached from the *sharī'a*; while Sufism had drifted toward a potentially antinomian mysticism.⁵⁵ In this context, the *Iḥyā'* emerged as a "metaphysics of enlightenment," reuniting fragmented modes of thought through the integration of law, logic, and intuition. Analytically, Sujat Zubaidi argues that the *Iḥyā'* not only contains an ethical elaboration of *fiqh*, but is also intertwined with an epistemic-logical construction further developed in *al-Mustaṣfā min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*.⁵⁶

Within his epistemological framework, al-Ghazālī places reason (*burhān*) at the center of knowledge. Reason is understood as the essential quality of human beings that distinguishes them from other creatures.⁵⁷ According to him, reason is fundamentally capable of grasping reality correctly; error does not originate from reason itself, but from the dominance of *khayāl* (imagination) and *wahm* (doubt).⁵⁸ Therefore, al-Ghazālī's critique of rationality is not absolute. Rather, he rejects three forms of rational deviation: (1) the corrupted rationality of the Sophists and the Bāṭiniyyah,⁵⁹ (2) the reduction of reason to mere apologetic theological polemics,⁶⁰ and (3) methodological errors in syllogistic reasoning.⁶¹ Within al-Jābirī's framework, this position may be understood as an attempt to rationalize the epistemology of *fiqh*, since al-Ghazālī rejects knowledge founded upon imagination, doubt, or unmethodological theological disputes. Nevertheless, reason retains legitimacy as an instrument for verifying knowledge and as a tool of *ijtihād* for interpreting social change.

This perspective explains why al-Ghazālī regarded logic (*mantiq*)⁶² as the prerequisite for all branches of knowledge.⁶³ According to Wael B. Hallaq, this position reflects the influence of the Aristotelian tradition within the epistemological structure of his thought.⁶⁴ In *Mi'yār al-'Ilm* and *al-Qiṣṭas al-Mustaṣim*, for instance, logic is presented, as noted by Yaman Tawpek, as an instrument for verifying knowledge, particularly through syllogism and analogy, so that the process of legal

⁵⁴ Robert Gleave, *Islam and Literalism: Literal Meaning and Interpretation in Islamic Legal Theory* (Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

⁵⁵ Ghazālī, *Al-Munqiz Min al-Dalāl*. 36.

⁵⁶ Sujat Zubaidi Saleh et al., "On Imam Ghazālī's Farḍ 'Ain and Farḍ Kifāyah: An Epistemological Approach," *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 30, no. 1 (2022): 48, <https://doi.org/10.24014/jush.v30i1.14661>.

⁵⁷ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, III. 7-11.

⁵⁸ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, III. 9.

⁵⁹ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, I. 241-242.

⁶⁰ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, I. 33.

⁶¹ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ Al-Anwār* (Dar Qawmiyah, 1964). 219.

⁶² Kuatnya perhatian al-Ghazālī dibidang ini dinyatakan oleh al-Jabiri bahwa: sekiranya ada seorang ilmuwan yang tetap mengembalikan citra logika seperti al-Farabi dalam artian mengikutinya untuk kemudian diterapkan dalam pola bayani, orang itu tidak lain adalah *hujjat al-Islam al-Ghazālī*. Jābirī, *Bunyah Al-Aql 'Arabī*, 436.

⁶³ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, I. 10.; Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfā Min 'Ilm al-Uṣūl*. 4-11.

⁶⁴ Wael B. Hallaq, "Logic, Formal Arguments and Formalization of Arguments in Sunnī Jurisprudence," *Arabica* 37, no. 3 (1990): 315–58, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4057146>.

istinbāt does not fall into subjectivity or methodological error.⁶⁵ Consequently, al-Ghazālī's epistemology of fiqh does not treat reality as static; rather, it opens space for ijtihād as a creative process for responding to social change.⁶⁶ Within this framework, uṣūl al-fiqh functions as a rational methodology that enables revealed texts to remain relevant and compatible with evolving social realities and the changing needs of legal society.⁶⁷

This epistemological reformulation becomes evident in al-Ghazālī's attempt to shift the dominance of *bayānī* reasoning toward a dialogue with *burhānī* reasoning. He sought to harmonize analogical textualism (*qiyās*) with the rationality of legal preference (*istiḥsān*) and public welfare (*istiṣlāḥ*),⁶⁸ while complementing them with a spiritual dimension (*'irfānī*) that enriches private legal practice.⁶⁹ However, when examined through the epistemological framework of al-Jābirī, the integration proposed by al-Ghazālī appears ambiguous. According to al-Jābirī, the stagnation of Islamic civilization resulted precisely from the dominance of textual-normative (*bayānī*) and mystical-gnostic (*'irfānī*) modes of reasoning, which marginalized rational-demonstrative (*burhānī*) thought.⁷⁰

