



### Summary

*Prof. Moosa analyzes the life and works of Ghazali and points out the fact that historically Ghazali has been one of the most influential philosophers, as a world figure on par with Thomas Aquinas of the Western world. He regards Ghazali as a very important interlocutor, since the big question for contemporary Islam and for Muslims is the question of tradition, the place of tradition and the authority of tradition, but also the authority of the written heritage.*

### Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination\*

*Assoc.Prof. Şafak Oğuz*

Prof. Moosa analyzes the life and works of Ghazali and points out that Ghazali has been one of the most influential philosophers in the history of Islam. He thinks that Ghazali is clearly a world figure as was Thomas Aquinas and states that a number of Muslim, Jewish and Christian scholars describes him as an inter-locutor. He also points out that while the Western Academy studies western scholars such as St. Augustine or Thomas Aquinas and brings those figures into the discussion of today's world today while Muslim philosophers ignore their written scholarly heritage.

Prof. Moosa argues that Ghazali's life shaped his philosophy and thoughts. He finds correspondence between his writings and the pivotal points of his life story. Moosa highlights the effect of Nizam al Mulk, Vizier of Seljuk Empire, on Ghazali's intellectual development as well as his interaction with a wide range of scholars from different backgrounds, philosophers, theologians, jurists, people from different perspectives and persuasions. He studies the crucial role played by these actors in his intellectual growth. He regards Ghazali to be a very, very important interlocutor, because he thinks that the big question for contemporary Islam and for Muslims is the question of tradition, the place, and the authority of tradition, but also the place of the archive and the historical archive.

Prof. Moosa argues that Ghazali was aware of the importance of the history and understood that Islam underwent a variety of experiences and people of different climes and times have contributed to the discursive tradition. Thus, Ghazali wrote his works based on a rich inheritance on the big questions about God, humanity, and the world. Therefore, he discussed the human experience of 500 years of Islam and analyze how law, theology and mysticism shaped the life of the community.

Prof. Moosa thinks that today's human dilemma and the human condition is similar to those Gazali depicted. He especially points out the importance of the "dihliz metaphor" in his spiritual autobiography "El-Münkız mine'd-dalâl" and underlines Ghazali's argument that the seeker of God is in a "dehliz", an intermediate location between the world and God. He argues that people, wherever they live or whatever they believe, are caught between different spaces and between discordant epistemological traditions.

He thinks that Ghazali synthesized different voices of the Islamic tradition to build a new object, which he calls the bricolage method, that was reflected in his book "İhyâ-u Ulûm-id-Dîn" and in his other writings. Thus, he finds the concepts of bricolage and the dihliz metaphor to be very crucial in understanding what Ghazali is doing.

\* This policy paper is based on the interview held with Prof. Ebrahim Moosa on 01 December 2022 in the context of the project called "A Common Horizon for the Humanity and the Planet" (<https://commonhorizon.kapadokya.edu.tr/>).





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Recently, it has become customary to claim that Ghazali had undermined philosophy in Islamic thought. Prof. Moosa, finds these charges strange and thinks that they were not carefully studied. He also thinks that part of this accusation that Ghazali undermined the rational tradition in Islam has very little to do with Ghazali and more to do with the condition of modern Muslims. Prof. Moosa also criticizes that many scholars focus on some kind of trivial details such as the exact birth date of Ghazali while overlooking his creativity found in his work.

He highlights that Muslim around the world are ruderless and they're trying to find answers to why they were colonized. They know they have a great tradition, but every generation is taught in the modern Western tradition. They become alienated from the past and few people try to diagnose the reasons why Muslims have not flourished and why they became colonized. A few people who are studying the ancient tradition figured out that the West succeeded because the West discovered rationality, science and technology. Muslims left all these things behind and Sufism, regarded as superstition, and Ghazali, the person that legitimated superstition, emerged as main scapegoats for that loss. Prof. Moosa, however, shows that Ghazali is anti-reason and points out that many scholars all around the world, even Frederick Starr in his book *The Loss Enlightenment* keeps on repeating this libel. Thus, he describes it as a kind of a cottage industry historiography scapegoating Ghazali.

Prof. Moosa explains that Ghazali had been in disagreement with philosophers because he was thinking that they did not pay sufficient attention to the teachings of the prophet, and they kept on creating and maintaining this Hellenic framework of knowledge. He thinks that Ghazali's was engaging also in a thought critique of Muslim theologians was a thought experiment. Ghazali writes in *Al-Mustasfa* that the best of learning and knowledge is that which combines tradition and reason. He criticizes Muslim theologians who debunk reason and who think that reason is not important. He tries to keep reason and tradition in a kind of intense conversation, and only on rare occasion would he bases his argument on the authority of tradition or authority of the Quran and the Sunnah to trump reason.

