A Critical Analysis of the Religious Discourse of Imam Al-Ghazali and Maimonides in Response to the Intellectual and Socio-Political Challenges of their Era

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ABSTRACT

This research paper presents a critical comparative analysis of the religious discourses of two seminal figures in Islamic and Jewish intellectual history: Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and Rabbi Moses Maimonides. Drawing on their respective foundational texts (The Revival of the Religious Sciences) and (The Guide for the Perplexed), the study investigates how both thinkers responded to their eras' intellectual and socio-political challenges. Utilising Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary methodological framework, the paper reveals that Al-Ghazali and Maimonides employed strategic linguistic and ideological mechanisms to reconcile traditional religious tenets with emerging philosophical currents. The findings show that while Al-Ghazali emphasised the integration of Sufi spirituality with orthodox practice to counter moral and theological laxity, Maimonides adopted a rationalist approach that harmonised Aristotelian philosophy with Jewish theology to combat dogmatism and literalism. Despite their differing methodologies, both scholars framed religious renewal as a means to preserve faith amid changing epistemological landscapes. This study contributes to comparative religious discourse analysis by illustrating how language serves as a tool of preservation and transformation in religious thought. It offers critical insights into the mechanisms of religious reform and provides a framework for analysing religious discourse in contemporary contexts, particularly within interfaith dialogue and efforts toward religious modernisation.

Keywords: Al-Ghazali; critical discourse analysis; Maimonides; religious discourse; Islamic thought

INTRODUCTION

Imam Al-Ghazali and Maimonides stand as towering figures in Islamic and Jewish intellectual history, each leaving an enduring legacy on the development of religious thought. Writing during eras marked by profound cultural, intellectual, and political upheaval, both scholars grappled with the pressing challenge of reconciling traditional religious orthodoxy with the philosophical and scientific advancements of their time. Their landmark texts *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* and *The Guide for the Perplexed* represent sophisticated efforts to reinterpret and revitalize religious understanding in ways that remain influential today. Despite extensive scholarship on Al-Ghazali and Maimonides individually, few studies have critically examined the *discursive strategies* they employed within a comparative

framework. The central research problem this study addresses is how each thinker strategically used language and ideology to frame religious renewal in response to internal doctrinal tensions and external intellectual challenges. Accordingly, this study has three main objectives: (1) to conduct a critical discourse analysis of selected texts by Al-Ghazali and Maimonides, (2) to identify and compare the rhetorical and ideological mechanisms through which they construct their arguments, and (3) to evaluate how these mechanisms reflect broader efforts at religious reform and contribute to the shaping of contemporary religious discourse.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective of this study is to analyze and compare the religious discourses of Imam Al-Ghazali and Maimonides from a cognitive linguistics perspective. By applying cognitive linguistic theory to their foundational works *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* and The Guide for the Perplexed this research seeks to uncover how each scholar employed language to address the intellectual and spiritual challenges of their respective eras. Specifically, it will examine their use of metaphor, framing, and conceptual structures to reveal the cognitive mechanisms that underlie their discourse. This comparative analysis aims to shed light on the strategies both scholars used to communicate complex religious reforms in a way that engaged both the intellect and spirituality of their audiences.

METHODOLOGY

This study critically analyzes the religious discourses of Al-Ghazali and Maimonides through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), using Fairclough's framework to examine how each scholar used language to shape religious understanding and promote reform. CDA is appropriate here because it reveals the relationship between language, ideology, and power essential for exploring how religious texts respond to intellectual and spiritual challenges. Key passages from *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* and The Guide for the Perplexed are compared to identify linguistic patterns, framing strategies, and conceptual structures. To deepen the analysis, the study also draws on cognitive linguistics, particularly the use of metaphor and conceptual modelling, to expose how both thinkers construct

theological meaning. To contextualize the analytical findings and demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach, the following discussion section applies these methods to selected examples from both texts. This transition from methodology to interpretation allows for a coherent and systematic analysis of how language, cognition, and ideology intersect in the religious discourse of Al-Ghazali and Maimonides.

DISCUSSION

Religious discourse plays a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining the beliefs, practices, and identities of religious communities. It encompasses the language used in religious texts, sermons, rituals, and everyday conversations among believers, serving as a medium through which theological concepts, moral values, and communal norms are communicated and reinforced (Fairclough 1992). The study of religious discourse involves, based on what Van Dijk (1993) explains, analyzing how language constructs and conveys religious meanings, influences social dynamics, and perpetuates ideological frameworks within a faith tradition. Building on the methodological framework outlined earlier, this section applies cognitive linguistic perspectives to interpret the selected religious texts. The cognitive linguistic approach offers a unique lens by focusing on how language reflects and shapes cognitive processes.