Al-Ghazālī's rationality nevertheless did not attain full epistemic autonomy in the manner of *burhānī* reasoning within the tradition of Ibn Rushd.⁷¹ Although, in legal epistemology, Ibn Rushd explicitly acknowledged in "*al-Darūrī fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*" that he followed the formulation of al-Mustaṣfā, he discarded formal logic on the grounds that it did not belong to the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh* itself.⁷² In the *Iḥyā'*, *burhānī* epistemology is indeed recognized by al-Ghazālī, yet its function remains subordinate to the authority of the text (*bayānī*) and controlled within a religious-sufistic framework. Logic is accepted only insofar as it strengthens the legitimacy of revelation and safeguards the orthodoxy of the sharī'a. Consequently, reason in al-Ghazālī's epistemology is not an independent source of knowledge, but rather an instrument operating under the hegemony of religious texts.⁷³

The *'irfānī* dimension in al-Ghazālī's epistemology is clearly reflected in his concept of the heart (*qalb*) as the medium for receiving divine illumination. According to Loumia Ferhat, the heart is not merely the center of spirituality, but also the locus for the transformation of knowledge and character. Through *tazkiyat al-nafs* and spiritual discipline, human beings attain knowledge that is not only cognitive in nature, but also ethically transformative. Consequently, al-Ghazālī's epistemology stands at the intersection of Sufism and philosophy, since knowledge is inseparable

⁶⁵ Yaman Towpek and Kamarudin Salleh, "The Writing Methodology of Mi'yār al-'Ilm Fī Fann al-Mantiq," *Journal of Usuluddin* 45, no. 2 (2017): 150, <https://doi.org/10.22452/usuluddin.vol45no2.6>.

⁶⁶ Muhyar Fanani, *Ilmu Ushul Fikih Di Mata Filsafat Ilmu*, (Walisongo Press, 2009).

⁶⁷ Abu Yasid, *Metodologi Penafsiran Teks, Memahami Ilmu Ushul Fikih Sebagai Epistemologi Hukum*, (Erlangga, 2012). xvii.

⁶⁸ Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfā Min 'Ilm Uṣūl*. 74.

⁶⁹ Saleh et al., "On Imam Ghazālī's Farḍ 'Ain and Farḍ Kifāyah." 84; Ahmad Zayyadi et al., "Transformation of Al-Ghazzali's Thinking from Rational to Suphistic Trends," *Indonesian Journal of Social Science Research* 3, no. 2 (2022): 82–87, <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijssr.03.02.03>.

⁷⁰ Muhammad Abid al-Jābirī, *Takwin Al-Aql al-Arabi*, (Markaz Dirasat al-Wihdat al-Arabiyyah, 1989).

⁷¹ M. Chazim Munajib and Abdul Basit, "Epistemology of Islamic Philosophy: An Analysis and Critique of Ibn Rushd's Epistemology," *Green Philosophy: International Journal of Religious Education and Philosophy* 3, no. 1 (2026): 13, <https://doi.org/10.70062/greenphilosophy.v3i1.268>.

⁷² Aksin Wijaya, *Nalar Kritis Epistemologi Muslim*, (IRCiSoD, 2024). 147-149.

⁷³ Jābirī, *Takwin Al-Aql al-Arabi*.

from the formation of morality.⁷⁴ From the perspective of Mohammed Abed al-Jābirī, al-Ghazālī indeed refined the relationship among these three epistemologies, yet he did not grant full autonomy to either reason or intuition. *Burbānī* epistemology remained positioned as a supporting instrument of *bayānī* reasoning, while *‘irfānī* knowledge was carefully regulated so as not to transcend the boundaries of the *sharī’a*.⁷⁵

This *‘irfānī* orientation becomes even more pronounced in *Mishkāt al-Anwār* and *Jawābir al-Qur’ān*. In the *Mishkāt*, knowledge is understood as divine light radiating into the heart after a process of spiritual purification. The heart thus becomes the medium of *ma’rifah* that transcends formal-rational knowledge. Hikmet Yaman explains that the intellect (*al-rūḥ al-‘aqlī*) is capable of comprehending meanings beyond the reach of the senses and imagination.⁷⁶ This perspective is further reinforced in the *Jawābir*, where al-Ghazālī asserts that the Qur’an contains inner layers of meaning accessible through a *maqāṣid*-oriented approach. He further classifies the *maqāṣid* of the Qur’an into two categories: the primary *maqāṣid* (*al-uṣūl al-muhimmah*), which include knowledge of Allah, the path toward Him, and the human condition upon reaching Him; and the complementary *maqāṣid* (*al-rawāḍif wa al-tawābi*), which include narratives of the righteous, refutations of the opponents of Islam, and the spiritual-moral provisions necessary for the journey toward Allah.⁷⁷

