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The Dichotomy of Science in the Perspective of History and the Views of Classical Scholars

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the phenomenon of the dichotomy of knowledge in Islamic civilization, with a primary focus on the epistemological perspective of Al-Ghazali. In the historical development of Islam, knowledge was initially perceived as an integrated unity between religious and rational dimensions; however, external influences and the process of Western colonization led to the separation between religious sciences and secular sciences. This study aims to explain the historical roots of the knowledge dichotomy, to reexamine Al-Ghazali's views on the integration of revelation and reason, and to analyze the impact of this dichotomy on contemporary Islamic education systems. The research employs a library research method with qualitative analysis of Al-Ghazali's classical works and modern scholarly literature. The findings indicate that the accusation against Al-Ghazali as the initiator of the knowledge dichotomy is not entirely well-founded; rather, he emphasized the importance of integrating rational knowledge and revelation for the benefit of the Muslim community. This study also identifies ideas and models of integration between religious knowledge and science that are relevant in the modern era and formulates a new epistemological paradigm based on Al-Ghazali's thought to bridge the crisis of knowledge dualism in contemporary Islamic education.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In Islamic civilization, the term science comes from the Arabic ʿilm which means to know, understand, and understand something in essence. In the epistemological view of Islam, knowledge is not just the result of human cognitive activity, but is a gift and mandate from Allah SWT given to humans to be able to recognize, understand, and manage His creation in the universe (Siregar et al; 2024). Science has a very important position because with science humans can reveal reality, understand the laws of nature, and build a civilized civilization.

In general, science is defined as knowledge that is systematically structured, logical, and can be tested through scientific methods to explain natural and social phenomena. In an Islamic perspective, science has a broader dimension than just scientific rationality, but it also includes moral, spiritual, and transcendental aspects oriented towards the recognition of the Creator.

The development of science in the history of Islamic civilization shows very complex and profound dynamics. From the time of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to the peak of the glory of the Abbasid Empire, science was seen as an inseparable unity between the religious and rational dimensions. Islam has since its inception emphasized the importance of seeking knowledge, just as the first revelation that came down affirmed the commandment to read and think. (S&P 2025)

According to Furlow (2020), the concept of ʿilm in the classical Islamic tradition is built on the basis of the unity between ʿaql (intellect), naql (revelation), and dzauq (spiritual sense). This means that the development of knowledge in Islam cannot be separated from moral values, faith, and spirituality. True scientific search must bring man to an awareness of the greatness and truth of God. Every science, whether empirical or metaphysical, has the main purpose of revealing the signs of God's greatness in the universe (Furlow, 2020) .

Science is not only related to worldly aspects, but is also a way to achieve spiritual understanding and get closer to Allah SWT. However, in the course of history, a phenomenon known as the dichotomy of science emerged, namely the separation between religious science and general science, which is considered by many academics to be one of the causes of the decline of Islamic civilization.

The emergence of the dichotomy of science did not occur suddenly but through a long process rooted in social, political, and intellectual changes in the Islamic world. In the heyday, Muslim scholars and scientists such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Al-Khawarizmi viewed science as a whole without a dichotomy between science and religion. However, as various schools of thought and external influences such as the translation of Greek works and the entry of Western rationalism emerged, epistemological tensions began to arise between groups that emphasized reason and those that emphasized revelation. (Humairah, Marjuni, Mahmud, & Sukawati, 2024)

The history of the development of science in Islam shows that Islamic civilization reached its peak when its people integrated divine revelation with the ability of human reason. In the classical period, science encompassed all aspects of life: from religious sciences such as jurisprudence, tafsir, and hadith, to rational sciences such as astronomy, medicine, mathematics, and philosophy (Pahilin & Putri, 2025). Muslim scholars such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Al-Khawarizmi saw no separation between religion and science, as both aimed at achieving truth and the benefit of mankind.

