

SCHELER AND GHAZĀLĪ: EXPLORATIONS OF THE FINALITY OF KNOWLEDGE BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores ways in which Islamic tradition in general, and Islamic philosophy in particular, contributes to a constructive rethinking of modernity in a dialogue between Western and Islamic thought. In modern Western thought, ethics and rational speculation came to be largely disconnected. Knowledge is conceived as instrumental to human empowerment and reduced to naturalised representation and information management. Ethics and values become problematic as ethical motivation could not be satisfactorily rationalised in the modern context. A series of European thinkers consider this disconnection as a major flaw of modern consciousness and address the question of modern moral wilderness.

In Islamic philosophy, as well as in the pre-modern European tradition, on the other hand, knowledge has always had an ethical goal. Knowing and ethical becoming are indissociable. The moral dimension of knowledge is grounded in a specific anthropology, an epistemic concept of practical and experiential knowledge and a teleological frame of thought.

After exposing the problem, the paper will concentrate on the ethical dimension of knowing as it is expressed in the work of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. In third part it will look at the different ways in which modern Muslim thinkers from diverse backgrounds — Allama Iqbal, Mahdi Ha'iri Yazdi, Seyyed Hossein Nasr and others — have sought to rehabilitate the traditional view of knowledge in modern terms. The paper will seek to characterise and analyse the multiplicity of approaches: metaphysical, analytical and traditionalist and show echoes of corresponding undertakings in Western philosophy.

Keywords: Hamid al-Ghazali, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Scheler, Ethics, Knowledge

Ali Allawi, an Iraqi politician and Islamic thinker, who has written the well-informed and critical book on the American occupation of Iraq has also completed a work titled *The Crisis of Islamic Civilization*. He explains that during the last 200 years the Islamic countries were faced with a triple challenge: the inescapable processes of modernisation, colonisation and globalisation. While modernity is not necessarily anti-Islamic per se, none of these processes came from within Islamic societies. Ali Allawi takes up the task to define the crisis of Islamic civilisation as an inadequate – too narrowly political and too defensive – response to these modern processes, failing to take into account the breadth of the Islamic tradition. He then tries to point to what he believes needs to be recovered from the tradition and the spirit of Islam, in two words, “wellsprings of Islamic ethics” and the “sense of the sacredness.” Ali Allawi did not define some new political tract but asked what makes modernity really different from the tradition. He speaks a language familiar to some critiques of modernity in the West.

Modernity is a challenge for the Western thought as well and not only the modernity of Islam on which the West so often likes to speculate. Modernity is a challenge for Western modern civilization itself.

There is, in my view, a fundamental philosophical question for which the Islamic tradition is a source of inspiration and which stands close to Ali Allawi's concerns. One of the defining aspects of modernity - questioned from the beginning of twentieth century onward - are modern forms of knowledge and their specific ends. A continuous criticism of modernity helped to highlight a big gap between pre-modern thought and European modernity: the disappearance of ethical dimension previously ascribed to knowledge. A closer look at the two traditions suggests that European modernity and Islamic thought do markedly diverge *in their perspective on the finality of knowledge*. While in the post-Cartesian Western tradition of thought, knowledge stands for an instrument of practical action, in the medieval Islamic thought knowledge is conceived of as serving a distinct, a higher purpose. In the former perspective, it makes little sense to ask to what end we seek and produce knowledge, because there are innumerable partial ends. In the latter, the unity of ends makes all the difference.

The "finality of knowledge" is also a vast subject. German philosopher Max Scheler suggested a distinction that allows us to approach the question without much speculation. Scheler distinguished between *forming*, *salvific* and *instrumental* forms of knowledge. A close look at these shows that we can only make sense of them by looking into the tradition, or even into the neighboring tradition of Islam - the reason why Max Scheler called for a cultural exchange between West and East in order to compensate the Western conceptual loss.

I want to explore the Schelerian criticism and his exhortation idea in four brief steps: Basing myself on Scheler's distinction (1) put into a historical perspective (2), I want to follow his footsteps and show that there is, indeed, a thought and tradition in Islam containing the forms of knowledge neglected in the Modern West in the work of Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī (3) and that this particular form of knowledge has proved to be a rich subject for both Western and Eastern thinkers to reflect upon modernity (4) and conclude with examples of parallel, Eastern and Western endeavours, to work with tradition (5).