This classification demonstrates that the Qur’an contains not only normative legal prescriptions, but also theological, ethical, and spiritual dimensions oriented toward the *maqāṣid* of the Qur’an. From the perspective of al-Jābirī, such a reading reflects a strong tendency toward *ta’wīl ‘irfānī*, namely the uncovering of the deepest meanings of the text through spiritual symbolism. Although al-Ghazālī continued to restrict esoteric interpretation so that it would not transcend the boundaries of the *sharī’a*, al-Jābirī argues that this epistemology still grants a dominant space to mystical reasoning in understanding revelation. Consequently, al-Ghazālī placed both reason and intuition under epistemic control, while the text remained the primary authority.⁷⁸ Within this framework, Lasmi Anisa Putri and colleagues argue that *Iḥyā’* produced a holistic yet hierarchical epistemological system,⁷⁹ in which *bayānī* occupies the highest position, while *burbānī* and *‘irfānī* function mainly to reinforce the authority of the text,⁸⁰ as reflected in al-Ghazālī’s statement: “*inna adillata al-aḥkām al-Qur’ān wa al-sunnah wa al-ijmā’ wa dalīl al-‘aql*”⁸¹ (Indeed, the sources of legal rulings are the Qur’an, the Sunnah, consensus (*ijmā’*), and rational proof).

In the process of legal *istinbāṭ*, al-Ghazālī employed the Qur’an, hadith, the opinions of the Companions, the *Tābi’in*, jurists (*fuqahā*), and scholars of *ta’wīl*. However, in *Iḥyā’*, he primarily emphasized the Qur’an, hadith, *ijmā’*, and the traditions of the Companions as the principal

⁷⁴ Loumia Ferhat, “Al-Ghazālī’s Heart as a Medium of Light: Illumination and the Soteriological Process,” *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 4, nos. 1–2 (2020): 201–22, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-12340050>.

⁷⁵ Jābirī, *Bunyab Al-Aql ‘Arabī*, 270–278.

⁷⁶ Hikmet Yaman, “The Light Verse between Philosophy and Sufism: A Comparative Analysis of the Interpretations by Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī,” *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 67, no. 67 (2024): 241, <https://doi.org/10.15370/maruiid.1553355>.

⁷⁷ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Jawābir Al-Qur’ān*, Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā al-Qabbānī (ed.) (Dār Iḥyā’ al-‘Ulūm, 1986). 23–24.

⁷⁸ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ Ulūm al-Dīn*, II. 80.

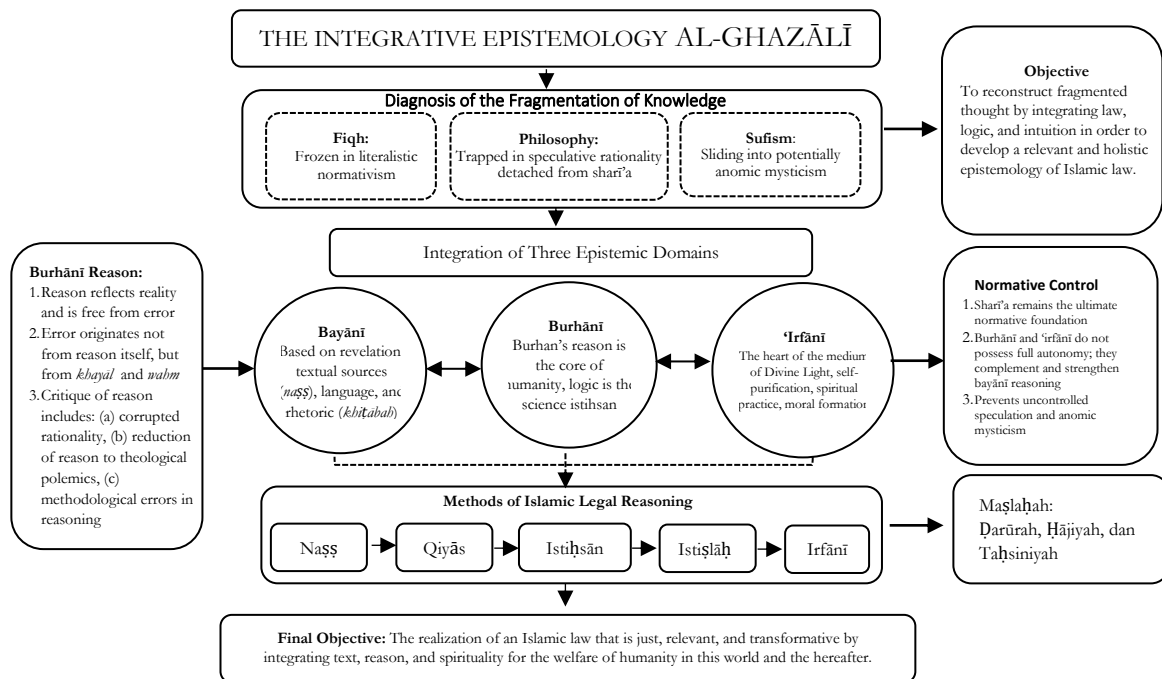
⁷⁹ Lasmi Anisa Putri and Muhammad Zalnur, “Rekonstruksi Epistemologi Islam: Integrasi Bayani, Irfani, Dan Burhani Untuk Resiliensi Pengetahuan Di Era Digital,” *Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* (Semarang) 10, no. 1 (2025). 115.

