

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *On Condemnation of Pride and Self-Admiration. Kitāb dhamm al-kibr wa'l-'ujb. Book XXIX of The Revival of the Religious Sciences. Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, translation with introduction and notes by Mohammed Rustom. Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2018. xxxvi + 190 pages.

This volume provides a lucid and engaging contribution to the growing corpus of English translations of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* published by the Islamic Texts Society. In this book, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) examines pride (*kibr*) and self-admiration (*'ujb*), as well as the corresponding virtue of humility. The two mortal vices (*muhlikāt*) that center al-Ghazālī's discussion are related. Pride is a disposition that stems from self-admiration and becomes manifest in proud behavior (*takabbur*) (xxvii, 57). Yet while self-admiration consists purely in an elevated sense of self, pride entails regarding oneself as greater than another – whether God, God's messengers, or other humans (xxviii, 26–27). In this sense, pride usurps the right of self-elevation that belongs only to God, whom the Qur'an names the Proud (*al-mutakabbir*) (1; Q. 59:23).

Al-Ghazālī not only identifies the principal maladies of pride and self-admiration but also diagnoses their specific causes and offers appropriate treatments. Here, he shows special concern for the dangers that attend religious knowledge and behavior (38–51, 88–100). These are the most insidious sources of pride, since they are good in themselves, praised by God and humans alike, and commanded by revealed law (88). To help his readers discern their pride and its causes, al-Ghazālī offers a series of tests. These represent one of the more distinctive, not to say practical aspects of his discussion. For example, if a person finds it difficult to compliment a debate partner, this suggests pride due to knowledge (xxxii, 101–102); if a person finds it taxing to run chores for those in need, that suggests the vile inner disposition that is the ultimate source of pride (102–103).

The structured nature of al-Ghazālī's exposition is clearly preserved in Rustom's translation. Part I addresses pride and humility, beginning with the condemnation of pride and praise of humility in the Qur'an, Ḥadīth and early Islamic traditions (chapters one through three) and moving to a systematic discussion of the nature of pride (chapter four), its objects (chapter five), and its apparent and underlying causes (chapters six and seven). The remainder of Part I discusses examples of humble behavior from early Muslims (chapter eight), how to uproot pride and instill humility (chapter nine), and the status of humility as a mean between the extremes of pride and self-abasement (chapter ten). In turn, Part II examines self-admiration as the root of pride, moving from its condemnation in revelation and Islamic tradition (chapter one) to a

more theoretical discussion of the nature of self-admiration (chapters two and three) and the manner of treating it in general (chapter four) and with regard to each of its specific causes (chapter five).

Rustom's translation is exceptionally lucid, consistent, and lively. As an example of lucidity, consider the rendering of al-Ghazālī's central definition of pride and its distinction from self-admiration:

'Pride' demands an object of pride (*mutakabbar 'alayhi*) and a cause for pride (*mutakabbar bihi*). As will be discussed, this is where pride is distinct from self-admiration (*'ujb*). Self-admiration does not demand anyone other than the self-admiring person (*mu'jib*). Were a person created alone, you could conceive of him as self-admiring. But it cannot be conceived that he be proud except when he is with someone else, and he considers himself to be above that person with respect to the 'qualities of perfection' (*ṣifāt al-kamāl*). That is when he is a proud person (26).

With appropriate use of Arabic technical terms, the translation expertly conveys the notion of pride as centered on the estimation of others and self-admiration as a matter purely of self-appraisal. Rustom's rendering of *mutakabbar 'alayhi* as "object of pride" and *mutakabbar bihi* as "cause of pride" draws a distinction that is easier in Arabic than in English, where "object of pride" could be understood to mean the object that is the source of one's pride (*mutakabbar bihi* in al-Ghazālī's use); yet the consistency with which Rustom uses these terms is necessary to preserve the technical meaning invoked by al-Ghazālī and succeeds fully in conveying the distinction that al-Ghazālī establishes. This technical precision is characteristic throughout the translation.