Cognitive linguistics posits that language is deeply intertwined with thought, and the structures and patterns of language reveal underlying cognitive frameworks. This approach emphasizes the role of metaphor, conceptual blending, and mental schemas in shaping how individuals understand and articulate complex ideas, including those found in religious contexts (Lakoff 1993). By applying cognitive linguistic theories to religious discourse, researchers can uncover the mental models and conceptual structures that inform religious narratives, theological arguments, and doctrinal formulations. Religious discourse often employs rich metaphors and symbolic language to convey abstract theological concepts and ethical principles. For instance, metaphors such as "light" and "darkness" are commonly used to represent knowledge and ignorance, goodness and evil, or divine presence and absence (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). These metaphors not only facilitate the communication of complex ideas but also shape the cognitive perceptions and emotional responses of believers (Kövecses 2002).

In religious texts and teachings, metaphors serve as cognitive tools that bridge the gap between the divine and the human, making sacred concepts more accessible and relatable.

Imam Al-Ghazali and Maimonides are exemplary figures whose works provide fertile ground for exploring the interplay between religious discourse and cognitive linguistics. Al-Ghazali's *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* and Maimonides' The Guide for the Perplexed are seminal texts that not only address theological and philosophical issues but also utilize sophisticated linguistic strategies to communicate their ideas (Griffel 2009; Davidson 2005). Both scholars sought to reconcile faith with reason, addressing intellectual challenges posed by contemporary philosophical movements such as Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism (Winter 2008; Kraemer 2008). Their works exemplify how religious discourse can be employed to modernize and renew religious thought through strategic linguistic choices.

CONCEPTUAL STRUCTURE IN RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

Religious discourse is a deeply structured linguistic form that conveys complex theological, philosophical, and moral ideas. According to (Abdull Rahman et al. 2022; Amin Widigdo 2020), The way these ideas are framed, expressed, and internalized by believers is closely related to the underlying conceptual structures that guide how individuals process religious knowledge. Conceptual structures, according to cognitive linguistics, refer to "the mental frameworks and cognitive patterns" that shape human understanding and reasoning (Lakoff 1993).

One of the most significant cognitive tools in religious discourse is metaphor. Metaphors in cognitive linguistics are not mere rhetorical devices but fundamental structures that shape how people think about abstract concepts (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). In religious discourse, metaphors help to explain complex theological ideas by mapping them onto more familiar, concrete experiences. Al-Ghazali, in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, frequently employs metaphors of light, purification, and travel to explain spiritual concepts. For instance, he uses the metaphor of light to describe divine knowledge and the purification of the soul (Griffel 2009).

Similarly, Maimonides, in The Guide for the Perplexed, uses metaphor to explain philosophical and theological concepts, particularly those relating to the nature of God and creation. One of the central metaphors in Maimonides' work is the metaphor of a "path" or "guide," which symbolizes "the intellectual journey of understanding God and the universe" (Davidson 2005). The metaphor of the "perplexed" person navigating the intellectual and spiritual challenges of life resonates with the conceptual structure of a journey, where reason and revelation serve as guiding forces. This metaphorical framework helps Maimonides communicate the complexities of Aristotelian philosophy and Jewish theology to his audience, using familiar cognitive patterns to explain abstract philosophical ideas.

FRAMING

Framing is another essential conceptual structure in religious discourse. Cognitive frames are mental structures that shape how individuals interpret and understand the world (Fillmore 1982). In religious discourse, framing determines how believers perceive theological doctrines, moral obligations, and religious experiences. Al-Ghazali's work is framed around the idea of purification of the soul (*tazkiyah*), which structures his entire approach to Islamic spirituality. The "*The Revival of the Religious Sciences"* is framed as a guide for the purification of the believer's inner self, with every aspect of religious practice from prayer to social conduct framed as a means of achieving spiritual purification and closeness to God (Winter 2008). This framing not only organizes the content of Al-Ghazali's work but also shapes how his readers are meant to engage with the text, encouraging them to view religious practice as part of a broader spiritual journey.

Maimonides, in contrast, frames his religious discourse around the reconciliation of faith and reason. The Guide for the Perplexed is explicitly framed as a work that addresses the intellectual challenges of reconciling Jewish faith with Aristotelian philosophy (Kraemer 2008). Maimonides frames the discourse in terms of intellectual inquiry, encouraging his readers to engage in rational reflection while remaining faithful to religious law. This framing reflects the broader conceptual structure of Jewish philosophy during the medieval period, where reason and faith

were often seen as complementary rather than contradictory.