⁸⁰ Ghazālī, *Al-Mustasfā Min ‘Ilm Uṣūl*. 9; Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ Ulūm al-Dīn*, I. 34–38.

⁸¹ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ Ulūm al-Dīn*, II. 80.

normative foundations.⁸² Ebrahim Moosa further identifies *istiṣlah* as the fifth legal source within al-Ghazālī's system.⁸³ At the practical level, al-Ghazālī developed the concept of *maṣlaḥah* through three categories: *ḍarūrah*, *ḥājīyah*, and *taḥsīniyah*.⁸⁴ This scheme demonstrates that the legal dimension in the *Iḥyā'* does not stop at the literal meaning of the text, but is also directed toward the protection of human welfare. In his analysis, Wael B. Hallaq describes *maṣlaḥah*, including al-Ghazālī's formulation of it, as a form of "religious utilitarianism."⁸⁵ Nevertheless, from al-Jābirī's perspective, burhānī rationality within al-Ghazālī's epistemology never achieves full autonomy, since its function remains to preserve the harmony between shari'a, logic, and spirituality.

Figure 1:
The Diagram of al-Ghazālī's Integrative Epistemology of Islamic Law



Source: Extracted and reconstructed from the preceding discussion.

The foregoing discussion demonstrates al-Ghazālī's strong commitment to positioning the Qur'an and the Sunnah as the highest sources of knowledge and Islamic law, without opposing revelation and reason. According to Ebrahim Moosa, al-Ghazālī did not merely follow the methodological framework of Al-Shāfi'ī and earlier scholars of *uṣūl al-fiqh*,⁸⁶ but rather developed a broader epistemological synthesis. Mustafa Abu Sway explains that the *bayānī* orientation appears dominant when al-Ghazālī discusses fiqh and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, particularly in his interpretation of the

⁸² Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*, II. 23.

⁸³ Ebrahim Moosa, "Languages Of Change In Islamic Law: Redefining Death In Modernity," *Islamic Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999): 305–42, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20837047>.

⁸⁴ Ghazālī, *Al-Mustasfā Min 'Ilm Uṣūl*. 275.

⁸⁵ Wael B. Hallaq, *A History of Islamic Legal Theories: An Introduction to Sunnah Usul al-Fiqh* (Cambridge University Press, 1997). 214–231.

⁸⁶ Ebrahim EI Moosa, "The Legal Philosophy of Al-Ghazali: Law, Language and Theology in al-Mustasfa" (Disertasi, University of Cape Town, 1995), 25–26. <https://open.uct.ac.za/server/api/core/bitstreams/a2f0e892-dafe-4988-826d-46d48863164e/content>.

Qur'an, hadith, āthār, akhbār, and the opinions of scholars.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the *burhānī* approach is evident in his use of logic and rational argumentation, whereas the '*irfānī*' approach is most visible in his discussions of Sufism and the inner dimensions of fiqh.

These three approaches form a complementary methodological structure. *Bayānī* functions as the normative foundation grounded in the authority of scripture and the Islamic scholarly tradition. *Burhānī* positions reason as a rational instrument for understanding empirical reality and the psychological dimensions of human beings, as reflected in al-Ghazālī's discussions of the *naḥs*, *ruh*, intellect, and heart (*qalb*) in *rub' al-muhlikāt*. Meanwhile, the '*irfānī*' approach is directed toward the purification of the soul and the moral-spiritual formation of human beings through inner experience in pursuit of closeness to God. For this reason, *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn* is not merely a Sufi work, but also a project for the ethical and spiritual revitalization of Islamic law.

