

THE ETHICS OF AL-GHAZALI'S PERSPECTIVE IN KIMIYAUS SA'ADAH AND ITS RELEVANCE TO CONTEMPORARY MORAL CHALLENGES

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Abstrak

Krisis moral yang ditandai oleh relativisme nilai dan sekularisme menuntut kontribusi etika religius yang bersifat transendental dan adaptif. Kajian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi struktur etika Al-Ghazali dalam *Kimiyaus Sa'adah* serta menilai relevansinya dalam merespons tantangan etika kontemporer. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan, dengan analisis tekstual dan hermeneutis terhadap karya primer Al-Ghazali dan literatur sekunder relevan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa etika Al-Ghazali berlandaskan wahyu sebagai sumber moralitas utama, namun tetap memberi ruang bagi rasionalitas dalam kerangka tafakkur dan introspeksi moral. Terdapat integrasi harmonis antara tazkiyah al-nafs, akhlak, dan cinta kepada Tuhan, yang diarahkan pada kebahagiaan ukhrawi. Sistem etika ini tidak hanya menekankan ketaatan formal terhadap hukum ilahi, tetapi juga transfigurasi batiniah melalui pengendalian nafsu dan aktualisasi sifat malaikat dalam diri manusia. Kesimpulannya, etika Al-Ghazali menawarkan model etika Islam yang bersifat teosentris, spiritual, dan rasional, yang tetap relevan untuk diterapkan secara kontekstual dalam masyarakat pluralistik dan sekuler. Kajian ini membuka peluang bagi pengembangan etika publik Islam berbasis wahyu yang dialogis dan inklusif, serta mendorong penelitian lanjutan dalam ranah bioetika, keadilan sosial, dan ekoteologi.

Kata Kunci: *Etika Al-Ghazali, Wahyu dan Moralitas, Tantangan Moral Kontemporer*

Abstract

The moral crisis characterized by value relativism and secularism demands the contribution of religious ethics that is transcendental and adaptive. This study aims to explore the ethical structure of Al-Ghazali in *Kimiyaus Sa'adah* and assess its relevance in responding to contemporary ethical challenges. This study uses a qualitative approach based on literature studies, with textual and hermeneutical analysis of Al-Ghazali's primary works and relevant secondary literature. The results of the study show that Al-Ghazali's ethics are based on revelation as the main source of morality, but still provide space for rationality within the framework of tafakkur and moral introspection. There is a harmonious integration between tazkiyah al-nafs, morality, and love for God, which is directed at ukhrawi happiness. This ethical system emphasizes not only formal obedience to divine law, but also inner transfiguration through the control of the passions and the actualization of the angelic nature in man. In conclusion, Al-Ghazali's ethics offers a theocentric, spiritual, and rational model of Islamic ethics, which remains relevant to be applied contextually in pluralistic and secular societies. This study opens up opportunities for the development of Islamic public ethics based on revelation that is dialogical and inclusive, as well as encouraging further research in the realms of bioethics, social justice, and ecotheology.

Keywords: *Al-Ghazali Ethics, Revelation and Morality, Contemporary Moral Challenges*

Introduction

Ethics is a branch of philosophy that focuses on the search for truth. As a science, ethics seeks to understand what is right and wrong, and can be accounted for with reason[1]. In this context, ethics examines the good and bad aspects from a moral point of view. One of the important tasks of ethics is to determine good and bad standards in human behavior. Some people call it morality or moral philosophy, because philosophy seeks to determine what is meant by morality and which human actions are considered good. As a branch of philosophy and science, ethics requires universal standards that apply consistently.

In the history of philosophy there are four theories of ethics in moral philosophy. First, the ethical theory of eudemonism developed by Aristotle in 384-322 BC, this school states that the purpose or benchmark is good and that the good of an ethical action is happiness[3]. The second theory of hedonism ethics developed by Aristippos of Cyrenic in 435-356 BC, according to which pleasure is something that is actually good for humans[4]. All three theories of utilitarianism, developed by the English philosophers Jeremy Bentham (1784-1832 AD) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873 AD), argue that an action is considered good if it benefits the many (majority) and not just the small group (minority)[5]. In this case, the category to show good and bad behavior is happiness for the majority, not the minority. The fourth theory of deontological ethics states that the measure of the good or bad of the action is an obligation.

After understanding the general picture of ethics, the author will now move on to a more specific discussion of the ethical thoughts of one of the Islamic figures, namely ethics according to Al-Ghazali. Al-Ghazali, known as *Hujjatul Islam*[6], developed an ethical thought that not only rested on laws and rules, but also embraced aspects of spirituality as well as how he divided ethics into several important aspects, such as man's relationship with Allah, fellow human beings, and himself[7].. In this discussion, attention will be focused on one of Al-Ghazali's monumental works, namely the book *Kimiyaus Sa'adah* (The Chemistry of Happiness), which is considered the culmination of his reflection on morality. This book not only provides guidance on good behavior, but it also offers practical methodologies for achieving closeness to God. Therefore, the main question asked is how did Al-Ghazali formulate the concept of ethics in *Kimiyaus Sa'adah*? This discussion aims to delve deeper into the essence of Al-Ghazali's thought and see how the ethics he formulated can contribute to contemporary life.