But over time, especially after external influences and Western colonialism entered the Islamic world, there began to be a shift in the scientific paradigm. Science then divided into two major poles: religious science studied in religious institutions and general science taught in secular modern educational institutions. Debates between philosophers and theologians, such as between Al-Ghazali and Ibn Rushd, marked a time in which the differences in the orientation of science became sharper, although it cannot be said that these great Islamic figures deliberately created a separation of knowledge. (Apriliani, Erman, & Hasnah, 2024)

Al-Ghazali is often referred to as a figure who is accused of being the cause of the birth of dichotomous views in Islamic science. This view arose because his works such as Tahafut al-Falasifah were considered offensive to philosophers and tended to reject excessive rationalist approaches. However, these accusations are not entirely true when viewed historically and textually. Al-Ghazali never rejected rationality or denied the importance of empirical science; What he rejects is the separation between science and moral-spiritual values. (Anam, 2022)

In the framework of his epistemological thought, Al-Ghazali divides knowledge not to dichotomize, but to organize the hierarchy of knowledge based on its usefulness for life and salvation in the hereafter. For him, all knowledge, both from revelation and intellect, remains based on Allah SWT as the source of all knowledge. The process of Western colonization of the Islamic world has also deepened this dichotomy. The education system in the colonies began to inherit a form of educational

dualism between religious education and general education, which reflected the secular modern Western mindset. As a result, the integrative consciousness that has been a hallmark of Islamic epistemology since the beginning is slowly eroding. (Damairi, 2020) (Apriliani et al., 2024)

The separation that emerged in postmodern Islamic history was more due to socio-political changes and educational patterns that adopted the secular Western system, especially since the colonial period. The dualism of education and the narrow view of science resulted in the stagnation of thought and the fading of the scientific spirit that had once been the hallmark of Islamic civilization. In the modern era, the discourse on the integration of religious science and general science is one of the epistemological solutions carried out by contemporary Muslim thinkers. This effort reaffirms the essence of knowledge in Islam which is comprehensive, covering empirical, rational, moral, and spiritual aspects, so that it not only produces sophisticated knowledge, but also moral and useful.

The study of the dichotomy of the history of science in Islam has undergone various conceptual developments over the past two decades. Studies show that there are great efforts in integrating religious science and science, but there is still a wide gap in its application epistemologically and practically in the world of Islamic education.

Salim's research (2022) in the Kariman Journal highlights Al-Ghazali's thought, which is often perceived as the basis for the emergence of a dichotomy of knowledge. He emphasized that the understanding of Al-Ghazali's work is still textual and has not been widely studied in the context of contemporary epistemology and its application to the modern educational curriculum. Although it contributes to philosophical understanding, the research has not empirically answered how the concept of Al-Ghazali can be applied as a model of science integration in today's educational institutions. (Salim, 2022)

Humairah et al.'s (2024) research entitled Understanding the Dichotomy of General Science and Religion tries to affirm that Islam views science as a whole and universal without dichotomy. However, this article tends to be qualitative descriptive, so it has not provided a concrete formula to integrate the two fields of knowledge in modern Islamic education policy. (Humairah et al., 2024)

Meanwhile, Muna et al. (2024) in their research Dichotomy of Religious and General Sciences in the Reorientation of Islamic Education highlights the negative impact of dichotomy on the education system, especially the weak synergy between secular and religious institutions. However, the results of his research are still limited to the sociological dimension and have not touched the epistemological aspects of the philosophy of Islamic science in depth. (Muna, Nurhuda, Yuwono, & Aziz, 2024)

Fakhrurrazi et al.'s (2024) research entitled Islam and Knowledge: Harmony between Sciences and Faith tries to offer a model of harmonization of Islamic values with modern scientific principles through education. This study shows a positive direction of the integration of knowledge, but focuses more on the context of contemporary madrasah education, rather than a philosophical analysis of classical figures such as Al-Ghazali. (Fakhrurrazi, Wasilah, & Jaya, 2023)

As for Adeoye & Baharun (2025) through their paper Integration of Islamic Thought and Scientific Knowledge in Educational Leadership, it makes a new contribution by emphasizing the need for an educational leadership approach based on the integration of Islamic thought and science. However, this study does not relate this integration to the conceptual footprint of classical scholars, so further study is needed on how Al-Ghazali's epistemology can be used as a foundation in the formation of the leadership paradigm of modern Islamic education. (Adeoye & Baharun, 2025)

