The Making of a Muslim Reformer: Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917-1996) and Islam in
Postcolonial Egypt, 1947-1967

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ABSTRACT

The Making of a Muslim Reformer: Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917-1996) and Islam in Postcolonial Egypt, 1947-1967

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This is an intellectual biography of the classically trained Egyptian Muslim scholar, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917-1996). A one-time leading intellectual of Egypt's influential Islamic organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, Ghazālī was a popular author with a vast public following. Although his ideas have shaped the trajectories of various Islamic groups that emerged in Egypt during the 1970s "Islamic Revival," he remains understudied. Through an analysis of his writings, this study presents a novel account on modern Islamic political thought, arguing that its sources extend well beyond what the secondary literature, as well as Muslims today, portray as the mainstays of the Islamic tradition—that is, the Qur'ān, the Sunna (Prophetic traditions), and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). In contrast, it places Sufism and Islamic philosophy, or more specifically Islamic philosophical ethics, at the heart of Ghazālī's modern-day political critiques. Additionally, it moves beyond the scholarly narrative that depicts contemporary Islamic political thought as simply Islamic reformulations of concepts and categories derived from modern Western social thought. By examining Ghazālī's considerable interest in Euro-American self-help, spiritualism, and psychical research, it shows how his engagement with these new forms of religion was mediated by Islamic theological concepts, which he deployed to not only make sense of his interlocutors' claims, but also correct and build upon their work. In highlighting the corrective and productive impulse behind his engagement with Euro-American thought, it demonstrates that Ghazālī was not merely an assimilator of Western ideas, but rather a contributor to a global project of rethinking the human potential.

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INTRODUCTION

The Making of a Muslim Reformer is an argument about how to read the writings of an eminent,

mainstream Sunni Muslim reformer, like its subject, the Egyptian, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917-

1996).[1] At its center is the claim that to make sense of his writings, and by extension those of

others Muslim reformers like him, scholars of modern Islamic political thought must begin from

the premise that contemporary Muslim reformers were informed by intellectual traditions and

textual resources that extended well beyond what are conventionally conceived as the mainstays

of the Islamic discursive tradition,[2] that is the Qur'ān, the Sunna (collections of the sayings and

doings of the Prophet Muḥammad), and the *fiqh* (jurisprudence) manuals of the *sharī'a* (which

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[1] Throughout this study I refer to Ghazālī and his contemporaries as involved in a broader project of "modern Islamic reform." I use "Islamic reform" to refer to their attempts to rethink various Islamic scholarly traditions (on "tradition" see footnote 2) and apply them to pressing political and social dilemmas. Muslim efforts to rethink Islamic scholarly traditions and their relationships to worldly and collective life are by no means endeavors restricted to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, Muslim scholars have long positioned themselves, and been positioned by others, as "revivers," such as, for instance, the famed eleventh century Muslim scholar, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). For an account of Abū Ḥāmid that rightly positions him as a "reviver," see Kenneth Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and His Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) esp. 1-11. "Modern" in my usage generally refers simply to the chronological era in which Ghazālī and his immediate predecessors and successors wrote, that is the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This period of history was distinct from earlier periods because of the Middle East's integration into a system of global capitalism, the introduction into the Middle East of the novel institutions of the modern nation-state, and the spread to the region of novel epistemologies often derived from Euro-American social sciences. These novel phenomena were products of the nineteenth and twentieth century gradual imposition of European colonial control over the region. For a seminal study addressing the advent of colonial modernity in the region, see Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Modern Islamic reform frequently, though not always, is related to these novel phenomena. I eschew terms such as "Islamism" and "political Islam" because their general usage is too reductive in nature.

[2] My usage of the notions of "tradition" and an "Islamic discursive tradition" are based loosely on Talal Asad's oft-cited text, *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1986). "A tradition," writes Asad, "consists essentially of discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history." The Islamic discursive tradition, he further noted, "includes and relates itself to the texts of the Qur'an and Hadith," 14. Using Asad's concept, Muhammad Qasim Zaman, has further argued that while Islam as a whole might be conceived of as a discursive tradition, scholars should also think of components of this tradition, such as the *sharī'a*, Sufism, and Hellenic philosophy as discursive traditions. My study follows Zaman in that it treats aspects of Sufism and Islamic philosophy as discursive traditions. In this schema, Zaman argues that the *sharī'a* is "the preeminent example of…a discursive tradition." See his *Ulama in Contemporary Islam: Custodians of Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 6.

may be glossed as Islamic "law").[3] The sources of their thinking go beyond even the various Western intellectual trends that spread to the Middle East through the nineteenth century extension of European colonial control over most of the region and came to inform the thought of many Muslim reformers.[4] Beyond these textual resources and intellectual trends, this study positions Sufism and the Islamic philosophical tradition, or more specifically the tradition of Islamic philosophical ethics, at the heart of Ghazālī's modern-day political and social critiques.[5] A second and related claim it advances is that when Muslim reformers, like Ghazālī, engaged novel Euro-American intellectual trends and cultural forms, those engagements were often mediated and facilitated by the existence of unique Islamic theological concepts. It thus advocates a way of reading the written works produced through Ghazālī and his colleagues' encounters with Western thought that brings to the foreground the Islamic theological concepts that these Muslim reformers deployed to make sense of the work of their Euro-American interlocutors, and, importantly, correct and build upon that work. These theological concepts, like Sufism and Islamic philosophical ethics, are likewise at the heart of Ghazālī's thinking. Once the sources of modern Islamic political thought are reconceived to include this richer, more diverse set of Islamic intellectual traditions it becomes possible, I argue, to think of Ghazālī and his colleagues as contributors to a global project of rethinking the human and the human potential in twentieth century life, and not simply as assimilators or translators of a project of political modernity elaborated in Europe and the U.S.

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[3] As the *sharī'a* encompasses a range of matters beyond "law" proper, including, for instance, the prescribed forms of worship (*al-'ibādāt*), I shall refer to the *sharī'a* as opposed to "Islamic law." For a critique of the normative assumptions attached to the term, "Islamic law," see Wael Hallaq, *Sharī'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-6.

[4] On the spread of novel epistemologies to the region see, Mitchell. On the influence of Euro-American social scientific concepts and categories on modern Islamic reform, more generally, see, Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[5] For my definitions of the tradition of Islamic philosophical ethics and Sufi ethics, see pages 8-9.

If one were to locate a foundational text in the study of modern Arab and Islamic intellectual history, a convenient place to begin would be Albert Hourani's 1962 *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*.[6] Among other things, Hourani's text put forth an influential characterization of the life and career of perhaps the towering figure of nineteenth and twentieth century Sunni Islamic reform, the Egyptian, Muḥammad 'Abduh (1849-1905). Analyzing 'Abduh's works and influence, Hourani posited two overarching tendencies within Abduh's thinking, both of which have become fundamental to how contemporary scholars conceive the nature of modern Islamic political thought. The first was what Hourani saw as a tendency within 'Abduh and his successors' thinking, like the Syrian Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (1865-1935), to restrict as definitive of the "ideal society" they aspired to create, only a core set of ideas that could be found during an imagined early "golden age"—the period that encompassed the life of the Prophet Muḥammad and the lives of his early companions and successors—and to view with suspicion subsequent developments within Islamic history, including most specifically Sufism and Islamic philosophy.[7] The second tendency Hourani posited within 'Abduh's thinking was an inclination to equate core Islamic teachings with concepts and categories derived from modern European social thought.[8] Summing up this latter aspect of Abduh's thought, Hourani noted that he carried further a "process" common to his immediate predecessors, like his teacher Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1838/1839-1897), "of identifying traditional concepts of Islamic thought with the dominant ideas of modern Europe. In this line of

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[6] For an account of the significance of that text and its author, see the recent edited volume, *Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda* eds. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); see especially Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, "Time, Language, mind and Freedom: The Arabic Nahda in Four Words," esp. 8-13; Roger Owen, "Albert Hourani and the Making of Modern Middle East Studies in the English-Speaking World: A Personal Memoir;" Rashid Khalidi, "The Legacies of Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age."

[7] Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 149-150.

[8] Ibid., 161.

thought, *maslaha* gradually turns into utility, *shura* into parliamentary democracy, *ijma'* into public opinion; Islam itself becomes identical to civilization and activity, the norms of nineteenth century social thought."[9] Additionally, beyond positing these two tendencies, Hourani's text located the primary component of 'Abduh's reformist efforts within the realm of rethinking the *sharī'a* and thereby placed it at the center of modern Islamic political thought.[10]

While *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* located these two tendencies within the thinking of a single towering Muslim reformer, subsequent scholars have shown how these tendencies also manifested as distinct core elements within two rival conceptions of "Salafism." More broadly, the study of Salafism has in fact become one of the burgeoning fields within the study of contemporary Islam.[11] The term itself did not come from 'Abduh, but what did was the inclination to posit concord and equivalence between Islamic teaching and Euro-American social thought, common to so-called "enlightened" Salafism. On the other hand, scholars take the tendency to restrict as definitive of "Islam" a core set of texts, most notably the Qur'ān and the Sunna, and certain theological and legal doctrines, as constitutive of so-called "purist" Salafism.[12] While this form of Salafism rejected attempts to reconcile Islamic teachings with Western thought and had a more diverse set of progenitors than 'Abduh and his students, it certainly resonated with their efforts to locate a core of Islam. Either as key tendencies within the thinking of a single towering figure of

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[9] Ibid., 144.

[10] Ibid., 151-154.

[11] A representative sample of the recent research on Salafism would include, Roel Meijer ed., *Global Salafism: Islam's New Religious Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Lloyd Ridgeon ed., *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015); Aaron Rock-Singer, "The Salafi Mystique: The Rise of Gender Segregation in 1970s Egypt," *Islamic Law and Society* 23, no. 3 (2016); Stéphane Lacroix, trans. George Holoch, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 2011).

[12] On these two forms of Salafism see, Bernard Haykel, "On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action," in *Global Salafism*; see also, Lauzière, 1-25.

modern Islamic reform, or as separate core elements characterizing two distinct forms of Salafism, the notion that modern Islamic political thought is a product of an attempt to assimilate Euro-American intellectual trends and/or restrict "Islam" proper to only that which can be derived from the Qur'ān and the Sunna is fundamental to how it has been conceived by contemporary scholars.

The two tendencies Hourani located within 'Abduh and his successors' thinking were not just characterizations of the nature of modern Islamic political thought. They have, I would argue, also come to serve as methodological principles for the study of modern Islam altogether. While few scholars of contemporary Islam would deny, for instance, the necessity of having a certain familiarity with the Qur'ān, the Sunna, key components of *fiqh*, as well as familiarity with Euro-American social thought, the same would not be said about the theories, concepts, and metaphors derivative of Sufism and the Islamic philosophical tradition. As a methodological principle, the approach to the study of contemporary Islam that combs the writings of nineteenth and twentieth century Muslim thinkers for key markers of modernity has recently been highlighted for criticism: "Within in the field of Islamic intellectual history," write Elizabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan, "it is easy to succumb to the temptation to concentrate one's analytical efforts mainly on the specifically 'modern' aspects of the thinkers and texts which one is studying."[13] On the other hand, while this "tracing-the-modern" approach to writing Islamic intellectual history has come under critical scrutiny, the Islamic scholarly traditions taken as representative of modern Islamic political

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[13] Elizabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan eds., *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 3. Many otherwise excellent studies on modern Islamic political thought exhibit this "tracing the modern" approach to writing Islamic intellectual history, an approach that centers on the assertion that whether or not modern Muslim thinkers acknowledge it, they are fundamentally involved in a "modern" project, from the epistemologies they employ to the institutions they seek to control. In this vein, see, for instance, Roxanne Euben, *Enemy in The Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism: A Work of Comparative Political Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy*.

thought remain restricted to those pertaining to the sciences of the Qur'ān and the Sunna, and most especially to the study of the *sharī'a*.[14] While Sufism in the nineteenth and twentieth century has been treated extensively within the secondary literature, it is made to appear as marginal to or increasingly marginalized by Muslim reformers,[15] with few exceptions,[16] and certainly not as a central component of the political thinking of eminent, mainstream Sunni Muslim reformers, like Ghazālī. Islamic philosophy in modern Egypt, on the other hand, has only received minimal attention.[17]

The tendency to place at the center of modern Islamic political thought a narrow set of Islamic scholarly traditions pertaining to the Qur'ān, Sunna, and *sharī'a* is by no means derivative simply of Hourani's pioneering study, but is rather reflective of the modern academic study of Islam as a whole, as Shahab Ahmed has compellingly demonstrated. "The notion of 'Islam' that gives normative and constitutive primacy to legal discourses is…the 'default' conceptualization of the majority of scholars today (even if it is often unacknowledged by them), and is certainly the

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[14] Of the numerous excellent studies on the *sharī'a* and reformist attempts to rethink it for the modern world are, Malcolm Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966); Zaman, *The Ulama in Contemporary Islam*; Talal Asad, "Reconfigurations of Law and Ethics in Colonial Egypt" in *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

[15] See, for instance, Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond, Surrey [England]: Curzon Press, 1999); Valerie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); Julian Johansen, *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt: The Battle for Islamic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Itzchak Weismann, "Modernity from Within: Islamic Fundamentalism and Sufism," *Der Islam* 86, no. 1 (2011).

[16] For exceptions to this general trend, see Andreas Christmann, "Reconciling Sufism with Theology: Abū al-Wafā al-Taftāzānī and the Construct of 'al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī' in Modern Egypt," in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Omnia El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 42-60; Amira Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter: Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Oliver Scharbrodt, "The Salafiyya and Sufism: Muḥammad 'Abduh and His Risālat al-Wāridāt (Treatise on Mystical Inspirations)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70, No. 1 (2007).

[17] Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', "Al-Azhar and Rationalism in Modern Egypt: The Philosophical Contributions of Shaykhs Mustafa 'Abd al-Raziq and 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud," in *Islamic Studies* 27, no. 2 (1988).

habitual one in the popular consciousness of the majority of contemporary Muslims and non-Muslims alike," he writes.[18] To be clear the argument advanced by *The Making of a Muslim Reformer* is not that this tendency is not reflective of the actual assertions of many Muslim reformers themselves, including in some of Ghazālī's own. Rather it questions the extent to which assertions should serve as the guiding principles of research and shape how scholars understand the nature and sources of modern Islamic political thought. Ultimately it is too restrictive and insufficient as a methodological principle to make sense of Ghazālī and many of his contemporaries' writings. Consider, for instance, a remarkable comment recorded by Ghazālī's colleague, friend, and fellow traveler, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926), himself an eminent Muslim reformer: Surveying his colleague's long and varied career, Qaraḍāwī noted that Ghazālī never authored a single text on *fiqh*,[19] despite, we should note, writing well over 60 individual works. Throughout his career, though particularly during the last two decades of his life, Ghazālī did dedicate great effort to explicating how the Qur'ān and Sunna should be approached.[20] Most of his early works, however, including his many social commentaries and political critiques, while frequently based upon referential material drawn from the Qur'ān and Sunna, nevertheless depended upon Islamic ethical traditions related to Sufism and Islamic philosophy for their argument, concepts, and theories. Ethics here should be understood as the art of character refinement and virtue cultivation, as well as techniques of introspection for diagnosing the subtle

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[18] Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 117. See more generally, 113-175.

[19] The comment is recorded in Qaraḍāwī's biography of Ghazālī, *al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī kamā ʿaraftuhu: riḥlat niṣf qarn* (*Shaykh Ghazālī as I Knew Him: Journey Over Half a Century*) (Cairo: Dār al-Wafāʾ, 1995), 151. On Qaraḍāwī's life, work, and influence see Bettina Gräf and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen eds., *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[20] Ghazālī is in fact known in the secondary literature almost exclusively for his later works dealing with the Qur'ān and Sunna. See footnote 29 for citations.

afflictions of the soul.[21] It is precisely because Ghazālī dedicated most of his attention to explicating the interior, affective components of Islamic teachings and practices, that Qaraḍāwī and Ghazālī's other biographers closely identify his life and career with that of his far more famous classical predecessor and namesake, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), a renowned Muslim scholar know by many simply as the "the proof of Islam" (ḥujjat al-Islām).[22]

Among the reasons Abū Ḥāmid has been venerated by Muslims across the centuries includes his authorship of his magisterial forty-book compendium dedicated to ethics, *The Revival of the Sciences of Religion*. Abū Ḥāmid plays a major role in the present study. This is not only because of the close link between Ghazālī and his namesake as perceived by the former's biographers, but also because Abū Ḥāmid was a figure of great interest to Ghazālī and the individuals who most shaped his intellectual formation. His ideas echo in many of Ghazālī's works. Abū Ḥāmid also plays a major role in this study because for those who read his compendium on ethics and his other text dedicated to the subject, *The Balance of Action,* he served as an influential conduit for the transmission of two often overlapping ethical traditions: one related to Sufism and another related

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[21] This definition of "ethics" is my own. It is intended to capture the basic underlying component common to Ghazālī's writings on this topic, as well as many of those of his classical predecessors and modern-day contemporaries. They used different terms for it, including "the refinement of character" (*tadhhīb al-akhlāq*) "the refinement of the soul," (*tadhhīb al-nafs*) "the purification of the soul" (*taṭhīr al-nafs*), "soul striving" (*jihād al-nafs*), "the training of the soul"(*riyāḍat al-nafs*), "ethics" (*al-akhlāq*), and "the science of ethics" (*'ilm al-akhlāq*). For introductions to the modern academic study of Islamic ethics, see Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991); Mohammed Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975); George Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Their definitions of Islamic ethics are more expansive than mine here and include, *inter alia*, discussions of the nature of good and evil and the extent of human freedom and responsibility.

[22] Ramaḍān Khamis al-Gharīb, *al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī: ḥayātuhu wa-'aṣruhu wa-abrāz man ta'aththara bi him* (*Shaykh Ghazālī: His Life, Time, and the Most Prominent People Who Influenced Him*) (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaram li Turāth, 2003), 219-228. See also Gharīb's second book on Ghazālī, *Maḥāwir al-mashrū' al-fikrī ladā al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī* (*The Pivots of the Intellectual Plan of Shaykh Ghazālī*) (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaram li al-Turāth, 2003) 63-74; Qaraḍāwī, *al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, 97-98, 185-186. On Abū Ḥāmid's renown and influence see, Garden, *The First Islamic Reviver*; Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue*; Fakhry, *Ethical Theories*, 193-206; Hourani, *Reason and Tradition*, 135-166; Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, 98-138; Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

to Islamic philosophy, both of which deeply influenced Ghazālī and his contemporaries. When I refer to a "Sufi ethical tradition" or "Sufi ethics" I simply mean ethics as elaborated by Muslim scholars who viewed themselves as Sufis or are viewed thusly by their modern-day readers. Examples of influential exponents of Sufi ethics important for my interlocutors include the thirteenth century Sufi master, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Sikandarī (d. 1309) and Abū Ḥāmid. When I refer to "Islamic philosophical ethics" I mean Islamic reformulations of ethical theories that can be traced to Plato and Aristotle. Examples of influential exponents of Islamic philosophical ethics important for my interlocutors include al-Fārābī (d. 951) and Miskawayh (d. 1030), and for reasons outlined in Chapters One and Two, Abū Ḥāmid.

In placing the arts of virtue cultivation at the heart of an influential, mainstream vision of modern Islamic political thought, *The Making of a Muslim Reformer* follows the pioneering work of the anthropologists, Saba Mahmood and Charles Hirschkind. In their compelling ethnographic studies of the Islamic Revival in contemporary Egypt, both have highlighted the increasing salience of forms of ethical self-cultivation to the piety movements that have remade the country's political and social landscape since the 1970s.[23] Mahmood's account in particular has drawn out the prominent role of Aristotelian inspired ethical theories in shaping the views of her interlocutors. While she recognized that Aristotle's ethics had historically greatly influenced Islamic understandings of ethical self-cultivation,[24] she did not explore in depth the modern historical genealogies of Islamic reformulations of Aristotle's ethics. This study builds from Mahmood's pioneering work but shifts attention to examine the place of the broader traditions of Islamic

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[23] *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Charles Hirschkind *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). For a related account of forms of ethical self-cultivation in Egypt's Islamic Revival, see Ellen McLarney, *Soft Force: Women in Egypt's Islamic Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 103-142.

[24] Mahmood, 137-138.

philosophical ethics and Sufi ethics within a mainstream, popular vision of modern Islamic political thought, while at the same time exploring these traditions' modern historical genealogies.

Indeed, as subsequent chapters will show, Ghazālī was influenced by and contributed to broader efforts among Muslim scholars and reformers to position ethical theories derived from Sufism and Islamic philosophical ethics at the center of Islamic reform in Egypt. Among the scholars and reformers who took part in these efforts and whose views I examine in this study are the Egyptian literary scholar, Zakī Mubārak (1891-1952), the two pioneers of the modern study of ethics in Egypt, Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā (1899-1963) and Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh Darāz (1894-1958), the prominent Sufi leader and scholar, Abū al-Wafā al-Taftāzānī (1930-1994), and Ghazālī's close colleague, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī. Unlike these scholars and reformers, however, with the exception of Qaraḍāwī, Ghazālī was a onetime leading intellectual of Egypt's most influential mass Islamic social movement, the Muslim Brotherhood. He was also a widely read author with a vast public following. Insofar as many of Ghazālī's writings explicated in simplified and abbreviated form techniques of ethical self-formation derived from the Sufi ethical tradition and the tradition of Islamic philosophical ethics, I argue that Ghazālī can rightly be considered a popularizer of these traditions. Ghazālī wrote many of his popular works during the crucial two decades prior to Egypt's Islamic Revival. His ideas were influential and came to shape the views of many of the young men and women activists who led the Islamic Revival,[25] as well as gave direction to a prominent "centrist" Islamic intellectual movement in 1980s and 1990s Egypt called

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[25] The most comprehensive historical account on the 1970s Islamic student movement that inaugurated Egypt's Islamic Revival positions Ghazālī as an intellectual who influenced the views of many of the student activists. See, Abdullah Arian *Answering the Call: Popular Islamic Activism in Sadat's Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 55, 66, 113, 116, 130, 155. For Ghazālī's influence on the prominent women's leader, Niʿmat Sidqī, see McLarney, 105. In his memoirs, ʿAbd al-Munʿim Abū al-Futūḥ, who during the 1970s was one of the student movement's leaders, describes Ghazālī's early writings and personal advice as influential for him and his fellow students. See, *ʿAbd al-Munʿim Abū al-Futūḥ: Shādid ʿalā tārikh al-ḥaraka al-Islāmīya fī Miṣr, 1970-1984* (*ʿAbd al-Munʿim Abū al-Futūḥ: Witness of the History of the Islamic Movement in Egypt, 1970-1984*) (Cairo: Dar al-Shurūq, 2010), 29, 33-34.

the Wasaṭīya.[26] Thus beyond rethinking the sources and nature of modern Islamic political thought, this study offers a history of some of the ideas that came to inform the Islamic Revival in Egypt.

But Ghazālī was also a popularizer of a different sort of literature, though one that nevertheless overlapped with key concerns within ethics more broadly defined than virtue cultivation viz. the relationship between reason and revelation. He helped disseminate "scientific" ideas gleaned from Arabic translations of works of American self-help, spiritualism, and psychical research by melding them together with Islamic theology. Ghazālī was greatly fond of works written by the American self-help pioneer, Dale Carnegie (d. 1955), and the American pioneer of psychical research, J.B. Rhine (d. 1980). He borrowed ideas from their texts to highlight the deep correspondence between ethical truths made known by human experience and reason, on the one hand, and revelation, on the other. In doing so he contested the notion that science and religion were incompatible, while at the same time showed that unique Islamic theological concepts could correct, redirect, and build upon the work of Euro-American men and women of "science." As his commentary on Carnegie's text was also dedicated to explicating the methods to treat "worry," a dangerous affliction of the soul, it was also a text of ethical self-cultivation in its own right. In exploring epistemological encounters between Arab-Islamic and Western intellectual traditions, my study builds off a number of recent excellent studies.[27] *The Making of a Muslim Reformer*, however, draws more attention to the corrective and productive impulses behind Muslim reformist engagements with Euro-American thought. Indeed, in some studies, the theologies Muslim

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[26] On the Wasaṭīya movement in Egypt and Ghazālī's role in giving it directions, see Raymond William Baker, *Islam Without Fear: Egypt and the New Islamists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[27] Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013); El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud*; Alireeza Doostdar, "Empirical Spirits: Islam, Spiritism, and the Virtues of Science in Iran," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no.2, (2016); Yoav Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012); Ahmed Ragab, "Prophetic Traditions and Modern Medicine in the Middle East: Resurrection, Reinterpretation, and Reconstruction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 132, no. 4 (2012).

intellectuals deployed to engage and make sense of Euro-American self-help, for instance, are neglected, such that the broader Muslim engagement with this novel cultural form is made to appear as reflective of the displacement of an Islamic sense of selfhood.[28] My study draws attention to Muslim corrections to Western intellectual traditions not to position "Islam" and the "West" in mutual hostility, but rather to highlight an under theorized aspect of the works of many Muslim reformers interested in Euro-American popular sciences, like self-help and spiritualism. It thus locates this tendency not only in Ghazālī's work, but also the work of other popularizers of spiritualism and psychical research in Arabic, including Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī (1862-1940) and Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī (1875-1954)—who, like Ghazālī, trained at Egypt's preeminent institution of Islamic learning, al-Azhar in Cairo—and a leader of Egypt's mid-twentieth century spiritualist movement, 'Alī 'Abd al-Jalīl Rāḍī.

The Making of a Muslim Reformer focuses primarily on Ghazālī's early books, published during the twenty or so years prior to the Islamic Revival in Egypt. Within the secondary literature, he is known mainly for his later works published in the 1980s and early 1990s, particularly his accounts on how to approach the Qur'ān and Sunna.[29] As a result of the secondary literature's focus on Ghazālī's later works, however, the very deep influence of Sufism and Islamic

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[28] Jeffery T. Kenney, "Selling Success, Nurturing the Self: Self-help Literature, Capitalist Values, and the Sacralization of Subjective Life in Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 4 (2015).

[29] The most extensive published English language account on Ghazālī is Haifaa G. Khalafallah, *The al-Ghazali Enigma and Why Shari'a is Not Islamic Law* (Sheffield, South Yorkshire; Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2017). The other two full-length published studies dedicated to Ghazālī are Mohammed Moussa, *Politics of the Islamic Tradition: The Thought of Muhammad al-Ghazali* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2016); Benaouda Bensaid, *In Service of God and Humanity: The Legacy of Shaykh Muhammad al-Ghazali*, (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2015). A chapter on him can be found in Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', *Contemporary Arab Thought: Studies in Post-1967 Arab Intellectual History* (London; Sterling, Va. : Pluto Press, 2004), 223-241; see also, Aslam Farouk-Alli, "The Dialogical Construction of the Muslim Self: A Reading of the Life and Work of Shaykh Muḥammad Al-Ghazālī," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 34, (2014). There is one important exception to this general trend of almost exclusive focus on his later career, Ibrahim Khalid Ibrahim Darwish Mohammad, "Al-Shaykh Muḥammad Ghazālī: A dā'iyah Caught Between Traditionalism and Modernity," (Ph.D. Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2013), which explores aspects of Ghazālī's theological views, his interest in Sufism, and science, 172-202, 207-214.

philosophical ethics on his political and social critiques has been overlooked, as well as his considerable interest in American self-help, psychical research, and spiritualism. Although it focuses specifically on Ghazālī and his writings, it also shows that many scholarly traditions and intellectual trends he was interested in were of great interest to other Egyptian Muslim reformers. It thus positions Ghazālī as a central node within a broader network of scholarly traditions and intellectual trends circulating in colonial and postcolonial Egypt.

Chapters One, Two, and Four examine Ghazālī's early writings on the arts of ethical self-cultivation and their relationship to material, collective, and worldly wellbeing. Chapters One and Two explore a number of his earliest works, which are also those most informed by Islamic philosophical ethics. The former takes up his writings on economics, while the latter considers his writings on ethics and politics, and the link between the two. Chapter Four explores his two studies published on Sufism. Although the influence of the Islamic philosophical tradition is noteworthy in his earliest writings, it is largely unacknowledged by Ghazālī. This is in contrast, for instance, to his writings on Sufi ethics and their relationship to politics, in which he explicitly aligns his writings with Sufi attitudes, sensibilities, and forms of ethical self-cultivation. Nevertheless, for reasons outlined in Chapters One and Two, my analysis in those chapters presumes that Ghazālī was well conversant with Islamic philosophical ethics and that he drew upon them to craft his writings. This presumption is not only warranted given Ghazālī's intellectual formation, but also on a methodological level. As we will see, reading Islamic philosophic ethics into and alongside of Ghazālī's earliest writings helps make sense of the moral claims those writings make, as well as the close link they presuppose exists between individual ethical self-formation and material, collective, and worldly wellbeing. The primary points of distinction between his writings within which Islamic philosophic ethics are in the fore and those within which Sufi ethics are in fore are

related to the respective places of human agency and divine agency in the cultivation of virtue and the relative value of matter and material life. In the former set of writings the human agent is depicted as the force in realizing virtue, while matter and material things are highly valued. In the latter set of writings, on the other hand, the divine is depicted as the agent that bestows virtue upon a worthy human subject, while matter and material things are depicted as relatively insignificant when compared with the immaterial human spirit and the Hereafter.

Insofar as Chapter Four highlights the role Ghazālī attributes to divine, unseen forces in imparting ethical realization to humans, the concerns of this chapter parallel those of Chapter Five, which takes up Ghazālī's writings on *jinn*, "wondrous occurrences" (*khawāriq al-ʿādāt*), the seemingly supernatural powers of prayer (*al-duʿāʾ*) and incantation (*al-ruqya*), and other matters pertaining to the "Unseen" (*al-ghayb*). In doing so these chapters make use of another impressive body of ethnographic study on contemporary Egypt.[30] In her account of practices of Islamic dream interpretation in Egypt, Amira Mittermaier draws out the important role her interlocutors attribute to Unseen beings in imparting ethical advice. Like Mittermaier, I pay close attention to the engagement of Muslim reformers, like Ghazālī, with the unseen, spirit world interlocutors because it opens up a window into "a mode of being in the world that disrupts the illusion of a self-possessed autonomous subject, [and calls] attention to in-betweenness and interelationality instead."[31] Though Mittermaier depicts this mode of being as most apparent in communities marginalized by modern Islamic reform, such as those interested in Islamic dream interpretations, I argue that modes of being that include frequent, ethically charged encounters with the Unseen

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[30] Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter*. See also, Mittermaier, "Trading with God: Islam, Calculation, Excess," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Religion*, eds. Janice Boddy and Michael Lambek (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

[31] Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter*, 2-3.

are, in fact, central to the logics of mainstream Islamic reform in Egypt. Chapters Four and Five thus borrow from Mittermaier's work, but shift focus to explore a rich and under theorized world of the Unseen in modern Islamic reform, a world which often evades the logics of rationalization.

More generally, together with Chapters Three, Chapter Five explores Ghazālī's writings on the ethics of epistemological encounters between Islamic forms of knowledge and Euro-American popular sciences. Chapters Three deals with his commentary on Carnegie's *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* (1948), while Chapter Five takes up his commentaries on works of Euro-American psychical research and spiritualism, including Rhine's *The Reach of the Mind* (1947). These chapters contest the assumption that the spread of ideas and cultural forms from Western contexts to Islamic ones fundamentally transformed and displaced understandings of human life rooted in Islamic ethics and theology. Instead they show how Ghazālī and his contemporaries approached novel forms of knowledge not merely as assimilators, but primarily as contributors. Indeed, as these chapters show, Muslim reformers utilized Islamic theological concepts derived from revelation to challenge, correct, and redirect the work of their Euro-American interlocutors.

CHAPTER ONE

Material Theologies

Introduction

This chapter begins by exploring Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's (1917-1996) intellectual formation, arguing that his thinking was fundamentally shaped both by Islamic philosophical ethics and Sufism. After establishing this background, it then turns to an analysis of his earliest book publications, focusing on the ways in which Islamic philosophical ethics informed his thinking about Egypt's "economic" conditions. While Ghazālī's relationship with Sufism and the mechanisms through which it shaped his thinking are fairly straightforward, his relationship with Islamic philosophical ethics and the mechanism's through which they shaped his outlook are more obscure. With regard to the former, not only was Ghazālī's father immensely fond of Sufism, one of Ghazālī's foremost intellectual influences, Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906-1949), the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, was also fond of Sufism and a onetime initiate in Egypt's Ḥisāfī Sufi Order. Furthermore, Ghazālī was a reader of classical Sufi scholars' writings, including most importantly, his namesake, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) and Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Sikandarī (d. 1309), and frequently acknowledged their influence on his thinking. Although the purpose of this chapter is to show how Islamic philosophical ethics influenced Ghazālī's thinking about Egypt's "economic" conditions, it explores the Sufi elements within his intellectual formation because, on the one hand, they help provide a more complete picture of who he was intellectually when he began his publishing career and, on the other hand, because Ghazālī's relationship with Sufism is part and parcel of his relationship with Islamic philosophical ethics. Indeed, one of his foremost intellectual influences, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), not only provided a *sharīʿa* aligned vision of Sufism

for subsequent Muslim scholars, but also an influential Islamic reformulation of Aristotelian ethics.

Thus, as I will argue, Ghazālī's namesake serves as one of the important conduits through which Islamic philosophical ethics came to shape his thinking. More concretely, however, Ghazālī was influenced by the efforts of a prominent Egyptian Muslim reformer and scholar, Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā (1899-1963), who presented Islamic philosophical ethics as a source of modern Islamic political thought. Not only was Ghazālī a student at Egypt's primary institution of Islamic learning, al-Azhar in Cairo, while Mūsā taught ethics (*al-akhlāq*) and philosophy (*al-falsafa*) there, but, as I will show in Chapter Two, Ghazālī almost certainly read Mūsā's texts on Islamic philosophical ethics and was influenced by his argument that ethics was the indispensable basis of politics. Mūsā's books on Islamic philosophical ethics, however, were part of a growing number of publications written by Egyptian Muslim reformers and scholars during the early to mid-twentieth century which took up ethics as the topic of research. This included the first studies to posit the existence of distinct Qur'anic "ethics" and a distinct Sufi "ethics." Related to these publications were a number of Arabic primers for the study of what might be called "comparative ethics," which included introductions to the ethical writings of modern Western philosophers. Together with Mūsā's works, this broader turn towards ethics among Muslim scholars provides multiple channels through which Ghazālī may have encountered the ethics of his classical predecessors. Ghazālī was also a very eclectic reader and thought himself as not having an allegiance to any particular school of thought. He thus may have even read works of Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī (d. 951), Miskawayh (d. 1030), and al-Māwardī (d. 1058), which were certainly published by the early twentieth century.

Ghazālī's first full length book, *al-Islām wa-al-awḍā' al-iqtiṣādīya* (*Islam and Economic Conditions*), was the first of a series of books Ghazālī would publish during the late 1940s and early 1950s on Egypt's economic conditions. It was also the first of a larger number of similar publications from the same period written by Brotherhood members and affiliates. In what follows, I will read into Ghazālī's early writings on Egypt's economic conditions a number of important themes that characterize Islamic philosophical ethics. In fact, I will suggest that Islamic philosophical ethics are central to Ghazālī's economic analyses. While he does not directly cite his classical predecessors in these works, Ghazālī was certainly exposed to Islamic philosophical ethics from multiple conduits, and I argue that they were on his mind when he wrote his economic works. This chapter and the following chapter bring out into the fore the extent to which Islamic philosophical ethics pervade his thinking. On the one hand, I do so to highlight the extent to which modern Islamic political thought is informed by sources beyond the Qur'ān, Sunna, and manuals of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*); and, on the other hand, I do so as a way of making sense of the arguments Ghazālī advances. Indeed, viewed from the perspective of Islamic philosophical ethics, the writings of modern Muslim reformers on economic matters appear far less abstract and symbolic than they have conventionally been portrayed within the secondary literature.

The notion that modern Islamic political thought is more abstract and symbolic than it is substantive is indeed commonplace within the secondary literature, particularly that dealing with the writings of twentieth century Muslim intellectuals associated with activist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood. Perhaps its earliest manifestations can be found in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's *Islam in Modern History* (1957), which was itself one of the first studies to take up "modern" Islam as a distinct phenomenon. Surveying Islamic trends in Pakistan at the time, Cantwell Smith singled out the writings of Abū-l-A'lā Mawdūdī (1903-1979), the journalist and leader of the Jamā'at-i

Islāmī, as particularly influential in shaping twentieth century Muslim understandings of Islam. On Mawdūdī, he writes, that he "would appear to be much the most systematic thinker of modern Islam; one might even wonder whether his chief contribution…has not been for good and ill his transforming of Islam into a system—or, perhaps more accurately, his giving expression to a modern tendency so to transform it." Indeed, he adds, many Muslims from "Pakistan and beyond…have come increasingly to the premise that there is an Islamic system of economics, an Islamic political system, an Islamic constitution, and so on."[1] While Muslim ideologues may have transformed Islam into a system, they have nevertheless failed to provide concrete solutions to contemporary social and economic problems, says Cantwell Smith. Commenting on the literature produced by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, he notes that it lacks "a realistic awareness of the actual problems of the modern state or its society." Rather, he adds, their programs, like those of the Pakistani Jamāʿat-i Islāmī, act "as symbols around which cluster 'Islamic' emotions irrationally stirred."[2] Cantwell Smith thus argued that while the highly abstract system of ideas articulated by Muslim activists failed to provide practical solutions to real life problems, their ideas nevertheless served as potent forces of ideological mobilization.

In his subsequent work, Cantwell Smith sought to show that Mawdūdī's systematization of Islam was only the most recent manifestation of a long-term process that had begun centuries earlier through which "Islam" increasingly became "reified."[3] It was most apparent, he argued, in the allegedly ubiquitous claim among contemporary Muslims that Islam was a "system."[4] Although he traced this process to a number of historical factors, he singled out the nineteenth and

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[1] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 234.

[2] Ibid., 159.

[3] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (San Fransicso: Harper & Row, 1978 [1962]), 80-118.

[4] Ibid., 115-116.

twentieth century Muslim encounter with European imperialism as its most powerful stimulus because this encounter produced a vast outpouring of Muslim apologetics in response to Western criticisms of Islam. "[T]he impetus to defend what is attacked," he noted, "would seem to be a powerful force towards reifying."[5] For later observers of modern Islam, aspects of Cantwell Smith's arguments have served as a guide for further research. Dale Eickleman and James Piscatori, took Cantwell Smith's arguments further, endeavoring to show how during the latter half of the twentieth century "Islam" had increasingly been subject to a process of "objectification." Adding to Cantwell Smith's argument, they pointed to a number of broader structural changes within Muslim societies, including the growth of mass education and modern print media, that led to sustained self-conscious reflection about what Islam is among Muslims and made it possible for them to conceive it as a "self-contained system."[6] The result of the "objectification of Islam," they add, is "that religious beliefs and practices are increasingly *seen* as systems (*mihaj*) to be distinguished from nonreligious ones."[7] Most recently, Cantwell Smith's attempt to trace the systematization of Islam in Mawdūdī's thought, has been echoed in attempts to trace the similar phenomenon among Salafis across the Muslim world. Indeed, according to Henri Lauzière, since the 1970s Salafis, following the lead of Muslim activists like Sayyid Quṭb, have increasingly conceived of Islam as an ideological system.[8]

The other aspect of Cantwell Smith's argument, that the brunt of the work performed by writings of "modern" Muslim reformers and activists occurred within symbolic realm of

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Dale F. Eickleman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 37-45; quoted on 38.

[7] Ibid., 42. Emphasis in the original.

[8] Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 219. For his analysis of how Salafis conceived of Islam as an ideology, see 199-230.

ideological mobilization, likewise presaged future research. Albeit writing from a different theoretical perspective, Eickleman and Piscatori argued that "Muslim politics" are fundamentally about the elaboration, interpretation, and contest over the meanings of symbols.[9] More specifically to economic matters, scholars examining the writings of Muslim reformers and activists dealing with the economy often highlight the symbolic nature of modern Islamic intellectual discourse as a way of explaining the appeal of this discourse, while at the same time demonstrating its inability to provide concrete solutions to the actual problems within the "economy." Echoing Cantwell Smith's arguments, Thomas Philipp, after surveying an impressive body of writings, asserts that "the whole concept of a specifically Islamic economy is of such recent origin and originated from the rejection of other from other systems, it was much easier to first work out what Islamic economics was not, rather than to find a positive content for it."[10] In a work dedicated specifically to "Islamist economics," Bjørn Olav Utvik argues that modern Islamic discourse pertaining to the economy is "Islamic" only in terms of its language and symbols,[11] while offering little in the way of practical solutions to economic problems. Nevertheless, he adds, this discourse effectively mobilizes it audience precisely because it is based on an Islamic idiom drawn from the Qur'ān and Sunna.[12]

The most comprehensive account of modern Islamic economic and social discourse, Charles Tripp's *Islam and the Moral Economy*, offers perhaps the most powerful iteration of this argument. In this work, Tripp endeavored to show how the entire conceptual architecture built by nineteenth

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[9] Eickleman and Piscatori, 5.

[10] Thomas Philipp, "The Idea of Islamic Economics," *Die Welt de Islams* 30, no. 1/4 (1990), 122.

[11] Bjørn Olav Utvik, *Islamist Economics in Egypt: The Pious Road to Development* (Boulder: Lynne Rhinner Publishers, 2006), 3.

[12] Ibid., 11.

and twentieth century Muslim reformers and activists, like Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Sayyid Quṭb, and ʿAlī Sharīʿatī, was fundamentally indebted to concepts drawn from Euro-American social scientific disciplines, including economics and sociology. While these reformers and activists were trenchant critics of Western societies, their economic and social analyses merely reframed aspects of Euro-American social scientific discourses in Islamic language and symbols. Tripp thus cordoned off the "Islamic response" to capitalism in the symbolic realm of language and idiom. The position of modern Muslim intellectuals on economic and social issues, he writes, was "an idealist and a self-consciously moralising position, dealing less with the structural or institutional mechanics of the capitalist enterprise than with the assumptions, values and consequences associated with capitalism as a historical phenomenon."[13] In their responses to capitalism, these intellectuals attempted to elaborate a "distinctive Islamic order" though "their reasoning was often vulnerable to the influence of that which they were seeking to criticise." Indeed, like "other proposed alternatives to capitalism, their vision seemed less like radical alternatives, and more like projects competing on the same terrain, judged therefore by broadly similar criteria."[14]

The way in which modern Islamic political thought is made to appear abstract, on the one hand, and symbolic, on the other, is perhaps most apparent in the various intellectual biographies of Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966), Ghazālī's famous Egyptian contemporary, who is widely regarded as the most influential twentieth century Sunni Muslim intellectual in Arab societies. As William Shepard argued, for instance, Quṭb's thought is almost synonymous with the systemization of Islam.[15] Asserts John Calvert, one of Quṭb's biographers, "More systematically than others before

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[13] Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6.

[14] Ibid., 8.

[15] See, for instance, William Shepard, "Islam as a 'System' in the Later Writings of Sayyid Qutb," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (1989).

him, [Quṭb] established Islam as a culturally authentic, programmatic ideology at odds with the various political orders dominating the Muslim world."[16] But as Calvert and many others have observed, although he endeavored to elaborate a culturally "authentic" Islamic ideology, Quṭb was well conversant with various secular Western intellectual traditions and very much influenced by them. Thus, various scholars have posited what they perceive as Quṭb's migration from his earlier secular, liberal orientation to an Islamist one.[17] Describing this journey, Calvert notes how Quṭb increasingly "turned to the language and symbols of Islam" to elaborate his political critiques.[18] Yet, ultimately, says Calvert, "Beneath the Qur'anic veneer of Qutb's Islamist writings resides a structural resonance with modern-era ideological currents. That is to say, Qutb imbibed and repackaged in Islamic form the Jacobin characteristics of the European revolutionary tradition."[19]

While subsequent scholars may not have drawn explicitly from Cantwell Smith's early work to frame their arguments, his writings were certainly first to attempt to show that "modern" Islamic political thought was abstract and symbolic, offering little in the way of solutions to economic and social problems, but effective as a form of ideological outreach and mobilization. In this chapter I suggest the possibility of exploring modern Islamic political thought beyond the themes of abstraction, systematization, and symbolism. My argument is not that scholarship that has explored these themes is mistaken, but that it is too totalizing in its claims. To begin, we might notice that many texts written by Ghazālī and his contemporaries were what might be thought of as composite texts. They were composite text in the sense that they convey a great deal of material addressing

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[16] John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 3.

[17] This migration is most extensively captured in Adnan Musallam, *From Secularism to Jihad: Sayyid Qutb and the Foundations of Radical Islamism* (Westport, CT.: Praeger, 2005), 53-167. See also James Toth, *Sayyid Qutb: The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 36-55; Calvert, 53-138.

[18] Calvert, 12.

[19] Ibid., 16.

what one might easily locate as "political" or "economic" concerns, such legal structures, democracy, party politics, land reclamation, nationalization of natural resources, and workers' wages, while at the same time conveying as much material addressing subtle moral and ethical concerns, such as the relationship between the material world, including the body, nature, and wealth, and the human capacity to realize Islamic belief, and the place of bodily health and material prosperity in the cultivation of virtue and in fulfillment of Islamic ritual practices. The latter aspects of these composite texts are conventionally sidelined by scholars in their analyses of modern Islamic political thought in favor of what they perceive as the more substantive components of these texts.

Thus, for instance, Phillip attempts to sum up Ghazālī's first book *Islam and Economic Conditions*, in six points. They are, he writes, "1) nationalization of all utility and monopoly companies, 2) limitations on the size of landholdings, creation of small landholdings to absorb the landless peasantry, 3) taxation of non-agricultural capital, 4) confiscation of all foreign-owned property, 5) linking workers' salaries to company profits, 6) progressive taxes on inheritance." He then adds, "It would be difficult to argue that this program contained a specifically Islamic approach to economy."[20] The preceding portions of Ghazālī's book, however, deal rather extensively with moral and ethical concerns pertaining to wealth and the material world, though Phillip finds no obvious place for them in his analysis of Ghazālī's views on the "economy." When moral and ethical concerns are considered in the secondary literature it is generally only to confine them to the realm of idealism. Describing the Lebanese Shi'ī theologian Muḥammad Bāqir al-Ṣadr's vision of the process of ethical self-cultivation through which an "Islamic personality" (*al-shakhṣīya al-islāmīya*) might be realized—a personality that formed the cornerstone of his theory

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[20] Phillip, 119.

of an "Islamic economy"—Tripp asserts that it is merely "an ideal construct…. [which] cannot serve as a sociological category with any real purchase upon the empirically verifiable world."[21] Timur Kuran, on the other hand, locates the "central feature" of Islamic writings on economic matters in what he calls Islamic "behavioral norms." After a lengthy critique and analysis of those norms, he concludes that they could not serve as the basis of a functional economic system because "[t]he suggested behavioral norms are not only riddled with ambiguity, but also unlikely to enjoy widespread adherence in a large society. In practice, many of them would have to be treated as state-enforced laws. There is no way of ensuring, moreover, that state officials would behave in an Islamically 'correct' manner. These criticisms are borne out by the fact that throughout most of the past fourteen centuries, members and officials of Muslim communities have had a tenuous link with Islam's behavioral norms, even when they have more or less agreed as to what these norms mean."[22]

The way in which the secondary literature on modern Islamic political thought often neglects the moral and ethical components of the writings of Muslim reformers and activists, or discusses them only to confine them to the realm of idealism is akin, I argue, to a similar phenomenon in the study of the *sharī'a*. In his work on the *sharī'a*, Wael Hallaq has observed a tendency within the secondary literature, especially the earliest Western studies of "Islamic law," to neglect the moral significance of the ritualistic components of the *sharī'a*—that is those components dealing with the human relationship with God or four pillars (*arkān*) of worship (*al-'ibādāt*). As Hallaq argues, scholars who took European law as the "paradigmatic model," criticized the *sharī'a* for conflating the "legal" with the "moral." It was argued that the *sharī'a* was deficient because its law "depended

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[21] Tripp, 122.

[22] Timur Kuran, "The Economic System in Contemporary Islamic Thought: Interpretation and Assessment," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 18, no. 2 (1986), 158.

upon morality for its enforcement."[23] Indeed, as Hallaq notes, within the *sharī'a*, "the moral subject was assumed to have already been fashioned qua moral subject within the 'law' at the moment of the juridical event, at the moment, that is, when the 'law' took for granted—as it always did—the presence of moral force."[24] Hallaq thus asks how the moral subject—the person who willingly submitted himself or herself to authority of the law—was constituted within the *sharī'a*? He answers by drawing attention to the crucial role Muslim jurists (*fuqahā'*) attributed to the pillars of worship as the mechanisms that cultivated and secured the un-coerced obedience of believers to the *sharī'a*. His work thus provides a means of conceiving the moral and religious components of the *sharī'a*, specifically the Islamic pillars of worship—which Hallaq calls "moral technologies of the self"—as ways of creating particular types of persons, as opposed to simply idealistic insertions into otherwise substantive "law."[25]

The world in which Ghazālī and his contemporaries lived—a world defined by the modern nation-state and its unique institutions—is very different from the world in which the *sharī'a* was first elaborated. Indeed, Hallaq argues that in the context of the modern nation-state system the *sharī'a* cannot function in the way it previously did.[26] Nevertheless, his work raises the question of whether or not Islamic moral technologies of the self can, even within a modern nation-state system, claim relevance to political and social struggles within contemporary Muslim societies. Ghazālī and his contemporaries certainly believed they could, which is evidenced by the great deal of attention they devoted to them in their writings. Moreover, Saba Mahmood's powerful and

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[23] Wael Hallaq, *The Impossible State: Islam, Politics, and Modernity's Moral Predicament* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 112.

[24] Ibid., 114.

[25] Ibid., 115-138. See also, Hallaq, *Sharī'a: Theory, Practice, Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1-25; 225-239.

[26] See, for instance, Hallaq, *The Impossible State*, 1-115; Hallaq, *Sharī'a*, 355-542.

compelling ethnographic study of the women's piety movement in contemporary Egypt—a movement that is part of that country's broader Islamic Revival—answers this question in the affirmative. At the center of this movement, which has already reshaped the political and social landscape of modern Egypt, are, according to Mahmood, a range of forms of ethical self-cultivation.[27] In Mahmood's account, the modes through which her interlocutors learn Islamic techniques of ethical self-cultivation are far more diffuse than Hallaq's, extending beyond manuals of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) to include *ḥadīth* compellations, Qur'ānic interpretations, sermons, and personal instruction. Thus, in addition to Islamic ritual practices, Mahmood also considers how other types of bodily actions including, for instance, the wearing of a *hijāb*, performing certain non-ritual deeds, and forms of daily comportment, all served for her interlocutors as techniques for ethical self-cultivation.

To analyze her interlocutors understanding of the relationship between bodily deeds and the cultivation of virtue, Mahmood deployed an "Aristotelian framework."[28] The "Aristotelian model of ethical pedagogy," she showed, was helpful in making sense of their beliefs, because within this model "external performative acts (like prayer) are understood to create corresponding inward dispositions."[29] Thus, for instance, the women she interviewed held that to realize the Islamic virtue of "shyness" (*al-ḥayā'*) one had to first behave shyly, or, alternatively, don the *hijāb*.[30] On the other hand, women who lacked the desire to consistently perform the daily ritual prayer (*al-ṣalāh*) were encouraged by Mahmood's interlocutors to make the performance of the daily prayer

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[27] In a similar vein, see Charles Hisrchkind's fascinating, *Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006)

[28] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), xv-xvi.

[29] Ibid., 135.

[30] Ibid., 155-161.

a habit as a way of cultivating and creating a desire to pray.[31] In both cases the interior disposition (shyness and desire) were understood to be created by external deeds. Theirs was an Aristotelian understanding of the relationship between bodily deed and virtue, for in the "Aristotelian tradition," writes Mahmood, "moral virtues (such as modest, honesty, and fortitude) are acquired through a coordination of outward behavior (e.g., bodily acts, social demeanor) with inward dispositions (e.g., emotional states, thoughts, intentions) through the repeated performance of acts that entail those particular virtues."[32] In other words, as Aristotle observed, "For things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g. men become builders by building and lyre players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts…."[33]

In utilizing Aristotelian ethics as an analytic framework to examine her interlocutors' views, Mahmood also recognized, of course, that Aristotle's ethical theories had historically greatly impacted classical Islamic understandings of ethics.[34] Nevertheless, Mahmood's intervention lay chiefly within the realm of showing the value of the Aristotelian tradition as an analytic framework, while leaving aside questions as to the modern historical genealogies of Islamic reformulations of Aristotle's ethics. My account in this and the following chapter builds from Mahmood's pioneering work, but considers in depth the place of the broader tradition of Islamic philosophical ethics—of which Aristotle's theory of the relationship between external deeds and interior dispositions was a part—within modern Islamic political thought, while at the same time attending to the twentieth century historical genealogies of Islamic philosophical ethics. These chapters read the tradition of

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[31] Ibid., 139

[32] Ibid., 136

[33] From Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, cited in Mahmood, Ibid.

[34] For her brief description of this historical influence, see 137-138.

Islamic philosophical ethics into and alongside of Ghazālī's and his contemporaries' writings for, not only is it likely that Ghazālī and his contemporaries were conversant with it, but this tradition also helps make their moral and ethical concerns intelligible. Indeed, it provides a way of reconceiving their ethical concerns as eminently political concerns. The more formal components of Islamic philosophical ethics are outlined more extensively in Chapter Two, but suffice it to say here that ethics, in this tradition, are understood as an indispensable basis of politics.

Sufism and the Two Ghazālīs

Born in 1917 in a village on the banks of the Nile about one hundred kilometers southeast of Alexandria, called Naklā al-'Inab, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī was given his name after the great Sufi scholar, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. His father, a merchant named Aḥmad al-Saqqā, saw Abū Ḥāmid in a dream, who directed him to name his son "Muḥammad al-Ghazālī."[35] Aḥmad was "enamored" (*shaghūfan*) with this eleventh century Muslim scholar,[36] which is not surprising given the latter's status as the "proof of Islam," and hoped that his son would one day take after Abū Ḥāmid.[37] Writes Ghazālī, his father was "a lover of Sufism (*taṣawwuf*), who respected its men and selected from their ways what he wished."[38] He thus grew up in a household in which Sufism was an important component of religious life. In this section I explore briefly the conduits through which Ghazālī may have learned about the moral techniques of Sufism and, more specifically, how he may have encountered the writings and teachings of Abū Ḥāmid beyond his formal education. I

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[35] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, "Qissat ḥayā" ("Life Story") in *Islamīyāt al-Mar'ifa* (Jan. 1997), pt. 1.

[36] Ramaḍān Khamis al-Gharīb, *al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī: ḥayātuhu wa-'aṣruhu wa-abrāz man ta'aththara bi him* (*Shaykh Ghazālī: His Life, Time, and the Most Prominent People Who Influenced Him*) (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaram li Turāth, 2003), 15.

[37] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī kamā 'araftuhu: riḥlat niṣf qarn* (*Shaykh Ghazālī as I Knew Him: Journey Over Half a Century*) (Cairo: Dār al-Wafā', 1995), 186.

[38] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Min maqālāt al-shaykh al-ghazālī* (*From the Articles of Shaykh Ghazālī*) vol. 3 (Cairo: Nahḍat Miṣr, 2005), 164.

then turn briefly to Ghazālī's descriptions of his relationship with Abū Ḥāmid before considering his formal education in the following section.

While Ghazālī and his biographers report extensively the details of his formal religious education, they offer little insight into how his father's Sufism affected Ghazālī's outlook as a youth. Ghazālī does record an anecdote that at least sheds some light on his spiritual inclinations as a youth. In a book chapter taking up the practice of "holding one's soul accountable" (*muḥasabāt al-nafs*), a practice that Ghazālī notes Sufis excelled at, he reports that as a youth he was very much committed this discipline. He would create short programs to purify himself from various imperfections. He would then record his good deeds and bad ones in a notebook, a practice apparently recommended by the eighth century Muslim scholar and polymath, Ibn Muqaffaʿ (d. 759). As a youth, he says, he longed for virtue and perfection. He goes to observe that while he was in secondary school, he and the local village children heard stories about ghosts that appeared at night. The stories made him terrified. Young Ghazālī, however, was taught that a righteous believer should only fear God. He therefore became discontent with himself for his fear of ghosts. He thus resorted to "disciplining" his "anxious soul" by subjecting it to what it feared most—he began going out at night by himself to visit graves and tombs as a way of surmounting his fear. Summing up his experiences, Ghazālī says that he was "the field of soul training" (*maydān al-riyāḍa al-nafsīya*). He does not tell us where he learned about such forms of spiritual training and notes that as a youth he lacked a "guide" (*murshid*) to direct him.[39] Given the broader context of the chapter in which Ghazālī relates his anecdote, it is clear that he understood soul training as related to Sufism.

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[39] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Jaddid ḥayātak* (*Renew Your Life*), (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1956), 247-250.

Beyond Ghazālī's father, he also had a very close relationship with another admirer of Sufism and Abū Ḥāmid, Ḥasan al-Bannā. Bannā established the Society of the Muslim Brothers in 1928 and Ghazālī joined it sometime after meeting Bannā in 1937, at the age of twenty. He remained a member of the Brotherhood for sixteen years, until he was expelled from the organization in 1953, some four years after Bannā's assassination. Out of all his intellectual influences, Bannā is the only figure that Ghazālī consistently acknowledges shaped his outlook. He describes himself, for instance, as being among those who were "cultivated at the hands (*tarabbū 'alā yadday*)" of Bannā,[40] and once observed that he was more influenced by Bannā than anyone else.[41] Bannā's affinities for Sufism are well established. According to Richard P. Mitchell, Bannā became attracted to the activities of Egypt's Ḥisāfī Sufi Order around the age of twelve, after he witnessed their *dhikr* circles.[42] He soon joined them and became a follower of the shaykh that led the circles. Together with some of his Ḥisāfī Sufi colleagues, Bannā went on to establish the Ḥisāfī Charity Society, a group he would later describe as the precursor to the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1922, at the age of sixteen, Bannā became a full initiate of the Ḥisāfīya.[43] While Mitchell does not report this in his account, Bannā notes in his memoirs that he became especially close to the Ḥisāfīya Order after he had an encounter with the order's founder, Ḥasanayn al-Ḥisāfī (1848/1849-1910), in a dream. Bannā reports being rescued from a demon by the Ḥisāfīya's long dead founder.[44] Bannā was also not a stranger to the types of Sufistic spiritual training that Ghazālī described

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[40] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Jur'āt jadīda min al-ḥaqq al-murr* (*New Doses of the Bitter Truth*) vol. 5 (Cairo: Nahḍat Miṣr, 2005), 4.

[41] Ghazālī, *Min maqālāt*, 165.

[42] *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 2. On the order's founder, Ḥasanayn al-Ḥisāfī (1848/1849-1910) see Frederick De Jong, *Encyclopedia of Islam 2nd ed.* s.v. "al-Ḥisāfī, Ḥasanayn."

[43] Ibid., 2-3.

[44] Ḥasan al-Bannā, *Mudhakkirāt al-da'wa wa-al-dā'īya* (*Memoirs of Calling and the Caller*) 3rd ed. (Beirut: al-Kutub al-Islāmī, 1966), 18-19.

partaking in as a youth. Indeed, Bannā notes that while a youth, he used to accompany a certain shaykh who would take with him and a number of other youths to visit the graveyards and tombs. While at the graveyards, their "spiritual cultivation" (*al-tarbīya al-rūḥīya*), as Bannā terms it, included reciting prayers and narrating stories of pious predecessors, and even entering into some tombs, where the young boys would contemplate their impending fates. Doing so, says Bannā, helped him and the other boys cultivate the virtue of "repentance" (*al-tawba*), and summon a sense of "regret" and a "determination" to live righteously.[45]

During his association with the order, Mitchell reports that Bannā's "whole outlook was permeated with the teachings of Sufism and with those of the towering figure of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī."[46] In his memoirs, Bannā writes that his reading of the latter's four-volume magna opus, *The Revival of the Sciences of Religion*, deeply influenced his understanding of the value of religious "knowledge" (*al-ʿilm*) vis-à-vis righteous "deeds" (*al-ʿamal*), and shaped his own belief that the latter was more important than the former.[47] This "Ghazzalian ordering of the sciences and knowledge," writes Mitchell, "was a basic feature of [Bannā's] preaching to his first followers in the Society [of the Muslim Brothers]; and, through his career, it sustained and reinforced, what one might call 'the practical and otherworldly' qualities of his mind."[48] Whatever the influence of Abū Ḥāmid on Bannā, the modern day Ghazālī certainly perceived a great deal of overlap between the two, noting on one occasion that perhaps no other figure in history besides Bannā shared Abū Ḥāmid's exceptional capacity to accurately simplify complex matters and convey them to general

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[45] Ibid., 19.

[46] Mitchell, 3.

[47] Bannā, 32-33.

[48] Mitchell, 3.

audiences.[49] On another occasion, the modern day Ghazālī noted how although Bannā eventually distanced himself from the Ḥisāfīya, his method of "moral cultivation" (*tarbiya*) recalled that of Sufis like al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsabī (d. 857) and Abū Ḥāmid.[50]

Ghazālī's observation here on Bannā's method of "moral cultivation," or *tarbiya*, recalls another aspect of Sufism. According to one account, from roughly the fourteenth century on, Sufis distinguished between two types of shaykhs from whom they would learn. There was a *shaykh al-ta'līm*, or teaching shaykh, from whom an aspirant would simply gain knowledge, which they would then put to practice themselves, and then there was a *shaykh al-tarbiya*, who would not only teach aspirants, but also intervene directly into their lives to provide them with spiritual training.[51] The notion of *tarbiya* in this context is thus not simply a type of education, but rather a form of spiritual cultivation involving close personal contact with a shaykh, with whom one has entered into a master-disciple relationship. Although during the nineteenth century the term *tarbiya* increasingly came to mean the type of formal "education" one received in a mass school system,[52] it seems that for the Muslim Brothers the term retained its Sufistic connotation. Indeed, as the author of one of the most extensive accounts on the inner workings of the Brotherhood notes, the organization's "cultivators," who are in charge of training and guiding its aspiring members, "were originally conceived as modern-day Sufi saints, who were superior to their followers in knowledge and spirituality, and were responsible only for a handful of students in order to be able to penetrate

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[49] Ghazālī, *Jur'āt*, 5.