Although Al-Ghazali has long been recognized as one of the greatest ethical thinkers in the Islamic tradition, there is still a lack of a deep and systematic study of the transcendental ethical dimensions[8] that he formulated in *Kimiyaus Sa'adah*, particularly in the context of contemporary

moral challenges marked by value crises, spiritual decadence, and cross-cultural ethical conflicts. Previous studies have tended to focus on the practical or moral aspects of individual Sufism without fully exploring the integration between spirituality, rationality, and revelation as the ethical foundation of Al-Ghazali. Therefore, a philosophical analysis is needed that is not only descriptive, but also analytical-critical of Al-Ghazali's ethical system in the text, as well as comparing it with the moral needs of modern plural and secular society.

This research aims to comprehensively explore the structure and main principles of Al-Ghazali's ethics as reflected in *Kimiyaus Sa'adah*, as well as evaluate its relevance in answering today's global ethical problems. The scholarly contribution of this study lies in the attempt to formulate an Islamic ethical framework that is rooted in classical texts but has an adaptive capacity to modern social realities, including interreligious dialogue and spiritual identity crises. Thus, this research not only enriches the treasures of contemporary Islamic philosophy, but also provides a normative foundation that can be used as a reference in the development of religious ethics in an increasingly complex public space.

Research Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of library research.[9] Literary research was chosen because its main focus is on an in-depth study of classical texts, particularly Al-Ghazali's *Kimiyaus Sa'adah*, as the primary source for understanding the construction of Islamic ethics from Sufistic and philosophical perspectives.

The primary data source in this study is the original text of Al-Ghazali's *Kimiyaus Sa'adah* in the Arabic version and its authoritative translation. Secondary data were obtained from a variety of relevant academic literature, such as books, scientific journals, dissertations, and articles discussing Islamic ethics, moral philosophy, and contemporary studies on Al-Ghazali's thought.

The data collection technique is carried out through systematic literature searching, both primary and secondary works, with emphasis on the selection of parts of the text related to the ethical structure, the relationship between man and God, and the principle of happiness from a sufistic perspective. All data are compiled and classified based on key themes that have been established in a theoretical framework.

Data analysis was carried out with a textual analysis approach and hermeneutic interpretation. Textual analysis is used to identify the internal structure of Al-Ghazali's ethical thought, while hermeneutic interpretation is used to interpret the philosophical and spiritual meaning of the text in a contemporary context.[10] This process includes a layered interpretation of key symbols,

metaphors, and concepts in the *book of Kimiiaus Sa'adah*, accompanied by a critical dialogue on their relevance in the face of modern ethical challenges.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses a referential triangulation approach, which is comparing and verifying information from primary texts with data from various credible academic secondary sources. In addition, the internal consistency of the text is also analyzed to ensure argumentative coherence and unity of thought structures in Al-Ghazali's work, so that the resulting interpretations remain within the framework of authentic meaning.

Discussion

Abu Hamid Muhammad Al-Ghazali was born in 450/1058 in Ghazalah, a village on the banks of the river on the outskirts of Tus (the home of the poet Firdawsi) in Khurasan[11]. Al-Ghazali had a brother named Ahmad Al-Ghazali (d. 520/1126 in Qazwin, Iran)[6]. Al-Ghazali was one of the most powerful figures and had one of the most organized thinking in Islam, as evidenced by his honorary title "*Hujjat al-Islam*" defender or guarantor of Islam[12]. His father was known as a pious man and a great lover of knowledge, his father died when Al-Ghazali and his brother were children, but before his father died Al-Ghazali and his brother were entrusted to his own friend who was a famous Sufi, it was from this Sufi that Al-Ghazali and his younger brother received their first education.

As a child, Al-Ghazali studied religion from Ahmad bin Muhammad Ar-Radzikani until he was 20 years old. After that, he continued his studies in Jurjan to study jurisprudence under the guidance of Abu Nasr Al-Ismaili[14]. After leaving Jurjan, Al-Ghazali went to Nisabur to study jurisprudence and theology with Abu Ma'alin Phisauddin Al-Juwaini (1028–1085),¹ known by the title "Imam Al-Haramain" (imam of the two holy cities of Mecca and Medina). Al-Ghazali later became his teacher's assistant until Al-Juwaini's death. In addition, in Nisabur, Al-Ghazali also studied and practiced Sufism under the guidance of Abu Ali Al-Farmadzi, a Sufi figure from Tus and a disciple of Al-Qusyairi[16]. From Al-Farmadzi, Al-Ghazali obtained the teachings of Shi'a ta'limiyah, which claimed to have authority over God's truth, a fundamental teaching of the Ismaili Shi'a that had been embraced long before the birth of Al-Ghazali.[17][18]

