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Knowledge of the Past: The Theory of Tawatur According to Ghazâlî*

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Despite the great emphasis which modern science has placed upon empirical investigation, it still remains true that a great part of what the average man would call his knowledge of the world is not derived directly from his own experience. A native Nebraskan readily declares that he knows the earth to be round even if he has never travelled outside his home state. He also readily declares that he knows that Chicago is located on a lakeshore, that Russia has a communist government, that the Confederates were defeated in the Civil War, or that President Kennedy was assassinated. To suggest that he ought to say "I believe that President Kennedy was assassinated" or "I knowt hat I heard news to this effect, but I cannot say that I know whether President Kennedy was actually assassinated" would make no sense to him. He would be convinced of his right to say, "I know that President Kennedy was assassinated."

History is made up of events which, except for those which happen to constitute one's personal history, lie outside one's individual experience. This means that if a knowledge of past events is to be predicated as a possibility a type of knowledge of the world must be admitted which is essentially nonempirical. (I am using the phrase "knowledge of the world" in contrast to the knowledge of mathematical or logical truths and to religious or mystical knowledge. "World" will be taken to mean the totality of spatio-temporal phenomena, past and present.) If I insist dogmatically that I know that President Kennedy was assassinated, I am claiming a knowledge of an event which has no basis in myo wn experience (contraryt o my knowledgeo fw hat I heard or saw in the media).

A historian who adopts a strict empiricist point of view is constrained to deny the possibility of having a knowledge of the actual events with which it is his business to deal. The only knowledge which he is entitled to claim is the knowledge of what is contained within his sources, the knowledge of data. This data consists mainly of verbal statements about past events, although non-verbal data (artifacts, etc.) will also be useful. The data or statements about past events are what the historian directly experiences, not the events themselves. They are his real "facts" out of which he attempts to construct in his imagination a picture of past events. This picture is reflected in the written account which he gives of the past event. A

* Bernard Weiss, Knowledge of the Past: The Theory of "Tawâtur" According to Ghazâlî, Studia Islamica, 61 (1985), 81-105.

picture or account of a past event is judged more or less "appropriate" or "probable" with reference to the data. The data must, of course, be sifted in accordance with agreed upon methodological rules, and the historian will seek to rely on the data which have the best methodological credentials. It is presupposed that some statements about past events are more true than others or that some are true and some are false. However, this truth and falseness cannot be determined through empirical verification, since the historian can never experience the event. Hence the need for methodological criteria with which to evaluate the usefulness of data in constructing appropriate pictures or accounts of past events (or we might say: with which to determine the degree of presumed truth -as opposed to empirically verified truth-which may be reasonably attributed to statements about past events.)

This strict empiricist point of view is at odds with the ordinary layman's view. The layman is aware that most of what he considers to be his knowledge of the world, past and present, is derived, not from personal experience, but from books, the media, general report, education, etc. Indeed, in ordinary English "knowledge" has this broader layman's meaning (ordinary language being, in any case, by definition the language of laymen). When one attends a university to acquire knowledge, one generally has this sense in mind. The university student will of course seek to master the methods of empirical research, partly by undertaking research projects on his own, so that he may in time add to the existing knowledge of the world, but the fact remains that he will build up a store of knowledge of the world not through empirical research but through the resources of the library and the classroom. Knowledge of the world, in the broader sense, is the possession of society as a whole; the individual seeks to acquire as large a part of it as possible and in so doing to further his own socialization.

Islam, like its kindred predecessors Judaism and Christianity, is firmly rooted in history. Any religion that is centered upon revelation necessarily has a large stake is history, for revelation is always an event in time, or series of events. The revelatory event or events, together with certain surrounding events, constitute a special history which is vested with a sacred character. In Islam the supreme revelatory event is the "descent" of the Qur'ân upon the Prophet Muhammad and his deliverance of the Qur'ân to his contemporaries. Each verse, in fact each word, is, in a sense, an event in its own right, for each represents an utterance on the part of the Angel and then subsequently on the part of the Prophet. Those words and deeds of the Prophet himself which are the product of divine inspiration (wahy) are also to be counted as revelatory events. Together with the revelatory events themselves, the events involved in the establishment of the Muslim community (umma) under the Prophet and its subsequent expansion and development under the Rightly Guided Caliphs, especially Abu Bakr and 'Umar, complete the sacred history of Islam.

That the past should be excluded from the domain of human knowledge is unthinkable to any serious Muslim who adheres to the traditional vocabulary of

Islam. "Knowledge" ('ilm), in the Islamic tradition, is not exclusively empirical but has the broader character mentioned above. Traditional Muslim learned opinion takes the point of view of the average man: 'ilm has much the same sense as "knowledge" in ordinary English. According to this point of view, I have every right to claim to know that President Kennedy was assassinated, just' as every Muslim (or, for that matter, any non-Muslim) has the right to claim to know that the Prophet Muhammad actually uttered all of the words found in the present-day text of the Qur'an. It would no more make sense form e to say "I think President K ennedy was assassinated" than for someone to say "I think the words of the Qur'an were actually uttered by the Prophet Muhammad." The events of sacred history, like many events of public history generally, belong to that world the knowledge of which is available to individuals in any age.