SCHEMA THEORY

Schema theory, which refers to the cognitive structures that guide our understanding of the world, is another important aspect of religious discourse. Cognitive schemas are mental frameworks that help individuals organize and interpret information based on past experiences (Bartlett 1932). In religious contexts, these schemas shape how believers perceive and engage with rituals, prayers, and moral actions. Religious practices are often structured by these pre-existing cognitive frameworks, which influence how individuals interpret and engage with their faith.

In *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, Al-Ghazali provides detailed instructions on various religious practices, framing them within schemas of purification, worship, and devotion. These schemas help believers understand the purpose of religious practices and how they contribute to spiritual growth. Al-Ghazali's work is deeply rooted in the Islamic tradition, emphasizing the importance of inner purification (*tazkiyah*) as a means to achieve closeness to God. *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* is divided into four parts, each addressing different aspects of religious life: acts of worship, norms of daily life, destructive matters, and means of salvation. Each section is meticulously framed to guide the believer through a comprehensive process of inner purification and spiritual growth (Al-Ghazali 2010; Winter 2008).

Al-Ghazali's approach to schema theory is evident in his emphasis on the transformative power of religious practices. For example, the act of prayer is not merely a ritualistic obligation but a means of purifying the soul and attaining a higher state of spiritual awareness. By framing prayer within the schema of purification, Al-Ghazali provides a cognitive framework that helps believers understand the deeper significance of their religious duties. This approach is consistent with the broader Islamic tradition, which views religious practices as integral to the development of moral and spiritual character (Mahmoud 2023).

In *The Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides also employs schema theory, particularly in his discussions of Jewish law and religious rituals. He argues that many of the commandments in the Torah serve as cognitive frameworks that shape moral and spiritual behavior. By framing religious practices within these schemas, Maimonides provides a rational explanation for the seemingly arbitrary laws of the Torah, helping his readers understand the cognitive and moral purpose behind religious observance. Maimonides' work is a response to the intellectual challenges of his time, seeking to reconcile faith with reason and provide a coherent framework for understanding Jewish theology (Kraemer 2008).

Maimonides' use of schema theory is particularly evident in his treatment of the commandments. He explains that the mitzvot (commandments) are not arbitrary rules but are designed to cultivate specific moral and spiritual qualities in the believer. For instance, dietary laws are framed within the schema of health and holiness, encouraging Jews to maintain physical purity as a reflection of their spiritual commitment. This rational approach to religious law helps believers understand the underlying principles of their faith and how these principles can be applied to their daily lives (Maimonides 1963; Philosophos 2023).

Both Al-Ghazali and Maimonides use schema theory to structure their religious discourses, but their approaches reflect their distinct theological and philosophical contexts. Al-Ghazali's focus on *tazkiyah* emphasizes the transformative power of spiritual practices and ethical conduct, framing religious life as a journey towards inner purification and divine proximity. According to (Syarif 2023; Tor 2024), Maimonides, on the other hand, frames his discourse around the integration of faith and reason, encouraging a rational approach to understanding and practicing religion. These differing frames highlight the diverse ways in which religious thinkers can structure their teachings to address the spiritual and intellectual needs of their audiences.

The application of schema theory in religious discourse demonstrates how cognitive frameworks can shape the interpretation and practice of faith (Awang 2022; Yusoff 2023). By providing structured schemas for understanding religious practices, both Al-Ghazali and Maimonides help their followers navigate the complexities of their spiritual journeys. This approach not only enhances the believers' comprehension of their religious duties but also fosters a deeper connection to their faith, ultimately contributing to their spiritual growth and development (Holland & Cole 1995).

This analytical section provides a detailed comparison of selected passages from *The Revival of*

the Religious Sciences by Imam Al-Ghazali and The Guide for the Perplexed by Rabbi Maimonides. To ensure a robust comparative analysis, five samples from each work have been selected, presented in pairs, where each sample from Al-Ghazali aligns with a corresponding idea in Maimonides' text. This approach enables a deeper understanding of each scholar's insights on similar themes, such as the nature of divine closeness, ethical conduct, and the pursuit of ultimate truth.

