



## Abu Hamid al-Ghazali in Our Times: How al-Ghazali is Interpreted and Transmitted in the Contemporary Turkish Context

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### **Abstrak**

Apakah Abu Hamid al-Ghazali berkontribusi pada kemunduran tradisi rasionalis dan ilmiah di dunia Muslim adalah perdebatan besar dalam studi Islam. Namun, literatur tentang pertanyaan ini hanya berusaha untuk membangun perdebatan historis. Meskipun al-Ghazali meninggal pada tahun 1111, pendapatnya masih mempengaruhi umat Islam saat ini. Jadi penelitian ini, berkontribusi melampaui perdebatan historis tersebut, mempelajari bagaimana al-Ghazali ditafsirkan di Turki kontemporer, dan apa yang diungkapkan oleh penafsiran mereka tentang pendekatan terhadap hukum alam, pengetahuan dan filsafat (pada dasarnya, studi tentang kejernihan konseptual dan prosedur yang valid dalam berpikir). Ketiga disiplin ilmu ini dipilih karena al-Ghazali dituduh berkontribusi terhadap kemunduran tradisi ilmiah di dunia Islam karena kritiknya terhadap filsafat, pandangannya tentang kausalitas, dan penggabungan pengetahuan batin ke dalam Sunnisme. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan seperti: "Apakah karya-karya al-Ghazali dirujuk saat ini untuk membenarkan sikap permusuhan terhadap filsafat?" Untuk mencapai tujuan ini, penelitian ini mempelajari bagaimana al-Ghazali ditafsirkan oleh dua gerakan sosial Islam di Turki: *İşıkçılar* dan *Erenköy*. Dengan mempelajari kasus-kasus ini, penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa bagaimana al-Ghazali ditafsirkan dan disebarkan di Turki berkontribusi pada (i) sikap yang sangat skeptis terhadap hukum alam, (ii) kecurigaan yang mendalam terhadap pengetahuan rasional dan akibatnya kepercayaan terhadap pengetahuan batiniah, dan (iii) sikap yang sangat kritis terhadap filsafat.

**Kata Kunci:** *Al-Ghazali, Islam dan filsafat, Turki, Islam dan ilmu pengetahuan, İşıkçılar, Erenköy, Islam dan rasionalisme.*

### **Abstract**

Whether Abu Hamid al-Ghazali contributed to the decline of rationalist and scientific tradition in the Muslim world is a grand debate in Islamic studies.

However, the literature on this question ventures only to construct a historical debate. Though al-Ghazali died in 1111, his opinions still influence Muslims today. So this research, rather than contribute to that historical debate, studies how al-Ghazali is interpreted in contemporary Turkey, and what this interpretation reveals about approaches to natural law, knowledge and philosophy (essentially, the study of conceptual lucidity and the valid procedures of reasoning). These three disciplines are chosen because al-Ghazali is accused of contributing to the decline of the scientific tradition in the Islamic world because of his criticism of philosophy, his occasionalist view of causality, and his incorporation of inner knowledge into Sunnism. The research aims to answer questions like: 'Are al-Ghazali's works referenced today to justify a hostile stance on philosophy?' To achieve this goal, the research studies how al-Ghazali is interpreted by two Islamic social movements in Turkey: Işıkçılar and Erenköy. Studying these cases, the paper concludes that how al-Ghazali is interpreted and transmitted in Turkey contributes to (i) a highly sceptical stance on natural law, (ii) a deep suspicion of rational knowledge and the consequent belief in inner knowledge, and (iii) a highly critical stance on philosophy.

**Keywords:** *Al-Ghazali, Islam and philosophy, Turkey, Islam and science, Işıkçılar, Erenköy, Islam and rationalism.*

## Introduction

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1056-1111) is one of the most influential names in Islamic history. In 1920, Samuel M. Zwemer, in *A Moslem Seeker After God*, defined al-Ghazali as a person who has 'left a larger imprint upon the history of Islam than any man, save Mohammad himself'. What Zwemer wrote of al-Ghazali, quoting al-Suyuti (d. 1505): 'If there had been a prophet after Mohammed, it would have been Al-Ghazali,<sup>1</sup> is the oft-repeated demonstration of the latter's impact.

There are, however, contending views among the assessments of al-Ghazali's impact. For some, al-Ghazali's legacy contributed to the decline of scientific inquiry in the Muslim world. For others, such a correlation is wrong. On this account, al-Ghazali is himself the subject of a grand-debate in Islamic studies.

The goal of this paper is to shed light on the grand debate on al-Ghazali from a novel perspective, that is, in terms of how his works are interpreted and transmitted in a contemporary context. Usually, arguments on the impact of al-Ghazali are studied in the continuum of the historical trajectory of Muslim societies. Indeed, the literature on al-Ghazali is primarily a historical debate. However, given that his works still influence Muslims, how al-Ghazali

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel M. A Zwemer, *Moslem Seeker After God: Showing Islam at Its Best in the Life and Teaching of Al-Ghazali Mystic and Theologian of the Eleventh Century* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1920), 21.

is interpreted and understood contemporarily in the transmission of religious knowledge is an equally fair method of evaluating his impact on Muslims. A consideration of whether al-Ghazali's works are used today to justify among Muslims a hostile stance on philosophy is as important as the consideration of whether al-Ghazali's opinions were behind the decline of philosophy in Islamic history. Reasoning thus, this paper aims to bring the grand debate on al-Ghazali into the present time.

To achieve its goal, this paper studies how al-Ghazali is interpreted and transmitted by two Turkish Islamic groups, Işıkçılar and Erenköy, and to estimate how that affects those groups' religious views. These two Islamic groups are chosen because they provide us with the opportunity of observing how Sunni actors reference al-Ghazali in the real-life contexts that transmit religious knowledge. This approach is another expected contribution of this paper, given that the literature on al-Ghazali is in fact a collection of scholars' articulations. Differently, the level of analysis in this paper is not concerned with intellectual articulations about al-Ghazali, but with the real-life-context transmissions of al-Ghazali's part of religious knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

Below, I shall first summarise how al-Ghazali's impact is interpreted by contending intellectual perspectives – particularly, on which grounds some scholars see that impact as a historical reason that explains the weakening of the scientific and rationalist tradition in the Muslim world. The debate on al-Ghazali's impact in Islamic history is methodologically important: I use it in this paper as the reference frame for understanding which narrative best captures the impact of al-Ghazali's works in the contemporary Turkish context: Is it the one that argues that al-Ghazali's legacy has played a negative role in the weakening of the scientific and rationalist tradition in the Muslim world, or is it the one that rejects such a correlation?

Next, I shall present the paper's cases, and describe why they are explanatory cases through which we can understand the contemporary use of al-Ghazali in religious communications. After that, I shall first present the methodology that I use in studying the cases, then analyse accordingly how al-Ghazali is referenced in the transmission of religious knowledge in the contemporary Turkish context. The paper will conclude by evaluating the findings that these two cases yield.

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<sup>2</sup> There are works on Turkish scholars' interpretation of al-Ghazali. For example, Taraneh Wilkinson studied how al-Ghazali's thought are referenced in Turkish theology faculties, see Taraneh Wilkinson, "Moderation and Al-Ghazali in Turkey," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 32, no. 3 (July 2018): 29–43, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v32i3.269>. Also, for a summary of how various historicists Turkish theologians criticize al-Ghazali see, Gokhan Bacik, *Contemporary Rationalist Islam in Turkey: A Religious Opposition to Sunni Revival* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2021), 137–38, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755636778>.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. The Grand Debate on Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali was born in 1056 in Tus (today's modern Iran). After his early education in Tus, he became the disciple of al-Juwayni (d. 1085), an influential Ash'ari scholar of the time, at the Nizamiyya Madrasa in Nishapur.<sup>3</sup> Al-Ghazali was later appointed to the prestigious Nizamiyya Madrasa in Baghdad. That position put him in close contact with the Seljuqi political elite, including Sultan Malikshah and the Grand Vizier Nizam al-Mulk.<sup>4</sup> However, his close contact with rulers, and his position at the Baghdad Madrasa (madrasas are faulted for serving the Saljuqi political projects<sup>5</sup>) are deemed by some to have affected him as conduits of political influence. In 1095, he suddenly abandoned his posts for a reclusive life. After 11 years of isolation, he returned to teaching at the Nizamiyya School in Nishapur in 1106.<sup>6</sup> He died in 1111, leaving many books behind that later became classics of Islamic thought.

