

Al-Ghazzali (1058-1111 AD)

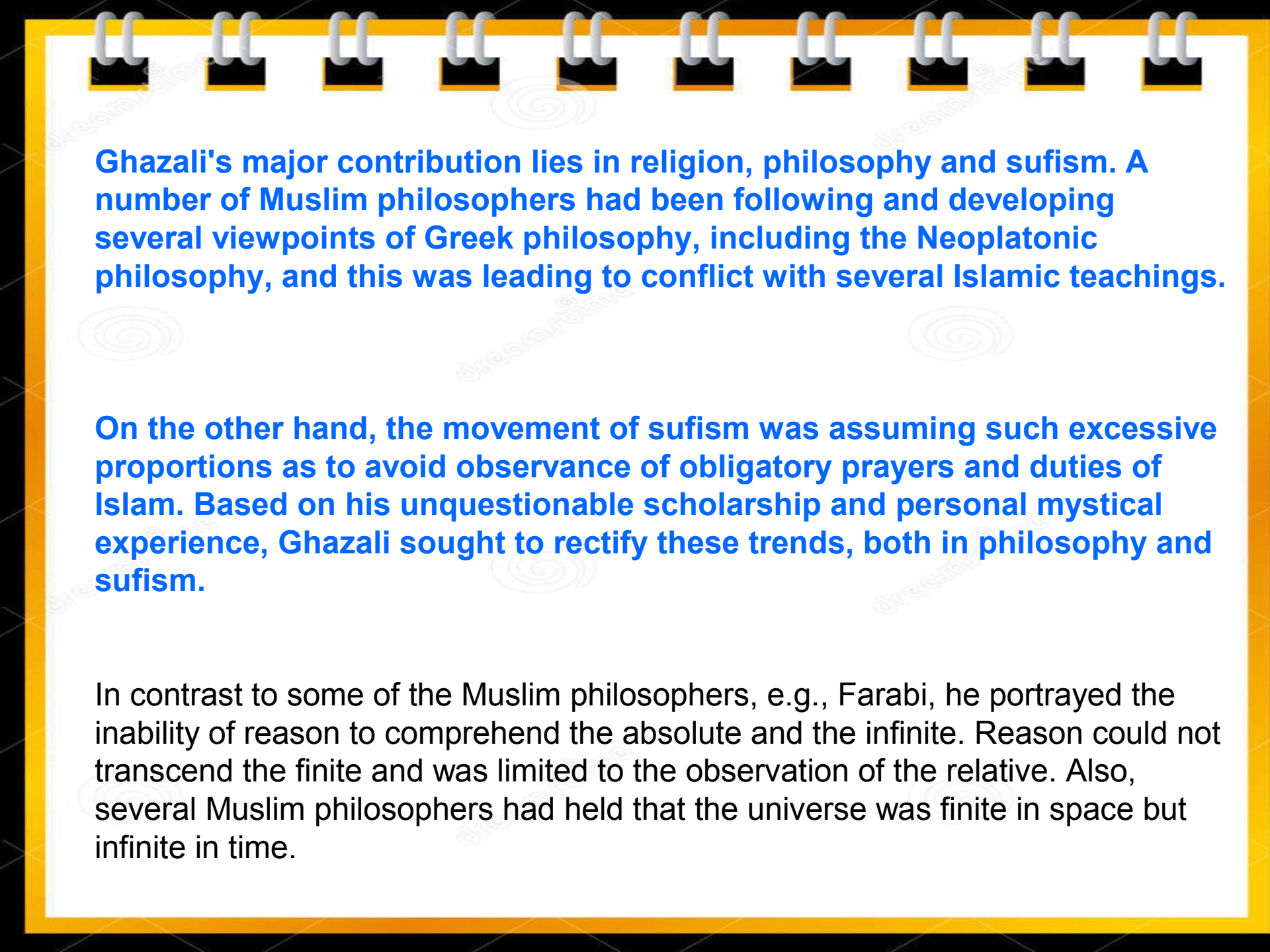
Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali is one of the most important scholars of Islamic thought. He was a philosopher, a legal scholar and a theologian and towards the end of his life a mystical thinker in the class of Ibn Arabi.

For many Muslims al-Ghazzali is the paragon of the *Mujaddid*, a reviver of Islam. Coming at a time when there were many disputations between philosophers and theologians, between rationalists and traditionalists and the Mystical and the orthodox, he tried to bridge these divisions.

His *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, The Revival of Religious Sciences embarks on a massive endeavor to find a golden mean between all these diverging trends.

The mature al-Ghazzali is very interesting.

After his intellectual crisis and subsequent spiritual awakening he becomes more like Sheikh Rabbani of India who balanced Shariah and Tariqah (law and mysticism).



Ghazali's major contribution lies in religion, philosophy and sufism. A number of Muslim philosophers had been following and developing several viewpoints of Greek philosophy, including the Neoplatonic philosophy, and this was leading to conflict with several Islamic teachings.

On the other hand, the movement of sufism was assuming such excessive proportions as to avoid observance of obligatory prayers and duties of Islam. Based on his unquestionable scholarship and personal mystical experience, Ghazali sought to rectify these trends, both in philosophy and sufism.

In contrast to some of the Muslim philosophers, e.g., Farabi, he portrayed the inability of reason to comprehend the absolute and the infinite. Reason could not transcend the finite and was limited to the observation of the relative. Also, several Muslim philosophers had held that the universe was finite in space but infinite in time.



Ghazali argued that an infinite time was related to an infinite space.

With his clarity of thought and force of argument, he was able to create a balance between religion and reason, and identified their respective spheres as being the infinite and the finite, respectively.

In religion, particularly mysticism, he cleansed the approach of sufism of its excesses and reestablished the authority of the orthodox religion.

Yet, he stressed the importance of genuine sufism, which he maintained was the path to attain the absolute truth.

He is one of the greatest theologians of Islam.

His theological doctrines penetrated Europe, influenced Jewish and Christian Scholasticism and several of his arguments seem to have been adopted by St. Thomas Aquinas in order to similarly reestablish the authority of orthodox Christian religion in the West.

So forceful was his argument in the favour of religion that he was accused of damaging the cause of philosophy and, in the Muslim Spain, Ibn Rushd (Averros) wrote a rejoinder to his Tuhafut.

He was a prolific writer. His immortal books include

Tuhafut al-Falasifa (The Incoherence of the Philosophers),
Ihya al-'Ulum al-Islamia (The Rivival of the Religious Sciences),

Some of his works were translated into European languages in the Middle Ages.

He also wrote a summary of astronomy.

Ghazali's influence was deep and everlasting.