This epistemological integration is clearly visible in al-Ghazālī's discussion of *ṭahārah* (purification). He divides purification into four levels: (1) external purification from ritual impurity and filth, (2) purification of bodily members from sin, (3) purification of the heart from blameworthy traits, and (4) purification of the inner self from all besides God, which represents the spiritual station of the prophets and the *ṣiddiqūn*.⁸⁸ The first level reflects the bayānī approach, emphasizing the formal legality of worship, while the remaining three levels demonstrate the '*irfānī*' dimension oriented toward moral and spiritual cultivation.⁸⁹ A similar pattern appears in his classification of fasting into *ṣaum al-awām*, *ṣaum al-khawāṣ*, and *ṣaum khawāṣ al-khawāṣ*.⁹⁰ According to Dajani, this is where the uniqueness of al-Ghazālī's fiqh epistemology lies, fiqh is not merely a formal legal system, but also a means of holistic, flexible, and transformative moral-spiritual transformation.⁹¹

Consequently, according to al-Jābirī, the *Iḥyā'* indirectly reinforced the stagnation of Arab-Islamic epistemology. Al-Ghazālī's project succeeded in saving religion from the secularization of philosophy and from mystical deviation, but at a considerable epistemic cost: the emergence of a deeply religious-spiritual civilization lacking autonomous rationality. In this sense, the *Iḥyā'* may be read as both a "savior of religion" and a "seal upon reason."⁹² Al-Ghazālī did not fully undertake an epistemological reform of religious law; rather, he sought to revive (*iḥyā'*) the religious sciences through the reactivation of traditional spirituality. His project was therefore more restorative than revolutionary, although it nevertheless opened critical space for the reconstruction of Islamic epistemology in the modern era.

Epistemic Reconstruction of al-Ghazālī's Integrative Rationality: Toward a New Synthesis of Modern Legal Epistemology

For some modern scholars such as Frank Griffel, the *Iḥyā'* in fact opened a new horizon for the epistemology of Islamic law. Al-Ghazālī positioned morality and spirituality at the center of knowledge, so that Islamic legal epistemology was not merely directed toward logical objectivity, but also toward a teleological orientation, namely the purification of the soul and closeness to

⁸⁷ MUstafa Abu Sway, *A Studi in Islamic Epistemology Al-Ghazali* (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1996). 40-53.

⁸⁸ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*, I. 125.

⁸⁹ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*, I. 151.

⁹⁰ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' Ulūm al-Dīn*, I. 68.

⁹¹ Dajani, *Sufish and Shari'a: The Forgotten School of Mercy*. 305.

⁹² al-Jābirī, *Naqd Al-'Aql al-'Arabi*. 121-125.

God.⁹³ Ebrahim Moosa likewise rejects readings that portray al-Ghazālī merely as a figure of orthodoxy or the “destroyer of philosophy.” Instead, he argues that al-Ghazālī constructed a creative intellectual tradition through the “poetics of imagination,” namely the capacity of imagination to mediate revelation, reason, symbol, ethics, and spiritual experience.⁹⁴

In contrast to Moosa, Muḥammad ‘Ābid al-Jābirī emphasizes the crisis caused by the subordination of burhānī reason. Yet al-Ghazālī simultaneously offered an alternative epistemological model in which knowledge is never neutral, but value-laden and transcendently oriented. In this context, the encounter between al-Ghazālī and al-Jābirī reveals two competing epistemological horizons. Al-Ghazālī limits the autonomy of reason in order to safeguard religion, whereas al-Jābirī limits the dominance of textual authority in order to preserve rationality. This tension is ultimately productive, since it opens the possibility for formulating a contemporary epistemology of Islamic law that is neither trapped within textual hegemony nor dissolved into secular rationalism. The crucial question, then, is whether a new epistemological *Iḥyā’* can emerge—one that not only revives religion, but also liberates reason.

This question was later addressed by a number of modern Muslim scholars. Among them was Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī in *al-Muwāfaqāt*,⁹⁵ although, according to Anis Masduki, his integration remained largely confined to the relationship between text and social reality.⁹⁶ Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī attempted to reconcile the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of Islam,⁹⁷ while Louay Safi proposed an integrated approach between Islamic and Western intellectual traditions.⁹⁸ Likewise, M. Amin Abdullah, inspired by al-Ghazālī, developed the paradigm of scientific integration-interconnection,⁹⁹ and Nur Syam advanced a cross-disciplinary approach to Islamic legal studies.¹⁰⁰ Akmal Bashori further introduced the “ultra-doctrinal-method” paradigm, which integrates the epistemology of *turāth* with modern scientific disciplines.¹⁰¹ These developments cannot be separated from al-Ghazālī’s intellectual legacy in the *Iḥyā’*. Nevertheless, while al-Ghazālī’s project largely remained within the interdisciplinary integration of Islamic sciences, these later scholars moved beyond the boundaries of classical Islamic disciplines by engaging modern social sciences and contemporary critical thought.