[50] Cited in Qaraḍāwī, 27-28.

[51] Laury Silvers-Alario, "The Teaching Relationship in Early Sufism: A Reassessment of Fritz Meier's Definition of the *shaykh al-tarbiya* and the *shaykh al-ta'līm*," *The Muslim World* 93, no. 1 (2003), 69-71.

[52] Timothy Mitchell *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 87-92.

and influence their lives."[53] Ghazālī certainly understood *tarbiya* as distinct from mere education.

After observing that Bannā possessed a wealth of knowledge on the "art of moral cultivation"

(*fann al-tarbiya*),[54] and that he single handedly cultivated an entire generation of advocates for

Islam,[55] Ghazālī distinguishes between the "educator" (*muʿallim*) and the "cultivator" (*murabbin*).

The difference between the two, he notes, is "akin to the difference between companies that

prepare medicinal cures and fill the stores with them for whoever wishes to obtain them, and a

physician who closely oversees his ill patient and becomes skillfully and expertly familiar with

what he has, and then watches over [the patient's] treatment until he recovers. And this physician

does so not in return for some payment, but for the sake of pleasing God."[56]

Thus, there were multiple conduits through which Ghazālī may have learned about the moral

techniques of Sufism and encountered the writings and teachings of Abū Ḥāmid, which themselves

served as conduits for Islamic philosophical ethics. Specifically on his relationship with the latter,

Ghazālī notes that although he was named after Abū Ḥāmid, he nevertheless benefitted equally

from Abū Ḥāmid and his philosopher critic, Averroes (d. 1198).[57] Ghazālī's observation here

comes in the context of a broader argument he advances about the importance of contemporary

Muslims reading all aspects of their classical heritage, as well as non-Islamic books. He wrote this

article sometime in the 1980s, but the sentiment it conveys is reflective of the views Ghazālī

articulated throughout his career. He considered himself a pioneer of a school of thought that

sought to benefit from all the Islamic sciences, as well as human philosophical and scientific

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[53] See Hazem Kandil's insightful, if harshly critical, account of the Brotherhood, *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 19.

[54] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Fī mawkib al-daʿwa* (*In the Caravan of Calling*) (Cairo: Nahḍat Miṣr, 2005, [1954]), 212.

[55] Ibid., 213.

[56] Ibid., 216.

[57] Ghazālī, *Min maqālāt*, 164.

discoveries, and considered the narrow reading habits of his contemporaries to be the greatest defect afflicting Muslim scholars of his day.[58] Although Ghazālī often mentions his eclectic reading habits and is reluctant to identify himself with any particular school of thought, Islamic or non-Islamic, his contemporaries and biographers frequently observe the impact of Abū Ḥāmid's heritage in shaping the modern day Ghazālī's thinking. The authors of two of the most extensive biographies on Ghazālī both argue that the link between the two Ghazālīs was strong.[59] In his biography of Ghazālī, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, for instance, describes him as carrying the spirit of Abū Ḥāmid into the twentieth century. Qaraḍāwī,[60] who was Ghazālī's friend and close colleague, asserts unequivocally the he was one of the great "revivers" of Islam, a *mujaddid*, who breathed fresh life into its teachings and reclaimed its inner sprit, much like his namesake. Of particular significance for Qaraḍāwī in drawing this comparison between the eleventh century and twentieth century Ghazālīs is their mutual interest in *taṣawwuf* (Sufism), on the one hand, and the way in which they both understood religion to rest upon a keen intellect (*al-'aql*) and a pure heart (*al-qalb*).[61]

Ghazālī never systematically outlined his views on Abū Ḥāmid, though bits and pieces of his evaluation of his namesake and his reading of the latter's works can be gleaned from some of his publications. Ghazālī once noted that when he began working as imam in 1941, he "poured over the heritage of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and noticeably benefitted from it."[62] Ghazālī frequently cites

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[58] Ibid., 166-168

[59] See, for instance, Gharīb, 219-228. See also Gharīb's second book on Ghazālī, *Maḥāwir al-mashrūʿ al-fikrī ladā al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī* (*The Pivots of the Intellectual Plan of Shaykh Ghazālī*) (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaram li al-Turāth, 2003) 63-74. See also, Qaraḍāwī's *al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī*, 97-98, 185-186.

[60] Like Ghazālī, Qaraḍāwī is widely regarded as one of the twentieth century's most influential Muslim reformers. See, for instance, the edited volume by Bettina Gräf and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Global Mufti: the Phenomenon of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[61] Qaraḍāwī, 185-186.

[62] Cited in Gharīb, 219.

Abū Ḥāmid throughout his works,[63] and recalls aspects of his reading Abū Ḥāmid's texts. For instance, he believed Abū Ḥāmid's *Revival* was essentially a work dedicated to providing "treatment" (*'ilāj*) for defects of soul and mind.[64] As he noted on another occasion, one feels elevated to the station of "excellence in worship" (*iḥsān*) when one reads Abū Ḥāmid's texts.[65] On a more general level, Ghazālī held that while Abū Ḥāmid was not the most reliable scholar to depend on for the science of *hadīth* criticism (*'ilm al-hadīth*), he was "one of the most brilliant men in moral cultivation, the fundamentals of religion, jurisprudence, and philosophy."[66] Ghazālī also considered himself a student of Abū Ḥāmid's philosophy (*falsafa*) and noted that his namesake carried the "brain (*dimāgh*) of a philosopher."[67] Finally, while Ghazālī was an instructor at al-Azhar, he was charged with teaching to his students one of Abū Ḥāmid's main text on ethics, *Mīzān al-'amal* (*The Balance of Action*).[68]

Ethics and al-Azhar

Ghazālī began his formal education at the *kuttāb* in his home village at five. At ten, he began studies at the al-Azhar religious institute in Alexandria. His father, a merchant, moved the entire family to Alexandria so that Ghazālī could begin his studies. While in Alexandria, his father purchased a book store. Ghazālī reports reading as much as he could as a child. He studied at the

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[63] Ghazālī's description of the Islamic virtue of "trust in God" (*tawakkul*), for example, relies on Abū Ḥāmid's account in his *Revival of the Sciences of the Religion*. See Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Jānib al-'āṭifī min al-islām: baḥth fi al-khuluq wa-al-sulūk wa-al-taṣawwuf* (*The Affective Side of Islam: An Investigation into Character, Behavior, and Sufism*) 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1962), 306-315.

[64] Ghazālī, *Min maqālāt*, 168.

[65] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, "Introduction" in Ibn al-Jawzī's *Ṣayd al-Khāṭir* (*Quarry of the Mind*) ed. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al- Ḥadītha, 1960), 6.

[66] Cited in Gharīb, 219-220.

[67] Ibid., 220.

[68] Gharīb, 220. Gharīb adds, however, that Ghazālī apparently preferred another text of Sufi ethics, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya's (d. 1350) *Madārij al-salikīn* (*Stairways of the Wayfarers*), and suggested that it take the place of Abū Ḥāmid's *Mīzān*, Ibid.

Azhar institute in Alexandria for ten years, before heading off to begin studying at al-Ahzar in Cairo in 1938. During his last year of school in Alexandria, Ghazālī met Ḥasan al-Bannā for the first time and he quickly thereafter joined the Muslim Brotherhood.[69] Ghazālī began attending al-Azhar in the fall of 1938, where he entered the School of the Fundamentals of Religion (*kullīyat usūl al-dīn*). He graduated in 1941 and then pursued a more specialized degree in "calling and guidance" (*al-daʿwa wa-al-irshād*), which he received from al-Azhar in 1943.

In trying to reconstruct how Ghazālī may have encountered Islamic philosophical ethics, we have already seen that one possible conduit was his reading of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's texts. While at al-Azhar, however, Ghazālī also had the opportunity to study with two pioneers of the study of ethics in modern Egypt, Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh Darāz (1894-1958) and Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā (1899-1963). The latter, I suggest, was particularly influential in shaping Ghazālī's thinking. Mūsā came from a family of prominent *ʿulamāʾ* (Muslim scholars). He studied at al-Azhar for twelve years. After graduating in 1925 he began teaching at the Azhar religious institute in Tanta, but was removed from his post two years later because of problems with his eyesight. He went on to learn French and study law, and then worked as a lawyer for some time. In 1937 he was invited by the then Rector of al-Azhar, Muṣṭafā al-Marāghī (1881-1945), to join the faculty at the School of the Fundamentals of Religion, where he was asked to teach ethics (*akhlāq*) and philosophy (*falsafa*).[70] Mūsā accepted the post and taught there, but also made plans to pursue a doctoral degree in philosophy in Paris, where he was to study with the famed French Orientalist, Louis Massignon (1883-1961). The outbreak of World War Two prevented him from beginning

[69] ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm ʿUways, *al-Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī: sīrat imām fī fiqh al-islām* (*Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī: The Biography of the Imam in His Understanding of Islam*) (Mansoura, Egypt: Dār al-Kilma lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzīʿ, 2010); Ghazālī, "Qissat ḥayā," pt. 2- pt. 3.

[70] Muḥammad al-Sayyid Dasūqī, *Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, 1317-1383 H/1899-1963 M: al-faqīh al-faylasūf wa-al-muṣliḥ al-mujaddid* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2003), 1-15.

his doctoral studies there. Instead, Mūsā continued to teach at al-Azhar and studied with an influential reviver of the study of Islamic philosophy in Egypt, Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Rāziq (1885-1947), who was then teaching at Fu'ād University.[71] Mūsā finally made it to Paris in 1945 and received a doctoral degree from the Sorbonne in 1948 after he defended his thesis on the Muslim philosopher, Averroes.[72]

By the time Mūsā began his doctoral studies in Paris, however, he had already published in Arabic three comprehensive studies on ethics. The first two were published in 1940. One of the works published in 1940 was a general introduction to the study of ethics, made up of articles he had first published in the late 1930s. The purpose of this text was to simplify the study of ethics for Arabic readers and to compare and contrast the views of classical "Islamic philosophers of ethics" (*falāsifa al-akhlāq al-islāmīyīn*) with those of Western philosophers.[73] The text became popular enough that later Muslim reformers, like Ghazālī's colleague, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, would recommend it to his readers as a "beneficial" book on ethics.[74] The second of Mūsā's books published in 1940 was a general history of ethics, entitled *The History of Ethics*, which included overviews of Greek, Islamic, and Western ethical philosophies.[75] His third work on ethics, first published in 1942, was dedicated specifically to Islamic philosophical ethics and outlined the ethical thought of three important classical Muslim scholars: Miskawayh (d. 1030), Abū Ḥāmid

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[71] Ibid., 16. On Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Rāziq, see Ibrahim Abu-Rabi', "Al-Azhar and Rationalism in Modern Egypt: The Philosophical Contributions of Shaykhs Mustafa 'Abd al-Raziq and 'Abd al-Halim Mahmud," in *Islamic Studies* 27, no. 2 (1988).

[72] Ibid., 17.

[73] Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, *Mabāḥith fī falsafat al-akhlāq* (*Studies in Philosophy of Ethics*) (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-'Arabī, 1948 [1940]), 2.

[74] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Thaqāfat al-da'īya* (*The Culture of the Caller*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Wahba, 1996 [1976]), 111.

[75] Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, *Tārīkh al-akhlāq* (*The History of Ethics*) 2ⁿᵈ ed. (Cairo: Maṭba'at Amīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān, 1943 [1940]).

al-Ghazālī, and Ibn ʿArabī (d. 1240). It also explored the relationship between Islamic philosophical ethics and Greek ethics.[76]

In Chapter Two I explore the argument Mūsā advances in these early works more extensively, but here I wish to note briefly what kinds of intellectual engagements Mūsā's career at al-Azhar, as well as his publications, may have opened for the students at al-Azhar, like Ghazālī. Mūsā wrote each of these works while a teacher at al-Azhar and, as he taught ethics and philosophy there, it seems likely that these texts reflected ideas he conveyed to the students in his classes. His presence at al-Azhar and his scholarship were remarkable enough to lead his former teacher, ʿAbd al-Rāziq, to comment on what he perceived as significant changes in the intellectual climate at al-Azhar since he supervised over the curriculum there in the early twentieth century. In ʿAbd al-Rāziq's preface to the second edition of Mūsā's *History of Ethics*, entitled "The Development of the Scholarly Environment at al-Azhar," he recalls that some twenty years ago (circa 1920), he served on a committee that was to determine "what would be taught in terms of books" at al-Azhar. ʿAbd al-Rāziq says that it was decided that Miskawayh's *Tadhhīb al-akhlāq* (*The Refinement of Character*), a foundational Islamic interpretation of Aristotelian ethics, would be included among these books, something which greatly excited ʿAbd al-Rāziq because he had wanted to find a way for the books of "Islamic philosophers" (*al-falāsifa al-islāmīyīn*) to enter into "the greatest Islamic institute." But, ʿAbd al-Rāziq quickly adds, not long after this decision was made, instructors and students at al-Azhar complained, claiming that Miskawayh's *Tadhhīb al-akhlāq* was a book that contained "philosophy" and that "noble al-Azhar should be free of it." ʿAbd al-Rāziq was thus greatly pleased that not only had Mūsā published his *History of Ethics*, which included extensive

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[76] Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, *Falsafat al-akhlāq fī al-islām, wa-ṣilātuhā bi-al-falsafa al-ighrīqīya, maʿa maqāla fī al-akhlāq fī al-jāhilīya wa-al-islām qabla ʿaṣr al-falsafa* (*The Philosophy of Ethics in Islam, and Its Link to Greek Philosophy, With a Chapter on Ethics During the Age of Pre-Islamic Ignorance and Islam Before the Era of Philosophy*) 2ⁿᵈ ed. (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Risāla, 1945 [1942]).

overviews of the views of both Miskawayh and Aristotle and had gone through its first printing in only two years, but also that its author was a teacher at al-Azhar in the School of the Fundamentals of Religion.[77]

Thus, by the time Ghazālī began his training at al-Azhar it seems likely that Islamic philosophical ethics were taught there, at least by Mūsā. For his part, Ghazālī, in his short memoir, tells us that he did in fact study with Mūsā. Although Ghazālī reports that once during his first year at al-Azhar he publically questioned Mūsā's high esteem for the French after a presentation given by the latter, his relationship with Mūsā afterwards nevertheless "became firm." He adds that not only did he become one of Mūsā's preferred students, but that throughout his entire studies at al-Azhar, Mūsā's "direction and guidance" were indispensable to young Ghazālī. After his graduation, continues Ghazālī, there arose between him and Mūsā "a deep friendship and cooperation in the service of the Islamic call."[78]

But Mūsā was not the only scholar at al-Azhar interested in ethics, with whom Ghazālī may have had the chance to study. According to Ghazālī, while he was a student, Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Darāz, also taught there.[79] Darāz is known for his efforts to systematically outline a Qur'ānic theory of ethics, published in French in 1950.[80] The text was Darāz's doctoral dissertation, which he wrote during his time as a doctoral student at the Sorbonne. Much like Mūsā, Darāz too came from a family of prominent *'ulamā'*. In 1939 he was selected along with a number of other Azhar

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[77] See 'Abd al-Rāziq's preface to the second edition of Mūsā's *Tārīkh al-akhlāq*, 5-6.

[78] Ghazālī, "Qiṣṣat ḥayā," pt. 5.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Darāz, *La morale du Koran. Étude comparée de la morale théorique du Koran, suivie d'une classification de versets choisis, formant le code complet de la morale pratique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1951 [1950]).

scholars to pursue doctoral studies in Paris.[81] Upon his return to Cairo in 1948, he taught ethics

and comparative religion at Fu'ād University and al-Azhar, and took a position on Egypt's

Supreme Council of 'Ulamā'.[82] In his doctoral dissertation, *La morale du Koran*, Darāz

endeavored to derive from the Qur'ān a comprehensive ethical theory and then compare it with the

ethical thought of Western philosophers, such as Kant and Bergson. The comparative component

of his study was apparently suggested to him by members of his doctoral committee, including

Louis Massignon.[83] In his study, Darāz argued that while the Qur'ān itself did not present a

systematic theory of ethics, it contained all the necessary elements for one. He presented his study

as filling a lacuna in the study of ethics, for not only had Muslims themselves neglected to posit

the Qur'ān's ethical theory, so too did Europeans. The latter, in particular, he noted, generally

skipped the Qur'ān's contribution to ethics altogether.[84] His study was thus a matter of reclaiming

the Qur'ān's rightful place in a global history of ethics. Indeed, Darāz was very much a

comparatist, publishing in Arabic during the early 1950s an introduction to the study of ethics,[85]

and another introduction to comparative religion.[86]

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[81] Aḥmad Muṣṭafā Faḍlīyah, *Al-'allāmah Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Darāz: sīra wa-fikr* (*The Great Scholar Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Darāz: His Life and Thought*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Īmān lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr, 2010), 37-47; see also, Abū Bakr ibn Sa'd 'Abd al-Rāḍī Qushayrī, *Al-'aqīda wa-al-akhlāq fī fikr al-Duktūr Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Darāz* (*Creed and Ethics in the Thought of Doctor Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh Darāz*) (Alexandria, Egypt: al-Ḥaḍarī lil-Ṭibā'a, 2006), 25-29.

[82] Qushayrī, 45.

[83] Ibid., 323; Faḍlīyah, 424.

[84] Darāz, vii-xxiv.

[85] *Kalimāt fī mabādi' 'ilm al-akhlāq* (*Words on the Principles of the Science of Ethics*) (Cairo: 1953)

[86] *al-Dīn: buḥūth mumahhada li-dirāsat tārīkh al-adyān* (*Religion: Introductory Research On the Study of the History of Religions*) (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-'Ālamīya, 1952).

Ghazālī certainly did not read French and Darāz's Qur'ānic ethics was not translated into Arabic until 1973.[87] It also appears that Darāz's career at al-Azhar overlapped with Ghazālī's only briefly. Nevertheless, Ghazālī mentions Darāz's presence at al-Azhar while he was a student and also reports, perhaps alluding to Darāz and Mūsā, that many Azharite scholars obtained doctoral degrees from Europe during those years and returned to Egypt to "powerfully serve their religion" with the knowledge they obtained abroad.[88] Regardless of whether or not Ghazālī also studied ethics with Darāz, the latter's work, together with Mūsā's, are certainly indicative of the intellectual climate at al-Azhar during the late 1930s and the 1940s. Darāz and Mūsā's works, however, reflected broader intellectual trends in Egypt. Their primers to the study of ethics, for instance, were preceded by other popular introductions to ethics, like the Egyptian literary scholar, Aḥmad Amīn's (1886-1954) *Kitāb al-Akhlāq* (*The Book of Ethics*), which was used in Egyptian secondary schools by the late 1920s.[89] While Amīn's text drew from a range of different philosophical sources, Western and Islamic, other introductions to ethics, like the Azharite scholar, Yūsuf Dijwī's (1870-1946) *Sabīl al-Saʿāda* (*The Path to Happiness*), drew primarily from Islamic ethical literature, including the work of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.[90]

Darāz and Mūsā's interest specifically in Islamic ethics might also be thought of as related to a general turn towards publishing on Islamic themes among Egyptian intellectuals during the 1920s and 1930s, which was first observed by Israel Geshoni and James Jankowski.[91] Regarding this

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[87] *Dustūr al-akhlāq fī al-Qur'ān: dirāsa muqārana lil-akhlāq al-naẓarīya fī al-Qur'ān* (*The Ethical Constitution of the Qur'ān: A Comparative Study of Theoretical Ethics in the Qur'ān*) (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1973).

[88] Ghazālī, "Qissat ḥayā," pt. 5.

[89] See Amīn's introduction to the second edition, *Kitāb al-Akhlāq* (Cairo: 1931 [1914]), no page number.

[90] Yūsuf Dijwī, *Sabīl al-saʿāda: fī falsafat al-akhlāq al-dīnīya wa-asrār al-sharīʿa al-Islāmīya* (*The Path to Happiness: On the Philosophy of Religious Ethics and the Secrets of the Islamic Sharīʿa*) (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Adabīya wa-Madrasat al-Ḥuqūq, 1914).

[91] See their *Redefining the Egyptian nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-34; 54-78.

trend, we might single out the work of the prominent Egyptian literary scholar, Zakī Mubārak (1891-1952), whose two-volume study on Sufism, first published in 1938, was cited by Ghazālī on various occasions. Mubārak began his own education at al-Azhar, though he left al-Azhar for Fu'ād University in 1916, shortly before receiving his *'ālamīya*, the Azhar equivalent of a doctoral degree. Throughout his studies, Mubārak received three doctoral degrees. His first was from Fu'ād University in 1924. His doctoral thesis, published in 1924, presented an influential, and controversial, analysis of "ethics" within Abū Ḥāmid's thought, entitled *Al-akhlāq 'inda al-Ghazālī* (*Ethics According to al-Ghazālī*).[92] The text caused some controversy because it was harshly critical of what Mubārak perceived as the otherworldly, and ultimately fatalistic, nature of Abū Ḥāmid's ethics. His argument that Abū Ḥāmid's ethics had no "social" value, as well as his analysis of Abū Ḥāmid's debt to Greek and Islamic philosophical ethics, anticipated some of the arguments Mūsā would advance in his later works about the potential of Islamic philosophical ethics serving as the basis of modern politics. As the focus of Mubārak's text on Abū Ḥāmid indicates, he, like Mūsā and Darāz, was very much interested in ethics. Indeed, his second major text, the two-volume study on Sufism, was perhaps the first modern Arabic account to posit the existence of a distinct Sufi "ethics."[93] This text was actually Mubārak's third dissertation, for which he received another doctoral degree from Fu'ād University in 1937. In between these two doctoral degrees, Mubārak also pursued another at the Sorbonne, which he received in 1931. His thesis there dealt with pre-Islamic Arabic poetry.[94]In Chapters Two and Four, I explore Mubārak's publications on ethics and Ghazālī's engagement with them more extensively.

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[92] *al-Akhlāq 'inda al-Ghazālī* (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tijārīya al-Kubrā, 1924).

[93] *al-Taṣawwuf al-islāmī fī al-adab wa-al-akhlāq* (*Islamic Sufism in Literature and Ethics*) (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Risāla, 1938).

[94] For brief biographical notes on Mubārak in English, see Mahmud al-Shihabi, *Zaki Mubarak: A Critical Study* (Jeddah: Tihama Publications, 1981), 11-50.

As by now has become clear, by the time Ghazālī began his book publishing career in the late 1940s, there were a range of conduits through which he may have encountered the study of "ethics"—Islamic, philosophic, Qur'ānic, and Sufi. He likely read Mūsā and Mubārak's publications, which, it should be noted, provided comprehensive overviews of the ethical theories of Greek philosophers, like Plato and Aristotle, and those of classical Muslim ethicists, like al-Fārābī (d. 951), Miskawayh, and, of course, Abū Ḥāmid. He studied with Mūsā at al-Azhar, and perhaps even Darāz. Beyond his formal education, as we have also seen, he may have encountered aspects of Abū Ḥāmid's ethics from his father and perhaps, Ḥasan al-Bannā. Additionally, by the time he began publishing full length books, Ghazālī had certainly read the works of at least Abū Ḥāmid. Indeed, we might highlight here Mubārak's observations from 1924, just three years before the modern day Ghazālī began his formal studies at the Azhar religious institute in Alexandria. Observes Mubārak, "In this age, *The Revival* is taught in al-Azhar and its religious institutes….The teacher shaykh Yūsuf Dijwī always recommends to his students that they benefit from *The Revival*."[95] While research has only recently begun to explore the nineteenth and twentieth century publication and circulation of the classical Islamic textual tradition within the Arab Middle East,[96] the works of classical Muslim scholars were clearly sufficiently available enough for individuals like Mūsā, Darāz, and Mubārak to utilize them in their studies. It therefore likely that Ghazālī too would have had access to that same corpus of texts.

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[95] Mubārak, *Al-akhlāq 'inda al-Ghazālī*, 244. In a way that recalls 'Abd al-Rāziq's comments regarding his attempts to teach Miskawayh's *Tadhhīb al-akhlāq* at al-Azhar circa 1920, Mubārak notes that Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905) had decided to teach Abū Ḥāmid's *Revival* together with Miskawayh's *Tadhhīb*, but the *'ulamā'* of the time perceived Miskawayh's text as "philosophy" and opposed 'Abduh's decision for this reason, Ibid. It should also be noted here that Mubārak was a sharp critic of Dijwī and held his work in little regard, 279.

[96] See, for instance, Ahmad Shamsy, "Islamic Book Culture through the Lens of Two Private Libraries, 1850-1940," *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 4, no. 1-2 (2016); Ahmad Khan, "Islamic Tradition in the Age of Print: Editing, Printing and Publishing the Classical Heritage," in *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage*, eds. Elizabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 52-99.

Material Theologies

Ghazālī received his *'ālamīya* in 1943, specializing in calling and guidance. After receiving his degree, he was appointed a imam at Cairo's at 'Azabān Mosque near al-'Ataba Square. Ghazālī had joined the Brotherhood sometime after he met Bannā in 1937. While a student at al-Azhar he was active in the Brotherhood organization there. After he graduated he not only worked as an imam, but also began publishing articles in the Brotherhood's magazine, *Majallat al-Ikhwān al-Muslimīn*, and soon thereafter was appointed by Bannā to be the magazine's secretary.[97] It was in fact Bannā's influence that spurred Ghazālī's publishing career. Recalling his very first attempt to submit an article for publication in the Brotherhood's magazine, Ghazālī notes that article was rejected. Not long after, however, Bannā visited the magazine's headquarters to complain of the lack of quality articles written by Brotherhood members. After looking through some of the articles the magazine had previously discarded, he found Ghazālī's rejected article and was impressed enough make it the lead article on the next edition of the magazine. Ghazālī reports with obvious pride that shortly thereafter Bannā wrote him a note praising Ghazālī's article and encouraging him to continue writing.[98] That article was the first of a number of articles Ghazālī would write, many of which would later be published in his early books.

I turn now to an analysis of Ghazālī's first full-length book, *Islam and Economic Conditions*, published four years after he received his *'ālamīya*. I explore how aspects of Islamic philosophical ethics play important roles in the work's key early chapters. I focus specifically on the presence of an Islamic reformulation of Aristotle's theory of the existence of certain bodily and external "goods" necessary to cultivate virtue. This theory received an extensive Islamic reformulation in

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[97] Ghazālī, "Qissat ḥayā," pt. 9.

[98] Ibid., pt. 6.

Abū Ḥāmid's discussion of virtue of thankfulness towards God (*shukr*) in book thirty-two of his forty book magisterial, *Revival of the Sciences of Religion*. Although Abū Ḥāmid is known as a critic of the philosophers, to read his account on this virtue is to read an Islamic reformulation of Greek philosophical ethics. That is not to suggest that his account was unoriginal—indeed it was a "reformulation"—for he altered key aspects of Greek philosophical ethics in numerous ways and gave them distinct ends in line with his vision of the human purpose. It is to suggest, however, that Islamic philosophical ethics—in this case the synthesis that Abū Ḥāmid crafted—are integral to Ghazālī's modern day understanding of Islam.

We should also note here that Abū Ḥāmid also drew explicitly from the writings of Sufis when crafting his ethical theories and presented his *Revival* as a compilation of Sufi ethics. Thus, as he combined various ethical traditions, it is difficult to posit clear distinctions in his writings between Islamic and Greek philosophical ethics, or between philosophical ethics and Sufi ethics. As Taneli Kukkonen has shown, for instance, the major point of convergence between views of the philosophers and the Sufis according to Abū Ḥāmid, was their shared concern for "perfecting the soul through the reformation of character."[99] Though the ethical teachings of the philosophers, such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle undoubtedly predated the teachings of the Sufis, Abū Ḥāmid maintained that the philosophers had, in fact, developed their views of ethics by borrowing from the Sufis, or more accurately, from some Sufi like pre-Islamic monotheistic group. To make sense of Abū Ḥāmid's claim, Kukkonen writes, "What compels al-Ghazālī to bring up the whole issue of priority is that there *is* a marked affinity between what the philosophers (Greek and Arabic) had proclaimed in their ethics and what one finds in certain texts of a more pronounced Islamic hue—

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[99] Taneli Kukkonen, "Al-Ghazālī on the Origins of Ethics" *Numen* 64, (2016), 273.

none more so than al-Ghazālī's own."[100] On the affinity between Sufi and philosophical ethics,

Kukkonen adds, "To begin from a general level, the notion that humanity hangs suspended

between a lower animal nature and an angelic contemplative mode of existence is a commonplace

in both philosophical tracts—especially those of a Platonic stamp—and Sufi texts. The need for a

close regimen of self-discipline is likewise common to the two traditions. The latter facet is

sufficiently important for al-Ghazālī himself to devote a whole book in the *Revival* to the topic of

disciplining the soul (*riyāḍat al-nafs*)…"[101] Abū Ḥāmid thus makes this claim because his own

ethical teachings were heavily indebted to the philosophical tradition and he therefore sought to

preempt the assertion that he borrowed from the latter by showing that the philosophers themselves

were ultimately indebted to a pre-Islamic Sufi like monotheist group. Kukkonen concludes, "In

evoking a continuous line of monotheist spirituality stretching back to pre-Islamic times, al-

Ghazālī is primarily creating room for himself to appropriate as much of the Greek tradition as he

deems useful."[102]

The influence of Greek ethics on Abū Ḥāmid derived from his reading of the works of Muslim

philosophers, including Avicenna, Averroes, and Miskawayh, who were themselves influenced by

Plato and Aristotle.[103] My interest here, though, is not in the modes of transmission through which

Abū Ḥāmid or other Muslim scholars picked up on Greek philosophy,[104] but simply to underline

the fact that to read Abū Ḥāmid is to read a version of Greek philosophical ethics. For instance,

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[100] Ibid., 277; emphasis in the original.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid., 282. For another perceptive analysis Abū Ḥāmid's engagement with certain philosophical virtues, in this case greatness of soul, see Sophia Vasalou, "An Ancient Virtue and Its Heirs: The Reception of Greatness of Soul in the Arabic Tradition," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 45, no. 4 (2017).

[103] Mohammed Sherif, *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 74.

[104] For recent work taking up the Arabic and Islamic assimilation of Aristotle's philosophy see, *Aristotle and the Arabic Tradition* eds. Ahmed Alwishah and Josh Hayes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

his division of the four cardinal virtues (wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice) was quite similar to the division elaborated by Aristotle and Plato, as was his understanding of soul and its faculties.[105] Like the philosophers, both Muslim and Greek, he also held that virtue lies midway between two vices,[106] and held that to acquire virtue one must habituate oneself to performing good deeds.[107] Here, however, I simply wish to highlight that Abū Ḥāmid theory of "goods" needed to realize thankfulness towards God is unmistakably Aristotelian.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle observes that the realization of happiness, the ultimate good, requires a range of other goods. Happiness for Aristotle was the noblest end to which humans could aspire because it was good in and of itself and served no other end. It was the most final good, he writes, "that which is always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else."[108] Things that were either necessary for reaching this final good or could be put to use towards it were "external" goods, such as wealth, friends, and children. External goods sometimes included for Aristotle what he called goods of the body, such as health. There were also goods of the soul which included the virtues. To acquire virtue and execute noble deeds, however, required certain external goods. Happiness necessitates "external goods," observes Aristotle, "for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment. In many actions we use friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the luster from happiness—good birth, goodly children, beauty…"[109] Summing up Aristotle's views on external goods, John Cooper writes that while some "provided the normal and

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[105] Sherif, 24-27.

[106] Ibid., 33-36.

[107] Ibid., 32-33.

[108] Aristotelian, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a 31-35.

[109] Ibid., 1099a 20 - 1099b 2.

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expected context for the exercise of the virtues," others "are used instrumentally as means to the ends aimed at in virtuous activities."[110]

Whatever the modes of transmission through which Abū Ḥāmid encountered Aristotle's theory of goods, it provided for him—and his subsequent readers—a way of conceiving the relationship between the material world and the realization of the human purpose. In his Islamic reformulation of Aristotle's theory, Abū Ḥāmid does not describe goods as "goods," but rather describes them as "blessings" (ni'am) bestowed by God upon His servants.[111] Also, as Majid Fakhry notes, Abū Ḥāmid "like Aristotle, identifies happiness with the chief good of man, but unlike him, he gives as its two primary divisions otherworldly and this-worldly. He is emphatic, however, that the first is the genuine variety; the worldly variety is spoken of as happiness purely metaphorically."[112] Abū Ḥāmid thus alters the definition of "happiness" in line with his distinct vision of the purpose of human life. His account of the ultimate happiness and the blessings that facilitate its realization occurs within his discussion of the virtue of thankfulness towards God, a highly esteemed virtue in his eyes which he connects to the remembrance of God (dhikr).[113] Like Aristotle, he divides goods or blessings into those of the soul, those of the body, and those found externally.[114] The former are the virtues and good character; those of the body are health, strength, beauty and long

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[110] John Cooper, "Aristotle on the Goods of Fortune," *Philosophical Review* 94, no. 2 (1985), 183-184.

[111] I focus here on Abū Ḥāmid's account in his *Revival*, in which he uses the term blessings; see Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ 'ulūm al-dīn* (*Revival of the Sciences of Religion*) (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2005), 1421-1487. For an English translation, see *Al-Ghazālī on Patience and Thankfulness* trans. H.T. Littlejohn (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011). In his other work on ethics, *Mīzān al-'amal*, he discussed "goods" as "goods" (khayrāt) and as virtues (faḍā'il); see Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-'amal* (Balance of Deeds) (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif bi Miṣr, 1964), 294-301. For brief overviews of this theory of goods, see Sherif, 77-78; and Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 201-204.

[112] Fakhry, 201.

[113] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ 'ulūm al-dīn*, 1421.

[114] He also includes another subset of goods, what Sherif calls "theological virtues," which are essentially the various forms in which God intervenes into a believer's life to aid and guide the believer's realization of the human purpose.

life. As for "the external blessings" (*al-niʿam al-khārijīya*), they are wealth, family, prominence, and nobility of clan.[115] Also like Aristotle, Abū Ḥāmid is keenly concerned with the ends to which these various goods are employed. Indeed, such goods are considered blessings only to the extent to which they are used for the correct purpose. That purpose, according to Abū Ḥāmid, is to obtain other worldly happiness and become close to God. Beyond these specific goods, Abū Ḥāmid also makes it clear that the blessings of the world theoretically encompass all of creation. He writes, "All that was created in this world was only created as an instrument for the servant to use to obtain happiness in the Hereafter and to attain closeness to God."[116] In terms of the specific virtue of thankfulness towards God, Abū Ḥāmid describes it as realized when a believer uses a blessing for its intended purpose (i.e. to become close to God) and is joyful over the blessing because it serves as a means to realize that purpose.[117]

Many of the goods or blessings that Abū Ḥāmid describes are, or course, elements of the material world, such as wealth and the body, or are maintained by material conditions, such as when the body, its health, and longevity are maintained by nourishment provided from the earth's natural bounty. Even some virtues of the soul, such as generosity, are maintained by sufficient wealth, as are prominence (*al-jāh*) and nobility. The capacity to realize the virtue of thankfulness and indeed the human purpose are likewise dependent upon certain material conditions. Thus, in Abū Ḥāmid's Islamic reformulation of Aristotelian ethics, all these and other material things are crucial elements within a process of establishing the proper knowledge of, and relationship with, God. It is this material theology, as I term it, that is fundamental to the modern day economic writings of twentieth century Muslim reformers like Ghazālī.

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[115] Ibid., 1446.

[116] Ibid., 1430.

[117] Ibid., 1424-1425.

Ghazālī opens *Islam and Economic Conditions*, describing his book as a "study of the position of religion (*al-dīn*) regarding economic conditions" drawn solely from the "texts of religion," that is presumably the Qur'ān and Sunna. He also adds that it is not a study of the systems or schools of thought that have emerged in contemporary times, but one aiming at correcting mistaken views about the relationship between religion and economic matters.[118] Although he does not draw explicitly from Islamic philosophical tradition to frame his views, many of his early works, like this one, bear clear affinities with it. In two of his early chapters he discusses, for instance, the relationship between material conditions and virtue and vice. He asks in these chapters, "Do Vices (*radhā'il*) Have Economic Causes?" and "Do Virtues (*faḍā'il*) Have Economic Causes?" As we saw in Aristotle and Abū Ḥāmid's accounts of "goods" and "blessings," from the perspective of the philosophical tradition, virtues and vices are dependent upon material conditions. I will come back to how Ghazālī discusses these questions presently, but first I wish to highlight how the way he begins this discussion likewise signals his affinity with Islamic philosophical ethics.

Prior to launching into his discussion of the relationship between material conditions and ethics, he asserts boldly, "Doctrines impelling to good deeds and virtuous character are the essence [*lubb*] of religion [*al-dīn*] and are the axel [*miḥwar*] around which its teachings pivot. The goal to which religion aspires is to find the appropriate environment in which to implant its doctrines and for their effects in character and deed to become manifest."[119] From here Ghazālī comments on the difficulties he encountered providing religious instruction and inspiring virtuous character and deeds among the "wretched" classes of Egyptian society, observing that it is impossible to fill another's heart with religious guidance when their stomach is empty, or clothe another in piety

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[118]Muḥammad al-Ghazālī *al-Islām wa-al-awḍā' al-iqtiṣādīya* (*Islam and Economic Conditions*) 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maṭaba'at al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1950 [1947]) 11.

[119] Ibid., 30.

when their body is naked. In this context, asks Ghazālī, "Can I make them know God, Mighty and Great?" Answering in the negative, "There is no path to knowledge of God other than knowing one's soul (*ma'rifat al-nafs*). He who knows his soul knows his Lord. The wretchedly poor are in a stupor about their souls, distracted by their present. The feeling of depravation and degradation paralyzes their thinking, so how can they know their Lord or be aware of what they must give to Him? Indeed, as they are unable to provide for themselves each day, it is preposterous to think that they can take up true preparation for the Afterlife."[120]

Beyond the clear link he perceives between material conditions and religious teachings, virtue and vice, Ghazālī's comments here show that he understands virtuous character and conduct as the essence of religion and understands knowledge of the soul as the basis of knowledge of God. These assertions, I would argue, are another way of saying that religion at its core is ethics and that ethics is the gateway to knowledge of God. To make sense of these claims, we might note that Abū Ḥāmid makes similar assertions in his other major work dedicated to ethics, *The Balance of Action*.[121] In the *Balance*, Abū Ḥāmid argues that ethics, that is knowledge of the soul, its faculties, and the means to purify is essential for believers for their success in the Hereafter. He justifies this assertion on the basis that the Qur'ān informs humans that to know the soul is to know God, and that the Prophet Muḥammad also said that the one who is most knowledgeable of his or her soul is the most knowledgeable of their lord.[122] In Abū Ḥāmid's ordering of the branches of knowledge, the only truly necessary form of knowledge, for most believers, is that which enables good deeds and virtuous conduct.[123] The branches of knowledge that fulfill this latter need are the three

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[120] Ibid., 30-31.

[121] According to Majid Fakhry, "it is the principle ethical treatise of Ghazālī," 194.

[122] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-'amal*, 199-200.

[123] Ibid., 228; 230.

branches of "practical science" (*al-ʿilm al-ʿamalī*), or the three branches of practical philosophy, which are ethics, economics, and politics. Of these three, ethics—which Abū Ḥāmid variously describes as "the science of the soul, its qualities, character traits, and the discipline of, and striving against, its passions" and as "the refinement of the soul"—is the most important.[124]

The modern day Ghazālī, as we have seen, was a reader of the works of his namesake and, while I cannot prove it here, it is plausible that to craft his argument in these early chapters he drew from *The Balance*—a text that also includes a distilled discussion of the various goods, material and otherwise, necessary to realize virtue and the human purpose.[125] Suffice it to say here that ethics was certainly on Ghazālī's mind when he wrote these early chapters, such that he describes it as the essence of religion.

From his above cited comments, it is clear that Ghazālī believes that human capacity to realize piety, to know God and to fulfill obligations towards Him is dependent upon material conditions. Hunger, poverty, and the search for a livelihood, he suggests, distract believers from thinking about, let alone dedicating effort to, fulfilling the human purpose. In different language, but conveying a similar point, Abū Ḥāmid explained to his readers why virtue has the "need" (*ḥāja*) for the external good of wealth. He writes, "without wealth, one becomes absorbed in the search for sustenance and clothing, a dwelling, and the necessities of living, and so, one does not become free for the acquisition of religious knowledge, which is the most noble of the virtues. As well, one is deprived of virtue of the *ḥajj*, alms giving, *zakāh* and charitable deeds."[126] Much of the modern-day Ghazālī's musings on the economic causes of virtue rest upon a similar conclusion—

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[124] Ibid., 231-233. For an excellent overview of Abū Ḥāmid's views on ethics and the practical sciences in *The Balance* see Fakhry, 193-196.

[125] Ibid., 294-301.

[126] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-ʿamal*, 296-297.

that material wellbeing and prosperity provide one with capacity to pursue noble activities and realize noble goals. As virtues made possible by material wellbeing and prosperity, he cites for readers, learnedness (*al-taʿallum*), pride of self (*ʿizzat al-nafs*), and good character (*ḥusn al-khulq*).[127] Conversely, material want and poverty, argues Ghazālī, obstructs the licit avenues for fulfilling desire (*shahwa*) and needs, which then leads people to pursue illicit ways of fulfilling them, as well as creates various temptations and distractions that pull people towards base activities and ends. Vices encouraged by material want, he writes, are theft (*al-sirqa*), illicit sex (*al-zinā*), and idleness (*al-taʿṭṭul*). Summing up the relationship between virtue and material conditions Ghazālī writes, that while humans can realize a degree of "perfection" (*al-kamāl*) despite the absence of material wellbeing, just as a tree may grow in a desert, virtues nevertheless "need for their growth the resources surging forth from the waves of the prosperous, noble and dignified life" and "may wither away and expire if they do not encounter continuous assistance that aids their nourishment and growth."[128]

While in this text, Ghazālī does not join the realization of the virtue of thankfulness to God to material conditions, he does so in his second book, which also dealt with economic matters. His discussion of the virtue of thankfulness in this text, as we will see, very much brings into fore his material theology. The notion that there is a material bases for knowing God and developing the proper relationship with Him, that of thankfulness, is found in the Qur'ān, which discusses thankfulness as closely connected with belief (*al-īmān*) in God. Likewise, in the Qur'ān, the opposite of belief, unbelief (*kufr*), is closely connected with the idea of ingratitude. As Toshihiko Izutsu has observed in his study of the religious and ethical concepts of the Qur'ān, for instance,

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[127] Ghazālī *al-Islām wa-al-awḍāʿ al-iqtiṣādīya*, 41-48.

[128] Ibid., 41.

kufr conveys a sense of ingratitude, and the meaning of its root, KFR, is most likely that of "covering." The idea is that the disbeliever (*kāfir*) is the one who enjoys the benevolence of God—as it is He who has created human life and the material things that sustain it—but shows no thankfulness to the benevolent Creator. The term means "'to cover, i.e. ignore knowingly, the benefits, which one has received', and thence, 'to be unthankful'."[129] Izutsu adds that there is such a close conceptual link between *kufr* as ingratitude and *kufr* as unbelief, that it is difficult, at times, to distinguish the two meanings. To explain he writes, "In order to understand this we have to remember that the 'signs,' ayāt, of God, which…were chiefly understood as 'favors' conferred by Him upon men calling forth 'thankfulness', may also very well be interpreted as so many manifestations of the divine Majesty, the Almightiness of God. In this second aspect, the 'signs' are naturally expected to arouse wonder and awe in the minds of men, and to cause them to 'believe' in Providence. He who refuses to do so is a Kāfir."[130]

In the present text, in a chapter taking up the "distribution of property," Ghazālī describes at length for his readers the relationship between material things, sensory experiences, the acquisition of virtue, and knowledge of God. He enters into this discussion while exploring the relationship between the realization of piety and material wellbeing and prosperity. Disputing the notion that "religiousness" necessitates living a crude, meager existence, devoid of pleasures and enjoyments, Ghazālī asserts that "religion" (*al-dīn*) in fact makes known to humans "the objects of life" (*matā' al-ḥayāh*) and how to use them for human benefit, demanding in return, thankfulness towards God. So that humans might be able to understand the "Divine discourse" (*khiṭāb Allāh*), religion prescribes for them a noble life with joy and comfort, he adds. Ghazālī cites for his readers the

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[129] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966), 119-120.
[130] 124.

Qur'ān: "Do you not see that God has made subject to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth and amply bestowed upon you His favors, [both] apparent and unapparent?" (31:20). Ghazālī then asks, "One wonders who is the person that can understand this speech? Who is the person that can feel all that it reveals in terms of God's blessings and reminds of His grace? Is it the person whose livelihood is guaranteed, who is strong in his days, and whose senses are open (*al-maftūḥ al-mashā'ir*) to all that is in life in terms of beauty and goodness?" Certainly it is not the person who lives in wretched conditions, for "he would not be aware of how this verse reveals that the heavens and the earth are made for his use. Rather he would feel subjected—in body and spirit—by everything between the heavens and the earth!"[131]

Continuing with this train of thought, Ghazālī adds that God-consciousness (*al-taqwā*) cannot be realized, nor can the "obligations of religion" be fulfilled, without material wellbeing and enjoyment of the pleasurable things in life. He cites a Qur'anic verse to this effect, which reads, "And fear [or become conscious of] He who provided you with that which you know, provided you with grazing livestock and children, and gardens and springs" (26:132-134).[132] Further on in the text Ghazālī asserts that belief in God is constituted through one's sensory interactions with the material world and one's capacity to enjoy the material comfort and the bounty of the earth. Many verses in the Qur'an, he says, support the Muslim's belief in his Lord "by means of tying it to the sights of the natural world, and, at the same time, by making him see that these manifestations of the natural world are sources of blessing for him, and resources of provision from which he should take sustenance and benefit." One can feel this, he says, when reading a verse such as, "It is God who subjected to you the sea so that ships may sail upon it by His

[131] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Islām wa-al-manāhij al-ishtirākīya* (*Islam and Socialist Programs*) 2nd ed. (Cairo: Maṭabaʿat al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1951 [1948]), 84-85.

[132] Ibid., 86.

command and that you may seek of His bounty; and perhaps you will be thankful. And He has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth, all from Him. Indeed, in that are signs for a people who give thought" (45:12-13). Commenting on this verse, Ghazālī, says that the sea here is not only "an economic resource," (*mawrid iqtiṣādī*) which humans should exploit and use for material benefit, but also "a spiritual resource" (*mawrid ma'nawī*). Indeed, the bounty of the seas, their mystery, and greatness are "cause of contemplation, reflection, and belief!" He concludes, "The economic aspect of this verse is the foundation upon which the spiritual aspect is built."[133]

It is perhaps clear by now that when Ghazālī speaks of the "economic" in these texts he was not referring to something related to the abstract object of study that scholars today call the "economy," but rather something far more mundane and practical. While it is too much to suggest that Ghazālī was writing in the genre of household economics, the branch of Greco-Islamic practical philosophy pertaining to the art of household management, his writings on economic matters bear some affinities with it.[134] Premodern Muslim scholars who took up "economics" or "the science of household management" (*'ilm tadbīr al-manzīl*) in their writings, such as Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawwānī (d. 1501) generally focused their discussions on how the establishment of a household and matters pertaining to domestic living fit into the

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[133] Ibid., 88.

[134] In his account of the genealogy of the modern social scientific discipline of "economics," Timothy Mitchell observes that the idea of "the economy" as an object of study is a relatively recent one dating from the mid-twentieth century. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, he writes, "'Economy' (usually with no definite article) referred to the proper husbanding of material resources or to proper management—of the lord's estate, for example, or the sovereign's realm. The term referred to a way of acting and to the forms of knowledge required for effective action." See, Timothy Mitchell, "Rethinking Economy," *Geoforum* 39 (2008), 1116. For introductions into Islamic conceptions of household management, see Yassine Essid, *A Critique of the Origins of Islamic Economic Thought* (Brill: Leiden, 1995), 179-228; Simon Swain, *Economy, Family, and Society from Rome to Islam a Critical Edition, English translation, and Study of Bryson's Management of the Estate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1-108, 246-256.

broader schema of realizing human purpose.[135] On this point, it is interesting to note that Ghazālī

discusses similar matters in a chapter in one of his earliest works—also very much informed by

Islamic philosophical ethics—that dealt with "*al-qaṣd*," or frugality. This latter word is one of the

roots of the modern Arabic word for economics, "*al-iqtiṣād*." As a virtue that Muslims should

cultivate, Ghazālī's describes *al-qaṣd* as essentially meaning "moderation" (*al-iʿtidāl*) and "being

in the position of the mean between two extremes" (*al-tawassuṭ*). Indeed, his discussion on this

virtue begins with the assertion that adopting the mean between two extremes is the general

principle through which a Muslim should approach all domestic and personal matters. Ghazālī's

"doctrine of the mean" is not unlike that of Abū Ḥāmid and the Greek philosophers, who held that

hitting the mean (*wasaṭ*) between two extremes was to realize virtue.[136] In this chapter, Ghazālī

discusses what he describes as matters related to the "personal lives of Muslims," including food

and eating habits, clothing, bodily care, personal hygiene, and household accoutrements and

comforts, focusing specifically on how each facilitates the realization of the human purpose. His

general point is that each of these elements of domestic and personal life serves as means to a more

important, loftier end, though they are not ends in themselves. "The world is a means to the

Hereafter," he writes.[137] As such, they should not be pursued or desired too avidly nor should they

be neglected. Rather they should be approached with moderation. "Being in the position of the

mean" (*al-tawassuṭ*), he writes, "is the essence of virtue (*al-faḍīla*). Being in the position of the

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[135] See Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's *Nasirean Ethics* trans. G. M. Wickens (London; New York: Routledge), 151-184; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawwānī, *Practical Philosophy of the Muhammadan People, Exhibited in Its Professed Connexion* [sic] *with the European, Being a Translation of the Akhlāk-i-Jalāly, the Most Esteemed Ethical of Middle Asia, From the Persian* trans. W.F. Thompson (London, Oriental translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1839), 245-311. For overviews of the ethical thought of al-Ṭūsī and al-Dawwānī, see Fakhry, 131-142 and 143-147, respectively.

[136] See Abū Ḥāmid's discussion of the four principle virtues in the *Balance*, 264-273; see also the *Revival*, 935. For an overview of the "doctrine of the mean," see Sherif, 33-38.

[137] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Khuluq al-muslim* (*Muslim Character*) (Cairo: Maṭabaʿat al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1953), 144-153, cited at 145.

mean here is that you possess life and exploit it for the reaching of lofty ideals, and not that life possesses you and exploits you for its base things (*danāyāhā*)."[138] Thus not unlike the philosophical science of household management or economics, *al-qaṣd*, then, means to find the place of all these domestic and personal matters within the broader schema of realizing the human purpose. On the general level, Ghazālī's conception *al-qaṣd* also shares much with Aristotle and Abū Ḥāmid's discussions of the various types of goods necessary to realize virtue.

Prior to concluding this chapter, I wish to briefly highlight the influence of Islamic philosophical ethics on Ghazālī's younger contemporary and close colleague, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, who is himself regarded as one of the twentieth century's most influential Sunni Muslim scholars.[139] Like Ghazālī, Qaraḍāwī was a reader of Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā's work and also Miskawayh's *Refinement of Character*.[140] His multivolume account on the Islamic ritual practice of almsgiving (*al-zakāh*) succinctly conveys an Islamic reformulation of Aristotle's understandings of the relationship between bodily deed, habit, and the cultivation of virtue of the type that Saba Mahmood has discussed in her work. Qaraḍāwī's discussion of *zakāh* as a technique of ethical self-cultivation begins, however, with an account of the respective roles of the state and individuals in fulfilling this ritual obligation. Its fulfillment, he writes, involves the joining of otherworldly obligation and this worldly power, as it does not simply rest on "the consciences of individuals" (*ḍamā'ir al-afrād*), but also the coercion of a "Muslim state" (*dawla muslima*).[141] Nevertheless, Qaraḍāwī quickly adds, the fulfillment of *zakāh* remains a fundamental pillar of

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[138] Ibid., 153.

[139] See, for instance, the edited volume by Bettina Gräf and Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Global Mufti: The Phenomenon of Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[140] Qaraḍāwī, *Thaqāfat al-daʿīya*, 111. He recommends both authors for those interested in ethics.

[141] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *Fiqh al-zakāh* (*Understanding Zakāh*) 2ⁿ ed. 2 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1973 [1969]), vol. 1, 86.

Islam, whether or not the state demands it or society facilitates it. "Indeed, it is in the first place, an act of worship that brings the Muslim closer to his Lord and, through the fulfillment of which, he purifies his soul and his wealth. Thus, if it is not demanded by the authorities, it is demanded by belief and the Quran."[142] As an absolute obligation of religion, Muslims must fulfill *zakāh* on their own, he says, until "the Muslim government" (*al-ḥukūma al-muslima*) appears.[143] Indeed, as he later adds, even though worldly powers, in theory, ought to collect and distribute it, Muslims today fulfill this obligation on their own accord, as their governments do not do it for them.[144]

Later in the text, Qaraḍāwī notes that *zakāh* is not just a mechanism through which a believer obeys and pleases God, but also a deed that purifies a believer from impurities created by sin and, more specifically, the vice of avarice (*al-shuḥḥ*). It thus serves as a means of realizing "the purification of the soul" (*al-taṭhīr lil-nafs*).[145] But, adds Qaraḍāwī, it also serves as a form of virtue cultivation. He writes, "Just as *zakāh* purifies the soul of the Muslim from avarice, it also is a training [*tadrīb*] for him in the character traits of spending, giving, and expenditure." Explaining the logic behind this process, he continues, "Of what there is no difference [of opinion] among the scholars of moral cultivation and ethics is that habit has a deep impact on the human's character, behavior, and direction, and for that reason it is said that 'habit is a second nature.' And the meaning of that is that habit has a force and power that is close to 'the first nature' humans are born with." By habituating oneself to performing such acts of giving, he writes, they become "a deeply rooted quality" within a Muslim.[146] Although deploying an Aristotelian ethical theory,

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[142] Ibid., 87.

[143] Qaradawi, *Fiqh al-Zakat*, vol. 2, 766.

[144] Ibid., 847.

[145] Ibid., 857-858.

[146] Ibid., 859.

Qaraḍāwī grounds his claims on the relationship between deeds, habit, and character formation in Qur'anic commentary of the twelfth century Muslim theologian and philosopher, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209).[147] Paraphrasing al-Rāzī, Qaraḍāwī says that to cultivate character traits such as generosity and compassion, is to take on, as much as humanly possible, the character traits of God.[148] The broader point conveyed by the passages of al-Rāzī's text cited by Qaraḍāwī is that material world and material things, such as wealth, serve a "means" (*wasīla*) to a lofty purpose and are not an "end" (*ghāya*) in and of themselves. To rephrase this idea along the lines of Aristotle's theory of "goods," the material world and material things are subordinate goods necessary to reach the highest good. Indeed, Qaraḍāwī cites Abū Ḥāmid in this regard, who writes, "bodily forms of worship [*al-'ibādāt al-badanīya*] are thankfulness for the blessing of the body, and the monetary [forms of worship], are thankfulness for the blessing of wealth."[149]

Conclusion

Whether or not Ghazālī or Qaraḍāwī explicitly ground their texts in the Islamic philosophical tradition, that tradition certainly pervades their writings. By reading this tradition into and alongside of their writings, as I have done in this chapter, we can now appreciate the work these texts perform not just as forms of ideological outreach and mobilization, but also as manuals that instruct their readers in techniques of Islamic ethical self-formation. This is an important task, because, as Saba Mahmood has shown, "political projects are not only the result of coalitional organizing, ideological mobilization, and critical deliberation," but are also "predicated upon affective, ethical, and sensible capacities that are often ignored as consequential to politics."[150]

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[147] The work cited here is al-Rāzī's *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (*The Great Commentary*).

[148] Ibid., 862.

[149] Ibid., 862-865. Quoted here at 863. The text cited is Abū Ḥāmid's *Revival*.

[150] Mahmood, xiii.

Reading the Islamic philosophical tradition into and alongside of their writings is, as I have argued, warranted on at least two fronts: First it provides the theories that help make sense of those writings' moral and ethical claims; and second, this tradition was definitely part of Ghazālī's intellectual formation and no doubt that of many other modern Muslim reformers, like Qaraḍāwī. Indeed, Ghazālī, as we have seen, was certainly exposed to Islamic philosophical ethics from multiple conduits, from his father to the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, Ḥasan al-Bannā— both of whom were readers of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's texts—to his own reading of the Sufi-philosophical synthesis crafted by the "proof of Islam." Moreover, as I have also shown, he came of age at a time when "ethics" was increasingly becoming a topic of interest at al-Azhar, which made it possible for young Ghazālī to study with the pioneers of the modern study of ethics there, Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā and Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh Darāz, as well as read their influential histories of ethics and those of another scholar interested in ethics, Zakī Mubārak.

Unlike his teachers, however, with the exception of course of Bannā, Ghazālī was a popularly orientated writer, with a vast public following. I explore Ghazālī's debt to Islamic philosophical ethics more extensively in Chapter Two, but suffice it to say here that given Ghazālī's influence and the extent to which Islamic philosophical ethics pervade his early writings, we might conceive of him as a modern-day popularizer of that tradition. While Mūsā, Darāz, and Mubārak wrote influential histories and studies of ethics which were read predominately by scholars and students, Ghazālī, in contrast, wrote manuals of Islamic ethical self-formation for a broader public. His teachers did pen political critiques of contemporary issues, as did Ghazālī, but his works were also guides to the proper practice of religion. That Ghazālī's understanding of techniques of ethical self-formation and the proper practice of religion was so informed by the tradition of Islamic philosophical ethics is significant because it raises the possibility of conceiving this tradition as

more fundamental to modern Islamic political thought than commonly assumed. Ghazālī, for the most part, explicitly grounds his writings in references to the Qur'ān and Sunna, but while that material provides the basic elements of his texts, those elements are sewn together with theories, concepts, and metaphors provided by the Islamic philosophical tradition.

CHAPTER TWO

The Politics of the Self

Introduction

The impact of European ideas, practices, and institutions on the Middle East is fundamental to the way scholars have conceptualized the "modern" history of the region.[1] Growing European dominance over the affairs of various Middle Eastern peoples during the nineteenth century, amongst other things, facilitated the Middle East's integration into a global economic system and the spread of the nation-state political system to the region, both of which distinguish the modern period of Middle East history from others.[2] Since the field's inception, most intellectual histories on Arab societies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have traced, in some way or another, the reconfiguration of European ideas, practices, and institutions in local Arab guises.[3] Timothy Mitchell's seminal *Colonising Egypt*, for instance, explored the creation of colonial modernity in Egypt, which was characterized by the emergence of modern political subjects produced through the distinctive institutions of the nation-state, such as the military, schools, and factories, and the advent of abstract, metaphysical conceptions of order, such as "culture," "society" and "the nation." To trace the history of colonial modernity in Egypt in Mitchell's formulation was, in other words, to trace the replication of European forms of political subject formation in Egypt and the series of epistemic ruptures wrought by the Egyptian encounter with

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[1] My interest in how scholars conceive the modern history of the Middle East is not to neglect the fact that the academic discipline of history is itself a legacy of European colonialism, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

[2] For a definition of the "modern" history of the region, see James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

[3] One might take Albert Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1963] 2009) as the foundational text of modern Arab intellectual history. The text, he noted in its 1983 reissue, was primarily concerned with tracing "breaks with the past." He goes on to observe, however, that he perhaps had overstated the rupture with the pre-nineteenth century, and that it may have been equally conceivable to write an account of the period that traced "continuity rather than a break with the past," viii-ix.

European thought.[4] Mitchell argued that the combined sum of these novelties displaced precolonial methods of politics and modes of perceiving the world in Egypt.[5] Building upon Mitchell's work, Gregory Starrett has argued that once Islamic religious discourses in Egypt encountered the modern nation-state and its educational systems, they "were reified, systemized in novel fashion, and set to work fulfilling the strategic and utilitarian ends of the modern and secular discourse of public policy."[6] This, he argued, led to the complete "functionalization of Egypt's Islamic heritage."[7] In his study of modern Islamic thought, Charles Tripp has argued that in the wake of the integration of Middle East into the global capitalist and nation-state systems, it became impossible for nineteenth and twentieth century Muslim reformers to envision any form of political critique without utilizing, consciously or not, concepts and categories derived from European social scientific discourses.[8]

In the last chapter I examined elements of the modern genealogy of the study of Islamic philosophical ethics in Egypt and explored how that ethical tradition informed Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's early economic writings. I suggested in the conclusion that while references to the Qur'ān and Sunna provide the skeletal structure of Ghazālī's early texts, the substantive components of his arguments, including the theories, concepts, and metaphors they depend on, are derivative of the Islamic philosophical tradition. This chapter fleshes out this claim further, focusing specifically on what was perhaps the central theory embedded in Ghazālī's early texts

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[4] *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). On the formation of modern political subjects see, xi, 14, 35, 74-75, 95-96. On the advent of novel metaphysics see, xii-xiii, 14-15, 43-44, 50, 79-80, 94, 100-102.

[5] According to Mitchell, the modern political method—the term he uses to describe this combined sum—would eventually "replace" other "modes of achieving authority and truth" in Egypt, 131.

[6] *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 10.

[7] Ibid., 73.