After Al-Juwaini's death, Al-Ghazali met with the Prime Minister of Sultan Malik Shah I, Nizam Al-Mulk, in 1091. Nizam Al-Mulk was the founder of the Nizamiyah Madrasah in Baghdad, where Al-Ghazali taught. In the same year, Al-Ghazali was appointed as a professor at the madrasah[19]. While in Baghdad, Al-Ghazali completed his studies on theology, philosophy, ta'limiyah-batiniyah, and Sufism. However, the influence of the four schools caused Al-Ghazali to

experience an epistemological crisis that forced him into exile for ten years. After a long period of spiritual exile, Al-Ghazali believed that "the Sufis are those who walk the path to God in a right and direct way," and attain the highest level of spiritual reality. Al-Ghazali began to reflect on the moral and religious decadence that was happening to the Muslim community at the time. In 1105, the ruler of Khurasan, Fakhr Al-Mulk, asked him to teach at Nisabur. However, Al-Ghazali only lived there for about five years before finally returning to Thus in 1110 AD[21].

In Thus, Al-Ghazali founded a madrasah and khanaqah (Sufi monastery) for Sufis, and there he spent the rest of his life as a religious teacher and Sufi teacher, seeking to improve spirituality. Al-Ghazali died in 505 AH/1111 AD in Thus, at the age of 53. Al-Ghazali left behind many written works, which according to Saiful Anwar amounted to 72 works, which can be grouped into various themes [14]. Al-Ghazali's most monumental work is *Ihya' Ulumuddin*, a book written to restore balance and harmony between the exoteric and esoteric dimensions of Islam. Al-Ghazali's other works include *Mi'yarul 'ilm* (the standard of knowledge) and *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (the confusion of philosophers) in the field of philosophy and logic, *al-Munkid Min Adh-Dhalal* (deliverer from error) in the field of philosophy, *Qawaid al-'Aqa'id* (principles of faith) and *al-Iqtishad fi al-I'tiqad* (the estuary of belief) in the field of theology, as well as *Kimiyaus Sa'adah* (the chemistry of happiness) and *Misykat al-Anwar* (the niche of light) in the field of Sufism[15].

Al-Ghazali's Transcendental Ethical Concept

Al-Ghazali wrote various works on morality derived from his practical experience as a Sufi. The main focus in Al-Ghazali's thought and life at this time was the good life in the hereafter. Before going through the skeptical phase, Al-Ghazali studied many fields, including philosophy, theology, and the inner circle, and eventually found that Sufism was the way to overcome his doubts[23]. One of Al-Ghazali's works that discusses ethics is *Kimiyaus Sa'adah*. In this book, Al-Ghazali explains that the main goal of his ethics is human happiness in this world and the hereafter. There are five methods described in *Kimiyaus Sa'adah* to achieve happiness in the hereafter: first, knowing oneself; second, knowing God; third, knowing the world; fourth, knowing the hereafter; and fifth, love for Allah, which is the most important topic and main purpose of this book. By following all these methods, true happiness will be achieved[7].

Understanding self-awareness is the key to understanding God. There is no one closer to us than ourselves. If a person does not know himself, how can he understand other things outside of himself?[7]. Therefore, humans need to learn their essence. Knowing yourself isn't just a statement like, "I know myself," which simply refers to physical recognition such as the body, hands, feet, head, or other limbs. Similarly, knowing yourself is not just about understanding basic behaviors

such as eating when hungry, drinking when thirsty, or acting when angry. This kind of knowledge will not lead a person to a deep understanding of God. On the contrary, what is meant by knowing oneself is understanding the true essence of oneself. The following is Al-Ghazali's expression in his book:

"... Who am I and where do I come from? Where am I going? What is the purpose of my existence in this world, and where can I find true happiness? It should be noted that there are three traits that reside in humans: animal nature, satanic nature, and angelic nature. We ourselves must determine which of the three is incidental and which is essential. Without revealing the secret, man will not find true happiness..."[7]

Animals have a nature that is limited to basic activities such as eating, sleeping, and fighting that are triggered by lust. If you belong to the animal class, then focus on these activities. Meanwhile, Satan has a nature that always encourages humans to commit evil, heinous and deceitful acts. If you belong to the group of demons, then do what is their habit. In contrast, angels have a noble nature, always contemplating the beauty of God and free from the tendencies of animal traits. If you have angelic qualities, try to recognize your true nature in order to draw closer to God Almighty and free yourself from the influence of lust and anger.

Humans are basically created with a combination of animal nature, satanic nature, and angelic nature. However, how can we understand that angelic attributes are the true essence of humans, while other attributes are merely additional? The answer lies in the fact that the essence of every being is something noble and unique in him. Reason is the highest ability that man possesses, allowing him to meditate on God. When reason dominates, man is freed from the impulses of lust and anger, so that he is able to attain the degree of angels. Conversely, if animal and demonic nature had dominated him, he would have continued to pursue worldly pleasures even after death [7], [24].