Muslim scholars and theorists have, of course, always been perfectly aware of the fact that most of the past lies beyond the reach of human knowledge, that most of it is, in fact, lost forever and will never be retrieved. They have also been aware that of that part of the past which lingers in the human memory or in written records much is speculative: the best we can do is form an opinion (zann) as to what precisely happened, knowledge of the event being beyond us. This is true even for a good part of the sacred history. The bulk of sayings and deeds attributed to the Prophet, for example, have a merely probable character. Even when the degree of probability is very high, as is the case with sayings and deeds recorded in the canonical hadith collections, it still falls short of becoming knowledge. However, that the past should be regarded as beyond knowledge altogether, as limited by definition to the probable, was unthinkable to the medieval Muslim. To relativize the past so completely would have been to relativize and ultimately do away with revelation itself. There had to be a core of genuine historical knowledge if there was to be revelation in the true sense of the word. Particular sayings and deeds of the Prophet might be open to discussion, but the edifice of Islamic revelation as a whole had to rest upon a foundation of unassailable historical certainty. Chiefa mong the facts of history which were included in this foundation were the existence of the Prophet Muhammad, his prophetic mission, the words which he delivered to mankind as from God and which constituted the proof of his prophethood, and the pivotal events of his career and of the early development of his community.

Any system of thought which allows for the possibility of a knowledge of the world not based on direct experience must deal with an obvious question: if direct experience is not the basis of this knowledge, then what is? The Muslim tradition has a ready answer to this question in the concept of tawatur. It is this concept that I propose to explore and attempt to explain in the following pages. The concept is propounded primarily in the books on the principles of jurisprudence (usûl al-fiqh). There are many books on this subject, and since the concept of tawatur seems to be more or less uniform throughout the literatüre on us'l al-fiqh one book would seem

to serve our purpose as well as any other. I have chosen Abû Hâmid al-Ghazâlî's (d. 1111 A.D.) work on usûl al-fiqh entitled al-Mustasfâ min 'ilm al-usûl for the added reason that, unlike most other books in this field, this book provides us with a general theory of knowledge within which to place Ghazâlî's discussion of tawatur. The usual place to deal with the theory of knowledge in medieval Islam was within theology (kalâm), and Ghazâlî's epistemological doctrine is the mainline one found in the great works of theology, such as al-Iji's Mawâqif.[1] What is unique about Ghazâlî's treatment (and convenient for us) is that within a single work, i.e. the Mustasfâ, he treats both a topic from jurisprudence (tawâtur) and a topic from theology (theory of knowledge), even though he deals with these topics in separate sections.[2]

The term tawâtur means literally "recurrence." As a technical term of traditional Muslim scholarship it has reference to the recurrence of statements about past events. According to the theory which Ghazâlî and other usûlîs (writers on usûl al-fiqh) propound, the recurrence of such statements produces in the minds of the hearers a knowledge that such statements are true. This theory is expressed succinctly in the phrase al- tawâtur yufid al-'ilm ("recurrence imparts knowledge"), which appears repeatedly in works on usûl al-fiqh. And it is important to add that the knowledge that a statement about a past event is true is taken to be tantamount to a knowledge of the event itself. This makes perfect sense. If I am able to say that I know that the statement "President Kennedy was assassinated" is true, then I am able to say that I have a knowledge of the event itself. Since I understand English and know what the words mean, I have some sort of knowledge of what happened in Dallas on November 22, 1963. It may not be quite on the same order as the knowledge of eye witnesses, which is empirical and therefore vivid and rich in sensory input, but it is knowledge nonetheless. This being the case, it is quite legitimate, in discussing the subject of the knowledge of past events, to place the focus on the knowledge of the truth of statements about past events, for when one has established the latter one has ipso facto established the former.

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[1] Al-Iji's epistemological doctrine has been studied in great detail by Josef van Ess in his Die Erkenninislehre des 'Adudaddîn al-Îci (Wiesbaden, 1966).

[2] The subject of tawâtur is dealt with in a special subdivision of the section on the Sunna of the Prophet (vol. I, pp. 132-140). This is the normal placement of this subject within usill al-fiqh books. The theory of knowledge, on the other hand, is to be found in the Introduction (muqaddima) to the Mustasfâ. Ghazâlî nowhere formally elaborates a theory of knowledge. The primary focus of the Introduction is upon logic. However, the elements of a theory of knowledge are discernible in the section of the Introduction in which Ghazâlî deals with the "material" (as opposed to the "formal") aspect of logical proof (burhân), that is to say, with the ultimate premises upon which all valid reasoning, i.e. reasoning which leads to true conclusions, is based (vol. I, pp. 43-49). Ghazâlî calls such premises "the sources of knowledge" (madârik al-'ilm) or "the sources of certainty" (madârik al-yaqîn). References in this article are to the Bulaq edition of the Mustasfâ (1322 hijrî). This edition has been reproduced in recent years in Baghdad by Qasim Muhammad al-Rajab. H. Laoust provides a brief synopsis of the content of the Mustasfâ (including the section on tawâtur) in his La politique de Ghazâlî (Paris, 1970), pp. 152-182.