[8] *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For assertions of this nature see, 8, 21, 42, 47-51, 52, 56-61, 62, 121, 194.

viz. the presumption of an organic and ineluctable relationship between ethics and politics, or, in other words, between the realization of individual ethical self-formation and the realization of the collective wellbeing. As we will see more extensively below, classical Muslim scholars who wrote within the tradition of philosophical ethics often presumed that there existed a natural and organic link between the three branches of practical philosophy, known as ethics, economics, and politics. They held that individual moral and material wellbeing was inseparable from collective moral and material wellbeing. While the tradition of practical philosophy may not have survived wholescale into the twentieth century, fragments of it, I argue, are integral to Ghazālī and his contemporaries' claims that self-reform is the basis of social reform. The excellent work of scholars such as Mitchell, Starrett, and Tripp has already traced the ways in which nineteenth and twentieth century Arab and Islamic understandings of collective life and the place of the individual within it, as well as the functions of religion and education in realizing collective wellbeing, are indebted to the advent of the modern nation-state, its institutions, and social scientific disciplines in the Middle East. Far less attention, however, has been paid to questions of continuity within Arab-Islamic intellectual history. This chapter thus ventures towards charting a longue durée history of the relationship between ethics and politics in Islamic thought. It suggests that the transformations commonly associated with the onset of colonial modernity in the Middle East are more fragmentary in nature than the secondary scholarship leads one to believe.[9]

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[9] The idea for such a history is taken from Elizabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan's introduction to the recent edited volume, *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 1-3. See also their perceptive critique of the tracing the "modern" approach to historical writing on Muslim societies, 1-11. For an account on Islamic theology that addresses the lacuna of studies exploring the impact of premodern thought on modern politics in the Middle East, see Daniel Lav, *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). My argument here is not to neglect recent innovative studies that have explored how the reconfiguration of European social scientific discourses in Arabic yielded a creative melding between European and Islamic intellectual traditions, as well as contributed to the revivification of classical Islamic theologies. See, for instance, Omnia El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); see also, Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). My intent is simply to explore more extensively questions of

Like Chapter One, this chapter reads the Islamic philosophical tradition into and alongside of

Ghazālī's writings because doing so helps make sense of his moral and ethical concerns and also

because he most likely drew upon that tradition to craft his arguments. Ghazālī, as we saw in the

last chapter, came of age during a period in which Islamic philosophical ethics were increasingly

of interest to Azharite Muslim reformers, like his teacher and colleague, Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā.

In Mūsā's early histories of Islamic philosophical ethics, he often highlighted for his readers the

organic link between ethics and politics within that tradition. Mūsā, it seems, was interested in

Islamic philosophical ethics precisely because this tradition tied a discourse on the refinement of

character together with a discourse on how to realize collective and worldly wellbeing. As a matter

of fact, he argues that ethics derived from the Islamic philosophical tradition could serve as the

basis of contemporary politics. To develop this argument, Mūsā attempted to distinguish between

an "ethics" drawn from the Muslim philosophers that dealt with collective and worldly wellbeing

and an "ethics" drawn from Sufism, which, he argued, were individualistic and otherworldly, and

ultimately unfit for political life. As we will see below, while doing so, Mūsā pits Abū Ḥāmid al-

Ghazālī (d. 1111) and his Sufi ethics against Miskawayh (d. 1030) and his philosophical ethics.

Aspects of Mūsā's evaluation of Islamic philosophical ethics and critique of Abū Ḥāmid, however,

were anticipated by Zakī Mubārak's 1924 *Al-akhlāq 'inda al-Ghazālī* (*Ethics According al-

Ghazālī*). That work, as we will see below, also took up the relationship between Islamic

philosophical ethics and Sufi ethics, and their respective places in and potentials for political life.

Mūsā and Mubārak's works not only demonstrate that the relationship between ethics and politics

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continuity in modern Islamic thought, which means, I argue, writing a history outside of the framework of discursive encounters between Islamic and European intellectual traditions. This chapter thus does not focus on how Islamic ideas were reconfigured in colonial and postcolonial contexts. For insightful studies that consider this question see, Samir Hajj, *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) and Caleb Elfenbein, "Full Bellies and Sincere Intentions: Re-reading Sayyid Qutb as a Theorist of Human Welfare," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no. 4 (2015).

was debated among Egyptian intellectuals during Ghazālī's time, but also that the writings of classical Muslim scholars that addressed the link between ethics and politics, including al-Fārābī (d. 951), Miskawayh, and al-Māwardī (d. 1058), were available and considered objects of study. Ghazālī certainly read Mūsā and Mubārak's texts and, as close reading of his early works will show, he probably also read al-Fārābī, Miskawayh, and al-Māwardī.

At least on the practical level then, there are firm grounds for exploring how Islamic philosophical ethics may have informed Ghazālī's modern-day vision of politics. But beyond this practical level, I am also interested in what might be thought of as more subterranean forms of continuity between Ghazālī's writings and premodern Islamic political and ethical thought. I thus begin this chapter briefly exploring three ways premodern Muslim scholars wrote about ethics, each of which, I argue, resonates with Ghazālī's modern-day political writings. The first comes from the synthetic ethical theory crafted by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), which melded together elements of Sufism and Islamic philosophical ethics. It relates to his preference for explicating the inner meanings and functions of Islamic practices, which he correlates with their impact in purifying the soul and his sharp critiques of Islamic exotericism. The second deals with the three-fold division of Islamic practical philosophy, as elaborated classical and postclassical Muslim scholars, and the organic link they perceived between them. The final example comes from Ottoman political thought. It deals with another way of conceiving the relationship between ethics and politics, common to Ottoman political treatises, which rested upon the presumption that the flourishing and wellbeing of human collectives was dependent upon the sovereign's individual moral health and spiritual realization.

A "Soul Doctor"

Ghazālī, as we saw in Chapter One, was remembered by contemporaries as carrying the spirit of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī into the twentieth century.[10] One of his colleagues who makes this comparison, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, even uses a term first developed by Abū Ḥāmid to describe his modern-day colleague. Ghazālī, writes Qaraḍāwī, was a specialist in *fiqh al-nafs* or the "discernment of the soul,"[11] or, in other words, he was what we might call a "soul doctor" (*faqīh al-nafs*). For reasons I will outline presently, by describing Ghazālī thusly, Qaraḍāwī was essentially saying that his colleague was first and foremost concerned with discerning the inner meanings and functions of Islamic teachings and practices, and how they work to refine the human soul and facilitate the human purpose. Abū Ḥāmid uses the term in his *Balance of Action*, one of the two major texts he dedicated to ethics, while distinguishing between those who specialize in the "practical" (*ʿamalī*) approach towards obtaining salvation in the Afterlife and those who specialize in the "theoretical" (*naẓrī*) approach. The practical method depends not upon a laborious search for knowledge (*ʿilm*), but upon strenuous effort to purify one's soul and thereby expose it to God's grace. Abū Ḥāmid associates this practical method with the way of the Sufis and, importantly, with the idea of being a soul doctor and realizing "discernment of the soul" (*fiqh al-nafs*). The original "soul doctor" (*faqīh al-nafs*), says Abū Ḥāmid, was the Prophet Muḥammad, though he obtained his discernment of the soul without strenuous effort. The theoreticians (*al-nuẓẓār*), on the other hand, are those that assert that proceeding upon the path of soul striving without an adequate level of theoretical knowledge is too dangerous for most, too corrupting to body and mind. One should, therefore, pursue knowledge before deed.[12] Abū Ḥāmid's own view

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[10] See Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī kamā ʿaraftuhu: riḥlat niṣf qarn* (*Shaykh Ghazālī as I Knew Him: Journey Over Half a Century*) (Cairo: Dār al-Wafāʾ, 1995), 185-186.

[11] Ibid., 151.

[12] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-ʿamal* (*Balance of Deeds*) (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif bi Miṣr, 1964), 221-224.

is that one should only pursue an amount of knowledge sufficient for properly performing deeds. Knowledge, he writes, is not an end in and of itself, but only a means to deeds.[13] In other words, one really needs both knowledge and deed, but the latter was clearly the more important of the two.

While both those who specialize in the practical and theoretical methods ultimately seek the "discernment of the soul," Abū Ḥāmid depicts it as more likely to be the fruit of the practical method, or the method that seeks to purify the soul. Indeed, his usage of the term *fiqh al-nafs* should be understood in the context of his critique of the way in which the learned men (*'ulamā'*) of his day understood and used the term "*fiqh*." As Ebrahim Moosa, the author of a compelling account on Abū Ḥāmid's life and work observes, although the term *fiqh* narrowly refers to "positive law," the word itself actually means "understanding," "discernment," and "intelligibility." In the narrow sense, the term thus refers to positive law as the result of the jurist's discernment. However, for Abū Ḥāmid, "the positivistic definition of the discipline of law…was contrary to the usage and meaning of the term *fiqh* among the first community of Muslims. During the prophetic and immediate post-prophetic era of Islam, he argued *fiqh* meant the 'knowledge of the path to the afterlife and cognition of the subtle perils afflicting the soul, as well as those actions that corrupt good deeds; the capacity to grasp the insignificance of the world and the burning curiosity to experience the pleasures of the afterlife with a heart overwhelmed by reverential awe [for the divine].'"[14] Thus, while most of the learned came to think of *fiqh* as the study of Islamic jurisprudence, the term itself actually means discernment. The original, primordial *fiqh* is not that which yields positive law, but that which yields refinement of heart and soul. Moosa describes the

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[13] Ibid., 227 and 230.

[14] Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 237-238. The passage quoted from Abū Ḥāmid is from Book I of his *Iḥyāʾ*.

discerner of the spirit, the *faqīh al-nafs*, as a master of *fiqh al-nafs*, translated as "self-intelligibility." He writes that for Abū Ḥāmid, the process of becoming a discerner of the spirit "is to be subject to an elaborate process of self-reflection. This means one must learn about the various conditions that afflict the soul and then, on the basis of that knowledge, become a master at offering advice in ethical matters."[15] In other words, to become a *faqīh al-nafs* is to become something akin to a master of ethics and *fiqh al-nafs* might be thought of as Abū Ḥāmid's capacious and creative appellation for ethics.

As we see from the above, Abū Ḥāmid's critique of Islamic exotericism is that scholars of jurisprudence (*fuqahā'*) have neglected this primordial, inner meaning and purpose of *fiqh*, and have instead become theoreticians concerned only with the exterior details of the *sharī'a*. The intent or purposes of the *sharī'a* have traditionally been described by Muslim scholars as the "*maqāsid al-sharī'a*." And it is no coincidence that when Qaraḍāwī describes for his readers the modern-day Ghazālī's *fiqh*, he notes that although Ghazālī never authored a book specifically on *fiqh*, understood as Islamic jurisprudence, he did expound extensively upon "*fiqh al-nafs*," understood as the discernment of the purposes of the *sharī'a* (*maqāsid al-sharī'a*).[16] Given the origin of the term "*fiqh al-nafs*" and what Abū Ḥāmid meant by it, and the parallel Qaraḍāwī posits between the careers of the premodern and modern Ghazālīs, it is clear that he understood the main thrust of his colleague's work as revolving not around expounding positive law, but around illuminating the inner meanings and functions of Islamic teachings and practices, and how they work to purify the human soul. Indeed, summing up his colleague's vision of "reform" (*islāḥ*), Qaraḍāwī describes its first and foremost pillar as "the purification of the soul" (*tazkīyat al-nafs*).[17]

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[15] Ibid., 238.

[16] Qaraḍāwī, 151.

[17] Ibid., 191.

As we see from these brief examples, the notion that ethics (i.e. the purification of the soul), or something at least akin to it, represents the intent and purpose of Islamic teachings and practices, constitutes an ideal of sorts within certain strands of Islamic thought, both premodern and modern. I wish to turn now briefly to explore how ethics was understood to relate with flourishing and wellbeing of human collectives, or what I describe as politics.[18]

Ethics, Economics, Politics

Why might Ghazālī think of the purification of the soul, or the reform of the self, as existing in an organic relationship to the flourishing and wellbeing of human collectives? The answer to these questions brings us first back to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's discussion of the practical method to obtain salvation in the Afterlife, or the way of deed, as he calls it; and second, to important Islamic philosophical texts that dealt with the relationship between ethics and collective life. Abū Ḥāmid frequently associates the practical method to obtain salvation to Sufism and, more importantly to my argument, associates it to ethics—one of the three branches of practical philosophy—the other two being economics and politics. Practical knowledge, Abū Ḥāmid writes, is divided into three sciences: First, there is the science pertaining to the soul and its characteristics, and how to discipline and strive against its passions (i.e. ethics); second, there is the science pertaining to how one might live with and manage the members of one's household (i.e. economics); and third, there is the science pertaining to the management (*siyāsa*) and ordering (*ḍabṭ*) of a town or quarter (i.e. politics). Of these three, the most important is unquestionably the management of one's soul (*siyāsat al-nafs*) or ethics. Indeed, he asserts, "If a human is not capable

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[18] I use "politics" here to refer to the science that shows humans how they might live together in mutual harmony. Politics, conceptualized as such, I argue and will show presently, is not too far from how Ghazālī, Qaraḍāwī, and their premodern predecessors conceived it.

of managing himself, how can he be capable of managing others?"[19] His threefold division of the practical sciences corresponds with the threefold division of practical philosophy: ethics, economics, and politics. Abū Ḥamid thus clearly perceives an organic connection existing between how one relates with one's own soul and how one relates with others, either as a householder or ruler. This relationship is so firm that for him ethics naturally takes precedence over the other practical sciences and is the key to them, so to speak.

The idea that ethics was an essential prerequisite for establishing the proper relationship with the Other, understood as God and as other human beings, is pronounced in crucial texts by Abū Ḥāmid's famous predecessors known for their interest in the practical philosophies, including al-Fārābī (d. 951) and Miskawayh (d. 1030), as well as later scholars, who elaborated more extensively on the branches of practical philosophy, including Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawwānī (d. 1501).[20] The idea undergirding their understanding of how ethics relates with the other practical philosophies is close to what Ebrahim Moosa, referring to Abū Ḥāmid's understanding of ethics, describes as "intersubjectivity." In his *Revival*, Abū Ḥāmid described ethics as "*'ilm al-muʿāmala*" or "the science of transactions." As Moosa notes, the verbal noun "*muʿāmala*" means "'interactive actions,' or 'to act in relation to others.'" He adds, "the ethical act is not an exclusive transaction with the self but is conditioned in relation to the Other. This Other is encountered at two levels: at the level of an intersubjectivity with other human beings in history and at the level of a transcendental intersubjectivity in relationship to God, often expressed as ḥuqūq Allāh, the duty toward God."[21]

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[19] Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, 231-232.

[20] For excellent introductions to the ethical theories of each of these scholars, including their writings on the practical philosophies, see Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

[21] Moosa, 230.

Like Abū Ḥāmid, these great scholars of Islamic philosophical tradition also posited an organic relationship between how one relates with one's own soul and how one relates with the Other. More specifically for my purposes here, each of these scholars posited a fundamental connection between the refinement of character and the flourishing and wellbeing of human collectives. Abū Ḥāmid does so too, particularly in his discussion of the virtue of brotherhood in his *Revival*, but the emphasis on ethics as a prerequisite for collective wellbeing is more easily located in the writings of the Muslim philosophers.[22] Miskawayh, al-Fārābī, al-Ṭūsī and al-Dawwānī each in their own way took up one or more of the three practical sciences in their texts; some were more systematic and explicit than others when discussing them. Nevertheless, I would suggest that for all of these scholars, ethics—the refinement of character and the purification of the soul—was conceived as the basis for the flourishing and wellbeing of human collectives. By this I mean first, that ethics was either thought of as the fundamental starting point for the proper practice of the other practical philosophies, which were themselves understood as necessary for human survival, as in the case of al-Fārābī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Dawwānī; and second, that ethics was thought of as the essential prerequisite for facilitating and maintaining the virtues of friendship and brotherhood, which were also both understood as necessary for human survival, as in the case of Miskawayh. The conventional division of the practical philosophies into ethics, economic, and politics survived

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[22] The texts I draw in this chapter are Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* (*The Refinement of Character*) (Cairo: Maṭbaʻat al-Turqī 1899); al-Fārābī, *Aphorisms of the Statesman* translated in Charles E. Butterworth, *Alfarabi: The Political Writings*, vol. 1 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); al-Māwardī *Adab al-dīn wa-al-dunyā* (*The Etiquette of Religion and the World*) (Beirut: al-Kutub al-ʻIlmīya, 1986) and *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* (*Counsel for Kings*) (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Falāḥ, 1984); Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's *Nasirean Ethics* trans. G. M. Wickens (London; New York: Routledge); Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawwānī, *Practical Philosophy of the Muhammadan People, Exhibited in Its Professed Connexion* [sic] *with the European, Being a Translation of the Akhlāk-i-Jalāly, the Most Esteemed Ethical of Middle Asia, From the Persian* trans. W. F. Thompson (London, Oriental translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1839).

well into the period following the death of the last 'Abbasid caliph in 1258, and for many scholars, came to include a fourth practical philosophy pertaining to law revealed by prophets.[23]

Beyond the practical philosophical tradition, the idea that ethics was integral to the flourishing and wellbeing of human collectives was also common within various strands of political thought during the Ottoman period. As Hüseyin Yılmaz argues, during the period of Süleyman the Lawgiver's rule (1520-1566), the entire structure of Ottoman political thought was reoriented away from the classical doctrine of the caliphate to focus specifically on the realization of the sovereign's individual ethical refinement and spiritual perfection, which was thought of as the indispensable prelude to the realization of worldly and collective wellbeing. This mystical turn in Ottoman political thought, as he terms it, derived largely from Sufism, but also took from the Islamic philosophical ethics, as well as pre-Islamic strands of political thought embodied in the mirrors for princes literature. Explaining this turn, Yılmaz writes:

> With the decline of the central caliphate and the rise of independent rulers, the discrepancy between classical juristic theory and political practice widened. As best illustrated in a burst of mirror for princes literature, moralism replaced idealism as the central theme of political discourse. This fledgling breed of political literature, which ultimately originated from the writings of Ibn al-Muqaffa in the eighth century but was overshadowed by the juristic discourse, shifted the focus from the qualifications of the universal caliph to the moral recuperation of the ruler in office, and from the uncompromising but abstract *shar'ī* principles of governance to specific instructions to turn existing administration into an efficient but just one. Because instating the best qualified candidate to the universal leadership of the Muslim community remained an unrealized utopia, the moralist tendency that aimed to turn the ruler in office into the best possible one found widespread appeal among statesmen, jurists, philosophers, and Sufis alike…. Thus the defining element of rulership was not its institutional sophistication but the human agent at the helm.[24]

[23] M. Cüneyt Kaya, "In the Shadow of Prophetic Legislation: The Venture of Practical Philosophy After Avicenna," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 24, no. 2 (2014).

[24] Hüseyin Yılmaz, *Caliphate Redefined: The Mystical Turn in Ottoman Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 9.

While political literature of this period centered on the figure of the sovereign, Yılmaz notes that Ottoman political theorists nevertheless believed that "ordinary people" should be acquainted with "the science of governance" (*'ilm al-siyāsa*) because, as one of these theorists asserted, "a human being is by nature social. It is a religious obligation that a person resides in a virtuous city, migrates from an unvirtuous one, knows how the residents of the virtuous city can benefit from him, and how he can benefit from them."[25]

Thus, throughout the centuries Muslim theologians, philosophers, and mystics have thought of the purification of the soul and the refinement of character as integral, in one way or another, to the establishment of a just and thriving human collective. While scholars have yet to trace the genealogy of the relationship between ethics and politics in Islamic thought from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth century, it seems unlikely to me that even after the advent of colonial modernity in the Middle East, the close link Muslim scholars perceived between the two simply dissolved or was reconfigured beyond recognition. Viewed from the perspective of the mid-twentieth century manuals of ethical self-formation written by Ghazālī and his contemporaries, it would appear that the organic and ineluctable link envisioned between ethics and politics survived not simply as an ideal, but as an actual practice which they articulated as a project of self-reform-cum-social-reform.

Ethics, Between Philosophy and Sufism

I turn now to explore more extensively the early twentieth century scholarship of Zakī Mubārak and Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, whose writings informed Ghazālī's later work. Both Mubārak and Mūsā were very much interested in the relationship between ethics and politics. Of particular concern to both was to distinguish between Islamic philosophical ethics and Sufi ethics,

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[25] Ibid., 12.

and to analyze their respective places in and potentials for modern political life. To posit a distinction between Islamic philosophical ethics and Sufi ethics, Mubārak and Mūsā focused on the writings of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, who, as we have already seen, melded together aspects of Islamic philosophy and Sufism. One of their main claims was that there were certain virtues valorized by the "proof of Islam," which he derived from the teachings of the Sufis, namely asceticism (*zuhd*) and reliance upon God (*tawakkul*), that were too orientated towards solitary life and otherworldly concerns, and therefore unfit for collective life and worldly necessities.

Mubārak's first book was published in 1924 and based on his dissertation for his first doctoral degree, which he obtained from King Fu'ād University. The book was called *Ethics According to al-Ghazālī*. It was a controversial book because it was sharply critical of Abū Ḥāmid and even led some of Mubārak's contemporaries to charge that he was an unbeliever (*kāfir*).[26] It was a comprehensive overview of Abū Ḥāmid's ethical theory, exploring in depth not only Abū Ḥāmid's views on ethics, but also the various sources from which he drew to craft his ethical theory, including Islamic philosophy and Sufism. In this latter aspect, Mubārak's book is not only an investigation into Abū Ḥāmid's ethics, but also a detailed study of the ethics of Muslim philosophers and the Sufis. On Abū Ḥāmid's debt to the Muslim philosophers, Mubārak observes that despite his critique of them and his attempt to distinguish himself from them, he was nevertheless greatly indebted to them to the point of "copying" many of their views on ethics. Yet despite the influence of Islamic philosophy on Abū Ḥāmid, his ethical views were ultimately overtaken by his inclination towards Sufism.[27] This inclination towards the latter is especially apparent in, *inter alia*, his endorsement of "abstaining from life" (*tazhīd fī al-ḥāyah*) and "the

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[26] See Mubārak's introductory comments, *Al-akhlāq 'inda al-Ghazālī* (*Ethics According to al-Ghazālī*) (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tijārīya al-Kubrā, 1924), 8.

[27] Ibid., 54-55.

cutting off of relations with people," ways of approaching worldly and collective life that Mubārak deems "far from the spirit of religion."[28]

The unstated subtext of Mubārak's critiques of Abū Ḥāmid is that if Sufi ethics cannot serve as a basis of worldly and collective life, Islamic philosophical ethics can. It is for that reason, I believe, that he consistently chides Abū Ḥāmid for not following the philosophers. Indeed, we might point out here, philosophers such as Aristotle and their Muslim counterparts like al-Fārābī, Miskawayh, al-Ṭūsī, and al-Dawwānī, were especially adamant that humans are by nature civic or political animals. As we will see later, Miskawayh, for instance, was a sharp critique of asceticism and solitary life because they were contrary to human nature and barriers to human flourishing. Yet, according to Mubārak, Abū Ḥāmid seems to have missed these truths, as his "science of ethics" in its fullest articulation does not concord with that of the philosophers, but only with that of Sufis.[29] Of particular importance for Mubārak in making this distinction is that Abū Ḥāmid ultimately conceived of "happiness" (*al-sa'āda*), or the final good or end point to which ethics leads, as otherworldly in nature. In fact, writes Mubārak, for Abū Ḥāmid the idea of worldly happiness could only be spoken of metaphorically. This, he says, indicates that Abū Ḥāmid did not have in mind "a social end" (*ghāyah ijtimā'īya*) for his ethics.[30]

As part of his critique of Abū Ḥāmid, Mubārak ventures his own understanding of virtue, noting that there are two types: "positive" virtues and "negative" virtues. As an example of the former, Mubārak lists hope (*aml*). Hope, he tells us, is a positive virtue because "it encourages its possessor to work along the path of life." "Asceticism" (*zuhd*), on the other hand, "is a negative

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[28] Ibid., 62.

[29] Ibid., 113.

[30] Ibid., 122.

virtue, because it makes its possessor content with what is upon him in terms of a bad state."[31] Mubārak argues that it is far better for believers to exhibit "vices of strength and power" than to adorn themselves the "virtues of weakness" that Abū Ḥāmid valorized. He not only argues that most of the virtues Abū Ḥāmid valorized were negative, but were also "individualistic" (fardīya) in nature, as opposed to "social" (ijtimāʿīya).[32] Such individualistic virtues would be suitable for individuals living in seclusion and isolation from others—they would be good for those seeking a "world of serenity." "But," says Mubārak, "if you wanted to enter the world of politics" such virtues are useless.[33] Mubārak later homes in on Abū Ḥāmid's valorization of the virtue of "reliance upon or trust in God" (tawakkul), observing that Abū Ḥāmid wrote voluminously on this supposed virtue. Yet, he exclaims that "what [Abū Ḥāmid] wrote about tawakkul was a plain call for monasticism, the cutting off of relations with people, and training in bearing thirst and hunger, and contentment with death rather than seeking sustenance!"[34] Mubārak later notes on several occasions that given the solitary and otherworldly orientation of Abū Ḥāmid's ethics, they could not serve as the basis for collective, national life.[35] Indeed, in today's world, Mubārak says—here invoking one of his contemporaries who likewise believes Abū Ḥāmid's ethics would be of little use for worldly life—"modern civilization" demands worldly power.[36] Nevertheless, Mubārak writes, it is difficult to find in the Egypt of his day a single critic of Abū Ḥāmid.[37] He thus

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[31] Ibid., 128-129.

[32] Ibid., 129.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 136-137.

[35] See, for instance, Ibid., 140 and 248.

[36] Ibid., 284.

[37] Ibid., 277

concludes his study with a sharp critique of the "learned men" of his day, who continue to uncritically teach and endorse Abū Ḥāmid's ethics.[38]

Much like Mubārak's account on Abū Ḥāmid's ethics, Mūsā's two histories of ethics, both published while he was a teacher at al-Azhar, also dealt extensively with the relationship between ethics and collective life, as well as whether or not Sufi ethics could serve as a basis of modern politics. More so than even Mubārak's account, Mūsā's works were comprehensive introductions to Greek and Islamic philosophical ethics. He gives special attention to how Greek philosophers, particularly Plato, and their Muslim successors, like al-Fārābī, understood that between "ethics" (*al-akhlāq*) and "the science of politics" (*'ilm al-siyāsa*) there was a "relationship, firmly bound without split." Explaining the logic behind this firm bind, he echoes the Greek philosophers who held that humans were civic or political animals. Each human, writes Mūsā, needs collective life because humans are not self-sufficient and find in other humans their completion or perfection (*al-kamāl*).[39] Aristotle, he notes, observed that "humans are civic [*madanī*] by nature and, as such, civic life [*al-madanīya*] is not the result of the an agreement among people to live together in exchange of mutual services and benefits, but rather is based upon human nature. It is considered necessary for elevation of the individual from one condition to another, and to realize all that is in his power of good and virtue."[40] Later in the text Mūsā describes for his readers how al-Fārābī, following Plato, likewise understood politics as based on ethics.[41] While politics should theoretically always be based on ethics, in today's world, writes Mūsā, the link between the two

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[38] Ibid., 286-288.

[39] Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, *Tārīkh al-akhlāq* (*The History of Ethics*) 2ᵈ ed. (Cairo: Maṭbaʻat Amīn ʻAbd al-Raḥmān, 1943 [1940]), 81.

[40] Ibid., 93-94.

[41] Ibid., 173.

has been severed.[42] After elaborating on Plato's views on ethics and collective life, Mūsā laments that the contemporary world's catastrophes and pains were created only once "shortsighted politicians severed politics from ethics, and built their policies for their lands on barefaced self-interestedness and detestable selfishness."[43] Mūsā's assertion that world problems have at their root the severing of ethics from politics very much foreshadowed the arguments Ghazālī would advance.

According to Mūsā, Miskawayh was among the Muslim philosophers who, like al-Fārābī, understood the innate human need for collective life and the necessity of basing that collective living on ethics. This Muslim philosopher, writes Mūsā, here mixing Miskawayh's words with his own, understood that "humans are social [*ijtimāʿī*] by nature viz. 'the human was not created of the creatures that live by themselves or can realize his survival by himself.' And if the matter is as such, then mutual assistance and mutual aid is necessary among all people. 'It is only just then that people seek assistance from us as we seek assistance from them, and we exchange with them what they exchange with us.'"[44] As Mūsā further elaborates, the philosophers like Miskawayh held that humans have an innate need for each other because their survival and flourishing depends upon the mutual exchanging of goods and services. For this reason, Mūsā notes, Miskawayh was a critic of asceticism and solitary living. Both the ascetic and the recluse necessarily benefit from the collective—for their lives would otherwise be impossible—but they do not benefit the group.[45]

But while Miskawayh criticized asceticism and recognized the "social" nature of human beings, his successor, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, valorized asceticism and solitary living. Both

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[42] Ibid., 81.

[43] Ibid., 84.

[44] Ibid., 190.

[45] Ibid., 190-191.

Miskawayh and Abū Ḥāmid were very much influenced by the philosophical tradition, notes Mūsā, though Abū Ḥāmid was ultimately far more influenced by the Sufis than the philosophers; he thus followed them in their valorization of asceticism.[46] Mūsā further pits Miskawayh's philosophical ethics against Abū Ḥāmid's Sufi ethics in his second history of Islamic ethical thought. Much of the text is dedicated to outlining the ethical theories of three Muslim scholars—Miskawayh, Abū Ḥāmid, and Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240). Regarding Miskawayh and Abū Ḥāmid, one of his concerns in this text is to ascertain which of these two great Muslims scholars provide the most relevant ethical theory for modern life. He is thus keen to highlight for his readers what he describes as Miskawayh's "social inclination" (*naz'a ijtmā'īya*). Miskawayh, points out Mūsā, did not condone asceticism and abstinence, nor the forbidding of lawful good things, rather he recognized that the human body had its rights and that it had to be maintained to realize virtue. He also recognized that humans are by their nature "civic" beings and need each other to obtain their share of the goods necessary for human survival and flourishing, which are ultimately beyond the capacity of one person alone to obtain without the help of others. Furthermore, Miskawayh also appreciated that the collective forms of worship God imposes upon humans are impossible to fulfill in isolation of other human beings.[47] Thus, without mutual assistance and cooperation, there is no way for humans to realize their "happiness" (*al-sa'āda*).[48]

While Miskawayh had a social inclination, Abū Ḥāmid, notes Mūsā, inclined towards asceticism. Abū Ḥāmid was deeply impacted by Greek ethics, he writes. In fact, the proof of Islam

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[46] Ibid. 198-199.

[47] 104-105.

[48] Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, *Falsafat al-akhlāq fī al-islām, wa-ṣilātuhā bi-al-falsafa al-ighrīqīya, ma'a maqāla fī al-akhlāq fī al-jāhilīya wa-al-islām qabla 'aṣr al-falsafa* (*The Philosophy of Ethics in Islam, and Its Link to Greek Philosophy, With a Chapter on Ethics During the Age of Pre-Islamic Ignorance and Islam Before the Era of Philosophy*) 2ⁿᵈ ed. (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Risāla, 1945 [1942]), 103-105

provided "a new picture of Greek ethics imprinted with a strong Islamic print."[49] That being said, Abū Ḥāmid veered from the philosopher's allegiance to the doctrine of the mean, and favored the Sufi inclination towards deficiency, especially in matters pertaining to the lawful good things in life and food. Continuing along these lines, Mūsā asserts that had Muslims followed Abū Ḥāmid and his exaggeration for deficiency, generation after generation of Muslims would have succumbed to incapacity and humiliation. [50] Abū Ḥāmid did understand the role wealth could play as "good" necessary to achieve virtue, yet he still held that being poor was ultimately more virtuous than being wealthy, adds Mūsā.[51] Given his inclination towards asceticism, deficiency, and poverty, "the author of the *Revival* would have been content" with hunger and deprivation.[52] Concluding his discussion of Abū Ḥāmid's ethics, Mūsā notes that there is much interest these days in questions pertaining to the "common good" (*al-ṣaliḥ al-ʿamm*). He thus asks whether or not Abū Ḥāmid had the common good in mind when he penned his ethical theories. This is an important question, asserts Mūsā, because it determines the value of "school of the proof of Islam" from "the social perspective."[53] No, writes Mūsā, the otherworldly orientation of Abū Ḥāmid's ethics, his inclination towards asceticism, his esteem of poverty and deficiency in food and clothing, as well as his valorization of reliance upon and trust in God (*tawakkul*), are all sufficient to demonstrate that he did not have the common good in mind when he wrote his ethical works.[54] Rather Abū Ḥāmid had the interest of only the Sufis in mind and "his school is not a school upon

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[49] Ibid., 122.

[50] Ibid., 152-153

[51] Ibid., 177-178.

[52] Ibid., 181.

[53] Ibid., 205-206.

[54] Ibid., 209-211.

which a gathering stands or with which a nation is made happy."[55] He quickly adds that had Muslims followed Abū Ḥāmid's ethics, Western imperial powers would have certainly rejoiced, as it would have facilitated their task of colonization.[56]

As we can see from Mūsā and Mubārak's accounts, there are clearly multiple logics informing their takes on the ethics of the philosopher and the Sufis. On the one hand, their critiques of Abū Ḥāmid's ethics are, in part, a reaction to what they perceive as the uncertain rank of Muslim nations in worldly affairs vis-à-vis their European colonizers. We might also note their concerns for the alleged otherworldly nature of his ethics overlapped with the broader anxieties of colonial era Egyptian elites that their countrymen lacked the necessary character traits for worldly progress, such as industriousness, productivity, and efficiency. As Timothy Mitchell has argued, such anxieties were very much reactions to British colonialist critiques of Egyptian "character" as backwards, inefficient and lazy.[57] Importantly, however, their critiques of asceticism and solitary living cannot be understood purely as reactions to Western colonialism. Nor can they be severed from premodern Islamic ethical theories. Indeed, it is not a coincidence that the Muslim scholar that Mūsā praises the most highly in his text is Miskawayh, who was likewise a critic of asceticism. Miskawayh, following the philosophers, saw asceticism as an affront to the civic nature of humans and, therefore, as a threat to their achievement of happiness.[58] Like Miskawayh, Mūsā's unease with asceticism derived from his belief that humans possessed a civic nature, which he understood

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[55] Ibid., 211.

[56] Ibid., 212-213.

[57] Mitchell, 104-111.

[58] See, for instance, Ibn Miskawayh's warnings against the evils of asceticism in *Tahdhīb al-akhlāq* (*The Refinement of Character*) (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Turqī 1899), 23-24. For an English translation of this text, see *The Refinement of Character* trans. Constantine K. Zurayk (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1968).

as the key to the flourishing of human collectives.[59] Mūsā and Mubārak's critiques of what they perceive as Abū Ḥāmid's neglect of "social" necessities thus also invokes the philosophers' criticisms of asceticism as incompatible with human collective life and flourishing. Their arguments are not simply animated by a desire to incite Egyptians to challenge Western imperialism and become more industrous, but also by an anti-ascetic impulse embedded in strands of Islamic philosophical ethics.

Revolutionary Politics

Ghazālī's writings that addressed ethics were distinct from those written by Mūsā and Mubārak, as they were not written as histories of ethics, but rather as manuals of instruction in ethical self-formation and works of moral admonishment. Yet Ghazālī cites their works on several occasions and was a student of Mūsā's, and it is likely that he consulted their texts while writing his own. Written during years of revolutionary enthusiasm in Egypt, many of Ghazālī's early texts addressed the need to inject ethics into politics. In 1952 a group of Egyptian military officers led a coup against the monarchy of King Fārūq (r. 1936-1952) and deposed him. Following the military coup, one of those officers, Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir (r. 1954-1970) emerged as Egypt's leader. 'Abd al-Nāṣir not only presided over the conclusion of Egypt's struggle against British colonialism, but also its nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 and its subsequent "victory" in the Suez war of that year, its union with Syria in 1958, its implementation of various socioeconomic development schemes, including the construction of the Aswan High Dam, as well as its adoption of socialism as the official state ideology in 1962. Judging from its early reforms

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[59] Other Muslim philosophers, like Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, maintained a similar understanding of the civic nature of humans. In his famous text on practical philosophy, al-Ṭūsī observes that "the human species…needs both the aid of the other species and the cooperation of its own kind to ensure the survival of the individual as well as that of the race." For example, it would be impossible for one human, without the assistance of others, to acquire all the means of survival, such as sustenance, a dwelling, clothing, and weapons, as well as master the various trades. This can only be achieved al-Ṭūsī says, when humans live together and cooperate, al-Ṭūsī, 189.

and written manifestoes,[60] the new regime and its ideologues pursued what might be thought of as a revolutionary politics—a politics envisioned as a struggle over the mechanisms of state power, whose goal was to use the state and its institutions to overturn Egypt's socioeconomic order.[61] The new regime evinced a deep faith, undergirded by a social scientific discourse about the laws of social change,[62] in the capacity of the state to initiate reform from the top-down and transform society. The institutional support for this belief came in the form of the Egyptian state's post-revolutionary establishment of the Permanent Council for the Development of National Production (PCDNP).[63] Politics in Egypt's revolutionary context was to use the state to initiate wide scale social interventions.[64]

If the regime and its ideologues articulated a politics of the revolutionary state, Ghazālī articulated what might be thought of as a "politics of the self," a politics envisioned, first and foremost, as a struggle for control over the soul and its inclinations. He thus positioned virtue cultivation and character refinement at the base of a project of realizing collective and worldly wellbeing. Not that he was uninterested in the state,[65] but most of Ghazālī's texts dealt with

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[60] Aspects of the regime's vision of revolutionary political struggle can be gleaned from 'Abd al-Nāṣir's 1954 text, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Public Affairs: Washington D.C., 1955), as well as another text written by the regime's foremost socialist theorist, Rāshid al-Barrāwī (d. 1987), entitled *The Military Coup in Egypt*, (Cairo: Renaissance Books, 1952).

[61] For accounts of the regime's ideology and revolutionary programs, see Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Roel Meijer, *The Quest for Modernity: Secular, Liberal and Left-wing Political Thought in Egypt*, 1945-1958 (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).

[62] See, for instance, Barrāwī's analysis on the social and economic factors that inevitably gave rise to the revolution, 51-95, and 'Abd al-Nāṣir description of how Egypt's revolution was determined by the country's historical stage, 39, 45.

[63] Barrāwī served as the first director.

[64] It is for this reason that Omnia El Shakry describes the ideology of the Nāṣirist state as one of *etatism*. See, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 197-218.

[65] For Ghazālī's views on state craft, see *Min hunā na'lim* (*From Here We Know*) (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, [1950] 1954), which was, not coincidentally, the first and one of the only of his many works to be translated into English; translated as *Our Beginning in Wisdom* (Washington D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1953).

concerns pertaining to the depths of the human soul. That being said, we need not envision Ghazālī's politics as somehow opposed to the regime's politics. Ghazālī was in fact one of the few of the Muslim Brotherhood's leading intellectuals who believed that the organization should adopt a non-confrontational approach towards the new regime. His stance on this issue brought him into conflict with the Brotherhood's leader at the time, Ḥasan al-Huḍaybī (1891-1973), and Ghazālī was expelled from the organization in 1953 for precisely this reason. While many of his former Brotherhood colleagues went on languish for years in 'Abd al-Nāṣir's prisons, Ghazālī was ultimately able to escape the regime's crackdowns on the Brotherhood because of his break with Huḍaybī. In subsequent years Ghazālī did, however, have a high-profile dispute with the regime (see Chapter Four) and was imprisoned briefly by the Egyptian state in 1965.[66] Nevertheless even after the regime's crackdown on the Brotherhood in 1954, Ghazālī continued to work within the Ministry of Religious Endowments, as he had been since the early 1940s, and continued his publishing career.[67] Ghazālī describes how after he was dismissed from the Brotherhood he decided to continue to work individually in the field of calling to others (*al-daʿwa*) in the two ways that were left open to him: publishing and teaching and delivering sermons in the mosques.[68]

Moral Afflictions

This section grounds the modern day Ghazālī's vision of politics in an "organic metaphor" widely deployed by his premodern predecessors when they wrote on the subjects of ethics and politics. Ghazālī often describes vice and virtue in terms of sickness and health. Articulated in such

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[66] Ramaḍān Khamis al-Gharīb, *al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī: ḥayātuhu wa-ʿaṣruhu wa-abrāz man taʾaththara bi him* (*Shaykh Ghazālī: His Life, Time, and the Most Prominent People Who Influenced Him*) (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaram li Turāth, 2003), 44; Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī kamā ʿaraftuhu: riḥlat niṣf qarn* (*Shaykh Ghazālī as I Knew Him: Journey Over Half a Century*) (Cairo: Dār al-Wafāʾ , 1995), 37-43; 49-50; Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, "Qissat ḥayā" ("Life Story") in *Islamīyāt al-Marʿifa* (Jan. 1997), pt. 12.

[67] Gharīb, 21.

[68] Ghazālī, "Qissat ḥayā" ("Life Story"), pt. 13.

terms, vice and other moral shortcomings are understood as affronts to the natural, healthy functioning of the human being. Conversely, to act virtuously is to act in a way that is in accordance with human nature and is conducive to health and wellbeing.[69] In this, he echoes the views of his classical predecessors, such as Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, who depicted good character as the condition of the soul in its natural, healthy form, and thought of vice as an illness afflicting the soul and essentially foreign to its nature.[70] In 1951 Ghazālī published a text entitled *Islam and Political Despotism*. Portions of the text were composed during 1949 while he was imprisoned by the Egyptian monarchy for his Brotherhood linked activism and were delivered as sermons to his fellow prisoners.[71] Like his earlier works addressing economic matters, Ghazālī's this text was a composite text—that is some chapters deal with easily recognizable political concerns, such as the viability of democracy and party politics in Egypt, while other portions are written in the style of an ethical guide. They address subtle afflictions of the soul and how they affect just governance, and are grounded in the organic metaphor.

He thus opens the text with a long discussion on "the place where the affliction lies hidden" (*makman al-dāʾ*).[72] The affliction here refers to that which has corrupted Egyptian politics. He deploys the organic metaphor throughout and depicts politics and political struggle as rooted in the individual effort to subjugate one's own passions. He notes that there exist certain problems that at first glance seem quite complicated, though in reality their solutions are readily at hand. All

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[69] I discuss Ghazālī's understanding of human nature (*fiṭra*) and its basis in Islamic ethical literature more extensively in Chapter Three, "Medicine for the Soul."

[70] On this point in Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's thought, see Mohamed Sherif *Ghazali's Theory of Virtue*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 32-35.

[71] Ghazālī, "Qissat ḥayā" ("Life Story"), pt. 10; al-Gharīb, 44; Qaraḍāwī, 14-15. Qaraḍāwī also reports meeting Ghazālī for the first time while in prison with him.

[72] The text, *al-Islām wa-al-istibdād al-siyāsī* (*Islam and Political Despotism*) (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1951). Ghazālī wrote many of the essays published in this text while imprisoned by the Egyptian monarchy in 1949 for his activism.

forms of knowledge, such as engineering, for instance, rest upon a certain set of axioms, he says. The "treatment" (*'ilāj*) that "religion" (*al-dīn*) provides for the dilemmas people face in life likewise rests upon a set of fundamental axioms. When observing "the corruption of [Egypt's] rulers and the evils of society" some might demand from religion a solution to these and other problems, thinking that religion would provide "detailed programs and precise explanations" for how to deal with the "tyranny" they face.[73] But what those demanding detailed programs for political problems forget, writes Ghazālī, is that all manifestations of injustice have their origins in the neglect of simple ethical truths. No, he says, "the matter demands not a philosophy, or an exposition of opinions, or an increase of schools [of thought]," but simply a reinvigorated focus on the virtues that religion imposes upon humans.[74] Indeed, those trying to diagnosis the "maladies" (*'ilal*) that give rise to political tumult, including even world war, will find only "greed, deceit, and hypocrisy" as the causes.[75] These "vices," he says, are simply those vices children are taught to avoid. They are infractions of "clear ethical axioms" (*badīhīyāt khulqīya wādiḥa*), axioms that are so obvious that people sometimes do not even notice them. Instead of returning to such axioms to solve political tumult, people fabricate complicated solutions that only lead them further astray, he writes. The salvation from political chaos lies in those "virtues" that have been neglected. This is the "simple cure" (*dawā' sādhij*), or "treatment," that religion provides for even the most difficult of problems, he concludes.[76]

Ghazālī, as we see here, begins his account of Egyptian politics by depicting virtue and vice in organic terms, and by describing political struggle as rooted in an individual effort to

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[73] Ibid., 22-23.

[74] Ibid., 23.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., 24.

maintain a healthy (i.e. virtuous) soul. As quickly becomes clear, however, the primary ailments

Ghazālī seeks to diagnose and treat are those affecting the moral being of Egypt's ruler at the time

King Fārūq. Ghazālī begins with Egypt's ruler, I argue, because he, much like his classical

predecessors, thinks of the sovereign's individual ethical health as integral to the health of the

entire body politic. He thus dedicates a significant portion of his text to identifying and elaborating

upon the "sicknesses of the soul" that have infected Egypt's ruling authorities, including

"arrogance" (*kibr*), "dissimulation" (*riyā'*), and "wastefulness" (*tabdhīr*). He grounds his

elaboration upon these ailments in verses of the Qur'ān, which discuss these character flaws at

length and warn believers against them. He also pays special attention to the corrupting influence

of sycophants at the ruler's side.[77] Much in line with the organic metaphor that permeates his text,

Ghazālī asserts that the presence of such sicknesses of the soul in human beings are distortions of

their God willed healthy nature, which, if left unchecked, threaten to erode their very "humanness"

(*insānīya*).[78]

Following Ghazālī's arguments here, it is easy to imagine him having picked up Mūsā's

History of Ethics and being drawn to Mūsā's discussion of the how Greek and Muslim

philosophers held that ethics were organically related to politics. Or perhaps Ghazālī even read al-

Fārābī's words himself. In his *Aphorisms for the Statesman*, for instance, al-Fārābī posited a link

between the ruler's ethical health and the wellbeing of the body politic.[79] His aphorisms, which

are reformulations of ideas drawn from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Plato's *Republic*, thus

begin with an exposition on the faculties of the soul, and how to maintain the soul's health and

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[77] Ibid., 25-42.

[78] Ibid., 28.

[79] For an overview of al-Fārābī's political writings see Charles E. Butterworth's introduction to his translation of some of the former's writings in *Alfarabi: The Political Writings*, vol. 1 (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 3-10.

ward against its illnesses. The health of the latter is found in equilibrium just as the health of the

body is found in its equilibrium. While the body's health is maintained by the physician, the health

of the body politic is maintained by the statesmen or king. The latter does this by maintaining the

health of the souls of the city's inhabitants. Indeed, collective wellbeing is envisioned by al-Fārābī

in terms of healthy individual souls.[80] Thus knowledge of the soul, of its health and its afflictions,

is doubly significant for the ruler; it is integral for his own moral health, as well as the prerequisite

for him to know how to accomplish the task of ruling his subjects.

By directing his moral admonishment towards Egypt's ruler, however, Ghazālī's work also

invoked the mirrors for princes literature, which often took the form of manuals of moral

admonishment to rulers (naṣīḥat al-mulūk).[81] A common theme running through Ghazālī's mid-

twentieth century text and this literature is the idea that the ruler's moral health is integral to the

health and wellbeing of the entire body politic. Thus, for instance, one such text attributed to al-

Māwardī (d. 1058)—an eleventh century Muslim scholar who Mūsā frequently lauded in his

histories of ethics as an exponent of pure Islamic ethics—provides a long discussion on the

character traits and ethical qualities a ruler should embody, and warns of particular vices rulers

must guard against. He terms this ethical practice the "governance" or "management" of the soul

(siyāsat al-nafs).[82] After establishing the governance of the soul as the starting point of political

practice, the text goes on to offer advice on how the ruler might direct his personal entourage and

household, and then to how he might manage the affairs of his domain. The three areas in which

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[80] al-Fārābī, 11-13.

[81] For an account of literature of this type in modern day Saudi Arabia see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 200-238.

[82] al-Māwardī, *Naṣīḥat al-mulūk* (*Counsel for Kings*), 113. For an English translation see Louise Marlow, *Counsel for Kings: Wisdom and Politics in Tenth-Century Iran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016).

the text provides moral admonishment reflect, of course, the three-fold division of practical philosophy—ethics, economics, and politics.[83] As the sovereign's ethical wellbeing is integral to his ability to rule effectively, al-Māwardī naturally begins his advice to rulers with ethics.

Ghazālī deploys the organic metaphor in relationship specifically to politics, but he also utilizes this metaphor in more general discussions on the nature of vice and sin. In this regard, the overlap between his views and those of his classical predecessors are even more direct. Thus, for instance, in a text on Islamic creed (*'aqīda*) that he also published in 1951, Ghazālī discusses at length the question of whether or not "sins" (*ma'āṣī*), understood as disobedience to God, can properly be called an "illness" (*maraḍ*).[84] He answers in the affirmative noting that the Qur'ān indeed describes "hypocrisy" (*nifāq*) as an illness affecting the heart.[85] His discussion of sin as sickness is part of a larger exposition on the subtle process by which those who are habitually disobedient towards their Lord progressively commit greater and greater sins. Ghazālī's concern here is to show sinners how they might restore their lost will to obey their Lord, and thereby regain God's grace. He thus dedicates a significant portion of the text to the Islamic virtue of "repentance" (*tawba*). While sins and a lost will to obey God are indeed illnesses, they are illnesses whose "treatment" is found in the recitation of Qur'ānic verses and sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad that stress God's forgiveness and His compassion. Ghazālī thus advises his readers to treat their dejection and loss of will with a strong dose of "hope" (*rajā'*) provided by the Qur'ān and Sunna.[86] Ghazālī's discussion of the treatments for despair resonates strongly with Abū Ḥāmid's account on the

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[83] On this point see Marlow's commentary on this text in vol. 2 of his translation, *Counsel for Kings*, fn24, 73-74.

[84] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *'Aqīdat al-muslim* (*Muslim Creed*) (Cairo: Dar al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1951), 127.

[85] Ibid., 128-129.

[86] Ibid., 130-131.

Islamic virtue of repentance, which likewise describes sin in organic terms and who also describes hope as a treatment for excessive fear of God's wrath.[87]

Although Ghazālī wrote in a very different historical context than his classical predecessors, he, like them, discusses vice and virtue in organic terms, thinks of ethics as the basis of politics, and posits a link between the ruler's ethical wellbeing and the health of the body politic. As we saw in the last chapter, many observers of modern Islam, especially those examining the writings of Ghazālī's more famous "Islamist" contemporary, Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966), have posited what they perceive to be a tendency among modern Muslim thinkers to present highly abstract, objectified visions of Islam.[88] But if we ground the writings of modern Muslim reformers in particular Islamic ethical traditions, their political visions appear more practical and far less abstract. Indeed, Ghazālī's commentary on the shortcomings that have corrupted mid-twentieth century Egyptian politics suggest that not all modern Muslim reformers were prone to abstraction and objectification when writing on Islamic politics.

Religion and Its Functions

This section further highlights the link between ethics and politics in Ghazālī's writings by exploring his views on the relationship between Islamic ritual practices and the cultivation of virtue, on both an individual and collective level. Like Ghazālī, many of his contemporaries, including one of the pioneers of the modern academic study of religion and ethics in Egypt, Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh Darāz (d. 1958)—to whom we were introduced in Chapter One—

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[87] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-tawba* (*The Book of Repentance*), 1387; and *Kitāb al-rajāʾ* (The Book of Hope), 1492; books Thirty and Thirty-Two of his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (*Revival of the Sciences of Religion*) (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2005).

[88] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 80-118; Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); and William Sheppard "Islam as a 'System' in Later Writings of Sayyid Qutb," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 1 (1991).

discussed and debated what they perceived as the "social" functions of Islamic ethics and religion, more generally. The existence of the "social" and its cognates in their writings indicates, of course, that modern Muslim reformers were influenced by discourses well beyond premodern Islamic ethical literature, including modern Euro-American social theory, to craft their views.[89] While attentive to the presence of concepts drawn from modern social theory in their writings, this section also highlights how their debates over the social functions of religion and ethics resonated strongly with premodern accounts on the functions of religion and the relationship between Islamic teachings, individual virtue, and collective wellbeing. Indeed, as I will show below, while debating the "social" relevance of ethics, religion, and Islamic ritual practices, twentieth century Muslim reformers drew upon both modern and premodern intellectual traditions.

I begin here with one of Darāz's well-known texts, which appears to have been one of the first Arabic texts in Egypt dedicated to the study of what might be thought of as "comparative religion." As we saw in the last chapter, Darāz's study of Qur'ānic of ethics was also written as comparative study. In his primer for the modern academic study of religion entitled, *Religion: Introductory Research On the Study of the History of Religions,*[90] Darāz explores "religion" as a social scientific category. Throughout the text, Darāz cites at length the works of early European theorists of religion, such as Weber and Durkheim. Like these scholars, Darāz was interested in analyzing religion as a distinct category of human life and experience, and even ventures his own definition of religion, locating its "essence" (*māhīya*) in beliefs.[91] Throughout he displays a deep concern for the "social" significance of Islamic teachings, and "religion" more generally.

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[89] On influence of social scientific discourses on modern Islamic thought see Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy*, esp. 13-77.

[90] Although first published in 1952 in Cairo, the version I cite here is *al-Dīn: buḥūth mumahhada li-dirāsat tārīkh al-adyān* 2ᵈ ed. (Kuwait: Dār al-Qalam, 1970).

[91] Ibid., 52.

Yet Darāz's text demonstrates the way in which he, like other modern Muslim reformers was informed by both premodern and modern intellectual traditions. This is most apparent in his discussion of what he calls the "social function" (*al-waẓīfa al-ijtimāʿīya*) of religion.[92] Although he draws extensively from modern Euro-American social theory and deploys the novel Arabic concept of society and its cognates, his discussion of the function of religion in society nevertheless resonates strongly with similar discussions amongst his classical predecessors, such as al-Māwardī. The latter, as I noted in the last section, was a figure of interest to Mūsā, who saw al-Māwardī's *Adab al-dīn wa-al-dunyā* (*The Etiquette of Religion and the World*) as providing an especially valuable ethics for modern life. This text is relevant for my purposes here because it highlights how al-Māwardī's understood that "religion" (*al-dīn*) performed a number of vital functions in human collective life. Al-Māwardī opens his discussion on these matters observing that religion is an integral condition for the realization of the "health" or "sound condition of worldly life" (*salāḥ al-dunyā*). This is because religion, more so than any other element of human life, subjugates the passions, and prevents humans from following their whims and desires.[93] As it prevents discord caused by unchecked passion, religion is thus essential to maintaining the wellbeing of collective life. Collective life or human association is understood by al-Māwardī as essential to the flourishing and wellbeing of humans. Indeed, like Miskawayh and the Greek philosophers, al-Māwardī understands humans as civic animals. God, he tells us, in His wisdom created humans with a fundamental need of each other.[94] As they are forced out of necessity to live with each other, they need religion to keep their base passions and desires in check.

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[92] Ibid., 98.

[93] Al-Māwardī, *Adab al-dīn wa-al-dunyā* (*The Etiquette of Religion and the World*) (Beirut: al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1986), 111.

[94] Ibid., 107.

Furthermore, as he adds later, religion acts as the most powerful cause of mutual affinity and friendship among humans, and is thus a fundamental bond that maintains collective life.[95]

Although writing from an epistemological stance informed by modern functionalist sociology, Darāz's understanding of the functions religion performs in society is certainly not disconnected from the arguments of his classical predecessors. Like them, he begins from the assumption that collective life is both essential to human nature and human survival. But the collective life, he writes, cannot be maintained without "cooperation" (ta'āwun). Religion, he argues, is the only force that can effectively enforce cooperation, and thereby yield mutual harmony within a society.[96] Like his classical predecessors, Darāz goes on to argue that those who embrace a particular religion are bound firmly together by important virtues—"love" (al-maḥabba) and "brotherhood" (ukhūwa)—without which human flourishing is impossible.[97] Echoing arguments advanced by al-Māwardī and Miskawayh, he observes that the bonds created by religion far surpass the strength of other bonds, and concludes that religion is an essential element in maintaining human welfare.[98] Given the broader interest in Islamic philosophical ethics at the time, as demonstrated by the careers of Mubārak and Mūsā, it is likely that Darāz's arguments were not only informed by a social scientific discourse about "religion" and its function in society, but also by a set of assumptions about "religion" as a requirement for human welfare and flourishing that derived from the writings of scholars like al-Māwardī and Miskawayh.

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[95] Ibid., 124.

[96] Darāz, 98-100.

[97] Ibid., 101-102. On love see, Ibn Miskawayh, 111-113; 117-120; 122-125. On friendship see, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Kitab al-ulfa wa-al-ukhūwa* (*The Book of Friendship and Brotherhood*), book fifteen of his forty book *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2005), 611-621; 628-650. On "intimacy" and "friendship" (*ulfa*) see, al-Māwardī, 124.

[98] Ibid., 102.

Much like Darāz, Ghazālī too was concerned with the functions of religion and religious practices. And also like him, when describing this significance, Ghazālī echoed arguments advanced by his philosophically minded classical predecessors. This is most apparent in his discussion of the work Islamic ritual practices perform in cultivating virtue on both an individual and collective level. He discusses this matter in a text he first published in 1953, entitled *Khuluq al-Muslim* (*Muslim Character*). Unique among his works, it was his only full-length text that was dedicated solely to Islamic philosophical ethics. I will return to a more extensive analysis of this text in the following section, but I wish to highlight here his Aristotelian understanding of the relationship between bodily deeds and the cultivation of virtue.[99] On Islamic ritual practices, he writes: "[They] are not obscure rites of the type that link the human to a mysterious unknown, and charge him with the fulfillment of vague acts and movements that have no meaning. No, of course not. The obligations Islam makes necessary upon each individual who belongs to it are repeated exercises that make one accustomed to living with good character [*akhlāq ṣaḥiḥa*] and remain firmly attached to this character no matter how the circumstances around him change. Indeed, they resemble physical exercises [*al-tamārīn al-riyāḍīya*] that one eagerly pursues, seeking from their consistent practice, wellbeing of body and health of life."[100] Islamic worship is thus essential to realizing good character. Indeed, he adds, the cultivation of virtue and the warding off of vice are, in fact, the "wisdom" (*ḥikma*) of Islamic ritual practices.[101]

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[99] The centrality of Aristotelian ethics to contemporary Islamic activism in Egypt has been brilliantly demonstrated by Saba Mahmood's recent anthropological account, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). My account here, however, is more attentive to the modern historical genealogy of these ideas. For a concise account of Aristotelian ideas in strands of classical Islamic ethics see, Ira M. Lapidus, "Knowledge, Virtue and Action: The Classical Muslim Conception of Adab and the Nature of Religious Fulfillment in Islam," in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam* ed. Barbara Daly Metcalf, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[100] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Khuluq al-muslim* (Cairo: Dar al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1953), 6.

[101] Ibid.

The notion that there is a wisdom to the forms of worship that extends beyond simply establishing a proper relationship to God is important to highlight here. As we will see presently, this idea was not without controversy in Islamic thought, especially when it came to the question of the purpose of worship in Islam and was part of a broader debate among Muslim thinkers. Did the forms of worship God legislated for humans have a wisdom to them that humans could ascertain through their intellects, such as facilitating the purification of the soul and maintaining the collective wellbeing? If so, was this the purpose of worship? Or was the wisdom of worship ultimately beyond human comprehension? And was its purpose simply for humans to establish a proper relationship with God? Here, Ghazālī foregrounds the work ritual practices do in refining character and cultivating virtue, which, he argues, are essential to maintaining the wellbeing of human societies. As this text ultimately took its cues from Islamic philosophical tradition, Ghazālī echoes the philosophers and their discussions of "friendship" (*ulfa*) and "brotherhood," by describing the wisdom of the Islamic practices of almsgiving (*zakāh* and *ṣadaqa*) as the encouragement of mutual acquaintance, affinity and affection. Almsgiving, he adds, not only purifies the "soul," but also elevates "society (*mujtamaʿ*) to a nobler level."[102] Although his interest in elevating society presumes a modern teleology of "progress," his concern for worship as a means to realize brotherhood, friendship, and collective wellbeing is part and parcel of the traditional concerns of Islamic philosophical ethics. Miskawayh, for instance, who understood collective life as vital to human flourishing, argued that the collective forms of worship in Islam, including communal prayer and pilgrimage, were made obligatory by God for the purpose of encouraging

[102] Ibid., 7.

brotherhood and friendship among believers.[103] Even Abū Ḥāmid, who did not think of mutual acquaintance, affinity and affection as the purpose of Islamic practices, recognized that these elements of brotherhood were necessarily fostered by the acts of material generosity and assistance towards other humans demanded of believers.[104]

Ghazālī, as I will show more extensively in the following section, positioned the cultivation of virtue, particularly through the enactment of Islamic ritual practices, at the base of a project of self-reform-cum-social-reform. As we can already see here, he clearly conceives of Islamic ritual practices as having "social" significance. Other Muslim Brotherhood affiliates, like Ghazālī's colleague, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926), likewise understood the enactment of Islamic ritual practices as a means to create virtuous individuals and collectives. As we saw in the last chapter, Qaraḍāwī's multi-volume account of the Islamic practice of *zakāh*, or almsgiving, puts forth an Aristotelian understanding of the cultivation of virtue in which the consistent repetition of a bodily act is said to create a virtuous disposition. But Qaraḍāwī's take on this issue is not only interesting because of its Aristotelian basis, but also because it shows that the notion that Islamic ritual practices constituted the means for realizing self-reform was not without controversy. Indeed, in a text he wrote on Islamic worship (*al-'ibāda*) sometime in the early 1960s, but did not publish until 1971, Qaraḍāwī takes great effort to show that while the proper performance of Islamic ritual practices will undoubtedly yield the "health" or "wellbeing of the soul" (*ṣalāḥ al-nafs*), this is not the purpose of worship.[105] Rather, its purpose is to establish the proper relationship with God, he

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[103] Miskawayh, 115-116. Indeed, so important was the virtue to friendship to philosophically minded thinkers like him, that he even points out that the Arabic word for human, *al-insān*, has as its root meaning, "*uns*" or fellowship, Ibid., 116.

[104] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Kitab al-ulfa wa-al-ukhūwa* (*The Book of Friendship and Brotherhood*), 629-631.