His legacy is so influential that it alone is believed to have been transformative of the trajectory of Islamic thought. For example, Antony Black defined al-Ghazali as a person who embarked upon 'the most radical restructuring of Islamic thought that has perhaps ever been attempted'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Eric Ormsby, *Ghazali* (London: Oneworld, 2000), 27; Antony Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 97, <https://doi.org/10.1515/978074-8647569>. The Nishapur Madrasa was founded in al-Juwayni's name, see Sibt ibn Al-Jawzi, *Mir'at Al-Zaman Fi Ta'rikh Al-a'yan* (Ankara: A. Sevim, 1968), 135.

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Garden, *The First Islamic Reviewer: Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali and His Revival of the Religious Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 18, doi:10.1093/acprof:oso-9780199989621.001.0001.

<sup>5</sup> Said Amir Arjomand, "The Law, Agency, and Policy in Medieval Islamic Society: Development of the Institutions of Learning from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Century," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 2 (April 1999): 269, doi:10.1017/S001041759900208X; Massimo Campanini, "In Defence of Sunnism: Al-Ghazali and the Seljuqs," in *The Seljuqs: Politics, Society and Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 228–39. R. Levy defined the school as 'founded officially as theological school, being recognized both by the religious leaders of Islam and by the State that provided its revenues, though by indirect means'. See, Reuben Levy, *A Baghdad Chronicle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 193–194; A. L. Tibawi, "Origin and Character of Al-Madrasah," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25, no. 2 (June 1962): 225–38, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0041977X00063709>. Ibn al-Athir (1160–1233) gave details of several cases in which Nizam al-Mulk personally appointed lecturers at the madrasa. See Ibn Al-Athir, *The Annals of the Saljuq Turks: Selections from Al-Kamil Fi'l-Ta'rikh of 'Izz Al-Din Ibn Al-Athir*, trans. D.S. Richards (New York: Routledge-Curzon, 2002), 207, 213, 247.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 24, 49, 58.

<sup>7</sup> Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought*.

However, for some, that impact was destructive, as it contributed to the decline of philosophy, and of general rationalist thought, in the Muslim world. Particularly, scholars who adhered to what is known as the Sunni Revival Thesis<sup>8</sup> have explained the legacy of al-Ghazali as another factor that caused the decline of Islamic civilization.

The semantics (systems of meaning) of the Sunni Revival Thesis, according to W. Cantwell Smith, is driven by the view that 'something has gone wrong with Islamic history'.<sup>9</sup> The things said to have gone wrong are usually the various grand changes, such as the rise of a new statehood inspired by the Sassanid tradition. (This is criticised for having weakened the trade-oriented mentality of Islamic societies.) There is also the birth of the Sunni orthodoxy that asserts the cooperation of state and religion, with scholars diminishing the autonomy of the latter.<sup>10</sup> In this construct, al-Ghazali is identified as another incident gone wrong, one that marked a break with the previous age (dubbed the golden age of Islam), causing decay in Islamic societies.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> George Makdisi, "The Sunni Revival," in *Islamic Civilization*, ed. D. H. Richards and Bruno Cassier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 155–68; Ahmet T. Kuru, *Islam, Authoritarianism, Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 118–63; H. A. R. Gibb, "An Interpretation of Islamic History," in *Studies on the Civilization of Islam*, ed. S. Shaw and W. Polk (Princeton: Princeton University Press, n.d.), 3–33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7zmtmgq.5>; Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 67–115; John Joseph Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam* (London: Routledge, 2002), 106–24, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203199763>; Ahmed Renima, Habib Tiliouine, and Richard J. Estes, "The Islamic Golden Age: A Story of the Triumph of the Islamic Civilization," in *The State of Social Progress of Islamic Societies* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016), 25–52, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24774-8\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-24774-8_2); Ira Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 111; Marshall G.S Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam Vol. 2* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 3, 12, 408; C. E. Bosworth, "The Heritage of Rulership in Early Islamic Iran and the Search for Dynastic Connections with the Past," *Iran* 11 (1973): 52, <https://doi.org/10.2307/4300484>.

<sup>9</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 41.

<sup>10</sup> This list also includes other issues. For example, for various scholars, the adoption of *iqta* (originally an Iranian system of land tax) by Muslims as a major reason to explain the decline of Muslim societies. See, C. E. Bosworth, "Military Organisation under the Buyids of Persia and Iraq," *Oriens* 18 (1965): 161, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1579733>; Ann K. S Lambton, *Landlord and Peasant in Persia: A Study of Land Tenure and Land Revenue Administration* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1969), 61; Heribert Busse, "Iran Under the Buyids," in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, ed. R.N. Frye (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 260, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521200936.008>.

<sup>11</sup> Bacik, *Contemporary Rationalist Islam in Turkey: A Religious Opposition to Sunni Revival*.

However, revisionist scholars dismiss the Sunni Revival Thesis as a myth by arguing that Muslims' contribution to science continued till after the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> The revisionist narrative argues also that al-Ghazali's legacy has not played a negative role in the decline of philosophy and rationalist thought in the Muslim world.<sup>13</sup>

This paper takes the critique of al-Ghazali by the Sunni Revival Thesis as the reference frame for studying how he is interpreted in contemporary Turkey. This is a result of methodological parsimony: Al-Ghazali constitutes a large space in the Islamic knowledge that is transmitted in Turkey. So, this article studies al-Ghazali in a Turkish context, but only in reference to critical issues raised by the Sunni Revival Thesis. This comparative analysis is expected to help us interpret al-Ghazali's impact in contemporary Turkey. With it, we can better answer questions like 'does the way contemporary Turkish actors use al-Ghazali result in an antagonistic stance on philosophy or science?' The justification of a such an inquiry is that al-Ghazali's impact continues today.

To avoid reductionism, on the other hand, this paper expands parsimony by increasing the number, as well as the scope, of the factors that define how the Sunni Revival Thesis criticises al-Ghazali.<sup>14</sup> In this regard, the critique of al-Ghazali is explained under three complex sub-titles:

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<sup>12</sup> Khaled El-Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 7, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107337657>; Khaled El-Rouayheb, "The Myth of 'The Triumph of Fanaticism' in the Seventeenth-Century Ottoman Empire," *Die Welt Des Islams* 48, no. 2 (2008): 196–221, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006008X335930>; Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 170–75, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203316276>; George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 241; Mohamad Abdalla, *Islamic Science: The Myth of the Decline Theory* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2008), 1–9; Makdisi, "The Sunni Revival."

<sup>13</sup> Munawar Haque, "The Impact of the Controversy between Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd on the Development of Islamic Thought," *Transcendent Philosophy Journal* 11 (2010): 93–132; Garden, *The First Islamic Reviewer: Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali and His Revival of the Religious Studies*; Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology*. There are also scholars who argue that the legacy of al-Ghazali is complex (including both the motifs of Aristotelian philosophy and Sufism) that cannot be reduced into a one narrative. See, Ebrahim Moosa, *Ghazali & The Poetics of Imagination* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 1–32, 237–60.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Baumgartner, "Parsimony and Causality," *Quality & Quantity* 49, no. 2 (March 2015): 840, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-014-0026-7>. To Baumgartner only maximally parsimonious solution formulas can represent causal structures.

(i) *His attack of philosophers made Muslims sceptical of philosophy*: Al-Ghazali's criticism of Aristotelian philosophers, such as Ibn Sina and al-Farabi, left an enduring legacy of a sceptical approach to philosophy among Muslims.<sup>15</sup> To remember the several places in his works that display his critical stance on philosophy: In *Ihya*, seemingly disturbed by the influence of philosophers, al-Ghazali declared that his aim is to let them know their limits.<sup>16</sup>

However, the problem is not his criticism of philosophers' concerns and procedures, but his assertion that they are heretics because of the views they defend.<sup>17</sup> This is most visible in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*: He challenges some opinions of Aristotelian philosophers like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina, such as their argument that all substances are pre-eternal. Not satisfied with this, he asserted also that their proclamation of those views makes them heretics. Furthermore, al-Ghazali did not refrain from broaching the issue of whether it is religiously permissible to kill those who endorse the philosophers' various beliefs, not only the philosophers themselves.<sup>18</sup> The scholars did not take kindly to this, specifically because the charge of being an infidel was central in al-Ghazali's opposition to the philosophers.<sup>19</sup>

(ii) *His explanation of causality contributed to the emergence of a mentality that has weakened the scientific tradition in the Muslim world*: Al-Ghazali was an interpreter of Ashari occasionalism. Thus, we read in his works that God creates events independently of any necessary connection with natural causes.<sup>20</sup> This shows al-Ghazali asserting that the proposal that natural law has the capacity to cause natural events is to deny God's omnipotence, since it implies that something is acting on its own accord, independently of God.<sup>21</sup> This assertion is mostly visible in the oft-quoted example of the burning cotton: The one who enacts the burning of the cotton

<sup>15</sup> Mohd Fakhruddin Abdul Mukti, "Al-Ghazali and His Refutation of Philosophy," *Jurnal Usuluddin* 21 (2005): 9; Konrad Hirschler, *Medieval Arabic Historiography* (London: Routledge, 2006), 59, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203965290>.