Based on the above study, it can be concluded that there are three main gaps in the research regarding the dichotomy of science and Al-Ghazali's views. First, there has not been a comprehensive study that has examined in depth the relationship between the epistemology of Al-Ghazali science and the paradigm of integration of contemporary science. Most of the studies are still descriptive and lack an applicable conceptual model. Second, efforts to integrate religious science and science in the Islamic education curriculum still face a gap between theory and practice. Many studies (such as ;) emphasize the importance of integration, but have not explained implementation methods based on classical epistemology. And third, the representation of Al-Ghazali in modern literature is still often

misunderstood as a figure who supports the dichotomy of knowledge, even though there is a lot of evidence that he is actually promotive of the unity of knowledge. Hermeneutic studies of Al-Ghazali's texts (such as Ihya' Ulumuddin and Tahafut al-Falasifah) are still very limited, especially in the context of re-reading with a philosophical approach to modern science. (Fakhrurrazi et al., 2023) (Adeoye & Baharun, 2025)

This study aims to analyze holistically the phenomenon of scientific dichotomy in Islamic civilization with a main focus on the epistemological perspective of Al-Ghazali. More specifically, this research has several objectives, namely to explain the historical roots of the emergence of the dichotomy of science in the Islamic scientific tradition and its influence on modern civilization, as discussed by , reinterpreting Al-Ghazali's view of science based on his main works ((Salim, 2022) *Ihya' Ulumuddin* and *Tahafut al-Falasifah*) to affirm whether Al-Ghazali is indeed a pioneer of dichotomous views or an integrative figure, analyze the influence of the dichotomy of science on the contemporary Islamic education system, especially in the Islamic Religious Education curriculum, as well as its implications for the intellectual and spiritual development of students; identify models of integration of religious and general sciences that are relevant to modern challenges, as developed in research on the Islamization of science and integrative education; and formulate a new epistemological paradigm based on Al-Ghazali's thought to bridge the gap between scientific, rational and spiritual approaches to religion in today's Islamic education system.

To achieve this goal, this study seeks to answer the following main questions, namely how the history and background of the dichotomy of science emerged in the Islamic world, and what factors strengthen the separation; whether it is true that Al-Ghazali's view is the basis for the birth of the dichotomy of knowledge, or whether he plays the role of an integrated figure between revelation and reason; how to implement the dichotomy of knowledge in the modern Islamic education system, especially in the curriculum structure and learning orientation; and how Al-Ghazali's epistemological position can be re-actualized to overcome the crisis of dualism of contemporary science.

2. METHODS

The research method used is a qualitative approach with the type of library research. This approach was chosen because the object of study is in the form of concepts, ideas, and thoughts of classical figures, especially Imam Al-Ghazali, as well as an analysis of contemporary scientific literature that discusses the dichotomy of science and the integration of science in Islam. The source of research data consists of primary data and secondary data. Primary data includes Al-Ghazali's main works, such as Ihya' Ulumuddin, Tahafut al-Falasifah, and Al-Mustashfa fi 'Ilm al-Ushul, while secondary data includes scientific journal articles, academic books, and scholarly publications relevant to the research theme. (Scott, 2016)

Data collection is carried out through searching academic literature, both print and digital, sourced from scientific journals, classic books, previous research results, and other scientific publications. The collected data was analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify the main themes related to the epistemology of Al-Ghazali, the relationship between revelation and reason, and the factors behind the emergence of the dichotomy of science in Islamic history.

Data analysis is carried out through three main stages, namely data reduction by selecting and classifying relevant literature based on key concepts such as epistemology, classification of knowledge, and integration of Islamic education; the presentation of data by explaining the relationship between Al-Ghazali's classical thought and the phenomenon of the dichotomy of science in the modern context; as well as drawing inductive conclusions to formulate a conceptual model of the integration of science based on Al-Ghazali thought that is relevant to today's Islamic education and epistemology.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

History and Background of the Emergence of the Dichotomy of Knowledge in the Islamic World

The understanding of science (al-'ilm) in Islam must always be associated with the essence of monotheism, which is the belief that all knowledge comes from Allah SWT and is used as a means to know, understand, and manage His creation in the universe. In the classical Islamic epistemological tradition, science is not only understood as the result of human intellectual activity, but as a divine mandate that has a moral and spiritual function. This is fundamentally different from modern Western epistemology which tends to separate empirical facts and ethical values, between materiality and spirituality.

