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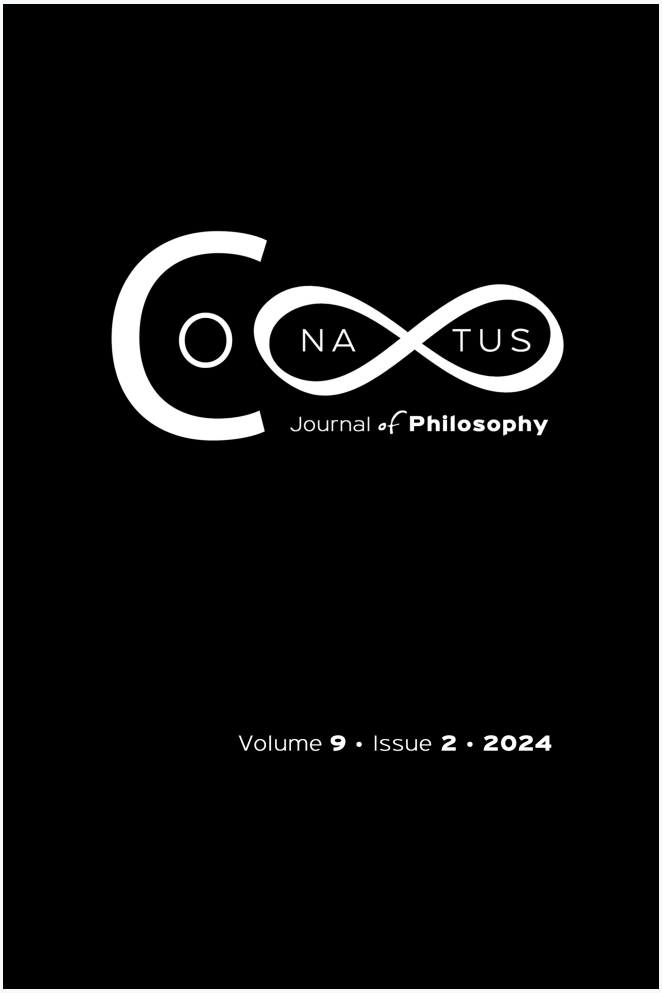

Al-Ghazali on Taqlid, Ijtihad, and Forming Beliefs

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Al-Ghazali on Taqlid, Ijtihad, and Forming Beliefs

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Abstract

Medieval philosophy has often been stereotypically characterized as rigidly reliant on authority and lacking originality. However, the present research challenges this perception by unveiling the lively debates among medieval philosophers in the Islamic World regarding the autonomy of thought for both esteemed scholars and everyday individuals. Rather than passively accepting authoritative doctrines, these philosophers contemplated the extent to which independent reflection should play a role. Surprisingly, their reflections resonate in the contemporary world as we grapple with parallel questions about the balance between authority and individual inquiry in our society. The first part of the paper introduces a timeless challenge faced by medieval Islamic philosophers: the formation of beliefs. This predicament persists today – how much should we rely on authority without critical examination, and when should we subject our beliefs to scrutiny? The paper introduces an Islamic classical tradition followed by Muslim jurists, theologians, and philosophers: the nuanced distinction between Taqlid (following authority) and Ijtihad (independent reasoning) to address this. The perspective of Al-Ghazali, a prominent representative of this tradition, is thoroughly examined, highlighting its contributions and challenges. In its methodological approach, this paper rigorously analyzes primary and secondary sources relevant to Al-Ghazali's views in Arabic and English. This comprehensive analysis aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between authority and independent reasoning in the context of medieval Islamic philosophy.