1. Different types of knowledge
2. Two traditions and circumventing the paradigm shift
3. Al-Ghazālī's notion of knowledge
4. Challenging the narrow conception of knowledge
5. Conclusion: Modernity and tradition, East and West

1. DIFFERENT TYPES OF KNOWLEDGE

Is there a finality to knowing? To what end do we seek knowledge? The question seems superfluous. Knowledge is obviously something valuable in itself. Knowledge generally increases our efficiency in the world and our understanding of it. Yet, the question becomes a fit subject for inquiry when we assume there are different ways to know things and different objectives attached to them. German philosopher and founder of philosophical anthropology Max Scheler (1874-1928) distinguished between the following types of knowledge or knowing: *instrumental* knowledge, *formative* knowledge and *redemption* knowledge.¹ Every type of knowing has specific motivations, aims and proper knowledge acts.

¹ In: Die Wissensformen und die Gesellschaft *Problem einer Soziologie des Wissens*. Francke, 1980, first published in 1926

Instrumental knowledge (*Leistungswissen*) is all that opens the world for human action, and makes action possible and efficient. Scientific and technological knowledge, most of the knowledge offered in universities, is of this kind of knowledge, animated by the practical concerns. Next to instrumental knowledge, Max Scheler defines a (self-) formative knowledge (*Bildungswissen*), that is, values and orientations that build and cultivate a human personality. Formation of cultivation (*Bildung*) is not a category of knowledge as it does not refer to a level of education or instruction. It is a category of being, a form of a personality. To that, Scheler adds a third form (*Heilswissen*), redemption knowledge, that is knowledge that brings about the overcoming of tensions and contradiction related to the being in the world.

While it is quite clear what Scheler meant, in his famous lecture of 1925,² by the critical notion of the instrumentality of knowledge, it is much less obvious to what cultivation and redemption forms of knowledge he referred. This difficulty was not only due to a short space given to their explanation by Scheler, but also to a great deal of anthropological theory that was necessary for Scheler to develop and explain them.

Yet Scheler's distinctions are of interest for a simple reason: Only the first kind of knowledge is one that takes a familiar, clear, "objective" form. When we seek knowledge about the world around us, we generally mean to learn facts, discover regularities and formulate their laws. The types of knowledge involved are natural laws and verified facts, products of observation and systematisation. Intersubjective methods of verification and justification make this knowledge objective. The finality of the instrumental knowledge is obvious: Knowledge is information gathered for the practical goal of action in the world. It is the knowledge sought by the Arendtian *homo faber*.³ Its finality is the achievement of a particular goal of an action. Knowledge for achievement does not have a finality of its own. It is pure "information," a transmission of facts and factual pieces of knowledge, serving the goals of individual actions.

That is why Scheler's distinction is markedly critical. Being *instrumental* to something is like having finality subservient to the goal of a different, independent thing, like the mastery of nature. Purely instrumental knowing has no finality of its own; it is deprived of a *telos* and an epistemology without teleology.

Scheler's critique consists in saying that this most prevalent type of knowing is value-free. In order to highlight what he understands by value and knowledge, Scheler suggests two other types of knowing: that of personal cultivation (*Bildung*) and knowing towards salvation or integrity (*Heil*). Personal development (being and becoming someone of value) and "salvation" are indicators of a purpose of knowing. It situates values and purpose within the human self, and within a human existential horizon. These two value-laden forms of knowledge are responsible for the transmission of values and virtues, and helpful in overcoming the contradictions and conflicts related to worldly life.

Yet, the notion of cultivating *virtue* and the concept of *salvation* have lost their unique content in modernity. Seeking a value-laden knowledge in cultivating virtue and in salvation does not

² F. Cohen, *Die Formen des Wissens und die Bildung* (Bonn, 1925)

³ Latin for "Man the Maker" or the working man or the creative man. An expression coined by Hannah Arendt and Max Scheler to describe humans as primarily seeking control of their environment and lives through the production of tools. See Max Scheler: *Die Stellung des Menschen im Kosmos* (1928) and Hannah Arendt: *Vita activa oder vom tätigen Leben* (1958).

immediately reveal to what kind of knowledge it actually is. The West has long viewed knowledge as *facts* and *information*. Since the beginning of the Scottish Enlightenment, philosophers have argued that facts (that is, “information”) cannot ground values, that is, virtue and salvation.

Scheler does not elaborate on the topic: he limits himself to pointing out that there are other human activities (formation, education, cultivation) and needs (integrity, salvation) that also employ learning and knowing, only of a different, unrecognized kind.