Since the time of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH, Islam has emphasized the importance of knowledge. The first revelation, Iqra', describes the command to read which means not only reading the text, but also reading the reality and the surrounding world as signs of God's greatness. The companions and tabi'in made science the foundation of Islamic civilization that shone in all fields of life, from law, medicine, astronomy, to governance. During the time of the Khulafa' al-Rashid (632–661 AD), intellectual activity developed along with the spread of Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula, and during the Umayyad Dynasty (661–750 AD), the scientific tradition began to be formalized through institutions such as Dar al-'Ilm and Bayt al-Mal.

However, the peak of the development of science was during the Abbasid Dynasty (750–1258 AD). The establishment of the Bayt al-Hikmah (House of Wisdom) institution in Baghdad by the Caliph al-Ma'mun became a symbol of the extraordinary progress of Islamic scholarship. At this institution, scholars translated Greek and Persian philosophical works into Arabic, and then interpreted them through an Islamic perspective. Figures such as Al-Kindi (the first Islamic philosopher), Al-Farabi (the founder of Islamic political philosophy), Ibn Sina (the Father of Medicine), Al-Biruni, and Al-Khawarizmi (the inventor of modern algebra) are manifestations of the unity between religion and science. Science, in their view, is a rational attempt to understand God's power through His creation.

However, since the middle of the 11th century AD, new dynamics have emerged in the Islamic world. When the golden period began to fade, some scholars showed a tendency to separate science based on the orientation of its sources or goals. The terms 'ilm al-naqli (the science of revelation) and 'ilm al-'aqli (rational science) began to be popular among scholars. Initially, the term was classifying, not dichotomous; used only to distinguish methods and sources of knowledge. But as Abbasid political power weakened and intra-sectarian conflicts increased, rational (and philosophical) approaches began to be suspected because they were seen as threatening religious orthodoxy.

The policy of the caliph Al-Mutawakkil (847–861 AD) suppressing the rationalist sect Mu'tazilah marked the end of the full patronage of Islamic rationalism. Philosophers, scientists, and rationalists were forced to quit or work in private spaces. This process resulted in a weakening of the integration between revelation and empirical science. When Baghdad fell to Mongol forces under Hulagu Khan in 1258 AD, the center of classical Islamic civilization collapsed, followed by the death of most of the once thriving free scientific movements.

This phenomenon was exacerbated by the development of extreme Sufism in the 13th to 15th centuries, where some Sufis viewed worldly knowledge as a spiritual barrier. Sufism movements such as the Abdul Qadir al-Jailani order emphasize the aspect of the hereafter rather than social and scientific contributions. Although Sufism also had a positive impact on Islamic spirituality, an overly esoteric pattern led to a scientific stagnation. Ironically, in the Shi'a world, rational sciences such as philosophy and astronomy continue to develop because of the support of scholars such as Mulla Sadra through the concept of al-Hikmah al-Muta'alliyah (transcendental theosophy).

After that time, Western colonialism in the 18th and 19th centuries played a major role in strengthening the separation between religious and general science. The colonial education system adopted a secular pattern: the natural, social, and humanities sciences were focused on economic and military interests, while religious education was marginalized as a moral and afterlife affair. As a result, educational dualism was formed: pesantren and madrassas on the one hand, and secular modern

schools on the other. This division is then interpreted as the "dichotomy of science" or the division of knowledge that interprets science and religion as two areas that do not touch each other.

Al-Ghazali's View: The Pioneer of Dichotomy or the Leader of the Integration of Reason and Revelation

Imam Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 AD) was often in controversial positions. Some people think that the book Tahafut al-Falasifah (The Confusion of the Philosophers) is the main cause of the death of Islamic rationalism. However, an in-depth analysis of his work shows that Al-Ghazali did not encourage the separation of knowledge at all, but rather tried to reform the paradigm of thinking so that knowledge could not be separated from spiritual values and sharia law.