Keywords: *Al-Ghazali; taqlid; ijtihad; belief; justification*

I. Introduction

When someone tells us that something will happen tomorrow or is happening outside of this room, we tend to ask them, what makes them think so? One way of justifying a belief is by showing sufficient evidence for the belief in question.[1] Howev-

[1] For more discussion on evidentialism, see Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

er, with the vast amount of information we are dealing with daily, we seem required to outsource the job of forming our beliefs to others.[2] For instance, when we think about the debate over the global economic crisis of inflation, many of us have an opinion about global inflation even though not everyone is an economist. Nevertheless, we all admit that global inflation is a critical issue that affects everyone's life, and we have beliefs about it despite not having any economic expertise. Similarly, we can run through all the political problems and controversies we face today, e.g., global warming and military conflicts. When we think about any of these issues, we see that to understand any problem deeply, we would probably need to have a Ph.D. in the relevant field, which may not be sufficient to understand the problem entirely. People often, for example, complain that even economists underestimate or do not understand the real implications of the problem of global inflation.

We are all in a situation of deferring to experts to form our beliefs about essential matters. This way of creating beliefs about a particular issue is causing much political upheaval because there is considerable debate about the circumstances under which we should be doing something but not the other. For instance, we have all these debates about fake news and how the public forms false beliefs.[3] It should be noted that this concern is not only about political matters. The same concern appears even when we think about everyday issues. For example, I would accept that the stove is off because my wife tells me so, though I risk lives when I take her testimony.[4] Alternatively, when colleagues ask me about screams they heard, they would believe what I tell them. Contemporary epistemologists refer to this matter as the problem of knowledge by testimony. A more general phenomenon plays out on many levels: the personal, the practical, and the political, which has to do with this way of forming beliefs where someone else tells you what is accurate, and you believe it because they say it is true.

It is natural and necessary to believe based on someone else's testimony. However, this way of forming beliefs is suspect because we usual-

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[2] See Alvin I. Goldman, "What Is Justified Belief?" in *Justification and Knowledge: New Studies in Epistemology*, ed. George Sotiros Pappas, 1-23 (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979); and William P. Alston, "Concepts of Epistemic Justification," *Monist* 68, no. 1 (1985): 57-89.

[3] It is widely held that beliefs are attitudes one takes when one takes something to be true. According to Bernard Williams, one's belief 'aims at truth.' Bernard Williams, *Problems of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

[4] Testimony is usually taken as a source of justification for our beliefs. For example, Burge argues that 'if something is a rational source, it is prima facie source of truth.' Tyler Burge, "Content Preservation," *The Philosophical Review* 102, no. 4 (1993): 457-488.

ly tend to think that we should form our beliefs based on understanding why the thing we believe is true.[5] For example, if we talk to a climatologist and they say that global warming is a severe threat to humanity, we tend to ask why they believe so. If this climatologist says, "I believe that global warming is a threat to humanity because one of my friend's friend is a climatologist and told me that," then we would think they do not know what they are doing because they are not experts. If we are strict about it, we might think we should only believe things we know are true. According to Stoicism, when someone is not sure what to believe, one should withhold belief entirely, and thus:

> Only the perfected human agent genuinely knows anything, because only she possesses the wide-ranging argumentative expertise necessary to defend what she has affirmed against any possible challenge, together with a grasp of the further facts that explain its truth.[6]

Hence, Stoics will only commit themselves when they are certain.[7]

On the other hand, Scepticism suggests that if you hold the policy that we should only form beliefs when we are sure, then we should never form any beliefs because we can never be sure, even about things that we usually think we are confident about.[8] For instance, the apple I see on the table could be made of wax. Thus, we are between two extremes on the issue of whether to form beliefs based on authority. According to the Stoic point of view, we should not believe something because someone else says it, while Sceptic argue that we would never be sure about anything because any belief could be false.

II. Two ways of forming beliefs

The least productive period in the history of philosophy to solve the problem of how we should form our beliefs would be medieval philoso-

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[5] For challenges to testimony as a source of justification, see Anna-Sara Malmgren, "Is There A Priori Knowledge by Testimony?" *The Philosophical Review* 115, no. 2 (2006): 199-241.

[6] Marion Durand, Simon Shogry, and Dirk Baltzly, "Stoicism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023 Edition), eds. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/stoicism/.

[7] For recent discussion on Stoicism, see Nancy Sherman, "Stoic Consolations," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2023): 565-587.