This is not to say thatt he knowledge of past events is reducible generically to a knowledge that statements about past events are true. This knowledge which the eye witness of an event has certainly entails much more than a knowledge that given statements about that event are true, although the eye witness will of course possess the latter. What is affirmed here (in our attempt to explain the medieval Muslim theory) is that the richer type of knowledge of a past event which the eye witness possesses does not represent the only type of knowledge that is possible; rather, there is another valid type of knowledge of the event, namely that which is represented by the sheer knowledge that given statements about the event are true.

This takes us to the crucial question, one which the reader will no doubt have already raised in his mind before this point. How is it possible to have a knowledge of the truth of statements about past events without a prior empirical knowledge of the event itself? Is not the former derived from the latter? Are not the two ultimately inseparable? Stated otherwise: How is it possible to know that a statement about a past event is true without direct empirical verification of the statement? The phrase al- tawâtur yufid al-'ilm is precisely the answer to this question. The theory which it expresses attempts to show how a knowledge of the truth of statements about past events can be possible without empirical verification.

Quite obviously, the theory under consideration in these pages stands in sharp contrast to modern empiricism. It is instructivet o compare the usûflî way of thinking with that of empirically-inclined modern historians. Both the usûlî and the empiricist historian agree that what we directly experience is not past events as such but statements about past events. 'It is the statement that lingers after the event has disappeared and intervenes between us and the event. It is the statement that we have directly before us. However, the usûlî by means of his concept of recurrence is able to gain from the statement a knowledge of the event itself (which, we have suggested, amounts to the knowledge that the statement is true, with any imaginative reconstruction as a non-essential by-product), whereas the empirically inclined historian must content himself with an imaginative reconstruction of the event which is at best appropriate or probable (or presumed to be true, as 'opposed to being actually verified as true), and this is because the latter is never in a position, lacking direct empirical verification, to affirm unequivocally that the statement is true.

We said above that accordingt o the theory under consideration the recurrence of statements about past events produces in the minds of hearers the knowledge that the statements are true. This knowledge thus arises in the mind without empirical verification. However, this general statement of the theory should not be taken at face value. It is subject to a number of very important qualifications, and it is only after considering these qualifications that we will be in a position to understand what the theory really is trying to say. These qualifications will make it apparent how very technical the term tawâtur and the related term mutawâtir are. It is because of the highly technical character of these terms that we

shall use them in their Arabic form rather than using literal English equivalents such as "recurrence" and "recurrent."

In order to be mutawâtir (literally "recurrent") a statement about a past event must be more than simply recurrent in the ordinary sense. It must meet a number of important conditions called "conditions of tawâtur" (shurût al- tawâtur). In one passage[3] Ghazali stipulates four such conditions (stated here in an order slightly different from his):

1. The statement must be based on knowledge, not on opinion. (This seems to be saying that the opinions which persons may have concerning past events can produce in the minds of others only their like; opinion can never produce that which surpasses it, namely knowledge. Hence, statements expressing opinions about past events cannot be mutawâtir in the technical sense.)

2. This knowledge must be necessary, that is, based on what is perceived through the senses.

3. The number of persons making the statement (or number of occurrences of the statement) must be kâmil (literally "complete"). Kâmil is in this case a technical term meaning "sufficient to rule out the possibility of collaborative fabrication." We will translate kâmil in this technical sense as "adequate." In order to fulfill this condition of adequacy, a statement must occur again and again (that is, issue from one person after another) until it has occurred a sufficient number of times to rule out all possibility of collaborative fabrication. This recurrence seems to entail both a subjective and objective aspect. If I am to have a knowledge of the truth of a statement about a past event, I must hear the statement a sufficient number of time (that is, from a sufficient number of different persons) to rule out collaborative fabrication. In other words, the recurrence of the statement must take place within my experience. On the other hand, the number of occurrences of the statement within the world at large may far exceed those which take place within my own experience. I as an individual may be exposed only to a portion of this total number of occurrences. What is important is that the number of occurrences I am exposed to be adequate. It goes without saying that the number of occurrences in the world at large will be adequate; they will, in fact, be in excess of the adequate number.

4. When a report is transmitted from the original witnesses to an event through a series of intermediaries, the three above mentioned conditions must apply to each successive point or stage in the transmission process.

In another passage, Ghazâlî speaks of two rather than four conditions. He calls these "conditions of the occurrence of knowledge (of the truth of statements about past events)," rather than "conditions of tawâtur," although it is clear that the two categories come down to the same thing. That is, the "conditions of tawâtur "

[3] Mustasfâ, vol. 1, p. 134.

represent not only conditions governing the application of the term mutawâtir to statements about past events but also conditions governing the actual occurrence of knowledge, conditions under which a statement about a past event will actually produce knowledge in the mind of the hearer.

It will be useful to quote the relevant passage in full:

> If an adequate number (of persons) makes a statement (about a past event) and the knowledge that their statement is true does not occur (in the mind of the hearer), then one cannot but be certain that the persons in question are telling a falsehood, for there are just two conditions governing making the statement) be adequate and (2) that these persons be making the statement on the basis of certainty (yaqin) and empirical observation (mushâhada). Therefore, if the number of persons making the statement is adequate, then the fact that the knowledge (that their statement is true) does not ocur is due to a failure to meett he second condition; for if the persons making the statement had been telling the truth, then, given the adequacy of their number, the knowledge (that their statement was true) would have occurred (in the mind of the hearer) necessarily.[4]

Here, clearly, we have two principal "conditions of tawâtur": (1) the statement about the past event must be based on certainty and empirical observation; that is to say, it must be true in the sense of being empirically based; and (2) the number of persons making the statement (or number of occurrences of the statement) must be adequate. Clearly Ghazâlî is here combining the first two of the four conditions mentioned above as a single condition. Strictly speaking, the first two of the four conditions are not separate conditions in any case, since the second simply narrows down the first by specifying that the knowledge required in the first be a knowledge based on sense perception. That is, if the second condition has been met, the first has also necessarily been met, since sense perception renders knowledge. As for the fourth condition, it is in fact not an independent condition but a "super-condition," as it were. It states something about the other conditions, namely that in cases where a statement is transmitted from person to person these conditions are applicable to each point in the transmission process.