⁹³ Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology* (Oxford University Press, 2009). 74-79.

⁹⁴ Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination*. 239-240.

⁹⁵ Abū Ishāq al-Syāṭibī, *Al-Muwāfaqāt Fi Uṣūl al-Syari’ah*, vol. 3 (Dār al-Fikr al-Arabi, t.t.).

⁹⁶ Anis Masduki, *Integrasi Ilmu Dalam Al-Muwāfaqāt, Menuju ARab Baru Paradigma Epistemologi Hukum Islam*, (Istana Agency, 2022).

⁹⁷ Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī, *Ḥijab Al-Balighah*, vol. 1 (Dar Khutub al-Ilmiyah, 1992).

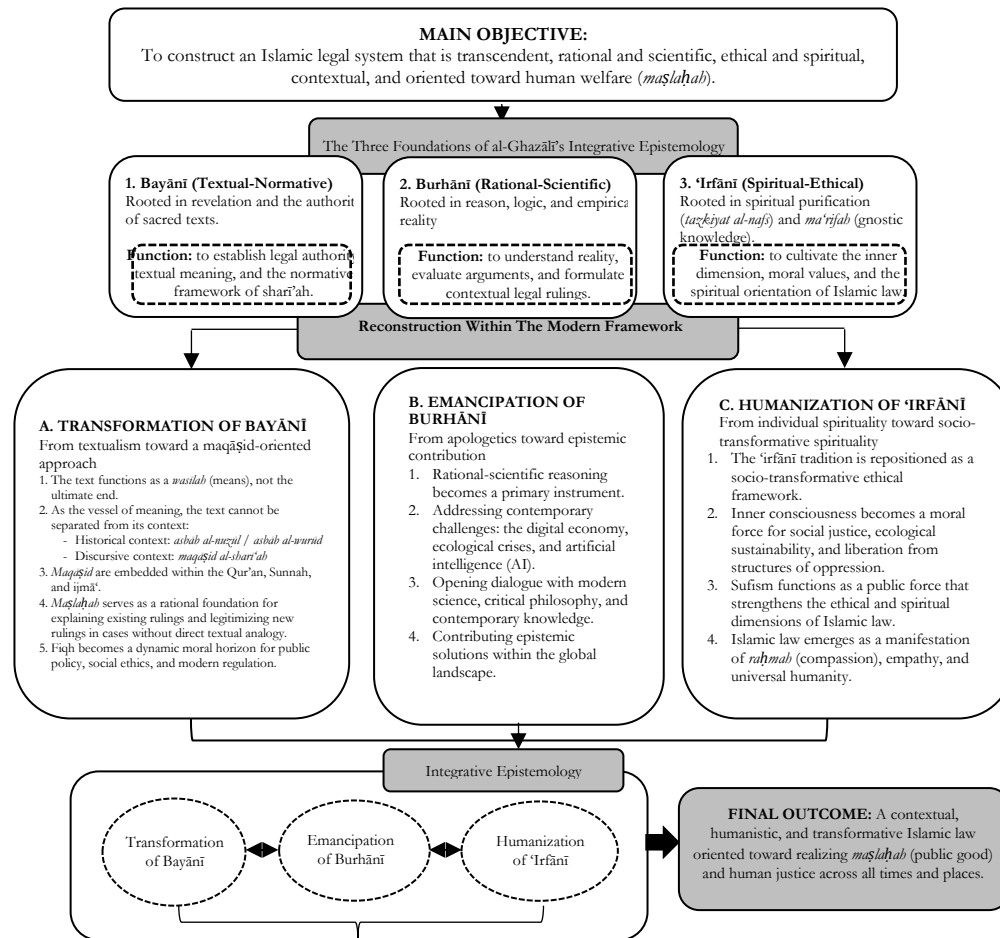
⁹⁸ Louay Safi, *Ancangan Metodologi Alternatif: Sebuah Refleksi Perbandingan Metode Penelitian Islam Dan Barat*, Terj. Imam Khoiri (Tiara Wacana, 2001).

⁹⁹ Abdullah, *Islamic Studies Di Perguruan Tinggi: Pendekatan Integratif-Interkonektif*.