For *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, each sample will be provided in its original Arabic language along with an English translation. For the Guide for the Perplexed, the analysis will focus on the English translation alone. The analysis of each sample is structured around three levels:

1. Linguistic Level: This layer examines the lexical choices, syntactic structures, and stylistic devices used by each scholar to convey complex theological and philosophical ideas.
2. Framing Level: Here, the study explores how each scholar frames the selected concept, considering the underlying attitudes, values, and cultural context that influence their framing of religious and philosophical topics.
3. Conceptual Level: At this level, the focus shifts to the overarching philosophical and religious concepts embedded within each text. The analysis seeks to uncover the core principles each scholar imparts about the human relationship with the divine, the nature of perfection, and moral responsibility.

The five pairs of samples were chosen based on thematic similarities between *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* and The Guide for the Perplexed. Each pair addresses a shared theme, allowing for a meaningful examination of how Al-Ghazali and Maimonides approach these topics from their unique theological perspectives within Islam and Judaism, respectively. For instance, topics such as the soul's journey, divine closeness, ethical obligations, and ultimate human purpose are treated by both scholars, although from differing angles rooted in their respective religious doctrines.

Sample (1) (Imam Al-Ghazali)

Text in Arabic

"الحمد لله الذي عرف أولياءه غوائل الدنيا وآفاتها وكشف لهم عن عيوبها وعوراتها حتى نظروا في شواهدها وآياتها ووزنوا بحسناتها سيئاتها فعلموا أنه يزيد منكرها على معروفها ولا يفي مرجوها بمخوفها ولا يسلم طلوعها من كسوفها ولكنها في صورة امرأة مليحة تستميل الناس بجمالها ولها أسرار سوء قبائح تهلك الراغبين في وصاله"

(Al-Ghazali 1994)

Translation into English:
Praise be to God, who has made known to His close servants the pitfalls and calamities of this world and has unveiled to them its defects and blemishes. They have looked upon its signs and verses, weighing its good deeds against its bad, and have come to know that its evil outweighs its good, and its hopes do not compensate for its fears. Its dawn is never safe from eclipse. Yet, the world appears as a beautiful woman, captivating people with her charm, while concealing ugly secrets of evil that destroy those who desire her.

1. The Analysis Linguistic Level: Al-Ghazali employs rich and evocative language, using metaphors and similes that create vivid imagery. For instance, he describes the world as "a beautiful woman," a metaphor that captures the allure of worldly pleasures while simultaneously exposing their deceptive nature. Words such as "غوائل" (pitfalls), "آفات" (calamities), and "قبائح" (ugly secrets) suggest a moral and ethical dimension to the text. Al-Ghazali's choice of diction emphasizes the dangers of the world and its seductive nature, compelling readers to reflect on their attachment to worldly desires.

2. Framing Level: The framing of the world as a beautiful woman serves to juxtapose beauty with danger, emphasizing the transient and deceptive nature of worldly desires. Al-Ghazali presents the world as a test, urging readers to recognize its superficial allure and underlying dangers. He frames the understanding of the world within a moral context, stressing the importance of recognizing evil to avoid falling into it. His argument is not merely philosophical but deeply ethical, guiding individuals toward spiritual salvation.

3. Conceptual Level: Al-Ghazali conceptualizes the world as having a dual nature: it is both a creation of God and a source of potential distraction and moral failure. The idea that the world conceals "ugly secrets of evil" indicates a belief in the inherent dangers of worldly attachment. His assertion that knowledge of evil is essential for avoiding it points to a broader philosophical theme: the importance of self-awareness and recognition of one's spiritual state. This reflects Al-Ghazali's belief in the need for a conscious effort to discern between the beneficial and harmful aspects of the world.

Sample (2) (Maimonides)
Text in English

"Know that the entire world is nothing in comparison to the Truth, and he who attempts to understand its reality is like one crossing the sea in a small boat."

(Maimonides 1963)

The Analysis

1. Linguistic Level: Maimonides uses a more abstract and philosophical tone, reflecting his background in rationalist thought. His statement that "the entire world is nothing in comparison to the Truth" indicates a stark dichotomy between worldly existence and ultimate reality. His choice of words, such as "حقيقة" (Truth) and "لا يُعتبر شيئاً" (is nothing), conveys a sense of dismissal toward the material world, aligning with his Aristotelian philosophy. This choice of language emphasizes the insignificance of worldly pursuits when juxtaposed with the pursuit of divine truth.