[8] For an overview of different accounts of scepticism, see Juan Comesaña and Peter Klein, "Skepticism," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/skepticism/.

phy. We tend to have a prejudice about medieval philosophy: it is highly authority-bound, uncreative, and non-innovative because medieval philosophers followed previous authorities, such as Aristotle, or revelations.[9] So, there are better ways of criticizing the nature of authority than medieval philosophy. However, this is a misconception; there are many cases where authority is challenged. For example, although philosophy in the Islamic world is authority-bound, there are quite a few ostentatiously innovative philosophers. Philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes underline that they were following their own reason, even to the extent that they were not necessarily following revealed tradition.[10] So, they treat philosophy as an autonomous field of inquiry that confirms religious revelation but is not dependent upon it. However, why do these hardcore rationalists tend to be Aristotelians in the medieval Islamic world?

They partially got the idea of having purely rational science from Aristotle but also by observing Muslim jurists and theologians. Frank Griffel argues[11] that early Ash'arites theologians distinguish between emulating other people's sayings and making an independent judgement.[12] To explain this, we need to introduce two Arabic terms. The first is taqlid, which means uncritically accepting authority and is usually used as a term for criticism.[13] For example, when I am told that

[9] This prejudice toward medieval Islamic philosophy can be traced back to The French Orientalist Ernest Renan (1823-1892). For Al-Afghani and Kemal's response to Renan's position, see Michelangelo Guida, "Al-Afghānī and Namık Kemal's Replies to Ernest Renan: Two Anti-Westernist Works in the Formative Stage of Islamist Thought," *Turkish Journal of Politics* 2, no. 2 (2011): 57-70.

[10] Even though philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes can be seen as rationalists, they were committed to the idea of the "unity of truth," that is, both revelation and the human mind can realize the ultimate truth of our existence. For a discussion on the role that the idea of "unity of truth" played in the thought of some Islamic philosophers, see Mesfer Alhayyani, "Ibn Tufayl's Hayy Ibn Yaqzan: The Natural Progression of the Mind and Intellectual Elitism," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103, no. 4 (2023): 2-3. It should also be noted that not all Islamic thinkers accept the idea of the unity of truth. For example, Al-Ghazali's core position in *The Incoherence of Philosophers* was that relying merely on human reasoning does not necessarily lead to realizing the ultimate truth of our existence; see Peter Adamson, *Philosophy in the Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 149.

[11] Frank Griffel, "Taqlīd of the Philosophers: Al-Ghazālī's Initial Accusation in his Tahāfut," in *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther, 273-296 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 279.

[12] Ash'arites represent widely held thought within Islamic theology/Kalam. Al-Ghazali is one of the prominent names of the Ash'arites, who share some common ideas within the school, such as the idea of divine intervention in causality. For more discussion, see Blake D. Dutton, "Al-Ghazālī on Possibility and the Critique of Causality," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 10, no. 1 (2001): 23-46.

[13] Griffel translates *taqlid* as 'uncritical emulation' in Griffel, "Taqlīd of the Philosophers," 274;

I am engaging in taqlid, it means that I have not thought something through for myself, and I say something just because I am following an authority or tradition. The second term is ijtihad, which means an effort (or making an "independent judgment").[14] Ijtihad is the antonym or the counter term of the word taqlid. Moreover, when I engaged in ijtihad, I thought about it and figured it out. Consequently, someone who engages in taqlid is called muqalid, and someone who participates in ijtihad is called mujtahid.

When we look at the Islamic legal tradition, we will find that early Muslim jurists started systematizing Islamic law based on the revealed tradition, which happened around the same time people started writing about philosophy in the Islamic world.[15] The question quickly emerges: What does it mean to make a legal ruling in this context? Jurists came up with the idea that there are two ways of making a legal ruling: through taqlid or ijtihad. The former way appears when a member of a legal school makes a legal ruling based on his master's previous ruling or whatever other members of the school have said. For example, when a jurist is ruling in an unclear situation, he could look for a previous ruling of someone considered authoritative and make that ruling rather than trying to figure it out himself. The other option is ijtihad, where the jurist is competent enough to return to the sources and make his own ruling based on revealed tradition. Islamic legal schools are founded by people considered to be mujtahids. For example, Al-Shafi'i, the founder of the Shafi'i legal school, can develop innovative new rulings. His ijtihad is based not only on his common sense or intuitions but also on the sources of Islamic law.[16]