<sup>16</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Book of Knowledge; Being a Translation with Notes of the Kitab Al-'Ilm of Al-Ghazzali's Ihya' 'ulum Al-Din Vol. 2*, trans. Nabih Amin Faris (Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf, 1979), 53–57.

<sup>17</sup> Mukti, "Al-Ghazali and His Refutation of Philosophy."

<sup>18</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers [Tahafut Al-Falasifa]*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 226. These beliefs are those like arguing all substances are pre-eternal and God's knowledge does not encompass the temporal particulars.

<sup>19</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazali* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), 26.

<sup>20</sup> Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers [Tahafut Al-Falasifa]*.

<sup>21</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Deliverance From Error [Al Munkidh Min Ad Dallal]*, trans. W.M. Watt (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1963), 37.

is God, through the mediation of His angels, or without mediation, not any agency in nature.<sup>22</sup>

Purporting hereby to have refuted the natural law, al-Ghazali developed a theory of movement that is ontologically dependent on agency, not laws. Accordingly, a movement is possible only when there is an agent capable of volition. So, since nature is not a living entity endowed with volition, it cannot be an agent of any movement.<sup>23</sup> God remains as the only agent. Therefore, causal relationships between natural events cannot be proposed.<sup>24</sup> For al-Ghazali, the term 'natural law' is simply a misnomer: All actions in nature belong to God. But the human mind tends to frame them as laws.

In *The Incoherence of the Incoherence*, Ibn Rushd (d. 1198) criticised al-Ghazali's theory of causality by pointing out that the denial of constant laws would require a 'tyrannical idea of God'. That would destroy the possibility of knowledge, for there would be 'no standard or custom to which reference might be made'.<sup>25</sup> That criticism continues to be levelled by contemporary critics for whom al-Ghazali's view of causality contributed to the weakening of scientific methodology. For example, Magid Fakhry says that it resulted in a systematic refutation of the concept of the necessary causal nexus of events, and created a major problem of bipolarity in Muslim thought.<sup>26</sup> As a result, popular engagement with Islamic theology has tended to focus on divine causation, and to maintain a deep mistrust of the natural laws.

(iii) *He incorporated the inner knowledge thesis into Sunnism, which weaken scientific and rationalist inquiry among Muslims:* Al-Ghazali provided a relentless critique of sense-based rational knowledge. He insisted that human knowledge cannot be doubt-free, because human senses are restricted.<sup>27</sup> As he no longer trusts sense-perception, al-Ghazali's dreams of finding an infallible body of knowledge.<sup>28</sup> Inspired by Sufi thought, he suggested a different method for acquiring knowledge.<sup>29</sup> As explained in *Al-*

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<sup>22</sup> Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers [Tahafut Al-Falasifa]*.

<sup>23</sup> Al-Ghazali.

<sup>24</sup> S.H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), 9.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Rushd, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence [Tahafut Al-Tahafut]*, trans. Simon Van Den Bergh (Cambridge: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1987), 325.

<sup>26</sup> Magid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 167. Also see, Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 46..

<sup>27</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Deliverance From Error [Al Munkidh Min Ad Dallal]*.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Ghazali.

<sup>29</sup> Margaret Smith, *Al-Ghazali: The Mystic* (Lahore: HIP, 1983), 225.



*Risalat al-Laduniyya*, this is the alternate method of 'acquiring knowledge from within'.<sup>30</sup> Unlike the knowledge from without, which is rational knowledge that is drawn through sensory perception and reasoning, knowledge from within is acquired, without sensory perception or reasoning, through the self-realisation that transcends all spatio-temporal dimensions. Al-Ghazali explained this in *Al-Munkidh* as the knowledge that 'did not come about by systematic demonstration or marshalled argument, but by a light which God most high cast into my breast'.<sup>31</sup>

The incorporation of inner knowledge into Sunnism was tantamount to adding a new discipline to the curriculum of Islamic knowledge.<sup>32</sup> Thus, the critics denounce al-Ghazali for elevating inner knowledge above the sciences.<sup>33</sup> Pragmatically, this was the downgrading of reason to a subservient status that is without the independent ability to determine truth. That is, reason can do no more than endorse one idea among alternatives, and then only if it is supported by religion. Simply, reason was given a subordinate role.<sup>34</sup> Magid Fakhry thus described al-Ghazali's legacy as 'sowing the seeds of misology'.<sup>35</sup> Mohammed Abed al-Jabri likened his legacy to a deep wound inside reason, which is still bleeding.<sup>36</sup>

Having summarised the critique of al-Ghazali according to the Sunni Revival Thesis, I should again remind that there are revisionist scholars who challenge that narrative on each point. To revisit various samples of the revisionist narrative on al-Ghazali, on causality only: Hans Daiber argues that al-Ghazali combined contingent causality and Occasionalism.<sup>37</sup> Karen Harding writes that al-Ghazali was in favour of causality and implied quantum physics.<sup>38</sup> Lenn E. Goodman is of the opinion that al-Ghazali was not

<sup>30</sup> Margaret Smith, "Al-Risālat Al-Laduniyya. By Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Al-Ghazālī (450/1059–505/1111)," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 70, no. 2 (April 1938): 186, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0035869X0008789X>.

<sup>31</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Deliverance From Error [Al Munkidh Min Ad Dallal]*.

<sup>32</sup> Ahmet T Karamustafa, *Sufism the Formative Period* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 107.

<sup>33</sup> D. B. Macdonald, "The Meanings of the Philosophers by Al-Ghazzālī," *Isis* 25, no. 1 (May 1936): 9–15, <https://doi.org/10.1086/347057>.

<sup>34</sup> Fiazuddin Shu'ayb, "Al-Ghazzali's Final Word on Kalam," *Islam & Science* 9 (2011): 157. Also see, Black, *The History of Islamic Political Thought*.

<sup>35</sup> Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*.

<sup>36</sup> Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri, *The Formation of Arab Reason: Text, Tradition and the Construction of Modernity in the Arab World* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 361, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780755610617>.

<sup>37</sup> Hans Daiber, "God versus Causality," in *Islam and Rationality* (Leiden: BRILL, 2015), 12, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004290952\\_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004290952_002).

<sup>38</sup> Karen Harding, "Causality Then and Now: Al Ghazali and Quantum Theory," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 10, no. 2 (July 1993): 167, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis->

against the idea of causality.<sup>39</sup> Omar Edward Moad believes that al-Ghazali held a neutral position on Occasionalism.<sup>40</sup> However, as stated before, the critique of al-Ghazali (under the three titles, above) by the Sunni Revival Thesis is provided as the methodological choice: I shall use it as the reference frame, an independent variable, according to which I interpret the case, that is, how contemporary Turkish actors use al-Ghazali's works in their religious interpretation, which will be the subject of the following sections.

## **2. The Cases: Işıkçılar and Erenköy**

Explaining how Ghazali is interpreted today in the transmissions of religious knowledge is possible by observing exemplary cases that reflect the general trends of how Sunni actors reference al-Ghazali as part of their religious socialisation and activism.<sup>41</sup> To achieve this goal, this article studies two Islamic movements in Turkey: Işıkçılar and Erenköy.

Islamic orders and networks such as the Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya have played important roles in the transmission of Islamic knowledge in the Saljuqi-Ottoman-Turkish historical continuity.<sup>42</sup> Linked to that historical tradition through Naqshbandiyya, Işıkçılar and Erenköy are organised as new religious social movements.<sup>43</sup> In a sense, they are modern incarnations of historical religious orders and networks, which today work collectively 'to restore, protect or create values in the name of a generalised

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v10i2.2505.

<sup>39</sup> Leen E. Goodman, "Ghazali's Argument from Creation (I)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1971): 67–85, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002074380000088X>.

<sup>40</sup> Omar Edward Moad, "Al-Ghazali's Occasionalism and the Natures of Creatures," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 58, no. 2 (October 2005): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11153-005-1595-0>. For further revisionist in this context see, Ilai Alon, "Al-Ghazālī on Causality," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 100, no. 4 (October 1980): 397, <https://doi.org/10.2307/602085>; Binyamin Abrahamov, "Al-Ghazali's Theory of Causality," *Studia Islamica*, no. 67 (1988): 98, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595974>.