According to Salim (2022), Tahafut al-Falasifah is not an attack on philosophy, but a methodological critique of three metaphysical problems that some Greek philosophers believe in: the permanence of nature, God's knowledge of the particular, and the absence of physical resurrection. Al-Ghazali rejects this view because it is contrary to the concept of divinity and the afterlife in Islam, not because he rejects rationality. In Ihya' Ulumuddin, he writes clearly that reason is the highest gift of God that must be used to reveal the truth. Reason is like "inner light," while revelation is "guiding light"; The two must be lit together to illuminate man's path to truth. (Salim, 2022)

The concept of science is built on the principle that science is derived from three main dimensions: revelation (naql), ratio ('aql), and intuition (dzauq). Revelation is the source of absolute truth, reason functions to explore the laws of natural causality, and intuition plays a role in translating truth into spiritual experience. This division is not a series of closed systems, but three complementary layers, a complete representation of Islamic epistemology.

In al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal, Al-Ghazali describes his personal experience in the intellectual journey between philosophical skepticism and Sufistic belief. He discovered that truth could not be reached only by logic (rationalism) or by text (traditionalism), but through a combination of the two within the framework of monotheism. Therefore, Al-Ghazali is not called a destroyer of philosophy, but a purification of rationality from atheistic and skeptical biases. This is reaffirmed by Shaleh et al (2024) who show that the division of knowledge in Islam according to Al-Ghazali is purely functional: fardhu 'ain includes compulsory knowledge for individuals such as faith, worship, and morals; Meanwhile, fardhu kifayah includes social sciences and sciences that are useful for society. All have a noble degree as long as they are used for the benefit of the people. (Shaleh, Asmuki, Mahmudi, & Junaidi, 2024)

Meanwhile, Ibn Rushd (1126–1198 AD) as an Andalusian philosopher criticized Al-Ghazali for being considered inconsistent, on the one hand using the philosophy of logic in al-Qisthas al-Mustaqim, but on the other hand criticizing philosophers. However, contemporary hermeneutic readings such as those carried out by Zulkifli Agus (2018) show that Al-Ghazali does not reject philosophy ontologically; he only opposes the application of Greek philosophy without the filter of revelation value. In this context, Al-Ghazali actually paved the way to epistemological integration which later became the basis for the concept of Islamization of modern science. (Aug, 2018)

The Integration of Knowledge in Modern Islamic Education

Efforts to unite religious science and general science into a whole and complementary unit, not just partial or related combinations. With the loss of this dichotomy or separation, it results in a more holistic understanding, namely a comprehensive and comprehensive perspective that can be seen from all sides, and ensures that science does not contradict religious beliefs.

The most concrete impact of the dichotomy of science can be seen in the structure of the modern Islamic education system. The separation of the curriculum between religious and science studies results in two types of educational products: normative scholars and secular intellectuals. According to Majida Faruk (2023), the contemporary Islamic education system is still heavily influenced by the

colonial model, where madrassas emphasize moral and ritual education, while public schools focus on technical expertise and worldly rationality. (Faruk, Ismail, & Mahmud, 2023)

In Indonesia, the legacy of dualism has emerged since the Dutch East Indies era. The pesantren and madrasah systems are under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, while public schools are under the Ministry of Education. These two institutions have run different curricula both in orientation and methodology. This makes it difficult to realize the ideal goal of Islamic education, which is to form knowledgeable and moral human beings (insan kamil).