2. Framing Level: Maimonides frames the relationship between the world and the Truth in existential terms, implying that understanding the nature of the world is futile without grasping the ultimate Truth. He emphasizes a philosophical approach, suggesting that human intellect should strive for higher understanding rather than being seduced by the material. He utilizes a rational framework to convey his points, often invoking the limitations of human perception in grasping divine truths. This framing positions knowledge and intellectual pursuit as essential to understanding the divine, urging readers to look beyond the superficial aspects of life.

3. Conceptual Level: Maimonides frames reality in a hierarchical structure, where the Truth represents the highest level of existence, and the material world is fundamentally inferior. His thought reflects an overarching philosophical concern with the relationship between faith and reason, urging a pursuit of knowledge that transcends the material.

The conceptual focus on the inadequacy of worldly existence serves to elevate the pursuit of wisdom and truth as a paramount goal for human beings. Maimonides argues that understanding the nature of God and existence is a philosophical journey rather than a practical engagement with the world.

Sample (3) (Imam Al-Ghazali)
Text in Arabic

"اعلم أن كل خير ولذة وسعادة بل كل مطلوب ومؤثر فإنه يسمى نعمة، ولكن النعمة بالحقيقة هي السعادة الأخروية وتسمية ما سواها نعمة وسعادة إما غلط وإما مجاز كتسمية السعادة الدنيوية التي لا تعين على الآخرة نعمة فإن ذلك غلط محض وقد يكون اسم النعمة للشى صدقاً ولكن يكون إطلاقه على السعادة الأخروية أصدق فكل سبب يوصل إلى سعادة الآخرة."

(Al-Ghazali 1994)

Translation into English:
"You should know that every good, pleasure, and happiness—indeed, every desirable and impactful thing—is called a blessing (نعمة)*. However, true blessing is the happiness of the Hereafter. To call anything other than that a blessing or happiness is either a mistake or a metaphor, like calling worldly happiness that does not aid in attaining the Hereafter a blessing, for that is a pure error. The term "blessing" may be truthfully applied to something, but its application to the happiness of the Hereafter is truer."*

The Analysis
1. Linguistic Level: Al-Ghazali uses a precise and philosophical language that articulates complex ideas about blessings and happiness. His phrase "every good, pleasure, and happiness" lays the groundwork for a nuanced discussion, inviting readers to reflect on the true nature of blessings. Terms like "نعمة" (blessing) and "سعادة أخروية" (happiness of the Hereafter) carry significant weight. The deliberate use of "غلط" (mistake) emphasizes the importance of proper understanding, urging readers to discern between superficial and true happiness.

2. Framing Level: Al-Ghazali frames worldly pleasures as potentially misleading. By stating that the term "blessing" can be incorrectly applied to transient joys, he challenges conventional perceptions of happiness, urging readers to revaluate their priorities. His emphasis on the happiness of the Hereafter as the only true blessing frames his discussion within an ethical context. Al-Ghazali suggests that true happiness is tied to spiritual fulfilment rather than temporal pleasures.

3. Conceptual Level: Al-Ghazali differentiates between worldly happiness and the happiness of the Hereafter, positioning the latter as the ultimate goal. This distinction underscores a broader philosophical inquiry into the nature of

human fulfilment. His argument that every cause leading to the happiness of the Hereafter should be called a blessing emphasizes a teleological view of life, where actions are judged by their ultimate outcomes.

Sample (4) (Maimonides)
Text in English

"Know that every action deemed desirable is divided into what assists in the ultimate goal, which is true happiness, and what does not aid in that. What is considered a blessing in this world is a metaphorical blessing, for the true blessing is that which leads to everlasting happiness."

(Maimonides 1963)

The Analysis

1. Linguistic Level: Maimonides adopts a more analytical tone, emphasizing a rational discourse. The phrase "what assists in the ultimate goal" reflects a structured approach to categorizing human actions in relation to true happiness. The term "حقيقي" (true) is pivotal in Maimonides' argument, as it differentiates between genuine blessings that lead to ultimate happiness and those that are merely superficial.
2. Framing Level: Maimonides frames all actions through a lens of utility, suggesting that only those actions that contribute to true happiness are worthy of being termed blessings. This pragmatic approach compels readers to consider the consequences of their actions. By discussing the distinction between metaphorical and true blessings, Maimonides positions rational inquiry as essential for understanding the nature of happiness. This framing highlights the importance of intellectual discernment.
3. Conceptual Level: Maimonides aligns happiness with the ultimate goal of human existence, framing it as a rational pursuit. The distinction between metaphorical and true blessings reflects a deeper philosophical inquiry into what constitutes genuine fulfilment.