<sup>41</sup> On exemplary cases see, Colin J. Beck, "The Comparative Method in Practice: Case Selection and the Social Science of Revolution," *Social Science History* 41, no. 3 (July 2017): 538, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ssh.2017.15>. On this role of case studies see, Howard Lune and Bruce L Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences* (London: Pearson, 2017), 172; Robert K. Yin, "The Case Study Crisis: Some Answers," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (March 1981): 59, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2392599>; Michael S. Lewis-Beck, "Case," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, ed. Michael Lewis-Beck, Alan Bryman, and Tim Futing Liao (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004), 90, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589>.

<sup>42</sup> See, İsmail KAYA, "Osmanlı Devletinde Devlet-Tarikat İlişkileri Bağlamında Meclis-i Meşayih," *Türk Kültürü ve Hacı Bektaş Velî Araştırma Dergisi* 100 (December 2021): 162, <https://doi.org/10.34189/hbv.100.008>.

<sup>43</sup> Sefa fiimfiiek, "New Social Movements in Turkey Since 1980," *Turkish Studies* 5, no. 2 (June 2004): 111–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1468384042000228611>.

belief,<sup>44</sup> in our case, Sunni Islam. So, organised as social movement, Işıkçılar and Erenköy utilise modern means and strategies to transmit their religious messages to the public. On this account, neither İskenderpaşa nor Erenköy is an isolated Sufi organisation. They are typical organisational agents of the interpretation and transmission of Sunni Islam.

Social religious movements derive their power mainly through their networking capacity. In this regard, a typical religious movement has usually an institutional network of schools, dormitories, charity organisations, radio, business organisations, newspapers, hospitals and television. For example, around one third of 10,000 private schools in Turkey are affiliated with religious movements.<sup>45</sup> There is also the informal network, which consists of various activities, such as gatherings, visits and collective religious meetings. The network is critical in recruitment, financing, solidarity, group activism and socialisation. It also enables the religious movements to disseminate their religious interpretation to the larger society.<sup>46</sup> Expectedly, that ability creates complex relations also with politics.

Islamic social movements have a serious role in the recent Islamisation of Turkey as partners of the Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party).<sup>47</sup> Reflecting that, there are politicians within the AKP who have Islamic social-movement backgrounds. For example, Mustafa Şentop, the incumbent Speaker of the Turkish Parliament, had his Islamic socialisation within İskenderpaşa, another Naqshbandiyya group.<sup>48</sup> Religious movements' complex relations with politics are particularly important, as those movements are proactively oriented bureaucracies.<sup>49</sup> They constantly strive for their members to be included in the bureaucracy, and to achieve this, they benefit from the help of their connections with politics. This sometimes creates even cases where a religious movement dominates a ministry. For example, bureaucrats who were socialised in the Menzil group

<sup>44</sup> Kayhan Delibas, "Conceptualizing Islamic Movements: The Case of Turkey," *International Political Science Review* 30, no. 1 (January 2009): 91, <https://doi.org/10.1177/019251210-8097058>.

<sup>45</sup> Cumhuriyet, "10 Bin Özel Okulun Üçte Biri Tarikatlarla İlişkili," Cumhuriyet, 2019.

<sup>46</sup> Yusuf Sarfati, *Mobilizing Religion in Middle East Politics* (London: Routledge, 2013), 10–27, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203797198>.

<sup>47</sup> Ayhan Kaya, "Islamisation of Turkey under the AKP Rule: Empowering Family, Faith and Charity," *South European Society and Politics* 20, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 47, doi:10.1080/13608746.2014.979031.

<sup>48</sup> Gokhan Bacik, *Islam and Muslim Resistance to Modernity in Turkey* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 134, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25901-3>.

<sup>49</sup> Hakkı Taş, "A History of Turkey's AKP-Gülen Conflict," *Mediterranean Politics* 23, no. 3 (July 2018): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2017.1328766>.

are dominant in the Ministries of Health and Energy.<sup>50</sup> Even when President Erdoğan appointed a new Minister of Health in 2018 (a person whose religious background is İskenderpaşa), this was interpreted as a strategy to counterbalance the Menzil group.<sup>51</sup>

It is in this regard that Işıkçılar and Erenköy are typical religious movements that use their institutional networks to bring their religious interpretations to the public. However, though they share the typical features of a religious social movement, Işıkçılar and Erenköy have their peculiarities that shape their group identity. To begin with the Işıkçılar: This group traces its modern origin to Abdülhakim Arvasi (1865–1943), who joined the Naqshbandiyya in 1879. However, the name that founded the movement was Hüseyin Hilmi Işık (1911-2001).

After graduating from military high school, Işık enrolled in the Chemistry Department of Istanbul University, graduating in 1936. He was promoted to the rank of captain in 1938. After serving in various military units, he was appointed as a teacher to Kuleli Military High School (Istanbul) in 1951. He taught chemistry there until retirement in 1960.<sup>52</sup> However, Işık remained more of a spiritual leader, tolerating his son-in-law Enver Ören (1939–2013) to become the *de factor* leader in the late 1970s. Ören was Işık's student from the Kuleli Military School. After Kuleli, he attended the Zoology and Botany Department at Istanbul University. Upon graduation, he joined Istanbul University to pursue an academic career. However, in 1970, Ören resigned from the University to devote himself entirely to the activities of Işıkçılar. The division of labour between Işık and Ören, however, ended when Işık died in 2001. Ören stayed as the leader of Işıkçılar till his death in 2013, when his son Mücahid Ören became the new leader.

After his death, Işık's books remained the movement's reference texts for understanding and transmitting Islamic knowledge to its followers, as well as to the larger public. Neither Enver Ören nor Mücahid Ören wrote a book to become the reference for Işıkçılar. Enver Ören defined the reading and distributing of Işık's books as the most critical Islamic service, and his son Mücahid Ören continued this policy. In his books, Işık called for a Sunni revival against several perceived threats, including Communism, positivism, and the various 'heretical' interpretations of Islam, like Wahhabism and reformism. Arguing that all these approaches are wrong, Işık proposed a revival of Sunnism as defined in the previous books of distinguished Muslim scholars. He believed that Islam needs no new interpretations, and that the

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<sup>50</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, *Erbakan'dan Erdoğan'a : Laiklik, Demokrasi, Kürt Sorunu ve İslam* (Istanbul: Kitap Yayınevi, 2011), 215.

<sup>51</sup> Cumhuriyet, "Yeni Bakanın Tarikat Bağlantısı," Cumhuriyet, 2018.

<sup>52</sup> Bacik, *Islam and Muslim Resistance to Modernity in Turkey*.

existing opinions and books are excellent.<sup>53</sup> Işık's books are therefore mostly translations of previous books of Sunni Islamic scholars, but they include his comments. The purpose of such a confusing method is to reconnect with the previous Islamic scholars' teachings. That method results in a strong traditionalism.<sup>54</sup>

The movement is known for its expertise in media. They have a newspaper (*Türkiye*), a television (*TGRT*) and a radio (*TGRT Radio*) that are popular nationwide, giving it a reach beyond the boundaries of the movement. The group has other typical institutions that an Islamic movement is expected to have, like printing companies, hospitals, schools and dorms. The group's İhlas School Network has 17 schools in Istanbul.<sup>55</sup> The group is also organised abroad.<sup>56</sup>

Erenköy, the second case, is an Islamic group that also follows the Naqshbandiyya order. The group traces its origins back to Muhammad Esed (1847–1931), a prominent Naqshbandiyya scholar of the late Ottoman and early Republican period. After Esed, Mahmud Sami Ramazanoğlu (1892–1984), a graduate of the School of Law at Istanbul University, emerged as the new leader of the movement in the 50s. Ramazanoğlu worked as an accountant in various Anatolian cities, where he developed contacts with merchants.<sup>57</sup> Those contacts gave Erenköy a sophisticated network of economic actors across the country. Under Ramazanoğlu, the group gradually advanced a distinctive brand of Islamic activism that targeted the merchant class. The group was led by Musa Topbaş (1916-1999), after Ramazanoğlu.

When Musa Topbaş passed away, his son Osman Nuri Topbaş (d. 1942) emerged as the new leader of Erenköy. Topbaş is a graduate of İmam Hatip High School (a religious vocational school). Reflecting the merchant-oriented mentality of Islamic activism in Erenköy, Topbaş engaged in a trade for a while.