My thesis, aiming to expand Scheler's critique, is as follows. Scheler's and Western inability to think values and knowledge together marks a difference between two traditions of thought. Western, post-Cartesian thought is governed by the instrumentalisation of knowledge and ascribes finality only to action to which knowledge is instrumental. Yet it does make sense in other, earlier traditions. In Latin West and Islam, the idea that attaining knowledge has a distinctive finality – such as personal cultivation and salvation – is fully intelligible. Let us first see what makes them differ on account of knowledge, bearing in mind those three forms.

2. TWO TRADITIONS AND THE PARADIGM CHANGE

By *modern Western thought* I understand philosophical perspectives on science that draw on post-Cartesian rationalist thought. It is based on a specific notion of nature as a mechanistic universe and a non-metaphysical positivism. In modernity, knowledge has been historicised and deprived of a *telos*. Since Kant, we know that science describes the world by means of symbolic representation in which the objects of science are historical: evolving and a construction. With Thomas Kuhn we learnt that the subject of science is historical as well – a community of scientists working with evolving paradigms. With Hannah Arendt we realised that the use of most knowledge is limited to production. The great amounts of knowledge produced by natural and social sciences have no special purpose other than the plurality of aims of diverse actions they serve. Accordingly, there is no place for a higher kind of knowledge, elevated above others. A piece of knowledge contained in the representation is of greater or lesser information value, it is more or less probable, it is better or worse justified but it is never more than that.

Medieval Islamic tradition, on the other hand, does ascribe value and purpose to knowledge. As such, there is a hierarchy of types of knowing and knowledge has a metaphysical dimension. Islamic thought has two main sources: the Islamic Revelation and Aristotelian Philosophy. The centrality of revelation gives all abstract thought – be it in Islamic East or in Latin West – a determination: a religious purpose. The second pillar, Aristotelianism, is a conceptual apparatus helping to explain the working of a teleologically structured world. Here, human life and human action have an ultimate end, a finality. The end can be formulated either in religious terms, or in Aristotelian ones respectively: as a fulfillment of a religious destiny of man, mostly conceived of as a preparation for the hereafter, and in search of perfection and fulfillment of human nature. Human existence is seen as created with a purpose; it is a frame for all action and also determines the use of knowledge. In this context, knowledge proper can be defined as knowledge of matters divine, that is, as knowledge of the end-determination of human life and of the path to its fulfillment or perfection.

There is an underlying analogy between what can be known about human ends and what can be known about the universe. Unlike the modern mechanistic universe, the teleological world as a whole has an end and humans are a part of it. Knowledge thus has two dimensions: epistemological and ontological. First, knowledge is the perspective of a knowing subject through

which he grasps objective and general structures of the world in its totality. Then there is a second, ontological or ontic perspective. By knowledge man does not only represent the world but also the structure of his own being that guides its living towards preset purposes. An understanding of the world directly leads to the knowledge of purposes of a person's own being, or existence. Thus knowing and being are intimately related; one seeks to know in order to connect or partake in being.

This all too short a description shows that there is a difference in the *the metaphysical basis of epistemology* between the two worldviews: teleological and mechanical, non-metaphysical. Historically, this difference corresponds to a change. From the Western perspective, a modern epistemic paradigm has replaced the Aristotelian one. Beginning with Galileo and Descartes, science works with a wholly different idea of what is to know nature and its laws. This modern paradigm has proven immensely successful: it has brought about modern physics and great and incredibly swift progress in technology. The transition from the Aristotelian and teleological metaphysical paradigm to the scientific, positivist one occurred between 16th and 17th centuries in science and in the 19th century in philosophy and has proven irreversible. European thinking does not subscribe to any kind of higher purpose than those negotiated socially and politically, even after a great number of attempts to theorise such a purpose has failed. One could say that a process of immanentisation and secularisation of thought⁴ has made the teleological metaphysical frame and its epistemological presuppositions a matter of the past. Along with it also all type of knowledge which seeks to connect knowledge and being has lost intelligibility.

This change is generally considered a positive one, a progress. If we think only about the success of modern science and the relative lack of success in explaining the physical world of the Aristotelian paradigm, we could easily come to this conclusion. There is no going back and there is nothing really interesting, epistemologically, in pre-modern worlds.

Yet, the progress in question is undisputed only in natural science. Philosophy, moral sciences and value systems do not, on the other hand, bring about undisputed progress, only a change. There are no general, common-sense criteria to measure progress in thought. There can and should be criticism. With Max Scheler, we could argue that the science model does not represent any superior kind of knowing, only one model which has come to dominate the *homo faber*' technical culture.