[105] *al-'Ibāda fi al-Islām* 2ⁿ ed. (Beirut, Dār al-Irshād, 1971), 116.

says. Through worship, the believer comes to know their essential poverty and utter dependence upon Him.[106]

Qaraḍāwī nevertheless understands that there are benefits to worship that extend beyond (but not above) establishing the proper relationship with God. He cites the fourteenth century Muslim legal scholar, al-Shāṭibī (d. 1388), to affirm this point. The latter observes that while the primary purpose of worship is to direct oneself completely towards God in submission to Him, worship also entails "otherworldly" and "worldly benefits" (*fawā'id ukhrawīya wa-dunyawīya*). Examples of the former include a greater "rank" (*daraja*) in the Hereafter, while examples of the latter include "the health of the soul" and "the acquisition of virtue" (*iktisāb al-faḍīla*).[107] It is thus clear that for Qaraḍāwī the realization of a virtuous or healthy soul is understood primarily as an act in relationship to God. However, he—much like Mūsā, Darāz, and Ghazālī, and indeed their classical predecessors—understands a virtuous self as existing not just in relationship to God, but also in relationship to other human beings. Indeed, significant portions of Qaraḍāwī's texts on *zakāh* and Islamic worship are thus dedicated to the "social" impacts of both worship and the realization of individual virtuous selves. Although he deploys the modern concept of society and its cognates throughout, Qaraḍāwī's arguments also depend upon an understanding of ethics as intersubjective in nature, which, I argue, owes itself to classical Islamic ethical thought. Thus, for instance, in his text on Islamic worship he outlines a distinction between what he calls "divine" (*rubbānīya*) and "civic" (*madanīya*) virtues. He argues that the virtues that Muslims are incited to cultivate are "divine" in nature—that is geared towards God—and that their realization is an act of worship in and of itself. Such virtues are superior to those that are simply "civic" in nature, that is geared

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[106] Ibid., 116.

[107] Ibid., 117-118.

towards other humans.[108] His argument here, however, is not that divine virtues lack civic effects, but rather that their civic effects are not their primary purpose. Either way his understanding of the intersubjective nature of ethics is clear—a virtuous self exists in relationship to the Other, understood first as God, and second as other human beings.

The Politics of the Self

I turn now to explore in more depth Ghazālī's 1953 *Muslim Character*, which as I previously noted, was his only full-length text that was dedicated solely to Islamic philosophical ethics. It was a popular text; it had gone through at least four editions by 1960 and has since gone through many more, including multiple English translations. Ghazālī describes the work as the second of a two-part study, the first of which was his *Muslim Creed*. Written as a manual for ethical self-cultivation, the text follows in form and style the works of the philosophers, such as Miskawayh's *Refinement of Character*, and the Sufi-philosophical amalgams of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, such as his *Revival of the Sciences of Religion* and *Balance of Deeds*. Yet in its explicit and frequent insistence on infusing an etiquette for worldly and collective life into a range of otherworldly imperatives, his text most resembles al-Māwardī's *Etiquette of Religion and the World*. Albeit in simplified and abbreviated form, he follows his classical predecessors in opening with a discussion of theoretical matters, including the nature of the soul, the place of virtue cultivation and character refinement with God's commandments and the prophetic mission, the sources for knowledge about the virtue (*faḍīla*) and character (*khuluq*), their respective natures, the means through which virtues are acquired and character is refined, and their relationship to belief in God. Each of the text's following twenty chapters then considers a particular virtue, character trait, or form of etiquette.

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[108] Ibid., 121-126.

As a whole, the work takes many of its cues from the textual tradition associated with Islamic philosophical ethics. Ghazālī, for instance, does not discuss traditional Sufi virtues such as asceticism (*zuhd*) and trust in and reliance upon God (*tawakkul*) in this text. Although the divine is never absent from his account, when it comes to the question of agency, he foregrounds the work of human agent in realizing the soul's purity. Many Sufis, including notably Abū Ḥāmid minimized human agency within the realm of soul purification, holding that the realization of the latter was dependent upon God's agency. Furthermore, although Ghazālī always discusses the cultivation of virtue and the refinement of character as an act of obligation to God, their place in facilitating relationships between humans and among humans is in the foreground in this text. Indeed, one of the theoretical matters he discusses in the opening of his text is the relationship between the realization of the soul's purity and the realization of collective and worldly wellbeing. As he certainly read the earlier histories of ethics written by Mūsā and Mubārak, it is not unlikely that he came to share their affinity for Islamic philosophical ethics. That being said, later in his career, Ghazālī would also author another text of a similar nature and format, though his discussion of ethics in that text was more aligned with Sufi sensibilities (See Chapter Four) than the philosophical tradition.

Although Ghazālī's text bears clear affinities with the tradition of philosophical ethics stemming from Aristotle, his short preface nevertheless conveys a certain unease with identifying too closely with the Greek philosophical tradition. "Having studied within the phases of our civilization, the philosophy of ethics and the methods of the philosophers, their criterion for ordering human conduct, we have been pleased with what is in it in terms of deep thought, a quest for the truth, and the peering at noble ideals." But, continues Ghazālī, we wish to bring to the attention of objective observers, "the wholesome forms of moral education and the splendid

character the carrier of the seal of revelation" brought with him into the world, which surpasses even that which "was bequeathed to humans from the philosophy of Greece and Rome." He adds, "It was once said to a learned Muslim: 'Have you read Aristotle's ethics?' He replied, 'Rather I have read the ethics of Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Allāh!'" While we have read "the ethics of Aristotle and the philosophers like him," writes Ghazālī, we perceive only in those of Muḥammad, "living truths, embodied in them perfection."[109]

Philosophical ethics were therefore certainly on Ghazālī's mind when he composed this text, yet he grounds his study in an Islamic textual tradition rooted in the Qurʾān and the Prophetic traditions. Thus in the very first lines of the preface he writes, "These extracts, from the Book and the Sunna, direct the Muslim to the virtues with which his religion is complete, and with which his world and Afterlife are put in the right condition (*tuṣliḥ*) together."[110] As we see here, like the philosophers, Greek and Muslim, he conceives of ethics as a central node around which collective and worldly wellbeing is formed and maintained, though he is eager to ground this idea within the *sharīʿa*. In terms of the textual references he cites throughout the book, he notes that he dispensed with references beyond the Qurʾān and Sunna, including the words of the "the learned men," "the imams," and "the worshipers," because "I intended that we return to the *sharīʿa* alone. I present the element of moral education within it, as it is a divine directive to which the Muslim is demanded to adhere, and when he veers from it, he is considered negligent in [fulfilling] the rights of God. There is a difference between demanding a form of etiquette because it is a general character trait, and with being charged with it because it is an obligation akin to the imposed forms of worship in this religion."[111]

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[109] Ghazālī, *Khuluq al-muslim*, 3-4.

[110] Ibid., 3.

[111] Ibid.

The sources of a Muslim's ethics, as well as their intersubjective nature, are thus central to how Ghazālī distinguishes Islamic virtue from Greek virtue. Ghazālī's text nevertheless still depends upon the philosophical tradition. Indeed, while he was clearly concerned with the "Islamic" nature of his enterprise, the earlier work of Mubārak and Mūsā had already provided multiple pathways for reclaiming a philosophical ethics that was "Islamic" in nature, though heavily influenced by the Greek tradition, which included the works of al-Fārābī, Miskawayh, al-Māwardī, and of course, Abū Ḥāmid. So even though Ghazālī only explicitly cites the Qur'ān and Sunna in his text, he also had at his disposal an "Islamic" philosophical ethics from which to draw. His arguments are in fact made possible by theories, concepts and metaphors drawn from it in its various strands. Ghazālī's intervention here, I would argue, is to simplify Islamic philosophical ethics and present them as nothing other than the *sharī'a*, rooted in the Qur'ān and Sunna. In that sense, we might rightly conceive of Ghazālī as a popularizer of Islamic philosophical ethics.

As we saw earlier, Ghazālī thought of the cultivation of virtue as an act of worship in itself. It is not surprising then that he describes the spread of "noble character traits" (*makārim al-akhlāq*) among humans as the primary purpose of Muḥammad's prophecy.[112] But for him, the cultivation of noble character is not only related to the proper worship of God; it is also a matter of sound belief (*īmān*) in Him. He argues, for instance, that a "weakness of character" (*ḍu'f al-khuluq*) derives from a weakness in one's belief.[113] Ghazālī's argument here is part of a broader debate among Muslim thinkers on whether or not good character and the performance of "good deeds" (*ṣaliḥāt*) are constitutive elements of belief.[114] The link Ghazālī posits between the performance

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[112] Ghazālī here cites a well-known report (*ḥadīth*) from the Prophet Muḥammad, which states: "Verily I was sent to perfect the noble traits of character," 6.

[113] Ibid., 9.

[114] On this debate see, Toshihiko Izutsu *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology* (Salem, NH: Ayer Company, Publishers, 1965); see also Lav.

of good deeds and the constitution of proper belief highlights the Aristotelian basis of Ghazālī's thinking. Much like Aristotle, many Muslim thinkers held that the execution of bodily deeds was crucial to the formation of inward dispositions. Bodily deeds could help form and solidify an inward disposition, such as belief in God. Yet, at the same time, the performance of the wrong types of deeds could also erode one's belief. Ghazālī, for instance, likens habitual sin to a disease that gradually eats away at one's belief in the same way that an illness destroys one's body.[115]

In her account on Aristotelian ethics in Islamic Revival in Egypt, Saba Mahmood shows that the way in which her contemporary Muslim interlocutors thought of ritual practices as the means to achieve belief, as opposed to symbolic representations of belief, underlines the limits of definitions of "religion" that focus upon ideas.[116] My interest here, however, is in the way in which Ghazālī thinks of belief in God as a mechanism for ensuring proper conduct among humans. The interactive nature of belief is nicely highlighted by the close relationship between good character and sound belief in his thought. In his text on Islamic creed, for instance, Ghazālī argues that the relationship between belief and deed is like the relationship between character and behavior. One who is brave, generous or honest acts with bravery, generosity and honesty, just as one who believes acts righteously. Proper Islamic belief, he adds, can even be thought of as something that characterizes deeds and behavior; to behave in a righteous manner is to be connected to God.[117] Thus, Ghazālī regards the means for establishing a proper relationship with God, including belief in and worship of Him as also the means for cultivating ethical relations with others. On the intersubjective nature of these ethics, he writes, "The truth is that if religion is good character

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[115] Ghazālī, *'Aqīdat al-muslim*, 116.

[116] Mahmood, esp. 118-142.

[117] Ghazālī *'Aqīdat al-muslim*, 106.

between one human and another, it is also, in its divine nature (ṭabʿīatihi al-samāwīya), a good link between a human and his Lord. Thus, both matters return to one truth."[118]

Ghazālī draws attention to how Islamic belief and ritual practices secure ethical human relations, I argue, because he wishes to affirm for his readers the significance of the reform of the soul to broader matters of collective and worldly wellbeing. "Islam," he writes, like other divinely revealed religions, takes as the basis of "its general reform, the human soul, before anything else. It devotes strenuous effort to penetrate the depths of the soul and implant its teaching in its very essence so that they become part of the soul."[119] He distinguishes the forms of ethical self-formation religion provides from modes of subject formation achieved by governments. He writes: "Perhaps some divine revelations speak of society and its states, government and its types, and present cures for the maladies afflicting them. Despite that, religions would not be out of their nature if they considered the righteous soul [al-nafs al-ṣāliḥa] as the precise program for each reform. Indeed, strong character is the eternal guarantor of each civilization. This is not to demean the work of those striving to build society and the state; rather it is to draw attention to the value of the reform of the soul [al-iṣlāḥ al-nafsī] in preserving life and bringing happiness to those alive…. [Indeed], The reform of the soul is the primary support for victory of the good in this life."[120] Ghazālī thus clearly conceives of reform of the soul as the basis of collective and worldly wellbeing, and thinks of it as a means to cultivate moral subjects that is distinct from those of the state.

Understanding the organic link he posits between soul-reform and collective wellbeing, helps us make sense of why, in the midst of the political tumult caused by Egypt's 1952 revolution, he

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[118] Ghazālī Khuluq al-muslim, 13.

[119] Ibid., 19.

[120] Ibid., 20.

wrote a text on ethics. The virtues, character traits, and forms of etiquette he discusses in this text

are similar to those taken up by his classical predecessors, including Miskawayh and Abū Ḥāmid.

Ghazālī's text discusses at length a range of character traits and virtues, such as honesty, loyalty,

faithfulness (*amāna*), sincerity, patience, compassion, forbearance, generosity, friendship and

brotherhood, and forms of etiquette, such as that of speech (*adab al-ḥadīth*), and that of

maintaining friendship and choosing friends. Ghazālī generally begins each chapter by situating

the particular virtue, character trait, or form of etiquette he is discussing vis-à-vis God. He depicts

honesty, loyalty, faithfulness, and sincerity, for instance, as qualities that first define a believer's

relationship with their Lord. He then goes on to show that the qualities that define a believer's

relationship with their Lord are also those that should define their relationships with other humans.

Although he foregrounds a proper relationship with the Other as the ends of the project of soul-

reform, the individual's relationship with their own soul (*nafs*) is naturally of great concern to

Ghazālī. To develop the proper relationship with the Other, one must begin first by taming and

training one's base desires and passions, and then channel them towards the appropriate ends. This

is especially apparent in his discussion of the virtues of temperance (*'iffa*) and frugality (*qaṣd*).[121]

Nevertheless, Ghazālī understands the reform of the soul to be the basis for learning how to live

properly with others. It is not hard, therefore, to see why he would think of the purification of the

soul as eminently relevant to politics.

His discussion of the virtue of modesty (*ḥayā'*) succinctly conveys how ethics and etiquette

are for Ghazālī conceived in terms of both otherworldly and this worldly imperatives. He opens

noting that modesty and lack thereof are decisive indicators of both the "value of a human's belief

[in God]" and the "extent of a human's etiquette." So decisive is modesty in revealing one's belief,

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[121] Ibid., 144-153.

writes Ghazālī, that it is the essential character trait of Islam. He cites a saying from the Prophet Muḥammad which states that for "each religion there is a character trait; and the character of Islam is modesty."[122] Ghazālī goes on to describe modesty as a "lively feeling" (*'āṭifa ḥayya*) in the soul which prevents one from committing evil and impels one to do good. This "lively feeling" derives from a firm belief in God and is naturally manifest in one's behavior towards others. The loss of modesty not only erodes belief from one's heart, he writes, but also causes injustice and threatens the stability of human associations. Indeed, the person who possesses no modesty "does not fear in their behavior the censure of the censurer, extends a hand of harm to people, and oppresses every person who falls within their power. For the likes of such a vicious person, no heart to sympathize will be found; rather such a person will sow malice in hearts and make it grow."[123] In describing modesty as an essential quality of a proper relationship with God and other humans, Ghazālī's writings echo those of al-Māwardī. The latter, like Ghazālī, depicts modesty as intersubjective in nature. He writes that it occurs towards God, when one is obedient to him; towards others when one refrains from evil and harming them; and towards oneself when one embodies temperance and remains aloof from others.[124]

The extent to which Ghazālī, like his classical predecessors, conceived of virtue, sound character, and good etiquette as means for securing multiple forms of wellbeing, including otherworldly, this worldly, and collective, is especially apparent in his discussions of the virtues of friendship and brotherhood, as well as a range of other virtues that are said to support them. In this, Ghazālī's text very much follows the works of classical scholars informed by Islamic philosophical ethics. Consider, for instance, Abū Ḥāmid's discussion of the virtue of brotherhood

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[122] Ibid., 165.

[123] Ibid., 166-167.

[124] al-Māwardī, *Adab al-dīn wa-al-dunyā* (*Etiquette of Religion and Worldly Affairs*), 212-213.

in his *Revival*. He opens his account describing the existence of brotherhood and friendship among humans as favors bestowed by God upon His creations. He describes a number of reasons why brotherhood and other forms of human association might be formed, but argues that the most noble and exalted form of brotherhood is that which is caused by love for God and commitment to His religion. The virtues of brotherhood and friendship are important for Abū Ḥamid because without them humans cannot properly practice religion. The love of friends, teachers, benefactors, servants and family can all be considered forms of love for God, he writes, because the benefits and services provided by such associations facilitate the practice of religion. He thus describes the individuals with whom one might associate as an "instrument" or "means" (*āla*) to practice religion. Speaking specifically of servants and benefactors, he notes that love of such people is "love in God" if one loves them for the fact that the services they provide give one "the spare time [*farāgh*] to pursue knowledge and work that makes close to God."[125] Friendship and brotherhood are thus significant for the fulfilment of the human purpose—that is knowledge and worship of God. Given their significance, Abū Ḥamid dedicates much of his account on friendship and brotherhood to how to maintain them. The most important factor in maintaining friendship and brotherhood is undoubtedly good character (*ḥusn al-khulq*). Indeed, he writes, "Friendship is the fruit of good character and division is the result of evil character [*sū' al-khulq*], for good character necessitates mutual love, concord and harmony, while evil character sows mutual hate, mutual envy, and incompatibility."[126] Although Abū Ḥamid's discussion of brotherhood and friendship is ultimately otherworldly in its teleology, it nevertheless provides a means for positioning belief in God and good character as vital to the formation, maintenance, and flourishing of human associations.

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[125] Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Kitab al-ulfa wa-al-ukhūwa* (*The Book of Friendship and Brotherhood*), book fifteen of his *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (*Revival of the Sciences of Religion*), 618.

[126] Ibid., 611.

As I noted previously, Miskawayh, following the philosophers, thought of humans as "civic" by nature—that is, humans by their nature need each other and must associate with one another for the sake of their survival. In his chapter describing the necessity of "cooperation and harmony" for human survival, he writes that people have an innate need for each other, "[E]very one of them finds his completion in his friend. Necessity calls for their seeking of aid from one another because people have deficiencies by their nature and are forced to seek the completion of these deficiencies…. So there is a true need and necessity that calls for a condition that combines and brings together various persons to become, through agreement and harmony, as one person, all of whose members are in the performance of one benefitting deed."[127] As friendship and human association are vital to the survival and flourishing of humans, Miskawayh naturally goes on to describe how one should develop and maintain friendships. He describes at length the mutual obligations friends have towards one another and the proper method for choosing companions. Miskawayh also emphasizes that good character and virtuousness create the strongest of bonds among humans. Indeed, "the good, virtuous person" naturally attracts the love of others, and becomes "of beneficence to others, whether by intention or not, for his acts are pleasing and loved and that which is pleasing and loved is desired. Many people therefore eagerly seek after him, welcome him, and imitate him."[128] He thus clearly thinks of good character as the basis of human flourishing. Indeed, it is by no means a coincidence that Miskawayh positions his discussion of the virtues of friendship and love at the end of his much longer account of the refinement of character. Ethics, in other words, are fundamental to knowing how to live properly in collective life, and maintaining and fostering human wellbeing.

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[127] Ibn Miskawayh, 111.

[128] Ibid., 126.

Like Miskawayh, al-Māwardī also understood humans to be created with a fundamental need of each other, one that necessitates individual character refinement. Al-Māwardī considers the mutual affinity among humans caused by their mutual need of each other as fundamental for the maintenance of "worldly wellbeing."[129] The maintenance of the latter is, in turn, a vital condition for the fulfillment of religious obligations.[130] Worldly life is thus a means to the Afterlife and that which maintains worldly life, like the forms of etiquette that enable the establishment of proper human associations, are therefore relevant to the Afterlife. For this reason, he includes in his discussion of the etiquette of worldly affairs an explanation on how friendship and affinity ensure human wellbeing. Within this explanation, al-Māwardī describes the causes of friendship, one of which is "benevolence." He understands benevolence largely in terms of acts of material generosity and charity.[131] Acts of material generosity and charity, and the cultivation of a benevolent disposition are thus understood here as means to ensure collective wellbeing.

I highlight this aspect of al-Māwardī's text because as we will see presently, Ghazālī in his modern-day writings likewise maintains that charitableness and generosity are character traits essential to maintaining worldly and collective wellbeing. Indeed, much of what Ghazālī describes in his text as "Muslim character" can be understood in terms of the discourse his classical predecessors elaborated on how to foster human association and live properly with others. Like them, he thus understood ethics as integral to other domains of human life beyond one's relationship with God, including economics and politics. The emphasis on virtue as a means to

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[129] al-Māwardī, *Adab al-dīn wa-al-dunyā* (*Etiquette of Religion and Worldly Affairs*), 109.

[130] He notes, for instance, that if the world around one is corrupt, then no matter how righteous one is in their individual life the corruptness of the world will inevitably affect one, 109-110. Worldly life is the realm in which one might fulfill religious obligations and is thus a means to the Afterlife, 108. As that is the case, he adds later, then knowledge of how to maintain the uprightness of the world is thus essential to fulfilling religion, 109.

[131] Ibid., 156.

make one's worldly life healthy and sound is a central theme of his text, but especially pronounced in his discussion of brotherhood (*ikhāʾ*), unity (*ittiḥād*), the choosing of friends, the etiquette of speech, generosity, and freedom from rancor.

On the human affinity of brotherhood, Ghazālī describes it as something called forth by human nature itself and integral to human flourishing. He opens noting that there is no "sensible" reason why humans should live in isolation from one another. They should instead live together in "society," wherein mutual love and security reign. Mutual acquaintance (*taʿāraf*) is, in fact, natural to humans. Though extraneous circumstances might prevent this "necessary mutual acquaintance" from taking its course, that should not "make forgotten the intended wisdom of the creation of people which is to populate the earth through their coordinated efforts."[132] In a way that recalls the words of Miskawayh, he describes human association as integral to one's wellbeing. Indeed, "life is not for [an individual] alone and is not made suitable for him alone." Rather, "upon others he has a right and in them is his welfare (*maṣlaḥatuhu*)," just as "upon him they have rights and in him is their welfare."[133] Along similar lines, he adds later that humans in isolation cannot overcome the hardships of life, but need collective life for their wellbeing. In this sense, he says brotherhood is not only a spiritual blessing, but is also a material one.[134] Also like Miskawayh, he notes in his discussion of "unity" that the members of a particular collective should act as one body.[135] Divisions amongst them are caused only by their negligence of the very thing ethics teaches them—that is how to subjugate their passions, desires, and whims.[136] Again like Miskawayh,

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[132] Ibid., 173.

[133] Ibid., 174.

[134] Ibid., 176.

[135] Ibid., 182.

[136] Ibid., 185.

Ghazālī describes Islamic ritual practices as means to foster human affinity and association. He first notes that the performance of collective prayer is more praiseworthy than individual prayer. He then adds that God made daily collective prayer obligatory "so that the Muslim might integrate within the society in which he lives."[137]

Ghazālī's writings on brotherhood and unity thus echo those of his classical predecessors. Indeed, I argue, he inherited from them a vibrant discourse about how to foster and maintain the collective wellbeing, a discourse that fundamentally informed his vision of politics. Further parallels can be seen in the way that he, like them, also dwells at length on the obligations of brotherhood and the etiquette for properly choosing friends. His discussion of the latter is particularly significant because it highlights the way in which he, like his classical predecessors, foregrounds ethics as the basis of human relationships and associations.[138] Their concern with the types of friends one has derived primarily from the perceived impact such people might have upon one's ethical wellbeing. Thus, for instance, Abū Ḥāmid valorized seclusion (*'uzla*) because he believed that associating with others would most likely degrade one's moral standing. Yet, on the other hand, he also argued that associating with others could also be beneficial ethically because they afforded one with the opportunity to practice the virtues and, moreover, one might learn from someone who is more virtuous.[139] Either way, for Abū Ḥāmid, ethics was of primary significance in human relationships. For his part, the modern day Ghazālī was a critic of seclusion, much like Miskawayh, though he also believed that it could be beneficial ethically under certain

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[137] Ibid., 186.

[138] On the etiquette of friendship and how to choose friends see Miskawayh, 131-140.

[139] On these ideas in Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's thought see his *Kitab ādāb al-'uzla* (*Book of the Etiquette of Seclusion*) Book Sixteen of his *Iḥyāʾ 'ulūm al-dīn* (*Revival of the Sciences of Religion*), 686, 692, 702, 704-709.

circumstances.[140] He nevertheless asserts that Islam is a "religion of gathering and friendship,"[141] which obviously necessitates an etiquette for properly choosing friends. He goes on to describe the influence friends have upon each other and notes that a morally upright friend can be a great benefit for "success in the world and happiness in the Hereafter."[142] Conversely, he adds, "Character robs character. How quickly does a human proceed in the direction towards which his companion incites him."[143] Thus one should always take great care with whom one associates.

The centrality of collective wellbeing in Ghazālī's vision of ethics is further highlighted by the way in which he, again like his classical predecessors, devotes much attention to the causes of the dissolution of friendships and associations. He dedicates a full chapter to the etiquette of speech, arguing that the misuse of it is the root cause of the dissolving of human associations and the spread of enmity. In this he echoes the words of Miskawayh, who warned of the dangers of backbiting and slander, and observed that they were the cause of great corruption.[144] Ghazālī, for his part, describes "good words" as means for preserving the love of friends and pacifying the enmity of rivals. On the spread of enmity, he notes that "Satan" seeks to prey upon humans, "wanting there to occur among them enmity and hatred, and that trifling disputes become bloody battles. Nothing but kindly speech will block the path in front of him. As for goodness of speech towards one's enemies, it extinguishes their hostility and breaks their sharpness, or at the least it prevents the progression of evil."[145] So powerful is "argument" (*jidāl*) and other negative forms of speech, according Ghazālī, that on a broader scale it corrupts religion, politics, science and

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[140] Ghazālī, *Khulq al-muslim*, 195.

[141] Ibid., 193.

[142] Ibid., 197.

[143] Ibid., 198.

[144] Ibn Miskawayh, 137-138.

[145] Ghazālī, *Khuluq al-muslim*, 78.

literature, and is "perhaps" even a cause of "civilizational collapse."[146] Along similar lines, in a subsequent chapter he dwells at length on the virtue of keeping one's heart "free from hatred." He ties the spread of hatred to the work of Satan who tries to dissolve human associations through enmity. In a way that highlights the web of ideas that are built around his understanding of ethics—he describes hatred as something that erodes one's belief and hinders one's worship, while also obstructing one's worldly wellbeing and one's relationship with others.[147] Indeed, he frequently warns that hatred and envy are not only forbidden, but are also harmful to human collectives.[148] Conversely, to destroy the disease of hatred is to "raise believing society to a more elevated level of mutual friendships or just interactions."[149]

As I suggested above, Ghazālī inherited from his classical predecessors, a discourse on how to foster and maintain worldly and collective wellbeing. Its centrality in his text is most succinctly captured in his discussion of the virtues of "generosity" (jūd) and "kindness" (karam). He opens noting that acting with benevolence towards other humans is first and foremost a matter of putting oneself in a proper relationship with God—that is, it is an obligation He imposes upon humans. Yet he quickly adds that it is also essential to maintaining worldly and collective wellbeing. He writes, "There does not exist a system, nor will there, in which humans might do without cooperation and equality; rather so that tranquility is established and happiness guaranteed, it is necessary that the strong sympathize with the weak and that he with much expends for he who possesses little." Echoing both Miskawayh and al-Māwardī, Ghazālī bases his assertion here on the belief that God, in His infinite wisdom, created humans with different capacities and divergent

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[146] Ibid., 83.

[147] Ibid., 86.

[148] Ibid., 93.

[149] Ibid., 88.

material standings precisely so that humans might learn to cooperate and care for one another.[150] Indeed, like his classical predecessors, he understands the need humans have for each other as something promoting collective wellbeing and human flourishing. Al-Māwardī, for instance, held that God created humans unequally so that they might seek association with others, without which they would perish. He writes, "if people are different and vary from each other, they become united through assistance, and interconnected through need," for need makes them seek out each other.[151] According to Ghazālī, if humans do not associate and care for one another they lose their humanness, as well as their status as believers. So important is providing for others to the collective wellbeing that Ghazālī describes generosity as a means for the "nation" to achieve success.[152]

"Reform yourself, then call to others"

During the late 1940s and early 1950s, Ghazālī was one of the leading intellectuals of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Though he left the organization in 1953, his thinking about the relationship between reform of the soul (*islāḥ al-nafs*) and collective wellbeing shaped the views of other Brotherhood affiliates and leaders, including well-known reformers, like Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, and other less known figures, like Muṣṭafā Mashhūr, a prominent Brotherhood leader of the 1970s who eventually became the organization's Supreme Guide in 1996. In fact by the early 1970s, Ghazālī had reestablished close links with the Brotherhood, especially after Egypt's new leader, Anwar al-Sadāt (r. 1970-1981) began freeing Brotherhood members from prisons.[153] Much like Ghazālī, Qaraḍāwī and Mashhūr also elaborated a project of self-reform-cum-social-

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[150] Ibid., 119.

[151] Al-Māwardī, 110.

[152] Ghazālī, *Khulq al-muslim*, 120

[153] Qaraḍāwī, 39. The most comprehensive study on the Brotherhood during the Sadāt years is, Abdullah al-Arian, *Answering the Call: Popular Islamic Activism in Sadat's Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

reform. Indeed, this project is central to the activist vision of the Brotherhood, which is encapsulated in its practice of "calling" (*da'wa*) others to adopt its understanding of Islam. Scholars of Islam have generally described the practice of calling as a form of ideological outreach and mobilization,[154] but my interest in it derives from its relationship to what Ghazālī, Qaraḍāwī, and Mashhūr understood as ethical self-cultivation. To quote Saba Mahmood's crucial, if neglected, observation, "political projects are not only the result of coalitional organizing, ideological mobilization, and critical deliberation," but are also "predicated upon affective, ethical, and sensible capacities that are often ignored as consequential to politics."[155] Indeed, according to these Muslim reformers, the practice of calling to others always begins first with reform of one's own soul. The organic relationship they perceive as existing between self-reform and social reform echoes the link maintained between ethics and collective wellbeing within the Islamic philosophical tradition.

I begin here, however, by drawing a different sort of parallel between premodern and modern Islamic thought regarding the practice of giving ethical advice to others, one that will help us better understand the function of the "caller" (*da'īya*) within the writings of Brotherhood affiliates. Michael Cook has shown that the modern practice of calling upon other Muslims to change their mode of practicing Islam has strong parallels with premodern understandings of the Islamic injunction "to command the right and forbid the wrong."[156] Yet there are also other ways of thinking about the relationship between this practice and premodern Islamic ethical thought. One of the distinctive elements of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's account on ethics, virtue, and vice is the

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[154] See, for instance, Carrie Rosefsky Wickham *Mobilizing Islam: Religion, Activism, and Political Change in Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 119-149.

[155] Mahmood, xiii.

[156] Michael Cook, *Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong in Islamic thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 505-584.

important role the Sufi shaykh plays in diagnosing the sicknesses afflicting the aspirant's soul.[157] In the writings of Brotherhood affiliates, however, it is the caller who is depicted as diagnosing the sick souls of others and providing treatments to them. Ghazālī's colleague, al-Bahī al-Khūlī, who wrote the Brotherhood's standard text on the practice of calling, describes the caller as someone who perceives the moral afflictions of others and gives them the cure. The illness affecting people today, writes Khūlī, is one that infects their hearts and eyes, rendering them incapable of perceiving God's majesty and signs in the world.[158] The task of the caller is thus to help others cure the aliments that affect their hearts and eyes.

Although Khūlī foregrounds the project of diagnosing and healing the sick souls of others in his account of calling, Brotherhood aligned thinkers conceived of the practice as beginning first with the reform of the soul. Indeed, as Ghazālī argues in his manual on the practice of calling, the caller's ability to diagnosis and treat the soul afflictions of others is based primarily upon the caller's experience refining his own soul. His discussion of this matter is part of his broader account on the ethical qualities a caller must embody. In language redolent with Sufi terminology, he writes that in order to be a caller, one must have progressed to the highest, most refined "stations of belief" (*manāzil al-īman*);[159] a level of closeness and awareness of God, he says, that is beyond the reach of the general populace.[160] In a way that perfectly highlights the intersubjective nature of his politics of the self, Ghazālī adds that because the caller possesses a close link with God, they are fully knowledgeable and cognizant of the state of their own soul, which in turn renders them

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[157] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-ʿamal*, 260.

[158] al-Bahī al-Khūlī, *Tadhkīrat al-duʿāh*, (Damascus: Dar al-Qalam, 1977), 144-145. Khūlī's text was first published in Cairo in 1943.

[159] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Maʿ allāh: dirāsāt fi al-daʿwa wa-duʿāh* (*With God: Studies in Calling and Callers*) (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1959), 180.

[160] Ibid., 177.

capable of knowing the souls of others. To truly know one's own soul is, in other words, to know both God and other human beings. He describes the process by which a caller comes to know his own soul and refine it as "soul reform." The caller, he tells us, provides "guidance" to others "in light of his reforming of his own soul" (*'alā ḍaw'in min iṣlāḥihi li-nafsihi huwa*). He thus knows how to treat others for the vices of "greed" and "stinginess," for instance, because he has first "treated" himself for those vices.[161] He becomes like a "doctor" for the "sick person,"[162] skillfully providing the remedy for the ailments of others.[163] This, Ghazālī writes, is the Qur'ānic method for "building nations and ushering in renaissances."[164]

The organic link between self-reform and social reform that is embedded in Ghazālī's discussion of the practice of calling to others depends, I argue, upon an understanding of the self as a microcosm of the collective that derives from Islamic philosophical ethics. The link between a reformed self and a righteous society is, in fact, quite common within the writings of Brotherhood aligned thinkers like Muṣṭafā Mashhūr on the practice of calling to others. Mashhūr's text was first published as a series of articles in the Brotherhood's popular magazine, *al-Daʿwa* (*The Call*), during the mid-to-late 1970s. The text presents in simplified language ideas that resonate strongly with those Ghazālī elaborated upon in his earlier works on Muslim creed, character, and the practice of calling. For my purposes here Mashhūr's text is significant for the way in which it treats self-reform as a prelude to calling to others and reforming society. He articulates this idea as a slogan of sorts: "Reform your soul and call to others" (*iṣlaḥ nafsak wa-idʿu gayrak*), he writes.

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[161] Ibid., 182

[162] Ibid., 185.

[163] Ibid., 187. According to Ghazālī, the skillful application of remedies for the maladies of the soul means being able to direct believers in what Qur'anic verse or Prophetic saying or aphorism from a Sufi thinker, such as Ibn ʿAṭā' Allāh al-Iskandarī (d. 1309), they should read to treat their particular affliction, Ibid.

[164] Ibid., 185.

The primary purpose of soul-reform according to Mashhūr is otherworldly in nature—it is about securing God's pleasure and avoiding his wrath in the Hereafter. Yet it is also the "necessary starting point" for realizing a range of other goals, including, of course, effectively calling to others.[165] Self-reform entails adhering to the proper creed, properly performing ritual practices and cultivating upright character. On practices of worship, he notes that it is not simply the external forms that are important for the caller, but also "the effect they have upon the soul." They should yield affective dispositions, such as "humility" towards God and "submission" to Him, as well as act as "a ladder for the spirit of the believer."[166] On "Muslim character," he writes, it should exemplary; the Muslim "is an exemplar of what he calls to, presenting Islam through deed, not simply theoretically, for the exemplarily deed has a much greater and more effective impact upon the souls of others than speech."[167]

Beyond writings dealing specifically with the practice of calling, however, Brotherhood affiliates discussed at length what they perceived as an organic relationship between the reform of the soul and the creation of a righteous society. One of the more extensive discussions of this matter was a text on Islamic belief published by Qaraḍāwī in the late 1960s. Like Ghazālī's much earlier texts on Muslim character and creed, Qaraḍāwī's text depicts the realization of proper Islamic belief as necessarily having ethical ramifications upon both individuals and collectives. Indeed, his text is in large part a description of the character traits believers should cultivate and embody. The first part of his text is dedicated to individual ethical matters, while the second part turns to the impact of proper Islamic belief upon the collective life. The organization of his text reflects, of course, the idea that self-reform inevitably yields social reform. In the section of the

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[165] Muṣṭafā Mashhūr, *Ṭarīq al-daʿwa* (*The Path of Calling*) (Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibāʿ wa-al-Nashr al-Islāmīya, 1979), 109.

[166] Ibid., 110.

[167] Ibid., 111.

text dealing with "belief in the life of society," he writes, "what is society in reality other than individuals bound together by shared binds." As such, "each effort expended for the forming of the righteous individual is a genuine deed for the forming of a righteous society."[168] The individual and the collective are thus fundamentally intertwined in his thinking.

Qaraḍāwī depicts self-reform as a basis for social reform throughout his text. He asserts, for instance, that "the reform of selves" is the primary means to achieve "social change."[169] Scholars of modern Islamic thought have noted the prevalence of "social" concerns among nineteenth and twentieth century Muslims reformers and have often treated these concerns as derivative of the translation of modern European social theory into Arabic. But as I have argued in my account of Ghazālī's politics of the self, modern Muslim reformers were undoubtedly informed by Islamic practical philosophy in their thinking about the relationship between ethics and collective life. Furthermore, to treat Islamic reformist discourse on collective wellbeing as derivative of modern social theory is to also drain it of its ontological stakes. Like Ghazālī, Qaraḍāwī envisions the impetus to become ethical as deriving first and foremost from the reality of an All-Powerful Creator to whom one will be held accountable in a truly existing Hereafter. Indeed, the project of self-reform-cum-social-reform that Qaraḍāwī describes is detailed in a text he dedicates specifically to Islamic belief. Only a proper belief in God and fear of His wrath, he argues, can inspire lasting and true self-reform.[170] In a passage that highlights the worldly and otherworldly stakes of self-reform according to him, Qaraḍāwī writes, "A change in the world of the soul is the closest thing to a revolution or coup in the world of matter; [it is] a change that transforms view, character, inclinations and habits. Soul change must accompany each movement, renaissance,

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[168] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-Īmān wa-al-ḥayāh* (*Belief and Life*) (Beirut: al-Dār al-Saʿūdīya li al-Nashr, 1969), 201.

[169] Ibid, 202.

[170] Ibid., 313.

political or social revolution, for without it, the renaissance or revolution will be just ink on paper or empty words scattered in the wind."[171]

Conclusion

If anything, Ghazālī's manual of ethical self-formation, *Muslim Character*, like his earlier works on Egypt's economic conditions and political despotism, highlights for the careful reader just how multifarious the sources of modern Islamic political thought are. Although he often presents his books as nothing other than the *sharī'a*, rooted in the Qur'ān and Sunna, they bear innumerable parallel and resonances with the tradition of Islamic philosophical ethics, both in content and form, making it all but certain that that tradition was one of the sources he drew upon to craft his arguments. Perhaps like his teacher and colleague, Mūsā, he was drawn to the tradition of Islamic philosophical ethics precisely because it posited an ineluctable and organic link between the refinement of character and the realization of collective and worldly wellbeing. Whether or not he was the first of the Brotherhood's leading intellectuals to position ethics as the basis of politics is beyond the scope of this chapter, but its seems that his take on this matter influenced the thinking of subsequent Brotherhood affiliates.

In the following chapters I will consider an even more diverse body of sources that informed his modern-day political thought, including Sufism, and others not based at all in an Islamic textual tradition, such as American self-help, psychical research, and spiritualism. Within each of these later aspects of his intellectual career, ethics remains in the foreground of his political thinking. Ghazālī was and remained a "soul doctor." The following chapter explores the resonances Ghazālī perceived between an Islamic discourse on "worry" (*al-qalaq*) and an internationally acclaimed text on worry written by the American self-help pioneer, Dale Carnegie. Together with Chapter

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[171] Ibid., 312.

Five, which explores Ghazālī's engagement with American psychical research and spiritualism, the following chapter analyzes Ghazālī's perspective on another fundamental issue pertaining to ethics: the respective places of revelation and human reason and experience in determining good and evil, and revealing the human purpose and the means to achieve it. In between these two chapters, Chapter Four examines how Ghazālī derived from Sufism certain sensibilities and attitudes towards worldly life, which he believed provided a suitable ethics for life during an era of crass materialism.

CHAPTER THREE

Medicine for the Soul

Introduction

After reading an Arabic translation of Dale Carnegie's *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* (1948) at the suggestion of a friend,[1] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī immediately set out to "return the book to its Islamic foundations."[2] In 1956, he published the fruits of his efforts. It was a nearly 260-page commentary on Carnegie's text titled *Jaddid ḥayātak*, or *Renew Your Life*. This chapter explores why Ghazālī, once a leading intellectual of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, found this internationally acclaimed text by an American self-help pioneer so compelling. While focusing on his commentary on *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, it also explores Ghazālī's engagement with another internationally acclaimed work of American self-help—Henry C. Link's *The Return to Religion* (1936).[3]

Historical accounts of the modern Middle East often narrate how the spread of global capitalism that accompanied the economic and political domination of the region by European powers and the U.S. during the 19th and 20th centuries fundamentally altered the way people there live and view their lives. It is often argued that older ways of living and understanding life were either displaced or modified by ideas that accompanied the spread of global capitalism. With regard to the development of self-help and other "psy disciplines" in Western contexts, Nikolas

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[1] "Barnamāj Jaddid ḥayātak li-al-shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī al-ḥalqa 1" (The Renew Your Life Program with Shaykh Muḥammad al-Ghazālī part 1) YouTube video 29:50. Posted September 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20N8fuNoZ8E&list=PLvuVUIuZL6qlzi35eZP6VGCTy_0OseVMv. This is the first of a thirty-part television series based on Ghazālī's text that aired on Egyptian television channel Iqrā'.

[2] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Jaddid ḥayātak* (*Renew Your Life*), (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1956), 12.

[3] He discussed Link's work in a book chapter he first published in 1959. The book was *al-Islām wa-al-ṭāqāt al-mu'aṭṭala*, (*Islam and the Obstructed Powers*) 2ⁿ ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha bi-Misr, 1964).

Rose has argued that they have been historically linked to the growth of new understandings of what it means to be a human being that emphasize autonomy, individuality, enterprise, and self-fulfillment.[4] The translation of American self-help into Egypt thus suggests changing understandings of selfhood caused by the spread of global capitalism. A growing body of literature dealing with neoliberalism in Egypt and elsewhere across the Global South, for instance, focuses on how it reconfigures religious practices and other forms of self-constitution "in line with principles of economic rationality, productivity, and privatization."[5] As one author has recently argued, the presence of American self-help literature in Egypt is indicative of the spread of neoliberal demands for subjects who are self-sufficient, industrious, and efficient.[6]

However, Ghazālī's commentaries on works of American self-help shows that the translation of this genre into Egyptian society did not lead to the displacement of understandings of what it means to be human rooted in ethical and theological conclusions drawn from the Qur'ān and Sunna. Indeed, as I will show, because of the existence of certain Islamic theological concepts, Ghazālī is able to understand the work of his American interlocutors and its "scientific" grounding not as competitors to revelation, but as confirmations of truths originally made known by the

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[4] *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[5] Mona Atia, *Building a House in Heaven: Pious Neoliberalism and Islamic Charity in Egypt*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), xvii-xviii. See also, Samuli Schielke, "Capitalist Ethics and the Spirit of Islamization in Egypt," in *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion*, ed. Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec (New York Berghahn Books, 2012); Jeffery T. Kenney, "Selling Success, Nurturing the Self: Self-help Literature, Capitalist Values, and the Sacralization of Subjective Life in Egypt," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 47, no. 4 (2015). For similar work dealing with Indonesia see, Daromir Rudnyckyj, *Spiritual Economies: Islam, Globalization, and the Afterlife of Development* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

[6] Kenney, 665. Kenney distinguishes two types of self-help literature in Egypt today. One is based primarily upon modern liberal subjectivities; it emphasizes autonomy, individuality and fulfillment. He terms the "self" of this literature the "enterprising self." The other form of literature deals with a "self" whose potentials and limits are defined and circumscribed by Islamic ethics. This is what he calls a "believing self" or "Muslim self." He argues that the former is predominant in Egypt and that its predominance is indicative of a transformation in understandings of religion. "Viewed as a whole," he writes, "the self-help genre demonstrates the extent to which religion has been commodified." Ibid., 676.

Qur'ān and Sunna. More generally, as scholars are increasingly demonstrating, the translation of texts from one context to another rarely leads to erasures and displacements, but more often leads those who engage them to translate the new and unfamiliar into more familiar terms and concepts.[7] My account of Ghazālī's engagement with American self-help builds off this scholarship, but attempts to move beyond analyses of how Euro-American intellectual traditions were reconfigured in colonial and postcolonial contexts by foregrounding his critique of self-help. I thus show how Ghazālī utilizes Islamic theological and ethical concepts to "correct" the work of his American interlocutors and bring out the deeper political significance of their discussions of the human self. By foregrounding Ghazālī's critique of self-help, this chapter presents him as a contributor to a project of conceiving political modernity, rather than as an assimilator of a project elaborated elsewhere.

To do this, I explore how Ghazālī draws upon Carnegie's text as a starting point to discuss theological concerns unique to the concept of worry (*al-qalaq*) within certain Islamic discourses. For Carnegie worry is primarily a problem pertaining to one's state of mind. To live a life without worry, is to embark upon a journey of self-realization through which one achieves self-sufficiency. For Ghazālī, however, worry is a different type of problem. Much like his classical predecessors, including influential Muslim scholars like Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1108/1109) and Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1201), Ghazālī does not see worry simply as a turbulent emotion pertaining to one's mental attitude. Rather, for Ghazālī, it is one of a number of "afflictions of the soul" (*amrāḍ al-nafs*), including fear (*al-khawf*), anger (*al-ghaḍab),* and anxiety

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[7] Excellent recent examples of this growing body of scholarship include, Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); Omnia El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Yoav Di-Capua, "Arab Existentialism: An Invisible Chapter in the Intellectual History of Decolonization," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012); Alireza Doostdar, "Empirical Spirits: Islam, Spiritism, and the Virtues of Science in Iran," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no. 2 (2016).

(*al-hamm*). Within certain strands of Islamic ethics and the Islamic medical tradition, more generally, afflictions of the soul, like worry, are regarded not only as causes of bodily sicknesses, but are also regarded as symptomatic of a greater threat to one's wellbeing. They manifest in hearts with faulty understandings of God and his will and thus threaten one with eternal pain in the Hereafter. As we will see, therefore, Ghazālī conceives of worry as a matter wrapped up in a range of theological concerns, including understanding how God's will and power manifest in the world, the potentials and limits of human agency, and the purposes of human life.

Indeed, although he clearly saw Carnegie as a fellow traveler, Ghazālī contests his perspective on religion as limited and, ultimately, incorrect and disputes his view that true happiness and the absence of worry could be realized through means other than the belief in God. More often, however, Ghazālī does not overtly challenge Carnegie's views, but instead simply uses them as points of departure for a discussion that is more fully in line with his understanding of selfhood and agency.[8] Thus, for instance, Carnegie emphasizes throughout his book that humans have the potentials and capacities within them to realize fulfillment and emotional wellbeing through their own efforts. Ghazālī, however, emphasizes that one can only partially do so through one's own efforts. For him, such matters are ultimately dependent upon God's will and His assistance. God indeed is the foremost agent in this process according to Ghazālī. He thus articulates an understanding of human agency that both incorporates and transcends views espoused by Carnegie.

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[8] My focus on Ghazālī's views on selfhood and human agency builds upon Samira Haj's distinction between liberal forms of selfhood and Islamic understanding of selfhood in her discussion of the life and work of the Egyptian Muslim reformer, Muḥammad ʿAbduh (1849-1905) in *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), and Amira Mittermaier's discussion of the limits of human agency and the potentials of divine intervention in *Dreams that Matter: Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). See also, Mittermaier's "Trading with God: Islam, Calculation, Excess," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Janice Boddy and Michael Lambek. (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

Carnegie, Link, and Their Translators

Dale Carnegie (1888-1955) is best known as the author of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*,[9] another international acclaimed text he published twelve years earlier than *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*. ʿAbd al-Munʿim al-Ziyādī, who translated *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* into Arabic in 1950,[10] also translated *How to Win Friends and Influence People* in 1946.[11] Ghazālī, however, either did not read the latter text or did not find it significant enough to mention. Although Carnegie is best known in the U.S. for his earlier text, it appears that at least in Egypt, his later text was more successful. Both texts were positively received in Egypt selling more copies than Ziyādī had anticipated,[12] but while *How to Win Friends and Influence People* had gone through six publications in its first fifteen years,[13] *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, was already in its fifth publication by 1956.[14] In the introduction to the second edition of his translation of this text, which was published only months after the first edition, Ziyādī attributes the first edition's swift sales to the way in which it filled a great void in "the Arabic library."[15]

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[9] First published in 1936, by 1937 the book was at the top of the best-seller list in the U.S. selling some 650,000 copies. By 1939 it had sold some one million copies. Throughout the following decade it would sell at least five million copies, and in the 1950s, with the beginning of paperback printing, the text "would go on to become one of the great bestsellers in American history, with some thirty million copies being purchased over the next eighty years." Steven Watts, *Self-Help Messiah: Dale Carnegie and Success in Modern America*, (New York: Other Press, 2013), 261-262.

[10] *Daʿ al-qalaq wa-ibdaʾ al-ḥayāh* (*Stop Worrying and Start Living*), (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī bi Miṣr, 1950).

[11] *Kayfa taksib al-aṣdiqāʾ wa tuʾaththir fī al-nās* (*How to Gain Friends and Influence People*), (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Ahliyya, 1946).

[12] In his introduction to the second edition of *How to Win Friends*, Ziyādī describes his astonishment at the "extraordinary speed" with which the first Arabic edition disappeared. *Kayfa taksib al-aṣdiqāʾ wa tuʾaththir fī al-nās*, 2ᵈ ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī bi Miṣr, 1951) Arabic page number "zā'." Likewise in his introduction to the second edition of *How to Stop Worrying*, published only months after the first edition, Ziyādī describes how the "swift sales" and positive reception of the first edition surprised him. *Daʿ al-qalaq wa-ibdaʾ al-ḥayāh*, 2ᵈ ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanji bi Miṣr, 1951), 1.

[13] *Kayfa taksib al-aṣdiqāʾ wa tuʾaththir fī al-nās*, 6ᵗ ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī bi Miṣr, 1961).

[14] *Daʿ al-qalaq wa-ibdaʾ al-ḥayāh*, 5ᵗ ed. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī bi Miṣr, 1956).

[15] Ziyādī, *Daʿ al-qalaq*, 2ᵈ ed., 1.

According to Steven Watts, the author of the most extensive biography on Carnegie, the two texts represent distinct aspects of Carnegie's career. *How to Win Friends and Influence People* dealt with how to achieve financial wellbeing and success in the 1930s, years of economic instability in the U.S. In contrast, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* dealt with how to realize emotional wellbeing and personal fulfillment in years of economic prosperity in postwar America.[16] As the title of this text implies, Carnegie saw worry as the primary obstacle to emotional wellbeing. Worry, as I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, was a concern to various premodern Muslim ethicists. Carnegie, as we will see, also placed a great deal of emphasis on the utility of religion in the achievement of emotional wellbeing.[17] That *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* dealt with this particular "affliction of the soul," on the one hand, and that it highlighted the utility of religion in dispelling it, on the other, explains at least part of Ghazālī's interest in this text as opposed to Carnegie's other famous text. Indeed, while Ziyādī translated another American self-help text on worry in 1958,[18] Ghazālī did not write anything on it, perhaps because that text did not deal with religion.

In *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, Carnegie not only highlights the importance of religion to one's emotional wellbeing, but also buttresses his claims in this regard by drawing upon the scientific authority of various psychologists, including William James, Alfred Adler, Carl Jung, and Henry C. Link. Indeed, the appeal of his work in the U.S., more generally, "gained much of its power from a subtle appropriation of psychological perspectives and techniques."[19] Carnegie,

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[16] Watts, 434-438. For another useful biography of Carnegie see, Giles Kemp and Edward Claflin, *Dale Carnegie: the man who influenced millions*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989).

[17] Ibid.14.

[18] 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Ziyādī, *Shifā' al-qalaq* (*The Cure of Worry*), (Cairo: al-Sharika al-'Arabīya li-al-Ṭaba', 1958).

[19] Watts, 6.

for instance, frequently references Link as an example of a scientist who discovered the benefits of religion, and encourages his readers to purchase Link's book. Link's *Return to Religion* was first published in 1936 in the U.S. and went through thirty-four printings in five years.[20] Thawrat 'Ukāshā, an Egyptian literary critic who served twice as Minister of Culture (1958-1962 and 1966-1970), translated Link's text into Arabic in 1959.[21] His translation was republished in Egypt again in 1964 and later in 1996. Ghazālī read this translation of Link's text and wrote a lengthy chapter on it in a book he published in 1959.

In their introductions to their translations, both Ziyādī and 'Ukāshā emphasize the scientific grounding of Carnegie and Link's works, although for different reasons. Ziyādī describes his desire to translate Carnegie's text as part of his broader interest in psychology (*'ilm al-nafs*).[22] In translating this text, he sought to show his readers how this science might help them deal with "fear, worry, shyness and loss of self-confidence."[23] In the introduction to *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* Carnegie laments the paucity of texts dealing with worry. Ziyādī, however, contradicts Carnegie's claim, noting that there are many texts dealing with worry, especially given what he describes as a recent growth of interest in psychology. What Carnegie really means, writes Ziyādī, is that there are no psychological studies dealing with worry from a practical (*'amalī*) standpoint. Indeed, he says, most take up worry from a "theoretical academic perspective" and are filled with complex technical terms. Such books, says Ziyādī, would require at least four years of

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[20] On Link and the impact of his book in the U.S., see Donald Meyer, *The Positive Thinkers: Religion as Pop Psychology from Mary Baker Eddy to Oral Roberts*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 243-249. On Link's influence upon Carnegie see Watts, 288-290.

[21] Tharwat 'Ukāshā, *Al-'awda ilā al-īmān* (*The Return to Belief*), (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'ārif, 1959).

[22] Throughout his career Ziyādī translated numerous self-help text into Arabic that drew from psychology including, Louis E. Bisch's *Be Glad You're Neurotic*, (New York: Whittlesey House, McGraw-Hill book Company, Inc., 1936) and W. Béran Wolfe's *How to Be Happy Though Human*, (New York: Farrar and Rinehart Inc., 1931).

[23] *Da' al-qalaq wa-ibda' al-ḥayāh* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī bi Miṣr, 1950), 17.

preparatory study in psychology for them to be of benefit.[24] ‘Ukāshā, on the other hand, positions himself not as a partisan of psychology, but of religion. He translated Link's text because he sought to show that religion does not conflict with science and that it is the best "solution to the problems of society."[25] So that the text might fulfil the author's goal of returning people to religion, ‘Ukāshā notes that he omitted translating portions of the original text that corresponded more to "the traditions and customs of Western society," than to "our life and environment."[26] These edits, as we will see, were crucial in shaping Ghazālī's understanding of Link's text. Although Ziyādī also edited Carnegie's text, he gives no explanation as to why.

The way in which Carnegie and Link blend elements of religion and science together owes itself to trends in American metaphysical religion that predate both authors, such as positive thinking and mind cure. Carnegie, in particular, was deeply influenced by the New Thought movement that emerged in the U.S. during the late nineteenth century. It combined aspects of religion, science, and philosophy, and advocated a number of ideas, including that "the human mind was the primary causative force in the universe," that "the remedy for human defects and disorders lay in the mental and spiritual realm," and that "health and material abundance were available to those who mobilized their available mental resources to pursue it."[27] Its affiliates included people like Phineas P. Quimby, who developed mental-healing, mystics like Ralph Waldo Trine, advocates of mind-cure, like Mary Baker Eddy, who was also the founder of Christian Science, and psychologists like William James.[28] Aspects of American metaphysical religion

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[24] Ibid., 15-16.

[25] ‘Ukāshā, 11.

[26] Ibid. He further supplements Link's text with many footnotes citing verses of the Qur'ān when they resonate with what Link writes.

[27] Watts, 132.

[28] On New Thought and forms of American metaphysical religion see Meyers, Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality*, (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2005), and Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic*

permeate both of most Carnegie's successful texts. Although he was made famous by his business acumen, Carnegie's antecedents were religious thinkers not businesspeople.[29]

As Courtney Bender has argued, part of the appeal of metaphysical religion to its adherents in the U.S. is that it does not appear to be tied to any particular religious tradition, but rather grounded in individual religious experience, something said to be the irreducible core of all religions. Yet, as Bender shows, although metaphysical religion in the U.S. appears free of tradition, it has historically developed out of an engagement with secular institutions, including clinics and hospitals, and secular forms of knowledge, including psychology and medicine. Indeed, its advocates authenticate the reality of their religious experiences through an appeal to these secular institutions and knowledge structures.[30] As someone who was deeply influenced by American metaphysical religion, it is not surprising that Carnegie presents his views on religion in *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* as being shaped more by psychology and modern medicine than by organized religion. Although in the Arabic translation of this text he appears to advocate a tradition free blend of science and religion, in the English original Carnegie's religion generally takes its cues from Protestant Christianity. The way in which Carnegie's views on religion appear grounded in science and, at least in the Arabic translation, not affiliated with a specific religious tradition, allows Ghazālī to assimilate aspects of Carnegie's text and use them for his own arguments about the mutual correspondence between science and religion.

Ghazālī was one of the first Egyptian Muslim thinkers to draw extensively from American self-help to craft an argument about the compatibility of religion with science. Following his lead,

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of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

[29] Kemp and Claflin, 189.

[30] See Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

the Egyptian Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926), a close colleague of Ghazālī and also a leading Brotherhood affiliated intellectual, would also draw extensively from Carnegie and Link's work in a text he published in 1969.[31] American self-help remains today a prominent feature in Egypt and elsewhere.[32] As James Bourk Hoesterey has shown, however, the appeal of this genre for those seeking to blend elements of religion and science extends well beyond Egypt into other predominantly Muslim societies, like Indonesia.[33]

On Human Nature (Fiṭra)

Ghazālī's introduction opens with a discussion of the Islamic concept of human nature, or *fiṭra*. For premodern Muslim thinkers, *fiṭra* typically referred to the innate capacity of human beings to know of God's existence and, more specifically, to a natural human inclination towards accepting Islam.[34] Thus, according to medieval Muslim scholars like Ibn Taymīya (d. 1328), humans are naturally born as Muslims and either remain in this natural state or are perverted from it due to parental upbringing.[35] Andrew March argues that the claim that there is a natural correspondence between Islam and human nature is a prominent theme within the writings of modern Muslim thinkers. For such thinkers, Islamic ethics are in perfect harmony with the innate inclinations and capacities of human beings because they correspond to human nature. These thinkers therefore draw upon this concept, says March, to argue that the Islamic law and Islamic teachings are

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[31] *Al-īmān wa-al-hayāh* (*Belief and Life*), (Beirut: al-Dār al-Saʻūdīya li al-Nashr, 1969).

[32] Today Carnegie's work is still utilized by Muslim thinkers like the Saudi Arabian cleric ʻĀʼiḍ Quranī whose 1996 *La taḥzan* draws extensively from Carnegie's *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*. *La taḥzan* (*Don't Be Sad*), (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymīya, 1996). According Jeffery T. Kenney, "Carnegie's books have gone through a number of translations in Egypt, and they are often cited in Egyptian self-help books," Kenney, 672.

[33] Hoesterey, 73-97.

[34] *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2ⁿᵈ ed., s.v. *Fiṭra*.

[35] *Encyclopedia of Islam* 3ʳᵈ ed., s.v. *Fiṭra*.

uniquely applicable to all places and all times.[36] Ghazālī, as I show in this section, understands *fiṭra* in similar terms, but he uses this concept more as a way of appropriating some aspects of Carnegie's book. At the same time, as we will see, he also uses the concept of *fiṭra* to refer to the starting point of journey of moral self-cultivation with divinely defined ends—one that he sees as bearing direct relevance to political practice.

Ghazālī begins his commentary attempting to justify why Carnegie's work is significant for Muslims in the first place. In doing so, he contests the claims of those that might deem any comparison between human reason and revelation as an affront to God, on the one hand, and the claims of those that might disparage the significance of this genre of writing altogether, on the other. With regard to the claims of former, Ghazālī opens his text pointing out that Islam is the religion of *fiṭra* and that its teachings and directives thus correspond to sound thinking and healthy dispositions. Because human nature is essentially Islamic, he says, it is possible that Islamic teachings may be corroborated by the fruits of human experience. Ghazālī describes his own as career as having been directed towards demonstrating the similarity between the teachings of Islam and the best of what "free thinkers" have arrived at in political, social, and personal matters. For Ghazālī this similarity serves to highlight a congruence between truths arrived at through human experience, like those conveyed in Carnegie's book, and those arrived at through revelation.[37] Indeed, as I noted above, upon reading Carnegie's text, Ghazālī immediately set out to "return the book to its Islamic foundations." He sought to do so not because the author explicitly conveys

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[36] Andrew F. March "Taking People As They Are: Islam As a 'Realistic Utopia' in the Political Theory of Sayyid Quṭb," *American Political Science Review*, 104, no. 1 (2010), 189.

[37] Ghazālī, 3.

something about Islam, but because the knowledge Carnegie transmits corresponds in innumerable ways to the verses of the Qur'ān and the sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad.[38]

Ghazālī's assertions here raise the question of the relationship between knowledge made known by revelation and that made known by human reason and experience—a matter of great debate among Muslim scholars past and present. Issues of particular concern for these scholars included whether or not good and evil could be determined independently of revelation and whether or not good and evil existed independently of God's judgment. The answers to these questions and others, including the question of extent of human freedom and responsibility, are central to Islamic ethics.[39] Sofia Vasalou's recent account on Ibn Taymīya "theological ethics" provides a useful way of making sense of Ghazālī's usage of *fiṭra* to posit a correspondence between revelation and Carnegie's realizations. Ibn Taymīya held that human nature could be a source of ethical knowledge for humans. He argued that because of their *fiṭra* humans naturally seek what is good for them and what is in their welfare.[40] "It is as a principle of desire, and more specifically a desire that has benefit as its primary purpose that the notion of *fiṭra* is repeatedly characterized in Ibn Taymiyya's ethical remarks across a number of different writings," she writes.[41] *Fiṭra* for Ibn Taymīya thus held epistemological value insofar as it could make known what is good for humans and in their welfare, she adds.[42] Additionally, for Ibn Taymīya and many other Muslim thinkers, the concept also held another type of epistemological value—*fiṭra*

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[38] Ibid.; 12.