Interestingly, these foremost jurists divide the juridical world into two kinds of jurists: mujtahids and muqalids. Note that the four significant jurists are pure mujtahids who start from first principles and

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and Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazālī's Use of 'Original Human Disposition' (*Fitra*) and Its Background in the Teachings of Al-Fārābī and Avicenna," *The Muslim World* 102, no. 1 (2011): 1. However, the present author uses here Adamson's understanding of Al-Ghazali's notion of taqlid as an 'uncritical acceptance of authority' see Adamson.

[14] Adamson, 174.

[15] Besides the Quran, revealed tradition also involves *Hadith*, a collection of reports about things the Prophet said and did.

[16] According to Griffel, a consensus among early Muslim thinkers suggests that, despite the tireless efforts of teachers and prophets, a segment of individuals has perennially struggled – and will continue to struggle – with grasping even the most fundamental theological doctrine of Islam, namely monotheism. See Frank Griffel, "The Project of Enlightenment in Islamic-Arabic Culture," in *The Cultures of Maimonideanism: New Approaches to the History of Jewish Thought*, ed. James T. Robinson, 1-20 (Leiden: Brill, 2009) for more discussion.

figure out everything independently. There are also the so-called mujtahids within a school. For instance, a Shafi'i jurist can practice ijtihad by following the principles laid down by Al-Shafi'i and his followers. This jurist would be considered a compromise between pure ijtihad and pure taqlid. More importantly, most jurists who make everyday rulings can and should engage in taqlid because people might not trust their competence to engage in a high level of ijtihad. For the same reason, people not trained to be jurists should only engage in taqlid when it comes to law. These ideas of taqlid and ijtihad in making legal rulings emerged very early in the 8th and 9th centuries when Aristotle and other philosophical texts were first translated into Arabic.[17]

It seems that the same ideas of taqlid and ijtihad found their way to theology. Muslim theologians make a remarkably similar distinction. Theologians were interested in whether Muslim believers and expert theologians should be engaging in ijtihad or taqlid. Griffel describes Al-Ghazali's stance regarding this question:

> Emulating other people's thoughts is considered a grave mistake for those capable of independent reasoning. There should be no doubt that, in the case of the awamm, i.e., the ordinary people, taqlid is not only tolerated but welcomed since an acquaintance with independent thinking would run the risk of having this group of people fall into unbelief. A scholar or someone who considers himself a mutakallim [theologian] must, however, accept the religious imperative to reason independently.[18]

According to this understanding, the expert theologian is a person who engages in ijtihad. The theologian should try independent judgement, for example, to prove the existence of God through a rational argument rather than believing because the Quran says so. Similarly, a good theologian should be able to give a good reason for believing a proposition about God's nature or the nature of prophecy. In contrast, the non-expert in theology, i.e., an ordinary person, is supposed to engage in taqlid regarding these matters. The reason behind this position is that ordinary people (non-expert theologians) are incompetent to engage on the issues that involve the existence of God, the divine attributes, etc.

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[17] See Emma Gannagé, "The Rise of Falsafa: Al-Kindī (d. 873), On *First Philosophy*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, eds. Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke, 30-62 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

[18] Griffel, "Taqlīd of the Philosophers," 280-281.