More than anything, understanding the soul is far more important in guiding us toward the knowledge of God than simply understanding the body and its functions. If a person does not know his own soul—which is the closest thing to it—how can he possibly understand other things? Indeed, humans are weak and despicable. However, if he utilizes the "chemistry of happiness" to abandon his animal nature and attain the degree of an angel, his value will be seen in the afterlife. On the other hand, if it fails to do so, its situation will be worse than that of a wild man who deserves to be destroyed. Nevertheless, man must also realize his superiority as God's most noble creature. On the other hand, he also needs to understand his weaknesses, since this awareness of powerlessness is one of the keys to knowing God[25].

In the book *Kimiyaus Sa'adah*, Al-Ghazali begins by quoting the hadith of the Prophet PBUH: "*Whoever knows himself, he will know his Lord.*" This shows that by understanding himself, man

can attain the knowledge of his God. When man contemplates his existence, he will realize that he never existed before, as it is stated in the Qur'an: *"Has there not come to man a time from time when he has not been something that can be called?"* (Qur'an, 76:1). The ability to think of God is the highest gift that man has. With rationality as an advantage, humans have a higher degree compared to animals. The deeper a person learns worldly science, the greater the satisfaction he feels in knowing the Creator. Man's perspective on his God will determine what will happen in the future. If a person understands that God is the supreme subject of science, he will achieve his life goals and experience true happiness. Awareness of its origins is the first step for humans to begin to think, understand, and draw closer to their God [7].

In the book *Kimiyaus Sa'adah* Al-Ghazali says "... This energy should not be opened only by sleep and death, but it should be opened awakely for those who devote themselves to jihad and latiahan (*riyadhah*), and are free from the grip of orgasm, anger, bad morals, and bad deeds. So if a person sits in an empty place and obstructs the path of his senses, opens his inner eyes and his hearing, and makes the heart relevant to the angelic world, and always says: "Allah, Allah, Allah" in his heart and not with his tongue, until there is no news with him either from himself or from the world, and he still sees nothing but God Almighty. The energy was opened, and he saw in his waking state what he saw in sleep, and the souls of angels and prophets, and beautiful and majestic images, and the kingdoms of heaven and earth appeared to him and he saw the indescribable..."[7]. This means that when a person truly knows his God, he will only remember God in his heart, and always mention the name of Allah with his heart, not with his words, and Allah will show his servant something that cannot be explained.

Humans are not the most appropriate party to be the judge of themselves. Therefore, he needs to consult *with* spiritual guides, namely the prophets and apostles or mursyid. The laws they set come from God's revelation, which provides guidelines in the form of limits that must be obeyed by man. A true Muslim will sincerely acknowledge and practice the limits set by Islamic law. However, anyone who neglects an established obligation, for whatever reason, is under the influence of Satan [7], [25].

Getting to know the world. Man must use his senses as a tool to study and understand the miracles that God has created in the universe. By contemplating or observing every sign of His greatness—whether seen in the heavens, the earth, or in himself—man will come to know God more and feel His presence in life. This process is not just observation, but also a deep reflection that fosters gratitude and awe to the Creator. During life in the world, everyone has a responsibility to take care of their soul, one of which is by always doing good to others and staying away from

destructive deeds. The knowledge of God and the deep love for Him become a shield for the soul, keeping man on the path of righteousness. On the other hand, when a person loves worldly things too much or something other than God, he not only distances himself from God, but also brings destruction to his soul. This state will make him lose his true direction and meaning of life [7].

The human body only needs basic necessities such as shelter, food, and clothing to survive and thrive. However, the physical desires inherent in the self often dominate and tend to rebel against the intellect which develops more slowly than the impulses of lust. These urges, if left unchecked, can trap humans in excessive desires. For this reason, God's laws taught by the prophets are important guidelines to control lust, including sexual desire, so as not to damage the balance of human life.[24] The world often deceives people by offering small pleasures that seem tempting, but are in reality temporary and deceptive. The world has so many branches of desire, which makes man constantly pursue it endlessly.

The Prophet Isa (AS) described this very wisely: *"The lovers of this world are like men who drink the water of the sea; The more he drinks it, the thirstier he becomes, and in the end he will die of insatiable thirst."* This message reminds humans that the pursuit of limitless worldly pleasures will bring only emptiness and destruction, while true happiness lies in self-control and drawing closer to God [7], [24].