Scheler's criticism, though, would be valid if his notions of cultivation and redemption knowledge were more than vague ideas but real, identifiable and distinct types of knowledge. While they intuitively seem interesting or plausible, it is difficult, for reasons explained above, to give them substance within post-Cartesian epistemology. Scheler could not do more than use them as critical concepts, in order to highlight that which lacks in the instrumental dimension of knowledge.

This is one of the reasons why the medieval tradition with its pre-modern paradigm is of interest to us today. It is as a reservoir of alternatives, if we can find them. Not for its scientific concepts, but because it contains among others, a different view of knowledge. In my view, there are most interesting examples of Scheler's *cultivation* and *redemption* knowledge. Especially, the Islamic

⁴ Recently Charles Taylor has attempted a conceptually balanced and historically broad account of that process in *A Secular Age* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007)

thought contains not only examples, but elaborate theories and description of a tradition of knowledge that is not instrumental. One of them we find in al-Ghazālī.

3. AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S PURPOSEFUL KNOWLEDGE

The Islamic tradition does indeed have a concept of non-discursive knowledge in which epistemic and ethical aspects of knowledge merge. Moreover, I want to argue, it is more than a metaphysical idea that could be dismissed once the metaphysical assumptions in question come into question. It is also a *kind* of knowing and a type of knowledge that defies simple description precisely because its purpose is larger than simply to state the truth and inform.

There is a host of related notions to the knowledge form in question: *ma'rifa*, knowledge by tasting (*dhawq*), knowledge by presence (*'ilm Hudūrī*), etc. This non-discursive kind of knowledge was made subject to explanations by theoretical epistemology (e.g. by Ibn Sīna, Suhrawardī). The most interesting approach towards *ma'rifa*, showing that it is as a distinct *kind* of knowing, is by a thinker who puts forward its practical side.

In his autobiography *Deliverer from Error (Munqidh min al-ḍalāl)*, Abu Hāmid al-Ghazālī distinguishes between three sources of knowledge: *authority* (*taqlīd*-learning from teachers, books, tradition and hear-say), *inference* (reflection, conceptual work and rational justification) and *tasting*. The last form is the “highest”: full certainty and confusion-free guidance comes only in the form of experiential states of the heart. Ghazālī proposes an alternative epistemology. It does not exclude learning and rational reflection; rather, it adds something to discursivity: personal experience and insight. Only, this experience is not to be thought of as some fleeting mystical vision, but rather as a product of a long and strenuous process of cultivation of virtues of character and virtues of distinguishing perception (in al-Ghazālī's words, purification of character and states of the heart).

To sum up Ghazālī's 40 volumes of the *Ihyā al-ulūm al-dīn* in a few words, only those who learn and habituate themselves to apply religious prescriptions (that al-Ghazālī has seen as medication for the soul) and both transmitted and rational knowledge in their practical (devotional as well as ethical) life-conduct, will be able to make their “selves” (*nafs, qalb* – their souls and hearts) instruments of knowledge capable of grasping (capable of tasting and of insight) the meaning of elementary religious concepts (such as creation, divine agency, divine power, etc.) so that they give a form to their lives and fulfill them (in a lasting happiness).

This “higher” type of knowledge has a specific finality: one learns for the sake of human fulfillment, that is, perfecting oneself in that which defines humanity and for the sake of attaining this happiness; there is a distinction between useful knowledge (serving human fulfillment) and useless knowledge (serving other ends); there is a hierarchy of knowledge or insight along with an idea of ascent in both knowledge and being (Ghazālī's *maqām*, or stations, on the wayfarer's path); knowledge is a path from elementary knowledge of the masses to the more captivating and delightful type of insight of the few; knowledge is practical - something becomes really known only when fully incorporated into acts and being. Knowledge of this type does not reside in books, but in a form of life.

The important aspect of Ghazālī's thought is that he did not seek to explain what this kind of knowledge of unveiling (*'ilm al-mukāshafa*) is, but wrote a series of books of diverse lengths about the practical ways to attain it (*'ilm al-mu'āmalā*). Rather than theorising on ‘Being’ in a metaphysical way, al-Ghazālī shows a practical way of connecting knowledge, ethical

perfectionism and human fulfillment, that is, of connecting the realm described by epistemology, ontology and ethics in speculative philosophy. As the objects of knowledge are the elements of a religious outlook, divine names, it is clear that the content is a kind of non-discursive, experiential grasping of the createdness of the universe and man's place in it, of course in an Islamic way. The way to this teleological knowing is not intellectual only, crucially, it is a practical path.

