

Classification of Knowledge in Islam

A Study in Islamic Philosophies of Science

OSMAN BAKAR

Foreword by

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND CIVILIZATION (ISTAC)
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA (IIUM)
KUALA LUMPUR

2006

© OSMAN BAKAR, 2006

THIS MALAYSIAN EDITION IS PUBLISHED
BY THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT AND CIVILIZATION (ISTAC),
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA (IIUM), 2006,
205A JALAN DAMANSARA, DAMANSARA HEIGHTS,
50480 KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA.
Tel: 603-2080 2900 Fax: 603-2094 8343
E-mail: istacbooks@iiu.edu.my, istacbooks@yahoo.com
Website: www.iiu.edu.my/istac

First impression 1992
Institute for Policy Research, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Second impression 1998
The Islamic Texts Society
22a Brooklands Avenue, Cambridge CB2 2DQ, UK

*All rights reserved. No part of this book may be
reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means,
electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording
or any information retrieval system, without
permission in writing from the copyright owner
and the publisher.*

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia

Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Osman Bakar

Classification of knowledge in Islam/Osman Bakar; foreword by Seyyed
Hossein Nasr.

ISBN 983-9379-44-5

1. Farabi. 2. Ghazzali,—1058–1111. 3. Qutb al-Shirazi, Mahmud ibn
Masud,—1236 or 7-1310 or 11. 4. Philosophy, Islamic. 5. Classification
of sciences—History. 6. Science—Philosophy—History. I. Syed Hossein
Nasr. II. Title.

001.012

CONTENTS

	Page
Foreword by Seyyed Hossein Nasr	xi
Acknowledgments	xvi
List of Transliterations	xvii
Introduction	1
General Domain of Study	1
Classifications Chosen for Study	1
The Nature and Scope of the Present Study	3
Contemporary Scholarship on the Subject	5

PART I. AL-FĀRĀBĪ

Chapter	
1.	The life, Works and Significance of al-Fārābī 9
1.1.	Introduction 9
1.2.	Al-Fārābī's Educational Background and Scholarly Life 10
1.3.	Al-Fārābī's Works and Significance 21
2.	Al-Fārābī's Psychology in Its Relation to the Hierarchy of the Sciences 43
2.1	The Idea of the Unity and Hierarchy of the Sciences 43
2.2	The Bases of the Hierarchy of the Sciences 46
2.3	The Hierarchy of the Faculties of the Human Soul 48
2.3.1	The Sensitive Faculty 50
2.3.2	The Imaginative Faculty 51
2.3.3	The Rational Faculty 54
3.	The Methodological Basis of the Hierarchy of the Sciences 69
3.1	Revelation, Intellect, and Reason 69
3.2	Religion, Philosophy and the Sciences 79
3.3	Al-Fārābī's Theory of Knowledge 83

4.	The Ontological and the Ethical Bases of the Hierarchy of the Sciences	95
4.1	The Ontological Basis	95
4.1.1	The Subject-Matter of Metaphysics	97
4.1.2	The Subject-Matter of Natural Science	99
4.1.3	The Subject-Matter of Mathematics	100
4.1.4	The Subject- Matter of Political Science	103
4.2	The Ethical Basis	106
4.2.1	Al-Fārābī's Theory of Virtue	107
5.	Classification and Description of Linguistic Science and Logic	121
5.1	Classification and Enumeration of the Sciences	121
5.2	Characteristics of Al-Fārābī's Classification	124
5.3	Division of Linguistic Science and Logic	126
5.3.1	The Science of Language	127
5.3.2	Logic	128
6.	Classification and Description of the Philosophical Sciences	137
6.1	The Mathematical Sciences	137
6.2	Natural Science	139
6.3	Metaphysics	142
6.4	Political Science	143
6.5	Jurisprudence and Dialectical Theology	145

PART II. AL-GHAZZĀLĪ

Chapter

7.	The Life, Works and Significance of al- Ghazzālī	155
7.1	Religious and Political Background of al-Ghazzālī's Period	155
7.2	Al-Ghazzālī's Early Education and Intellectual Interest	157