[39] For excellent introductions to these questions in Islamic ethics, see Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam*, (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 11, 31-58; George Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. 15-48.

[40] Sofia Vasalou, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theological Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 69-70.

[41] Ibid., 70.

[42] Ibid., 74.

constituted a natural disposition to know God. Human nature for Ibn Taymīya was therefore a source of *both* ethical and theological knowledge. By arguing that *fiṭra* served as source of ethical knowledge, he took aim specifically at the Muslim philosopher Avicenna (d. 1037), who held that human nature could not provide ethical knowledge. Vasalou explains Ibn Taymīya's "alacrity" to take on Avicenna's rejection of human nature as a source of ethical knowledge because maintaining the opposite—the human nature provides ethical knowledge—"is a tenant that feeds into a broader conception of the religious life as the highest fulfilment of the good. To the extent that this conception deploys a notion of 'good' that is intuitively available to us—'good' is what serves our 'welfare'—it supports a theological vision whose basic thrust...is to argue for the convergence between the demands of faith and the demands of our being."[43]

Ghazālī's understanding discussion of *fiṭra* in the opening discussion of his commentary of Carnegie's text resonates strongly with the idea of human nature as a source of both ethical and theological knowledge as articulated by Ibn Taymīya. As we will see more extensively in the following sections, Ghazālī deploys the concept as a way of making sense—for both himself and his readers—of how it is that Carnegie and his interlocutors arrived at a strong, if vaguely defined monotheism, and acquired knowledge of great ethical value independently of revelation. What Ghazālī is saying in his opening discussion is that because of their God given nature, Carnegie and his interlocutors' have arrived at a set of truths that are essentially "Islamic" in nature. Carnegie, his religion, and its scientific groundings are thus not competitors to God's revelation but reaffirmations of the truth of the Qur'ān and the Sunna.

Additionally, we might note here that one of the interesting aspects of Ghazālī's willingness to countenance such a close correspondence between Islamic teachings and American self-help, is

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[43] Ibid., 83.

that it demonstrates that not all leading Muslim reformers were as suspicious of American culture as Ghazālī's more famous Egyptian contemporary, Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966). Quṭb, who is commonly depicted as the founder of contemporary Islamism,[44] journeyed to the U.S. in the late 1940s as part of Egyptian educational mission. Upon returning to Egypt after an extended stay in Greeley, Colorado, he wrote a scathing critique of what he perceived as the depravity and licentiousness of American culture.[45] Ghazālī's exposure to American popular culture was certainly more limited than Quṭb's. Indeed, it is questionable how much he knew about Carnegie beyond Ziyādī's introduction and, indeed, "self-help" a genre of literature. Nevertheless, his positive endorsement of many of Carnegie's ideas provides a compelling counterpoint to the alleged hostility of Islamic reformist movements towards American culture.

While the concept of *fiṭra* allows Ghazālī to assert that the fruits of human experience may corroborate Islamic teachings, it also brings the political nature of the problem of worry for Ghazālī to the foreground. As we have already seen in previous chapters, he devoted great efforts to demonstrate that individual character formation was immensely relevant to broader issues of political and social reform. Ghazālī held that individual ethical self-cultivation was essential to the project of living with others and ensuring the collective wellbeing. The possibility of humans realizing self-cultivation, however, has roots in another understanding of *fiṭra*. When discussing matter's pertaining to ethics, prominent Muslim scholars, such as Abū Ḥāmid, al-Iṣfahānī, and Ibn al-Jawzī, for instance, began from the assumption that human beings had a God-ordained purpose

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[44] See, for instance, John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); James Toth, *Sayyid Qutb: The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[45] Quṭb's critique of American culture was recording in the Egyptian magazine, *al-Risāla* in 1951, published as "Amrīkā allatī ra'aytu" ("The America I Have Seen"). This and other articles he wrote about the U.S. are found in Ṣalāḥ 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Khālidī, *Amrīkā min al-dākhil bi-minẓār Sayyid Quṭb* (*America From the Inside in the View of Sayyid Quṭb*) 5ᵗ ed. (Jeddah: Dār al-Manārah, 1991), 97-123. For an account of Quṭb's stay in the U.S. and his views on American culture see, Calvert, 139-156.

in life, which was defined as the realization of true Islamic belief (*īmān*) and the attainment of

everlasting happiness in the Hereafter.[46] To fulfil this purpose, God created humans with the

corresponding innate capacities, including the capacity of humans to realize purity of soul. The

ability of human beings to purify their souls and achieve their perfection was in turn predicated on

the innate capacity of humans to change their character (*akhlāq*).[47] For these thinkers, the natural

longing of human beings for the soul's perfection, as well as their innate ability to achieve it,

constituted the fundamental basis of human nature, or *fiṭra*.[48] *Fiṭra* in this sense thus served as the

starting point of an ethical journey—one to which the soul naturally inclined—with predefined

ends.

The ideas of the aforementioned premodern Muslim scholars echo clearly in the modern day

Ghazālī's opening discussion of *fiṭra*. Much like them, he regards worry, distress, and grief as

vices that must be removed in the project of becoming an ethically sound human being. Indeed,

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[46] On the elaboration of the purposes of human life within classical Islamic ethical theories and the means to achieve them see Mohamed Sherif *Ghazālī's Theory of Virtue*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 3; Hourani, 140, 147-148; Fakhry, 177-178, 197.

[47] According to al-Iṣfahānī purity of soul is a fundamental precondition for humans to assume the role of God's successors on earth and for perfecting worship of Him. If purity of soul is a necessary precondition for realizing the human purpose, then it must be something within the human capacity to achieve, which is what Iṣfahānī asserts when outlining the possibility of humans changing their character. See al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī, *al-Dhari'a ila makarim al-shari'a* (*The Means to the Noble Traits of the Shari'a*) (Cairo: Dar al-Sahwa, 1985), 96; 116-117. For an overview of Iṣfahānī 's ethical thought, see Fakhry, 176-185. Although Iṣfahānī does not refer to *fiṭra* here explicitly, other Muslim ethicists, like Ibn al-Jawzī and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, did tie the capacity of humans to change character to their understanding of human nature. See, for instance, Ibn al-Jawzī *Al-Ṭibb al-rūhānī* (*Spiritual Medicine*), (Cairo: Matba'at al-Thaqafa al-Dinīya, 1986), 57. See also, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'ulum al-din* (*The Revival of the Sciences of Religion*), vol. 3, (Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2005), 937-941.

[48] According to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, for instance, purity of soul and the perfection of character are natural ends to which the human soul inclines. The soul's natural healthy state, he argued, is found in the equilibrium of character, or the mean between the vice of deficiency and the vice of excess of a particular character trait, wherein the virtue resides. Because equilibrium of character is natural for the soul, deviation from it constitutes a sickness (*marad*). Indeed, humans are naturally born in a state of being in "equilibrium and of sound *fiṭra*." One is born with sound *fiṭra* and only deviates from this nature as a result of external factors, such as parental upbringing, education, or negative company, 943. importantly, for Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, the nature of the human heart, (*ṭab' al-qalb*)—itself regarded as the seat of the soul within this ethical tradition—is expressed by the soul's natural inclination to wisdom, love, knowledge, and worship of God. Thus, while *fiṭra* can be thought of as an innate neutral human state, it is nevertheless one that predisposes humans towards knowledge and worship of God, and the perfection of their character, 941.

for Ghazālī, to purify the soul and rid it of these vices is ultimately to facilitate the human capacity to realize the purpose in life. It is no surprise, for instance, that Muslim scholars devoted substantial attention to how humans might purify their souls from worry.[49] Operating within a tradition that deems purity of soul as the basis of morality, the modern day Ghazālī deems the battle against this worry and the cultivation of its opposite, the virtue of satisfaction with God's decree (*riḍā*), as exceptionally relevant to issues of social and political reform. He writes, for instance, that although there are some that "despise" writings that take up such personal matters, dispelling "the social fog" prevalent in Arab nations means that reformers must not limit their efforts, but must "delve into personal problems and defects of character." This book, he adds, is not an attempt to satisfy some "scholarly luxury" (*taraf ʿilmī*); instead, it is part of an endeavor "to rectify mistaken views and unjust conditions."[50] Individual ethical self-cultivation is significant for Ghazālī because as he notes, "curing and treating the problems of the people is not possible but for a man who has solved his own problems and treated his own defects with the religious truths he presents [to others]."[51]

Although Ghazālī suggests that the political ramifications of worry are underappreciated by his contemporaries other Arab intellectuals, particularly those invested in translating existentialism into Arabic, likewise held that worry was something of great ethical significance.[52] Indeed, not unlike Ghazālī's attempt to meld together Islamic discourses on worry and American self-help, the Egyptian philosopher, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (d. 2002), ventured, for instance, to meld together Sufi discussions on worry with those of existentialism, arguing that existentialism had revealed

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[50] Ibid., 14.

[51] Ibid., 9.

[52] On existentialism in Arabic, see Di-Capua.

truths that Sufism had long acknowledged.[53] But whereas Badawī and his European interlocutors,

Søren Kierkegaard (d. 1855) and Martin Heidegger (d. 1976), regarded worry as an avenue for the

realization of a higher truth,[54] Ghazālī, like many of his classical predecessors, understood worry

as obstacle to realization of truth.

Thus, as we seen so far, Ghazālī begins with the concept of *fiṭra* in order to highlight the

possibility of concord between Islamic ethical lessons and knowledge gained from human

experience, and also to highlight the broader moral and political significance of the struggle against

worry. As we will see presently, the theological overtones of the Islamic concept of human nature,

as well as the problem worry in Islamic thought, both assist Ghazālī in his efforts to "correct" the

work of Carnegie and Link. In other words, he challenges his American interlocutors with a

theology that can lay claim to their insights, while also claiming to surpass them.

Science and Translation

In this section I explore elements intrinsic to Carnegie and Link's texts that facilitated

Ghazālī's assimilation of their ideas. Ghazālī's American interlocutors, for instance, both ground

their claims about the benefits of religion and religious practices in the latest scientific research.

By doing so, their work resonated with Ghazālī's own efforts to dispute the alleged disenchanting

power of science. Additionally, both of these American authors present their understandings of

religion and its benefits as not tied to any particular religious tradition, but common to them all.

The seemingly ecumenical nature of their views, however, owed itself to the forms of editing

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[53] See his *al-Insānīya wa-al-wujūdīya fī al-fikr al-'Arabī* (*Humanity and Existentialism in Arab Thought*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣrīya, 1947), 67-82.

[54] For a succinct account of Badawī's views on worry, see his *al-Zamān al-wujūdī* (*Existentialist Time*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣrīya, 1945) 170-175. For Heidegger see, James Magrini, "'Anxiety' in Heidegger's Being and Time: The Harbinger of Authenticity" (2006). *Philosophy Scholarship*. Paper 15.

h p://dc.cod.edu/philosophypub/15

deployed by their Arab translators. Indeed, as I will also show, the translators of Carnegie and Link's texts often omitted from the Arabic versions key passages or certain words that are found in the English originals where the American authors discussed their views on religion and prayer, and added other words not found in the originals. Together these factors ultimately facilitated Ghazālī's project of absorbing, correcting, and expanding upon their work. In what follows, I not only attend to the forms of editing deployed by the Arab translators, but also chart how Ghazālī saw his American interlocutors as fellow-travelers, who, like him, were invested in disputing the secular nature of science. I also explore the corrective impulse embedded in his commentaries on Carnegie and Link's texts.

Although Max Weber famously argued that modern life was characterized by a "disenchantment of the world," various nineteenth and twentieth century intellectual trends, from spiritualism to theosophy to New Thought have long melded forms of science and religion together.[55] Indeed, Carnegie, as suggested above, owed much of his appeal and success to his ability to blend religious ideas and practices together with modern psychology. Thus, for instance, one chapter in *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* details the scientifically established benefits of religious beliefs and practices for one's emotional wellbeing. At the end of this chapter, Carnegie even urges his readers to pray whether or not they believe in God. Prayer (*al-ṣalāh*), he says, is something "practical and effective" (*'amalī fa''āl*).[56] It "achieves for you three matters that

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[55] On spiritualism, see Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004); Beth A. Robertson, *Science of the Séance: Transnational Networks and Gendered Bodies in the Study of Psychic Phenomena, 1918-40* (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2016). For Iran, see Alireeza Doostdar, "Empirical Spirits: Islam, Spiritism, and the Virtues of Science in Iran," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no.2, (2016). For theosophy and New Thought, see Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 257-329.

[56] I draw quotations of Carnegie and Link's words from the Arabic translations of their texts unless otherwise indicated. I do so to more accurately reflect what Ghazālī read.

each human cannot do without whether they are a believer or an atheist."[57] First, it allows you to articulate your troubles so that you can deal with them effectively; second, it allows you to feel that you are not alone in carrying your burdens; and third, prayer pushes you towards doing and moving forward. Here he quotes, Alexis Carrel—the French American mystic, cardiovascular surgeon, and Nobel Prize winner—who says that "'Prayer is the greatest energy giving rise to action known until now.'" "So why not benefit from it?" asks Carnegie. "Call it the Lord or Allah, or Spirit, the naming is not important, as long as we agree that it is the creating power that dominates the universe."[58] Much of the chapter is filled with examples of such practical benefits of prayer and religion, each accompanied by stories or quotes from famous philosophers, psychologists, scientists, or business people, testifying to these benefits.

Earlier in the chapter Carnegie recalls how, as a youth, he came to question the truth of religion as a result of his education, seeing it as something that contradicted science. But as he grew older, he became less interested in reconciling such contradictions. Although most people, including himself, do not understand the mysteries of religion, he writes, "that did not stop me from enjoying the lofty spiritual life that religion brings me."[59] Carnegie adopted a new view of religion, he says; one that did not pay attention to doctrinal differences between Christian sects. Rather, "what I am interested in now is the blessings [*ni'am*] religion confers to me, in the same way that I am interested in the blessings electricity, good food, and pure water confer to me. They help me live a happy, pleasant life. But religion confers to me more than that. It gives me spiritual enjoyment [*mut'a rūḥīya*]. It gives me—in the words of William James—'a strong impetus for continuing life…a rich life; a happy, content big heartedness.' It gives me belief, hope, bravery, keeps me

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[57] Ziyādī, 301.

[58] Ibid., 302-303.

[59] Ibid., 284.

from fear, depression, and worry....it helps me in creating a fertile oasis in the middle of the dessert of my life."[60]

In the English original of this passage, Carnegie begins with, "I am tremendously interested in what religion *does for me*."[61] In translating this passage, Ziyādī purposely eaves out the "does for me" portion of this sentence, using instead an Arabic word with deep Islamic theological overtones—*ni'am*—one that refers to the blessings God bestows upon humans. This edit makes it seem as if Carnegie is referring to God-bestowed benefits of religion. Yet, as is clear in the English original of Carnegie's discussion of prayer and the benefits of religion, the effectiveness of prayer depends not upon anything God bestows, but upon things intrinsic to the act of praying itself. That is why he concludes that prayer is a practical act that is of use to both believers in God and nonbelievers. In contrast, for Ghazālī, prayer does not and could not produce benefits—and, in fact, would be nonsensical—unless there existed a responsive God who demanded that humans to pray. At times, however, Carnegie's view on prayer and the existence of God are ambiguous. Sometimes he refers to God as the power to which one connects when praying. But Ziyādī often adds references to God and belief in God when they are lacking in the English original. Thus, for instance, in the English original Carnegie cites William James, who speaks of the calming and reassuring powers of "religious faith." When translating James's words, however, Ziyādī renders the English, "religious faith," into the Arabic, "belief in God and dependence upon Him."[62] Ultimately, Ziyādī's edits helped contribute to Ghazālī's view of Carnegie and the philosophers

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[60] Ibid, 285.

[61] Dale Carnegie *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1951), 152, emphasis added.

[62] Ziyādī, 301.

and scientists he quotes as genuine believers in God, but believers who lack a full understanding of how to establish a proper relationship with Him.

Carnegie goes on to note that at one time, people debated whether or not science and religion were mutually incompatible, but today, he says, that debate has been resolved. "Indeed, the most modern of the sciences—psychiatry (*al-ṭibb al-nafsī*)—proselytizes (*yubashshir*) on behalf of the principles of religion."[63] Psychiatrists, he continues, advocate on behalf of religion because they have realized that prayer (*al-ṣalāh*) and belief (*al-īmān*) are capable of curing most of the diseases people complain of. They are "preachers of a new type. They do not encourage us to hold on to religion so as to protect ourselves from the tortures of hell in the Afterlife, but rather recommend that we hold on to religion to protects us from the hell of this life: stomach ulcers, nervous breakdowns, and insanity."[64] Carnegie recommends that his readers purchase a copy of Henry C. Link's *The Return to Religion* for an example of a psychologist advocating on behalf of religion.[65] Although the Arabic translations quoted above read as if Carnegie is claiming that psychiatry has been mobilized on behalf of religion, in general, in the English original, he is referring specifically to Christianity. He writes in the original, for instance, that psychiatry is teaching today, "what Jesus taught."[66] Quickly after this, he writes, "Yes, the Christian religion is an inspiring, health-giving activity."[67] From here he goes on for several paragraphs highlighting the virtues of Christianity. [68] But these mentions of Christianity and Jesus are omitted from the Arabic translation entirely, leading the reader to believe that Carnegie is advocating on behalf of all religions.

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[63] Ziyādī, 285-286.

[64] Ibid., 286-287.

[65] Ibid., 287.

[66] Carnegie, 153.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid., 153-154.

Within Link's text there is also a blending of science with religion,[69] on the one hand, and, on the other, edits by the Arab translator that make the text read as if Link is advocating on behalf of religion, in general, as opposed to Christianity, in specific. Link opens the text noting that his return to religion was stimulated not by a life crisis, but rather by his observation of countless patients as a psychiatrist; it was, in his words, "based upon the discoveries of psychology [*ilm al-nafs*]."[70] He says that although he was not a religious person, he nevertheless increasingly found himself, during the course of his practice, utilizing religious teachings in his recommendations to his patients because these teachings expressed many of the same ideas as psychology, but in a more effective manner. His patients responded more effectively to these teachings than to his scientific jargon. Link began advising his patients to participate in their local churches and eventually found himself explaining "the psychological significance [*al-ahmīya al-nafsīya*] of religions, taking as examples of this significance, the wide social activity of the prophets and their encouraging of people to deny themselves for the sake of others."[71] Thus, says Link, he came to realize that the "discoveries of psychology reveal that the holding and attaching of oneself to ancient religious truths leads to the bettering of one's personality and the achievement of contentment and happiness."[72] He goes on to cite a study he participated in that showed that people with religious beliefs had better personalities than those without such beliefs.[73] From here he outlines his conception of religion, which includes "the belief in the existence of a power as the source of human life, a power that is God;….the belief in a divine code of character that God laid

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[69] On Link and his text see Meyers, 243-249.

[70] 'Ukāshā, 14-15.

[71] Ibid., 17-18.

[72] Ibid., 18.

[73] Ibid., 26.

out in His successive revelations," and in the idea that religions conveys a set of truths that are more valuable than those of science.[74] In the English original, however, when describing the "psychological significance" of religion, Link refers not to religions and prophets in general, but specifically to the "Christian religion" and "its Founder."[75] Further, in the English text, when describing his conception of religion, Link refers not to "a divine code of character God laid out in His successive revelations," but to a code of character "expressed by the Ten Commandments and in the life of Christ."[76]

As is clear from these passages, Carnegie and Link ground their appeal to the benefits of religion in science—psychology and psychiatry. Additionally, at least in the Arabic versions of these texts, both authors describe the benefits of religion as not tied to any particular tradition, but seemingly common to all religions. As we will see presently, Carnegie and Link's melding of religious and scientific forms of knowledge together resonated with Ghazālī's own efforts to dispute the notion that science inevitably turns people away from religion. Indeed, as we will see presently, Ghazālī understands Carnegie and Link's scientifically derived religion not as a challenge to truths made known by the Qur'ān and Sunna, but as demonstrations of those truths. This, together with the seemingly ecumenical nature of Carnegie and Link's accounts, facilitated Ghazālī's project of absorbing, correcting, and expanding upon their work.

Commenting on Carnegie's account of the benefits of religion and religious practices, Ghazālī begins by challenging the alleged disenchanting power of science. He notes, for instance, that although some may see a conflict between religion and science, in fact, numerous learned men have been guided to God by their scientific research alone. In a clear reference to *fiṭra*, Ghazālī

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Henry C. Link, *The Return to Religion*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936) 6.

[76] Ibid., 14.

says that what lead them to religion, along with other great leaders, was simply "sound thinking."[77]

Yet, he adds, many Western men of science remain unaffiliated with any particular religious tradition. In this, says Ghazālī, "they are excused to a certain extent" because the complexities and contradictions of their own religious traditions have turned them away from organized religion.[78] "The important thing," his says, "is that belief in God as the Creator of the heavens and earth remains…in their souls, as does the high voice of *fiṭra*, even if it becomes inaudible from time to time, due to what surrounds it in terms of erroneous accretions."[79] Through their sound human nature, these learned men have come to accept the existence God, but because of the corruptions of their own religious traditions they chose not to join an organized community of believers. For Ghazālī, these corruptions are what he calls the distortions in pure monotheism, specifically the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. Nevertheless, when they appeal directly to their Lord through prayer in moments of difficulty, they are, according to Ghazālī, closer to Islam than to any other religion.[80] They are thus not "unbelievers" (*kuffar*), but operating totally within the "laws of *fiṭra*."[81] As we see here, although in the American context, the spread of modern metaphysical religion might be thought of as a testament to the erosion of the appeal of religious truths articulated in conventional manners, in Ghazālī's context, the spread of this new form of religion is merely a testament to the truth of God's existence and will.

Ghazālī draws a similar set of conclusions from his reading of Link's text. Indeed, his commentary on the latter's work ends wtih the assertion that there is wide ground for comparison

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[77] Ghazālī, 196-197.

[78] Ibid. This is part of a polemic Ghazālī launches against what he sees as the complications and contradictions of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

[79] Ibid., 198.

[80] Ibid.

[81] Ibid., 199.

between Islamic teachings and the conclusions "of sound *fiṭra* that have been recorded by the pure knowledgeable men of the West."[82] Ghazālī recalls for his readers the story of Link's return to religion, one inspired by his scientific practice. He quotes the Arabic translation of Link's understanding of religion as a belief in an all-powerful God and a divine code of ethics as an example of the pure monotheism to which sound human nature naturally inclines. According to Ghazālī, even though Link does not agree with the official teachings of the Church, he nevertheless still advises his patients to attend church and to pray. He does so, writes Ghazālī, because he believes that they will derive from it "the wellbeing of the soul."[83] As Link discovered through his scientific practice that belief in God is vital to one's wellbeing, Ghazālī asserts that his return to religion was thus inspired by nothing other than "the opening of this heart to religious principles discovered for him by his *fiṭra*."[84] Continuing, Ghazālī notes that Link advises his patients, whatever their denomination, to attend church, even though the particular religious teachings provided there might not correspond to their personal views. This is because the act of attending church and exposing oneself to religious teachings cultivates self-sacrifice, which is the key to happiness. According Ghazālī, Link therefore understands that his patients need religion and church attendance to counter the emptiness and materialism of their lives. In Ghazālī's words, this American psychologist "takes advantage of the feeling of religiousness of his patients, whatever its type, to treat the destructive effects of materialist civilization."[85]

Ultimately, for Ghazālī, Link's text demonstrates "the social and individual value of belief" discovered by modern psychology. Religiosity, he adds, whether in its pure or adulterated forms,

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[82] Ghazālī, *al-Islām wa-al-ṭāqāt al-muʿaṭṭala*, 242.

[83] Ibid., 223-224.

[84] Ibid., 224.

[85] Ibid., 226.

may give one "peace of soul" and "spiritual energy" (*ṭāqa rūḥīya*) to confront life's tragedies and difficulties.[86] Clearly Ghazālī is not opposed to the idea that belief entails such benefits. As he writes in his commentary on Carnegie's text, for instance, the true belief that derives from pure *fiṭra* is "the trustworthy spiritual support that is hurried to in times of difficulty and is depended upon in the carrying of burdens and the encountering of misfortunes."[87] He thus sees Carnegie and the scientists and philosophers he quotes, as well as Link and his patients, as genuine believers of a type, whose experiences testify to the power of *fiṭra* and the benefits of belief, but who nevertheless are only partially correct in their understanding of religion. Insofar as they hold a pure monotheism they are believers, but what they lack is equally important for Ghazālī. He asserts, for instance, that one cannot properly establish a relationship with one's Lord in whatever manner one chooses. One must do so in the correct form and this, he says, is precisely what Islam provides in contrast to other religions.[88] In his discussion of Link's text he observes that although the religion of this psychologist and his patients is closer to Islam than any other religion, "the otherworldly accounting is unclear for them, and the ordered, detailed rights of this God are even less clear for them."[89]

Although Ghazālī draws from the work of these American authors, his understandings of the purpose of religion is distinct from theirs. Both Carnegie and Link advocate a utilitarian approach to religion. Link, for instance, quotes a Biblical saying: "He that findeth his life shall lose it; and

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[86] Ibid., 222.

[87] Ghazālī, *Jaddid ḥayātak*, 205.

[88] Ibid., 206.

[89] Ghazālī, *al-Islām wa-al-ṭāqāt al-muʿaṭṭala*, 228.

he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it."[90] For Link, the idea that wellbeing comes from sacrificing oneself for the sake of others that is entailed in this saying aligns perfectly with truths established by science. Link writes, "the most important of the discoveries of modern psychology is that it has proven scientifically that the happiness of humans and their capacity to realize their essences will not be achieved with anything other than the sacrifice of the self for the sake of the other, and one's accustoming oneself to submit to a particular order."[91] Here the notion of sacrificing oneself for another is to be understood in general terms. As human selfishness is the root of all unhappiness, self-sacrifice is the way towards living "a full life…because the human sacrifice of their direct desires and inclinations for the sake of some lofty principle…leads to the continual development of their loving sentiment and the increase of their good inclinations." [92] Link thus appreciates religion for its utility: happiness is realized only through self-sacrifice and religion is the best means to cultivate self-sacrifice.

Ghazālī highlights this passage for his readers because it demonstrates the scientific proof of the importance of religion.[93] But in his discussion of Link's views, he distinguishes his understanding of religion from Link's utility based perspective. Link holds that self-sacrifice in and of itself leads to happiness. Ghazālī, in contrast, holds that the capacity of self-sacrifice to yield happiness depends upon the object of one's sacrifice. After quoting Link, he thus asserts that the only sacrifice of benefit is for God's sake—it is the relinquishing "of the desires of the soul

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[90] 'Ukāshā, 48-49. In the English original Link clarifies that the person speaking here is Christ, 33. 'Ukāshā leaves out the mention of Christ in the Arabic translation. It seems that Ghazālī is unaware of this. He tells his readers, instead, that it is God who is speaking here.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ghazālī, *al-Islam wa-l-taqat*, 235-236.

and inclinations of the passions in accordance with God's commands and His path."[94] Indeed, for Ghazālī, the means to achieve happiness are not even matters of human choice, as happiness comes only from worshipping God. He writes, the complete subordination of oneself to God entailed by Islam, "makes the happiness that one desires the fruit realized by proceeding according to God's commands."[95] But this sacrifice is not simply a matter of one's own happiness; more importantly, it is for "the pleasure of one's Lord."[96]

As we have seen in his discussion of the practical benefits of prayer above, Carnegie encourages his readers to utilize prayer and religion, more generally, as means for achieving their personal fulfillment and realizing their inherent self-sufficiency. Prayer, he says, is an effective tool for helping one surmount obstacles. Ghazālī does not dispute this idea, but takes this discussion in a direction that more fully reflects his understanding of human agency. Indeed, for Ghazālī, the more important issue with regard to prayer as a means of surmounting obstacles revolves around the question of who, exactly, removes these obstacles. He thus turns to the question of human agency. As he makes clear to his readers, humans must seek the Lord's assistance because they are inherently not self-sufficient and dependent upon an all-powerful, but responsive God. "How poverty stricken we are for He who inspires us with that which is correct and guides us to the truth when matters become doubtful for us."[97] Prayer in this context is a matter of recognizing one's inherent insufficiency and need for divine intervention in one's affairs, for it is God that both creates and removes all obstacles. Thus, for instance, Ghazālī writes that it is God

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[94] Ibid., 232. It is clear in both the English and Arabic versions of Link's text that the idea of sacrificing oneself is to be understood in general terms, and does not refer specifically to sacrificing oneself to God.

[95] Ibid., 237.

[96] Ibid., 236.

[97] Ibid., 210.

who bestows peace and ease in life.[98] When people are in fear, it is He who "returns to them their tranquility."[99] Through prayer, says Ghazālī, God gives His worshippers the means to request His forgiveness, and, as such, prayer is not just an acknowledgement of His all-powerfulness, but also of His mercy.[100] To pray for God's guidance in times of hardship is a perfectly legitimate reason to pray. It was the practice of the Prophet Muḥammad.[101] The important point for Ghazālī is that humans should not seek to become self-sufficient, for that is impossible, but instead must depend upon God. In fact, he continues, "God, the Exalted, loves when His servant requests for what he wishes from Him and asks for His grace, as he wishes. Indeed, He warns humans from being content with their own capabilities! Such a shortcoming deprives one of the blessings of God's sublime assistance and imprisons one for life within the limits of one's weakness and ignorance."[102]

As we see from the above, while Carnegie discusses prayer in the context of how to realize one's essential self-sufficiency, Ghazālī discusses it in the context of how to realize one's dependence upon God. Indeed, for him, prayer is only a limited means of exercising of one's agency as, ultimately, God is the one who creates and removes the obstacles that one faces in life. This split conception of agency, which appears part human and part divine, brings me back to my earlier discussion of the way in which classical Muslim scholars dealt with the possibility of humans achieving ethical self-cultivation, as well as my account of Islamic philosophical ethics.

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[98] Ibid., 211. Here Ghazālī uses the Arabic word "*al-ṣalāh*" for prayer, which is the formal ritual practice of prayer, but throughout this chapter he also uses the Arabic word "*al-duʿāʾ*" for prayer, which could be translated as the supplication of God or the invocation of God.

[99] Ibid., 206.

[100] Ibid., 211-216.

[101] Ibid., 219.

[102] Ibid., 221.

While the concept of sound human nature (*fiṭra*) served as the starting point for a journey of ethical refinement, Muslim thinkers like Abū Ḥāmid and al-Iṣfahānī held realization of virtuous character ultimately depended upon God's grace and assistance.[103] As Mohamed Sherif has eloquently put it, within Abū Ḥāmid's thought, "divine assistance implies a radical critique of the self-sufficiency of the philosophic virtues which undermines their efficacy. For [Abū Ḥāmid], everything in the world, including man and his actions, is created, determined and ordered by God's will. In such a world, it is impossible for man to have free choice and consequently, on his own, to acquire the philosophic virtues. In order for man to do anything, he is in constant need of divine aid. The philosophic virtues can have efficacy in this world only when they are conditioned by the theological virtues."[104]

Ghazālī's account thus offers a gentle corrective to Carnegie's partial, and ultimately mistaken, understanding of the potentials of human agency. Humans, he says, should not depend upon themselves, but rather depended upon God. Indeed, he takes the discussion of human agency as an occasion to clarify the meaning of a central Islamic virtue, *tawakkul*, meaning "trust in and depend upon God." While encouraging his readers to trust that God will manage their affairs, he is nevertheless keen to point out that one should not mistake trust in God for fatalism, laziness or incapacity. Rather, he notes, humans should know that the realm in which human will and actions

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[103] This idea is tied particularly to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's legacy. See, for instance, Sherif, 78-86, Hourani 153, and Fakhry 201-202. In her work on Islamic dream interpretation in contemporary Egypt, Amira Mittermaier draws attention to the role her interlocutors attribute to divine assistance in facilitating their ethical journeys, *Dreams That Matter*, 141. See also Mittermaier, "Trading With God," 284-287. For another take on the necessity of divine assistance for the realization of virtue, albeit within a different religious tradition, see Talal Asad's discussion of the role of divine grace in medieval Christian monastic ascetic practice in *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 108.

[104] Sherif, 85. Sherif uses the term "philosophic virtues" to refer to those virtues such as "wisdom" (*hikma*) and "temperance" (*'iffa*) that are cultivated through individual effort, but are nevertheless dependent upon what he terms "theological virtues" for their realization. "Theological virtues" refer to God assistance to believers through His guidance (*hidāyat allāh*), His direction (*rushd*), His leading (*tasdīd*), and His support (*tay'īd*). See Sherif, 24-76 and 78-86.

are determinant is greatly limited in comparison to that in which God's will and actions are determinant.[105] The notion that humans should depend less upon themselves and more upon God offers an important point of contrast with "self-help" understood as a form of self-reliance. Indeed, one of the earliest self-help texts translated into Arabic, *Self Help* by the English writer, Samuel Smiles (d. 1904), dwelt at length on the importance of self-reliance. The lesson Smiles sought to give his readers was idea that success can only be achieved by those who rely upon themselves.[106] The book and its message of self-reliance were popular in Egypt, even championed by Egyptian nationalists during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[107] Despite the appeal of this idea in turn of the century Egypt, Ghazālī's mid-twentieth century commentary on Carnegie's text warns against self-reliance altogether, and instead advocates trust in and dependence upon the divine.

As we have seen in this section, although Ghazālī assimilates the ideas and experiences of his American interlocutors and understood them as reaffirmations of the truths revealed of the Qur ān and Sunna, he nevertheless perceived their views as limited and in need of correction. What he did absorb from them, was, as we have seen, partially the result of the forms of editing used by Arab translators, which made it seem as if Carnegie and Link's texts were ecumenical in nature. It was also the result of the way both Americans blended aspects of religious practices and ideas together with scientific research. Indeed, their melding of religion and science resonated with Ghazālī's own efforts to dispute the alleged disenchanting power of science.

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[105] Ibid., 202-203.

[106] *Sirr al-najāḥ* (*The Secret of Success*) (Beirut, ND), 3-67. For the English original see Samuel Smiles, *See Help; With Illustrations of Character and Conduct* (London: John Murray, 1859).

[107] On the reception in Egypt of the Arabic translation of *Self-Help*, see Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 108-110. Smiles opens the book with a long chapter on "Self-Help." The term "self-help" in the Arabic version of the text is rendered as "self-reliance" (*al-iʿtimād alā al-nafs*).

Human Powers

Ghazālī engagement with Carnegie's text exposed him to various forms of American metaphysical religion, which as we have already seen, blended elements of religion and religious practice with forms of secular knowledge, particularly medicine and psychology. Like many of the people he cites in this book, Carnegie believed that physical and material conditions were products of mental states. In one chapter, for instance, Carnegie discusses at length the work and insights of Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, to demonstrate the power of the mind (*al-dhihn*) to shape one's life. Ghazālī relates these aspects of Carnegie's text to his readers in a chapter he titles, "Your Life is a Creation of Your Thoughts" ("Ḥayātak min ṣunaʿ afkārak"). Ghazālī, as we will see in this section, perceived a great deal of resonance between the mind over matter convictions of Carnegie's interlocutors and certain aspects of Sufism. The resonance is so strong that he describes Carnegie's interlocutors, like Eddy, as representatives of "American Sufism," (*al-taṣawwuf al-amrīkī*).[108] In particular he highlights for his readers what he sees as the parallels to the mind over matter beliefs of American Sufis and the modes of moral self-cultivation (*tarbiya*) taught by Muslim Sufis, as well as their tales of the wonder working powers of their shaykhs.

Carnegie's chapter provides quotes from famous individuals to underline for his readers the powers of the mind: Ralph Waldo Emerson says, "Tell me what a man thinks about and I'll tell you who he is;" Marcus Aurelius says, "Our life is the creation of our thoughts;" and Norman Vincent Peal says, "You aren't what you think you are; rather you are what you think."[109] To draw out the power of one's "mental direction" (*ittijāh dhinī*), Carnegie relates the results of a

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[108] As we will see more extensively in Chapter Four, Ghazālī's distinction between "American" and "Islamic" Sufism is indebted to the burgeoning study of "comparative mysticism" (*al-taṣawwuf al-muqārin*) in Arabic which held that Sufism was the Islamic example of the universal religious phenomenon of "mysticism."

[109] Ibid., 177-178.

psychological experiment proving that one's bodily strength changed according to the content of one's thoughts.[110] He also relates the story of Mary Baker Eddy's discovery of "the healing power of the mind" (*al-'ilāj bi quwwat al-'aql*).[111]

During the course of his commentary on this chapter, Ghazālī relates these quotes and stories to his readers, but he begins first asserting what he seems to perceive as the main point of convergence between Carnegie's account on the power of the mind and Islamic discourses: "The happiness, pain, worry, and tranquility of the human, comes forth from within the person himself alone." The Prophet Muḥammad says, for instance, "Whoever is pleased, then for him is pleasure and whoever is resentful, then for him is wrath." Ghazālī adds another Prophetic tradition which recounts the story of Muḥammad telling a Bedouin suffering a fever that his illness is means of "cleansing" (*ṭahūr*) his sins. "No," responds the Bedouin, it is a fever that will take me to the grave. "Then so it is," replies the Prophet. Commenting on this report, he writes, "It means that the matter is subjected to personal consideration [*i'tibār shakhṣī*], for if you will it to be a cleansing, so it is and you are content, and if you will it to be your ruin, so it is and you are displeased." Ghazālī adds that the way in which contentment and displeasure derive from within humans is akin to the way in which one's "state of soul" (*ḥāl nafsī*), or what he later describes as one's intention, determines the value of an external deed.[112]

Continuing Ghazālī asserts that what he variously describes as "the states of the soul," "thoughts," and "feelings" (*mashā'ir*) exhibit enormous impact on the course of human lives.[113] For that reason, says Ghazālī, God has said in the Qur'ān that He "does not change a people's lot

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110 Ibid., 180-181.

111 Ibid., 182-184.

112 *Jaddid ḥayātak*, 112.

113 Ibid., 113-115.

unless they change what is in their souls." To this, Ghazālī adds another verse of the Qur'ān which ends with the declaration that "God would not change a favor which He had bestowed upon a people until they change what is within their souls." Commenting on these verses, Ghazālī says that they underline the firm link between "purity of soul and purity of living, between beauty of character and beauty of life," and affirm for us that He brings His blessings down as grace to the godfearing and those who do good, just as He brings down wrath on impious.[114] Similarly, out of recognition of the life determining power of the soul, "the earliest Islamic moral self-cultivation [*al-tarbiya al-islāmīya al- ūlā*]," which he later attributes to Sufis, gave great attention to the matter of "studying souls and their states, hearts and their conditions" and demonstrated "greatest happiness comes forth from interior of human not exterior, and inciting one to expect within the horizons of soul alone…good fortune, prosperity, and pleasure." The "wayfarers" (*sālikūn*), who reach such heights, Ghazālī continues, rightly observe that if only kings knew of such pleasure, they would kill for it.[115]

Although Ghazālī perceives a great deal or resonance between the mind over matter convictions of Carnegie's interlocutors and the soul exercises of Sufis, he nevertheless believes that Sufis have become excessive (*ghālū*) in their search for truth in the human interior. He thus turns to a comparison of "American" and "Islamic Sufism." While Islamic Sufis excelled in the study and training of the soul, they have erroneously come to believe that they might perceive through their investigations of the human soul, "natural truths of the universe and life."[116] He relates to his readers the story of Mary Baker Eddy, who remarkably healed herself through the

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[114] Ibid., 118.

[115] Ibid., 118-119.

[116] Ibid., 119

power of her belief (*īmān*) and went on to found Christian Science (*al-ʿilm al-masīḥī*).[117] He describes his own inclination to give credence to such "curious tales," as well "the wonder workings" (*al-khawāriq*) of the poor of India. "Indeed, the high aspiring powers of the soul [*al-quwā al-nafisīya al-ṭāmiḥa*] create marvels." While the existence of such marvels testifies to the powers of the human soul, they should not be taken as "general material laws," but kept within the realm of individual experience.[118] Indeed, the Americans who relate this story, he exclaims, do not take these miracles as the basis of science, production, and industry. But in Egypt, where such "legends" (*aṣāṭīr*) abound, people have taken them as occasions to neglect "God's laws" (*sunnat Allāh*).[119]

As we see from the above, Carnegie's claim that his readers could take charge of the direction of their lives if only they took charge of their attitudes, thoughts, and feelings, was for Ghazālī, comparable to the techniques of moral self-cultivation taught by Sufis and Qurʾānic assertions that God does not change the lives of believers until they change themselves. While he confirms for his readers the marvelous and seemingly miraculous impacts the soul and mind have on people's lives, he nevertheless warns them against believing that the wonders of the soul flout the natural laws of the universe.

Medicine for Body and Soul

As we saw in the previous section, Ghazālī found Mary Baker Eddy's story compelling enough to convey it to his readers. Eddy, it is said, cured herself of her physical ailments through the power of her religious belief. Part of the appeal of Eddy's story for Ghazālī almost certainly derived from the fact that Islamic medical texts also acknowledge the impact of the soul's health on the body's

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[117] Ibid., 119-120.

[118] Ibid., 120.

[119] Ibid., 121.

wellbeing.[120] Carnegie, for his part, frequently emphasizes the close relationship between emotional and physical states, often appealing to medical research to demonstrate harmful and debilitating health effects of worry and anger. He even highlights for his readers what was, at the time, a new trend in the medical field—psychosomatic medicine (*al-ṭibb al-jismānī al-nafsī*).[121] Ghazālī accepts the firm link between one's spiritual and bodily wellbeing and highlights for his readers its scientific basis, as demonstrated by Carnegie's discussion of modern medicine. But for Ghazālī, like his premodern predecessors, worry and anger are not simply causes of bodily sickness. Such afflictions of the soul are also indicators of the weakness of one's knowledge of God. Thus, while affirming the link between spiritual and physical health, Ghazālī also adds to the discussion with a range of theological concerns related to worry that his American interlocutor neglects.

Carnegie opens his chapter dealing with the harmful health effects of worry with a quote from Alexis Carrel, a Nobel Prize winner in medicine: "Business men who do not know how to fight worry, die young." Though not conventionally thought of as such, worry, Carnegie continues, is a disease (*maraḍ*) capable of inflicting great bodily harm. One in ten Americans, he says, suffer from a nervous collapse due to worry.[122] Throughout the chapter, he quotes various medical doctors and psychologists testifying to the fact that worry causes bodily and psychological diseases. At one point, after quoting Plato's assertion that physicians are mistaken in attempting to treat the body without treating the mind (*al-'aql*), Carnegie writes, "It has taken medical science two thousand

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[120] For overviews of Islamic medicine see, Rahman, Manfred Ullman, *Islamic Medicine*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1978), and Peter E. Pormann and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

[121] On the development of psychosomatic medicine and its relevance to popular psychology and self-help, see Meyers, 94-101.

[122] Ziyādī, 56-57.

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and three hundred years to realize the truth of [Plato's] words! Only now has there begun to spread a type of medicine named 'psycho-somatic medicine' [*al-ṭibb al-jismānī al-nafsī*][123] that treats body and soul (*al-nafs*)[124] together at the same time. Medicine has conquered, or almost conquered, diseases caused by microbes…but has stopped incapable in front of worry, fear, hatred, and despair at a time in which the numbers of the victims of these emotional diseases [*al-amrāḍ al-ʿāṭifīya*] grows at a terrible pace."[125]

In a later chapter dealing with the negative health effects of anger, Carnegie likewise channels the authority of modern medicine to demonstrate the link between one's emotions and one's bodily health. He begins, for instance, quoting a *Life* magazine article which asserts, "The most prominent thing that distinguishes those afflicted by high blood pressure is their quickness to be affected by, and become obedient to, rage and resentment."[126] Although focusing on the bodily effects of worry and anger, Carnegie also describes the psychological damage wrought by such emotions. Anger and the desire for revenge, he stresses, are not just causes of physical illness, but also obstacles to our own happiness. Thus, he concludes, to maintain a "mental attitude" that attracts peace and happiness, avoid getting angry and seeking revenge.[127]

Within certain Islamic medical texts, there is much emphasis on the soul's impact on the body. Scholars of Islamic medicine, for instance, have drawn attention to the ways in which medieval Muslim thinkers ascribed to the "psyche," or the "soul's moods" and "afflictions," the power to

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[123] Ziyādī prints this term in both Arabic and English.

[124] In the English original Carnegie uses the word "mind" not soul, 20. Ziyādī uses the word "soul" here because within the Islamic ethical tradition the locus of emotions, like worry and anger, is not the mind (*'aql*), but the soul, which is itself seated in the heart.

[125] Ziyādī, 60-61.

[126] Ibid., 202.

[127] Ibid., 214.

generate physical diseases.[128] Yet for many of these thinkers, "afflictions of the soul" such as fear, anger, sadness, and grief were not only problems pertaining to one's bodily wellbeing, but also one's spiritual wellbeing. Indeed, as I noted above, according to these thinkers, people suffering such afflictions were deficient, in one way or another, in some aspect of their belief in God. It was not that all manifestations of these afflictions are indicators of corrupted belief, as some, such as fear (*khawf*) of God and His punishment, or sadness (*ḥuzn*) over one's past sins, were indicators of true belief. Rather, what was reprehensible was when the emotions of fear, sadness, and anxiety (*hamm*) derived from worldly matters, such as the loss of one's wealth or loved one, or the onset of an illness.[129] A fit of anger, on the other hand, was said to put one into the control of Satan.[130] What was important for these thinkers was that when one experienced fear, sadness, or anxiety due to the loss of something worldly it meant that one had placed one's trust in something other than God—such as one's wealth or health. Further, the presence of such afflictions caused by worldly events meant that one did not understand that everything that occurs in the world is subject to His will.[131] To become resentful at one's fortune is to become resentful at God.

Islamic medical texts, particularly those focusing on what was called "Prophetic medicine," likewise devoted significant attention to the negative bodily and spiritual effects of the afflictions of the soul and prescribed their cures. In a way that recalls aspects of Carnegie and Ghazālī's discussions of the powers of prayer, in their well-known texts on Prophetic medicine, two Muslim scholars, Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Dhahabī (d. 1378) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (d. 1350),

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[128] Ulmann, 97-98; Pormann and Savage-Smith, 48-49; Rahman 85.

[129] On the praiseworthy and reprehensible types of fear, see Iṣfahānī, 330-331. On sadness and anxiety, see Ibn al-Jawzī, 40-41 and 42-43.

[130] Iṣfahānī , 346.

[131] Iṣfahānī ., 333-334.

also describe prayer (*al-ṣalāh*) as a remedy for illnesses of the body. When describing "Prophetic

remedies," the former notes, for instance, that the Prophet Muḥammad urged those with stomach

ailments to pray. According to al-Dhahabī, this was because prayer diverts the feeling of pain from

the soul, allowing it to summon the strength to repel illness. Indeed, he continues, skilled

physicians observe that hope (*rajā'*) and fear (*khawf*), and other states of the soul elicited by prayer,

strengthen one's capacity to repel disease. Prayer, as well, entails certain bodily movements that

help the body fight illness. Moreover, it destroys anxiety and anger, and summons for one the

capacity of good planning (*al-tadbir al-muṣīb*) and decisive response (*al-jawāb al-ṣadid*). As

prayer entailed both "virtues" (*faḍā'il*) for this world and the Hereafter, it was the delight of the

Prophet Muḥammad.[132] Likewise, Ibn al-Qayyim held that the soul exerted great impact upon the

body,[133] such that when it was filled with joy and the heart filled with pleasure, illness could be

more easily dispelled.[134] He considers the heart's health, by which he means one's spiritual

wellbeing, as integral to one's physical wellbeing. The health of the former is maintained by

knowledge of God and trust in Him and so too, therefore, is the health of the body. As praying to

God is to acknowledge Him as one's Lord and place one's trust in Him, prayer is itself constitutive

of both physical and spiritual health. He writes, for instance, "Prayer is of the greatest helps in

obtaining welfare [*maṣāliḥ*] and warding off causes of corruption in this world and the

Hereafter…it repels diseases of the heart, and drives away disease from the body…[It] attracts

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[132] Abu 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad al-Dhahabī, *Al-ṭibb al-nabawī* (*The Prophetic Medicine*), (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bākī al-Ḥalabī, 1961), 139-140. For English translations of passages of his text see Rahman, 43-46.

[133] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, *Al-ṭibb al-nabawī* (*The Prophetic Medicine*), (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 1978) 74. For an English translation of this text see, *Medicine of the Prophet*, trans. Penelope Johnstone (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1998).

[134] Ibid., 187.

[God's] blessing…preserves [His] grace, repels misfortune, causes [His] mercy to descend, removes grief, and benefits many of the pains of the stomach."[135]

Even though thinkers like Ghazālī and his premodern predecessors thought of the body as distinct from the soul, it is perhaps misleading to speak of "spiritual" and "physical" health within, as they are clearly fundamentally intertwined for many of these thinkers. Indeed, as Fazlur Rahman observes, the "integrality of the health of the whole person—spiritual, psychological, physical, and moral—is the essence of the message of the so-called Prophetic Medicine."[136] Carnegie's description of psychosomatic medicine, therefore, harkens back to certain aspects of this tradition. Ghazālī, for his part, opens his chapter on Carnegie's discussion of the bodily impacts of worry, confirming for his readers that worry indeed destroys the body.[137] Later he describes his own wonder at the power of sadness to debilitate the body. He relates how recent discoveries in "modern medicine" have done much to explain the precise mechanisms through which "violent crises of the soul" (*al-azmāt al-nafsīya al-'ātiya*) gravely impact the body. He likens this modern medical knowledge to the Qur'ān's reporting of Jacob's loss of eyesight caused by his sadness and to 'Ā'isha's reporting of the great physical distress she suffered due to her grief (*al-ghamm*).[138]

While Ghazālī conveys to his readers the modern medical truths that Carnegie relates, he adds to them another body of truths conveyed by the Qur'an and Sunna. Indeed, much of his commentary is concerned with showing how worry and sadness are manifestations of faulty understandings of the purpose of human life and how God's will operates in the universe. The stories Carnegie provides about the prevalence of worry in the U.S. are, for Ghazālī, examples of

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[135] Ibid., 271.

[136] Rahman, 45.

[137] Ghazālī, *Jaddid ḥayātak*, 39.

[138] Ibid., 45-46.

the afflictions of body and soul wrought by greed, avarice, and materialism (*al-māddīya*).[139] He relates for his readers a series of statements from the Prophet Muḥammad, which are meant to demonstrate for believers the relative insignificance of worldly concerns in relation to quest for the Hereafter. The Prophet says, "Whoever focuses all his concern on one matter [i.e. the Hereafter], God will suffice him and spare him the worries of this world. But whoever wanders off, God will not care in which of these valleys he is destroyed." Commenting on the Prophet's words, Ghazālī notes how they are intended to bring peace to the heart, and uproot greed and remove pain caused by incessant preoccupation with the world.[140] Ghazālī clarifies that such traditions are not meant as rejections of worldly life, but rather rejections of the pursuit of wealth for its own sake, a pursuit in which "hearts are dissolved, health is devalued, worries increase, and illnesses are attracted."[141] Ghazālī goes on to describe how true "knowledge" (*ma'rifa*)—described here as an understanding of the relative insignificance of this worldly life in comparison to life in the Hereafter, preference for God over everything else, and conviction in the eventual encounter with Him—is knowledge that protects believers from "sadness" and brings to them "contentment" and "relaxation." He cites the Qur'ān: "Those who have believed and whose hearts are assured by the remembrance of God. Unquestionably, by the remembrance of God, hearts are assured. Those who have believed and done righteous deeds, a good state is theirs and a good return."[142]

As we see from these examples, worry and sadness are for Ghazālī matters wrapped in a range of theological concerns, concerns that are absent in Carnegie's account. Ghazālī thus adds to the truths conveyed by American self-help pioneer a set of truths conveyed by the Qur'ān and Sunna.

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[139] Ibid., 39.

[140] Ibid., 41.

[141] Ibid., 42.

[142] Ibid., 44.

Ghazālī's take on these issues also articulates a distinct understanding of the limits and potentials of human agency in the world. The Prophetic statements Ghazālī provides for his readers, for instance, depict the divine as the primary, though not exclusive, agent determining whether or not one experiences worry. The Prophet says: "Whoever makes the Hereafter his goal, God makes his heart rich, and organizes his affairs, and the world comes to him whether it wants to or not. And whoever makes the world his goal, God puts his poverty right before his eyes, and disorganizes his affairs, and the world does not come to him, except what has been decreed for him."[143] Later, Ghazālī relates to his readers various prayers (ad'īya') said by Prophet Muḥammad, which are portrayed as mechanisms for securing divine intervention into one's spiritual wellbeing. Ghazālī narrates another account of the Prophet's deeds in which Muḥammad instructs one of his followers to say a particular prayer so that God might dissolve his worries. Commenting on the prayer related by the Prophet, Ghazālī writes that it is "a key to new states of soul with which the life of the man is changed [*miftāḥan li-awḥāl nafsīya jadīda bi-hā tatagayyaru ḥayāt al-rajūl*]. From there, he steps along the straight path and encounters God's assistance."[144] In Carnegie's account, on the other hand, overcoming worry is a self-willed effort, and agency therefore is not split between God and humans.

Their different understandings of agency become more apparent in further chapters. In a subsequent chapter Carnegie describes a threefold strategy for removing worry from one's life—when problems arise, he says, first obtain the facts; second analyze them; and third, take a decisive decision. According to Carnegie, most people suffer from worry because they refuse to see the truth of matters and instead see only what confirms their thinking.[145] In his commentary on this

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[143] Ibid., 41.

[144] Ibid., 48.

[145] Ziyādī, 75-77.

chapter, Ghazālī opens citing verses of the Qur'ān that detail two opposing Qur'ānic concepts that he sees as related to what Carnegie says here—conjecture (*al-ẓann*) and God's guidance (*al-hudā* or *al-hidāya*). With regard to the latter, Toshihiko Itzusu has observed that the notion of accepting God's guidance—that is being guided by Him (*ihtidā'*)—is essentially a synonym in the Qur'ān for belief (*īmān*).[146] Indeed, he adds, religion is formulated within the Qur'ān in terms of divine guidance.[147] To follow one's "negative inclinations" (*hawā*) or "passions," which are considered the opposite of revealed truth (*'ilm*), is to be led away from God's guidance. Likewise, "conjecture" in the Qur'ān, is also said to lead one astray.[148] The Qur'ān, Itzusu writes, often attributes *shirk*, or associating another with God, "to the working of the mental faculty of *ẓann* 'thinking,' a word which is used as a general rule in contrast to *'ilm* 'knowledge' and denotes accordingly a groundless, unwarranted type of thinking, uncertain or doubtful knowledge, unreliable opinion, or mere conjecture."[149]

Thus, when relating to his readers Carnegie's strategy for removing worry, Ghazālī translates it into the Qur'ānic terms of conjecture and God's guidance. He begins noting that most pay no attention to the truth, and, fewer still, live by it. This is because they follow not God's guidance, but rather their whims. He cites verses from the Quran, including: "If thou obeyest the most part of those on earth they will lead thee astray from the path of God; they follow only surmise, merely conjecturing." It is for this reason, says Ghazālī, that God tells believers to seek his guidance: "Guide us in the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed, not of those against

[146] *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Quran*, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002) 133.

[147] Ibid., 193.

[148] Ibid., 139-141.

[149] Ibid., 132.

whom Thou art wrathful, nor of those who are astray."[150] He recalls Carnegie's assertion that people often persist in rejecting the truth of matters even though it is right before their eyes. For him the similarity between this assertion and the way in which the Qur'ān warns humans against being heedlessness of God (*al-ghafla*), is such that it is almost as if Carnegie is explaining verses of the Qur'ān.[151]

Yet, despite this similarity, Ghazālī nevertheless renders Carnegie's strategy to remove worry into terms that correspond more to his theology and understanding of human agency. He writes, for instance, "Although being guided to the truth and persevering upon the Straight Path requires effort and persistence, it also requires that one seek God's assistance through His inspiration." For this reason, he says, it was the custom of the Prophet Muḥammad to pray in times of difficulty.[152] Later in the chapter, Ghazālī explains Carnegie's idea of taking a decisive decision without regret, doing so in terms of two virtues described by the Qur'ān—"tranquility" (*sakīna*) and "trust in God" (*tawakkul*). The former, says Ghazālī, is the peace inspired in one's soul by belief—a peace whose source is "intimacy with God, trust in His decree, and seeking His assistance whenever a matter fills with misgivings or a horizon darkens." Thus, when one encounters difficult life situations, one should do so with tranquility knowing, as the Qur'ān records, "'Naught shall visit us but what God has prescribed for us; He is our Protector; in God let the believers put all their trust.'"[153] For Carnegie, to realize the absence of worry is to realize one's self-sufficiency and this requires no assistance from a divine power. For Ghazālī, however, to live without worry is not simply to exert

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[150] Ibid., 52-53.

[151] Ibid., 55.

[152] Ibid., 53.

[153] Ibid., 57.

effort to adhere to the truth in times of difficulty. Rather, as we see in these examples, one must also beseech God's guidance and inspiration.

Although Ghazālī and Carnegie both held that worry and grief exerted deep influence upon one's bodily health, Ghazālī appeared more interested in understanding worry as a manifestation of one's weak knowledge of God and of one's ignorance of one's dependency upon Him. Thus, when conveying Carnegie's advice to his readers, Ghazālī adds to it another body of theological knowledge centered on Islamic belief and of the limits and potentials of human agency. The absence of worry, for him, is not simply something achieved through one's own efforts, as it is for Carnegie. While it requires effort and persistence towards understanding and acting in accordance to the truth, a life without worry is ultimately something bestowed by God.

Contestations

Ghazālī generally does not explicitly highlight for his readers his corrections of Carnegie's ideas. Earlier in this chapter, however, I drew attention to particular instances in which Ghazālī did do so, pertaining to what he saw as Carnegie and Link's limited understanding of religion. In what follows, I will describe other examples of what Ghazālī perceives as the limits of Carnegie's advice. Both relate to the way in which worry, for Ghazālī, is wrapped up in a range of theological concerns, including the proper understanding of God's power and will and the nature of good and evil, while for Carnegie, it is simply an obstacle to one's personal fulfillment. In doing so my intention is to further explore the ways in which Ghazālī fruitfully engages this American self-help pioneer's text, while at the same time correcting and building upon it.

One of the strategies Carnegie conveys to his readers to "banish" worry from their lives, is to rely upon the statistical likelihood that most of what one worries about will never materialize. He writes, "It is within your ability and mine to rid ourselves of ninety percent of our fears right now,

if we ceased mulling over our thoughts and instead sought the assistance of facts established by statistics to see if there was some truth that might justify our fears."[154] For Ghazālī, however, Carnegie's advice here is only a poor substitute for true Islamic belief. Much of his commentary in this chapter focuses on how a Muslim should properly understand fate (*al-qadar*). After relating Carnegie's advice to his readers, he observes that "modern civilization" has poor knowledge of God and thus has to rely upon such means to avoid worry. Such a treatment, he writes, will never be sufficient if hearts lack belief.[155] Indeed, for Ghazālī, statistics do not actually convey the truth of the way the world works. They might be helpful briefly, but what is most helpful is to understand that the chaos of the world and the misfortunes one may encounter are all subject to divine will. One must further understand that even the fruits of one's efforts are still subject to Him. Instead of worrying about the future, therefore, one should first fulfill one's obligations and then place one's trust in God and be at peace with what He wills as the fruits of one's endeavors.[156] The notion that God is the All-Powerful operative force in the world highlights the theological grounding of worry, for it means that how one reacts to trials and tribulations—whether with contentment or resentment—is fundamentally linked to the strength or weakness of one's belief. Thus, Ghazālī maintains that a true believer perceives the deed of God in everything that occurs around one, whether it is good or bad. He cites a verse from the Qur'ān: "No affliction befalls in the earth or in yourselves, but it is in a Book, before We create it; that is easy for God; that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor rejoice in what has come to you; God loves not any man

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[154] Ziyādī, 128-129.

[155] Ghazālī, 83.

[156] Ibid., 80.

proud and boastful." The real believer, Ghazālī continues, is patient in both joy and sorrow, for moderation in reaction to the turns of events are fruits of the belief in divine foreordainment.[157]

According to Ghazālī, misfortune can even inspire piety. It may awaken one's belief and return one to God, he writes. Such a "result transforms the illness into a cure and the trial into a boon, and these, without doubt, are of the most coveted fruits of certainty [al-yaqīn] and contentment (al-riḍā) with what God makes."[158] In this sense, misfortune is itself a means to realizing piety, albeit an unexpected and unpredictable one. Ghazālī's discussion of the benefits of misfortune harkens back to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's discussion of the Islamic virtue of "patience" (al-ṣabr). For the latter, given that God's will is the sole operative force in the universe, all things, including tribulation (al-balā'), can be considered among His blessings (al-niʿam). Tribulation could indeed assist one by turning one's heart away from the world and remind one of its essential fickleness, which, in turn, may assist in keeping one's heart with God. Insofar as tribulations are used to become closer to Him, they are blessings.[159] Yet, as tribulations are unexpected, occurring without warning, they are opportunities to cultivate piety that cannot be said to depend solely upon the self-willed efforts of a believer. Abū Ḥāmid cites a ḥadīth to this effect: "Verily a man may not be able to reach rank with God Most High by his own deed, until he is afflicted by a tribulation in his body and reaches rank with that."[160] As we have already seen, Ghazālī frequently highlights God's intervention into one's affairs. But here, however, he places more stress on the fact that one should not be content with an evil if it can be changed through one's own efforts. He thus chastises

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[157] Ibid., 86-87.

[158] Ibid., 89.

[159] Abu-Hamid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* vol. 4, 1475-1476. For an English translation see, *Al-Ghazālī on Patience and Thankfulness, Kitāb al-ṣabr wa 'l-shukr: Book XXXII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences, Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, trans. H.T. Littlejohn, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2007).