The "super-condition" comes into play where the hearer is not in direct contact with original witnesses to an event but is rather dependent on intermediaries. Most of what we consider to be our knowledge of the world is acquired from statements, not of witnesses, but of intermediaries. Knowledge is thus passed along a chain, or rather a multitude of chains. In Ghazâlî's time, these intermediaries were presumed to be almost exclusively persons. Ghazâlî did not live in the age of the media, as we do, and even the written word, being the product not of the printing press but of fallible copyists, was considered inferior to the

[4] Mustasfâ, vol. I, p. 138.

spoken word. The "super-condition", we have said, states that at every point in the process of transmission of a statement the two primary conditions must be met. Only if they are met can the knowledge of the event flow through time, especially from generation to generation. Thus there must always be, at every point in time, an adequate number of persons making possible an adequate number of occurrences of a given statement within the experience of any hearer. The number of persons who originally witnessed the event must necessarily be adequate. As they pass the word along to intermediaries, their statements will for a time be co-mingled with the statements of intermediaries to insure the flow of knowledge. But eventually the original witnesses will all die, and the flow of knowledge will there after depend entirely on intermediaries, whose number, as the word is continually passed on from person to person, must always remain at or above the adequate level. Furthermore, the statements must, at every stage in the transmission process, always be based on sense perception. Ghazâli does not make it entirely clear what this means. Presumably it may either mean that the intermediaries will always be making statements on the basis of sense perception in that they will state only what they have heard others say (just as the original witnesses saw or experienced in some other way the event itself), or it may mean that the intermediaries will always go on stating what has been experienced by the original witnesses, so that what the original witnesses experienced is, as it were, carried on through time and the knowledge which flows through time continues to have its ultimate basis in that experience.

Any statement about a past event which meets Ghazâlî's two primary conditions and which, if transmitted through time, continues to meet these two conditions at every point in the transmission process can, according to the theory expounded by Ghazâlî, be termed mutawâtir in the technical sense, and such a statement will by virtue of having met these conditions produce in the mind of the hearer a knowledge of its truth, which is tantamount to a knowledge of the event itself.

It must be emphasized that the fulfillment of the two primary conditions in no way enters into the thinking of the hearer of a mutawâtir statement as a prelude to the occurrence of knowledge. They are extraneous to the hearer altogether. The theory expounded by Ghazzâlî affirms simply that if a statement about a past event is true in the sense of being empirically based and if it is sufficiently widely circulated to rule out the possibility of collaborative fabrication there will occur spontaneously in the mind of the hearer, i.e. without any logical antecedents, a knowledge that the statement is true.

Neither of the two conditions is sufficient by itself. A statement which is true but does not recur on a scale thay may be deemed adequate may be persuasive (particularly if those making it are known to be trustworthy), but it will not impart knowledge and will therefore not be mutawâtir in the technical sense. The same is true, interestingly enough, of a statement which is circulated on a scale sufficient to

be deemed adequate but does not derive from the experience of original witnesses and is therefore not true. It may seem peculiar that Ghazâlî is unwilling to call such a statement mutawâtir in view of its wide circulation, but it is at this point that the technical character of the Arabic term tawâtur becomes most apparent: it is the recurrence not just of any kind of statements about past events but only of empirically-based true statements.

One may ask how it is that a falses tatement can gain circulation among a large group of people whose number precludes collaborative fabrication. Ghazâlî's answer is simple: the fabrication may have been the work of a part of the group, whose number did not rule out collaboration, and the resultant falsehood spread to the rest of the group, who accepted it without being aware of its falseness. These latter become unwitting perpetuators of a falsehood. The essential point here is that a falsehood, though it can arise only within a group small enough to make collaboration possible, can easily gain circulation among a large group of people whose number precludes collaborative fabrication. There are ample examples of this. Ghazzâlî mentions the Prophet Muhammad's alleged appointment of 'Alî as the first Imam, which to the Sunni Muslim is a clear falsehood. The numbers of Shî'îs who perpetuate this "falsehood" is more than sufficient to rule out collaborative fabrication.[5] The same can be said of Jewish and Christian heresies.

If it is possible for a falsehood to be circulated ampng a number of people sufficient to rule out collaborative fabrication, why bother with the second condition at all? The answer would seem to be that some condition must be posited other than the sheer truth of a statement, and this condition must have something to do with number. Ghazâlî seems to feel that there is some sort of strength in numbers. The statement of the many seems to have in his thinking some sort of impact which the statement of the few does not have. This impact, so Ghazâlî's theory seems to be affirming, can be best explained by the fact that the many are incapable of collaborative fabrication, in contrast to the few.