Unlike Işıkçılar, Erenköy has no past leader whose books are still regarded as major works in the interpretation and transmission of Islamic knowledge. Instead, in Erenköy, the incumbent leader dominates the group's interpretation of religion, but of course, in continuity with the previous leaders. In this regard, Osman Nuri Topbaş, the incumbent leader, has

<sup>53</sup> Mustafa. Tekin, "Işıkçılık," in *İslamcılık*, ed. Yasin Aktay, Tanıl Bora, and Murat Gültekingil (Istanbul: İletişim, 2005), 344.

<sup>54</sup> Şerif Mardin, *Türkiye'de Din ve Siyaset Makaleler 3* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2015), 30.

<sup>55</sup> İhlas Koleji, "İhlas Koleji Website," *İhlas Koleji*, 2022, <https://ihlaskoleji.k12.tr/okullarimiz/ortaokul>.

<sup>56</sup> For activities abroad see İhlas Vakfı, "Yurtdışı Hizmetlerimiz," İhlas Vakfı, 2022.

<sup>57</sup> Necdet Tosun, "Mahmut Sami Ramazanoğlu," in *İslam Ansiklopedisi Vol. 34*, ed. Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı (Ankara: TDV İSAM, 2007), 442.

thematic books where the author presents his interpretation of religion from a typical Sunni-Sufi perspective.

As expected, the impact of Erenköy on middle-class merchants has attracted the interest of political actors. For example, Eymen Topbaş, a leading figure of the Topbaş family that dominates Erenköy, occupied high-level administrative positions in the 1980s, in the Motherland Party of Turgut Özal. The group has developed close relations also with President Erdoğan. For example, Mustafa Latif Topbaş, a Turkish billionaire, is close to Erdoğan. That cooperation with politics helps the movement in the bureaucracy. Some members of the group have recently been appointed to critical posts at critical public offices, including the *Diyanet* (The Directorate of Religious Affairs).<sup>58</sup>

Erenköy has a complex network of institutions to transmit its religious interpretation to the public. We see in this network schools, hospitals, radio station and affiliated companies that are active in various field such as tourism. Erenköy is also an internationally-operating movement. For example, its Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation has more than 130 educational institutions abroad.<sup>59</sup>

### **3. The Interpretation of al-Ghazali in Contemporary Turkey**

The books written by Hüseyin Hilmi Işık and Osman Nuri Topbaş define ‘Islamic knowledge’ as it was interpreted by Işıkçılar and Erenköy, and transmitted to the members, as well as to the public. Members of religious movements are expected to regularly read these books,<sup>60</sup> for they guide those movements’ activities. Group members are expected also to deliver and promote those books to others. The methods of argumentation and proof in such reference books are naturally different from those of academic works.<sup>61</sup> They are written from a religious perspective, where the purpose is to preach the orthodox religious truths. The ultimate objectives of these books are to affect Muslims’ daily lives in specific ways by motivating them, and to provide a blueprint of the Islamic life. On this account, those books purvey epistemological and practical engagements with Islam. Below, I analyse how Işık and Topbaş reference al-Ghazali, expecting that this will serve us as a

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<sup>58</sup> Adem Efe, *Dini Gruplar Sosyolojisi* (Istanbul: Dönem, 2013), 165–66.

<sup>59</sup> Cumhuriyet, “10 Bin Özel Okulun Üçte Biri Tarikatlarla İlişkili.”

<sup>60</sup> The group gathering where such books are read is called *sohbet*. It is a discursive practice of pious reading circles where people learn, interpret and transmit religious knowledge. Smita Tewari Jassal, “The Sohbet: Talking Islam in Turkey,” *Sociology of Islam* 1, no. 3–4 (April 2014): 188–89, <https://doi.org/10.1163/22131418-00104005>.

<sup>61</sup> On this see, Martin Adam, “Persuasion in Religious Discourse: Enhancing Credibility in Sermon Titles and Openings,” *Discourse and Interaction* 10, no. 2 (December 2017): 5–25, <https://doi.org/10.5817/DI2017-2-5>.

sample of how al-Ghazali is interpreted and transmitted in present-day real-life contexts.

To achieve this goal, my methodological procedure is to make a referential content analysis of the works of Işık and Topbaş. As O. R. Holsti posits, content analysis is 'any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages'.<sup>62</sup> In this context, one technique of content analysis is referential content analysis, which is a tool for teasing out the main themes of a text.<sup>63</sup> K. Krippendorff defines 'referential content analysis' as the task of ascertaining how an existing phenomenon is portrayed.<sup>64</sup> In our case, this is to analyse and explain how Işık and Topbaş reference al-Ghazali in their transmissions of religious knowledge to their followers, and to the general public. This entails the effort to identify what *kind* of religious interpretation that referencing reveals about causality, knowledge and philosophy. That effort, successfully deployed, will enable us to answer questions like 'is al-Ghazali referenced to promote an antagonistic stance on philosophy?' The identification of causality, knowledge and philosophy as the three main themes is the logical consequence of this paper's appreciation of the fact—that the Sunni Revival Thesis is the active reference-frame in the interpretation of al-Ghazali's impact in contemporary Turkey. As discussed above, this interpretation bundles the thesis that al-Ghazali is a historical cause of the scientific decay in the Muslim world because of his opinions on causality, knowledge and philosophy.

#### 4. Işıkçılar

Işık recognises al-Ghazali's works as a canonical authority. Commenting on the virtues of *Ihya* after describing it as the most useful book,<sup>65</sup> Işık writes that 'if a non-Muslim lovingly turns the pages of *Ihya*, he becomes an honorary Muslim'.<sup>66</sup> Naturally, al-Ghazali's opinions play an influential role in Işık's

<sup>62</sup> O. R. Holsti, *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1969), 14; Lune and Berg, *Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Also see, James Drisko and Tina Maschi, *Content Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 82, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190215491.001.0001>.

<sup>63</sup> Roberto Franzosi, "Content Analysis," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, ed. Michael Lewis-Beck, Alan Bryman, and Tim Futing Liao (London: Sage Publications, Inc., 2004), 186, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412950589>.

<sup>64</sup> K Krippendorff, *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publication, 1980), 62.

<sup>65</sup> Hüseyin Hilmi Işık, *Kiyamet ve Ahiret* (Istanbul: Hakikat, 2017), 62.

<sup>66</sup> Hüseyin Hilmi Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye* (Istanbul: Hakikat, 2014), 420.

framing of his views on causality, knowledge and philosophy. Işık references al-Ghazali's books extensively while commenting on those topics.<sup>67</sup>

As a typical proof of al-Ghazali's influence, Işık, borrows the former's 'fire and burning cotton' exemplar. Like al-Ghazali, Işık concludes that the fire does not cause the cotton to burn; only God does. To deny the secondary causes of fire, Işık reduced them to mere human illusions: 'nor oxygen, nor heat, nor the electrons cause the burning; only God does'.<sup>68</sup> His use of modern terminology (oxygen; electrons) intends to give the impression that religious truth has not changed because complex scientific discourses have come into being. Furthermore, that terminology enables him to give the Ghazalian argument a modern guise. These moves by Işık do not, however, change the Ghazalian substance: Işık simply repeats with al-Ghazali that natural law is a misnomer, since it is nothing but the custom of God, whose will is the momentum, or the driver of, events. So, causality is about God the agent and His customs, not about natural law, which has neither life nor the power to will.<sup>69</sup> It is abundantly clear that al-Ghazali's theory of events as the momentum of divine agency is the groundwork of Işık's explanation of causality. So, for Işık, it remains true that only a conscious agent with the ability to will can cause a movement/an event. Lacking those faculties, a law cannot be the cause an event/movement.

How Işık incorporates al-Ghazali's arguments into his religious interpretation results in his heavily sceptical stance on natural law: God is the governor of nature, creating and managing every event directly. So, people should appeal directly to God, not to natural law. Işık is against the attributing of events to natural causation. For him, the only concession to natural law is that the universe is operated by a dual causality, natural and the divine, but the latter is superior.<sup>70</sup> To support his interpretation, Işık asserts that God can change his custom as he wishes. What is more, he declares that belief in the suspension of nature is an essential part of faith.<sup>71</sup> This is to declare causality to be the primarily the domain of faith, and of scientific inquiry only secondarily. This requires Muslims to believe that there is no fixed natural law.

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<sup>67</sup> In fact, translations of al-Ghazali's various books like *Munkidh*, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* and *The Alchemy of Happiness* are part of reference books of Işıkçılar.

<sup>68</sup> Hüseyin Hilmi Işık, *Belief and Islam* (Istanbul: Hakikat, 2015), 77-78.