Ghazālī bases himself not only on metaphysical arguments, but on experience and tradition of a kind of religious practice. As such, his account of knowledge escapes the damage done by a loss of teleological concepts and remains comprehensible until today.⁵ Moreover, there are aspects of Ghazālīan epistemology that directly mirror Scheler's distinctions.

Cultivation knowledge

For Ghazālī, real knowledge comes from the practical action of self-cultivation. The reason is explained in anthropological terms borrowed from Islamic Philosophy and Sufism. Both the instrument of knowledge and the specific capacity for knowing are present in man as potentials and need to be cultivated and developed.

Ghazālī bases his non-discursive, experiential knowledge in the concept of self (*nafs*) or in the synonymous heart (*qalb*). In the Aristotelian and also Quranic Philosophy, the human self is a dynamic system in which governance of reason and balance of "passions" needs to be established. It is only then that the immaterial soul's capacity for knowing can be deployed. Ghazālī thus sets a preparation as a prerequisite of knowledge and this preparation is of a moral kind. A reform of character through moral discipline and spiritual struggle seeks to establish a *nafs* of a rational and virtuous character, liberated from the distractions of its lower, material parts. Self-control and capacity of self-fashioning are prerequisites to knowing the good because the self is both the place of understanding and of realization of the good. The idea that unprepared soul is incapable of the higher knowledge of purposes (of "the good") is a general late antique trope.⁶ The underlying theory is Aristotelian functional psychology, developed further in Islamic literary (*adab*) thought into a system of virtue ethics⁷ and in Islamic philosophy metaphysics centered on the notion of the immaterial intellect.⁸

Ghazālī has added a second prerequisite, a Sufi variation on the theme of higher knowing. He developed the Quranic notion of tasting (*dhawq* – 'tasting' death, punishment, justice, joy) into a technical epistemic notion of an experiential knowing. It is an inner sense, akin to the talent for music and poetry, more or less present as talents are among people, and always cultivated through practical training. It is like a practical realization, in both senses of the word, of that which one

⁵ This fact is related to Ghazālī's intention. He was not isolated in his epistemic views, in fact, he gave expression to a scheme of things that existed, in different forms, in almost the whole spectrum of Islamic thought, including philosophy. Mostly, he targeted an audience familiar with philosophy. It is this audience that he sought to bring back to a certain kind of religious practice; he did not have to convince them about teleology, only about the imperative to seek better knowledge and happiness in religious practice. This is why his discourse, aimed at his-days philosophers, is very explicit on the underpinnings of his thought and on the status of practice. For the "practical" intentions of his thought, see the first preface of *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, tr. Michael E. Marmura (Brigham: Young University Press, 1997).

⁶ Analysed by Pierre Hadot in his *Philosophy as a Way of Life* and by Michel Foucault in his *Hermeneutics of a Subject*.

⁷ See Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhib al-Akhlaq*.

⁸ Especially Avicennian philosophy. See Herbert Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and the Theories of Human Intellect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

knows. As tasting the savor of honey or sweetness of love is not equivalent to their mere description (experience is needed), it refers to a type of knowing involved in such cases. The analogy does not consist in the momentary psychological experience of knowing (Williams) but refers to a life-long cultivation of this other epistemic sense. In a non-religious example, being capable of recognizing and appreciating a sonata by Brahms also demands a long direct experience and a cultivation of a sense for “the wine of music.” Only those “initiated” by long practice can evaluate and appreciate the beauty of interpretation.

The training in question is the *Sufi* path adapted for a general public. In the forty Volumes of the Revival of Religious Sciences (*Ihyā al-ulūm al-dīn*) Ghazālī says that this kind of training consists in the acquisition of virtues of character and beyond that in a cultivation of *Sufi* virtues (conversion, patience, gratitude, *tawhīd*, God-reliance, love). Those virtues always have an intellectual basis and practical habitus; their deepening leads the adept to experiential realization of a deeper sense contained in them. The noetic dimension refers to deepening the sense of Islamic teachings (*tauba* - concentration on the hereafter; *tawhīd* - apprehension of the world seen in the perspective of oneness; *tawakkul* – trust in Allah, *mahabba* - appreciation of the miraculous nature of world as creation, etc.) The adept is helped by a series of auxiliary virtues containing spiritual exercise (introspection, control of one's progress, sincerity, meditation on death and creation, remembrance).