The positing of the two conditions seems to be based on some such thinking as the following. We are all aware of the presence in our minds of knowledge of the truth of statements about certain historical events and about certain phenomena in the present world to which we have not been direct witnesses. Like all knowledge, this knowledge is a subjective state perceived through introspection; it is simply there. We cannot, however, attribute this knowledge to sensory perception or rational intuition. We must therefore explain it on some other grounds. On attempting to analyze the circumstances that attend the occurrence of such knowledge in our minds, we note an important pattern: such knowledge occurs only when we have heard the statement from a large number of people. An awareness thus arises of number as a conditioning factor. This knowledge is never present in our minds when we have heard the statement from a few persons but

[5] Mustasfâ, vol. I, pp. 138-139.

only when we have heard it from many. And yet number in itself cannot provide the whole explanation, since there are statements which we have heard from large numbers of people which we do not know to be true (or even know not to be true). To this category belong heresies, superstitions and fables. Therefore it is necessary to add a further condition, namely the truth of the statement.

The term kâmil (which we have been translating in its technical usage as "adequate") applies to a precise number, namely the minimal number of persons required to preclude collaborative fabrication. Any number which is more than this number is described as "excessive," or "more than adequate" (zâ'id). Thus there is a fixed number of which we can say: with groups of this number or more collaborative fabrication is out of the question, whereas with groups whose number is less it is not.

Can this minimal number be determined? Ghazâlî rejects the attempts of other Muslim theorists to set the number at forty or seventy. Rather, he holds that this number is known only to God. We certainly have no way of computing it. If we were to attempt to do so by counting the instances of hearinga givens tatement up to that point where the knowledge that the statement was true occurred in us, we would find that it is impossible to pinpoint the moment when this knowledge occurs. It would be like trying to pinpoint the moment when childhood ends and adulthood begins.[6]

It does not, in any case, matter that we cannot know what the minimal number is. The conditions which govern the occurrence of knowledge of the truth of statements about past events, we have said, in no way enter into the thinking of the hearer. It is not necessary that we know the number of persons making a statement about a given event is kâmil in order subsequently to know that the statement is true. One does not argue one's way from adequacy of number to the truth of the statement. The reverse, in fact, is the case. If I find within myself a knowledge that the Prophet Muhammad actually existed I can argue from this that the number of persons from whom I have heard a statement to this effect has been adequate, since the knowledge could not exist if the number were not adequate.[7]

Obviously, extremely large numbers must necessarily be in the "more than adequate" category. One can know, for example, that a million persons are incapable of collaborative fabrication, since this would require a common purpose and common motivations which, in the existings cheme of things, are impossible in the case of such a large number. However, this knowledge is in itself no guarantee that knowledge of the truth of a statement will occur. In the case of the statement "the Prophet appointed 'Alî to be the first Imam," we know that the number of persons making the statement is well above the adequate number. If we find that a

[6] Mustasfâ, vol. I, p. 137.

[7] Lakinnâ bi-husûli'l-ilmi'l-darûriyi natabayyanu kamâla'l-'adadi li-anna bi-kamâli'l-adadi nastadillu 'ala husûsi'l-ilm, Mustasfâ, vol I, p. 135.

knowledge of its truth does not exist in our minds, we may argue from this that the other condition has not been met, that the statement is not empirically based, is not true.

Thus in the end the term mutawâtir designates a category of statements about past events which we know to be true by virtue of a knowledge which we "find" within ourselves. This knowledge does not require or result from empirical verification; it is simply there, apart from any such verification. Where the knowledge of the truth of any statement results from empirical verification, it is indistinguishable from empirical knowledge as such. In the case of statements about past events, no such verificationis possible. The theory of tawâtur places the knowledge of the truth of mutawâtir statements on an independent footing, rendering such verification unnecessary. Through tawâtur a purely historical knowledge, distinct from sensory knowledge, is upheld. Like sensory knowledge, this historical knowledge is not the product of discursive reasoning; it simply occurs within us. However, in contrast to sensory knowledge, it is subject to those special conditions which we have just considered.

The theory behind the concept of tawâtur and its conditions can perhaps be stated with greatest clarity and succinctness in English as follows: the widespread recurrence of true statements about past events produces in the minds of hearers a knowledge that these statements are true. "Widespread" must of course be understood to mean "on a scale sufficien to rule out the possibility of collaborative fabrication." From this statement of the theory two corollaries follows: (1) a recurrence of true statements about past events which is not widespread does not produce in the minds of hearers a knowledge that these statements are true, and likewise (2) the widespread recurrence of false statements about past events does not produce in the minds of hearers a knowledge that they are true. It is helpful to bear in mind, especially with respect to the second corollary which appears to be tautologous, that the knowledge that a statement is true is to be distinguished from the actual truth of the statement. The knowledge is a subjective state occurring within the mind; the truth of the statement is an objective reality existing outside the mind, the object of the knowledge that takes place within the mind. Thus what the second corollary is meant to say is that knowledge, though a subjective state, cannot exist apart from its proper object. Hence, the knowledge of the truth of a statement cannot exist unless the statement is in fact true. If the statement is false, one cannot have the knowledge that it is true.