<sup>69</sup> Hüseyin Hilmi Işık, *Kıymetsiz Yazılar* (Istanbul: Hakikat, 2014), 14, 224. For other places where Işık uses al-Ghazali's metaphors and analogies, see, Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

<sup>70</sup> Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

<sup>71</sup> Hüseyin Hilmi Işık, *Faideli Bilgiler* (Istanbul: Hakikat, 2014), 39, 68.



Ibn Rushd, as explained above, objected that refuting causality rules renders God to be 'like a tyrannical prince ... of whom no standard or custom is known to which reference can be made'.<sup>72</sup> On the contrary, for Işık, a nature with no standard is a requirement of faith, as any conception of natural law would imply limitations of God's sovereignty and omnipotence. Instead, God acts in nature as he wishes: no natural law binds him. He suspends order for some higher virtues.<sup>73</sup> Işık seeks to prove this by reminding that pious people have appeared in different places at the very same time.<sup>74</sup> So, for Işık, what people call natural law is a fiction rather than a reality. If God lets someone fly, the man-made concept of 'natural' presents this case as supernatural. This had nothing to do with the supernatural or the natural. Rather, a flying man is only a change in God's custom.<sup>75</sup> (While reading Işık's comments, one should remember that he had a modern education in chemistry, and he worked as a chemistry teacher with the military title of colonel, for long years at the Işıklar Military High School, a backbone of modernist military education.)

When it comes to how Işık formulates his views on knowledge, we again observe al-Ghazali's strong influence. Almost as a replica of al-Ghazali's method, Işık starts by reminding that human reason and senses are limited in various ways, and this makes of human reason a faculty that fails to grasp the divine governance of nature.<sup>76</sup> He quotes al-Ghazali's *Al-Munkidh* directly while discussing the limited scope of human reason that makes it incapable of discovering all sorts of knowledge.<sup>77</sup> Işık uses al-Ghazali's example of the limits of the human eye.<sup>78</sup> Purporting to have established the limitations of human reason, Işık proceeds to address 'inner knowledge' as the sublime form of learning.<sup>79</sup>

Işık's intensive references to al-Ghazali in his effort to formulate a critical perspective on human reason and the senses brings him to the same conclusion that Ghazali had reached: the subservience of reason. According to Işık, reason can be only an instrument that operates according to mechanical principles, and this is never enough to generate reliable knowledge.<sup>80</sup> Reason is only an instrument of measurement that desperately

<sup>72</sup> Rushd, *The Incoherence of the Incoherence [Tahafut Al-Tahafut]*.

<sup>73</sup> Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

<sup>74</sup> Ali bin Emrullah and Muhammad Hadimi, *İslam Ahlakı* (Istanbul: Hakikat, 2014), 24.

<sup>75</sup> E. Abdullah Süveydi, *Hak Sözü'n Vesikaları* (Istanbul: Hakikat, 2014), 306-9., 306-9.

<sup>76</sup> Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

<sup>77</sup> Işık, *Faideli Bilgiler*.

<sup>78</sup> Işık.

<sup>79</sup> Süveydi, *Hak Sözü'n Vesikaları*.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

needs the guidance of a superior method to acquire reliable knowledge.<sup>81</sup> At best, reason can choose only between alternatives, and then only if it is given true guidance. But there is always risk: If not properly guided, subservient reason can become an instrument of delusion. To prevent such risks, Işık takes an alarmist stance on the use of human reason in religious reasoning. He condemns as 'infidel' those who interpret the Qur'an according to reason, for the only legitimate and correct meanings are those advanced by the Sunni scholars.<sup>82</sup> He thus reduces Islamic reasoning to an intellectual effort within the tight boundaries of Quran, the hadith/traditions, and the previous scholars' works. In his hands, reason ceases to have authority to go beyond the texts, since dependence on pure reason leads to the rejection of prophethood.<sup>83</sup>

Having read Işık on causality and knowledge, it is not surprising to observe an antagonism to philosophy in his works. Işıkçılar reference books define philosophers as heretics for having ideas that threaten the Islamic faith. To a large extent, Işık interprets philosophy as part of al-Ghazali's fight with philosophers to purge Islamic thought of their errors.<sup>84</sup> In this context, Işık marks a period in Islamic history as the source of many problems, including the contamination of the Islamic faith with scientific knowledge and philosophical thinking.<sup>85</sup> For him, the interaction of Islamic and Greek thought in that period paved the way for erroneous interpretations of religion.<sup>86</sup> Işık salutes the latter period, where al-Ghazali played his role, as the restoration period when Islam's contamination was cured.<sup>87</sup> He defines al-Ghazali as a saviour of orthodox Islam in an age of chaos, when heretical ideas infected the Muslim world.<sup>88</sup>

Logically, this results in Işık's referencing al-Ghazali to develop a highly antagonistic stance on philosophy. Işık often repeats that 'Imam al-Ghazali informed that philosophers are infidel'.<sup>89</sup> The Ghazalian impact is most visible when Işık repeats al-Ghazali's criticism of philosophers on their tenet of eternal nature of universe in his *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Quoting al-Ghazali, Işık declares that the philosophers who hold the view that the universe is eternal are *kafir* [infidel].<sup>90</sup> In a direct sense, al-Ghazali is the

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<sup>81</sup> Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

<sup>82</sup> Işık.

<sup>83</sup> Işık.

<sup>84</sup> Işık, *Belief and Islam*.

<sup>85</sup> Işık, *Namaz*, 15. Süveydi, *Hak Sözün Vesikaları*.

<sup>86</sup> Işık, *Faideli Bilgiler*.

<sup>87</sup> Işık, *Belief and Islam*.

<sup>88</sup> Işık, *Kıyamet ve Ahiret*.

<sup>89</sup> Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

<sup>90</sup> Işık.

'proof' that justifies Işık's rejection of philosophy. This is evident when Işık writes:

*Al-Ghazali detailly analysed the Greek philosophers, and informed that they are ignorant, idiot and infidel. He wrote in his books that Muslims should not appreciate such infidels.*<sup>91</sup>

Thus, Işık's account of philosophy is grim: He advises Muslims not to read the Greek philosophers, for their impact is the agent of the contamination of the Islamic faith. Instead, they should be satisfied with Islam, for even a simple tradition that grew from the Prophet's utterances is worth more than the talk of all the old Greek philosophers.<sup>92</sup> Greek philosophers are heretic scholars, Işık frequently tells the reader.<sup>93</sup> He writes that 'the Greek philosophers are the most ignorant people on earth'.<sup>94</sup> Işık makes no allowance even for the greats of classical philosophy. He calls Plato *ahmak* (stupid), and derides Aristotle for depending on reason rather than experience. Işık blames these two giants of Greek philosophy for the delay of Europe's technological development, which, he argues, would have happened much earlier than the eighteenth century, had it not been for their poor intellectual guidance.<sup>95</sup> That harsh stance is also valid for Muslim philosophers: Ibn Hazm (d. 1064) is a heretic.<sup>96</sup> Ibn al-Haytham (d. 1040) and Abu Bakr al-Razi (d. 935) were influenced by Greek philosophy.<sup>97</sup>

Işık reserves a special place for Ibn Sina in his list of heretics as the leader of those who follow reason.<sup>98</sup> For him, Ibn Sina was of limited vision. This caused his lesser share of Islam, and he stayed in the 'dirt of philosophy' (*felsefe pislği*.)<sup>99</sup> Işık draws heavily on al-Ghazali while condemning Ibn Sina and al-Farabi.<sup>100</sup> As noted above, he repeats al-Ghazali's accusation of Ibn Sina and al-Farabi in particular, of sharing Aristotle's opinion that matter is eternal, then declares that they are unbelievers.<sup>101</sup> Besides, more symbolically, he quotes al-Ghazali to deride Ibn Sina and al-Farabi.<sup>102</sup> Işık

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<sup>91</sup> Işık.

<sup>92</sup> Işık.

<sup>93</sup> Işık, *Namaz*,

<sup>94</sup> Muhammad bin Qutbuiddin Izniki, *Miftah Al-Jannah* (Istanbul: Hakikat, 2014), 19; Işık, *Kıymetsiz Yazılar*.

<sup>95</sup> Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

<sup>96</sup> Izniki, *Miftah Al-Jannah*.

<sup>97</sup> Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

<sup>98</sup> Izniki, *Miftah Al-Jannah*.

<sup>99</sup> Işık, *Kıymetsiz Yazılar*.

<sup>100</sup> Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

<sup>101</sup> Işık, *Belief and Islam*.