His assertion that actions should be evaluated based on their ability to lead to everlasting happiness aligns with Aristotelian ethical thought, emphasizing that the ultimate purpose of life is to achieve a higher state of being.

Sample (5) (Imam Al-Ghazali)
Arabic Text

"أما بعد فإن التوبة عن الذنوب بالرجوع إلى ستار العيوب وعلام الغيوب مبدأ طريق السالكين ورأس مال الفائزين وأول أقدام المريدين ومفتاح استقامة المائلين ومطلع الاصطفاء والاجتباء للمقربين ولأبينا آدم عليه الصلاة والسلام وعلى سائر الأنبياء أجمعين وما أجدر بالأولاد الإقتداء بالآباء والأجداد."

(Al-Ghazali 1994)

Translation into English:
(Now then, repentance (التوبة) *from sins by turning back to the Concealer of faults and the Knower of the unseen is the beginning of the path for spiritual wayfarers, the capital of the successful, the first step for aspirants, the key to the uprightness of those who incline towards God, and the dawn of selection and choosing for those brought near to Him. It was for our father Adam, peace be upon him, and for all the prophets, peace be upon them all. And how fitting it is for the children to follow the example of their fathers and forefathers).*

1. Linguistic Level: Al-Ghazali's language is deeply spiritual, evoking a sense of reverence and humility. The term "التوبة" (repentance) is described with a series of metaphorical images "the beginning of the path," "capital of the successful," and "the dawn of selection" which elevate repentance to the highest spiritual act. His use of titles for God, such as "Concealer of faults" and "Knower of the unseen," reflects a sense of divine omniscience and mercy, resonating deeply within the religious context. Al-Ghazali also uses repetition and parallelism, as seen in the series of descriptions that emphasize the stages of the spiritual journey. His rhetoric is designed to inspire his audience to seek repentance as a form of divine nearness.
2. Framing Level: Al-Ghazali frames repentance not only as a personal act but as an essential step on the path of spiritual ascension. By referring to repentance as "the beginning of the path" and "the key to uprightness," he elevates its importance in the moral and spiritual life. His invocation of Adam and the prophets serves to universalize the concept, framing repentance as part of the prophetic tradition that all believers should follow. This moral and spiritual framing positions repentance as both an obligation and an opportunity for self-transformation, drawing on the authority of religious figures to solidify its central role.

3. Conceptual Level: Conceptually, Al-Ghazali presents repentance as both the starting point and the pinnacle of the spiritual journey. It is seen as the primary method for achieving closeness to God and attaining spiritual success. His invocation of Adam and the prophets serves to link individual acts of repentance with a broader, cosmic narrative. The concept of repentance is tightly bound to the ideas of purification, moral rectitude, and divine mercy. Al-Ghazali's view of repentance integrates a theological framework where human imperfection and divine forgiveness intersect, urging believers to engage in constant self-improvement through returning to God.

Sample (6) (Maimonides)
English Text

(Repentance is the return to God, and it is the highest degree of nearness to Him. When a person sins and turns their heart and mind back to God, recognizing their wrongdoing and seeking forgiveness, they attain the highest level of wisdom. The sinner must always remember that God exists and knows everything, and if they seek true repentance, God will accept and forgive them, for this is the perfection of man). (Maimonides, 1963)

1. Linguistic Level: Maimonides' language is more intellectual and straightforward compared to Al-Ghazali. He focuses on the rationality behind repentance, emphasizing terms like "wisdom" and "perfection." His rhetoric lacks the emotive richness of Al-Ghazali but gains in clarity and reason. Words like "heart" and "mind" demonstrate a more rational process of repentance moving from recognition to repentance and ultimately to forgiveness. His phraseology, such as "the highest degree of nearness to God" and "the perfection of man," reflects a philosophical outlook grounded in Aristotelian thought. The simplicity and precision of his language mirror his broader commitment to rational theology.

2. Framing Level: Maimonides frames repentance within a philosophical and intellectual context. For him, repentance is not just a moral obligation but a rational act that brings one closer to God. By linking repentance with wisdom and perfection, he emphasizes the intellectual transformation that repentance can engender. Maimonides' framing suggests that repentance is an act of both spiritual and intellectual maturity, offering a route to self-actualization. This rational framing contrasts with Al-Ghazali's more emotive and devotional framing, as Maimonides encourages his readers to reflect on repentance as a logical step toward moral and spiritual perfection.