Despite its sophistication, the theory elaborated by Ghazâlî leaves certain difficulties unresolved. It seems to posit a knowledge which has no demonstrable objective underpinning. We are presented with a knowledge which is simply there, which we simply "find" within ourselves, without really being shown how the knowledge got there. The "conditions of tawâtur" do not really explain this. Hence the theory seems to be locked into an essentially subjectivist stance. Knowledge is,

of course, a subjective state; we do "find" it within ourselves; but if some sort of objective underpinnings cannot be pointed out it ceases to be knowledge.

This subjectivist tendency becomes evident when we consider cases where conflicting claims to knowledge of the truth of statements about past events arise. How are such disputes to be resolved? Empirical verification, we have noted earlier, is ruled out by definition. Rational intuition and logical deduction are also ruled out. The truth of statements about past events is not axiomatic, nor is it derived from axioms. If it were possible to resolve the disputes on the basis of the widespread recurrence of statements, we would have an objective underpinning. But we cannot do this. One disputant cannot say to another, "Wait until you have had a chance to listen to more people and you will see that I am right," because false statements can be just as widely circulated as true statements; in fact, they can be more widely circulated in given instances. Thus the condition of adequacy of number does not provide us with our objective underpinning. And the other primary condition of tawâtur, namely the actual truth of statements, is hardly a ground for argument: it is rather the desideratum of the dispute.

In the section of the Muslasfâ on the definition (hadd) of knowledge, Ghazâlî notes that knowledge may easily be confused with credence (i'tiqâd). This is because both exhibit a kind of confidence (jazm). Thus a person who claims to have knowledge may in fact be mistaken; his knowledge may turn out to be mere credence. The difference between knowledge and credence is that in the case of knowledge one has taken into consideration the opposite of what he knows and ruled it out, whereas in the case of credence one attaches oneself blindly to what one believes without taking real cognizance of its opposite. Knowledge involves an open mind, credence a closed mind, with the result that knowledge has a firm intellectual grounding and is secure against doubt, whereas this cannot be said of credence.[8] In accordance with this distinction, we could attemptt o argue, with respect to cases of conflicting claims to knowledge of the truth of statements about past events, that in such cases at least one of the disputants must be a dogmatist who has mistakenly taken his credence to be knowledge. But this would take us back to square one, for we would be dealing with a situation where one disputant (the one who possesses true knowledge) would be expected ultimately to prevail over his opponent by revealing the process whereby he had taken both that which he now knows and its opposite into account and had settled with absolute assurance on the former, and this would presuppose the objective underpinning which we have not been able to discover.

In order to discover the place which the knowledge of the truth of statements about past events occupies within Ghazâlî's theory of knowledge, we must turn to the section of the Mustasfâ which deals with logical proof (burhân). In examining this section, we must bear in mind that the knowledge of the truth of statements

[8] Mustasfâ, vol. I, pp. 25-26

about past events falls within the larger category of knowledge of the truth of statements about phenomena which lie outside our experience. Such phenomena include not only past events but also present phenomena, such as the existence of cities we have never visited. As was intimated at the beginning of this article, what is at stake in the discussion of knowledge of the truth of statements about past events is the possibility of a non-empirical knowledge of the world at large, both past and present. Such knowledge in its entirety is the concern of all theorizing about tawâtur, for present phenomena are just as much as past mediated to us by widely recurrent true statements.

In order to spare ourselves of the clumsiness that comes with frequent referencet o "the knowledge of the truth of statements about past events and present phenomena lying outside our experience" or "knowledge resulting from widely recurrent statements," we will in the following paragraphs take the liberty of referring to this knowledge by means of the shorter phrase "second-hand knowledge." This designation can be misleading unless it is carefully kept in mind that the term "second-hand" is intended to convey nothing more than the notion that the knowledge in question is a knowledge of the truth of statements made to the hearer by others and that such statements are possible only because someone was direct witness to the events or phenomena themselves and was prompted to make statements about these events or phenomena. The knowledge in question thus presupposes an empirical knowledge in others apart from which the true statements (which are its object) could not exist in the first place. It is not a question of empirical experience being handed from one person to another: that by definitionis impossible. It is rather a question of statements being made on the basis of empirical experience and of their truth being subsequently known to persons other than the original witnesses as a result of their widespread recurrence (tawâtur).

According to Ghazâlî, the knowledge which we are here designating as "second-hand knowledge" belongs to the class of necessary knowledge (al-'ilm al-darûrî). In his usage necessary knowledge is knowledge which "imposes" itself upon the intellect in the sense that it does not admit of doubt. It is therefore not the product of any conscious deductive reasoning, for that which results from deduction may, when severed from its logical basis, be doubted; it requires logical proof in order to be raised above doubt. Knowledge which is dependent upon logical proof constitutes a second category, namely discursive knowledge (al-'ilm al-nazarî). Necessary knowledge is the source of discursive knowledge in that all discursive knowledge is derived ultimately from it by means of logical deduction. The distinction between necessary and discursive knowledge thus amounts to a distinction between knowledge which is the source of other knowledge and knowledge which is derived from the source. It would be in keeping with Ghazâlî's way of thinking to speak of necessary knowledge as "source knowledge" and discursive knowledge as "derived knowledge." It must be emphasized, however,

that the terms "source" and "derived" are used here in a logical rather than strictly epistemological sense. All logical deduction must start somewhere. Necessary knowledge is this starting point. The conclusion of a syllogism represents knowledge which has been derived from a source, namely the premises. If the premises are themselves derived, then they must be carried back to prior premises until finally we reach the real source of all logical deduction, namely those propositions which are not arrived at through deduction but are simply there as principles which impose themselves upon the intellect

Ghazâlî divides necessary knowledge into five types or sub-categories, which he calls the five "sources of (derived) knowledge" (madârik al-'ilm, or madârik al-yaqîn).[9] These are:

1. A priorit ruths (awwalyât), as represented by statements such as "I exist," "A thing cannot be both eternal and created," "If one of two contradictory statements is true the other must be false," "Two is greater than one," etc.