From the above explanation of the threat of world danger, it is important to remember that not everything in this world is reprehensible. There are two things that actually have noble value and must be maintained, namely knowledge and pious deeds. These two things are the main provisions of human beings to determine their fate in the hereafter. Knowledge provides enlightenment and guidance, while righteous deeds are tangible evidence of devotion and obedience to Allah. A person's deeds not only bring blessings, but also strengthen the memory and love of Allah. As affirmed in the Qur'an, *"All good things will last forever (eternal)."* Good deeds become an eternal spiritual investment, transcending the mortal nature of this world. The Prophet Muhammad PBUH also reminded: *"This world is cursed, and everything in it is also cursed, except for the dhikr of Allah (Dzikrullah) and everything that supports it."* This hadith teaches that everything that does not bring people closer to Allah has no lasting value. Therefore, it is important for people to make knowledge, righteous deeds, and dhikr the top priorities in their lives, in order to avoid worldly traps that deceive and lead to true happiness [7], [24]. (4) Knowing the Hereafter. A believer in the Qur'an and As-Sunnah certainly understands the concept of heaven and hell, two aspects that are at the core of life after death. The awareness of the existence of these two places makes them understand that the life of this world is only a temporary phase that serves as a field of

preparation for the hereafter. Paradise is a promise for those who are obedient and do good deeds, while Hell is a warning to those who disobey God's commandments [7], [24]. Although some people doubt the existence of the afterlife, common sense teaches that we should act as if life after death were real. This is due to the potential for infinite great consequences: eternal rewards in heaven for those who do good, or painful torment in hell for those who ignore His teachings. In the face of this choice, taking the right step becomes very important because the stakes are eternal happiness or suffering.

By realizing this, it becomes clear that salvation in the hereafter can only be achieved by those who are consistent in following God's instructions and teachings. This includes performing worship with solemnity, which is not just a routine, but also a form of deep communication with the Creator. Doing good to others, whether in the form of physical assistance, emotional support, or fair treatment, is a reflection of the human values taught by religion. On the contrary, staying away from all forbidden acts is an effort to protect oneself from sin that can damage the relationship with God and others. In addition, preparation for the hereafter is also a reflection of true faith. Belief in life after death is not only a belief, but also an inspiration that encourages humans to live a life with high responsibility and awareness. This awareness makes a person think before acting, ensuring that all his actions are of good value both in this world and in the hereafter [7], [24]. Therefore, preparing for the hereafter is an obligation for every individual who believes, not only as a form of obedience to Allah, but also as a tangible manifestation of confidence in His promises. In this preparation, there is a great hope of attaining eternal grace and happiness by His side. (5) Love for Allah. In the book *Kimiyaus Sa'adah*, love for Allah is the most important topic as well as the final goal to be achieved. Human perfection, according to Al-Ghazali, will be realized when the love of Allah fully fills one's heart. This love is the pinnacle of devotion and happiness, placing man's relationship with the Creator as the main thing. Although in reality the love of God does not always dominate the hearts of all people, at least it must be the most powerful and superior to love for anyone or anything other than God [7], [24]. Muslims agree that loving Allah is an obligation as well as a virtue that must be possessed by every believer. This is affirmed in His words which describe the nature of believers: *"He loved them and they loved Him"* [7], [24]. This verse affirms the reciprocal relationship between God and His servants which is based on pure and sincere love.

However, some people who only know worldly and sensory pleasures tend to understand beauty in a limited way. For them, beauty is only found in physical things, such as stunning colors, outward appearance, or body shape compatibility. This understanding narrows the meaning of true beauty, because they cannot capture moral and spiritual beauty. In fact, moral beauty is a noble

quality possessed by a person of good character, such as honesty, compassion, and wisdom. This is a higher and deeper beauty, which can only be understood by a heart that has been filled with love for God [7], [24].

Those who think that love of God can bring worldly happiness alone have strayed from a correct understanding. Love for Allah is not a means to achieve material pleasures, but the ultimate goal of human life leading to an encounter with Him in the hereafter. Like a person who really wants something and feels relieved and happy when he succeeds in achieving it, the encounter with Allah after overcoming various obstacles in the world is the highest happiness that can be felt by humans in the hereafter. However, this happiness can only be achieved by those who love and feel good about Him in the world.

A person whose heart has never been filled with love and longing for Allah during his life on earth will not be able to experience this supreme pleasure. In other words, if in this world we have only a little love for Allah, then in the hereafter the happiness we feel will also be very limited. Therefore, people's future levels of happiness are a direct reflection of their level of love for God in the present [7], [24]. God confirms this in His words conveyed to the Prophet David: *"My servant who loves Me the most is the one who does not seek Me for fear of punishment or for the expectation of reward. He seeks Me only to pay his debt to My divinity"* [7], [24]. This statement teaches that true love for God must be pure, not based on fear or expectation of retribution, but on an awareness of the essential relationship between man and his Creator. This is the highest form of love, which leads man to true and lasting happiness.