<sup>102</sup> Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

declares Ibn Sina as faithless, quoting al-Ghazali directly.<sup>103</sup> Similarly, he quotes Al-Ghazali when he declares al-Farabi an infidel.<sup>104</sup>

Işık's opposition to philosophy is never limited by philosophers' problematic opinions. He categorically rejects philosophy, warning that philosophical statements are nothing but diversions from the right path.<sup>105</sup> Işık simply imagines philosophy as the opposite of religion. This is inevitable, as philosophy relies on pure reason, which is the rejection of revelation.<sup>106</sup> This categorical rejection made Işık conclude that there is no such thing as a truly Islamic philosophy. So, he rejects the presentation of al-Ghazali as an Islamic philosopher.<sup>107</sup> His conclusion is neat: 'No true Islamic scholar was a philosopher, and no true philosopher can be an Islamic scholar'.<sup>108</sup>

## 5. Erenköy

Al-Ghazali also shapes the religious paradigm of Erenköy's reference books. Reflecting this is Topbaş's way of formulating the Islamic concepts of causality, knowledge and philosophy with reference to al-Ghazali.

To start with causality: Topbaş uses a metaphor from al-Ghazali to summarise his perspective. Accordingly, he likens nature to a painting on a canvas. There is a painter who paints various dots, lines, and other shapes on the canvas. But those shapes on the canvas have no ability to influence the act of painting. The only authority to affect size, shape, or colour of the appearances on the canvas is the painter's will. There is no causal mechanism to determine the shapes on the canvas, other than the painter's custom or wishes. This gives rise to the analogy that God is the painter of nature: He decides and makes everything in nature. No other factor, therefore no natural law, causes something in nature.<sup>109</sup> This analogy is a replica of al-Ghazali's analogy in *Alchemy of Happiness*. Here, al-Ghazali likens a physicist who relies on natural law to an ant who, crawling on a sheet of paper and observing black letters spreading over it, sees the pen alone as the cause of those black letters. So, the ant cannot grasp the real cause of the shapes on the paper, that is, the fingers of the painter, God.<sup>110</sup> This last sentence of Al-Ghazali's appears

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<sup>103</sup> Işık.

<sup>104</sup> Işık, *Kıymetsiz Yazılar*.

<sup>105</sup> Işık, *Belief and Islam*.

<sup>106</sup> Işık, *Kıymetsiz Yazılar*.

<sup>107</sup> Emrullah and Muhammad Hadimi, *İslam Ahlakı; Işık, Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

<sup>108</sup> Işık, *Tam İlmihal Se'adet-i Ebediyye*.

<sup>109</sup> Osman Nuri Topbaş, *Gönül Bahçesinden Son Nefes* (Istanbul: Erkam, 2016), 176.

<sup>110</sup> Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *The Alchemy of Happiness [Kimiya-Yi Sa'Adat]*, trans. Claud Field (Lahore: Sh. M. Ashraf, 1991), 38.

in Topbaş in a slightly revised form: 'To understand nature we must focus on the artist, not on the work of art'.<sup>111</sup>

His views on causality make Topbaş highly critical of natural law: To Işık, attributing a real effect to natural law is wrong, as it is God who governs the universe.<sup>112</sup> The sole cause of every event in nature is divine power.<sup>113</sup> So also for Topbaş, for whom natural events are the results of God's creations that happen as his unceasing interventions in nature.<sup>114</sup> God rules the universe without intermediaries.<sup>115</sup> As explained by Topbaş, nature therefore has no place for any law that affects events.

As observed in the case of Işık, the refutation of causality by Topbaş also leads to an epistemic fatalism that Ibn Rush formulated as the denial of constant laws that would destroy the possibility of knowledge: Topbaş asserts that an understanding of nature is not possible.<sup>116</sup> This impossibility is caused by fact that the divine will determines natural events, so we cannot explain natural events with reference to the laws of nature. Facing this reality, Topbaş warns that people should be satisfied with their deficiency, so long as they do not develop an alternate method for understanding the divine aspect of natural events.<sup>117</sup> To explain the impossibility of knowing how nature works, Topbaş reminds of events like disasters, which he interprets as the hints of divine governance. To him, those events cannot be explained on the basis of scientific observations of natural phenomena.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, it is better to define Topbaş's nature as ruled by a divine arbitrariness. It is a nature where God does anything he wishes. Thus, for Topbaş, the human distinction of natural and supernatural is meaningless. People, for they are led by their limited senses and reasoning, mistakenly imagine some of God's actions as supernatural.<sup>119</sup> In truth, the man-made binary of natural and supernatural has nothing to do with God's custom. God can do whatever he wishes as there exists no consistent framework, including the natural law, to theorise God's actions. So, what is explained by humans as

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<sup>111</sup> Osman Nuri Topbaş, *The Islamic Approach to Reasoning and Philosophy* (Istanbul: Erkam, 2016), 67.

<sup>112</sup> Osman Nuri Topbaş, *The Secret in the Love for God* (Istanbul: Erkam, 2009), 62.

<sup>113</sup> Osman Nuri Topbaş, *Islam Spirit and Form* (Istanbul: Erkam, 2006), 61.

<sup>114</sup> Osman Nuri Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith* (Istanbul: Erkam, 2002), 238.

<sup>115</sup> Osman Nuri Topbaş, *The Golden Chain of Transmission Masters of the Naqshibandi Way* (Istanbul: Erkam, 2016), 176.

<sup>116</sup> Topbaş, *Islam Spirit and Form*.

<sup>117</sup> Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith*.

<sup>118</sup> Topbaş, *The Secret in the Love for God*.

<sup>119</sup> Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith*.

supernatural is only God's actions that are not comprehensible by humans. Accordingly, what seems like a natural law is an illusion.

This radical position enables Topbaş to propose a religious causality to explain natural events. Accordingly, natural events like fires, plagues and droughts, relate to people's piety:

*If most of the servants are on the right path, rain comes down as a mercy and a blessing, and happiness follows. However, if most of the community is inclined to earthly desires, then floods, droughts or earthquakes become inevitable. These sad events occur because of sins or rebelliousness committed by people. In other words, natural disasters happen only after spiritual quakes have already happened to corrupt hearts.<sup>120</sup>*

According to Topbaş's idiosyncratic religious causality, 'people's spiritual states and their actions, good or evil, play a role in the triggering or the deflection of earthquakes'.<sup>121</sup> Natural law is now completely irrelevant. Topbaş freely writes that it is wrong to exaggerate the role of physical rules by saying things like 'if the buildings were strong enough, this earthquake would not have killed so many people'.<sup>122</sup> He thus rejects the explanation of nature as 'purely physical rules' that allow us, for instance to 'blame tectonic faults for earthquakes'. The offering of such explanations is only to wander around among ordinary causes that have no real effect, and to remain unaware of the divine will behind natural events.<sup>123</sup> The logical upshot of this argumentation is to ask Muslims to organise their lives in accordance with the reality of a divine causation, rather than rely on natural law, for natural laws are uncertain, while the divine rules are constant.<sup>124</sup>

On the next subject of knowledge: Reminding of Işık, Topbaş formulates his views through an intensive engagement with al-Ghazali's arguments. The dominance of al-Ghazalian methodology determines the similar conclusions of Topbaş. Since divine intervention is the agent behind events in nature, Topbaş requires a special way of knowing the divine dimension that is beyond the visible realm.<sup>125</sup> To prove the need for such an alternate knowledge, Topbaş repeats the al-Ghazalian method of elaborating

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<sup>120</sup> Topbaş, *The Secret in the Love for God*.

<sup>121</sup> Topbaş.

<sup>122</sup> Topbaş.

<sup>123</sup> Topbaş.

<sup>124</sup> Topbaş.

<sup>125</sup> Topbaş, *The Islamic Approach to Reasoning and Philosophy*; Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith*.

the limits of human reason and senses.<sup>126</sup> So, given such limits of human reason and senses, inner knowledge remains the only reliable method of examining and comprehending the real causes that operate in nature. To strengthen his argument, Topbaş quotes al-Ghazali:

*I realised that human reason alone cannot understand everything properly, and that it would not always fail in the attempt to draw aside the curtain that covers the visible side of things.*<sup>127</sup>

Topbaş presents inner knowledge as acquired only through a subjective process without standard rules, and accessible only upon spiritual maturation.<sup>128</sup> Thus, acquiring inner knowledge is not possible by a fulfilment of the various methodological inquiries that result in rational knowledge. Inner knowledge is independent of those sense-and-reason based endeavours. It is received directly through the heart.<sup>129</sup> Topbaş means here that the limits of human senses and reason are no longer problematic in the pursuit of inner knowledge, since it is independent of sense and reason.