These are in fact, methods of internalization of the various aspects of a teleological frame. To the Hellenistic idea of a perfectible self and a preparation for knowledge, Ghazālī added a detailed, practical and concrete picture of the process of cultivation: its stages, mechanisms and aims. He made the process and the noetic dimension of ethical cultivation entirely comprehensible even outside the pre-modern frame.

Redemption knowledge

Finally, knowledge has a goal it shares with the goal of human life. The life's aim in the philosophical tradition is happiness – the Aristotelian *eudaimonia*, the *sa'āda* of Miskawayh and Ibn Sīna. Contentment, happiness and contemplation of good and beauty stem from the mere exercise of good and beautiful, from virtuous form of life. That is, knowing what is good leads to doing the good and finding a full satisfaction in one's exercise of rational freedom. The “substantial good” in question has to be seen as one grounded in the perfected self - not in just an idea.

Ghazālī added the preparation for the hereafter. Both Ibn Sīna and Ghazālī talked about salvation, *najāt*, and redemption virtues, *munjīyāt*. Knowledge was the way to salvation for both: contemplation for Avicenna, living out the experiential knowledge through the cultivation of virtues for Ghazālī. The implication of salvation is both religious and non-religious. The primary motivation for Ghazālī is of course religious. Yet *najāt* does not only have sense of redemption in the afterlife. Already in this life, prophetic knowledge and rational governance of one's practical life are synonymous to healing (the Avicennian *shifā'*) through a right epistemic stance and “unworldly happiness” and spiritual delights that accompany it. This is a widespread topic in Islamic philosophy, from ar-Rāzī to Miskawayh, and from Ibn-e-Sīna to Ghazālī.

Moreover, if we understand Ghazālī's higher knowing as the internalization of the teleological frame, we have given another dimension to what Scheler describes as the overcoming of contradiction of human existence.

To sum up: Ghazālian epistemology presents specific forms of knowing. They can be said to correspond to Schelers' cultivation knowledge (*Bildungswissen*) and redemption knowledge (*Heilswissen*). As such they support the Schelerian alternative to the narrower concept of knowledge mentioned earlier.

The focus on practice makes Ghazālī stand out among others, Muslims and Christians, who reflected upon the teleological knowing. He tries to explain why a modern mind will not be able to fully accept the contents and be persuaded by this sort of *Bildungswissen* and *Heilswissen*: not because it makes no sense but because it consists in the practical preparation of the self which cannot be put aside.

4. CHALLENGING THE NARROWNESS OF THE MODERN CONCEPT OF KNOWLEDGE

Where do we go from here? A look into the Islamic past shows that there are indeed strong examples of other ways of relating to knowledge than the prevalent instrumental one. A Western philosopher could argue that the Ghazālian example is of limited interest – that is, only of historical interest. Islamic tradition to which Ghazālī and Ibn Sīna both belong is still a part of the pre-modern, Aristotelian world. We can only make sense of Ghazālian knowledge in an Islamic or an Aristotelian context. It rests on a teleological anthropology and thus on an overall scheme of things no longer prevalent in the modern West; its study is only a glance into Europe's intellectual past.

There are two objections to arguments relegating Islamic thought and this specific view on knowledge, to the past.

First: Rather than an epistemological theory, Ghazālian rendering of the experiential knowledge is a description of a *practice* and an inquiry both into its conceptual and practical structure. The kind of knowing, being a wide-spread practice in Ghazālī's times, had an existence outside theory and outside the books, in a long religious tradition until modernity. It would not be very difficult to show how Ghazālian virtuous knowing has lived on, particularly in *Sufi* poetry, in the Iranian Shiraz School of thought and further until today in texts and practices of a number of Islamic authors and groups. This continuity, for the sake of this short exercise, is an interesting subject of study and one aspect of the importance of Islamic civilization today.

Secondly, the critical thought of Max Scheler has not been unique in the West. The narrowness of the technical, control- and technology-driven knowledge production has been, in various ways and with various conclusions, a subject of a large number of studies from phenomenology (Edmund Husserl), anthropology (Hannah Arendt) to critical studies (Michel Foucault) and moral philosophy (Alisdair MacIntyre). They constitute a critical engagement with European modernity and attempts to think beyond the fetters of hitherto powerful modern paradigm.

Some of these works explicitly call for a return to the previous Aristotelian paradigm. Their aim, surely, is not to take it back, but to use it as an inspiration of different form of thinking, in order to renew modern Western thought. Others directly suggest learning from ways of thinking beyond Europe's limits - Islam, India, China, etc.