The translation also manages to be lively and engaging without sacrificing its clarity. "Ignoramus" is charming as a rendition of *jāhil* (*passim*), while preserving the root sense of "ignorance." So, too, in Rustom's translation the boastful worshippers and ascetics satirized by al-Ghazālī spring to life: "I do not sleep at night, and I complete the Qur'ān every day," brags one (49–50). "What gives you prominence? Whom have you met? What Prophetic traditions have you learned?" crows another (50). Equally vivid is the language condemning pride. Seeing the military leader al-Muhallab strutting around Baṣra, the ascetic Muṭarrif cries out, in Rustom's rendering, "You were at first a disgusting drop of sperm and in the end you will be a filthy corpse. And between these two states you are the bearer of faeces." (14) So al-Muhallab drops his strut, and this reader, at least, draws a smile.

As Rustom's excellent introduction and notes indicate, al-Ghazālī draws heavily on the *Ri'āya li-Ḥuquq Allāh* of al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857),

whose insights into the human mind and emotions are unparalleled in early Islamic literature. Two aspects of al-Ghazālī's treatment stand out as particularly Muḥāsibīan. The first is the notion that "ascetics and worshippers," precisely because they have conquered the more obvious passions, are especially prone to pride (43–50). The second lies in al-Ghazālī's sensitivity to the human capacity for self-delusion. How easy it is, he notes, to be pleased with one's humility and so to display "pride through displaying humility" (102)! Rustom argues that al-Ghazālī reworks al-Muḥāsibī's ideas into a more logical and systematic form (xxvi). This is certainly true, and it suggests the need for further study of al-Muḥāsibī's influence on moral psychology, as well as of the latent structures of al-Muḥāsibī's own work.

Readers of this journal will find special interest in the translation, for Rustom clearly conveys the Sufi dimensions of al-Ghazālī's discussion. The most challenging source of self-admiration, in al-Ghazālī's view, are false opinions. Here, the only remedy is to cling to what is demonstrated by proof from revelation, while remaining skeptical of ungrounded opinions. Yet to sift the certain from the conjectural is possible only for a person who is guided by the light of God (141) – a realization hard won by al-Ghazālī, as famously described in his autobiographical *Deliverance from Error*.

At the same time, Rustom's introduction highlights the subtle connections between al-Ghazālī's understanding of humility and the Sufi ideal of annihilation of the self. This comes to the fore in al-Ghazālī's commentary on a saying of the foundational early Sufi al-Junayd (d. 298/910) that "humility for the people of oneness (*ahl al-tawḥīd*) is pride." As al-Ghazālī explains, al-Junayd seems to indicate that the very act of humbling oneself requires affirming and thus attending to one's self (*nafs*); in contrast, "the person of oneness (*muwahaḥhid*) does not affirm his self, nor does he see it as a thing that he should humble or elevate" (23). One sees here the justness of Rustom's remark that "in the final analysis, humility is not simply to lower the self. Rather, humility is when there is no self left to lower" (xxxvi). This understanding stems ultimately from the view that all human virtue, action, and even ability (*qudra*) are gifts from God, who is the doer of every deed (125). As al-Ghazālī concludes, there is no room for self-admiration over actions or characteristics whose agent and creator is God alone (118–125).

Thanks to its combination of accessibility, lucidity, and precision, this volume would be well suited to university courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition to courses focused on Islam, the translation has much to offer courses in ethics and moral philosophy and would enable such courses to incorporate ideas from the Qur'an, Ḥadīth, Kalām, and Sufism. More broadly, this book will benefit academics and non-academics alike who seek a

sophisticated reflection on some of the most intractable human emotions and dispositions. Rustom emphasizes the contemporary relevance of this volume of the *Revival*, noting that his own translation was first prompted by a disillusionment with the pretensions of academic learning. Some of al-Ghazālī's arguments will, of course, carry less weight with modern English readers. Not many, I imagine, will be moved by the reflection that their emergence from the "passageway of filth" – that is, the birth canal – sullies their claims to an honorable lineage (84). Nevertheless, most of al-Ghazālī's rhetoric and argumentation holds enduring power. Readers of this wonderful translation may indeed find that in studying al-Ghazālī's exposition, they gain insight not only into the subtleties of Islamic moral philosophy, but also into the subtle ways in which pride twists our understanding of ourselves and of others.

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