[160] Ibid., 1476.

misguided Sufis who preach that one should be content with all the hardships that befall one. Indeed, like his premodern predecessors, Ghazālī emphasizes that the virtues of contentment and patience can become marks of disobedience to God when it is within one's capacity to change the evils one encounters.[161] "Contentment with one's lot," he asserts, is no excuse for negligence and laziness.[162]

Later in his book, Carnegie offers his readers another strategy to avoid worry. To banish "melancholy" from their lives, he says, they should concern themselves with helping others. To buttress this assertion, he channels the scientific authority of the psychologist, Alfred Adler. He quotes a passage from Adler's book, *What Life Should Mean to You*: "You can be cured [from melancholy] in two weeks if you follow this prescription: try to please one person each day."[163] Carnegie adds other quotes like this from psychologists, Carl Jung and Henry C. Link.[164] In the passage from *What Life Should Mean to You* quoted by Carnegie, Adler goes on to note that one of the most important aspects of religion is that it teaches people to love their neighbors. Being kind to others, says Adler, is the foremost means to achieve happiness for oneself.[165] Later Carnegie observes that the idea that helping others is the key to helping oneself is indeed among the most profound wisdom conveyed by the prophets of religion. But if a religious lesson is not convincing, says Carnegie, then take the advice of an atheist (*mulḥid*); he quotes Theodore Dreiser, who says that, "If man is to extract pleasure from life, he must participate in giving pleasure to others, for the pleasure of the individual depends on the pleasure of others, and the pleasure of

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[161] Abu-Hamid al-Ghazālī makes a similar point, observing that contentment with something that is evil and within one's capacity to change is a manifestation of disobedience towards God.

[162] Ghazālī, *Jaddid ḥayātak*, 91-93.

[163] Ziyādī, 263.

[164] Ibid., 269-271.

[165] Ibid., 264.

others depends on that of the individual."[166] In this chapter, Carnegie thus highlights the utility of doing good—one should be kind to others because, as psychologist, prophets, and even atheists confirm, it creates happiness for oneself.

In his commentary on this chapter, Ghazālī relates for his readers Carnegie and his interlocutors' perspectives on why one should do good. They claim, says Ghazālī, that the impetus for doing good need not be tied to seeking reward in the Hereafter or obedience to God's command. Rather, one should do good because it brings pleasure to oneself—an idea that supposedly rests upon a "scientific fact" that both believers and unbelievers should equally respect. It is lamentable, says Ghazālī, that religious instruction has been devalued to such an extent that people have to rely upon such means to convince others to do good.[167] He takes this as an occasion to draw attention to the theological grounding of the question of good and evil within a major strand of Islamic ethics. For Ghazālī, like many adherents of Ash'arī theology, good and evil do not have an objective existence; rather good and evil are determined solely by God.[168] One must do good and avoid evil, therefore, because it is what He commanded. Following God's command, in turn, preserves one from His punishment and assures for one His reward in the Hereafter. According to Ghazālī, as humans naturally seek to preserve themselves from ill, this very inclination should serve as the impetus for doing good. In other words, one should do good to avoid God's punishment. "It is not an insult upon one, as some may claim, to worship God seeking His heaven or fearing His fire; indeed, this is a great perfection and a noble path."[169]

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[166] Ibid., 271-272.

[167] Ghazālī *Jaddid ḥayātak*, 175.

[168] For general overviews of debates regarding the nature of good and evil in Islamic ethics see Fakhry, 31-58. See also Hourani, 133-166 and Hourani, "The Ethical Presumptions of the Qur'ān," in *The Muslim World* 70, no 1. (1980).

[169] Ghazālī, *Jaddid ḥayātak*, 171.

Thus, as we have seen from these examples, Ghazālī draws from Carnegie's text often as a starting point for a discussion of one or another of the theological concerns related to worry. While Carnegie tells his readers to seek the assistance of statistics to banish their worry, Ghazālī tells his readers that one can only conquer worry through properly understanding that God is the All-Powerful operative force in the universe, and thus whatever occurs is subject to His will. Carnegie tells his readers to do good for others because it brings pleasure to oneself regardless of one's intention. Ghazālī tells his readers to do good to others, but be mindful of one's intention, for only with the proper intention will a good deed yield God's pleasure and reward. Although he does not always openly challenge what Carnegie says, these examples highlight Ghazālī's corrections and expansions upon the ideas of this American self-help pioneer.

Conclusion

Although I spoke in the introduction about the translation of "self-help" into Arabic, Ghazālī's engagement with Carnegie and Link's texts is perhaps more appropriately understood as a discursive encounter between American and Islamic literatures about prayer and its effectivity, the limits and potentials of human agency, the meaning and purpose of human life, and the causes of worry. I have explored only a small slice of this encounter, albeit an important one given Ghazālī's eminent stature among Muslim reformers. Other accounts examining the translation of "self-help" into Arabic in Egypt have argued that it has led to a secularization of forms of selfhood there.[170] A close reading of Ghazālī's engagement with the works of his American interlocutors, however, suggests otherwise.

While analyses of discursive encounters between Islamic and Western literatures have generally focused on the reconfiguration of European intellectual traditions in Arabic, my focus

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[170] See Kenney's "Selling Success, Nurturing the Self."

here has been on how Ghazālī corrects and builds upon the work of his American interlocutors. In this I have sought to present Ghazālī as a contributor to a project of conceiving political modernity in the Global South, as opposed to an assimilator of a project articulated elsewhere. Thus, as we have seen, while fruitfully engaging their work, he also challenges Carnegie and Link's limited perspectives with a higher and more important body of theological truths derived from the Qur'ān and Sunna. Furthermore, as we have seen, while Carnegie and Link's metaphysical religion might be thought of as a competitor to conventional forms of religion, including Islam, in certain contexts, for Ghazālī, the existence of metaphysical religion is only a reaffirmation of God's existence and will.

CHAPTER FOUR

Sufi Sensibilities

Introduction

Scholarship on the period of Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir's (r. 1954-1970) rule in Egypt has depicted it as one characterized by great efforts to increase Egypt's economic productivity, material progress, and social development. Egyptian state officials and intellectuals placed the state and its institutions at the center of the drive to increase the nation's productive capacities. Policymakers developed state programs to uplift target populations, including women and peasants, and inculcate them with progressive, socialist ideas.[1] They used the education system to instill "useful" forms of knowledge with the intention of creating more industrious citizens.[2] The ʿAbd al-Nāṣir regime and its affiliated intellectuals articulated an ideology of "economic planning," which held that the state could scientifically and rationally engineer society by increasing Egypt's productive capacities.[3] The state and its ideologues conceived of economic productivity and material progress as the keys to Egypt's future.[4] The regime's adoption of socialism as the official state ideology in 1962 reflected the general ethos of this period.

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[1] Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Omnia El Shakry *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[2] For such attempts, see Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformations in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 79-80.

[3] On the ideology of "economic planning" see, Roel Meijer, *The Quest for Modernity: Secular, Liberal and Left-wing Political Thought in Egypt*, 1945-1958 (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 7.

[4] The attempt of the postcolonial state under ʿAbd al-Nāṣir to realize economic productivity and material progress was in large part a continuation of colonial state efforts to create a modern rational "order" in Egypt. On the creation of this "order" in nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Egypt see, Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Around the same time the Egyptian state adopted socialism as the official state ideology, Muḥammad al-Ghazālī published the first of a series of two books on Sufism (*taṣawwuf*). Ghazālī, as we have seen, was a central figure in Islamic reform in Egypt and his ideas have been foundational to the intellectual trajectory of today's Muslim Brotherhood. His texts on Sufism are remarkable because in them Ghazālī valorizes virtues and sensibilities such as trust in and dependence upon God (*tawakkul*), temperance (*'iffa*), and ascetic self-discipline (*zuhd*) that seem out of sync with the state's valorization of the seen, material aspects of life, as well as his own earlier works. He not only valorized these virtues and sensibilities, but also channeled a Sufi discourse on asceticism and the subjugation of bodily desires into a trenchant political critique of the ruling regime's ideology.[5] This critique entailed a rejection of the view, promoted by the Egyptian state, that humans could master the natural world, rationally control it, and subjugate it for their purposes. His texts, in contrast, minimize human agency and effectivity in the world, and emphasize instead human incapacity, fragility, and dependence upon divine providence and will. In this they provide something of a contrast to his earlier texts infused with Islamic philosophical ethics.

Ghazālī's elevation of ascetic self-discipline and self-mastery to a place of prominence within postcolonial Egyptian politics owes much to his reading of classical Sufi ethical literature. He dedicated a significant portion of his first text on Sufism, for instance, to introducing his readers

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[5] As will become clear presently, I am using an expansive definition of "asceticism," one that extends beyond what Patrick Olivelle has called "elite asceticism," or extraordinary feats of bodily discipline practiced by select individuals. See his "The Ascetic and the Domestic in Brahmanical Religiosity" in *Asceticism and Its Critics: Historical Accounts and Comparative Perspectives* ed. Oliver Freiberger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 29-31. My usage of "asceticism" is informed by Geoffrey Harpham's discussion of asceticism in the "loose sense," which "refers to any act of self-denial undertaken as a strategy of empowerment or gratification," Geoffrey Harpham, *The Ascetic Imperative in Culture and Criticism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), xi-xiii. Muslim writers, both premodern and modern, I argue, have historically used the Arabic term for asceticism, "*zuhd*," in both this "loose sense" and in a way that encompasses Olivelle's "elite asceticism."

to the aphorisms of the famed thirteenth century Sufi master, Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Sikandarī (d. 1309), which he included alongside his own mid-twentieth century interpretation of them. Yet, Ghazālī's valorization of Sufism was also informed by his readings into what was called in Arabic, "comparative mysticism" (*al-taṣawwuf al-muqārin*), a mid-twentieth century discursive formation that drew upon Western scholarship on mysticism.[6] He not only read Arabic accounts on this phenomenon, but also the work of the French-American cardiovascular surgeon and Nobel prize winner, Alexis Carrel.[7] A medical doctor with mystical inclinations, Carrel wrote the international bestseller, *Man, The Unknown* (1936), which was translated into Arabic and read by Egyptian Muslim reformers, like Ghazālī, and his contemporaries, Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966) and Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926). Ghazālī's second work on Sufism echoes Carrel's critique of materialism.

Ghazālī's ascetic politics, however, also bear intriguing similarities with those of the Indian leader and activist, Mohandas Gandhi. In a different context and time, Gandhi channeled Hindu understandings of asceticism into a form of anticolonial politics. Indeed, according to one recent account on his political philosophy, his efforts to reinterpret and link Indian ascetic practices to worldly political activity was one of his singular achievements.[8] Ghazālī was, of course, far less famous than Gandhi and they both held different understandings of asceticism. Nevertheless, they both endeavored to reinterpret premodern ethical practices for twentieth century political struggles

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[6] On formation of the concept of "comparative mysticism" in Arabic, see Andreas Christmann, "Reconciling Sufism with Theology: Abū al-Wafā al-Taftāzānī and the Construct of 'al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī' in Modern Egypt," in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) and Christmann, "Reclaiming Mysticism: Anti-Orientalism and the Construction of Islamic Sufism in Post-Colonial Egypt," in *Religion, Language and Power*, eds. Nile Green and Mary Searle-Chatterjee (New York: Routledge, 2008).

[7] For an extensive, if sympathetic, biography on Carrel, see Joseph T. Durkin, *Hope for Our Time: Alexis Carrel on Man and Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965). For an account of some of his more controversial views see, Andrés Horacio Reggiani, *God's Eugenicist: Alexis Carrel and the Sociobiology of Decline*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

[8] See Veena R. Howard's fascinating study, *Gandhi's Ascetic Activism: Renunciation and Social Action* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013).

and critiqued the notion that ascetic sensibilities were contrary to political engagement. The parallels between their ascetic politics suggests the need to go beyond normative assumptions that treat "asceticism" and "mysticism" as inherently solitary, individual, and unconcerned with collective and political life.[9]

Beyond Ghazālī's ascetic challenge to materialism and its international comparisons, his texts on Sufism are also remarkable for another reason. While scholarly accounts on Islamic reform often depict Sufism as either marginal to nineteenth and twentieth century reform efforts or marginalized by them,[10] this eminent, mainstream Muslim reformer argued that Sufism is so essential to the Islamic heritage that without it there can be no "Islam." His esteem for Sufism thus provides an extraordinary counterpoint to the broader narrative on the alleged rejection of Sufism by modern Muslim reformers. While more recent scholarship has begun to explore how Arabic translations of Western intellectual traditions helped inspire a postcolonial revival of interest in Sufism among Muslim intellectuals,[11] this chapter goes beyond analysis of discursive formations and discursive encounters between Islamic and Western intellectual traditions. Such encounters have been fruitful areas of research in recent years,[12] yet Ghazālī and his colleagues not only read

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[9] For recent attempts to define asceticism in more expansive ways see, Olivelle and Harpham. On "mysticism," scholars have argued that attempts to define it as a private and subjective form of religion depoliticizes it by rendering it irrelevant to social life. See, for example, Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2-9. The notion that Sufism, as the Islamic manifestation of mysticism, is at its root private and subjective is common in scholarly accounts. See, Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977) 3-4. As the "private and personal" overtones of the term "mysticism," fail to account for the political roles and collective actions of Sufis, Carl Ernst has suggested that the term is misleading when applied to Sufism. See his, *Sufism: An Introduction to the Mystical Tradition of Islam* (Boston: Shambhala Publications Inc., 2011), xix.

[10] Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis: The Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond, Surrey [England]: Curzon Press, 1999), 54; Valerie J. Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 7.

[11] See Christmann's above articles; see also, Omnia El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 42-60.

[12] Scholars have shown, for instance, that the translation of Western intellectual traditions into Arabic by no means led to the displacement of local traditions, but instead contributed to their revival. See Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). Analysis of discursive encounters have also

between traditions and created new ones, but also read within their own intellectual traditions. They attempted to reclaim them for mid-twentieth century life and valorize them in the face of internal and external critics.[13] This chapter thus explores Ghazālī's debt to Sufism and the work it performs in crafting the Muslim subject, according to him. To do so, this chapter pays close attention to his critique of Islamic exotericism and legalism, as well as his advocacy of ascetic self-mastery. It considers seriously the ontological assumptions that inform his rejection of materialism and follows his radical critique of the illusions of human self-sufficiency, autonomy, and agency in the world.

Although focusing on Ghazālī's writings, this chapter contextualizes his interest in Sufism by exploring the critiques of Sufism authored by the Egyptian scholar, Zakī Mubārak (d. 1952), as well as the Egyptian state's early twentieth century attempts to reform Sufi orders and practices. The second section examines Ghazālī's immediate context, exploring the writings of one of the 'Abd al-Nāṣir regime's foremost socialist theorists, Rāshid al-Barrāwī (d. 1987). Subsequent sections read Ghazālī's writings alongside those of an influential Sufi intellectual and leader, Abū al-Wafā al-Taftāzānī (1930-1994).

Sufism and Its Critics

This section briefly explores the views of an early twentieth century critic of classical Sufi thought, the Egyptian scholar, Zakī Mubārak, to whom we were introduced in Chapters One and

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contested the presumed unbridgeable divide between Islamic and Western intellectual traditions by showing how Muslim intellectuals melded different epistemologies. See El Shakry, *The Arabic Freud*.

[13] The extensive interest of nineteenth and twentieth century Muslim reformers in premodern Islamic intellectual traditions, as well as their debts to them, has only recently become a focus within Western scholarship. For a recent attempt to deal with the influence of premodern traditions on modern Islamic thought see the edited by Elizabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan, *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition: Modern Interpretations of the Classical Heritage* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016). Their account, however, focuses primarily on the sciences of the Qur'ān, Sunn and *fiqh*. see also Daniel Lav, *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Two. Mubārak authored at least two important studies dealing directly with Sufism. The first, as we saw, was a text on one of the most famous Sufi scholars, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). The second was a multivolume history of Sufism. Later Muslim reformers like Ghazālī, Taftāzānī, and their contemporary, Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā (d. 1963), who I introduced in Chapter One, debated and discussed ideas about Sufism and ethics that Mubārak first promoted. Mubārak was a sharp critic of Sufi views on worldly life and especially the Sufi valorization of *zuhd* (abstinence or asceticism) and *tawakkul* (trust in and dependence upon God). As I suggested in Chapter Two, Mubārak's criticism of Sufism was grounded, in part, in an anti-ascetic impulse imbedded in certain strands of Islamic philosophical ethics and, in part, in an overall impression among colonial era Egyptian elites that their countrymen lacked the necessary character traits for worldly progress, including industriousness, productivity, and efficiency. Here I focus on this latter element within Mubārak's criticisms of Sufism

These criticisms reflected a broader campaign among late nineteenth and early twentieth century Egyptian state officials, intellectuals, and Muslim reformers to reform Sufi orders and practices. Indeed, the Egyptian state had taken various steps to control Sufism, including the forming of a Sufi Council in 1895 to regulate Sufi orders and practices.[14] Egyptian intellectuals and Muslim reformers were concerned with sililar matters. Prominent Muslim reformers, like Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897) and Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1905), were critical of certain Sufi practices and ideas, though they did not reject all aspects of Sufism and, in fact, had Sufi roots

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[14] For an extensive review of these early state sponsored efforts to see Frederick De Jong "Aspects of the Political Involvement of Sufi Orders in Twentieth Century Egypt – An Exploratory Stock-Taking, (1907-1970)," in *Islam, Nationalism, and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan*, eds. Gabriel Warburg and Uri M Kupferschmidt (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983); see also, Julian Johansen, *Sufism and Islamic Reform in Egypt: The Battle for Islamic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), esp. 22-25.

themselves.[15]   Others, however, like Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935), found little of value in Sufism.[16] More generally, disapproval and condemnation of Sufism became particularly forceful during the late nineteen and early twentieth century.[17]

In his second work on Sufism, *al-Taṣawwuf al-islāmī* (*Islamic Sufism*), Mubārak builds upon his earlier critique of Abū Ḥāmid's Sufi ethics (See Chapter Two). Perhaps his sharpest criticism comes in his chapter dealing with Sufi attitudes towards worldly life. Discussing Sufi views on the stations of abstinence and asceticism (*zuhd*), Mubārak describes with contempt the figure of the "dervish" (*darwīsh*) in Sufi writing. Associating the dervish with the "poor person" who accepts their poverty instead of trying to better their situation, Mubārak says they are among the "weak personalities" of the world. Instead of depending upon others, the poor person should work and struggle for their provision. The problems, however, is that Sufis have presented such people in a favorable light and have thus promoted "laziness," "chaos," and "stagnation."[18]

Indeed, Mubārak argues that the Sufi call to renounce the world was the most reprehensible aspect of Sufism.[19] The Sufi flight from the world is reprehensible, he says, because worldly life is an excellent arena for developing character (*akhlāq*) and learning about "the causes of the decline of nations."[20] Their rejection of the world is, in reality, a manifestation of their inability to confront "social vices."[21] He historicizes the Sufi neglect of worldly affairs by suggesting it was

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[15] See Johansen, 12-21. For a perceptive analysis of 'Abduh's nuanced views on Sufism see, Oliver Scharbrodt, "The Salafiyya and Sufism: Muḥammad 'Abduh and His Risālat al-Wāridāt (Treatise on Mystical Inspirations)," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 70, No. 1 (2007).

[16] Sirriyeh, 97-102.

[17] De Jong, 312-313.

[18] Zakī Mubārak *al-Taṣawwuf al-islāmī* (*Islamic Sufism*) vol. 2 (Cairo: Matba'at al-Risāla, 1937), 158.

[19] Ibid., 127-128.

[20] Ibid., 129.

[21] Ibid., 135.

an aversion that grew from the moral corruption of their times.[22] He acknowledges that some Sufi thinkers, like Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Sikandarī, were more ambivalent about the dangers of worldly life. Discussing the latter's views on whether or not the Sufi should seek the means of sustenance (*tasabbub*), or completely cut himself from worldly concern for the sake of God (*tajarrud*), he chides Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh for giving preference to the latter because engaging in worldly life is a "golden opportunity" for the development of character.[23] Yet, as many Sufis rejected worldly affairs, Sufism has harmed Muslim societies. "The ṣufīya committed the ugliest of crimes against Muslims when they made asceticism worthy of love and made wealth worthy of hate. They are the ones who made Muslims the most behind of peoples."[24] They have made poverty (*faqr*), a great vice, into a virtue. Had Sufis better understood "human nature," they would have realized that the poor person cannot "lead social, political and ethical renaissances" and that wealth is a great tool for "reformers."[25] Mubārak thus found little value in Sufi attitudes towards worldly life.

By the time mid-twentieth Muslim reformers, like Ghazālī and Taftāzānī, penned their works on Sufism in which they endorsed Sufi attitudes towards worldly life, Egyptian intellectuals, like Mubārak, had already elaborated extensive critiques of those very attitudes. But it was not just Egyptian intellectuals who were worried about the influence of Sufism on Egyptians. The Egyptian state, as we saw, also sought to reform and regulate Sufi orders and Sufi practices. Mubārak's criticism of Sufism was based upon his concern for the alleged backwardness of Egyptians, which, he argued, was promoted by the Sufi valorization of asceticism, poverty, and dependence on God.

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[22] Ibid., 133.

[23] Ibid., 169-172.

[24] Ibid., 177.

[25] Ibid., 180.

As we will see in the following section, his concern over the industry and productivity of Egyptians foreshadowed the concerns of the postcolonial state under Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir.

Scientific Socialism

The colonial era critiques of Sufism by Egyptian intellectuals, were often animated by an overall perception of Egypt's backwardness. Concerns for the productivity and industry of Egyptians were shared by many Egyptian elites during the twentieth century. Concerns of this nature reached their height during the ʿAbd al-Nāṣir era in Egypt. This section thus briefly explores the ideology articulated by the ʿAbd al-Nāṣir regime and its aligned intellectuals. This ideology, as we will see, rested upon the idea that by increasing the productive capacities of the nation, the Egyptian state could rationally engineer the creation of a new society.

In 1962 the government of ʿAbd al-Nāṣir presented the "Charter for National Action" declaring socialism to be Egypt's official ideology. The ideas that underlay the document were debated and discussed among Egyptian intellectuals over the course of the previous two decades. The thought of the Egyptian economist and socialist theorist, Rāshid al-Barrāwī, for instance, influenced the content of the Charter. Barrāwī has been described as one of the most influential intellectuals of the early ʿAbd al-Nāṣir period, whose thought served as an intellectual foundation for the regime's subsequent ideology.[26] He was closely associated with the regime, serving as the head of its 1952 Permanent Council for the Development of National Production (PCDNP). The latter was a key institution of the new regime; it was to survey the nation's productive capacities and draw up a scientific plan to increase production and investment. According to the most extensive account on Barrāwī's thought, his "contribution to the resolution of Egypt's political and socioeconomic problems was his promotion of the state as the embodiment of 'rationality' and the perfect

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[26] Meijer, 66.

instrument of social transformation…. Central to al-Barrawi's thought is his support for revolution from above, technocratic rationalization of the economy through planning and politics as 'administration.' He voiced his absolute belief in the progressive forces of science, expertise, efficiency and the power of numbers in the language of extreme socialist modernism."[27] His views and the Charter will serve as instructive contrasts to the ideas Ghazālī and Taftāzānī articulated.

Great confidence in the capacity of humans to rationally engineer the creation of a prosperous society through a strong state was one of the central aspects of the 'Abd al-Nāṣir regime's ideology, as laid out in the Charter. Roel Meijer has described this ideology as one of "high modernism."[28] Meijer borrows the term from James C. Scott, who uses it to describe the ideology of twentieth century state sponsored projects of social uplift, which entailed deep confidence in the capacity of science and technology to remake society.[29]

The authors of the charter expounded an ideology of high modernism. Asserting the "Inevitability of the Socialist Solution," they write, "Efficient socialist planning is the sole method which guarantees the use of all natural resources, be they material, natural, or human in a practical, scientific, and humane way aimed at realising the common good of the masses, and ensuring a life

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[27] Ibid., 67.

[28] Ibid., 13.

[29] Describing high modernism Scott writes, it "is best conceived as a strong, one might even say muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws." James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 4. Others have also used Scott's concept in postcolonial contexts. Michael Mahoney, a historian whose work deals with contemporary Mozambique, also draws upon the idea of high modernism to describe the ideological outlooks that inform that country's colonial and postcolonial regimes. Mahoney further argues that high modernism served as a backdrop to both Soviet socioeconomic development theories and American modernization theory. "Estado Nuvo, Homem Novo (New State, New Man): Colonial and Anticolonial Ideologies in Mozambique, 1930-1977," in *Staging Growth: Modernization, Development, and the Global Cold War*, David C. Engerman et al eds., (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

of prosperity for them."[30] The Charter exalts science as the central means of realizing Egypt's good. "Science is the weapon with which revolutionary triumph can be achieved," its authors write. It will provide the solutions to Egypt's social and economic dilemmas, and thus "science for society should be the motto of the cultural revolution at the present stage."[31] The problems facing Egypt are conceived as problems pertaining to the country's productive capacities and the efficient, rational distribution of its natural resources.[32] The Charter frequently highlights the ability of Egyptians to determine their destinies and take control of their world through precise planning. "National action based on planning," asserts the Charter, "must be clear to the machinery of production at all levels. The responsibility of each individual in this action must be clear to him, so that he may, at any time, know his exact position in the national action."[33]

Much of the ideological content of the Charter had precedents in works written by Barrāwī during the 1950s and 1960s.[34] One of Barrāwī's well-known texts was a work on the "economic philosophy" of the 1952 Egyptian revolution. In this work, Barrāwī argues that history is driven by material and economic conditions, that Egyptians should utilize science and technology to increase the nation's productive capacities, and that in doing so, Egyptians can rationally control and plan their future. He opens the text asserting that "healthy society must have as its support strong economic foundations that are appropriate to its circumstances and goals."[35] Indeed, he later notes, a transformation in the nation's productive capacities via agrarian reform is the basis of the

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[30] Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāṣir, *The Charter* (Cairo: Information Department, 1962), 52.

[31] Ibid., 85-86.

[32] Ibid., 51; 54; 60-63.

[33] Ibid., 79.

[34] Meijer, 72-75.

[35] *al-Falsafa al-iqtiṣādīya li al-thawra: min al-nāḥiyatayni al-naẓrīya wa-al-ʿilmīya* (*The Economic Philosophy of the Revolution: From Two Perspectives, Theoretical and Scientific*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣrīya, 1955), dāl.

creation of a "new society."[36] The necessity of increasing the "productivity of the individual" (*intājīyat al-fard*) is also stressed.[37] The text is in large part an overview of the revolutionary regime's economic policy and plans to increase agricultural and industrial production and investment. Barrāwī singles out the creation of the PCDNP, of which he served as its first head, as an important sign of Egypt's development. On the creation of the Council, he writes, "it is an indicator of the direction that the state ought to proceed upon. And is not [this direction] development according to drawn out programs with established goals and specific deadlines…"[38] Economic planning and development schemes would become the centerpieces of the new regime's ideology.[39]

In his later works, Barrāwī argued that "scientific socialism" would solve Egypt's dilemmas. He believed in the capacity of humans to increasingly master and exploit the natural world, but held that despite their material advancement they have been unable to equitably divide wealth and resources. This necessitates "socialist planning," he writes.[40] He argues that Egyptians must more efficiently mobilize their human and natural resources and lauds the Charter for making this a major goal.[41] Barrāwī asserts that the "ideology" (*aydiyūlūjī*) of the Charter proceeds from the truth that political systems are "direct reflections of the dominant economic conditions in [a nation]."[42] Socialism, he adds, is thus historically inevitable, imposed by objection conditions.[43]

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[36] Ibid., 19.

[37] Ibid., 44.

[38] Ibid., 53.

[39] On this point see Meijer, 7; 178-180.

[40] *Mafāhīm jadīda fi al-ishtirākīya* (*New Conceptions of Socialism*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlū al-Miṣrīya, 1963), 9-11; 22.

[41] Ibid., 197-198.

[42] *Al-madhāhib al-ishtirākīya: dirāsa muqārina* (*Modern Socialist Schools: A Comparative Study*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlū al-Miṣrīya, 1967), 311.

[43] Ibid., 327-330.

Citing the Charter, he writes that socialism in Egypt must take its cues from science, for only "scientific socialism" can surmount the nation's "problem of economic and social backwardness." Egypt, he concludes, needs "modern scientific and technological expertise" and a "complete scientific plan" in order to realize "true development, quick and balanced."[44]

As we have seen from the above, a central component of the Egyptian state's high modernist ideology was the conviction that people of the twentieth century would increasingly master and control the natural world through science and technology, and thereby rationally engineer society. Other Egyptian thinkers, including Ghazālī and Taftāzānī, however, articulated a different sort of ideology for the modern world, one informed by Sufi sensibilities. As we will see shortly, a fascinating aspect of the Sufi tradition that informed their thought was a discourse that encouraged believers to adopt a non-calculating disposition and discouraged them from planning their futures. Instead this discourse countenanced trust in divine providence and contentment with fate.

Just one year prior to the 'Abd al-Nāṣir regime's adoption of socialism as the official state ideology, Ghazālī had entered into a high-profile dispute with the regime. Until that point he had continued to work within the Ministry of Religious Endowments, though after this dispute he would be demoted to a lower ranking position. Although throughout the 1950s Ghazālī was a consistent critic of Egyptian politics and society, he nevertheless joined the mass political organization, the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), established by the regime in 1962 as part of adoption of the Charter.[45] He would later justify that decision describing his participation in the

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[44] Ibid., 335-336.

[45] For descriptions of the ASU and the Charter, see Kirk J. Beattie *Egypt During the Nasser Years: Ideology, Politics, Civil Society* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 163-166.

Union as a means to inject into it an Islamic character and as a way of serving God. He describes it as ultimately being a painful experience.[46]

At a National Congress held to debate the Charter, Ghazālī gave a twenty-minute speech in which he lamented the degradation of Egyptian culture and the spread of foreign ways and mores among elite Egyptians. He argued that more attention be afforded to matters pertaining to moral and religious probity and, in the last few minutes, argued for the implementation of a dress code among both men and women.[47] The following day, Ghazālī was lampooned in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram*, which mocked his speech and published cartoon caricatures of him. As the week went on, other newspapers followed suit. According to the author of a biography on Ghazālī, his speech and, indeed his presence, at the Congress had offended the progressive sensibilities of much of the Egyptian intelligentsia, who saw Egypt as the vanguard of revolutionary socialism. On the Friday of that week, Ghazālī led the prayers at al-Azhar mosque. Afterwards, there erupted a large spontaneous protest led by supporters of Ghazālī, who marched to al-Ahram's offices to express their discontent with Ghazālī's disparagement in the Egyptian press.[48] "In an era in which unofficial demonstrations were rare and risky, over 5,000 people rallied at al-Azhar mosque to call for a government in conformity with Islam," writes another scholar.[49] The protest even caught Ghazālī off-guard and he resisted participating in it. Nevertheless, the protest garnered international attention, and it appears that the Egyptian state demoted Ghazālī's position in the Ministry of Endowments from director of Egypt's mosques to an inspector in the ministry for that

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[46] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, "Qiṣṣat ḥayāh" ("Life Story") in *Islamīyāt al-Marʿifa* (Jan. 1997), pt. 14.

[47] Ibid., pt. 15.

[48] Haifaa G. Khalafallah, *The al-Ghazali Enigma and Why Shariʿa is Not Islamic Law* (Sheffield, U.K.: Equinox, 2017), 73-77.

[49] Beattie, 165.

reason.[50] He was not only demoted but was also forbidden from delivering Friday sermons at al-Azhar and was banned from participating in any radio or television broadcasts. His books were also censored, and he was not allowed to publish a handful of them. Ghazālī was at the time in the process of building a home, and he came to believe that the regime was attempting to "freeze" him "materially and morally." It was in this context, he notes, that he finished *The Affective Side of Islam*,[51] his first book on Sufism which was published in 1962.

To Plan or Not to Plan

In this and the following sections, I turn to a close look at Ghazālī's views on Sufism, as well as those of his influential contemporary, Abū al-Wafā al-Taftāzānī. Taftāzānī was a shaykh in Egypt's Ghunaymīya Sufi Order. During the 1980s he became the head shaykh of Egypt's Sufi orders.[52] In their views on Sufism, Ghazālī and Taftāzānī held much in common. One particularly significant point of convergence in their writings was their mutual esteem for the writings Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Sikandarī. Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh is known as the Sufi master who systematized the teachings of Abu Hasan al-Shādhilī (d. 1258), the eponym of the Shādhilīya Sufi order, an order prominent in Egypt today.[53] A large portion of Ghazālī's first text on Sufism was dedicated to a reinterpretation of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's famous aphorisms. Just three years prior to the publication of Ghazālī's text, Taftāzānī published an extensive account on the life and work of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh. Both of these prominent Muslim reformers found Sufism and Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's thought deeply relevant for mid-twentieth century Egyptian life.

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[50] Khalafallah, 76-77.

[51] Ghazālī, "Qissat ḥayāh," pt. 16.

[52] On Taftāzānī's life and work, see Christmann, "Reconciling Sufism with Theology;" see also, El Shakry, 42-60.

[53] Sherman A. Jackson, *Sufism for Non-Sufis?: Ibn 'Ata' Allah Al-Sakandari's Taj Al-'arus*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7; Victor Danner, W. M Thackston, and 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad Ansari al-Harawi *The Book of Wisdom*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 29.

Ghazālī and Taftāzānī, however, were different types of intellectuals. The writings of the latter, for instance, were informed by Euro-American scholarship on Sufism and the latest trends in Euro-American thought. He was particularly interested in psychoanalysis and with reconciling it with Sufism. He read the works of Euro-American thinkers in their original languages, like French and English. Ghazālī, in contrast, was a much more parochially minded thinker, who did not read in European languages. Taftāzānī authored academic studies on Sufism, whereas Ghazālī, I would argue, wrote as a Sufi. He sought to popularize Sufi ideas and render them applicable to everyday life. Like other Sufi thinkers before him who wrote commentaries on Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's aphorisms, Ghazālī adopts the role of a commentator, providing his own unique interpretation to the words of his thirteenth century predecessor geared for mid-twentieth century life. Like his classical forbears, he also writes long explications of Islamic virtues particularly associated with Sufism, like repentance (*tawba*), and describes how one might realize them. Taftāzānī, on the other hand, presents more of an academic survey on Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's life and work, while making an argument about Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's significance for modern times.

Despite these differences, both Ghazālī and Taftāzānī saw in Sufism something eminently relevant to Egyptian life. Like Sufi thinkers before them, they both valorized the unseen, non-material components of life, encouraged dependence and reliance upon God, and emphasized the futility of human attempts to control their futures and subjugate the material world to their desires. In this, their writings constituted sharp critiques of the high modernist sensibilities of the 'Abd al-Nāṣir regime and its aligned intellectuals. I begin here with Taftāzānī's text on Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's life and work, which he published shortly before Ghazālī published his account on Sufism.

During an era characterized by an ideology of economic planning and concern for material progress, Taftāzānī used Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's life and work to argue that Egyptians should adopt a

non-calculating disposition and refrain from planning their futures. His argument was not that Egyptians should flee from worldly life and responsibilities, but rather that they should infuse their worldly lives with Sufi sensibilities and attitudes. Taftāzānī's book was both a political critique of the 'Abd al-Nāṣir regime's ideology and an attempt to render Sufi sensibilities relevant for mid-twentieth century Egyptian life. Taftāzānī opens his text on Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh noting that the era in which Egyptians live is one of pure "materialism" (*al-māddīya*), where people pay no attention to the world "beyond matter" and beyond "the felt" (*al-ḥiss*). For Taftāzānī, Sufism is a means through which Egyptians might come to appreciate the significance of the spiritual world. He argues that Sufism provides a "positive philosophy" (*falsafa ījābīya*) for life, by which he means that it is "a complete program (*mihaj*) for life." "The realized Sufi," he continues, "is he who does not see a contradiction between his worshipping life and the life of the society in which he lives; rather he seeks the assistance of worshipping life in social life, [especially] for its burden and struggle." Recall here that earlier in the twentieth century Mubārak criticized Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī for allegedly valorizing "negative" virtues (See Chapter Two), or character traits that discouraged partaking in worldly affairs. In describing true Sufism as a "positive philosophy" for life, Taftāzānī was clearly responding to Mubārak. Through his text on Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, Taftāzānī presents a model of complete Sufism; one that joins worshipping life and social life together.[54]

According to Taftāzānī, the most important aspect of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's legacy is that through him "the school of the cessation of planning" (*madhhab isqāt al-tadbīr*) received its most extensive treatment. He was, in fact, the first to give this school its "complete picture."[55] The concept ceasing to plan (*isqāt al-tadbīr*) combines sensibilities that are characteristic of Sufi writings, including

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[54] *Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Sikandarī wa-taṣawwufuhu* (*Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Sikandarī and His Sufism*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāhira al-Ḥadītha, 1958), thā'-dāl.

[55] Ibid., 1.

human dependence upon the divine, the ineffectiveness of human agency in the world, absolute trust in divine providence, and acceptance of fate. So important is the idea of non-planning to Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's thought that Taftāzānī describes it as the "basis" of his school of Sufism. Describing the starting point of this thirteenth century Sufi master's thought, Taftāzānī writes that it is the idea that "the human, no will (*irāda*) has he, compared to the will of God that directs the entire universe including the human."[56] Within Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's thought, the idea that humans ultimately do not possess wills is, according to Taftāzānī, a way of coming to know God and a mode of ethical self-training. To lack a will, he writes, is to become aware of one's fundamental incapacity and thereby come to know God. If humans do not possess wills, Taftāzānī adds, then they do not possess the capacity to plan. To cease planning is also a mode of ethical self-training. To plan is to preoccupy oneself with matters of an unknown future and promote the illusion that one can control them. It further preoccupies the wayfarer from worship. Such planning, says Taftāzānī, is thus of "the most severe defects in the journey to God Most High which prevent the wayfarer from arrival." Indeed, the impulse to plan derives from the lower soul and its base desires, which command one to evil. The existence of this impulse indicates, therefore, that one has yet to subjugate one's base soul.[57]

Mindful, however, that critics of Sufism have long argued that it promotes laziness, fatalism and incapacity in worldly affairs, Taftāzānī is eager to show that this is, in fact, not the case. By encouraging the wayfarer to cease to will and plan, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh does not wish to make the Sufi incapable of taking any action in his or her life. No, says Taftāzānī; Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh wants the wayfarer to become accustomed to not mindlessly following their passions and base desires, and thereby become capable of dominating their impulses and inclinations. Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh only denies

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[56] Ibid., 99.

[57] Ibid., 105-106.

that humans possess a "planning will" (*īrāda mudabbira*) on a "metaphysical" level, but acknowledges that they possess such a will on a "psychological" level. Although humans ultimately have no control over the events of the universe, on a psychological level they can and should control their own behavior, says Taftāzānī. They should, for instance, actively plan to realize Islamic virtues.[58] Understood in this way, to assume a non-calculating, non-planning disposition would not lead one to abstain from all deeds or lead to "complete stagnation" on a societal level. By encouraging such a disposition Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh prods the wayfarer towards willingness to face hardship and pain, knowing that everything that happens proceeds according to divine will.[59] Thus to cease planning is not to adopt a "negative" perspective regarding worldly life. In fact, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh allowed the wayfarer to take part in social life, and concern for the "means of worldly life" (*asbāb dunyawīya*) as long as this concern was within the limits established by the *sharī'a*.[60] Along similar lines, Taftāzānī is eager to explain that seeking a livelihood by no means contradicts the basic tenet of Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's school of Sufism. The crux of the issue, according to Taftāzānī, revolves around the wayfarer's intention in seeking a livelihood. If the wayfarer does so for the purpose of satisfying the soul's base desires then it is reprehensible. But if the wayfarer seeks a livelihood for the sake of charity and benefice, then it is praiseworthy. The search for a livelihood is only reprehensible when it turns one away from God.[61]

Taftāzānī goes on to argue that it is only by ceasing planning that Egyptians can realize healthier, more fulfilling lives. Indeed, it appears that the ethical lesson that Egyptians might take from Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's discourse on ceasing to plan is what is of most importance for Taftāzānī.

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[58] Ibid., 107.

[59] Ibid., 109-110.

[60] Ibid., 111.

[61] Ibid., 112-114.

He notes that if the wayfarer should seek a livelihood, he or she should do so without greed and without affixing the heart to the fruit of that search.[62] He concludes the chapter with a remarkable assertion for an era of scientific calculation and economic planning: He writes, "We in our lives are most in need of ceasing planning with God, most in need of obtaining psychological relaxation for our minds exhausted and our hearts consumed by continuous thinking of the matter of a livelihood…What would happen if we worked without looking to the results of the future which are the matter of our Creator and Director? What would happen if we expelled from our minds the illusion of our capacity to change the course of events according to our will? What would happen if we accepted the decree of God with contentment…?"[63]

Thus, while the Egyptian state and its aligned intellectuals sponsored numerous development schemes based upon scientific socialist planning, Taftāzānī counselled Egyptians to plan less and depend more upon divine providence. By infusing their lives with Sufi sensibilities, he believed Egyptians could overcome the materialism of the era. In making these arguments, however, Taftāzānī, as we have seen, was keen not to give ground to the critics of Sufism, who claimed that it encouraged laziness, apathy, and fatalism. Rather he argued that Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's discourse on ceasing to plan provided Egyptians with an ethically sound mode of partaking in worldly life.

Ascetic Politics

I turn here to examine Ghazālī's first text on Sufism, *The Affective Side of Islam* (*al-Jānib al-'āṭifī min al-islām*). Like Taftāzānī, Ghazālī saw Sufism as eminently relevant for mid-twentieth century life. As a prominent Sufi leader, Taftāzānī's esteem for Sufism was natural. Ghazālī's interest in Sufism, however, deserves further comment here. Ghazālī was a mainstream Muslim

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[62] Ibid., 116.

[63] Ibid., 117.

reformer and a one-time leading intellectual of the Muslim Brotherhood. The secondary literature on Sufism often depicts modern Islamic movements, like the Brotherhood, as fundamentally hostile to Sufism, this despite the fact that the founder of the Brotherhood, Ḥasan al-Bannā (1906-1949), had deep Sufi sympathies, as we saw in Chapter One. This literature frequently describes modern Islamic movements as "fundamentalists," "Islamists," or "Salafists," and portrays them as rigid legalists with little interest in the interior elements of Islamic practice and implacably hostile to Sufism and Sufi orders.[64] Indeed, the idea that nineteenth and twentieth century reformist conceptions of Islam were anti-Sufi is quite widespread.[65] As one scholar writes, "The constitution of fundamentalism as the hegemonic discourse of modern Islam depended on the marginalization of its Ṣūfī Other."[66]

The problem with terms like fundamentalist, Islamist, and Salafist is that they are too reductive and ultimately fail to encapsulate the capacious understandings of "Islam" articulated by prominent, mainstream Muslim reformers, like Ghazālī. Ghazālī, as we have seen in previous chapters, drew freely from a diverse array of Islamic ethical and theological traditions and melded them into a synthesis. His capacious understanding of Islam, I argue, challenges scholars to develop a conception of modern "Islam" that is capable of incorporating the Islamic philosophical ethics that informed Ghazālī's writings on economics and politics, the Islamic theology that he utilized to correct and build upon ideas drawn from American self-help and paranormal psychology, and the Sufi sensibilities upon which his critique of materialism rests. In his writings

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[64] For assertions of this nature see, for instance, Hoffman, 358-363; Sirriyeh, 147; Ernst, xiii-xvi.

[65] See, Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabiʻ, "al-Azhar Sufism in Modern Egypt: the Sufi Thought of ʻAbd al-Halim Mahmud," *Islamic Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1988), 207-210; De Jong, "Opposition to Sufism;" Christmann, "Reconciling Sufism with Theology," 197; and Christmann, "Reclaiming Mysticism," 64.

[66] Itzchak Weismann, "Modernity from Within: Islamic Fundamentalism and Sufism," *Der Islam* 86, no. 1 (2011), 165.

on Sufism, he elaborates political critiques of the ruling regime's ideology, contemporary Egyptian understandings of Islam, and the materialistic nature of modern civilization, all of which are infused with Sufi sensibilities and attitudes of ascetic self-discipline. To understand the significance of these Sufi inspired political critiques, we must think beyond normative assumptions about what constitutes "mysticism," which depict it is inherently apolitical,[67] and the alleged rejection of Sufism by modern Muslim reformers.

While Ghazālī valorizes Sufism, he is well aware of the deep suspicion towards Sufism held by some of his contemporaries. The title of his text, *The Affective Side of Islam*, reflects this awareness. To get a sense of what this prominent Muslim reformer understands is Sufism and what he means by the "affective" side of Islam, we might briefly follow his critique of "Islam" devoid of Sufism. He opens the text observing that some aspects of Islam have received so many detailed and extensive studies that one might assume that they constitute "Islam" itself. Given that so much attention is afforded to Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), one might presume that *fiqh* is Islam. The same is true with the inordinate amount of attention afforded to rules regulating relations amongst individuals, families and societies, he says. On these aspects of Islam, "speech has gone deep, and the studies of them have been characterized by a noticeable scholarly precision, and remarkable imams have become prominent in them." He continues, "As for the soul and ethical side [*al-jānib al-nafsī wa-al-khulqī*] it, in its entirety, has not had its right recognized, or it has not received the

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[67] Hoffman, for instance, suggests that Sufism is inherently apolitical and uninterested in worldly matters, 16, 358. While the ethical sensibilities of Sufism are often suggested to be apolitical, scholars have long recognized that Sufi organizations have played major roles in anticolonial struggles and postcolonial politics. See Itzchak Weismann "The Politics of Popular Religion: Sufis, Salafis, and Muslim Brothers in 20th-Century Hamah," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37, no. 1 (2005); and De Jong, "Aspects." For an account of the genealogy of normative assumptions on "Islamic mysticism" amongst Western scholars see, Ernst 1-18; see also, Christmann, "Reclaiming Mysticism," 58-63. For accounts on the genealogy of the term "mysticism," see Jantzen; and Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 25-62.

same precise attention that other aspects have received."[68] Why are there so many books of scholarly precision on the ritual ablution, but so few books of the same caliber on "sincerity, trust in God, righteousness, loyalty, patience and love etc.?" Yet, says Ghazālī, "externally manifest deeds" (*a'māl ẓāhira*) including those directed towards God (*'ibāda*) and those directed towards others humans (*mu'āmala*), are neither truthful or complete if unaccompanied by these "interior meanings" (*al-ma'āni al-bāṭina*).[69] According to Ghazālī, the believer who focuses on the exterior, while paying no attention to the interior, may perform worship properly, but does so with coldness of soul, callousness of heart, and harshness. Such a person seems to wish that others would stumble so that he can condemn their mistakes and demonstrate his superior knowledge. While this type of believer may possess vast knowledge, they are afflicted by great ailments of heart, says Ghazālī.[70]

The Sufis, in contrast, have devoted much attention to "the human's link with his Lord and his link to his [own] soul."[71] But the books of the Sufis lack scholarly precision. They are too colored by subjective experiences and, therefore, dangerous in some ways.[72] The believer with Sufi inclinations possesses a warm heart, deep desire for God and love for His messenger, but may ultimately lack sufficient knowledge of the limits established by the *sharī'a*.[73] Despite these mild criticisms of Sufis, Ghazālī's text remains a tribute to Sufi sensibilities and attitudes. Sufism, or what he calls the "affective" side of Islam, is found in affective dispositions, like trust, sincerity,

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[68] *al-Jānib al-'āṭifī min al-islām: baḥth fi al-khuluq wa-al-sulūk wa-al-taṣawwuf* (*The Affective Side of Islam: An Investigation into Character, Behavior, and Sufism*) 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1962), 3.

[69] Ibid., 3-4. As Ernst notes, the notion that Sufism concerns for the inner aspects of Islamic practices is common within Sufi literature, 26. See also Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 27-28.

[70] Ibid., 7.

[71] Ibid., 4. For an account of the methods of spiritual purification in according to an early Muslim scholar, see Gaven. Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam: The Life and Works of al-Muḥāsibī*, (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011).

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 6.

and loyalty, that are said to characterize and give significance to external deeds, as well as attitudes of worldly indifference and ascetic self-discipline. Sufism, according to Ghazālī, concerns with the human interior as opposed to the exterior. It pertains to the individual's relationship to the divine and to their own soul. The affective dispositions that Ghazālī characterizes as central to the Sufis are what Sufi scholars like, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, would call "states of the soul." The works of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and al-Qushayrī (d. 1074), for instance, devoted great attention to how believers might realize such states, while at the same time purify themselves from vices of the soul.

The Sufi valorization of the unseen, non-material components of humans, including the soul, is fundamental to Ghazālī's political critique of the ruling regime's ideology. Ghazālī elaborates a political critique based upon a Sufi understandings of worldly life and ontological assumptions informed by Sufism and revelation. He begins his discussion of these matters, for instance, outlining the truth established by the Qur'ān that humans have within their material substance a divine, immaterial, unseen portion. He recalls the Qur'ān's description of God's creation of humans from clay into which He breathed His spirit. The exalted status of humans among God's creations, derives not from their earthly substance but from the presence of His breadth within them.[74] He describes the "materialism" that has come to dominate mid-twentieth century life as the latest round of a primordial struggle between the animal, earthly portions of humans and their divine essence over which side might control and direct human life.[75] The great defect of "materialistic civilization" is that it exploits human intelligence to fulfill base passions and desires. In doing so it has given free rein to "the call of the clay" and "extinguished the call of the spirit."[76]

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[74] Ibid., 111-112. See also El Shakry's brief commentary on the "divine breadth" in *The Arabic Freud*, 42.

[75] Ibid., 113.

[76] Ibid., 115.

While Ghazālī's discussion of the relationship between matter and spirit may not seem related to the Egyptian regime's ideology, it is clear that he intends it to be. For Ghazālī, the regime's concern for increasing Egypt's economic productivity is a manifestation of materialism. He writes that many people today speak only of the necessity of "raising the economic level," but where is the concern for the nonmaterial components of humans? This is not to neglect material conditions, says Ghazālī, but to point out that "the economic conditions that we wish to exert domination over are only the means and not the ends, and that the purpose towards which we direct them is to serve greater goals."[77] A concern for the greater purpose, understood here as spiritual refinement, is what Ghazālī sees as missing from the regime's ideology of economic planning.

The greater purpose of spiritual refinement constitutes the ends of the Sufi path of *jihād al-nafs* or "soul striving," according to Ghazālī.[78] He depicts materialism and the refinement of the soul as two poles on opposites ends of a continuum of realizing the human purpose. "The noticeable characteristic of the people our time," he writes, "is their satisfaction with their souls, quick in plunging into their desires. They think that their material and spiritual desires must be answered and that the obstacles in front of them must be removed."[79] Soul striving, in contrast, is the cultivation of ascetic self-discipline. It involves strenuous effort to tame and train the soul's passions, and channel them to loftier ends. The "internal battle," he writes, "has no cry or weapon in it, yet this battle is of far graver consequences than those battles in which corpses are strewn about and in which blood is spilt."[80] In his view, Islamic ritual practices and other manifestations of "obedience" to God constitute the means for instilling this ascetic self-discipline. They are the

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[77] Ibid., 110-111.

[78] See also El Shakry's take on Taftāzānī's understanding of *jihād al-nafs* in *The Arabic Freud*, 52-55.

[79] Ghazālī, 130.

[80] Ibid., 140.

crucial mechanisms through which one subjugates the passions and learns to habitually act against desires, and thereby realize the "desired perfection" (*kamāl manshūd*).[81] In the current age, he says, education systems train the intellect through progressive stages to reach a desired goal. Can one imagine that the refinement of the soul demands less effort? "If what is sought after is that the soul reaches a rank in which it loves the good and finds it pleasing, and hates the evil and finds it contemptable, then the matter requires longer practice; practice in which the human struggle towards perfection, and divinely willed success [*tawfīq ilāhī*] … are encountered."[82] The objects of desire are many, he says; from love of the self, to members of the opposite sex, to wealth, to ostentation. Opposing such desires requires rigorous soul striving.[83] "The human," he writes, "will not be successful in this striving unless he becomes accustomed to disobeying his passions."[84]

Ghazālī suggest throughout this text that Islamic ritual practices (*'ibādāt*) are the means for subjugating the passions, an idea which may take its cues from the Islamic philosophical tradition, as we saw in Chapter Two, but can also be thought of as related Sufi attitudes of ascetic self-discipline. This idea is fundamental to mid-twentieth century Muslim reformist discussions of the Islamic ritual practice of fasting (*ṣawm*). Ghazālī, for instance, argues as much in another text published around the same time as the present work.[85] According to him, the human capacity to cultivate an ascetic self-mastery over the body, its desires and passions, constitutes the very essence of humanness, for it is *the* characteristic that fundamentally distinguishes humans from

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[81] Ibid., 131-132.

[82] Ibid., 132.

[83] Ibid., 133-134.

[84] Ibid., 134. See also Hoffman's account on *jihād al-nafs* and *zuhd* in Egypt today. She notes, for instance, that "Sufis insist that self-denial and crushing the passions are an integral part of the Sufi path, even today," 198.

[85] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Hādhā dīnunā* (*This is Our Religion*) 2ⁿᵈ ed., (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1965), 123-128. This text was first published in 1960.

animals.[86] His close colleague, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926), also advances a similar argument in his own account on fasting.[87] Qaraḍāwī encourages his readers to contemplate the wisdom behind God's temporary imposition of hunger and thirst upon worshippers, and goes on to describe for them a range of "secrets" (*asrār*) and "wisdoms" (*ḥikam*) behind the practice. Much like Ghazālī's account of ascetic self-discipline, Qaraḍāwī begins observing that humans possess within their material bodies a divine immaterial substance—God's breadth—which is their true essence. The body is likened to "riding beast" (*maṭīya*) and like a riding beast in must be trained. If humans are to realize the human purpose and not devolve into animalism, they must become masters of their bodies. God imposes fasting upon humans so that they might learn to subjugate their passions and desires. In this regard, fasting serves to strengthen the spirit.[88] The extent to which fasting constitutes "training of the will" (*tarbīyat al-īrāda*) is crucial for Qaraḍāwī. While one is fasting, he writes, there is constant effort to resist desires for food, beverage and sex, yet there is no watcher other than God and no force compelling one to keep the fast other than one's will.[89] The cultivation and maintenance of ascetic self-discipline is thus central to Qaraḍāwī's understanding of this pillar of Islamic practice and, by extension, his understanding of Islam.

In Ghazālī's take on soul striving, he argues that all material things and conditions are considered means towards the ends of realizing spiritual refinement. This idea of ends and means undergirds Ghazālī's resuscitation of a key Sufi virtue, asceticism or abstinence (*zuhd*), on the one hand, and his critique of the high modernist sensibilities of the era, on the other. Within Sufi

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[86] Ibid., 123.

[87] *al-ʿIbāda fī al-islām* (*Worship in Islam*) 2ⁿ ed. (Beirut, Dār al-Irshād, 1971). Qaraḍāwī notes in the introduction to this text that it was originally published sometime in the early 1960s. I have, however, been unable to locate a copy of the first edition.

[88] Ibid., 272-275.

[89] Ibid., 275.

literature, achievement in soul striving is depicted in terms of realizing particular virtues, sometimes called stations (*maqāmāt*), such as patience, trust, and temperance.[90] Like Sufi writers before him, Ghazālī's text entails descriptions of these virtues and how they might be realized.

Although Ghazālī valorizes *zuhd*, he is aware of the controversy around Sufi attitudes towards worldly life and thus seeks to establish the proper interpretive field in which this Sufi virtue should be understood. He first describes his preference for using the term "temperance" instead of *zuhd*. Echoing Mubārak's division between negative and positive virtues (see Chapter Two), he notes that "temperance" is more of "a positive virtue" in that it "refers to the ability of one who is agitated or excited to control one's self, or the ability of one who is deprived of something to command one's will." *Zuhd*, on the other hand, may have a similar meaning and may yield a similar result, "but it verges closer to a negative attitude and to resignation."[91] Moreover, temperance and its derivatives are mentioned in numerous sound Prophetic traditions (*ḥadith*s) while *zuhd* is not. Ignorance of the world and weakness in its affairs also empowers the enemies of the Muslim community. Many Muslims today have turned away from working for the sake of worldly welfare, he says, because those promoting asceticism have erroneously claimed that worldly matters are always distractions from the Hereafter. For these reasons, Ghazālī says, he has preferred to use the term temperance over *zuhd*, "one title over another."[92] Yet Ghazālī is not willing to jettison *zuhd*, but instead resuscitates this virtue by tying its meaning to that of temperance and contentment. Indeed, he argues that while *zuhd* may not be found in sound traditions, it is very common in weaker ones. And in these traditions, the meanings of *zuhd* are acceptable insofar as they "refer to

[90] For useful reviews of these stations see, Hoffman, 156-163; Schimmel, 98-101. For these stations and other Sufi practices see Ernst, 98-119

[91] Ghazālī, *al-Jānib*, 225.

[92] Ibid., 228-229.

temperance, contentment, desire for God, and concern with the abode to come." Such "noble meanings," he adds, "are worthy of welcome."[93]

Ghazālī's discussion of temperance, contentment—and, by extension, *zuhd*—revolves around a question of the significance of worldly life. Both non-believers and believers, he says, struggle for a livelihood and to better their existences. Yet, whereas the former embark upon such endeavors as ends in and of themselves, the latter see them only as means to a greater end. "The world," he writes, "if it is not a means [*maṭīya*] to the Hereafter, then it is an abode of delusion and a futile realm." In fact, he continues, "Islam looks at the world with the most severe of contempt" when it is sought as an end in and of itself.[94] He cites verses from the Qur'ān and Sunna to buttress this claim. He adds, however, that these texts must be understood in the proper "framework;" namely that worldly life is condemned only when it is pursued for its own sake, with no thought of one's Lord and the coming Recompense.[95] If worldly life is not to be rejected, then it must be engaged with the proper etiquette. "Verily, there is an etiquette [*ādāban*] for the mastery of life," Ghazālī writes, "which must be studied with precision; that is the secret of our discussion of temperance and contentment."[96] In an oblique reference to the high modernist sensibilities of the era, he notes that across the globe today there are numerous calls to "raise living standards." But to what ends, he asks? Continues Ghazālī, "animalism," comes to dominate a people's social, political, and ethical principles when life is taken to not go beyond material existence on this earth. The purpose of revelation's call to temperance and contentment is to delineate the limits within which one might enjoy worldly life and thereby keep one within the bounds of moderation. "The greatness of belief

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[93] Ibid., 227-228.

[94] Ibid., 229-230.

[95] Ibid., 232.

[96] Ibid., 233.

is not that it divests its holders of the world… The greatness of belief is that it allows them mastery over what they wish, as long as [the object of mastery] is in their hands not in their hearts."[97]

Ghazālī, much like Taftāzānī, thus elaborates a critique of materialism and high modernism very much informed by certain Sufi sensibilities and attitudes about the relative insignificance of worldly life when compared to the quest for the Hereafter. Insofar as he perceives *zuhd* to be an ethical ideal central to what it means to be a Muslim, his modern text resonates strongly with premodern accounts by Sufi scholars.[98] While some Sufis understood *zuhd* as renunciation of worldly life and desires altogether, for many others it was understood as an attitude of indifference towards worldly life.[99] Sufis, according to Leah Kinberg, understood that worldly life was necessary for survival and therefore inescapable. Those who practiced *zuhd* were thus supposed to train their desires and passions, so that they could partake in worldly life without their hearts becoming affixed to it. *Zuhd* could be about purging one's hands from all possessions, but it was also common that *zuhd* was understood as a matter of purging one's heart of desire and love for worldly life. She describes this as an attempt to find "compromise" between the reality that worldly life is necessary to survival and the ethical ideal of being indifferent towards it.[100]

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[97] Ibid., 244-245.

[98] Ghazālī's take on *zuhd* is not unlike the *zuhd* of "spiritual poverty" that Hoffman describes in her account on Sufism in twentieth century Egypt. She writes that many Sufis in Egypt today understand *zuhd* in the sense that the thirteenth century Sufi master al-Shādhīlī (d. 1258) did. The Sufi order that is attributed to him, common in Egypt today, urged its members to seek a livelihood. According to Hoffman, "Shādhīlī interpreted poverty in a spiritual sense, allowing a person to be 'poor toward God,' that is, recognizing his need of God, without renunciation of all material thing." "Many contemporary Egyptian Orders," she continues, "follow this same philosophy," 197.

[99] In her reading of premodern Sufi literature Leah Kinberg suggest "that *zuhd* is the philosophy of life inherent in Islam according to which any Muslim who considers himself pious—no matter what religious current he thinks he belongs to—must behave," 29. While I do not endorse Kinberg's generalization, she nevertheless makes a convincing argument that *zuhd* was understood as a philosophy of life, which for various Sufi thinkers may or may not have included a rigid denial of all worldly pleasure.

[100] Ibid., 38-40.

This range of viewpoints on what *zuhd* is can be seen in Abū Ḥāmid's account of this virtue in his *Revival of the Sciences of Religion*. One aspect of *zuhd* that his account highlights is the notion that it was an attitude of indifference towards the world, where one is neither distracted by condemning it nor distracted by pursuing it. In this context, *zuhd* means that one is never preoccupied by worldly needs, whether in their presence or absence, but simply takes from the world what is necessary.[101] Abū Ḥāmid's account of *zuhd* resembles his account of the related virtue of temperance. It is thus of no surprise that the modern day Ghazālī, as we saw, links these two virtues in his discussion. For the eleventh century Ghazālī, the effort to exert mastery over the body and its desires, particularly for food and sex, was the starting point of the journey of ethical self-cultivation.[102] Like the Greek philosophers who influenced his thinking, Abū Ḥāmid defined temperance as the virtue of the soul's appetitive faculty. Though to indulge in the passions would be to veer from temperance, Abū Ḥāmid pointed out that desires of the appetitive faculty should not be repressed totally, for the desire for food and sex was essential to human survival. Rather he counselled wayfarers to strive to reach temperance, that is the mean between too much and too little desire.[103] In a way that recalls the discussions of ascetic self-discipline written by his modern-day successors, Abū Ḥāmid likens the body to a means of travel, or "vessel," that carries the soul on its journey to God and thus must be maintained.[104]

Whether or not Ghazālī's views on temperance and *zuhd* are the same as those of his classical predecessors is less significant than the fact that when responding to mid-twentieth century

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[101] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of the Sciences of Religion*) (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2005), Book 34, *Kitab al-faqr wa-al-zuhd* (*The Book of Poverty and Abstinence*), 1543-1544. For a discussion of his views on poverty and asceticism see Sherif, 138-142.