In the following paragraphs, I will give a brief overview of the ways in which a glance into the depths of a philosophical tradition has been useful and important from a critical and a systematic

point of view. “Forms of knowledge” stand here for the most general and also most striking aspect that comes up in studying tradition.

(a) As a contrast

As Max Scheler would have noted, the reminder from the past, be it Latin or Islamic, functions as a foil to the one prevailing conception of knowledge – the impersonal, objective methodically justified information – through an example of a different way of knowing: the fulfilling acquaintance with ideal forms of a human life and character. It is this reminder that makes the limitations and narrowness of the instrumental *episteme* apparent. As such, a “cultural exchange” is beneficial especially to the West who has “forgotten” about the other forms of knowledge and has difficulties in understanding societies and cultures. The foil of the past proves important e.g. in anthropology. Understanding modern Islamic practice, benefitting from cultural exchange would be impossible for the West without it.⁹ Equally, stepping out of the orientalist mindset as well as the narrow secularist paradigm requires a larger understanding of one's past too.

It seems further that while generally sidelined by hard facts and naturalistic knowledge, there is a void and a need to fill it. Our common concepts have roots and we are reminded of them by simply using those certain words. Wisdom, the focal point in philosophy, and science, comes from the Latin *sapere*, which also means *tasting*, similar to *dhawq*. As I have attempted to show, al-Ghazālī's knowing by tasting is such a reminder of this forgotten relation to knowledge. The Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has further pointed to the importance of the practical aspect of every language act and to the fact that language and knowledge have concrete, practical forms without either of them being hegemonic. This reminder of voids helped immensely to direct further inquiry in the philosophy of language, moral philosophy and pragmatism. We can expect that others will follow.

(b) As a historical context of modernity

Michel Foucault, the historian of social sciences, is of the view that awareness and study of previous forms of knowledge and of relationship between the subject of knowing and regime of truth, or discourse, is crucial when we want to grasp modern ways of thinking. Many concepts and ideas seem powerful and immutable, like the idea of truth. These had in fact evolved with time and they had a different meaning in pre-modern times. In Foucault's view, the changes in intellectual perspectives on “truth” are secondary to the fact that our ways of relating to the truth and their forms of knowledge have gone through much more consequential transformations. While working on a genealogy of subject, Foucault wrote a history of forms of knowledge. In the *Hermeneutics of Subject* and *The Care of the Self*, he gave a lot of space to a knowledge form close to the Ghazālīan *ma'rifa*. Above all, he made it accessible to a modern reader by explaining the most important and most readily lost aspect – the specific relation to knowledge that makes value-laden knowing possible.

Michel Foucault has explained that the relationship to truth was different in pre-modern times. This is in line in the philosophy of Pierre Hadot. Truth, taken as synonymous to a verified fact or substantiated argument, used to have a different meaning altogether. “Truth” is knowledge that organizes a subject, makes the subject of a particular “regime of truth” reach a state of intellectual,

⁹ Talal Asad and Saba Mahmoud are two of the proponents of a critical anthropology of Islam in the US.

ethical development in which he or she can “see”, realize, taste that truth. In Hellenistic Antiquity, truth is the expression of a normative, regulative cultural or religious system. It makes little sense for some modern Europeans, but a lot more sense in a religious perspective. Foucault’s work in fact is like translating an ancient paradigm into a modern language. As a theoretician of intellectual change and a critique of modernity, Foucault actually bridged the gap between antiquity and modernity.

(c) As a basis for a renewal of modern thought

The moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has built a far stronger and more direct criticism of modern moral thought on his knowledge of the Aristotelian episteme.

The disconnectedness of the “is” and “ought,” between the description of the world on the one hand, and norms and ethics on the other, has found critics in the West itself. As expressed in MacIntyre’s diagnosis, this disconnectedness equals the loss of a concept of teleology. While the teleological paradigm in natural sciences was replaced by a more practical concept of nature, in moral thought it has not been the case. The loss of teleology in MacIntyre’s words, resulted, in moral wilderness, in which discursive philosophy seeks to ground anew, the binding force of “ought” and “good” and finds them either in the feeling and emotions about good and evil (the so called emotivism of Hume), or in rational prescriptions of the logic of mutual recognition of autonomous agents (Kant). There is in the modern moral thought, a lack of the original impetus towards ethics. Moral motivation is generally the weakest point in modern ethics, because it can hardly flow from an argument.