He thinks that people have misunderstood Ghazali a great deal and believes that the charge that Ghazali has contributed to the decline of Islamic philosophical and the rational

tradition is absolute libel. He finds Ghazali inspirational, because Ghazali works within the intellectual architecture of his time. The intellectual architecture of his time was philosophical, and he could see to what extent he could purchase into it. So he did inherit the architecture of the time. He also stresses the fact that the 20th and 21st century Muslims are unable to buy into the cognitive architecture of their because they believe they are not the authors of that architecture.

Prof. Moosa criticizes the lack of history writing in the Muslim world and the lack of a comprehensive descriptions of Islamic history. He underlines the fact that western historians, on the other hand, study their history very deeply and they write their story of history as victors.

#### PROFESSOR EBRAHIM MOOSA

Ebrahim Moosa, a Professor of Islamic Thought and Muslim Societies (AUC) in the Keough School of Global Affairs at the University of Notre Dame (Indiana/USA), completed his BA at Kanpur University (India) in 1982, his MA in 1989 and his PhD in 1995 at University of Cape Town (S. Africa). Moosa's interests span both classical and modern Islamic thought with a special focus on Islamic law, history, ethics and theology. He co-directs *Contending Modernities*, the global research and education initiative examining the interaction among Catholic, Muslim, and other religious and secular forces in the world. He is a faculty fellow of the Keough School's Liu Institute for Asia and Asian Studies.

He is the author of *What Is a Madrasa?* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015), *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005) (*winner of the American Academy of Religion's Best First Book in the History of Religions*). He is also the co-editor of the books: *The African Renaissance and the Afro-Arab Spring* (Georgetown University Press, 2015); *Islam in the Modern World* (Routledge, 2014), and *Muslim Family Law in Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonial Legacies and Post-Colonial Challenges* (Amsterdam University Press, 2010). His book *Ghazali and the Poetics of Imagination* was translated to Turkish under the name of *Gazzali ve İmgelem Poetikası*. Professor Moosa has published in many academic journals and has received several international awards.



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ABOUT THE PROJECT

### Imagining A Common Horizon for Humanity and the Planet

The world is passing through an extremely troubled period in its history, with a seemingly new challenge encountered at every turn. Serious economic, social, cultural, environmental and political crises at a global level are exacerbated by those being felt in individual countries. The challenges we are facing take a variety of forms, from financial collapses to climate change, from international terrorism to regional conflicts, and from the refugee problem to xenophobia.

All of these crises are being aggravated by the impact of the pandemic, revealing the inability of humanity to tackle them collectively, and invalidating the romantic discourse of globalization. As history continues its march, we are reminded that the answer to the common problems of humanity cannot be found by becoming more introverted, polarized or prejudiced. No matter how severe our problems, our destiny should not be seen as unchangeable. The problems we experience are primarily a result of human activity, and can be overcome only through human effort, but we should remain aware that there are many different hurdles to be passed if we are to rid ourselves of the crises being experienced in many parts of the world.

Only through conscious, patient and collective effort can we overcome the problems of humanity. Now is the time for dignified people from the different cultures and geographies of the world to come together in solidarity. It is time to speak with full respect of human dignity, setting aside the importance we place in our individual identities. An alliance of people who see truth and justice as the major pillars of our kind, will be able to open the door to a new era of solidarity for humanity. A dignified future is possible. We believe that Turkey holds a special, if not privileged, position, based on its geographical, historical and cultural characteristics, and can serve as a host to this joint effort of humanity.

Our goal within the scope of this project is to bring together the leading thinkers of the world, to create an international intellectual platform that draws its strength from human dignity, and that aims to build for the future of humanity and the planet with a holistic synergy with a view to offering humanity a common horizon. As Cappadocia University, our vision in this regard is to provide an academic platform from where esteemed intellectuals from around the world can share their visions for a common future of humanity and our planet, and to comment on the challenges and opportunities they envisage.

You can find detailed information about the Project at <https://commonhorizon.kapadokya.edu.tr/en/>

Cappadocia University (<https://kapadokya.edu.tr/en/>) is a young foundation (private) university in central Turkey, Cappadocia. The main goal of the university is to raise generations of opinion leaders who can read the 21st century realistically, and whose views therefore carry weight and significance – go-to men and women who are highly knowledgeable in their fields, who are happy to share their knowledge, and who will thus be respected and trusted by others. Cappadocia University is home to a highly successful dual-pronged system of academic and vocational programs that act in support of each other.

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CAPPADOCIA UNIVERSITY