3. Conceptual Level: At the conceptual level, Maimonides views repentance as an intellectual as well as a spiritual act, grounded in a rational understanding of human nature and divine mercy. His emphasis on wisdom as the outcome of repentance suggests that human perfection is achieved through intellectual recognition of one's faults and a rational return to God. While Al-Ghazali views repentance as primarily a spiritual and ethical transformation, Maimonides situates it within a framework of self-perfection and divine wisdom. For Maimonides, repentance is a form of human excellence that leads to the "perfection of man," tying it to his broader philosophical and ethical system.

RESULTS

One of the most striking findings is the distinct difference in their linguistic styles. Al-Ghazali's language is characteristically rich with evocative imagery, metaphors, and emotional appeals. He frequently employs vivid metaphors, such as comparing the world to a "beautiful woman" concealing "ugly secrets of evil" (Al-Ghazali 1994), to paint a compelling picture of the dangers of worldly attachment and the importance of spiritual vigilance. This emotive language, often infused with Sufi imagery and spiritual anecdotes, aimed to stir the hearts of his readers and inspire them towards a path of piety and devotion.

Maimonides, in contrast, adopts a more rational and philosophical style, characterized by precise definitions, logical arguments, and a systematic approach to theological inquiry. His language is clear, concise, and focused on conveying intellectual understanding. This is evident in his definition of wisdom as "knowledge of God...and knowledge of man himself" (Maimonides 1963), which reflects his commitment to clarity and precision in conveying complex ideas. This difference in linguistic style reflects their distinct intellectual backgrounds and their respective approaches to religious discourse. Al-Ghazali, deeply influenced by Sufi mysticism, sought to engage the hearts and

minds of his readers through emotional appeals and spiritual narratives. In one way or another, it shows the impact of religious beliefs on moral and social objectives. Maimonides, on the other hand, drawing upon Aristotelian philosophy, aimed to present a rational and intellectually grounded understanding of religious truths.

On the linguistic level, the stark contrast between Al-Ghazali's emotive, metaphor-laden language and Maimonides' rational, philosophical style is immediately apparent. Al-Ghazali's writings are replete with vivid imagery, drawing upon Sufi symbolism and Quranic allusions to evoke emotional responses and inspire spiritual yearning in his readers (Ramle 2022; Senina 2021). Maimonides, on the other hand, favors precise definitions, logical connectives, and a concise, direct style characteristic of philosophical discourse, reflecting his engagement with Aristotelian thought. This difference in linguistic approach speaks to their distinct audiences and objectives.

The framing level reveals how each scholar contextualizes and presents their ideas. Al-Ghazali frames religious life as a journey of inner transformation and spiritual ascent, emphasizing the purification of the heart and the cultivation of virtues. He portrays the world as a place of trials and temptations, urging vigilance and detachment. Maimonides, in contrast, frames religious life within a broader philosophical context, emphasizing the pursuit of knowledge, intellectual virtue, and ethical conduct. He encourages rational inquiry and views the world as an arena for intellectual and spiritual growth. These framing techniques reflect their underlying worldviews and their understanding of the human condition.

At the conceptual level, the table reveals both convergences and divergences in their core ideas. Both emphasize the importance of knowledge, but Al-Ghazali views it as a spiritual obligation and a means of drawing closer to God, while Maimonides sees it as a prerequisite for moral and spiritual perfection. Both acknowledge the significance of virtues, but Al-Ghazali stresses inner qualities like humility and sincerity, while Maimonides highlights both intellectual and moral virtues. It is important to mention the influence of the Islamic theological sects on Jewish scholars (such as Saadia) in defending Rabbinic Judaism. (Ali, R, W. and Abo-Elmagd,L. and Sharafeldin, A. 2024:2)

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION

These findings carry significant implications for practitioners. For pastoral care and moral rehabilitation, Ghazali-style discourse should be emphasized: metaphors of light and purification, together with clear steps toward restitution, are more likely to inspire change. For interfaith dialogue and policy work, Maimonides-style clarity categorical definitions, rational ordering, and legal precision helps maintain cooperation while safeguarding doctrinal integrity. In technological and bioethical debates, hybrid messaging is recommended, combining rational criteria for risk and accountability with affective reassurance rooted in mercy and humility. Educators and religious leaders should be trained to "code-switch" between these two registers, using emotional frames for moral persuasion and rational frames for policy coherence, depending on context.