¹⁰⁰ Nur Syam, *Integrasi Ilmu Mazhab Indonesia: Studi Interdisipliner, Crossdisipliner, Multidisiplin, Dan Transdisipliner*, (Kencana Media Group, 2023).

¹⁰¹ Akmal Bashori, “Pembauran Hukum Ekonomi Syari’ah Di Indonesia: Studi Pemikiran K.H. Ma’ruf Amin” (Disertasi, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2025).

Figure 2.
Scheme for the Epistemic Reconstruction of the Integrative Reasoning in Fiqh Scholarship



Source: Compiled and analyzed by the author.

The scheme above reflects the opening of new possibilities for reading the epistemology of modern Islamic law in a more radical and productive manner. Contemporary discourse on the epistemology of Islamic law cannot be separated from efforts to reconstruct the intellectual reasoning of the classical Islamic tradition, which revolves around three principal epistemic modes: bayānī, burhānī, and 'irfānī. If al-Ghazālī successfully synthesized these elements within a distinctive medieval integrative framework, contemporary challenges demand their “rearticulation” so that Islamic law can engage critically with global realities. The task facing Muslim jurists today is therefore to develop this synthesis within the context of modern civilization, characterized by critical rationality, empirical science, and social complexity. This reconstruction may be traced through several major directions.

First, the transformation of bayānī reason. Bayānī should no longer be reduced to rigid textual formalism (*naṣṣ*), as portrayed in al-Jābirī's formulation of Arab reason, but must instead be understood as a foundation of ethical values and moral orientation. According to Abū Ishāq al-Shāṭibī, textual expressions (*ṣiḡḥāt*) function as intermediaries (*wasilah*) for conveying intended

meanings.¹⁰² Consequently, the text cannot be abandoned, since it remains the vessel through which meaning is communicated. At the same time, texts are inseparable from their contexts, including the circumstances of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl* and *asbāb al-wurūd*) as well as the broader discursive context of maqāṣid. Empirical context is explicit, whereas maqāṣid represents an implicit discursive horizon embedded within the Qur'an, Sunnah, and ijma'.¹⁰³

Within the modern paradigm, Jasser Auda argues that revelation must be interpreted through a maqāṣid-oriented approach so that Islamic law does not become trapped in literalism, but instead functions as a flexible and adaptive moral guide responsive to social change.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Felicitas Opwis emphasizes that *maṣlaḥah* clarifies the underlying rationale of Islamic legal rulings and, in cases lacking direct textual analogies in the Qur'an or ḥadīth, may justify the formulation of new legal judgments.¹⁰⁵ Through this framework, fiqh is no longer understood merely as positive law, but as a dynamic moral horizon capable of guiding public policy, social ethics, and modern regulatory systems.¹⁰⁶

Second, the emancipation of burhānī reason. Rational-scientific reasoning (*burhānī*) must not merely be acknowledged, but should function as a primary instrument for addressing contemporary challenges such as bioethics, the digital economy, ecological crises, and artificial intelligence (AI). The epistemology of Islamic law is therefore required to engage in serious dialogue with modern science, critical philosophy, and contemporary social theory.¹⁰⁷ At this point, Islamic law is challenged not merely to adopt an apologetic posture, but also to contribute epistemic and normative solutions within the global intellectual landscape.¹⁰⁸

Third, the humanization of 'irfān. The 'irfānī tradition, long associated with individual spiritual experience, must in the modern context be repositioned as the foundation of a transformative social ethic. Inner consciousness should no longer be understood merely as an elitist mystical experience, but as a moral force for social justice, ecological sustainability, and the liberation of humanity from structures of oppression. In this sense, Sufism does not remain confined to the private sphere, but becomes a public ethical force that strengthens the moral and spiritual dimensions of Islamic law.¹⁰⁹

Implications for Gender Equality in Women's Labor

Within the context of global modernity, the issue of women workers reveals a significant gap between contemporary socio-economic dynamics and the development of *fiqh* discourse. Classical *fiqh al-mu'āmalāt* emerged within social structures that did not fully recognize women's equal participation in economic life; consequently, labor relations between men and women were rarely

¹⁰² Syaṭībī, *Al-Muwafaqat Fi Uṣūl al-Syari'ah*, vol. 2. 73.

¹⁰³ Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfā Min 'Ilm Uṣūl*. 179.

¹⁰⁴ Jasser Auda, *Maqasid Al-Shari'ah As Philosophy of Islamic Law* (The International of Islamic Thought, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ Felicitas Opwis, "New Trends in Islamic Legal Theory: Maqāṣid al-Shari'a as a New Source of Law?," *Die Welt Des Islams* 57, no. 1 (2017): 7–32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44646040>.

