



Al-Ghazali's Mystical Approach to the Interconnection between Religion and Politics: The Method of Esoteric Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

Al-Ghazali played diverse and influential roles in the realms of science and politics, leaving a lasting impact on Islamic intellectual history. His unique personal and intellectual experiences led to the production of distinctive works. This paper examines how Ghazali conceives of politics, particularly in light of his transition from jurisprudence to Sufism. The central hypothesis is that Ghazali offers a new framework for understanding religious teachings and the relationship between religion and politics. This transformation marks a shift from an externally oriented political approach to one rooted in introspection and spiritual depth. At the core of this shift lies Ghazali's emphasis on the "heart" as the most essential aspect of human life. For him, the heart is not merely a personal concern but is deeply intertwined with society and governance. He initiated this new paradigm by proposing a synthesis of politics and prophecy and by articulating the heart's central role in both prophetic existence and political leadership. This paper explores the significance of the heart in the intersection of politics, prophecy, and esotericism, arguing that Ghazali's Sufi perspective offers a distinct and introspective model of political thought.

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1. Introduction

Al-Ghazali occupies a pivotal place in the intellectual and political history of the Islamic world. He played multiple influential roles, and his works—though at times seemingly contradictory—reflect a profound evolution in his thought. This article investigates the desirability of Al-Ghazali's later political views, particularly following his personal and intellectual transformation. The central hypothesis is that Al-Ghazali redefined the relationship between religion and politics by shifting the focus from external authority to the inner self. His ideal vision of politics, therefore, is one rooted in the heart and characterized by spiritual insight, sincerity, and moral reform.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a historical-analytical approach to examine Al-Ghazali's political philosophy in the context of his personal transformation and broader socio-religious developments. By engaging in textual analysis of Al-Ghazali's later works—especially *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)—and situating them within the framework of Islamic political thought, the research identifies key turning points in his approach to governance, prophecy, and religious knowledge. Particular attention is paid to the themes of introspection, esotericism, and ethical reform as the basis for his political vision.

3. Findings

Al-Ghazali's departure from formal politics to spiritual seclusion marked a turning point in his intellectual trajectory. No longer content with jurisprudential and scholastic paradigms, he introduced a politics of the heart—a model based on mystical awareness, inward reform, and ethical sincerity. He emphasized the importance of the heart not only in personal spirituality but also in public governance. Politics, in his view, must reflect prophetic knowledge, characterized by intuitive certainty and oriented toward collective well-being. Al-Ghazali did not reject the Sharia or jurisprudence but sought their revival through a mystical epistemology. He presented a dual understanding of politics and prophecy, arguing that the inner dimension of revelation should guide political leadership. The esoteric reading of prophetic function, in his thought, calls for a governance rooted in compassion, tolerance, and wisdom. His writings suggest that the harmony between religion and politics can only be achieved through a reformatory mission grounded in esoteric understanding and personal transformation.

His advocacy for "tolerant politics" emerged from his shift from external sciences to internal, spiritual disciplines. Through this transition, he redefined legitimate authority as one based not solely on power or law but on sincerity, purity of heart, and ethical intent. He entrusted this model to the "scholars of the hereafter" and righteous rulers who commit themselves to reform society in the Prophet's moral image.

4. Conclusion

Al-Ghazali's later political philosophy offers a compelling model of spirituality-infused governance. By privileging the heart, he provided a paradigm that unites inner transformation with social reform. His approach reconfigures the political role of the Prophet as the embodiment of divine wisdom, and positions sincere intention as the foundation of both personal piety and just governance. In a time of political upheaval and philosophical conflict, Al-Ghazali's introspective ethics provided a path toward individual and collective happiness—not through outward conformity, but through heartfelt belief and inner sincerity. His legacy is that of a seeker who found in mysticism and prophetic adherence the means to reconcile religion and the world, and to propose a vision of politics imbued with tolerance, wisdom, and moral purpose.

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