Contents

7.3	Al-Ghazzālī's Intellectual Crisis	158
7.4	Post-Crisis Intellectual Life and Works	159
7.5	Al-Ghazzālī's Spiritual Crisis	162
7.6	Spiritual Retreat and Scholarly Output	163
7.7	The Authenticity of Some Works Attributed to al-Ghazzālī	165
7.8	Significance of al-Ghazzālī's <i>Ihyā</i> and His Sufism	171
8.	Al-Ghazzālī's Classification of Seekers After Knowledge	181
8.1	Basis of Classification	181
8.2	Al-Ghazzālī's Views Concerning the Four Classes	182
8.2.1	The Mutakallimūn	182
8.2.2	The Philosophers	185
8.2.3	The Ta'limites	189
8.2.4	The Sufis	194
8.3	Significance of the Classification	196
9.	Al-Ghazzālī's Classification of the Sciences	203
9.1	Basis of the Division into Theoretical and Practical Parts	204
9.2	Basis of the Division into "Presential" and Attained Knowledge	204
9.3	Basis of the Division into Religious and Intellectual Sciences	205
9.4	Basis of the Division into "fard 'ayn" and "fard kifayah" Sciences	206
9.5	Classification of the Religious and Intellectual Sciences	207
9.5.1	Religious Sciences	207
9.5.2	Intellectual Sciences	208
9.6	Nature and Characteristics of the Religious Sciences	210
9.7	The Ethico-Legal Status of the Intellectual Sciences	213
9.8	Nature of the Theoretical-Practical Division	217

Classification of Knowledge in Islam

9.9 The Worldly and Other-Worldly Rational Sciences	217
9.10 Significance of the Division into "Presential" and "Attained" knowledge	218
9.11 Conclusion	219

PART III. QUṬB AL-DĪN AL-SHĪRĀZĪ

Chapter

10. The Life, Works and Significance of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī	229
10.1 Quṭb al-Dīn's Education and Intellectual Life	229
10.2 Quṭb al-Dīn's Works	236
10.2.1 Philosophical Works	237
10.2.2 Religious Works	242
10.3 General Significance of His Works	243
11. Quṭb al-Dīn's Classification of the Sciences	249
11.1 "Ḥikmat" as the Basis of Classification	250
11.2 Divisions of "Ḥikmat"	251
11.2.1 Theoretical Philosophy and Its Divisions	
11.2.2 Practical Philosophy and Its Divisions	256
11.3 Non-Philosophical or Religious Sciences	257
11.3.1 Sciences of Fundamental Principles of Religion	258
11.3.2 Sciences of Branches of Religion	258
Conclusion	263
The Philosophical Bases of the Three Classifications: Similarities and Differences	263
A Selected Bibliography	271

The views of classical Islamic thinkers ably analyzed by Dr Bakar here speak very directly to the current debate on the Islamization of knowledge and in fact provide an absolutely necessary dimension without which talk of this subject cannot proceed much beyond mere chatter.

- Seyyed Hossein Nasr, from the Foreword

This is an interesting book and an accurate guide to three of the most significant thinkers in the Islamic world, namely, al-Farabi, al-Ghazali and Qutb al-Din al-Shirazi....this is a useful and intelligent treatment of an important topic.

- Oliver Leaman, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*

Altogether, this study constitutes a major contribution to the understanding of how the classification of knowledge fits into the traditional cosmological scheme as well as the role that classification played in giving coherence to the Muslim education system.

- Idris Samawi Hamid, *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin*

.....à notre connaissance, c'est la première fois que l'on traite dans une langue européenne de la classification des sciences qui est sienne dans son *Durrat al-tāğ li-ğurrat al-dībāğ*.

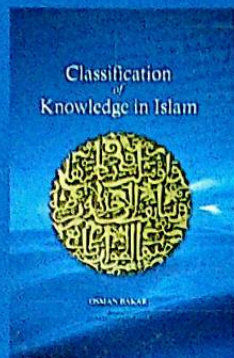
- Claude Gilliot, *Studia Islamica*

The author admirably shows the insights which study of knowledge classification can offer to our understanding of Islamic thought as a whole.

- Paul L. Heck, *Bibliotheca Orientalis*

Dr. Osman Bakar is currently Professor of Islamic Thought at International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), International Islamic University, Malaysia; Emeritus Professor of Philosophy of Science, University of Malaya; Senior Fellow, Prince Al-Waleed Center of Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University where he formerly held the Malaysia Chair of Islam in Southeast Asia (2000–2005); and Research Fellow, Center for Interdisciplinary Study of Monotheistic Religions (CISMOR), Doshisha University, Kyoto, Japan. He is the author of 13 books and more than 150 articles on various aspects of Islamic thought and civilization, particularly Islamic science.

Cover image: the ISTAC Library collection



ISBN 983-9379-44-5



9 789839 137944 0