¹⁰⁶ Abdullah Saeed, "Trends in Contemporary Islam: A Preliminary Attempt at a Classification," *The Muslim World* 97, no. 3 (2007): 395–404, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2007.00186.x>.

¹⁰⁷ Bashori, "Pembaruan Hukum Ekonomi Syari'ah Di Indonesia: Studi Pemikiran K.H. Ma'ruf Amin." 244–246.

¹⁰⁸ al-Jābirī, *Naqd Al-'Aql al-'Arabi*; Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511801044>.

¹⁰⁹ Nasr Sayyid Hossein, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (SUNY Press, 1989); Mohammed Arkoun and Robert D. Lee, *Rethinking Islam*, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429304651>.

treated as a central juridical concern.¹¹⁰ This limitation is not merely historical in nature but continues to affect the slow articulation of *fiqh* in responding to the complex realities of global labor markets, ranging from migrant workers to digital platform labor.

At the global level, reports issued by the *International Labour Office* (ILO) consistently indicate persistent wage gaps, gender-based occupational segregation, and the vulnerability of women within informal sectors and global supply chains.¹¹¹ This demonstrates that marginalization is not a normative assumption but a documented structural reality.¹¹² In this context, *fiqh* cannot remain defensive or apologetic; rather, it must undertake an epistemological reconstruction that enables meaningful engagement with empirical data, social theory, and international legal regimes.

The reconstruction of al-Ghazālī's integrative legal epistemology may be productively applied to the sphere of protecting labor rights and human dignity. The emancipation of *burhānī* reasoning requires data-driven analyses of wage disparities, the exploitation of migrant labor, and the impact of global market policies on women. The transformation of the *bayānī* paradigm encourages a maqāṣid-oriented reading of texts concerning labor, maintenance (*nafaqah*), and justice, so that they are not interpreted in a "patriarchal-formalistic" manner, but rather as principles of protection and substantive equality. Meanwhile, the humanization of the *'irfānī* dimension cultivates an ethical consciousness grounded in *karāmah insāniyyah* (human dignity) as the foundation for social advocacy. Through this framework, Islamic law can contribute to a global normative order that guarantees justice, security, and the empowerment of women workers.

From this integration emerges a progressive, humanistic, and cosmopolitan epistemology of Islamic law, one that is not confined to the static legacy of classical *fiqh*, but transforms into a legal paradigm responsive to the complexities of modernity. Through such epistemological exploration, contemporary Islamic law may be projected not merely as a normative system binding upon Muslims, but as an alternative model of legal epistemology for the global community: a system that unites text, reason, and spirituality within a transformative, humanistic, and emancipatory horizon.

Conclusion

Through the synthesis of *bayānī*, *burhānī*, and *'irfānī*, Al-Ghazālī advances an integrative epistemology that rejects the fragmentation of reason. He employs the *bayānī* mode when addressing issues closely related to Islamic law (*fiqh*) and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, particularly in interpreting scriptural texts. The *burhānī* mode serves to reinforce logical and philosophical argumentation, while the *'irfānī* mode discloses the inward, spiritual dimension of both jurisprudence and Sufism. These three modes do not constitute a rigid hierarchy; rather, they form an interconnected epistemic network that mutually sustains one another. Al-Ghazālī's intellectual legacy, however, does not remain confined to the medieval period. On the contrary, it challenges the modern world—marked by critical rationality, empirical science, and social complexity—to undertake a renewed articulation. Accordingly, the reconstruction of his legal epistemology may be read as a methodological agenda that opens dialogue with global realities. The emancipation of *burhānī* reasoning situates critical rationality and empirical science as partners in *ijtihad*; the humanization of the *'irfānī* dimension transforms spirituality into an ethical force for social justice and sustainability; and the transformation of the *bayānī* paradigm reinterprets texts through a maqāṣid-

¹¹⁰ Bashori, "Pemberuan Hukum Ekonomi Syari'ah Di Indonesia: Studi Pemikiran K.H. Ma'ruf Amin." 101.

¹¹¹ Lansky et al., *Wanita, Gender, Dan Bekerja*, Biro Kerjasama Luarnegeri (ed.) (Kementerian Pekerjaan RI, 2020).

¹¹² Lansky et al., *Wanita, Gender, Dan Bekerja*. 65-93.

oriented and contextual approach. Through this synthesis, Islamic law moves beyond legal formalism toward a humanistic and transformative legal ethics. It functions not merely as an internally binding normative system, but also as an alternative legal epistemology that integrates text, reason, and spirituality in responding to the complexities of global modernity.

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