However, Al-Ghazali in *The Deliverance from Error* argues that even the humble believer should engage in a limited amount of ijtihad, e.g., believers should be able to understand a good basic argument for the existence of God.[19] On the face of it, this sort of policy is desirable because it would make their beliefs secure. A person who believes that God exists, for example, would not be vulnerable once faced with challenges regarding belief in God:

> Since my first years and all the way to maturity, the thirst to perceive the real natures of things (darak haqā'iq al-umūr) was my custom and habit: it was an innate disposition and nature (gharīza wa-fitra) placed in me by God, not something I would have chosen and cultivated for myself. The shackles of authoritarianism (taqlīd) therefore fell from me and inherited beliefs fell to pieces in my sight even while I was still a youth: this happened when I saw how the children of Christians never grew up to embrace anything other than Christianity, or the children of Jews anything other than Judaism, or the children of Muslims anything other than Islam. I also heard the Tradition according to which the Messenger of God said: "Every newborn is born with an innate nature (fitra): then his parents make him into a Jew, a Christian, or a Magi." Through this my inner being was moved into researching the reality of that original innate nature (haqīqa al-fitra al-asliyya) as well as the true nature of those accidental beliefs that [come about] by authoritative adherence to parents and instructors.[20]

The worry that Al-Ghazali addresses seems to differ from the one this paper described. Al-Ghazali's concern is not about keeping our beliefs stable, but it is that if you believe by taqlid, your beliefs will only be as good as those you follow, and the authority might be wrong. According to Al-Ghazali, if I were a Jew, I would follow Jewish tradition and Jewish authority, which would get me part of the correct answer because, for example, I would be a monotheist. However, I would also reject the prophecy of Mohammad. In such a case, the fact that I am a Jew rather than a Muslim is just a matter of epistemic luck, in which I be-

[19] We can consider Al-Ghazali's views in this work as his final and most mature views since it was written a few years before his death.

[20] Taneli Kukkonen, "Al-Ghazālī on Error," in *Islam and Rationality*, ed. Frank Griffel, 3-31 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 4.

lieve certain things just because I grew up in a situation where the available authorities believed these such and such things, so I end up believing it.[21] For this reason, it seems Al-Ghazali rejected taqlid because it was alarming. Instead, Al-Ghazali tried to figure out everything out on his own. However, we have seen above that Al-Ghazali does not think everyone should engage in ijtihad and abandon taqlid. Thus, it seems that Al-Ghazali believes that only the independent-minded intellectual elite should reflect rationally and prove everything for themselves.

On the other hand, the philosophers come along with the same line of thought. Ironically, their posture of supreme independency, purely rational philosophy – freed from the bonds of religious devotions – was borrowed from the juridical and theological tradition. For example, when Averroes wrote the Decisive Treatise, he said that the people in the best position to understand the Quran are philosophers because philosophers have an independent rational way of securing truth through demonstrative proofs.[22] So, philosophers know what is true independently and can tell what the Quran means. In this way, Averroes recapitulates a way of thinking about rationality already well established in Islamic juridical and theological tradition, which he knew very well. His grandfather – also named Averroes – wrote works on law. He describes various kinds of mujtahids and muqalids, corresponding to Averroes' contrast between philosophers, theologians, and ordinary people.

Thus far, this paper addresses a problem that medieval Islamic thinkers faced and described how a long tradition of jurists, theologians, and philosophers reacted to it. However, this approach seems philosophically unsatisfactory because it is elitist. To say that some people are capable of figuring out everything vital for themselves and that ordinary people do not figure out anything when it comes to essential matters is very elitist because it classifies the majority of people as intellectually incompetent. So, all ordinary people can do is follow the experts' opinions. This elitism looks philosophically unattractive and might not be surprising if we lived in the medieval era, where most people were not even literate. We might

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[21] For more discussion on epistemic luck, see Hamid Vahid, "Knowledge and Varieties of Epistemic Luck," *Dialectica* 55, no. 4 (2001): 351-362; and Duncan Pritchard, "Virtue Epistemology and Epistemic Luck," *Metaphilosophy* 34, nos. 1/2 (2003): 106-130.

[22] Campanini lists Averroes' classification of humans: philosophers, theologians, and ordinary folks. According to Averroes, there are interpretive problems about what the Quran means, and since philosophers know what is true, they can check every interpretation against their philosophical demonstrations. See Averroes, *Decisive Treatise*, ed. Massimo Campanini (New Jersey: Gorgias Press LLC, 2017).

be very pessimistic about the ability of ordinary people to form their beliefs through a rational form of expertise.