[102] On this point, see Sherif, 56-57

[103] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-'amal* (*Balance of Deeds*) (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif bi Miṣr, 1964), 269-270.

[104] Ibid., 310-311.

materialist challenges, he does so with a discourse about worldly life inspired by Sufism. While his writings here are informed by Sufi perceptions on the insignificance of worldly affairs and attitudes of ascetic self-discipline, as we saw in Chapters One and Two, he drew upon a different discourse—one informed by Islamic philosophical ethics—to make an argument about the importance of worldly wellbeing, material prosperity, and human flourishing. The writings of this prominent, mainstream Muslim reformer thus serve to highlight a capacious understanding of modern "Islam" that transcended the artificial limits of terms like Salafi, fundamentalist, and Islamist.

Rereading a Sufi Master

Much recent scholarship has focused upon discursive encounters between Islamic and Western intellectual traditions. Scholars have given less attention to how Muslim reformers debated and reinterpreted premodern Islamic traditions and channeled them into modern political commentaries, especially those traditions that derive from sources that take cues from textual resources beyond what are conventionally depicted as the mainstays of the Islamic discursive tradition, that is the Qur'ān, the Sunna, and *fiqh*. As a way of going outside of the framework of the discursive encounter, this chapter has considered the work Sufism performs for the modern Muslim subject, according to Ghazālī. By stepping outside this framework and showing how Ghazālī channeled Sufi attitudes and sensibilities into a critique of mid-twentieth society, it becomes possible, I argue, to think of him and his colleagues as contributors to a global project of rethinking the human and the human potential, and not simply as assimilators or translators of projects political modernity elaborated in Europe and the U.S. To further demonstrate this, I turn now to his commentary on the words of the Sufi master, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Sikandarī. As we saw with Taftāzānī's work, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh was a figure of interest in mid-twentieth century Egypt. His

collection of aphorisms was his most famous text and has garnered numerous commentaries throughout the centuries.[105] Taftāzānī reports that the text was taught in Sufi circles in mid-twentieth century Egypt.[106]

In this text Ghazālī adopts the role of a Sufi commentator, providing his readers with his own unique interpretation of Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's aphorisms. As we saw in Chapter One, Ghazālī was known by his contemporaries for his interest in Sufism. Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī singles out his colleague's commentary on Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's aphorisms for special praise.[107] Qaraḍāwī also describes Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's aphorisms as one of the "purest" avenues to love of God.[108] For his part, Ghazālī introduces his readers to the wise sayings of this Sufi master by noting that Sufis have traditionally provided excellent studies of the human soul, how to purify it and render it free of defects. Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's book of aphorisms serves as an exceptional example of this type of study. Yet, says Ghazālī, Muslims have not benefitted fully from this important aspect of Sufism because over the centuries important Sufi texts have become overlaid with theologically suspect and overly complex commentaries. This has, unfortunately, led many to eschew these important studies.[109] Ghazālī only mentions one such theologically suspect and overly complex commentary on Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's book of aphorisms—that of the eighteenth century Sufi scholar, Ibn ʿAjība.[110] Ghazālī thus endeavors to provide the proper interpretation to Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh's words.

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[105] Jackson, 8; Danner 34, 38. According to Mubārak, the text was taught publically by the great scholars of al-Azhar well into the twentieth century. Mubārak recalls attending public readings of the *Ḥikam al-ʿAṭāʾīya*, as the aphorisms are called in Arabic, by the former Grand Mufti of Egypt, Muḥammad Bakhīt (d. 1935), during the month of Ramadan at the Ḥusayn Mosque

[106] Taftāzānī, Ibid., 89.

[107] Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, *al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī kamā ʿaraftuhu: riḥlat niṣf qarn* (*al-Shaykh al-Ghazālī as I knew Him: A Journey of Half a Century*) (Cairo: Dār al-Wafāʾ, 1995), 98.

[108] Ibid., fn1.

[109] Ghazālī, *al-Jānib*, 142-143.

[110] Ibid., 95.

The aphorisms Ghazālī relates to his readers address a range of topics, though my analysis will, for the most part, focus how he renders these wise sayings relevant to mid-twentieth century Egyptian life. Of particular interest to me here is how Ghazālī channels them into oblique criticisms of the ruling regime's ideology and the high modernist sensibilities of the era. While the regime and its key ideologues championed the human ability rationally control and engineer society, master the natural world, and facilitate progress, Ghazālī's commentary on Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's aphorisms, in contrast, valorizes Sufi sensibilities clustered around notions of resignation to divine will, reliance upon divine providence, and a belief in the human lack of self-sufficiency.

Thus, for instance, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh says, "Realize your attributes and He will help you with His attribute; realize your lowness and He will help you with His sublimity; realize your impotence and He will help you with His power; realize your weakness and He will help with His might and force." According to Ghazālī, this aphorism highlights the truth that humans are ultimately not masters of their fate, but rather dependent upon divine aid to accomplish their endeavors. But the people of this "deluded age" are overly confident in their capacities and trust only the material, witnessed world. As they pay no heed to "the World Unseen" (*'ālam al-ghayb*), they are deprived of cosmic assistance and thereby condemned to perpetual hardship and war.[111] Ghazālī, as we see here, draws upon Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's words to advance a radical critique of the idea of human self-sufficiency. Another aphorism reads, "No search pursued with the help of your Lord remains at a standstill, but any search pursued by yourself will not be fruitful." Dependence upon divine providence and will, says Ghazālī, is the best means to accomplish one's endeavors. Conversely, "dependence upon oneself, no matter the affairs that have been mastered and conditions that have

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[111] Ghazālī, 178-181. In translating these aphorisms I have consulted the translations of Victor Danner, W. M Thackston, and 'Abd Allah ibn Muhammad Ansari al-Harawi in *The Book of Wisdom*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1978).

been met, will not open the doors of good." In fact, writes Ghazālī, when one seeks to accomplish purposes only through one's own means with no thought of divine aid, one's purposes will be obstructed.[112] So incapable are humans without God's grace, says Ghazālī, that even the efforts to live righteously only yield success through divine will. Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh says, "If you were to be united with Him only after the extinction of your vices and the effacement of your pretensions, you would never be united with Him. Instead, when He wants to unite you to Himself, He covers your attribute with His attribute and hides your quality with His quality. And thus He unites you to Himself by virtue of what comes from Him to you, not by virtue of what goes from you to Him." Commenting on this aphorism, Ghazālī recalls for his readers that the Prophet Muḥammad once told his companions that even he would not enter heaven were it not for God's mercy and grace.[113]

Ghazālī utilizes the words of this thirteenth century Sufi master to show the limits of human agency and critique the idea of human self-sufficiency. The belief in fundamental human incapacity that undergirds this critique is brought more directly into the fore in Ghazālī's later discussion of the virtue of trust in God (*tawakkul*). His discussion of *tawakkul* was indeed an apt place for him to elaborate upon the idea of human insufficiency, given that eminent classical authorities like, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, described this virtue as the practical application of the believer's realization that God is the only effective agent operating in universe. As we saw earlier, an earlier generation of scholars Sufism, like Zakī Mubārak and Muḥammad Yūsuf Mūsā, were crtical of Abū Ḥāmid's views on the virtue of trust in God. The modern day Ghazālī, however, not only valorizes *tawakkul*, but also buttresses his account on this virtue by drawing from that of Abū Ḥāmid. It is likely that in doing so, Ghazālī sought to repudiate Mubārak's well-known take on the

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[112] Ibid., 147-149.

[113] Ibid., 169-172

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matter. Ghazālī's account on this virtue resembles Abū Ḥāmid's account in its basic structure and in the overall sensibility it conveys, though it is far less extensive and does not go as far as Abū Ḥāmid in its practical applications.[114]

Ghazālī's discussion of trust in God begins with the general theory upon which *tawakkul* rests. Abū Ḥāmid described this theory as the virtue of "divine unity" (*tawḥīd*), which asserted that God is the only effective agent operating in the world.[115] The modern day Ghazālī's discussion of trust in God thus opens describing the way in which trust in God is built upon an acknowledgement of divine hegemony over human life. Although humans suppose they are the masters of their affairs, most of what happens in the world occurs beyond human will and is subject only to divine will. Ghazālī exhorts his readers to contemplate their bodily functions, assuring them that they will discover that much is beyond their control. Writes Ghazālī, even if you control your faculties, you have no control over matters external to you, and thus no absolute control over whether or not some or another harm might befall you. Humans depend upon what they suppose they can control. Yet the means upon which they depend commonly fail. Those that understand the operative principle in the universe trust only in the one and true Agent, and not in means lower than Him, including their own capabilities and capacities. Ghazālī writes, trust in God entails the "servant's discernment (*baṣīra*) of the limits of the sphere in which his power and will operate, and the vast extent within which sublime will and might act without restriction."[116]

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[114] Scholars have only begun to explore the debt of modern Muslim reformers to premodern Islamic intellectual traditions. For an account of the influence of premodern exegetical techniques on Ghazālī's contemporary Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966), see Nicolai Sinai, "Reading Sūrat al-Anʿām with Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and Sayyid Quṭb," *Reclaiming Islamic Tradition*, 136-159.

[115] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of the Sciences of Religion*) (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2005), Book 35, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa-al-tawakkul*, (*The Book of Divine Unity and Trust in God*), 1619. For an English translation see David B. Burrell, *Faith in Divine Unity and Trust in Divine Providence: The Revival of the Religious Sciences Book XXXV* (Fons Vitae, 2001). See also, Sherif, 142-145. Schimmel observes that "*tawakkul* in its interiorized sense means *tauḥīd* [*tawḥīd*]," 119.

[116] Ghazālī, 306-307.

The modern day Ghazālī's assertion that to trust in God means to distrust all means other than Him resonates strongly with Abū Ḥāmid's general description of this virtue. Both of their accounts also revolve around practical matters pertaining to how to maintain human wellbeing and material welfare. First and foremost among these practical concerns is the matter of seeking a livelihood. At issue for Abū Ḥāmid was whether or not seeking a livelihood contradicted *tawakkul*, on the one hand, and whether or not it was acceptable for someone to renounce seeking a livelihood altogether for the sake of pursuing nothing other than worship and pursuit of knowledge of religion, on the other.[117] The modern day Ghazālī's account exhibits a slightly different concern for he presumes that his readers do, or at least should, seek to provide for themselves to the best of their abilities. He provides an ethical lesson for them that centers on the idea that while seeking a livelihood one should trust that God will ultimately provide. Ghazālī provides his readers with an extract from Abū Ḥāmid's account on *tawakkul*, which relates a series of traditions exhorting believers to trust in God. After citing his premodern forebear, he notes that such traditions constitute an ideal "treatment" for those who, in the effort to secure a livelihood, either despair or become greedy. Yet, he says, as the virtue of trust in God is too commonly misunderstood, "these [traditions], which intend spreading trust in the far reaches of the human soul so that it neither debases itself nor becomes anxious, their meanings have been over turned in some souls, for they have understood from them what should not be understood; they have understood that striving is futile and that silence is religion."[118] Thus, while Ghazālī counsels his readers to trust in God's providence, he nevertheless remains cautious that this virtue not be understood as an excuse for passivity and apathy.

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[117] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa-al-tawakkul*, 1625-1629. See also Schimmel's account on the relationship between poverty, *tawakkul*, and seeking a livelihood, 117-122.

[118] Ibid., 312.

The extent to which Ghazālī's commentaries on Sufi aphorisms and virtues gravitate towards matters pertaining to the livelihoods and material wellbeing of believers is indicative of the context in which he wrote. The 'Abd al-Nāṣir government sought to increase Egypt's economic productivity and the industriousness of Egyptians. It adopted an ideology of "scientific socialism," which held that Egyptians could master the natural world and control their futures. Responding to this ideology, Ghazālī drew upon a Sufi discourse about the relative insignificance of human effort, material concerns, and worldly affairs. In an era characterized by state led efforts to improve the rank and status of Egyptians, for instance, Ghazālī instead counsels his readers to value "obscurity" (*khumūl*). Says Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, "Bury yourself in the earth of obscurity for no fruit can sprout forth from that which is not buried." Such words, Ghazālī says, are ideal for those seeking leadership and precedence. Leadership is taxing to one's ethics and requires forbearance to endure its challenges. Instead of seeking leadership, believers should cultivate their capacities in seclusion and anonymity, and wait patiently for their efforts to bear fruit.[119]

His commentaries on other aphorisms further highlight the way in which Ghazālī perceives the wise sayings of this Sufi master as eminently relevant to mid-twentieth century Egyptian life. Whereas the Egyptian regime and its ideologues depicted the material world as something to be mastered and exploited for human purposes, Ghazālī's writings on Sufism convey a deep suspicion towards this world, highlighting its seductive powers and potential for leading believers astray. Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh says, "Don't roam from creature to creature as a donkey in a mill, which departs from one place and arrives at that very same place. Rather go from the creations to the Creator. 'And that the final end is unto thy Lord[.]….'" Commenting on this aphorism, Ghazālī says that many people today are imprisoned by the material world, failing to ever perceive "that which is

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[119] Ibid., 144-145.

beyond matter" (*mā warā'a al-mādda*). Even believers who strive to live righteously become "lost in the wilderness of life, numbed by the demands of living, senses absorbed in outward appearances," never reaching the "secret of existence."[120] Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, writes Ghazālī, likens such people to donkeys in a mill, roaming from place to place in a circle. The true believer should, in contrast, purify herself from the bonds tying her to the earth and direct herself towards God.[121]

Ghazālī's commentary on another of this Sufi master's aphorisms highlights his critique of the high modernist sensibilities of the era. Says Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh, "Part of the completeness of grace accorded to you lies in His providing you what suffices and holding you back from what makes you exceed bounds. In order that your sadness over anything be little, let your joy over it be little."[122] Ghazālī begins observing that "life" is full of all sorts of "seducing things" (*mughriyāt*) that incite people's desires and turn their souls away from the God. "The truth is," writes Ghazālī, "that poverty and wealth are traits of the soul (*akhlāq nafsīya*) before they are worldly manifestations."[123] Are the wealthy ever truly satisfied with what they possess, he asks? Conversely, is it not true that those with less may find joy because they see that what they have is sufficient? But this is what the materialists (*al-māddīyun*) will never understand, he says. Although we hear much about "raising living standards," the reality is that "human life is more in need of character than provision, more in need of esteeming its spiritual value than its material value, more in need of remembering God than anything else."[124]

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[120] Ibid., 158.

[121] Ibid., 159.

[122] Ghazali, 183.

[123] Ibid., 183-184.

[124] Ibid., 184-185.

Ghazālī, I argue, drew upon Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's aphorisms to reclaim and valorize sensibilities associated with Sufism that were not only attacked by critics, but also out of sync with the Egyptian regime's high modernist ideology. These sensibilities centered on the idea that humans should depend less upon themselves and more upon the divine to accomplish their purposes and that they should always be wary towards worldly affairs and material concerns which can easily lure the inattentive believer away from seeking God. Like scholars who provided commentaries on Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's words, Ghazālī sought to highlight their relevance for his readers' lives. One of the ways in which he does so, as we have seen, is by channeling these aphorisms and the sensibilities they convey into a social commentary and political critique of the 'Abd al-Nāṣir regime's ideology.

Sufism and Other "Mysticisms"

This section turns to trace the trajectory of Ghazālī's interest in Sufism, which culminated in his 1967 call for the revival of this Islamic science. A crucial aspect of his call for the revival of Sufism was his argument that in its purest form it constituted the primordial religion practiced by the earliest Muslim community—"the righteous ancestors" (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*). This section traces the genealogy of this idea in his thinking by exploring first its resonance with a similar argument advanced by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī in Book One of his forty volume magna opus, *The Revival of the Sciences of Religion*. Second, it also explores how Ghazālī gleaned a related idea from his study of "mysticism," which included reading Alexis Carrel's *Man, the Unknown* and a text written by Muḥammad al-Ghallāb, one of Ghazālī's Egyptian contemporaries, who pioneered the study of "comparative mysticism" (*al-taṣawwuf al-muqārin*) in Arabic.[125] In their respective texts, both Carrel and Ghallāb valorize "mysticism" as the pre-institutional, non-dogmatic core of all

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[125] On the process by which postcolonial Muslim thinkers came to see Sufism as "Islamic mysticism," or the Islamic expression of a universal religious phenomenon, see Christmann, "Reconciling Sufism with Theology" and Christmann, "Reclaiming Mysticism."

religions. This valorization of mysticism can be traced to nineteenth century efforts of Euro-American scholars of "world religions" and liberal spirituality seekers,[126] and helped Ghazālī articulate the idea that Sufism constituted a sort of primordial piety, integral to Islam.

Ghazālī's call for the revival of Sufism begins echoing the argument he made in his earlier text on the same subject. He describes Sufism's relative neglect among the Islamic sciences. Here, however, while making this argument, he is also building upon an argument Carrel advances in *Man, the Unknown* about the pitfalls of the overspecialization and compartmentalization of knowledge. Carrel argues throughout his text that scientific advancement has been overly skewed towards the physical sciences. While humans possess a great wealth of knowledge about their physical world and the material, mechanical functioning of their bodies, they possess much less knowledge about the existence and functioning of their spirits. The limited knowledge humans possess about their spiritual capacities is exacerbated by the compartmentalization of the study of human beings. Humans are often only studied from one of many perspectives, such as the perspective of medicine, sociology, psychology, or chemistry, but never studied as a whole.[127] Carrel thus attempts to present a more comprehensive study of humans in his book, one that treats both their material and spiritual components together.

Like Carrel, Ghazālī calls for a more holistic study of humankind, which would include the study of the human spirit, traditionally the domain of Sufism. He begins describing the "religiosity" (*al-tadayyun*) that Sufism facilitates. "Complete Islam," he writes, "is not a scientific

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[126] For an account on the historical formation of the study of comparative religion, see Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press). On the relationship of this discipline to liberal conceptions of "spirituality," see Schmidt.

[127] I draw here from the Arabic translation of Carrel's text to reflect more accurately what Ghazālī read. Shafīq As'ad Farīd, *al-Insān, dhalika al-majhūl* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1960), 13-18; Alexis Carrel, *Man, the Unknown* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), 1-5.

or economic 'theory,' nor is it simply a thought about God, no matter how sound that thought is in regard to its conception and deduction." It is rather "a heart, the locks of which have been opened, the interior of which has become expansive; in which love shines forth throughout all its corners. Indeed, it is a heart affixed to its Lord, eagerly following His traces in the universe; loving of the good, hating of the evil, expanding with each good thing and retracting with each evil one."[128] He argues that when it comes to Islam, theoretical knowledge is of no use unless it is practiced, that is manifest in behavior. The Qur'ān, he says, reminds Muslims of this, when God asks: "Will you bid others to piety, and forget yourselves while you recite the Book? Do you not understand?" "Yes," continues Ghazālī, "sound thinking must be followed by sound conduct (*taṣarruf*)." This might seem axiomatic, but how do Muslims realize this truth, he asks.[129]

Ghazālī does not answer this question directly, but instead implies that this truth has yet to be realized is because learned Muslims have not diligently applied themselves to benefitting from the methods of refining the soul developed by Sufis. Thus he notes that while the learned men of his time have devoted immense attention to the "legal sciences" (i.e. *fiqh*), few have devoted attention to directing Muslim believers in how they can realize a felt religiosity, without which knowledge of the legal sciences is simply knowledge. While not a Sufi himself, says Ghazālī, he nevertheless recognizes that despite their errors and exaggerations, Sufis have devoted much needed attention to how believers could realize this necessary religiosity.[130] But because of the fierce struggle that erupted between Sufis and scholars of the legal sciences (*fuqahā'*), neither benefits from the other,

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[128] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Rakā'iz al-īmān: bayna al-'aql wa-al-qalb* (*The Pillars of Belief: Between Intellect and Heart*) (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Aml, 1967), 131.

[129] Ibid., 132.

[130] Ibid., 133-134.

and today Muslim communities have partisans of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) without heart and spirit, and partisans of Sufism without sound knowledge of the *sharī'a*.[131]

Ghazālī goes on to argue that great scholars of early Islam, like Bukhārī, the compiler of one of the six canonical collections of prophetic statements and deeds, were not only exceptional scholars, but also exceptionally pious and reverential worshippers of God. Scholars like Bukhārī, he adds, did not simply specialize in one branch of the Islamic sciences, while neglecting the others, but rather excelled in them all.[132] Earlier in the text, Ghazālī describes to his readers Carrel's argument about the necessity of a holistic approach to studying human life. Carrel writes, "The science of humans makes use of all other sciences….Obviously no one scientist is capable of mastering all the techniques indispensable to the study of a single human problem."[133] For Ghazālī, Carrel's assertion here echoes a truth long acknowledged by the great scholars of the Islamic heritage. Speaking of Abū Ḥāmid, Ghazālī says that he was an exemplary scholar, one who sought to master a diverse range of sciences in his search for the truth.[134]

But Ghazālī does more than simply invoke Abū Ḥāmid's name here. Indeed, his entire discussion of the relationship between Sufism and the Islamic legal sciences echoes the words written by his classical predecessor centuries earlier on three fronts: First, the primacy Ghazālī attributes to Sufism among the Islamic sciences resonates with an argument advanced by Abū Ḥāmid about the relative importance of exoteric and esoteric religious sciences. Second, his preference for practical over theoretical knowledge parallels Abū Ḥāmid's preference. And third, Ghazālī's claim that Muslims must seek to revive the lost primordial piety of the righteous

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[131] Ibid.,136.,

[132] Ibid., 137-138.

[133] Farīd, 62-63; Carrel, 44-45; cited in Ghazālī, *Rakā'iz al-īmān*, 48.

[134] Ghazālī, *Rakā'iz al-īmān*, 45.

ancestors also resonates with the argument advanced by his classical predecessor. While this latter claim was by no means unique to Ghazālī or mid-twentieth century Egyptian Islamic reform,[135] what is exceptional about the modern day Ghazālī's argument is that the crucial element within his reformist project is a fresh look at the Sufi heritage. Indeed, as we saw earlier in this chapter, the alleged rejection of Sufism by Muslim reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a prominent narrative within scholarly accounts of Islamic reform. Yet, it is by no means a coincidence, however, that just as Abū Ḥāmid made a Sufi like science the key in his effort to revive the religious sciences, so too did the modern day Ghazālī.

Thus, for instance, Abū Ḥāmid opens his magna opus noting that it was intended to draw much needed attention back to what he calls "the science of the way of the Hereafter."[136] He describes this science an archetypal mode of piety that was once practiced by "the righteous ancestors" (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), but has since become forgotten and neglected. The focus of his text, however, is only the portion of this science that can be put into words, what he calls "the science of transactions" (*'ilm al-mu'āmala*). The other portion, "the science of the unveiling," cannot be articulated. Like the broader science of the way of the Hereafter, the science of transactions is something of a primordial religion—it is that which the prophets taught before it was overlaid by the disciplines of Islamic jurisprudence and dogmatic theology. Abū Ḥāmid's focus on this science

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[135] Indeed, the notion that Muslims must retrieve the lost "Islam" of "the righteous ancestors" (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) is essential to many modern Islamic reformist movements, in particular those that call themselves "Salafis," that is adherents of the way of the righteous ancestors. For an excellent account of the emergence of the term Salafism in Arabic and its usage during the twentieth century, see Henri Lauzière, *The Making of Salafism: Islamic Reform in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). Scholars today depict Salafism as almost synonymous with anti-Sufism. For an account Salafi criticues of Sufism, see the edited volume by Lloyd Ridgeon, *Sufis and Salafis in the Contemporary Age* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), esp. Richard Gauvain's chapter, "Egyptian Sufism under the Hammer: a preliminary investigation in the anti-Sufi polemics of Abd al Rahman al Wakil (1913-70)," 33-58.

[136] For a more comprehensive account of this science according to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, see Timothy J. Gianotti, "Beyond Both Law and Theology: An Introduction to al-Ghazālī's 'Science of the Way of the Afterlife' in Reviving Religious Knowledge (*Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*)," *The Muslim World* 101, no. 4 (2011).

is part of his broader critique of the jurists and theologians of his time who have mistaken their narrow disciplines as the substance of religion itself, forgetting and neglecting the more important interior elements of the religion. Indeed, this science of transactions further divides into two; an external and an internal component. The first part is that which relates to acts of worship and customs, while the second part is that which pertains to the character traits or qualities believers must cultivate and embody. But as he makes clear, even when it comes to external deeds, his interest is in the interior dispositions that give them significance.[137] Although he does not say so explicitly, his emphasis on interior dispositions, as well on the practical, interactive elements of Islamic practice, reflect his preference for the way of the Sufis, which he positioned in opposition to what he saw as the theoretical approaches of the jurists and theologians.[138]

The modern day Ghazālī's conception of Sufism, as we will see presently, parallels what Abū Ḥāmid described above as the lost way of the righteous ancestors. Ghazālī writes that while "Sufism" did not exist as a distinct, coherent phenomenon during the early days of Islam, the type of deep piety it represents was nevertheless constant among the righteous ancestors (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*) of today's Muslims. It was a "way of life" (*sulūkan wa-namaṭan fi al-ḥayā*), he says, "before it was a science belonging to the family of religious sciences."[139] Ghazālī prefers to describe the deep piety of the righteous ancestors as "Sufism" (*taṣawwuf*), but quickly adds that the naming of this science does not matter because it is not the name that counts, but the substance that is important. One may call it "Sufism" or invent a different name for it, says Ghazālī. What is important is that there exists a science among the sciences of religion that "elevates the human to

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[137] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of the Sciences of Religion*) (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2005), Book I, *Kitāb al-'ilm* (*The Book of Knowledge*), 8-10.

[138] On this point, see Moosa, 240, 245.

[139] Ghazālī, *Rakā'iz al-īmān*, 163-164.

the station of excellence in worship (*iḥsān*); a science that treats the defects of the intellect and soul, which veil one from one's Lord and affix one to the soil; such defects that concern for the outer forms of worship, but not with their meaning and wisdom."[140] Ghazālī relates his personal experience of making good his link to God by reading the words of the great scholars of the Islamic heritage, including Abū Ḥāmid, Ibn al-Jawzī, Ibn Taymīya (d. 1328), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya (d. 1350), and Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Sikandarī, who, despite their vast differences, nevertheless all embodied the deep piety represented by Sufism.[141] Later Ghazālī offers a threefold description of the Sufism of the righteous ancestors, the Sufism that he seeks to revive. It is first that which makes "theoretical belief" an overwhelming feeling in the soul, and progress from "an intellect that conceptualizes to a heart that is aware and moving." Second, it is a process of the "purification of the soul," whose end point is that the human becomes a gatherer of virtue and free from vice, and is thereby made acceptable to God and worthy of His pleasure. And third, it is a perspective that allows one to realize that earthly life is merely a means to the Hereafter.[142]

The notion that Sufism during the early days of the Muslim community constituted a primordial piety, a "reality without a name," is, in fact, an old trope in Sufi literature.[143] In making this argument, however, Ghazālī not only echoes the words of his classical predecessors, but also draws upon Ghallāb's work on comparative mysticism and as well as Carrel's discussion of mysticism in *Man, the Unknown*. Thus, for instance, Ghazālī notes that his threefold description

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[140] Ibid., 139.

[141] Ibid., 140.

[142] Ibid., 163.

[143] See, for instance, Ahmed T. Karamustafa, *Sufism: The Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 100. Hoffman provides a quote from the Sufi thinker al-Hujwīrī (d. 1077) on this point. Al-Hujwīrī observes, "Today Sufism is a name without a reality, but formerly it was a reality without a name." According to Hoffman, "Hujwiri explains that in the Prophet's generation people in fact practiced Sufism, though the name did not exist, whereas "'nowadays the pretence is known and the practice unknown,'" 3.

of true Sufism is inspired by his recognition that mysticism (*taṣawwuf*) is a "general human inclination" shared among the world's religions,[144] an idea that he gleaned from both Ghallāb and Carrel's work. Indeed, after defining his vision of authentic Sufism for his readers, Ghazālī discusses Ghallāb's work on comparative mysticism at length. Ghallāb's text on comparative mysticism was intended to show the vital role mysticism could play in a time of materialism. According to Ghallāb despite, or perhaps because, of the sheer materialism of the era there has been great interest in recent years in "spiritual ways" (*inhāj rūḥīya*).[145] But the problem, he says, is how to find an authentic way. The purpose of his comparative method is thus to ascertain what constitutes the true mystical path. He focuses specifically on three schools (*madhāhib*) of mysticism (*taṣawwuf*)—Islamic mysticism, Christian mysticism, and Hindu mysticism.[146] He draws extensively from the writings of Orientalists, while at the same time disputing some of their ideas, including the notion that Islamic mysticism derived from non-Islamic sources. He gives special praise to Ignác Goldziher and Louis Massignon.[147] Ghallāb goes on to argue that true mysticism is non-sensuous. In fact, he says, the beginning of all genuine mysticisms is the conquering of bodily desires.[148] From the conquering of the self, mysticism progresses to the realization of a personal link with the divine.[149] Ghallāb's text is reminiscent of the work of early Euro-American scholars of comparative religion who held that more primitive religions were

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[144] Ghazālī, *Rakā'iz al-īmān*, 165.

[145] Muḥammad Ghallāb, *al-Taṣawwuf al-muqārin* (*Comparative Mysticism*) (Cairo: Maktabat Nahdat Misr, 1956), 7.

[146] Ibid., 8.

[147] Ibid., 40, 42-45.

[148] Ibid., 158.

[149] Ibid., 163-164.

materialistic, sensuous, and bodily in focus, while more advanced religions were intellectual, focusing on creed, doctrine, and the individual tie with the divine.[150]

After discussing Ghallāb's work on comparative mysticism, Ghazālī goes on to cite an extensive passage from Carrel's text. In this passage, Carrel notes that although "mystical activity" (*al-nishāṭ al-ṣūfī*) is common to all "great religions," its presence in modern life is quite rare.[151] Like Ghallāb, Carrel describes "mysticism" (*taṣawwuf*) as the most exalted form of religion, which begins first with the ascetic conquering of bodily desires, and progressively moves towards the renunciation of the world and, finally, the self.[152] The mystical journey towards God, Carrel says, is one of intellectual refinement, without material forms, and is expressionless.[153] Carrel goes on to assert that the mystic's journey ends with him losing himself in God.[154]

While Ghazālī's call for the revival of Sufism was informed by a liberal conception of mystical religion as conveyed by Ghallāb and Carrel, their work also raised theological problems for Ghazālī. Indeed, unlike Ghallāb and Carrel, who approach the issue of the existence of "mysticisms" in the plural from a perspective of scholars of comparative religion, Ghazālī approaches this issue from a theological perspective. He asks, for instance, how could there exist different mystical manifestations of one truth? Ghazālī solves this problem not by drawing upon the terms and categories of comparative religion, but by deploying a conceptual repertoire derived from Qur'ān. For him, Carrel's mysticism and those that Ghallāb describes, are either partial or

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[150] See Masuzawa, who not only describes the historical formation of the study of comparative religion, but also the hierarchy of religions articulated by early scholars of the field, esp. 12-13, 46-64.

[151] Farīd, 165; Carrel, 134; Ghazālī, 173.

[152] Farīd, 165-166; Carrel, 135-136; Ghazālī, 174-175.

[153] Farīd, 166; Carrel, 135; Ghazālī, 174.

[154] Carrel, 136. As this concluding moment of the mystic's journey as conveyed by Carrel was not translated into the Arabic version, Ghazālī does not cite this portion for his readers. However, Ghazālī rejected the notion that one could become one with God so it is safe to assume that he would have rejected Carrel's description of the end point of mystical life had it been translated into the Arabic version.

incomplete manifestations of one truth, or, as in the case of Hindu mysticism, simply human

perversions of that truth. With regard to Carrel, Ghazālī assimilates the experiences and the truths

this French American spiritualist conveys as "Islamic" by rendering Carrel a pseudo-Muslim.

Describing Carrel and other men of science who accept the existence of God, Ghazālī says that

they can be likened to *ḥunafā'*—a term whose meaning for Ghazālī derives from its Qur'ānic usage

to refer to pre-Islamic Arabian monotheists.[155] Although the *ḥunafā'* were surrounded by rampant

paganism, they nevertheless held a vaguely articulated, but sincere monotheism, says Ghazālī.

They were guided to it simply through the purity of their God-given nature. Carrel and other

Western scientists, he says, are like the *ḥunafā'*, who because they do not know any better, quench

their thirst for God in the stories of great mystics and ascetics.[156] A further point of distinction

between Ghazālī's views and those of Carrel and Ghallāb, is that while a direct personal

relationship with God is integral to Ghazālī's conception of Sufism, it is neither formless nor

expressionless, as the mysticisms Carrel and Ghallāb describe. Rather, Sufism, for Ghazālī is laid

out in detail by Islamic ethical texts and is always circumscribed by the *sharī'a*.[157]

    Ghazālī, however, was not the only prominent twentieth century Muslim reformer to draw

from Carrel's text.[158] His contemporaries, Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966) and Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī, who are

both widely regarded as influential twentieth century Muslim reformers, also made use of Carrel's

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[155] *The Encyclopedia of Islam* 2ⁿᵈ ed., s.v. "*ḥanīf*."

[156] Ghazālī, *Rakā'iz al-īmān*, 175-176.

[157] As Wayne Proudfoot has argued, the notion that mystical experience constituted the irreducible core of religion was one developed by early Euro-American scholars of religion as a protective strategy in order to affirm the existence of "religion" as a distinct category of human life. The mystical experience was said to be ineffable, solitary and individual, and hence immune to scientific exploration. See his *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

[158] It appears that the first prominent Egyptian intellectual to comment extensively on Carrel's *Man, the Unknown* was the famed literary scholar 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād in his text *'Aqā'id al-mufakkirīn fī al-qarn al-'ishrīn* (*The Creeds of the Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century*) (Cairo: Maktabat Gharīb, 1968), 86-90, which was first published during the 1940s.

work, as did prominent Muslim intellectuals in Iran.[159] Importantly, however, aspects of Ghazālī's usage of *Man, the Unknown* are quite unique from that of his Egyptian counterparts. Thus, for instance, while Ghazālī draws extensively from Carrel's discussion of mysticism and, as we will see in the following chapter, supernatural phenomena, Qaraḍāwī does not mention them and Quṭb explicitly targets these aspects of this French-American doctor's work for criticism. Quṭb, for instance, seeks to present Islam as a complete "system" (*minhaj*) for life.[160] He thus questions the way in which Carrel concludes that science is the best hope for the future of humankind. He writes of Carrel, "Indeed, he does not possess a system for life other than that which science confirms because religion—as it is in his environment—is, in its best of forms,… merely spiritual activity (*nishāṭ rūḥī*), the refinement of character, and a link with the unseen worlds (*'awālim ghaybīya*)." Such an understanding of religion inevitably ends up becoming monastic, Quṭb argues.[161] Quṭb's broader point is that because of Carrel's limited understanding of religion, he sees it simply as spiritual activity and, therefore, when trying to develop a comprehensive ideology for life, he has no choice but to rely upon science. But, says Quṭb, because Islam is a complete system pertaining to economic, political and social matters, as well as religious ones, Muslims need not put their faith in science, but only revive their religion.[162] For Ghazālī, Sufism constitutes the fundamental core of Islam, and thus Carrel's discussion of mysticism resonates with his views. For Quṭb, in

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[159] Houchang E. Chehabi observes that Alexis Carrel's works were popular in Iran. His *Man, the Unknown* was utilized by thinkers such as Mehdi Barzagan, and 'Ali Shari'ati began his career by translating into Persian an article Carrel wrote on prayer. See Chehabi's *Iranian politics and Religious Modernism: The Liberation Movement of Iran Under the Shah and Khomeini* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 47-48.

[160] On Quṭb's depiction of Islam as a "system," see William Shepard, "Islam as a 'System' in the Later Writings of Sayyid Qutb," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25 no. 1 (1989).

[161] Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Islām wa-mushkilāt al-ḥaḍāra* (*Islam and the Problems of Civilization*) (Cairo: 'Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1962), 166-167.

[162] Ibid., 168-169.

contrast, Carrel's exalted views of "spiritual mysticism" (*taṣawwuf rūḥī*) are simply manifestations of his limited understanding of religion.[163]

Ghazālī's call for the revival of Sufism was thus informed by the idea that Sufism constituted primordial piety of the righteous ancestors, an idea that had premodern precedents in the writings of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī. In making this call he sought to challenge the neglect of Sufism among Muslim scholars and the materialist nature of mid-twentieth century life. His belief that "mysticism" could act as the antidote to the ailments caused by materialist civilization put him in conversation with intellectual trends that extended well beyond Egypt, which were encapsulated in Ghallāb's study of "comparative mysticism" and Carrel's critique of materialism.

Conclusion

As scholars have amply documented, during the period of 'Abd al-Nāṣir's rule in Egypt, the state and its affiliated intellectuals sought to rationally control and engineer the creation of a new society. By increasing the productive capacities of the nation and making its citizens more industrious, the regime's ideologues believed they could inaugurate an era of progress and material prosperity. The regime's adoption of "scientific socialism" as the official state ideology was a key aspect of its efforts in this regard.

Around the same time, leading Muslim reformers, like Ghazālī and Taftāzānī, articulated a different sort of ideology for mid-twentieth century Egyptian life, one informed by Sufi sensibilities and ascetic impulses. While the Egyptian state encouraged its citizens to more rationally plan their futures, Taftāzānī instead drew upon a Sufi discourse on "the cessation of planning" to argue that his compatriots should adopt non-calculating dispositions. Ghazālī, for his part, contested the state's emphasis on the material, seen components of life by drawing upon and

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[163] Ibid., 166-167.

valorizing a Sufi discourse on the necessity of striving against the soul's passions and cultivating an ascetic self-discipline. Informed by a Sufi discourse on trusting divine will and providence, he further argued that humans were only nominally in control of their futures and exerted limited agency in the world.

In seeking to demonstrate the relevance of Sufism to mid-twentieth century Egyptian life, Ghazālī and Taftāzānī not only responded to the Egyptian state, but also critics of Sufism, who saw little of benefit in this Islamic science. For both of these modern Muslim reformers, the intellectual legacy of the thirteenth century Sufi master, Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh al-Sikandarī, was central. Ghazālī provided his own unique commentary on this Sufi master's famous aphorisms, while Taftāzānī elaborated upon Ibn 'Aṭā' Allāh's discourse on ceasing to plan. Ghazālī further drew upon an old trope in Sufi literature about *tasawwuf* constituting the type of primordial, nameless piety that characterized the practice of the earliest Muslim community, "the righteous ancestors."

While Ghazālī's belief in the importance of ascetic self-discipline to politics connected him to ascetic political visions championed by other subaltern intellectuals, like Gandhi, his willingness to think of Sufism as a type of "mysticism" connected him to international intellectual trends related to the comparative study of mysticism. Indeed, his late 1960s call for the revival of Sufism was inspired, at least in part, by his reading of Ghallāb's Arabic study on "comparative mysticism" and Carrel's mystical critique of materialist civilization.

CHAPTER FIVE

Worlds Unseen

Introduction

In Timothy Mitchell's seminal work on nineteenth century British colonialism in Egypt,[1] he traced the rise of a modern rationalizing "order" there, which was based, in part, upon the spread of social scientific understandings of human life and society to Egypt, and, in part, upon the creation of state institutions, including military training facilities, factories, and systems of mass education, that worked to discipline and cultivate modern Egyptian subjects. Since the publication of Mitchell's pioneering text, scholars have explored at length the spread of rationalizing ideologies to Egypt and the introduction of state led modernization schemes there. They have, for instance, written extensively on the translation of social scientific theories into Arabic,[2] the assimilation of social scientific concepts among Arab intellectuals,[3] and the advent of colonial and postcolonial state sponsored efforts to create productive, industrious citizens.[4] Far less scholarly attention, however, has been afforded to trends in modern Egyptian intellectual history, and Islamic reform, more specifically, that do not fit comfortably within the rationalizing logics of the state and the social sciences.[5]

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[1] *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[2] See, for instance, Omnia El Shakry, *The Great Social Laboratory: Subjects of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Marwa Elshakry, *Reading Darwin in Arabic, 1860-1950*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2013).

[3] Charles Tripp, *Islam and the Moral Economy: The Challenge of Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[4] Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

[5] For an important and compelling exception to this general trend see Amira Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). See also, Mittermaier, "Trading with God: Islam, Calculation, Excess," in *A Companion to the Anthropology of Religion*, eds. Janice Boddy and Michael Lambek (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); and Amal Ghazal, "Illiberal Thought in the Liberal Age: Yusuf al-Nabhani (1849-1932), Dream Stories and Sufi Polemics Against the Modern Era," in

As a window into such trends, this chapter explores what was a vibrant world of the "Unseen" (*al-ghayb*) in colonial and postcolonial Islamic reformism in Egypt—a term used in the Qur'ān to describe God's hidden world of mysteries, which includes the human spirit, *jinn*, angels, heaven, hell, and the Last Day, whose ultimate nature is reportedly inaccessible to human reason.[6] To do this, it examines the writings of a number of early to mid-twentieth century Egyptian Muslim reformers who engaged and debated Euro-American spiritualism and psychical research in Arabic. It focuses specifically on Muḥammad al-Ghazālī's writings, but also explores the writings of the Egyptian pioneers of the study of Euro-American spiritualism in Arabic, including two eminent Muslim reformers, Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī (1862-1940) and Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī (1875-1954)— who, like Ghazālī, trained at Egypt's preeminent institution of Islamic learning, al-Azhar in Cairo—and two popularizers of spiritualism and psychical research in postcolonial Egypt, Ra'ūf ʿUbayd (d. 1989) and ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Jalīl Rāḍī. Like their Euro-American interlocutors, these Egyptian Muslim reformers discussed at length séances, spirit mediums, and channeled spirits, as well as seemingly supernatural occurrences (*khawāriq al-ʿādāt*), including cases of healing being achieved by prayer, clairvoyance, telepathy, and reported human encounters with the spirits of the dead and *jinn*—God created spirit like entities born of fire who at times guide humans and, at others, lead them astray. Together these writings give shape to an Unseen world in modern Islamic thought—one informed by logics that overlap with, but often transcend, the limits of modernist reason.

Arabic Thought Beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda, eds. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

[6] *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2ᵈ ed., s.v. *al-Ghayb*; see also, Mittermaier, 47 and 260fn1. For a detailed discussion of premodern and modern Muslim accounts on matters pertaining to the Unseen see, Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Haddad, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

This chapter ventures towards charting a slice of the history of the Unseen in modern Islamic thought by considering seriously the theological stakes of spiritualism and psychical research for these Muslim reformers, as well as the ontological assumptions at play in their attribution of agency in human history to *jinn*, spirits, and other unseen beings. To chart a history of the Unseen in modern Islamic thought is to give an account of modern Islamic thought that highlights what the historian Robert Orsi has called "presence," as opposed to privileging "absence," in the views and lives of the subjects of the modern academic study of religion. Orsi argues that historians and social scientists privilege absence when they treat human encounters with gods, spirits, and the divine simply as manifestations of one or another social force.[7] Discussing Marion apparitions and other instances of the transcendent breaking into time, he notes that such events are almost always "translated" into the familiar and safe categories of modern historical and social scientific thought by the scholars that study them.[8] Marion apparitions and devotional pilgrimages to apparition sites thus become social, political, and economic functions. His work challenges historians to enlarge their conceptual and analytical vocabularies by taking as the object of study the ways in which people and gods, "really present to them," interact.[9] This chapter follows Orsi's challenge to go beyond the social by considering the way in which these Muslim reformers interact with the Unseen, and attribute to it historical agency and explanatory power in their own lives, as well as human history.

While foregrounding the power and agency of the Unseen modern Islamic thought, this chapter also explores Muslim reformist engagement with Euro-American spiritualism and psychical

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[7] Robert A. Orsi, "Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity," *Historically Speaking* 9, no. 7 (2008), 13-14; see also Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 57-58.

[8] Orsi, *History and Presence*, 58.

[9] Orsi, "Abundant History," 14; see also Orsi, *History and Presence*, 4.

research as an avenue for considering the developing understanding of what constitutes "science" in the Middle East. Scholars of nineteenth and twentieth century scientific exploration into supernatural phenomena in the U.S. and Europe have shown that the histories of spiritualism and psychical research not only challenge the presumption of clear-cut boundaries between science and non-science, but also the alleged disenchanting powers of science.[10] Spiritualists and psychical researchers deployed empirical methods to investigate the existence of spirits, as well as the paranormal powers of the human mind.[11] They thus elaborated a "science" that rejected forms of materialism and countenanced the existence of immaterial entities and extra-physical forces operating in the world. For Ghazālī, his Egyptian contemporaries, and some of their Euro-American interlocutors, the unique qualities of this "science" meant that knowledge yielded through experimental methods and knowledge yielded through revelation were not mutually exclusive, but often overlapping.[12]

As we have already seen in Chapter Three, the existence of certain Islamic theological concepts allowed modern Muslim reformers, like Ghazālī, to correct and build upon American metaphysical religion and its scientific grounding, and position it not as a competitor to truths made known by the Qur'ān and Sunna, but rather as a confirmation of those truths. As I further show in this chapter,

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[10] For compelling accounts on spiritualism and psychical research in North America and Western Europe see, Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004); Beth A. Robertson, *Science of the Séance: Transnational Networks and Gendered Bodies in the Study of Psychic Phenomena, 1918-40* (Vancouver; Toronto: UBC Press, 2016). For Iran, see Alireeza Doostdar, "Empirical Spirits: Islam, Spiritism, and the Virtues of Science in Iran," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 58, no.2, (2016).

[11] Hence Catherine L. Albanese describes spiritualism as possessing its own form of "scientific positivism." *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 263. Like spiritualists, however, other trends in American metaphysical religion, including theosophy, New Thought, and Christian Science described their unique truths as deriving from a melding of forms of religion and empirically verifiable natural laws. See Albanese, 259-264, 272-276, 297, 307-309.

[12] For a recent study of Egyptian Islamist attempts to distinguish between knowledge made known by modern "science" and that made known by revelation and Prophetic example, see Ahmed Ragab, "Prophetic Traditions and Modern Medicine in the Middle East: Resurrection, Reinterpretation, and Reconstruction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 132, no. 4 (2012).

Muslim reformers not only borrowed from the epistemological authority of the new sciences of the spirit, but also drew upon Islamic theological discourses to contribute to the burgeoning study of invisible beings and human powers. They claimed a range of Islamic precedents for the phenomena reported by spiritualists and psychical researchers, and often deemed revelation's epistemological authority to be superior to spirit science when it came to understanding the functioning of the Unseen. This was particularly the case when it came to ascertaining the identities of spirit world interlocutors. I thus argue that the spread of spiritualism and psychical studies to the Middle East testifies not to the erosion of revelation's epistemological value for Muslim reformers, but rather to the ability of Islamic discourses to assimilate and redirect modes of scientific inquiry for theological purposes. Ghazālī, for instance, challenges his Egyptian and Euro-American interlocutors with what he perceives as a more truthful body of Islamic theological discourses and deploys them to both correct and reject aspects of their work.

Ghazālī's engagement with Arabic translations of works of Euro-American spiritualism and psychical research is encapsulated in a remarkable text he published in 1967.[13] This chapter, however, also explores another text Ghazālī published in the early 1980s in which he discusses human encounters with the Unseen yielded by prayer (*al-duʿāʾ*) and incantation (*al-ruqya*). According to Ghazālī, the mechanisms by which prayer and incantation work to ward off evils and procure worldly benefits pertain to God's hidden world of mysteries and are therefore unknowable to humans. Like his commentaries on Euro-American spiritualism and psychical research, his text on prayer and incantations presumes a world inhabited by Unseen spirit world beings and is thus an ideal avenue for further investigating aspects of modern Islamic thought Egypt that exceed rationalizing logics.

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[13] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Rakāʾiz al-īmān: bayna al-ʿaql wa-al-qalb* (Kuwait: Maktabat al-Aml, 1967).

Worlds Unseen

This section and the first part of the following section contextualize Ghazālī's interest in Euro-American spiritualism and matters pertaining to the Unseen by offering a brief account of the lives and work of his Euro-American interlocutors, and by exploring the writings of the early pioneers of the study of spiritualism in Arabic, Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī and Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, and those of two popularizers of Euro-American spiritualism in Egypt, Ra'ūf 'Ubayd and 'Alī 'Abd al-Jalīl Rāḍī.[14] Like Ghazālī, Jawharī and Wajdī were members of the Islamic scholarly class, who had trained at al-Azhar. 'Ubayd and Rāḍī, while not members of this scholarly class, were also invested in Islamic reformism, which for them involved melding aspects of spiritualism with Islamic teachings. 'Ubayd was a lawyer and author of a massive history of Euro-American spiritualism in Arabic. Rāḍī was an educator at one of Cairo's universities and the most prolific popularizer of spiritualism in mid-twentieth century Egypt. He was a translator of many Euro-American spiritualist texts into Arabic and author of his own original works on spiritualism, as well as the co-editor of Egypt's only spiritualist magazine, *'Ālam al-rūḥ* (*World of the Spirit*), and a key figure in one of Cairo's spiritualist societies.

After setting this context, the second part of the following section turns to Ghazālī's interest in Euro-American spiritualist writings. Although he drew upon the writings of Euro-American psychical researchers, he also was sharply critical of accounts of conjured spirits, as well as their Egyptian purveyors in postcolonial Egypt. I pay close attention to the logics informing his critique of conjured spirits and the knowledge they impart in order to posit an important, though often neglected, distinction between modernist critiques of suspect forms of knowledge, like

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[14] Smith and Haddad offer very useful reviews of the writings of these and other Egyptian intellectuals interested in Euro-American spiritualism, 99-126.

spiritualism, and critiques of such forms of knowledge that rest upon theological claims. It shows, for instance, that Ghazālī's critique of the accounts of channeled spirits was not based upon a modernist logic of whether or not the existence of spirit world beings concurred with a scientific, rational understanding of the universe, but was based upon whether or not the existence of these "spirits" and the knowledge they impart concurred with truths made known by God's revelation. This section thus foregrounds the theological stakes of spiritualism and psychical research for Ghazālī. It also highlights how Ghazālī, in fact, accepts the existence of his unseen interlocutors, but only disputes their identity, arguing that they are not the spirits of the dead who seek to guide the living, but a malignant type of *jinn* leading believers astray.[15]

Ghazālī's engagement with spiritualism and psychical research included his disputation of the identities of conjured spirits, as well as his extensive reading into a work by the American pioneer of paranormal psychology, J.B. Rhine (d. 1980), and a work by the French-American mystic, cardiovascular surgeon, and winner of the Nobel Prize in medicine, Alexis Carrel (d. 1944). Neither of these works reports on séances, mediums, and conjured spirits—the stuff of spiritualism in its typical form—but Carrel and Rhine's texts and their investigations into supernatural phenomena were very much indebted to the work of late nineteenth century Euro-American spiritualists. Indeed, although Rhine is regarded as a pioneer of paranormal psychology, scholars of the latter trace its early beginnings to spiritualism. The primary concern of many spiritualists was to establish communication with the dead usually through séances with a living spirit medium.

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[15] Like Mittermaier, I pay close attention to the engagement of these Muslim reformers with their unseen, spirit world interlocutors because it opens up a window into "a mode of being in the world that disrupts the illusion of a self-possessed autonomous subject, [and calls] attention to in-betweenness and interelationality instead," *Dreams that Matter*, 2-3. Though she depicts this mode of being as most apparent within marginalized communities in modern Islamic Reform, such as those interested in Islamic dream interpretations, I argue that modes of being that include frequent, ethically charged encounters with the Unseen are, in fact, central to the logics of mainstream Islamic Reform in Egypt.

Rhine's significance in the history of American spiritualism derives from his role in professionalizing the study of the supernatural during the 1930s. In part because of Rhine's efforts, the séances of spiritualists would compete with controlled experiments in laboratories of academic institutions as means to investigate paranormal phenomena.[16] Rhine was a trained botanist, although early in his career he developed an interest in psychology. He established the Department of Paranormal Psychology at Duke University, as well as the first academic journal of parapsychology. Rhine not only helped shift the method and setting in which the supernatural would be investigated, but also shifted the focus of study away from attempts to communicate with the dead and towards the investigation of the supernatural potentials of the human mind. By empirically establishing the existence of phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis, Rhine and his colleagues believed they could demonstrate the existence of a force integral to human beings that operated beyond the laws of natural science and could survive the body's material death.[17]

Rhine's professional career was dedicated to garnering the approval of mainstream science for his work in parapsychology, though the field never gained the acceptance of the broader scientific establishment. Carrel, on the other hand, was a well-established and respected scientist prior to becoming interested in the supernatural. Carrel, who won a Nobel Prize in medicine for his work in cardiovascular surgery, was at the pinnacle of his academic career when he published a work of popular science. His book, *Man, the Unknown* (1935), was immensely popular and went through

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[16] For an account of the scientific controls and technologies developed by early psychical researches like Rhine, see Robertson, 20-48, 99-126.

[17] Paul D. Allison, "Experimental Parapsychology as Rejected Science," in *Sociological Review Monograph Series: On the Margins of Science, The Social Construction of Rejected Knowledge*, vol. 27, no. s1; Michael McVaugh and Seymour H. Mauskopf, "J. B. Rhine's Extra-Sensory Perception and Its Background in Psychical Research," *Isis*, Vol. 67, No. 2 (June, 1976); Seymour H. Mauskopf, "Marginal Science" in *Routledge Companion to the History of Modern Science*, eds. R.C. Olby, G.N. Cantor, J.R.R. Christie, and M.S.J. Hodge (London: Routledge, 1990).

eight publications in its first year alone.[18] In it, Carrel marshals accounts of supernatural occurrences, including those found in the stories of mystics and saints, Rhine's studies in parapsychology, and his own witnessing of miraculous healing at a Marion apparition shrine in Lourdes, France, to advance a critique of scientific materialism.[19]

Rhine, whose *Reach of the Mind* was not as popular as Carrel's text, also launched a critique of scientific materialism. Both Rhine and Carrel attribute the immensely destructive nature of modern warfare to what they see as a flawed conception of the human—one that devalues human life by stripping it of any spiritual significance. They both contend that the ills of modern life are caused, in large part, by materialism, particularly that which is associated with science. Thus Rhine, for instance, opens his text with a chapter entitled "Fundamental Questions About Humanity," in which he describes how the scientific revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries essentially destroyed older views of humans as possessing both bodies and spirits or souls.[20] He writes, "There is no tolerance left in the natural sciences for anything like the immaterial reality which people used to call the spirit [*rūḥ*]."[21] Later on, Rhine argues that a broader conception of the human, which includes spiritual and mental capacities that are beyond the recognition of current scientific understandings, would stem a rising tide of inhumanity. The more humans think of themselves as simply matter, he says, the crueler and more inhumane

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[18] Joseph T. Durkin, *Hope for Our Time: Alexis Carrel on Man and Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), ix.

[19] The most extensive English language biography of Carrel is Durkin's.

[20] Rhine's text was translated into Arabic by an Egyptian scholar named Muḥammad al-Ḥalwajī. Ḥalwajī's translation, entitled *Al-ʿaql wa-saṭwatuhu* (*The Mind and its Reach*) (Cairo: Dar al-Ḥadītha, 1952), includes a brief note from Rhine himself praising Ḥalwajī's translation, as well as another note also praising the translation written by Ghazālī's Muslim Brotherhood affiliated colleague and close associate, al-Sayyid Sābiq (d. 1994). On Sābiq's interest in Rhine's text and spiritualism more generally see page 21-22 of the present chapter. I cite passages from Rhine's work as they appear in the Arabic to reflect more accurately what Ghazālī read.

[21] Ḥalwajī, 8; J.B. Rhine, *The Reach of the Mind* (New York: W. Sloane Associates, 1947), 10.

towards each other they become.[22] Similarly Carrel argues that because humans have neglected to study their spiritual capacities and instead have only focused on the material side of their being, they have built modern civilization upon a flawed understanding of their own nature. As such, modern civilization is ill-suited for human life and threatens its very existence.[23] Rhine and Carrel's willingness to countenance the existence of extra-physical forces operating in the world garnered them the ire of many of their science-minded contemporaries.[24] Indeed, they both self-consciously position themselves as radical critics of the scientific establishment. Rhine describes his own work as threatening the very basis of the scientific order because "[t]he acceptance of nonphysical action would admit two kinds of reality, and divide the universe."[25] Carrel, on the other hand, takes aim specifically at Cartesian dualism, arguing that scientific advancement is arbitrarily obstructed by the error of treating mind and matter as separate phenomena.[26]

As 'Ubayd observes in his massive Arabic history of spiritualism, both Carrel and Rhine were sympathetic to religion. Carrel, for instance, was not only interested in mystical communion with God, but also the miraculous healing power of prayer. 'Ubayd quotes at length from an article Carrel wrote about prayer, and describes this French American spiritualist's belief that prayer is as vital as "air and water" to "human life."[27] Rhine, for his part, observes that his own work could be taken to corroborate certain religious beliefs, including the existence of a soul or spirit and the

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[22] Ḥalwajī, 252-253; Rhine, 219.

[23] I draw here from the Arabic translation of Carrel's text to reflect more accurately what Ghazālī read. Shafīq As'ad Farīd, *al-Insān, dhalika al-majhūl* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ma'ārif, 1960), 36-45; Alexis Carrel, *Man, the Unknown* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935), 21-29.

[24] Mauskopf, 876; McVaugh and Mauskopf and 162, 178; Allison, 278; Durkin, 112-113.

[25] Ḥalwajī, 203; Rhine, 177.

[26] Farīd, 54-59; Carrel, 37-41. For a general overview of Carrel's critique of scientific materialism see Durkin, 1-28.

[27] Ra'ūf 'Ubayd, *al-Insān rūḥ la jasad: baḥth fi al-'ilm al-rūḥī al-ḥadīth* (*Humankind, Spirit not Body: A Study in Modern Spiritual Science*) (Cairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1964), 529.

continued existence of that immaterial entity after bodily death.[28] Although he often speaks of the mind (*'aql*) and its potentials, Rhine uses this term interchangeably with the spirit (*rūḥ*), and sometimes the soul (*nafs*). He contests the notion that the mind is merely the functioning of the brain, and argues that the soul and the mind are essentially the same entity.[29] 'Ubayd's text thoroughly describes Rhine's work at the parapsychology (*bārāsīkūlūjī*) lab at Duke University, observing that his studies on telepathy (*tilbā'ī*), clairvoyance (*al-jalā' al-basrī*), and precognition (*al-tanabbu' bi al-mustaqbal*) should be understood to demonstrate the possibility of life after death.[30]

If common themes can be said to run through the careers of those affiliated with spiritualism and psychical research in North America, Western Europe, and the Middle East, they would not only include a rejection of scientific materialism, but also a desire to evaluate and exalt the potentials and capacities of the non-material components of humans.[31] Indeed, according to one scholar of modern Britain, the "occult" was "at the heart of a contemporary preoccupation with the riddle of human identity and consciousness as manifested in competing ideas of the self."[32] Although various Islamic discourses, including Islamic philosophic ethics and Sufism, discussed questions pertaining to the human self,[33] as we will see in this chapter, Muslim reformist readings

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[28] Ḥalwajī, 242-245; Rhine, 209-211.

[29] Ḥalwajī, 2-7; Rhine, 4-9.

[30] 'Ubayd, 122-123.

[31] As Albanese notes, for instance, American metaphysicians were primarily interested in "mind and its powers," 13. Late nineteenth century British spiritualism, as Owens observes, was first and foremost concerned with "'the constitution of man'" and "'the powers of the interior of man,'" 114. Similar concerns were shared by Iranian spiritualists, who, as Doostdar writes, were attracted to Spiritism because they perceived it as not only a scientific enterprise, but also a moral and ethical one, 326.

[32] Owens, 13.

[33] Chapters Two and Four of this dissertation take up these issues more extensively. For a compelling exploration into premodern Islamic conceptions of selfhood and interiority see Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). For the contemporary period, see Samira Hajj

of Euro-American occultism helped inspire further theorizations of the human interior, while raising questions about what it means to be human.

Debating Spiritualism and Psychical Research in Arabic

A particularly important issue for Egyptians interested in spiritualism was question of the relationship of this "modern spiritual science" (*al-ʿilm al-rūḥī al-ḥadīth*) to Islam. Those Muslim reformers, like Jawharī, Wajdī, ʿUbayd and Rāḍī, who held that the knowledge imparted by conjured spirits could corroborate Islamic teachings, posited an "epistemological resonance" between modern spiritualism and Islamic revelation.[34] As we will see presently, the idea that humans inhabited a world that was also inhabited by unseen beings, including the spirits of the dead and jinn, and that these unseen beings not only assisted and guided humans, but also deceived and lead them astray, had a number of precedents in Islamic texts, including the Qurʾān, the Sunna, the accounts of Sufis, and works by prominent premodern Muslim scholars. Modern Muslim reformers drew upon such precedents to posit a mutually beneficial relationship between Islamic teachings and spiritualism. They believed that Islamic texts could be taken to confirm and corroborate spiritualist teachings just as the work of spiritualists could be taken to confirm and corroborate Islamic teachings.

Jawharī is best known for his multi-volume Qurʾānic exegesis (*tafsīr*), which highlighted what he saw as the significant overlap between the findings of modern science and God's word as revealed in the Qurʾān.[35] He was also greatly interested in Euro-American spiritualism. Indeed,

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Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 109-152.

[34] I borrow the notion of "epistemological resonance" from Omnia El Shakry's recent work on epistemological overlaps between Islamic forms of knowledge and psychoanalysis, *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

[35] *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-qurʾān al-karīm* (Cairo: Muṣṭafa al-Bābi al-Halabi, 1932). On this text see Elshakry, 312-313. On Jawharī's interest in spiritualism see Smith and Haddad, 114.

one approach towards positing a unity between spiritualism and Islamic teachings can be gleaned from Jawharī's 1919 commentary on the topic, *Kitāb al-arwāḥ* (*The Book of Spirits*), which records a debate between Jawharī and a contemporary Muslim interlocutor on the prospective concord between spiritualism and Islam. While he and Wajdī were not the first Arab intellectuals to consider Euro-American spiritualism in detail,[36] their works represent some of the more influential engagements with this modern spiritual science as they were frequently lauded by mid-twentieth century Egyptian enthusiasts of spiritualism, like 'Ubayd and Rāḍī.