It is obvious that the method and arguments of Topbaş on knowledge are the replicas of what al-Ghazali did in his *Al-Munkidh*, where he formulated inner knowledge as not coming about by systematic demonstration or marshalled argument, but by a light that the God most high casts into the breast.<sup>130</sup> As a matter of fact, when it comes to demonstrating the superiority of inner knowledge to rational knowledge, Topbaş narrates a parable where al-Ghazali is reported to have seen warned someone who was preoccupied with the sciences of the world:

*I will feel pity for you, son, should you fail to transform your knowledge of theology, logic, rhetoric, poetry and grammar into wisdom and gnosis. You will have otherwise not received any benefit, but merely wasted the life given to you by the Almighty to worship Him.*<sup>131</sup>

Declaring the supremacy of inner knowledge, Topbaş inevitably reaches Ghazali's conclusion: Downgrading reason to a subservient status. This is a Ghazalian formula that we have detected also in *Işık*. As reasoning may

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<sup>126</sup> Osman Nuri Topbaş, *Islam: The Religion of Truth* (Istanbul: Erkam, 2015); Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith*; Topbaş, *The Secret in the Love for God*.

<sup>127</sup> Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith*.

<sup>128</sup> Topbaş.

<sup>129</sup> Topbaş.

<sup>130</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Deliverance From Error [Al Munkidh Min Ad Dallal]*.

<sup>131</sup> Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith*.

generate conclusions mixed with 'doubt, hesitation, error, deficiency and delusion' due to its natural limits, Topbaş asserts that it is better for reason to stay 'within its natural limits', and to accept the guidance of revelation. Only in so doing can reasoning be saved from being dragged into contradiction.<sup>132</sup> Topbaş commends his solution as the putting of reason into the service of religion. He formulates this as 'may reason be sacrificed for Muhammad'.<sup>133</sup> If this is not done, and reason is taken as the only instrument, the result will be disaster for humanity.<sup>134</sup>

On the last, but not least, subject of philosophy, we again see that Topbaş interpret al-Ghazali in a way that results in a highly critical, sometimes even hostile, stance on philosophy. The reference books of Erenköy repeatedly state that philosophy is not compatible with Islam. Topbaş is alarmed by the weakness of philosophy as well by as its potential harm to people.<sup>135</sup>

His main criticism is that philosophy uses various procedures of reasoning, such as analogical deduction, that allows people to avoid submission to divine revelation. Topbaş thus interprets philosophy as the weakening of the human ability to engage with absolute knowledge. Philosophy enslaves the limited senses and human intellect.<sup>136</sup> For Topbaş, practising philosophy is to prefer a defective and misleading method when one has available the perfect method of inner knowledge. This harsh stance on philosophy is particularly visible in his argument that it is Satan who introduced analogical reasoning.<sup>137</sup> Topbaş bases this view on a Qur'anic verse where, after creating Adam, God ordered the angels to prostrate themselves before him. Satan did not comply, though all the other angels did. When asked, Satan reasoned to legitimate his disobedience as follows: 'I am better than Adam: you created me from fire, and you created him from clay'.<sup>138</sup> Topbaş interprets this verse as proof that reasoning might generate wrong results and lead one away from obeying God's orders. As interpreted by Topbaş, a logical derivative of Satan's argument is the lesson that the absolute knowledge that comes from God must be obeyed, and reasoning must be distrusted, because it has no ability to acquire true knowledge.

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<sup>132</sup> Topbaş, *The Islamic Approach to Reasoning and Philosophy*.

<sup>133</sup> Topbaş.

<sup>134</sup> Topbaş, *Gönül Bahçesinden Son Nefes*; Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith*.

<sup>135</sup> Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith*.

<sup>136</sup> Topbaş.

<sup>137</sup> Topbaş, *The Islamic Approach to Reasoning and Philosophy*.

<sup>138</sup> Topbaş, *Gönül Bahçesinden Son Nefes*.



To enhance his argument on the weakness of the philosophical method, Topbaş references al-Ghazali. For example, he borrows an argument from *The Incoherence of Philosophers* where al-Ghazali criticises the philosophers for busying themselves with empty arguments. Thus, to plunge into narrating the differences among the philosophers would involve too long a tale.<sup>139</sup> Repeating this argument, Topbaş also points out that the disagreements among philosophers are proof of the inadequacy of reason and philosophy.<sup>140</sup> Accordingly, philosophers prove their own limitations in their constant debates and falsification of one another's views.<sup>141</sup> So, we understand from Topbaş that the philosophers' lack of ability to acquire absolute knowledge leaves them engaged in endless and pointless debate. To illustrate this argument, Topbaş recounts the story of Muhammad Iqbal, who read Ibn Sina and al-Farabi. Not satisfied with their dry sentences, Iqbal found himself 'a traveller in their nightmare dead-end streets'.<sup>142</sup>

As another method, Topbaş tries to show how the philosophers' ideas have been useless throughout history. He claims that not even one person can be found who has attained happiness through belief in and practice of Aristotle's philosophy.<sup>143</sup> But this is again an argument borrowed from al-Ghazali. In challenging philosophers for their failure to produce useful knowledge, al-Ghazali, in *Munkidh*, describes the mystics as men of real experience and not merely men of words.<sup>144</sup> There is no doubt that 'men of words' in that comparison references philosophers. Quoting al-Ghazali verbatim here, Topbaş, too, repeats that philosophers are simply 'men of words,' not purveyors of ideas that can be put to work to cure social problems or guide people to salvation. He also quotes al-Ghazali saying that philosophy cannot provide sufficient answers to 'my need'.<sup>145</sup> Not surprisingly, in giving various examples of philosophers whose ideas have no practical application, Topbaş reminds al-Farabi.<sup>146</sup> To prove his thesis, Topbaş claims that in the history of humanity, no society has achieved peace and happiness by implementing the views of a particular philosopher.<sup>147</sup> On the contrary, he argues, philosophers have often provoked distress among people.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>139</sup> Al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers [Tahafut Al-Falasifa]*.

<sup>140</sup> Topbaş, *Islam Spirit and Form*.

<sup>141</sup> Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith*.

<sup>142</sup> Osman Nuri Topbaş, *Civilization of Virtues 2* (Istanbul: Erkam, 2009), 437.

<sup>143</sup> Topbaş, *The Islamic Approach to Reasoning and Philosophy*.

<sup>144</sup> Al-Ghazali, *Deliverance From Error [Al Munkidh Min Ad Dallal]*.

<sup>145</sup> Topbaş, *Sufism: A Path Towards the Internalization of Faith*.

<sup>146</sup> Topbaş, *The Islamic Approach to Reasoning and Philosophy*.

<sup>147</sup> Topbaş.

<sup>148</sup> Osman Nuri Topbaş, *Contemplation In Islam* (Istanbul: Erkam, 2009), 16.

## **Conclusion**

The interpretation and transmission of al-Ghazali in contemporary Turkey is indeed not limited to the two Islamic groups studied in this paper. That subject should also be analysed in other cases, like how al-Ghazali is interpreted and transmitted in mosque sermons, or in the schoolbooks used in the compulsory religious courses in Turkey.

However, this paper, having studied two typical Sunni religious movements, has observed that how al-Ghazali is interpreted and transmitted in Turkey contributes to: (i) a highly sceptical stance on causality and natural law; (ii) a deep suspicion of rational knowledge because of the limits of human reason and the senses, and a consequent belief in the necessity and existence of inner knowledge; and (iii) a highly critical, even antagonistic, stance on philosophy and philosophers. The reference books of Işıkçılar and Erenköy interpret al-Ghazali as making categorical and normative adverse criticisms of natural law, rational knowledge and philosophy.

On this account, in terms of the characteristics of al-Ghazali's impact, the findings of this paper support those scholars who criticise the legacy of al-Ghazali's part in the Sunni Revival Thesis, albeit in a different temporal context. So, this paper's findings suggest that any person who is exposed to al-Ghazali as interpreted by Işıkçılar and Erenköy is likely to become critical of natural law, rational knowledge and philosophy. No case is detected in Işıkçılar and Erenköy that could tend to support the revisionist perspective on al-Ghazali.

Though al-Ghazali died in 1111, his impact upon Muslims continues today. In other words, al-Ghazali survives as a contemporary phenomenon. The nature of al-Ghazali's impact is therefore not solely a historical issue. This article, by illustrating through two cases how al-Ghazali's impact is crucial in contemporary Turkey, concludes that there is need for more studies on how contemporary Muslims incorporate al-Ghazali in their interpretations of Islam. The intensive debate on al-Ghazali's historical impact has the potential of preventing us from seeing and discussing how al-Ghazali's legacy influences today's Muslims.

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