Research by Nadhif et al. (2025) shows that this separation results in a gap in students' character. Students from Islamic boarding schools have good spiritual strength but are incompetent in science and technology, while students from secular schools excel academically but lack spirituality and social values. This symptom is known as the phenomenon of "intellectual split personality." (Nadhif, Sirojuddin, & Hakim, 2025)

Several integration efforts are now being carried out. The concept of integration-interconnection developed by Amin Abdullah at UIN Sunan Kalijaga is an inclusive education model that seeks to combine academics and religiosity. In Malaysia, Syed Naquib al-Attas' approach to Islamization of Knowledge emphasizes the formation of an Islamic worldview that combines empirical logic with transcendental values. Meanwhile, in Pakistan, Ismail al-Faruqi's Reintegration of Knowledge project emphasizes the importance of paradigm unity in scientific research so that science does not lose its moral direction. (Rizki & Wati, 2025) (Fitri, Fitriani, & Putri, 2024)

However, research by Fakhrurrazi (2023) and Adeoye (2025) shows that this integration is still theoretical. In practice, the Islamic education curriculum still features two parallel paths: one teaches value-free Science Education, and the other Religious Education that is not empirically based. This shows that there is still a large gap between the idea and implementation of the integration of knowledge in modern Islamic educational institutions; (Fakhrurrazi et al., 2023) (Adeoye & Baharun, 2025)

Actualization of Al-Ghazali's Epistemology to Overcome the Crisis of Dualism of Contemporary Science

Al-Ghazali's epistemology or theory of knowledge offers a philosophical guide to restore the unity of science in the midst of the crisis of modern science. In Mizan al-'Amal and al-Mustashfa fi 'Ilm al-Ushul, he emphasized that knowledge is not just an intellectual activity, but the worship of reason that leads man to achieve maqam ma'rifat (divine knowledge). The main principle in its epistemological framework is that truth has a rational, intuitive, and revelatory hierarchy, but all go to the same source, namely God.

In contemporary science, this thinking is relevant to overcome the three major problems of the world of knowledge: materialism, dehumanization, and secularization of science. The crisis of materialism arises when science is narrowed down to a means of production and profit, thus overriding human values. While dehumanization can be seen from the loss of ethics and spirituality in the scientific profession, as well as the secularization of science causes a separation between facts and values. Al-Ghazali's concept of combining reason, revelation, and spiritual intuition can be the antithesis of the crisis of modern science.

The actualization of this idea can be done through three strategic approaches. First, epistemological reform, which is to instill the principle of monotheism in science and technology education. Any scientific theory or experiment should be attributed to the majesty of God, not just the causality of nature. Second, an integrative interdisciplinary approach, where empirical research involves a moral-Islamic view. For example, biotechnology research must consider sharia maqasid and life ethics. Third, strengthening the spirituality of science that places scientists not as rulers of nature, but the caliph of Allah on earth who is responsible for maintaining the ecological and moral balance of the world.

As emphasized by Syamsul Anwar in the Center for Studies of the University of Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (2025), this effort does not mean abolishing modern science, but instilling a new perspective that combines religiosity and science, a paradigm known as interconnection-integrative. Through this paradigm, science is no longer mapped dichotomously, but is evaluated from its contribution to humanity and the oneness of God. (UMY, 2025)

4. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of the dichotomy of the history of science in Islam is rooted in a long process involving external influences, such as Greek rationalism and Western colonialism, as well as internal shifts in the scientific paradigm of Muslims. In classical times, the unity between revelation and ratio became the basis for the progress of Islamic civilization, reflected in the work of scholars such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Al-Khawarizmi. However, after the weakening of political authority and the rise of colonialism, there was a separation between religious and general sciences that led to an epistemological crisis and intellectual decline.

Imam Al-Ghazali is often misunderstood as the figure who causes the dichotomy of science because of his criticism of philosophy in Tahafut al-Falasifah. In fact, through his works such as Ihya Ulumuddin and al-Munqidz min al-Dhalal, Al-Ghazali actually taught the unity of intellect, revelation, and spiritual intuition within the framework of monotheism. The classification of knowledge into fardhu ain and fardhu kifayah is not a form of separation, but an epistemological hierarchy based on the value of its benefits and moral goals. Thus, Al-Ghazali's epistemology offers an integrative model that is able to answer the dichotomy problem of modern science.

In modern Islamic education, the dualism of the system between religious and scientific curricula still creates an imbalance between intellectual competence and spiritual depth. The integration of knowledge carried out by contemporary figures such as Amin Abdullah and Syed Naquib al-Attas is an important step to restore the spirit of Islamic science based on monotheism and human benefit.

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