The Dominance of Revelation over Rationality

From the discussion above, it is clear that Al-Ghazali's ethical thinking is very closely related to the teachings of God's revelation. In Al-Ghazali's view, the determination of whether an action is considered good or bad is entirely based on the revelation of Allah contained in the Qur'an.[26] In his book, *Kimiyaus Sa'adah*, Al-Ghazali explains that the laws established by revelation aim to provide limits that must be obeyed by humans. These boundaries are not mere earthly rules, but divine guidelines to guide man to a righteous and meaningful life [7], [24]. This is in line with the words of Allah: *"We will set the right scales (charity) on the Day of Judgment, so that no one will be harmed in the slightest"* (Qur'an: 21:47). This verse affirms the principle of absolute divine justice, whereby every good or bad deed, no matter how small—even the weight of a mustard seed—will be justly rewarded. In other words, no human deeds escape the supervision and consideration of Allah [7], [24].

Through this thought, Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of making revelation the basis in determining ethical actions. Good and evil are judged not only from earthly impacts, but also from the consequences of the hereafter. Therefore, understanding and following the boundaries set by revelation is not only an obligation, but also a path to eternal salvation and happiness. Within this framework, each individual is responsible for his or her actions, bringing his or her life into harmony with a greater divine purpose.

Al-Ghazali Ethics and Divine Command Theory

Al-Ghazali's ethical idea is based on the relationship between the paradigm of revelation and moral action that emphasizes that happiness is God's grace. In the Islamic theistic tradition, God is described as a legislator who has established the laws that all creatures must follow. Man was created as a free individual, man has the freedom to accept or reject what God commands, but if man wants to live as he should, man must follow God's laws. According to James Rachels (2004), some theologians have developed the idea of the relationship between morality and divinity into a theory known as the *Divine Command Theory*. This theory states that an action is morally right if commanded by God, and morally wrong if it is forbidden by Him. In other words, the standard of morality does not originate from the subjective view of man, but rather depends entirely on the divine will.

James Rachels' theory asserts that God is the absolute source of all moral values. What God commands, as in the scriptures, is a guide that man must follow in order to live according to His will. On the contrary, the violation of these commandments is considered immoral because it is contrary to the will of the Creator. However, this theory also raises philosophical questions, as posed in *the Euthyphro Dilemma* by the ancient Greek philosopher Plato: *Is something good because it is commanded by God, or does God command it because it is good?* This question opens up a deeper discussion of the nature of morality and the relationship between God and goodness [29]. In the view of certain theologians, this theory provides a solid basis for religious people to understand good and evil through divine revelation. By making God the supreme source of morality, this theory encourages humans to live a life in harmony with God's laws as a form of obedience and respect to Him.

According to Amin Abdullah, there is a clear separation between ethics based on reason and ethics based on revelation. This separation is rooted in the classification of science made by Al-Ghazali, in which he distinguishes between traditional science (*'ulumul Naqliyyah*) which is based on revelation, and secular science (*'ulumul Aqliyyah*) which is based on human reason and experience. In this context, Amin Abdullah points out that the understanding of ethics is often

influenced by the basis on which it is based, be it divine revelation or human rationality[31]. Some people argue that human actions and behaviors that are considered ethical, especially in the context of everyday morality, are often based on religious teachings. They see behavior that reflects religious values not only as an expression of morality, but also as a form of worship[31]. In other words, ethical acts that are in accordance with religious teachings are understood as part of obedience to God, so they have a spiritual dimension that goes beyond the worldly aspect.

Balance of Mind and Spirituality

This approach shows that in the Islamic tradition, religious morality and ethical human behavior are inseparable. Revelation-based ethics serve as divine guidance that provides limits and direction to human behavior, while reason-based ethics complement by considering social context and rationality. The two, when they go hand in hand, can create harmony between faith and worldly life, making every human action meaningful both in this world and in the hereafter. Through this view, it becomes clear that ethics in Islam is not only limited to formal morality, but also includes a greater goal, which is to bring people closer to God and create a just and balanced society.

In this context, religious actions are carried out solely by God's command, without considering the need for ratios as the primary source of guidance. The reason behind this view is the belief that revelation is the absolute and perfect source of truth, while other sources of truth, such as human reason, are considered relative. According to Al-Ghazali, ratios have limitations because their truth cannot be absolutely trusted. Human ratios tend to be affected by experience, context, and interpretation, so they cannot reach the absolute level offered by revelation[31]. Nonetheless, Al-Ghazali did not completely rule out the role of ratios in human life. He emphasized that although ethics must be based on revelation, ratios still have an important function in explaining and formulating teachings that are spiritual or mystical. An example is in the process of contemplating God (*tafakkur*), where man uses his intellect to understand the signs of God's greatness in the universe. In this case, the ratio serves as a tool to draw closer to God, but remains under the guidance of revelation.

Al-Ghazali's view reflects an effort to create a balance between revelation and reason in guiding human life. Revelation provides absolute moral guidance, while ratios help people understand, ponder, and apply these teachings in daily life. Thus, ethics in Al-Ghazali's view is a harmonious combination of divine guidance and human intellectual faculties, which together lead humans to spiritual perfection.