2. Introspective observations (al-mushâdât al-bâtinîya), e.g. "I am hungry," "I am thirsty," "I am afraid," "I am happy," etc.

3. External sensory perceptions (al-mahsûsât al-zâhirîya), e.g. "The snow is white," "The moon is round," "The sun is bright," etc.

4. Inductions (al-tajribîyât), e.g. "Fire consumes," "Bread satiates," "Rocks fall," "Wine intoxicates," "Scammony relieves the bowels," etc.

5. Widely recurrent data (al-mutawâtirât), e.g. "Mecca exists," "Shâfi'î existed," "The number of (required daily) prayers is five," etc.

It may be noted that if we combine the second and third of these sources of knowledge, namely introspective observations (which could also be called internal sensations) and external sensory perceptions (as Ghazâlî himself does in his Mi'yâr al-'ilm),[10] we then have four basic types of necessary knowledge: (1) a priori

[9] Mustasfâ, vol. I, pp. 44-46. Ghazâlî speaks of seven sources of certainty (i.e. knowledge) and confident credence, but makes it clear in the course of his discussion that only five of these can be considered sources of certainty (yaqîn, qat'). It should be noted that knowledge and certainty were, for Ghazâlî as for the usulis in general, correlative concepts. To know a thing was to be certain of it. Ghazâlî in fact combines the two concepts in the phrase madârik al-'ulûm al-yaqînîya (p. 46). In his discussion of logical proof the concept of certainty is the more prominent, primarily because of its special relevance to logic. The question with which Ghazâlî is chiefly concerned in this discussion is not "what are the ultimate sources of all knowledge" (although his answer to this question emerges clearly enough between the lines) but rather "how can we be certain that the conclusions of our logical proofs are true?" The certainty of the conclusion obviously depends on the certainty of the premises, and the ultimate premises from which all logical deduction proceeds become the "sources of certainty." But, as certainty is a correlate of knowledge and as the conclusions of logical proofs clearly constitute knowledge, these ultimate premises may also be called "sources of knowledge," it being understood that in the context of logic they are sources of derived knowledge.

[10] Ed. Sulaymân Dunyâ (Cairo: Dâr al-Ma'ârif, 1961), p.187.

knowledge, (2) sensory knowledge, (3) inductive knowledge and (4) second-hand knowledge.

SomeMuslim theorists up to thet ime of Ghazâlî were unwilling to include the last two of these types of knowledge under the category of necessary knowledge. They argued that only knowledge which is absolutely primitive and underived, as are the first two types, deserve to be so classified. Inductive knowledge and second-hand knowledge, they maintained, are not absolutely primitive and underived because they are the product of a process of reasoning. This reasoning is not "manifest" (zâhir), as is the reasoning involved in ordinary logical deduction. Rather, it is "hidden" (khafî). We may sense its traces, but we are not fully aware of it at the moment when it occurs within our intellects; it eludes us. "Hidden" reasoning is subliminal.

Ghazâlî accepts the notion that inductive knowledge and second-hand knowledge entail a "hidden" reasoning but takes the view that these types of knowledge must be regarded as necessary precisely because the reasoning upon which they are based is hidden. Where knowledge occurs without there being a clear-cut consciously utilized logical basis which the intellect is able to retain and refer back to, it makes perfect sense to say that the knowledge imposes itself upon the intellect[11]

Implicit in the notion of "hidden" reasoning is a recognition that inductive knowledge and second-hand knowledge cannot be primitive in the same absolute sense that a priori truths and sensory knowledge are primitive. If not primitive, they must be derived; if the derivation does not occur by means of any conscious operation of the intellect, then a covert operation must be posited.

A priori knowledge and sensory knowledge were not, among the medieval Muslim theorists, opposing categories, as they tended to be in the Western dialogue between "rationalists" and "empiricists." Rather, rational intuition and sensory perception were both accepted as sources of knowledge, having, it would seem, a complementary relationship to each other. In a strict epistemologicals sense they are the ultimates sources of knowledge. As such they stand apart from inductive knowledge and second-hand knowledge which, as we have noted, are sources only with reference to logical processes.

One is tempted on the basis of Ghazâlî's discussion to posit three categories of knowledge rather than two: (1) primitive knowledge, the ultimate source of all other knowledge, (2) covertly derived knowledge, and (3) logically deduced knowledge. However, this three-fold classification is apparently nowhere to be found in the literatüre of medieval Islam. That literature knows only the categories "necessary" and "discursive"; and for this reason the placement of covertly derived knowledge becomes something of a problem.

