The al-Ghazali Enigma and Why Shari'a is Not Islamic Law, by Haifaa G. Khalafallah. Equinox Publishing, 2017. 288 pp. Hb. £75.00/\$100.00. ISBN-13: 9781781792957; E-Book £75.00/\$100.00. ISBN-13: 9781781794661.

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Writing intellectual history is complicated, not least because establishing the impact of authors and preachers is an elusive matter. The common usage of empty labels such as “prominent,” “renowned,” and “well-esteemed” exposes the difficulty. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1917–1996), in particular, epitomizes the problem. A student of Ḥasan al-Bannā and a disciple of the modernist-apologetic approach developed in Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, he did not hold any public offices of importance. As other prolific second-generation Islamists, for most of his adult life he was never fully pro-government nor in opposition. Nonetheless, any casual observer pursuing the bookshelves of Islamic-interest bookstores, whether in the Arab world or in Europe, will recognize the space his contributions occupy. Remarkably, Haifaa Khalafallah’s monograph is, to the best of my knowledge, the first in the English language dedicated entirely to an examination of al-Ghazālī’s writings, and to the social conditions that shaped them and were, in part, shaped by them.

The book’s main thesis can be summed up as follows: *shari’a* is not a fixed code of unchanging laws, rather, it is a general guide that provides jurists with broad discretion to adjust God’s commands to new circumstances. Western scholars, and some Muslim scholars, do not understand this. Al-Ghazālī did, and herein lies his great contribution. The argument against ‘Orientalists’ who misconstrue *shari’a* is repeated throughout the book with a passion that makes the reader wonder whether the year is still 1978. Moreover, the author’s clear sympathy for al-Ghazālī results in some less than convincing analyses. The epilogue (pp. 218–235) for example, gratuitously surveys post-Arab Spring Egypt to suggest that Egypt’s troubles could have been prevented had more attention been given to al-Ghazālī’s ideas.

Khalafallah read many of al-Ghazālī’s works, and interviewed people who knew him or engaged with his works, resulting in an intellectual biography that is certain to engross anyone interested in modern

Keywords: Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, Islamism, Islamic thought, Islam in Egypt

Egyptian history or Islamist thought. Yet, the book is not without significant flaws. Al-Ghazālī's career and personal life are not systematically explored, and crucial episodes—including his dismissal from the Brothers—are treated in an almost anecdotal way. It is peculiar that a book on al-Ghazali's thought hardly mentions, if at all, the concepts of *wasatīyya* ("the harmonizing middle ground") and "the cultural attack" (*al-ghazw al-thaqāfī*) both of which are central to his intellectual legacy. Al-Ghazālī's continual ability to ally with, and work for, regimes that opposed his core beliefs remains an enigma. Some analyses are shallow, such as Khalafallah's characterization of Sadat's amendment of the constitution that transformed *shari'a* into a primary source of legislation as being "merely symbolic" (p. 86).

The depiction of al-Ghazālī's polemic with Khālīd Muḥammad Khālīd is disappointing. Khalafallah states that Khālīd, a "close friend of al-Ghazālī, was a scholar at al-Azhar and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, but he shared the modernist-intelligentsia's view that the only way Muslims could advance was to turn their backs to their own past practices and to follow the successful examples of the West" (p. 52). Islamists will heartily accept this depiction, but Khālīd's agenda deserves a more thorough treatment. In contrast to al-Ghazālī, Khālīd believed that revelation-grounded politics would result in an oppressive theocratic government, ruled by personal-inclinations and self-interests. Essentially, Khālīd explained why the modernist-apologetic attempt at reconciling revelation and doubt is an empty promise. Al-Ghazālī's mission in life was to convince Muslims that revelation and doubt, or tradition and modernity, can be reconciled. This is why Khālīd enraged him so much, and why, four decades later in one of the saddest episodes in modern Egyptian history, al-Ghazālī defended the assassins of Farāj Fawda, who made similar (albeit not identical claims) to those Khālīd made.

It is impossible to understand al-Ghazālī's pragmatic approach to jurisprudence, demonstrated in the book mainly through his evolving and rather arbitrary attitudes to gender-equality, independent of his determination to defend the relevance and advantages of a revelation-based society. A serious study on al-Ghazālī must critically examine the coherence of his ideas. There is no trace in the book of the scholarly debate on the implications of Islamist concepts of democracy, including al-Ghazālī's, or on some of al-Ghazālī's stances on science. Khalafallah relates al-Ghazālī's derision of 'Abd al- 'Azīz b. 'Abdallāh b. Bāz's (1910–1999) insistence that the earth is not round (p. 256). Citing al-Ghazali's contempt of Saudi Ara-

bia's highest religious authority becomes yet another example of his rational and pro-science tendencies. The reader is left wondering whether Khalafallah is familiar with al-Ghazālī's brutal attacks against Darwinism, the Big Bang model or Freudianism.

A number of anecdotes throughout the book illustrate al-Ghazālī's straightforward and engaging personality, and his impatience with some of the religious absurdities that prosper in our day and age. An Algerian knocked on his door one night and asked that he expel a spirit that had inhabited his body. Al-Ghazālī answered: "you are a big guy, why do you not take possession of this jinni instead of it seizing you?" (p. 115). Al-Ghazālī wanted Muslims to address the urgent challenges of this world, and had a way of demanding them to do so in language that was comprehensible to all. While his intellectual horizons were limited, his down-to-earth style and passion earned him many admirers, and encouraged his foes to forgive him.