Al-Ghazali affirms that the highest faculty in man is reason, which provides the ability to contemplate God and understand the essence of truth. Reason enables man to control himself and

direct his life towards a higher spiritual goal. If reason is able to dominate and lead the human self, then the individual will be free from the influence of lust and anger, two traits that are often the main obstacles on the way to perfection. In this condition, humans can reach a high spiritual level and join the angelic order in terms of nature and behavior [7], [24].

Al-Ghazali also explained that the natures of animals, demons, and angels, although essentially different, are all applicable in humans. Animal nature reflects physical desires, such as the desire to eat, sleep, and reproduce, while satanic nature reflects the urge to do evil, deceive, or harm others. These traits must be controlled so as not to dominate the human self. This control can only be exercised by the use of reason, guided by revelation. If man succeeds in controlling the nature of animals and demons in him, he will acquire good morals, which ultimately leads to true happiness. On the other hand, if a person is busy serving these two qualities, bad morals will develop, which will eventually lead to suffering both in this world and in the hereafter. In Al-Ghazali's view, God's laws taught by the prophets were the main guidelines for controlling these traits. These laws provide clear limits on managing carnal desires and leading humans to a life that is in harmony with God's will [7], [24]. In other words, man's success in controlling animal and demonic nature through revelation-guided intellect is the key to achieving moral perfection and true happiness.

Al-Ghazali's ethical thought discusses man's obligation to God, therefore his ethics can be categorized as religious ethics. In fact, this obligation to God is solely aimed at saving every individual in the hereafter[31]. According to Al-Ghazali's ethics, everyone has an obligation to obey the rules set by God, as it is said in the book *Kimiyaus Sa'adah* "Man is not the best judge to judge himself, he must consult with spiritual guides, i.e. prophets, to set such limits". God sets the boundaries that humans must follow through the laws they make through His revelation [7], [24]. So in this case, the good or bad of an action is determined by God, which means morally good means a command from God, while morally bad means a prohibition from God. According to Amin Abdullah, in his book entitled "Between al-Ghazali and Kant: The Philosophy of Islamic Ethics" also explains, that al-Ghazali's ethics are classified as religious ethics, because they are based on God's revelation as the basis for ethical action [31].

Al-Ghazali vs. Kantian Ethics: Revelation Heteronomy and Moral Autonomy

Immanuel Kant placed moral autonomy at the core of ethics, namely that moral actions are actions performed out of obligations imposed by human practical ratios, not by any external authority, including revelation. In *his Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant emphasized that morality is universal and a priori, and derives from the categorical imperatives found in man's

own rational capacity[32], [33]. Kant's ethics is deontological because it assesses the morality of an action based on intentions and obligations, not consequences or purposes outside of the action itself.

In contrast, Al-Ghazali's ethics relied on the principle of revelation as the supreme normative authority. In *Kimiyaus Sa'adah*, Al-Ghazali states that the good and bad of an action are determined by God, not by human reason alone. Morality, in his view, is heteronomous, because it relies on the divine will as a source of value. Al-Ghazali did acknowledge the function of reason as a tool of tafakkur, but reason is subject to the guidance of revelation. Thus, if Kant rejected revelation as a moral basis because it threatened autonomy, Al-Ghazali saw revelation as a guarantee of absolute truth, guiding reason not to get lost in moral relativism. This difference reflects a contrasting epistemological orientation: rational-secular in Kantian ethics and theocentric-transcendental in Al-Ghazali ethics.

Al-Ghazali vs Utilitarianism: The Purpose of the Hereafter and Consequentialism

The ethics of utilitarianism, as developed by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, assesses morality based on the consequences of an action, especially the extent to which it maximizes happiness or benefit for as many people as possible[5], [34], [35]. This ethics is consequentialist and utilitarian, and tends to be worldly and empirical. Happiness in utilitarianism is measured through physical and psychological pleasure or satisfaction, and is therefore quantitative as well as secular.

Al-Ghazali rejects the measure of happiness that is purely earthly and sensual. In *Kimiyaus Sa'adah*, he affirms that true happiness can only be achieved through spiritual closeness to Allah and salvation in the hereafter. Al-Ghazali's ethics do not judge good or bad actions from social benefits or collective satisfaction, but rather from their conformity with the true purpose of human life, which is to achieve ma'rifatullah and divine love. Therefore, in Al-Ghazali's paradigm, actions that appear to be socially "beneficial" are not necessarily of moral value if they are not based on sincere intentions and the guidance of revelation. This suggests that Al-Ghazali rejected the hedonistic and consequentialist orientation of utilitarianism, and instead developed a eudaimonic-after-centric paradigm.

Al-Ghazali vs Modern Islamic Contextual Ethics: Sachedina and Nasr

In the context of contemporary Islamic thought, figures such as Abdulaziz Sachedina and Seyyed Hossein Nasr have tried to reinterpret Islamic ethics to be relevant to the principles of pluralism, human rights, and global multicultural realities. Sachedina, for example, developed the idea of *moral autonomy* in Islam and emphasized the importance of ethical rationality in responding to the challenges of democracy, bioethics, and individual freedom[36], [37]. He tends to

deconstruct normative-authoritarian ethics, and proposes an adaptive approach to maqāṣid al-sharī'ah-based contextual approach.