[11] Mustasfâ, vol. I, pp. 132-134.

Ghazâlî apparently does not regard "hidden" reasoning as entirely beyond analysis. It may, he seems to say, be reconstructed by the theorist. He reconstructs the reasoning involved in induction as follows: "If it were not the case that, for example, rocks always fall, then there would necessarily be some variation in our experience: sometimes, upon being released, rocks would fly upwards or to one side or remain in their place. The fact that in our experience rocks have always fallen is a sure indication that it is in the nature of rockst o fall."[12] As for the reasoning which underlies second-hand knowledge, this, in Ghazali's reconstruction, entails two "premises": "(1) Those (making such-and-such statement) are by virtue of their different circumstances and motivations and their large number such that nothing could have united them all in (the perpetuation of) a falsehood; rather they can only have concurred on the truth; and (2) they all concurred in making a statement about an actuality (wâqi', i.e. a spatiotemporal phenomenon, not an opinion or rational principle)."[13] From these premises, so one gathers, it follows that the statement is true. The two premises seem to have some sort of relationship to the two conditions of tawâtur mentioned earlier. It would appear that these conditions enter, in some way, into the "hidden" reasoning, although just how they enter in is not clear, especially in view of what we have said earlier about the conditions not constituting logical antecedents. The logic entailed in the "hidden" reasoning is obscure at best, and Ghazâlî does not choose to elaborate upon it. Even under analysis the "hidden" does not come entirely to light. It remains something of a mystery

There is, for Ghazâlî, a certain similarity between inductive knowledge and second-hand knowledge which goes beyond the fact that both are covertly derived. Inductive knowledge results from a recurrence of experiences. For example, one may observe that upon applying a certain liniment to a pain in some part of the body the pain disappears. If this experience keeps recurring, one will eventually reach the point where knowledge will occur, namely the knowledge that the particular type of liniment used cures the pain in question. Similarly, second-hand knowledge also results from a recurrence of experiences, the repeated hearing of a statement concerning a past event.

Furthermore, both inductive knowledge and second-hand knowledge are preceded by a gradual growth of opinion. After observing on a given number of occasions that pain ends when a liniment is applied we find the opinion forming within us that the liniment cures the pain; as this experience continues to recur a point is reached where the opinion gives way to knowledge. The same thing goes for statements about past events and present phenomena lying outside our

[12] This reconstruction is phrased in my own words. See Mustasfâ, vol. I, p. 46.

[13] Mustasfâ, vol. I, p. 132. Ghazâlî seems to say on this page that the mind is aware of these premises but not aware that it is aware of them; not aware, in other words, of its own awareness. This is a curious statement, but it does not, it seems to me, contradict the characterization of the "hidden" reasoning as essentially subliminal.

experience. We do not, upon having our first experiences of hearing from a number of persons the statement "Shâfi'î existed," know immediately that the statement is true; rather we first find ourselves believing that the statement is probably true, and only subsequently, when the highest stage of opinion has been transcended, do we know that it is true. In both cases we are never aware of the precise moment in which knowledge emerges. This eludes us.[14]

Despite these similarities, there is, however, an important difference between inductive knowledge and second-hand knowledge, which, though not expressly stated by Ghazâlî, is clearly implied. Inductive knowledge is a generalization from particular experiences, whereas second-hand knowledge is not. The knowledge that the statement "Shâfi'î existed" is true is in no sense a generalization from the particular experiences of hearing this statement. The affirmation that such a statement is true is not an affirmation of a general truth about the phenomenal world; it does not belong to the class of affirmations such as "rocks fall," "fire rises," "wine intoxicates," etc. As we have already noted, second-hand knowledge is a knowledge that takes us beyond the reach of our senses: it is a knowledge of the absent. Although it has a formal linkage with the experience of original witnesses, there is no question of its emerging out of our experience in the way that inductive knowledge emerges out of our experience.

To sum up: Ghazâlî is certain that there is such a thing as knowledge of past events, such as the existence of Muhammad and his call to prophethood. This knowledge is, owing to the absence of an empirical base, reducible to a knowledge that statements about past events are true. Such knowledge occurs spontaneously, that is to say without consciously utilized logical antecedents, whenever true (in the sense of empirically based) statements about past events are heard from a number of persons sufficient to rule out the possibility of collaborative fabrication. It does not occur when a false statement is heard from this number of persons; nor does it occur when a true statement is heard by a smaller number of persons. Since no consciously utilized logical antecedents are involved, it must be classified as necessary knowledge. It does not, however, have the immediacy of a priori rational truths and sense perceptions. For this reason a "hidden" or subliminal reasoning must be posited. Unlike inductive knowledge, which also is necessary and involves a "hidden" reasoning, this knowledge involves no generalization from particular experiences. Even though Ghazâlî's theorizing about the knowledge of the truth of statements about past events leaves certain difficulties unresolved, it demonstrates a firm grasp of the kinds of issues which must be faced if such a knowledge is to be posited.

[14] Laoust notes that according to Ghazzali a new convert to Islam may be excused for denying matters transmitted by tawâtur. Apparently, a new convert is considered not to have been as yet sufficiently exposed to recurrent reports among Muslims to have reached the point where a firm knowledge that these matters are true (i.e. a second-hand knowledge) can occur. Laoust, op. cit., p. 354.