Nevertheless, this elitism is not only unattractive but also epistemically problematic. Even if you think that you are one of the elitists, it does not seem like an excellent policy to form all your beliefs based on your efforts. Should we have a criminology degree before voting intelligently on a new criminal law bill? Even if we do so, we would be experts in one field, namely, criminology. But what about other things? How can we have an opinion about climate change? Should we have a degree in climatology? What if I want to buy a new car but need clarification on the best one that suits my budget, lifestyle, daily routine, etc.? As a result, it is implausible to claim that all our beliefs should be formed based on our efforts. In many cases where we lack expertise, we should trust what the experts in a particular field tell us. Hence, in this context, the claim that we should figure out everything necessary by ourselves is not a good theory of belief formation.

III. Justified taqlid as a solution

An excellent solution to the problem that this paper discussed above can be found in Al-Ghazali. Consider the following quote from his autobiography where he is talking about convincing yourself that someone is a prophet:

> If doubt arises regarding whether a specific person is a prophet or not, certainty is only attained by knowing their circumstances. This can be achieved either through direct observation or through consistent accounts and testimonials. For instance, if you understand Medicine and jurisprudence, you can recognize the jurists and physicians by observing their conditions and hearing their statements. Even if you do not see them, you are not prevented from knowing whether al-Shafi'i was a jurist and whether Galen was a physician, not through blind imitation [taqlid] but by learning something from Jurisprudence and Medicine, reading their books and treatises. Thus, you gain necessary knowledge about what they are like. Similarly, if you comprehend the meaning of prophethood, by delving into the Quran and traditions, you acquire necessary knowledge that Muhammad is at the highest degree of prophecy.[23]

[23] I translated this paragraph from Arabic to English from Al-Ghazali's *The Deliverance from*

The parallel that Al-Ghazali draws, Jurisprudence and Medicine, is more beneficial for us.[24] Al-Ghazali suggests that we do not need to be super experts in Jurisprudence and Medicine to recognize a competent jurist or a competent doctor; we need to know enough so that we are in a good position to identify the competent ones, and then we can follow their advice. So, the thought here is that we have some responsibility for figuring out which authorities to follow, but the responsibility does not arise to becoming an expert yourself. For example, I do not have to become an expert in Medicine – or have a Ph.D. in Toxicology – to tell good doctors from bad ones.

To distinguish between good and bad doctors, I need to know their qualifications: from which universities they graduated, at what hospitals they worked, etc. So, there are some criteria by which we can distinguish good doctors from bad ones, and then I choose to believe what the good experts say rather than the others. In this sense, I outsource my belief to the experts, but in a responsible way by at least finding out enough about the subjects that I know whom to trust.

We may call this stance a "justified taqlid," a compromise between absolute taqlid and absolute ijtihad. In this justified taqlid, I do not go so far as to figure out everything for myself like what a stoic would tell us to do, nor would I follow whichever authorities have been handed to me because then I will fall into the problem of epistemic luck. In this stance of justified taqlid, we would not believe whoever was put before us; instead, we would be critical about which authority to consider. We would have a good shot at having true beliefs when we are critical enough to determine which ones are the proper authorities. This might look like a satisfactory solution to the problem that this paper addressed above: "How should we form our beliefs?"

IV. Challenges to Al-Ghazali's view

Up to this point, we have explored Al-Ghazali's perspective on what we have termed "justified taqlid" as a plausible approach to the belief formation problem addressed in this paper. However, this concluding section delves into three concerns regarding Al-Ghazali's view.

Error/ Al-Munqid Mina-d-dalal. Abū Hāmid Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqid Mina-d-dalal* (Bairut: al-Maktaba al-'Assriyyah, 2019).

[24] For more elaboration on Al-Ghazali's concept of prophecy, see Frank Griffel, "Al-Gazālī's Concept of Prophecy: The Introduction of Avicennan Psychology into Aš'arite Theology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2004): 101-144.