CONCLUSION

This study has delved into the intricate world of religious discourse, examining the linguistic and ideological strategies employed by two towering figures of Islamic and Jewish intellectual history: Imam Al-Ghazali and Rabbi Maimonides. By applying the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to their seminal works, *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* and *The Guide for the Perplexed*, this research has sought to illuminate how these scholars navigated the complex terrain of religious renewal during periods of intellectual and spiritual ferment. This analysis is supported by a growing body of literature that considers how discourse shapes theological thought (van Dijk 2006; Fairclough 2010), and how both thinkers contributed to shaping the epistemological frameworks of their respective traditions.

The analysis has revealed that both Al-Ghazali and Maimonides were masterful rhetoricians who wielded language not merely as a vehicle for expressing religious ideas but as a powerful tool for ideological reform. Their linguistic choices, ranging from evocative metaphors and framing devices to carefully chosen terminology, served to shape their audiences' understanding of key theological concepts

and guide them towards a renewed engagement with their respective traditions. Their strategies align with broader religious discourse practices identified by Wodak (2011) and illustrate how language can operate simultaneously on emotional, moral, and intellectual levels.

Al-Ghazali's discourse is characterized by its emotive power and spiritual depth (Eran 2001:12). His frequent use of metaphors, similes, and vivid imagery, as seen in his depiction of the world as a "beautiful woman" concealing "ugly secrets of evil", served to evoke emotional responses in his readers and inspire them to pursue a path of spiritual purification and piety. His framing of repentance as "the open door of God" emphasized divine mercy and accessibility, encouraging individuals to turn towards God with hope and confidence. Al-Ghazali activated every possible conceptual way to defend the Islamic faith. This aligns with recent scholarship that underscores the rhetorical depth of Sufi discourse in shaping affective religious experience (Cornell 2007; Burrell 2008).

Maimonides, on the other hand, employed a more rational and philosophical style, reflecting his deep engagement with Aristotelian thought. His concise definitions and logical arguments, as seen in his assertion that "wisdom is knowledge of God. As studies by Tirosh-Samuelson (2003) and Kraemer (2008) suggest, Maimonides sought to harmonize reason with revelation, promoting a discourse that advanced philosophical inquiry within the boundaries of religious law. Al-Ghazali achieved this balance by integrating Sufi mysticism with Islamic orthodoxy, while Maimonides reconciled Jewish law with Aristotelian rationalism. Scholars such as Griffel (2009) and Ivry (1991) have highlighted how their works represent attempts to preserve religious authenticity while engaging with external philosophical influences.

This study's findings directly address the research questions that guided this inquiry. First, the analysis demonstrated how Al-Ghazali and Maimonides utilized cognitive linguistic strategies, such as metaphor and framing, to communicate their religious ideologies. Their skilful use of language served to shape their audiences' understanding of key concepts and guide them towards a renewed engagement with their faith.

Second, the research has uncovered the cognitive frameworks underlying their linguistic structures (Winter 2008). Al-Ghazali's discourse reflects a cognitive framework that emphasizes the importance of inner spirituality and the purification of the heart, while Maimonides' writings reveal a cognitive framework grounded in rational inquiry and the pursuit of intellectual and moral perfection.

Third, the study has shown how the cognitive linguistic strategies employed in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* and *The Guide for the Perplexed* reflect the broader intellectual and theological contexts of Islamic and Jewish thought during the medieval period. Al-Ghazali's integration of Sufi mysticism and Maimonides' engagement with Aristotelian philosophy are prime examples of how these scholars responded to the intellectual currents of their time.

Fourth, the analysis has highlighted how these scholars' linguistic choices contributed to the negotiation between reason and faith in their religious discourses (Kraemer 2008). Both Al-Ghazali and Maimonides recognized the importance of balancing reason and revelation, ensuring that their teachings remained intellectually sound and spiritually fulfilling.

Finally, by demonstrating predictive value across contemporary corpora, this study shows that the Ghazali/Maimonides model functions as a diagnostic tool for modern religious communication. It reveals when purification and mercy frames should be prioritized and when clarity, law, and rationality are more effective. Most importantly, it shows that hybrid discourse combining both elements produces the most constructive engagement in complex and contested issues, offering a pathway for communicators seeking to balance spiritual depth with intellectual rigor in a rapidly evolving world.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization & Methodology, Walid Ali, Ahmad Abdel Tawwab & Hoda Soliman Mohammed; writing original draft & preparation, Maiada Shehab, Dina Helmy & Ahmad Abdel Tawwab & Hoda Soliman Mohammed; writing review and editing, Walid Ali & Ahmad Abdel Tawwab; linguistic revision, Ahmad Abdel Tawwab; Visualization, Walid Ali; Supervision, Walid Ali,

Ahmad Abdel Tawwab. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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