Of particular significance for Jawharī was the way in which both spiritualism and Islamic teachings confirmed the reality of unseen beings from spirit worlds imparting ethical advice to humans. In this text he devotes great attention to how the accounts of the spirits of the dead channeled by Euro-American mediums confirm the reality of the otherworldly accounting for the living. Thus, for instance, on the question of whether or not the dead spirits of the wicked are punished with torture in the *barzakh*[37]—an intermediate state between death and resurrection—Jawharī uses the account of one conjured spirit, the words of whom are recorded in a Euro-American spiritualist text, to confirm that the answer is indeed yes. He further adds that these spirit world messages resonate strongly with the work of the great Muslim scholar, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), who likewise endeavored to assure the reality of the otherworldly accounting for skeptics. Like Abū Ḥāmid, these channeled spirits convey the message that humans should not attach their hearts to the world of the seen, but instead prepare themselves for the Afterlife.[38]

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[36] Indeed, the works by Jawharī and Wajdī that I cite in this article describe a vibrant late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Arabic debate on spiritualism in the popular science monthly, *al-Muqtaṭaf*.

[37] On the *barzakh* see, Smith and Haddad, 7-8; and *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2ⁿᵈ ed., s.v. *Barzakh*.

[38] Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, *Kitāb al-arwāḥ* (*The Book of Spirits*) (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Miṣrīya, 1919), 63-64.

Jawharī thus melds the words of these spirits with those of his classical predecessor to provide an ethical lesson to his readers.

However, while the ethical advice imparted here by spirits is a positive one, Jawharī also asserts that wicked spirits can and do lead the living astray. This truth is not only conveyed by the works of Euro-American spiritualists, but also by Islamic ethical literature, like Abū Ḥāmid's *Revival of the Sciences of Religion*. Jawharī thus relates for his readers Abū Ḥāmid's words on the subtle events that occur in one's heart prior to one committing an act of piety or impiety. Paraphrasing the words of his classical predecessor, Jawharī says that although the good and evil deeds that people commit are inspired first by their own thoughts, the source of these thoughts is ultimately not the individual, but two invisible beings that reside in the individual's heart. Abū Ḥāmid labeled the one that impels the individual to evil, a "devil" (*shayṭān*), and the one that impels an individual to good, an "angel" (*malak*). Jawharī writes, "the angel refers to a creature created by God, Most High, whose affair is to lead to the good, benefit with knowledge, reveal the Truth, promise the good; God has created this creature and put it to use for that. The devil refers to a creature whose affair is the contrary to that."[39] Jawharī's contemporary interlocutor adds, as if convinced by Jawharī's exposition, that if Euro-American spiritualism does indeed confirm the reality of unseen beings at times guiding humans and, at others, leading them astray, it can certainly be taken as a confirmation of the truth of the Islamic religion.[40] As we see here, Jawharī's text thus provides two overlapping explanations of the identities of the unseen beings who intervene into human lives. They are either spirits of the dead channeled by mediums or, perhaps, angels and devils residing in individual human hearts. Either way, he confirms for his readers the reality of

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[39] Ibid., 75.

[40] Ibid., 76.

these unseen beings, and their capacity to impart ethical knowledge to the living, by melding Islamic texts with those of Euro-American spiritualists.

His close contemporary, Wajdī, a renowned scholar and rector of al-Azhar, was invested in a similar endeavor.[41] Wajdī's views on spiritualism are conveyed in his three-volume text, *'Alā aṭlāl al-madhhab al-māddī* (*Upon the Ruins of the Materialist School*). Perhaps his most famous text, it was intended as a challenge to scientific materialism. Indeed, Wajdī, like Jawharī and their Euro-American interlocutors, came to see spiritualism as a valuable tool in the struggle against materialist strands of thought.[42] He saw materialism as a multifaceted school of thought, one that not only rejected the hand of God in human history, but also the existence of the human spirit and the broader spirit world (*al-'ālam al-rūḥānī*). He notes that if one were to dare speak to materialists about "a world behind matter" (*'ālam warā' al-mādda*), they would only laugh in one's face. How can one believe in what one has not seen, they would ask? Theirs is a logic only of eyes and the senses, says Wajdī.[43] Thus, what is significant about the accounts of Euro-American spiritualists, for Wajdī, is that they confirm the reality of the spirit world through the method of science. Indeed, he takes great effort in the second volume of his work to explain the "experimental method" of Euro-American spiritualists—the repeated conjuring of spirits (*taḥḍīr al-arwāḥ*) through a living spirit medium (*wasīṭ*).[44] The experiments of the spiritualists, he tells his readers, which have been repeated thousands of times in many countries, have affirmed "scientifically" the existence of the

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[41] On Wajdī see Smith and Haddad, 112 and 114; and Elshakry 281-283.

[42] In this introduction, Wajdī describes his text as a response to the rise of materialism; Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, *'Alā aṭlāl al-madhhab al-māddī* (*Upon the Ruins of the Materialist School*) vol. 1 (Cairo: Maṭbaʻat Dāʾirat Maʻārif al-Qarn al-ʻIshrīn, 1921), 3.

[43] Muḥammad Farīd Wajdī, *'Alā aṭlāl al-madhhab al-māddī*, vol. 2, 135-136.

[44] Ibid., 32-34.

extraordinary phenomena reported by spiritualists.[45] In a way that resonates with the argument that 'Ubayd would make some four decades later, Wajdī concludes the second volume painting a picture of the gradual undoing of the ancient conflict between science and religion through the latter's adoption of the scientific method to confirm the reality of the spirit world.[46]

Much like Jawharī's text, a central concern for Wajdī is to confirm that the spirits conjured are, in fact, the spirits of the dead. He introduces this concern by describing two forms of opposition to spiritualism. The first, that of the materialists, asserts that these so-called conjured spirits are not really spirits at all. They are only made to appear so through the trickery and deception of so-called mediums. The other form of opposition, that of the religious, asserts that these spirits are not the spirits of the dead, but rather demons (*shayāṭīn*) working to deceive humans.[47] Wajdī's primary concern here is with contesting the religious opposition. He disputes their assertion that these conjured spirits are demons by pointing out that demons work to deceive and lead people away from religion. These spirits, on the other hand, work to console the living about death; they command the right and forbid the wrong; most importantly, they have led millions of materialists to belief in God and the Hereafter.[48] Wajdī goes on to describe a second argument deployed by the religious opposition to spiritualism. Do not these conjured spirits claim to be bringing to the world of the living a higher more refined religion than those established, including Islam, ask his religious opponents? Wajdī, however, does not respond to this assertion, even after citing passages from Euro-American spiritualist texts that assert that all religions are one and each only holds a part of the truth. Wajdī simply repeats again that spiritualism challenges atheism, implying that the

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[45] Ibid., 34.

[46] Ibid., 141.

[47] Ibid., 72.

[48] Ibid., 117.

assertion of a unity of religions is less significant for him than the value of the teachings of conjured spirits in confronting unbelief.[49]

Wajdī's assertion that the spiritualist method might help undo the conflict between science and religion holds affinities with a position staked out by 'Ubayd in the mid-twentieth century. 'Ubayd takes great effort to demonstrate that spiritualism does not contradict Islamic understandings of the world or human life and, in fact, helps clarify questions related to the nature of God and the human spirit. He describes how two eminent Muslim reformers, Jawharī and Wajdī, found spiritualism of great use to Islam.[50] He also cites *fatāwā* (Islamic legal decrees) from various scholars at al-Azhar to highlight the Islamic legitimacy of this new science.[51] More broadly, 'Ubayd conceives of spiritualism as a scientific tool that could be deployed in the struggle against materialism.[52] Ultimately, however, the real significance of this spirit science for religion, according to 'Ubayd, is that it confirms the truths of religion through the experimental method of science.[53] It thus supports religious beliefs in a manner that is "more in line with the logic of various sciences and their tremendous discoveries that have paved the way in front of humanity for its speedy progress forward, to say nothing of its harmony with the spirit of the era."[54] 'Ubayd adds that by utilizing the work of spiritualists, "religious thinking can become at its core scientific thinking," which is to say that religion can become scientific.[55] As we see here, even though 'Ubayd clearly thinks of this new science of the spirit as providing a useful service to religion, he

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[49] Ibid., 118-125.

[50] 'Ubayd, 202-206.

[51] Ibid., 210-211; 609-611.

[52] Ibid., 12-13.

[53] Ibid., 16.

[54] Ibid., 613.

[55] Ibid., 621.

attributes to it an epistemological authority that is greater than, or at least equal to, that of revelation.

As we saw in Jawharī and Wajdī's accounts, a central concern for these reformers was related to the identities of these spirit world messengers. Were they truly spirits of the dead, or *jinn*, or perhaps angels and demons residing in individual human hearts? 'Ubayd, for his part, held that channeled spirits were indeed the spirits of the dead, who returned to the world of the seen to impart ethical advice to the living. He thus accepts the descriptions of spirit life, the Hereafter, and God that are reported to humans by conjured spirits of the deceased as legitimate additions to knowledge provided by revelation. He finds the recorded words of one such spirit called Silver Birch (to whom I will return to shortly)—channeled by a British medium named Maurice Barbanell (d. 1981)—as particularly revealing as to the nature of God.[56]

Rāḍī was a practitioner of spiritualism himself and a member in one of Egypt's spiritualist societies. His first major text on spiritualism was published in 1951, entitled *The Unseen World: A Comprehensive Study of the Spirit, the Human, Death, the Story of Creation, Angels, Jinn, Paradise and Hell in Light of the Most Modern of Scientific Theories*.[57] As the title of Rāḍī's text implies, he was deeply concerned with evaluating the Unseen from the perspective of science. He was, for instance, quite concerned with explaining the composition of unseen beings including spirits and *jinn*. He thus draws extensively upon Euro-American spiritualist writings on "ether" (*al-athīr*) to explain the functioning of these immaterial entities and how they interact with the

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[56] Ibid., 524-529.

[57] *al-'Ālam ghayr al-manẓūr: baḥth shāmil fī al-rūḥ wa-al-insān wa-al-maw*t*, qiṣṣat al-khalq, wa-al-malā'ika, wa-al-jinn, wa-al-jinna, wa-al-nār 'alā ḍaw' aḥdath al-naẓrīyāt al-'ilmīya* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī, 1951).

material world.[58]   With regard to the *jinn,* he devotes great attention to explaining the mundane aspects of their lives, including their appearance, their manner of living, and their sources of sustenance.[59] Throughout his career, however, Rāḍī not only drew upon the science of spiritualists to help explain the Unseen, but also to affirm the truth of Islamic teachings. He opens the present text noting that the work of "Western spiritualists" (*rūḥīyīn garbīyīn*) is of great relevance to Egyptians, as their work not only concords with science and reason, but also with revelation. Indeed, he describes the primary purpose of his book as interpreting the accounts of spiritualists in the light of religion.[60] Much of his text, therefore, deals with positing concord between spiritualism and Islam. One of Rāḍī's principal methods for positing this accord was to find Islamic precedents for spirit mediumship. He thus argued that the Prophet Muḥammad was the greatest spirit medium known to history. Drawing upon the work of Euro-American spiritualists, he describes the essential qualities of spirit mediums, and then shows for his readers how the Prophet Muḥammad not only embodied all such qualities, but also accomplished feats that far surpassed those of ordinary mediums.[61] He even suggests that prophethood is itself a form of spirit mediumship. All prophets, including Muḥammad and Jesus, he writes, inhabited "the material and ethereal world at one time, and addressed ethereal persons not seen by anyone but themselves."[62] Prophets mediate messages from the ethereal world to the material world, he continues. The Qur'ān, writes Rāḍī, was indeed transmitted to Muḥammad "from the ethereal world, the world of the Unseen."[63]

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[58] Ibid., 11-25.

[59] Ibid., 195-197.

[60] Ibid., 3.

[61] Ibid., 250-255.

[62] Ibid., 251.

[63] Ibid., 256.

The concord Rāḍī and other Egyptian spiritualists posited between spiritualism and Islamic teachings was by no means uncontroversial. For many opponents of spiritualism in Egypt, it appeared that the Qur'ān itself forbade human exploration into the spirit in at least one crucial verse. The verse in question reads, "They will question thee [O, Muḥammad] concerning the Spirit. Say: 'The Spirit is of the bidding of my Lord. You have been given of knowledge nothing except a little.'"[64] Egyptian spiritualists, however, like Rāḍī's chief Egyptian predecessor, Aḥmad Fahmī Abū al-Khayr (d. 1960), who co-edited Egypt's only spiritualist monthly magazine together with Rāḍī, and founded Egypt's first spiritualist society, Jami'īyat al-Ahrām al-Ruḥīya (The Pyramid Spiritualist Association), disputed this point.[65] Abū al-Khayr acknowledged, for instance, that the spirit is indeed of God's bidding, but asserted that so too is matter and all of the material world. Contesting the logic of his opponents, he then questioned wryly that if it is perfectly legitimate for Muslims to seek to understand the functioning of the material world, then why not that of the spiritual world?[66]

In Rāḍī's second major text on spiritualism, which was published only a few years before Ghazālī published his own text, he provides further context on spiritualism in mid-twentieth century Egypt. He describes the existence of spirit mediums in Egypt,[67] the witnessing of spirts in human form,[68] cases of medical healing achieved by spirit mediums,[69] and even instances of spirits

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[64] 17:85, Arberry translation.

[65] For a brief English introduction to Abū al-Khayr see Smith and Haddad, 114 and fn53. In Arabic, see 'Ubayd, 206-208.

[66] Abū al-Khayr's words here are recorded in 'Ubayd's history of spiritualism in Arabic, 208.

[67] 'Alī 'Abd al-Jalīl Rāḍī, *Aḍwā' 'alā al-rūḥīya* (*Light Upon Spiritualism*) (Cairo: Lajnat Nashr al-Thaqāfah al-Rūḥīya, 1961), 14-15.

[68] Ibid., 21-22.

[69] Ibid., 66.

performing surgical operations.[70] He notes that the quick spread of "the spiritualist movement" in Egypt can be attributed to the way in which it challenges materialism and other destructive, morally perverted systems of thought.[71] Indeed, on Egypt's first spiritualist society, the Pyramid Spiritualist Association, he quotes the groups founding charter which begins asserting that the group's primary objective is "to return the materialists to belief in the Unseen and continuation of life after death."[72] He also describes the professional make up of Egyptian spiritualists, which includes doctors, lawyers and politicians.[73]

Rāḍī's depiction of widespread spiritualist activity in postcolonial Egypt helps explain Ghazālī's interest in addressing this modern science of the spirit. Rāḍī's work is also relevant to making sense of Ghazālī's views for at least two other reasons. In both of his major texts on spiritualism, for instance, Rāḍī offers extensive accounts on the activities and functions of *jinn*, which resonate strongly with Ghazālī's own take on the matter. Much like the early pioneers of the study of spiritualism in Arabic, Jawharī and Wajdī, Rāḍī was quite concerned with ascertaining the identities of conjured spirits. He believed that it was possible that some of the reports of the spirits of the dead interacting with the living from Egypt and across the globe perhaps did not involve the spirits of the dead at all. Rather it was possible that many of these so-called spirits could in fact be *jinn*. This was almost certainly the case with malicious spirits. But even friendly spirits, he held, could also be *jinn*, as it is known that some of these unseen beings are pious and do good works.[74] Indeed, he says, while the Qur'ān affirms that there exists enmity between *jinn*

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[70] Ibid., 72-73.

[71] Ibid., 116.

[72] Ibid., 171.

[73] Ibid., 118.

[74] Rāḍī, *al-ʿĀlam ghayr al-manẓūr*, 277-279.

and humans, the accounts of prophets and Sufis also indicate that the *jinn* can and do assist humans.[75] He thus concludes that caution must be taken when dealing with accounts of conjured spirits.[76] Ghazālī, as will see shortly, articulates a variation of this argument.

The second reason Rāḍī's work is also relevant to making sense of Ghazālī's views derives from the former's interest in the words of the channeled spirit, Silver Birch. As I mentioned above, Rāḍī was the first to translate Silver Birch's words into Arabic and Ghazālī responded directly to this channeled spirit. It appears that Silver Birch was a controversial figure in mid-1960s Egypt. Of particular concern to the Egyptian critics of spiritualism was the way in which Silver Birch claimed to be bringing a new and more refined religion into the world, on the one hand, and his related claim that the external forms and obligations of religion were meaningless, on the other hand. Rāḍī, however, contests this interpretation of Silver Birch's words. He notes, for instance, that Silver Birch described himself as a servant of God,[77] and adds that spiritualism cannot be considered a new religion; rather, he says, it can only be understood as "new" by those who possess no religion.[78] He also says that the spiritualist critique of the external forms and obligations of religion is intended only as a critique of the excessive rites and forms of Christian churches.[79] Indeed, he notes, Muslim and Christian practitioners of spiritualism in Egypt observe all religious

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[75] Ibid., 193.

[76] Ibid., 279.

[77] Ibid., 49.

[78] Ibid., 50-51.

[79] Ibid., 51.

obligations.[80] Their séances (*jalsāt rūḥīya*) are merely gatherings to invoke and remember God,[81] and they begin each sitting with readings from their respective holy books.[82]

Thus, as we have seen, by the time Ghazālī penned his own engagement with Euro-American spiritualism there had already been in Egypt a long history of interest in spiritualism among Muslim reformers. In Euro-American spiritualism, these reformers found a valuable ally that could corroborate truths made known by Islamic texts with an epistemological authority, to paraphrase 'Ubayd, more in line with the logic of modernity. That being said, particularly when it came to the discussion of the identities of the spirit world beings who interacted with humans, these reformers clearly attributed to Islamic revelation and ethical literature an equally powerful epistemological authority. While these spirit world beings may be the spirits of the dead, as spiritualists claim, they might also be the *jinn*, or the angels and demons who reside in human hearts, that Islamic texts have informed believers about. Thus, as Rāḍī notes, for instance, while Muslims should utilize spiritualism in the struggle against materialism, they also have the duty of clarifying matters pertaining to the Unseen that are inaccessible to spiritualists and their methods, but can be known only through Islamic revelation.[83] In this sense, these Muslim reformers were not simply assimilators or translators of Euro-American spiritualism, but also contributors to an international project of rethinking what it means to be human. It should also be noted that the "science" these Muslim reformers were invested in was one that did not assume "absence," but rather presumed "presence," and thus attempted to bridge an "ontological fault line" of modernity.[84]

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[80] Ibid., 44-45.

[81] Ibid., 10.

[82] Ibid., 44-45.

[83] Ibid., 4.

[84] The phrase is Orsi's, *History and Presence*, 38.

Prior to turning to Ghazālī's critique of spiritualism and his commentary on Rhine and Carrel's work, it is important to point out here that other influential Brotherhood affiliates were also interested in spiritualism, including Ghazālī's close colleague al-Sayyid Sābiq (d. 1994). Best known for his multivolume text on Islamic jurisprudence *Fiqh al-sunna*, which served as the Brotherhood's primary manual for Islamic jurisprudence, he also authored a forward to the Arabic translation of Rhine's text. Sābiq also wrote another text published during the mid-1960s on Islamic doctrines in which he offered an extensive account of Rhine's studies in paranormal psychology in a chapter dealing with Islamic beliefs about the human spirit. In it, he summarized Rhine's key findings, argued that this American's work undoubtedly confirmed the existence of the human spirit, and went on to encourage his readers to read Rhine's text.[85] Like other Muslim reformers interested in this modern science of the spirit, Sābiq describes the work of Euro-American spiritualists as a challenge to materialism and evidence of God's hand in human history. He asserts, for instance, that it in an era dominated by materialist thinking, it was God who inspired learned men to seek "scientific proofs" of the existence of the "spiritual world behind the world that is seen."[86]

Ghazālī, for his part, discusses at length Rhine and Carrel's works throughout his text. His text is in large part a call for more interest in the Unseen. He uses this term to refer to Islamic theological discussions on the human spirit, the otherworldly accounting, angels, *jinn* and the Last Day. Yet he also uses it more broadly to refer to that which stands in opposition to the materialist emphasis on the seen, the felt, and perceived—matter devoid of spirit. He observes, for instance, that in recent years "essential humanness" (*al-insānīya al-mujarrada*), or human dignity devoid of

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[85] *al-'Aqā'id al-Islāmīya* (*Islamic Doctrines*) (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabīya bi Miṣr 1964), 232-234.

[86] Ibid., 224-225.

"distinctions of race, religion, language, color, or anything that resembles [such distinctions]," has become a watch word or slogan for many intellectuals, politicians and regional and international bodies.[87] But for most who champion this slogan, "the human" is often understood merely as a material body, whose existence and significance is limited to worldly life.[88] Throughout his text, Ghazālī seeks to affirm for his readers the reality of the Hereafter. The fundamental defect of materialists is that they do not see properly. Their vision is unnaturally limited to only that which is in-front of them. This lack of vision is unnatural in the sense that it is *juḥūd*, a willful rejection of the truth.[89] Citing the Qur'ān, he notes the horror they will experience upon their deaths when the reality of the otherworldly reckoning is made apparent to them.[90] Although the materialist tendency is particularly strong in the current era, Ghazālī is adamant in pointing out that "materialism" is as old as time. His concern here is to clarify that the prevalence of materialist interpretations of the world is not a result of scientific advancement, but rather ancient human shortcomings. He writes, since ancient times humans have "hidden themselves behind the walls of matter apparent, presuming that existence does not extend beyond things perceived by the senses, and have called a lie to the prophets who spoke to them of the Last Day…Indeed, belief in the present and unbelief in tomorrow, belief in the body and unbelief in the spirit—this solid, hard materialism is not the child of modern scientific advancement as some praise; it is instead the child

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[87] Ghazālī, 19.

[88] Ibid., 20.

[89] Ibid., 109. Speaking specifically of scientists and scholars among believers and non-believers, Ghazālī says that a believing scientist is more truthful and precise in their judgement and thinking because they perceive God's hand in the world, while a non-believing scientist arbitrarily limits their knowledge of existence by "rejecting" (*yajḥadu*) God's authorship of the world. The verb *jaḥada* in the Qur'ān is used to refer to willful ignorance of those who see God's signs (*ayāt*), but deny or reject what they signify. See for example, 6:33, 7:51, 11:59, 29:47, 29:49, 31:32, 40:63, 41:15, 51:28, and 46:26. Lane describes it as denying or disacknowledging something whether one knows it to be otherwise or not.

[90] Ibid., 75.

of ancient ignorance, an ignorance whose darkness has not yet been dispersed from certain groups of people."[91]

In the present work, however, Ghazālī not only confronts would-be deniers of the human spiritual potential and the reality of the Afterlife with Qur'ānic verses, but also draws upon the testimony and science of Carrel and Rhine. Ghazālī is keen to point out, however, that aspects of the Unseen, including God's essence and the essence of the human spirit are ultimately unknowable,[92] and that what is knowable about the Unseen, including the existence and activities of angels and *jinn*, is ultimately circumscribed by information provided by the Qur'ān and Sunna.[93] Science may corroborate some of the truths provided by revelation, such as the existence of God and the human spirit, but cannot go beyond it. Indeed, Ghazālī 's critique of Carrel is simply that he seeks to know what cannot be fully understood by humans.[94] In contrast, although Carrel and Rhine acknowledge the limits of science in its current state, they remain hopeful that it may one day fully explain supernatural phenomena. These differences aside, Ghazālī thinks of Carrel and Rhine as fellow travelers who, like him, reject "materialist logic," seeing humans as greater than a mere "handful of dirt."[95] After citing a long passage from Rhine's text, Ghazālī notes that through his experiments this scholar of parapsychology (*'ilm al-nafs wa-mā warā'uhu*) has demonstrated that "the human is a dualistic being, material and spiritual."[96]

But the testimony of Rhine and Carrel also raised certain theological questions for Ghazālī, which he discusses at length in a chapter titled, "Wondrous Occurrences (*khawāriq al-'ādāt*): Their

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[91] Ibid., 77.

[92] Ibid., 84-86.

[93] Ibid., 110-112.

[94] Ibid., 93-94.

[95] Ibid., 87.

[96] Ibid., 92.

Meaning and Indicators."[97] I pay close attention to these theological questions, as well as others posed by accounts of channeled spirits, in order to highlight the logics animating Ghazālī's engagement with spiritualism. Although theological matters are often neglected and overlooked within scholarly accounts on modern Islamic thought,[98] they are significant because they give shape to a way of being in the world, and understanding its functioning, that transcend the limits of modernist reason, and thereby challenge the claim that twentieth century Muslim reformers have been animated by a desire to rationalize Islamic teachings.[99] Furthermore, I focus on the theological underpinnings of his engagement with his Western interlocutors' work because it is through his deployment of certain Islamic theological concepts that he makes sense of their work, and, more importantly, corrects and builds upon it.

Properly speaking, writes Ghazālī, the Islamic scholarly tradition uses the term "extraordinary occurrences" to describe two types of phenomena. The first are miracles proper (*mu'ajizāt*), which God bestows to His Prophets to assist them with accomplishing their missions. The second are simply extraordinary occurrences. While Ghazālī gives the former a clear definition, he leaves the latter vague. This lack of a clear definition for the latter is somewhat in keeping the Islamic scholarly tradition because, as we will see presently, there exists much controversy and debate

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[97] The Arabic term, "*khawāriq al-'ādāt*," which I translate here as "wondrous occurrences," literally means "occurrences that exceed the customary."

[98] See, for instance, Daniel Lav's *Radical Islam and the Revival of Medieval Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), which argues that the theological aspects "Islamist" writings are particularly marginalized by scholars of modern Islam, who are generally far more interested in the political content of these writings, even though the political and the theological are often intensely intertwined in such writings.

[99] Smith and Haddad, for instance, have argued that within the writings of modern Muslim reformers references to the Afterlife have become increasingly terse because modern Muslim reformers have, since the nineteenth century, been more eager to respond to the challenges of rationalist ideologies and Western imperialism, and have thus dedicated more effort to elaborating the worldly significance of Islam, 99-101. The logics informing Ghazālī's engagement with spiritualism, however, suggest that the rational and the worldly are less hegemonic in modern Islamic thought that Smith and Haddad suppose.

over what exactly constitutes a "wondrous occurrence" and over the status of people who create such occurrences.

According to Ghazālī, they occur to "the pious and impious, and ordinary people."[100] The gist of what Ghazālī means by extraordinary occurrences can be gleaned from his commentary on Rhine and Carrel's works. Ghazālī cites for his readers two lengthy passages from their texts. In the first, Rhine relates several anecdotes about acquaintances who have experienced unexplainable events, such as clairvoyant dreams, visions (*ru'yā*), premonitions (*indhārāt*), and intuitions (*ilhām*), adding that while such stories are valuable, the phenomena they report must be subject to rigorous controlled experimental study.[101] This is, of course, the purpose of Rhine's book, which records in detail his experimental studies of these supernatural human potentials. After praising Rhine for his commitment to subjecting such phenomena to experimental study, Ghazālī cites a passage from Carrel's text. The passage is excerpted from the latter's discussion about how mental states, spiritual activities, and emotions can affect the human body and the broader material world. Of particular importance for Carrel, and by extension Ghazālī, is the seemingly miraculous effects of prayer. In this passage Carrel weaves his knowledge of physiology, biology, and anatomy together with the stories of mystics and saints, and his own witnessing of bodily healing achieved by prayer at a Marion apparition cite in Lourdes.[102] Carrel describes cases of healing caused by prayer as miraculous and concludes that the effects of prayer "prove the clear importance of this spiritual activity, which has been almost completely ignored by hygienists, physicians, educators, and sociologists."[103]

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[100] Ghazālī, 333.

[101] Ḥalwajī, 53-55; Rhine, 51-53; Ghazālī, 326-329.

[102] Farīd, 178-182; Carrel, 147-150; Ghazālī, 329-333.

[103] Farīd, 182; Carrel, 150; Ghazālī, 333.

Ghazālī clearly understands the phenomena reported by Rhine and Carrel as of the type of extraordinary occurrences that the Islamic scholarly tradition has dealt with. He includes within this category non-miraculous events reported by the Qur'ān such as clairvoyant visions, as well as contemporary accounts of the seemingly supernatural powers of Sufi shaykhs. He thus links the extraordinary occurrences reported by Rhine and Carrel to others reported by revelation and by contemporary Egyptians. On Rhine's text, for instance, Ghazālī writes that "it contains scientific experimental studies in extraordinary psychic phenomena [*al-ẓawāhir al-nafsīya al-khāriqa*] like thought transference, clairvoyance, precognition, the ability of the mind to exploit matter, the existence of the spirit, etc. The book is a pioneering scientific attempt to investigate aspects of extraordinary occurrences *that have been discussed at length among the religious*."[104] Ghazālī somewhat incredulously observes that materialists will undoubtedly reject Rhine's findings, even though his studies proceed by the scientific method. Ghazālī adds that he himself was not quite convinced by Rhine's work until he read Carrel's text some years later, which likewise contains a wealth of scientific study related to unseen human powers, including telepathy.[105] "Both authors," he concludes, "see in the human a mysterious power with which he or she can at times perceive things that are impossible to perceive with the ordinary senses and familiar ways."[106] It is clear, therefore, that Ghazālī accepts that extraordinary phenomena occur frequently, and that they have Islamic precedents, as well as relevance to events reported by contemporary Egyptians. His primary concern in this chapter is thus to give these extraordinary occurrences their proper Islamic accounting.

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[104] Emphasis added. Ghazālī, 320.

[105] Ibid., 323-324.

[106] Ibid., 326

Within the Islamic scholarly tradition wondrous occurrences were perhaps most extensively discussed and debated in the context of Sufism. For Sufis, their supporters, and detractors one issue of debate was the status of the reported "marvels" (*karāmāt*) of Sufi shaykhs and saints. These marvels included those of an "epistemological" nature, such as clairvoyance, the ability to read others' thoughts, and foreknowledge of events that have yet to pass. Other marvels included what Renard describes as "power miracles," such as the ability control and manipulate wild animals, *jinn*, and natural forces, as well as the power to heal.[107] For Sufis and their supporters, the ability of their saints and shaykhs to produce such marvels was evidence of divine favor and of the divine working through them.[108] As indicators of God's grace and will, such wondrous occurrences were wrapped up in a range of theological concerns. According to the Andalusian Sufi scholar Ibn 'Arabī, for instance, if one denied a saint's marvels one would not obtain salvation in the Hereafter.[109] For many others, however, the main theological concern was belief in prophetic miracles. Summarizing one systematic attempt to deal with these matters, John Renard writes, "People who refuse to accept the Prophetic message are to be considered unbelievers, whereas those who dismiss saintly communications merely miss out on the benefits of the Friend's blessing and spiritual authority."[110]

But, it would seem, to assent to the existence of someone who could exhibits such "'custom-shattering' acts" (Renard's more literal translation of the Arabic term, *khawāriq al-'ādāt*) could also be a threat to one's otherworldly wellbeing if the alleged marvel worker was a pretender,

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[107] John Renard, *Friends of God: Islamic Images of Piety, Commitment, and Servanthood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 92-93.

[108] Ibid., 95

[109] Ibid., 96-97.

[110] Ibid, 261.

charlatan, or magician. Indeed, one theme in the literature taking up such custom-shattering acts is the idea that God may allow his enemies to display such powers, for it would lead to increase arrogance on their part and their eventual downfall.[111] There thus emerged a tradition on how to ascertain whether or not someone who produced marvels was God-favored or a simply charlatan, a central component of which was idea that if this marvel worker was genuine their deeds would inevitably support the mission of God's prophets and not contradict it.[112] Although Renard's account focuses specifically on the wonder workings of Sufi saints and shaykhs, other form of Islamic literature describe such phenomena, including the Qur'ān and Sunna,[113] and other literatures recounting the virtues and marvelous powers of the Prophet Muhammad's Companions.[114]

Ghazālī's assertion that Rhine and Carrel's accounts deal with events that religious folks have discussed thus certainly has some basis in accounts of, and debates over, wondrous occurrences and Sufi marvels. As we will see presently, the way in which Ghazālī discusses these and some of the positions he stakes out resonates strongly with how they were discussed within the Islamic scholarly tradition. For his part, Ghazālī, begins with what seems to be a familiar modernist concern with whether the acceptance of wondrous occurrences is reasonable or superstitious. He notes that as a youth he was inclined to disbelieve that they occurred because that would seem to contradict the idea that the universe abides by a natural order. He also describes his displeasure at the willingness of the "superstitious" to accept as true everything they hear.[115] Yet, he quickly

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[111] Ibid., 270 and 273-274.

[112] Ibid., 272.

[113] Ibid., 273.

[114] Ibid., 112-113.

[115] Ghazālī, *Rakā'iz*, 317.

adds, that as a believer, there are certain things he must accept, implying he is not willing to reject all that does not stand up to the seemingly ordered, rational functioning of the universe. Included within the category of things believers must accept are miracles and extraordinary phenomena reported by revelation. Do such phenomena abide by laws yet to be discovered by science? Some of the learned believe this is so, says Ghazālī, but for him it is clear that God, as the creator of the universe, does as He will. The miracles and extraordinary phenomena reported by revelation are without a doubt God willed "deviations from the general rules that organize the affairs of creation."[116] This much is clear with regard to revelation, he says. But what about contemporary accounts of extraordinary phenomena, such as those reported by Rhine, Carrel, and numerous Egyptians, he asks?

He writes that while exceptions to the principles governing the universe exist, they should not be taken as rules, as some Egyptians do. To do so, asserts Ghazālī, would be to offend science and religion. At the same time, however, although he wishes not to make rules out of exceptions, Ghazālī clearly believes that extraordinary events of the type described by revelation occur frequently in contemporary Egypt and across the globe. His concern thus quickly moves from whether accepting the existence of such phenomena is rational or superstitious to assessing their theological implications. The sheer frequency of such events, as well as the fact that they occur to the pious, the impious, and ordinary people, means for Ghazālī, that they do not serve as indicators of one's status vis-à-vis God. As he later makes clear, his point here is related to a theological dispute he has with certain unnamed Sufis, who erroneously believe that the extraordinary occurrences that occur to Sufi shaykhs are indicators of their exalted status in God's eyes. More gravely, he adds, misguided Sufis further confuse matters when they begin to direct their

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[116] Ibid., 319.

veneration and prayers to Sufi shaykhs as opposed to God alone. According to Ghazālī, these Sufis think that if God has bestowed remarkable powers upon a certain Sufi shaykh, then that shaykh must also be capable of interceding with God on a believer's behalf. They mistakenly think that they should, therefore, direct their prayers to the shaykh and beseech him to intercede with God on their behalf. For Ghazālī, however, such ideas constitute violations of God's unity, and therefore are not "Islamic." He does not dispute that certain shayhks might possess remarkable powers, and, in fact, accepts that this could be the case. He only rejects that Muslims should seek out particular shaykhs for their alleged intercessory powers. He thus rejects particular Sufi claims not because they contradict reason or the natural order of the universe, but because they violate God's unity.[117]

How could it be, though, that people might possess such remarkable powers as those attributed to Sufi shaykhs? Ghazālī provides two less decisive answers, the first of which he derived, at least in part, from his reading of Rhine and Carrel's text. He writes, "Perhaps," people who possess remarkable abilities like clairvoyance are capable of "developing their spiritual capacities" through "practice and training."[118] Indeed, "the spiritual being" of some individuals may resemble "the material being" of others in its capacity to be trained and developed.[119] Absent an exhaustive reading of the Islamic scholarly tradition, Ghazālī's assertion here seems to be an interesting innovation in the way such matters have traditionally been discussed. Ghazālī also adds later that ultimately nothing in the universe occurs other than through God's will. The widespread reports of the occurrence of extraordinary phenomena might indeed be true, though they certainly have no relationship to one's status vis-a-vis God. After making this assertion, he writes, "while we respect

[117] Ibid., 337-338.

[118] Ibid., 334

[119] Ibid.

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absolutely the laws of cause and effect, we know that there is no cause that reaches its end other than through the permission of God…"[120] Thus, while humans may possess the capacity to develop extraordinary powers, the realization of such powers ultimately depends upon God's will; and though they may be dependent upon God's will, they are definitely not indicators of His favor.

As we have seen thus far, Ghazālī's reading of Rhine and Carrel's accounts of extraordinary phenomena raised theological questions for him related to how to account for the frequent, global reports on such phenomena, as well as helped him settle a dispute with certain Sufis over intercession. In the following chapter of Ghazālī's text, he offers his own take on conjured spirits and other "claims of modern spiritualism." In it he discusses at length the words of Silver Birch and another conjured spirit, and thus the chapter appears to be responding directly to Rāḍī's work. Though Ghazālī disputes the identity of these conjured spirits, he accepts the reality of their existence. He uses their words as recorded in a text translated into Arabic by Rāḍī and as reported by the latter's journal, *The World of the Spirit*, to decipher their intentions and give them a proper Islamic theological accounting. Like much else in his writings, Ghazālī thus approaches the issue of conjured spirits as a theologian and grounds his views on this matter in truths revealed by the Qur'ān and Sunna.

He begins by observing that some religious folks are of a naïve nature and become excessive in their belief in the Unseen. By excessive here Ghazālī means that the things they think they know about the Unseen go beyond what the Qur'ān and the Sunna have revealed. Perhaps referring to the work of Jawharī, Wajdī, and Rāḍī, he also adds that some well-intentioned believers have even sought to achieve a victory for God by using the accounts of channeled spirits to confirm Islamic

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[120] Ibid., 339.

truths.[121] The chapter is thus in part a warning to those who go too far in seeking to know the Unseen, such as Egyptian spiritualists, and in part an admonition to those who neglect the reality of the spirit, the Afterlife, and the otherworldly accounting. Ghazālī asks rhetorically, can the spirits of dead residing in *barzakh*—the intermediate space between life and death in which spirits reside awaiting resurrection—come back to the world of the living and, as the proponents of spiritualism claim, provide guidance and admonition to the living? And, perhaps in response to Rāḍī's work, can sprits come back to the world of the living and perform medical healing, he asks?[122] Ghazālī's concern here revolves around two theological issues raised by the accounts of Egyptian spiritualists. The first is whether or not the spirits of the dead can come back from the *barzakh* and inhabit the world of the living; and second is whether or not, once in the world of the living, such spirits can perform good deeds and thereby obtain God's pleasure and atone for past sins. By performing such "social services" for the living, for instance, can the dead add to their account of good deeds?[123] On this question, Ghazālī asserts that the Qur'ān and the Sunna make it unequivocally clear that the answer is no. While both affirm that humans possess sprits that survive bodily death and that the Hereafter truly exists, they also affirm that this-worldly life, no matter how short it may be, is the only realm in which believers can achieve piety and perform good deeds.[124] Ghazālī cautions his readers neither to become excessive in their interest in the Unseen nor become deluded by the world of the seen. They should instead accept that which is made known by the Qur'ān and Sunna, and diligently prepare themselves for the otherworldly

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[121] Ibid., 343.

[122] Ibid., 344.

[123] Ibid., 345.

[124] Ibid., 345-346.

accounting, knowing full well that their time in the world of the living is their only opportunity to perform good deeds.[125]

If the Qur'ān and Sunna not only make the reality of the otherworldly accounting clear, as well as assure humans that they can only perform good deeds while they are alive, why do some claim that the spirits of the dead can come back to offer good services, Ghazālī asks? For him, the answer to this question revolves around the true identities of these spirit world beings. Ghazālī argues that such allegedly channeled spirits are, in fact, neither the spirits of the wicked nor the pious, but rather *jinn* who perpetually seek to manipulate and take advantage of humans.[126] His argument here was undoubtedly informed by the works of the early pioneers of the study of spiritualism in Arabic, including Rāḍī, who held that it was perfectly possible that some channeled spirits were *jinn*. But Ghazālī, as we will see, also adds his own unique interpretation. He notes that a number of spiritualist societies have been established in Egypt with the aim of channeling the spirits of the dead and spreading their teachings. Ghazālī cites at length for his readers passages from a text translated into Arabic by Rāḍī recording Silver Birch's words, as well as the words of another channeled spirit recorded in *World of the Spirit* in order to ascertain the intentions and aims of these spirit world beings. In the passages Ghazālī cites both of the channeled spirits describe spiritualism as revealing "a new religion" to humankind, one which will dissolve the artificial barriers between peoples of different nations and religions by unifying them around "one truth."[127] According to these spirit world beings, the rites and rituals of various religions are merely human perversions and fabrications, which serve only to act as barriers to a unity of religions.[128] The

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[125] Ibid., 346.

[126] Ibid., 351.

[127] Ibid., 353.

[128] Ibid.

stories of Adam and Eve are only myths.[129] Says Silver Birch, "There is no golden heaven nor fiery hell; this is only the conception of those with limited views. Do not tie yourselves to one book, one teacher or one guide. Our loyalty is not to a book or religion or creed, but to the Great Spirit alone."[130]

As Muslims understand Islam to be the last of God's revelations, the fact that these spirit world messengers claim to be revealing a religion superior to those already established is, for Ghazālī, incontrovertible proof that these spirits are not spirits of the dead. He thus likens Silver Birch and other channeled "spirits" to Musaylima, a false prophet who attempted to entice the Prophet Muḥammad to share authority with him and who battled against the early Muslim community.[131] While these spirit world interlocutors are undoubtedly messengers from the Unseen, they are not the spirits of the dead, but rather *jinn*. "We do not doubt," writes Ghazālī, "that the principles of this modern spiritualism are of the nonsense attributable to the *jinn* who have taken advantage of a group of the sons of Adam, and capture them in these gatherings—gatherings of ghosts and illusions, or what are claimed to be gatherings to channel spirts—in order to dictate to them this reprehensible speech."[132] Perhaps these *jinn* follow the command of Satan, who delights when seducing believers.[133] Ghazālī goes on to warn his readers that the *jinn* do indeed possess powers that far surpass those of humans and vast capacities for deception. Nevertheless, he adds, while the *jinn* and Satan possess remarkable powers and some knowledge of things of which humans are

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[129] Ibid., 354.

[130] Cited in Ghazālī, 356.

[131] Ibid., 352, 354. For more on Musaylima see, *Encyclopedia of Islam* 2ⁿ ed., s.v. "Musaylima."

[132] Ibid., 358.

[133] Ibid., 359.

ignorant, this knowledge is limited and might be incorrect. "It is certainly not," however, "knowledge of the Unseen."[134]

As we have seen thus far in this section, Ghazālī, together with his Egyptian predecessors and contemporary interlocutors, inhabits a world in which humans possess remarkable, mysterious powers, and in which they frequently interact with unseen spirit beings, who impart to them forms of ethical knowledge, some of which may be helpful or harmful. The world of Unseen in modern Islamic thought is, in other words, a world not circumscribed by the limits of modernist reason. I highlighted the theological concerns informing Ghazālī's critique of conjured spirits and the knowledge they impart in order to posit an often-neglected distinction between modernist critiques of suspect forms of knowledge, like spiritualism, and critiques of such forms of knowledge that rest upon metaphysical claims. Ghazālī, as we saw, contested the accounts of channeled spirits not because the existence of spirit world beings contradicted scientific, rational understandings of the universe, but because their existence and the knowledge they imparted contradicted what he saw as Islamic theological truths. Ghazālī, as we also saw, accepted the existence of his unseen interlocutors, but only disputed their identities. I have thus tried to present a more robust account of modern Islamic reform in mid-twentieth century Egypt, one that does not privilege "absence" by treating debates among modern Muslim reformers as merely effects of broader social phenomena, such as, for instance, the fragmentation of, and contest over, religious authority in Islam.[135] Furthermore, as we have also seen, the existence of certain Islamic theological concepts,

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[134] Ibid., 359-360.

[135] This argument, articulated most succinctly by Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori in *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), is deployed extensively within scholarship on Islamic Reform. See, for instance, Emilio Spadola, *Calls of Islam: Sufis, Islamists, and Mass Mediation in Urban Morocco* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014). While providing a powerful narrative on the contest for leadership among twentieth century Muslim activists and intellectuals, it often leads to accounts on Islamic reform that exclude the presence and agency of the Unseen. By this I mean that Muslim reformist encounters with, and debates over, the Unseen are

such as *jinn*, miracles (*al-mu'ajizāt*) and wondrous occurrences (*khawāriq al-'ādāt*) allowed Ghazālī to make sense of his Western interlocutors' work, as well as correct that work and build upon it.

The Powers of Prayer

In a text Ghazālī published in the early 1980s he returns to matters pertaining to the Unseen, including a range of seemingly supernatural phenomena achieved by prayer and incantation. The text was a manual on prayer and was the first Ghazālī published after roughly ten years of vibrant Islamic activism in Egypt—a phenomenon that scholars commonly refer to as the Islamic Revival. As is the common practice for Islamic prayer manuals, it is a collection of the recorded supplications of the Prophet Muḥammad.[136] The mechanisms by which prayer and incantation work to procure forms of worldly wellbeing are said to be related to the Unseen and beyond human reason to comprehend. Ghazālī's prayer manual is thus significant for my purposes in this chapter because it provides another avenue for considering Muslim reformist understandings of the Unseen. Like his commentaries on Euro-American spiritualism and psychical research, his account here presupposes a world inhabited by various invisible interlocutors, one in which humans must beseech divine protection from harmful forces.

This is made particularly clear in Ghazālī's discussion of *ruqya*, or incantations, which he describes as words believers recite at certain times of the day to invoke divine protection, or words they recite when they are in pain or troubling circumstances so that God might protect and relieve

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treated simply as manifestations of a contest over worldly authority among Muslim reformers and are thus drained of their otherworldly stakes and unseen interlocutors.

[136] For general introductions to Muslim conceptions of prayer, see Marion Holmes Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Constance E. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions: A Study of Prayer Manuals in Common Use* (London: S.P.C.K., 1961).

them.[137] He relates for his readers a particularly common form of incantation which invokes the protective properties of certain Qur'ānic verses. Ghazālī describes for his readers how upon going to bed, the Prophet Muḥammad would recite certain Qur'ānic verses, including the *mu'awwidhatān*, or the two Qur'ānic verses of refuge (sūras 113 and 114) , over his outstretched palms, dry spit, or blow, into them, and then rub his palms over his body as a means of procuring God's protection.[138] When recited these two verses of refuge allow believers to take refuge in God from evil, Satan's whispers, *jinn*, other humans, and the envious. Historically, these and other forms of "refugee taking" were "enjoined for those occasions or actions which are most exposed to demonic assault…execrated by evil powers."[139] Ghazālī encourages his readers to practice this type of *ruqya*, as well as others that are simply supplicatory prayers or the repetition of certain phrases for a particular number of times.[140] Like the *ruqya* Ghazālī describes here, these and other "paraliturgical" usages of the Qur'ān, including talismans and amulets, are deployed by believers in a range of Muslim societies for "protection from disease, accident, or conscious malefic intention; protection and blessing of interior and exterior physical space (especially the domicile or place of business); success in defensive as well as aggressive warfare; material wellbeing and accrual of wealth; fertility (human, animal, and agricultural); individual, familial, and communal welfare, particularly that of children; and knowledge of the meaning and outcome of specific events or the destiny of a given life within the unfolding of sacred history."[141]

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[137] For an account of *ruqya* practiced as a form of exorcism, see Spadola.

[138] Padwick, 83-93.

[139] Ibid., 86-87.

[140] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Fann al-dhikr wa-al-du'ā' 'inda khātam al-anbiyā'* (*The Art of Prayer According to the Seal of the Prophets*) (Cairo: Dār al-I'tiṣām, 1980), 93-95.

[141] Kathleen Malone O'Connor. "Popular and Talismanic Uses of the Qur'ān," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill).

During his discussion of *ruqya* and supplicatory prayers, Ghazālī offers explanations of some elements of their effectivity, though he acknowledges that the precise mechanisms of their effectivity are ultimately matters pertaining to Unseen and unknowable to humans. In a chapter titled "Does Supplication Suppose Ordinary Causes?" he transmits for his readers a number of *ruqya* through which a "Muslim finds healing from the ailments that afflict him." The link of such incantations with "the world of Unseen things is clear," he writes, "since the intellect cannot understand the secret of dry spitting or the secret of the number [of repetitions] indicated."[142] Why is one person afflicted by a certain illness and not another person even though both may be infected by the same bacteria, asks Ghazālī? The truth of the matter, he says, is that behind the agency of the bacteria there is another more effective agent—i.e. God—who both facilitates or, conversely, obstructs the bacteria's power to cause illness. "Indeed, the world of the perceived is miniscule and limited when compared to the world of the Unseen. The power over the causes of illness and wellbeing are barely in our hands and mostly far from our reach."[143] Supplicatory prayers, he continues, thus serve as means for securing the intervention of the one and true Agent. He goes on to relate other Prophetic traditions in which some of Muḥammad's companions are depicted as healing people from various physical ailments by performing *ruqya* on their behalf. As there is always an element of the Unseen involved in these accounts, the successes and failures of *ruqya* cannot be generalized.[144] The lesson for believers, writes Ghazālī, is that "Not all reciters [of the Qur'ān] cure and not all readings [of the Qur'ān] provide treatment, but God has worshippers who, if they desire and beseech His grace, it descends."[145]

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[142] Ghazālī, *Fann al-dhikr wa-al-du'ā'*, 94.

[143] Ibid.

[144] Ibid., 96-97.

[145] Ibid., 96.

In her discussion of prayer in Islamic thought and practice, Marion Holmes Katz has suggested that "In a modern and secular context it may be natural to conceive of answered prayers as divine interventions in an otherwise regular natural order, as breeches in the chain of cause and effect." For premodern Muslim thinkers, on the other hand, "divine responsiveness to prayer is an integral part of the natural order and of the chain of causality…. "[146] Despite Katz's assertion, Ghazālī almost certainly holds this latter view, though he is obliged to respond to those who hold an understanding of the natural functioning of the universe that excludes divine agency. In the current text, as we will see, Ghazālī is called upon to explain how *ruqya* and other instances of the transcendent breaking into time might relate with a scientific understanding of the universe.[147]

This is most apparent in his discussion of supplications for rain (*istisqā'*)—a topic he sees as related with supplications for need (*ḥāja*) and guidance (*istikhāra*). He discusses these matters in a chapter dealing with supplications for travel and journeys because, like praying for rain, the fulfillment of needs, and guidance, they are examples of the human need for assistance from the Unseen. If embarking upon a journey one should, like the Prophet Muḥammad, take refuge in God's perfect words (i.e. the Qur'ān) as protection from evils that may arise along the way. Indeed, God grants his protection and munificence to those who call and implore Him, says Ghazālī.[148] From here he turns to a report relaying a supplication for rain said by the Prophet Muḥammad which resulted in a downpour. After relating this prayer, Ghazālī goes on to discuss how this event might relate with a scientific understanding of the universe through an anecdote. He recalls being asked by a youth whether one knows God through "rational proofs" (*dalīl ʿaqlī*). To this Ghazālī

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[146] Katz, 43.

[147] On modern Islamic reformist attempts to explain the effectiveness of *ruqya* see, Yusuf Muslim Eneborg, "The Quest for 'Disenchantment' and the Modernization of Magic," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 25, no. 4 (2014).

[148] Ghazālī, *Fann al-dhikr wa-al-duʿāʾ*, 67-72.

responded that one can know God from "felt experience" (*khibra ḥissīya*), implying that one does not need to know God rationally to accept His existence. Elaborating, Ghazālī observes that he personally has made numerous requests to God that only He was capable of answering, and that God fulfilled his requests. How could he not know God after that, asks Ghazālī?[149] But this "deluded youth" persisted and asserted that he had learned in school that matter is neither created nor ceasing, suggesting, of course, that the divine has no agency in the natural world. Ghazālī attributes this youth's view, which ascribes to matter all causal powers, to the pervasive materialism (*al-māddīya*) of the era. However, says Ghazālī, what is astonishing is not that people feign ignorance of God, but that they attribute their denying of His agency to "science" and "progress."[150] Willfully refusing to perceive God's deed in the universe is, in fact, an ancient human flaw. The difference between a believer and unbeliever is that the former perceives God's hand in all phenomena, while the latter refuses to acknowledge "the divinity behind what we behold of causes" and instead attributes causal powers to things lower than Him.[151]

Thus, according to Ghazālī, the natural order of the universe is such that Unseen forces regularly intervene into and shape human lives. Divine responsiveness to supplicatory prayers, whether for protection while travelling, for various needs, for guidance in pressing dilemmas, and, of course, for rain, is part of this order. It would appear that the universe is structured in this way so that humans might, as Ghazālī writes, develop greater belief in God by beseeching and receiving His aid. In fact, "Prayer for rain, to fulfill needs, and for guidance are prescribed for this reason." Ghazālī relates his own experiences in the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia personally witnessing rain produced by prayer. He writes, "I have seen people in Mecca, if rain is tardy, they

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[149] Ibid., 73-74.

[150] Ibid., 74-75.

[151] Ibid., 75-76.

hasten to prayer [*al-ṣalah*], calling out requesting aid from the heavens, and it is only a matter of days before a downpour descends." Concluding this chapter, he laments that if only people who lived in draught prone areas truly knew God they might also end their draughts by beseeching His grace.[152]

Much like Ghazālī's commentaries on Euro-American spiritualism and psychical research his discussion of prayer and incantation highlights his deep interest in the Unseen. As we have seen, the mechanisms by which prayer and incantation work to procure worldly wellbeing for believers are beyond human powers of comprehension. Together with his writings on seemingly supernatural phenomena, Ghazālī's descriptions of the powers of prayer and incantation help give shape to a world in which humans regularly interact with Unseen forces.

Conclusion

Much of the historiography on nineteenth and twentieth century Egypt has focused on tracing the rise of a modern rationalizing order there. As such, far less scholarly attention had been afforded to trends in modern Islamic reform that do not fit neatly within the rationalizing logics of the state and the social sciences. To chart a history of modern Islamic reform that includes logics that both overlap with and transcend the limits of modernist reason, I have explored aspects of the Unseen in the writing of Egyptian Muslim reformers. As we saw with their readings of Euro-American spiritualism and psychical research, Egyptian Muslim reformers staked out a range of positions regarding the epistemological value of the work of their Euro-American interlocutors. They not only borrowed from this work, but also drew upon theological truths made known by revelation and other Islamic literatures to challenge, correct, and corroborate the of their Euro-American interlocutors. The "science" these Muslim reformers engaged was particularly ideal for

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[152] Ibid., 76.

their efforts because it did not presume a world of "absence," but rather presumed a world full of various Unseen spirit world beings.

Throughout this chapter I also highlighted the way Egyptian Muslim reformers interacted with the Unseen and attributed to it historical agency and explanatory power in their own lives, as well as human history. By doing so, it considered the problem of "presence" within Islamic Reform and thereby followed Orsi's challenge to go beyond the social scientific accounts of religion. Indeed, to chart a history of the Unseen in modern Islamic thought, I argue, is to treat the Unseen as historical agent, and not as a mere effect of social phenomena.

Conclusion

Like his eleventh century namesake, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), "the proof of Islam," who is considered a great synthesizer of various ethical traditions,[1] Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917-1996) can also rightly be described as an influential synthesizer. His writings synthesized together Islamic philosophical ethics, Sufism, Islamic theological concepts, American self-help and psychical research, Qur'ānic verses and Prophetic traditions, while at the same time attending to the pressing political and social dilemmas in colonial and postcolonial Egypt. Ghazālī's mid-twentieth century political and social critiques, as we have seen, were very much indebted to theories, concepts, and metaphors derived from Islamic philosophical and Sufi ethics, as well as sensibilities and attitudes derived from Sufism, more generally. As we have also seen, the points of distinction between his writings informed by Islamic philosophical ethics and those informed by Sufism pertained to the respective places of human agency and divine agency in the cultivation of virtue, as well as the relative value of material life. Whereas the former set of writings depict the human agent as effectively realizing virtue, and matter and material life as highly significant, the latter depict the divine as effectively bestowing virtue, and matter and material life as relatively insignificant. The seeming disjunction between these two visions of ethics derives not from any contradiction in Ghazālī's thinking, but rather from his concern with the context in which his writings would be received. The former were written during a period of revolutionary fervor and political instability, while the latter were written during an era of "high modernism" and intended as political critiques of the ruling regime's alleged materialism.

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[1] See, for instance, Majid Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), who describes Abū Ḥāmid quite simply as "The Synthesis." "We have in al-Ghazālī," he writes, "both speculative and practical, the most articulate synthesis of the fundamental currents in Islamic thought, the philosophical, the religious, and the mystical," 193.

Although his relationship with Sufism and Sufi ethics was more explicit in his writings, the place of Islamic philosophical ethics within those writings had to be teased out through interpretive analysis. Despite that, the place of Islamic philosophical ethics in his writings was noteworthy. Indeed, whether or not mainstream eminent Muslim reformers, like Ghazālī and his colleague, Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1926), explicitly cite the philosophers, Muslim and otherwise, the latter's views pervade their modern-day writings, from their discussions of the relationship between wealth and virtue and bodily deeds and character refinement, to their discussions of the functions of the prescribed forms of worship and the organic link perceived between individual ethical self-cultivation and collective and worldly wellbeing. When read alongside the tradition of Islamic philosophical ethics, its significant influence on their writings is readily apparent. The Muslim reformist debt to the Islamic philosophical tradition in ethics and politics, as well as Sufi attitudes, sensibilities, and ethics, however, has to a large extent been obscured by scholarly insistence to treat as the mainstays of modern Islamic political thought a narrow set of ideas and concepts that can be readily traced to the Qur'ān, the Sunna, *fiqh* manuals, and various fragments of Euro-American social scientific discourses. The inclination among scholars of contemporary Islamic political thought to treat as "Islamic" only that which can be derived from the Qur'ān and Sunna is both reflective of the assertions of modern Muslim reformers themselves and, as Shahab Ahmed has argued, reflective of tendencies within the broader academic study of Islam to treat the Islamic legal discourses as having normative primacy.[2]

Beyond Sufism and the Islamic philosophical tradition, a significant body of Ghazālī's writings were dedicated to exploring various epistemological encounters between Islamic forms of

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[2] Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 117. See more generally, 113-175.

knowledge and Euro-American popular sciences. Ethics, however, remained central to these writings as well. What are the respective places of human reason and experience, and revelation in making known ethical truths and in revealing knowledge about the functioning and nature of the universe, God's power, and His material and immaterial (viz. the human spirit and *jinn*) creations? Much like the medieval Muslim theologian and jurist, Ibn Taymīya (d. 1328), Ghazālī held that human nature (*fiṭra*) was such that humans could indeed arrive at certain ethical and natural truths without the assistance of revelation. In Ghazālī's writings, revelation often corroborated these human discovered ethical and natural truths and, in certain matters, revelation ultimately circumscribed the human ability to discover such truths. Throughout I have highlighted the very significant role played by Islamic theological concepts, such as *fiṭra*, *jinn*, the human spirit (*al-rūḥ*), miracles (*al-muʿajizāt*) and wondrous occurrences (*khawāriq al-ʿādāt*), as well as practices derived from revelation, such as incantations (*al-ruqya*) and supplicatory prayer (*al-duʿāʾ*), in facilitating these broader epistemological encounters. Ghazālī, as we saw, utilized these concepts and practices to not only make sense of his Euro-American interlocutors claims, but also to correct, redirect, and build upon their work. I focused on the corrective impulse behind Ghazālī's engagement with his Euro-American interlocutors' work not to reify "Islam" and the "West" in mutual hostility, but rather to show how Ghazālī and other Muslim reformers were *contributors* to an international project of rethinking the human and the human potential, and not simply assimilators or translators of a project elaborated elsewhere. Once Ghazālī and his Egyptian colleagues are reconceived as contributors, it is possible to see how they thought of themselves as equals in a shared project with their Euro-American interlocutors. They thought of themselves as equals in the sense that they brought with them a body of truths that was equal or greater in epistemological value than those marshalled by Western men and women of science. To do this, I

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argued that Muslim reformist engagements with Western "science" should be read in a way that considers seriously the theological stakes of these epistemological encounters and locates the theological concepts that made them possible.

Ghazālī, as we saw, was just one of a larger number of prominent Egyptian scholars and reformers interested in popular international intellectual trends and Islamic scholarly traditions. But unlike many of these scholars and reformers, with the exception of course, of Qaraḍāwī, Ghazālī was a widely read, popularly orientated writer with a large public following. This was especially the case given his status as a one-time leading intellectual in Egypt's most influential mass Islamic social movement, the Society of the Muslim Brothers. On a practical level, it appears that his break with the Society's early 1950s leadership made possible his long and flourishing career in that it allowed him to avoid the prisons and gallows of the Egyptian state under Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir (r. 1954-1970) and 'Abd al-Nāṣir's successors. Ghazālī's writings, published during the twenty or so years prior to Egypt's 1970s Islamic Revival, which has since remade the country's social and political landscape, were unquestionably fodder for that revival. Indeed, as the brilliant work of Saba Mahmood and Charles Hirschkind has shown, forms of ethical self-cultivation were certainly at the fore during the Islamic Revival.[3] Furthermore, as we have also seen, Ghazālī dedicated great effort to explicating the ethics of the encounter with the Unseen (*al-ghayb*). And in that, we might see his writings as also presaging some of ways in which encounters with the Unseen were interpreted and understood during later decades, as explored by Amira Mittermaier in her account of Islamic dream interpretation in contemporary Egypt.[4] Though

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[3] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). See also, Ellen McLarney, *Soft Force: Women in Egypt's Islamic Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 103-142.

[4] Amira Mittermaier, *Dreams that Matter: Egyptian Landscapes of the Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). See also, Mittermaier, "Trading with God: Islam, Calculation, Excess," in *A Companion to*

Ghazālī continued to write until his death in 1996, I have focused on his earlier writings infused with Islamic philosophical ethics and Sufism because they have largely been neglected in the secondary literature, just as his very considerable interest in the Unseen, American self-help, psychical research, and spiritualism has been neglected in that literature. Additionally, given the important place of ethics in contemporary Egyptian Islamic activism it seems to me that these early writings constituted important sources for some of the ideas that gave shape to the Islamic Revival.

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