

Review of: "From Avicenna to Salam: The Excommunication of Muslim Scholars in the Islamic World"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

This is an interesting piece on the issues regarding excommunication in Muslim thought, particularly in historical terms. The author has given some examples like Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Khaldun, among others. In addition, the author gave some modern examples.

Although there are good insights, there was a need for more analysis, particularly regarding the case of Al-Ghazali, which I believed required more reflection as Al-Ghazali evolved intellectually, bearing in mind he was a philosopher, theologian, and jurist. He mastered philosophy before levelling criticism against it. I guess there was a dynamic intellectual engagement among early Muslim scholars. In fact, Ibn Rushd came some decades later to also engage with Al-Ghazali after the latter died.

With regards to expressions such as "Al-Ghazali was superficial," they can be tuned down, as one can observe that Al-Ghazali's legal encyclopedia (Al-Mustasfa) was greatly influenced by philosophy and logic. It was the second most important and oldest book on Islamic legal theory after the work of Shafii.

Thus, I beg to raise a fundamental question of whether Muslims became backward because of Islam or because of the attitude of some Muslim scholars. I would say the latter, as Islamic texts call for innovation and critical engagement.

On the whole, the paper is interesting but could be enriched by more cross-referencing and more reflective historical analysis.