Meanwhile, Seyyed Hossein Nasr prioritizes the cosmological and metaphysical dimensions of Islamic ethics. He emphasized the interconnectedness of morality with the spiritual order of the universe, so that the modern ethical crisis is understood as the result of man's disconnection from the divine and natural sources [38]. Although in line with Al-Ghazali in prioritizing the spiritual-transcendental dimension, Nasr emphasizes more on ecological awareness and the integrity of creation in contemporary Islamic ethics.

Al-Ghazali stands between these two approaches. He did not emphasize moral plurality or social-secular maqāṣid as Sachedina did, nor did he make the cosmological dimension as the center of his ethics like Nasr. Al-Ghazali's ethics rests on the transformation of the individual soul through tazkiyah and riyāḍah, based on revelation and ukhrawi goals. Nevertheless, the transformative spirituality that Al-Ghazali offers can still inspire modern public ethics, provided it is rearticulated in a rational, contextual, and inclusive frame as contemporary Islamic thinkers do.

The Relevance of Al-Ghazali's Ethics in Modern Islam

The relevance of Al-Ghazali's ethics in the context of modern Islam lies in its ability to present a synthesis between the spiritual-transcendental dimension and the moral orientation of praxis. In *Kimiyaus Sa'adah*, Al-Ghazali emphasizes the importance of tazkiyah al-naḥs (purification of the soul), control of passions, and love of Allah as irreplaceable moral foundations. His ethics are theocentric and rooted in revelation, but still make room for rationality as a tool of tafakkur. This ethical model becomes a normative alternative to the modern moral crisis characterized by value relativism, consumerism, and secularization, by offering a solid ethical foundation and a life purpose that transcends the world.

In comparison, Abdulaziz Sachedina offers a more contextual approach, emphasizing the importance of *moral autonomy*, *human rights*, and maqāṣid al-sharī'ah as an Islamic ethical framework that is responsive to democracy, pluralism, and individual rights. In contrast to Al-Ghazali who emphasized the heteronomy of revelation, Sachedina tried to reconcile Islamic ethics with modern universal rational principles. He rejected a purely dogmatic and normative moral approach, and instead suggested a contextual reading of revelation, especially in issues of bioethics and social justice. In this regard, Sachedina represents a more horizontal and inclusive renewal of Islamic ethics.

Meanwhile, Seyyed Hossein Nasr departed from a modern spiritual crisis triggered by man's dissociation from nature and God. He offers an ecological ethical approach that emphasizes the

sanctity of nature as a manifestation of God and rejects modern materialistic secularism. Although in line with Al-Ghazali in prioritizing the transcendental dimension, Nasr is more cosmological and metaphysical in assessing ethical crises. Thus, Al-Ghazali's position lies in the middle: not secular and contextual like Sachedina, but also not completely cosmic like Nasr. Its ethics remain relevant if reinterpreted contextually as active spirituality—namely, tazkiyah with social implications, inclusive revelation ethics, and the hereafter orientation that shapes the ethical consciousness of modern humans.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the ethics of Al-Ghazali in *Kimiyaus Sa'adah* are transcendental by placing revelation as the main source of morality, but does not deny the function of rationality as a tool of tafakkur that supports ethical understanding. This ethics combines three main aspects: the spiritual dimension through tazkiyah al-nafs and love for Allah, the moral dimension through the control of lust and noble morals, and the rational dimension through the role of reason in contemplating the signs of God and strengthening faith. By integrating revelation and reason in one intact ethical system, Al-Ghazali offers an ethical paradigm that is not only religious and normative, but also reflective and applicable in guiding human beings towards happiness in this world and the hereafter.

This article makes an important contribution to contemporary religious ethics discourse by demonstrating the compatibility of Al-Ghazali's ethics to moral debates in the era of globalization. With a harmonized approach between transcendental and pragmatic aspects, this study opens up space for the reinterpretation of classical Islamic ethics in response to modern challenges such as secularism, spiritual crises, and value relativism. These findings not only enrich the treasures of Islamic philosophy, but also offer a model of religious ethics that can compete conceptually with modern ethical theories such as Kantianism, utilitarianism, and contemporary Islamic contextual approaches.

For future scientific development, it is recommended that Al-Ghazali's ethical studies be further expanded in a cross-disciplinary context, especially on contemporary issues such as bioethics, social justice, the environment, and digital ethics. Further research also needs to explore the possibility of dialogue between Al-Ghazali's ethics and Western ethical theories and progressive Islamic thought in order to strengthen the normative basis of an inclusive and adaptive Islamic public ethics. In addition, a hermeneutical-critical approach to classical texts such as *Kimiyaus Sa'adah* can enrich an understanding of the dynamics of the relationship between revelation, reason, and moral praxis in modern society.

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