The first concerns the ambiguity in demarcating the line between justified and unjustified taqlid. Establishing a clear distinction poses challenges analogous to differentiating between a good and less competent doctor. The degree of certainty in justifying taqlid varies based on the depth of inquiry. For instance, when determining the competency of a doctor, one may halt at various levels of confidence: recognizing the doctor's qualifications, delving into the history of surgeries performed, consulting other medical professionals, and so forth. The critical question emerges: at what point can one deem their taqlid justified in following a particular authority? The challenge lies in the realization that, regardless of where the search for evidence concludes, there may always be a higher degree of justification, leaving uncertainty about the threshold sufficient to validate taqlid.

The second concern highlights that the concept of justified taqlid, while offering a valuable framework, needs to provide a comprehensive solution to the overarching challenge of justifying all our beliefs. Instead, it imposes limitations, acknowledging that justified taqlid is attainable in some cases but not universally applicable. Al-Ghazali's perspective implies that to distinguish between proficient and inadequate doctors, one must possess a deep understanding of their qualifications and career history, subsequently choosing to trust the judgments of competent experts. However, this viewpoint appears overly demanding, especially considering its application across diverse fields. While one might successfully differentiate between competent and incompetent experts in Medicine, extending this discernment to every discipline seems implausible. Can one confidently identify proficient climatologists or economists with the same precision? The idea of justified taqlid offers a substantial resolution to part of the challenge. For example, individuals with a solid medical background may achieve a level of justified taqlid, enabling them to select the proper authorities to follow. Nevertheless, justified taqlid is not a panacea; its feasibility is constrained by the reality that we need more expertise in every field, rendering the problem only partially resolved.

The third concern raises the issue that the concept of justified taqlid does not eliminate the problem of elitism; instead, it compounds it by introducing a tripartite classification of individuals instead of a binary one. As argued earlier, this approach to categorizing people is philosophically unsatisfactory due to its inherent elitist nature. Expanding on the second concern, it becomes evident that there are three distinct classes of people: mujtahid (those capable of independently discerning everything necessary), justified muqalid (those capable of discerning

some important matters independently, as illustrated in Al-Ghazali's example of distinguishing competent doctors from incompetent ones), and ordinary people, or pure muqalid (who consistently defer to the opinions of others without regard to their ability to assess competence). This philosophical perspective, however, needs to be more attractive as it categorizes the majority as intellectually incompetent, posing significant ethical and epistemological challenges.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of Al-Ghazali's perspective on the formation of beliefs provides valuable insights into the intricate interplay between authority, independent reasoning, and the challenges of belief formation within the Islamic tradition. This paper has delved into the nuanced distinctions of taqlid and ijtihad, as articulated by Al-Ghazali, shedding light on the dynamic intellectual landscape cultivated by Muslim jurists, theologians, and philosophers.

As scholars continue to probe the philosophical underpinnings of belief formation and epistemic practices, future studies may build upon the foundation laid out in this paper. Potential avenues for further research include a more extensive examination of Al-Ghazali's specific contributions to the distinction between justified and unjustified Taqlid, as well as an exploration of how these concepts resonate with contemporary discussions on authority and expertise.

Moreover, an in-depth analysis of how Al-Ghazali's ideas intersect with broader philosophical traditions, both within and beyond the Islamic world, could offer a comprehensive understanding of belief formation as a universal human endeavor. Researchers may also delve into comparative studies, exploring parallels and divergences between Al-Ghazali's views and those of other influential thinkers across different cultural and religious contexts.

Furthermore, future investigations could extend into practical applications, considering how Al-Ghazali's insights might inform contemporary discussions on epistemology, education, and intellectual diversity. By engaging with Al-Ghazali's ideas in the context of modern challenges, scholars may contribute to the ongoing dialogue on belief formation and epistemic practices, fostering a more nuanced understanding of the dynamic relationship between authority and independent reasoning in the pursuit of knowledge.

In essence, this paper serves as a steppingstone for future research endeavors, offering a comprehensive exploration of Al-Ghazali's views on belief formation and laying the groundwork for continued scholarly

inquiry into the philosophical dimensions of epistemology within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

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