We could sum up his argument in saying that Western thought has lost the intelligibility of certain notions of human good and perfectible human nature in which virtue was a value per-se and cultivating one’s self made full sense. As we have seen in Ghazālī’s example, the very sense of learning was to perfect oneself. Perfectible human nature belonged to the Aristotelian, pre-Cartesian concept of nature and man; in the mechanical universe of modern science and technological action, men do not have a nature to fulfill or an ethical state of being to achieve. Men do not seek knowledge in order to be more perfect or simply more virtuous but only to act more efficiently.

5. CONCLUSION: TRADITION AND MODERNITY – EAST AND WEST

It is of course impossible to go back to a pre-modern metaphysical paradigm, as it is impossible to continue speaking of tradition once our conceptual instruments have changed. But MacIntyre suggests revisiting the tradition, especially the concept of teleology, and to find ways to adapt its final thought to modern forms of argumentation.

In conclusion, I want to point to ways in which contemporary thinkers actually make use of tradition. Most interestingly, there are such efforts both in the East and in the West, in modern, secular thought and in religious, Islamic thought, and they often appear as parallel. On both sides, a traditional “content” is moulded into modern “discourse” or concepts and form of expression. The subject of knowledge forms stands in the centre of many of these efforts.

There are three “classes” of thinkers who defend the traditional way of knowing: those who seek a super-tradition, those who intend to reformulate the tradition in modern ways and those who want to modernize the tradition.

The first is *traditionalism* or *perennial philosophy* – a view that there is a common, unchanging structure to human thought, especially visible in most cultures' mystical tradition. Its main proponents are Henry Corbin,¹⁰ a French orientalist and Seyyed Hossein Nasr,¹¹ a Persian, both with a personal religious stance. They make common intercultural features of religious traditions into a general structure of human thought. Their main basis is the contents of mysticism – Eastern and Western – that is, the forms of knowledge free of modernity and changes but present across all cultures. Because their conceptual tools are beholden to their traditional sources, they remain difficult to approach for those who do not share their view.

Secondly, there are the *modern traditionalists*, those who endeavor to reformulate tradition in modern ways. They are traditional religious men educated both in modern Western and in traditional Aristotelian philosophy. Its two main proponents are French Catholic Jacques Maritain and Iranian Mehdi Haeri Yazdi. Both concentrated their work on tradition and modernity on forms of knowledge. Jacques Maritain studied the concepts of human nature and its epistemic faculties. He coined the concept of *knowledge by connaturality* in an effort to formulate philosophically the concept of knowledge rooted in human nature.¹² Mehdi Haeri Yazdi attempted in his "*Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy*" to formulate in modern philosophical vocabulary the concept of knowledge by presence (*al-'ilm al-hudūrī al-ishrāqī*). To this end, he used all philosophical tradition from its Greek origins to most recent theories in analytical philosophy, philosophical language and logic.

The modern traditionalists in fact do not do so much work on tradition as they *translate* it into philosophical discourse to make the tradition accessible and usable. In the words of Reza Hajatpour, they not only seek to salvage tradition, but also "to give philosophy a place in the spiritual life of men" because for them "philosophy is a free space for thinking, a meeting place for men and traditions."¹³

Thirdly, there are those who try to *revive tradition from within modernity* – here, the forms of knowledge and teleology, as found in the tradition – within the modern, philosophical paradigm, without a systematic recourse to religious concepts. The landscape of these efforts is vast. I will mention two names to illustrate these endeavors. The Scottish Catholic Alasdair MacIntyre is one: a moral philosopher who works the instruments of philosophy to make them "think" anew, critically and freely, and to conceive of values and ends as rooted in human practice rather than in theories. A Muslim counterpart immediately comes into mind: Allama Iqbal also thought of a renewal of a philosophy of the *khudi* as a way of thinking in modern, philosophical ways, the "possibility of religion" and "his thoughts on non-conceptual modes of approaching reality" a new.

¹⁰ See e.g. *En Islam Iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (4 vols.). Gallimard, 1971 3; *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*. (Swedenborg Foundation, 1995).

¹¹ See e.g. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (1989)

¹² Jacques Maritain, *The Range of Reason* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1952); *The Degrees of Knowledge* (New York, 1959); See Douglas A. Ollivant, *Jacques Maritain and the many ways of knowing*, (Americain Maritain Association, 2002)

¹³ Reza Hajatpour, *Mehdi Hairi Yazdi interkulturell gelesen* Introduction. (Bautz, 2008)

These are examples of efforts parallel in East and West, that should be carried further. Knowing and learning from others can only enrich us and possibly diffuse the contrast between modernity and tradition: traditions are living forces and even modern thought seeks to evolve and recreate a lost dimension for itself.

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