

Eureka Journal of Humanities and Social Research (EJHSR)

ISSN 2760-4934 (Online) Volume 2, Issue 5, May 2026



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<https://eurekaopenaccess.com/index.php/4>

THE ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXISTENCE IN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY AND SUFISM

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Abstract

The relationship between knowledge and existence is one of the most important metaphysical problems in the history of philosophy. Islamic philosophy and Sufism developed complex ontological and epistemological systems that deeply analyze the relationships between human beings, existence, and divine truth. This article examines the ontological foundations of knowledge and existence in Islamic philosophy and Sufism based on historical-philosophical, comparative, and hermeneutic methodologies. The views of Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Imam Al-Ghazali, Suhrawardi, Ibn Arabi, Jalaluddin Rumi, Najmuddin Kubro, and Bahauddin Naqshband are critically analyzed. The article reveals the ontological and epistemological essence of key Sufi concepts such as *wujud* (being), *ma'rifa* (spiritual knowledge), heart, soul, *kashf* (unveiling), *irfan* (gnosis), and truth. In particular, the theory of *Wahdat al-Wujud* is examined as one of the most important ontological concepts in Islamic metaphysics. The results of the study show that Islamic philosophy and Sufi metaphysics connect the process of understanding existence not only with rational thinking but also with spiritual purification, divine illumination, and inner experience.

Keywords Islamic philosophy, ontology, Sufism, *wujud*, *ma'rifa*, heart, soul, *irfan*, *kashf*, truth, *Wahdat al-Wujud*, metaphysics, Rumi, Ibn Arabi, Al-Ghazali.

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Introduction

Ontology and epistemology are among the oldest and most fundamental branches of philosophy. Ontology studies the essence of existence, the nature of being, and the structure of reality, while epistemology investigates the possibilities, sources, and forms of knowledge. Throughout the history of human thought, the relationship between knowledge and existence has always been one of the central philosophical problems.

Within Islamic civilization, philosophical and Sufi thought developed a unified metaphysical system in which being and knowledge were interpreted as deeply interconnected. For Muslim thinkers, knowledge was not merely a theoretical process but also a means of achieving spiritual perfection. Therefore, in Islamic philosophy, ontology and epistemology are closely interrelated [4].

Ancient Greek philosophy, especially the metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, had a strong influence on Muslim philosophers. However, scholars such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina combined Greek metaphysics with Qur'anic worldview and created a new ontological system [5].

Sufism, on the other hand, emphasized the spiritual and intuitive dimensions of knowledge. According to Sufi thinkers, true knowledge is attained through the purification of the heart and the soul's closeness to divine truth [6]. Mystics such as Rumi, Ibn Arabi, Najmuddin Kubro, and Bahauddin Naqshband interpreted existence through the principle of divine unity.

In today's modern technocratic society, humanity is increasingly facing spiritual decline, existential alienation, and moral crisis. Therefore, the contemporary relevance of Islamic ontology and Sufi metaphysics has significantly increased [7]. In particular, Sufi concepts such as heart purification, spiritual perfection, and divine love play an important role in the moral education of youth.

The aim of this article is to analyze the ontological foundations of knowledge and existence in Islamic philosophy and Sufism through historical-philosophical and comparative approaches.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted using historical-philosophical, comparative, hermeneutic, and textological methodologies.

The historical-philosophical method was used to examine the formation and development of ontological and epistemological ideas. The intellectual evolution from ancient Greek metaphysics to Islamic philosophy was analyzed [8].

The comparative method was applied to identify similarities and differences between rational ontology and Sufi ontology. The philosophical views of Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina were compared with the concepts of Rumi, Al-Ghazali, and Ibn Arabi.

The hermeneutic method was used in interpreting classical Sufi texts. Symbolic images, metaphors, and spiritual meanings in Sufi literature were analyzed from a philosophical perspective [9].

In addition, primary sources such as the Qur'an, Hadith, *Masnawi*, *Fusus al-Hikam*, and *Ihya Ulum al-Din* were analyzed using textological methods.

The interdisciplinary nature of the research allowed for an integrated study of philosophy, theology, metaphysics, psychology, and ethical teachings.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The concept of *wujud* (being) is one of the central categories of Islamic metaphysics. Muslim philosophers deeply analyzed the essence of existence, the hierarchy of being, and the relationship between divine existence and the material world [10].

Al-Farabi explains existence as a hierarchical system based on causality. According to him, all beings emanate from the "First Cause." He writes: "The true happiness of man lies in the knowledge of the Highest Being" [11].

Ibn Sina, on the other hand, explains ontology through the distinction between essence (*mahiyya*) and existence (*wujud*). According to him, in contingent beings

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essence and existence are separate, while in the Necessary Being they are identical [12].

The Qur'an states: "**Allah is the Creator of all things**" (Surah Az-Zumar, 39:62). This verse highlights the divine origin of existence.

In Islamic philosophy, knowledge is not separated from existence. Knowledge is closely connected with the ontological perfection of human beings [13].

According to Al-Farabi, human intellect achieves perfection through understanding existence. Ibn Sina distinguishes between theoretical and intuitive levels of knowledge. In Sufism, true knowledge is *ma'rifa*. *Ma'rifa* is attained through inner spiritual experience and divine illumination. Rational ontology is based on reason and logic, whereas Sufi ontology is grounded in spiritual experience and unveiling (*kashf*).

Imam Al-Ghazali demonstrated the limitations of rational philosophy. In *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, he writes: "The Sufis are the true guides to the path leading to God" [5].

According to Al-Ghazali, true knowledge is achieved through the purification of the heart.

Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi developed the philosophy of *Hikmat al-Ishraq* (Illuminationism). According to him, the essence of existence is light [16]. The Qur'an states: "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth" (Surah An-Nur, 24:35). Suhrawardi interpreted this verse in a metaphysical sense and explained existence through the hierarchy of levels of light.

One of the most important epistemological concepts in Sufism is *ma'rifa*. *Ma'rifa* is not ordinary knowledge but the heartfelt perception of divine truth [7]. Rumi writes in the *Masnawi*: "The intellect sees the boundary, but love sees infinity" [8]. This idea demonstrates the primacy of love and intuitive knowledge in Sufi thought.

In Sufism, the heart is considered the spiritual center of human existence. Sufis interpret the heart as a mirror reflecting divine truth. A hadith states: "In the body

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there is a piece of flesh; if it is sound, the whole body is sound; it is the heart.” Rumi also says: “The heart is a mirror; it must be polished”. The soul is interpreted as the divine element within human beings. The Qur’an states: “**The soul is from the command of my Lord**” (Surah Al-Isra, 17:85).

Kashf is one of the most important epistemological categories in Sufism. It refers to the unveiling of divine truth within the heart. Al-Ghazali writes: “The light that Allah casts into the heart is the key to many kinds of knowledge”. Thus, knowledge is not only logical reasoning but also the result of divine illumination. Ibn Arabi developed one of the most famous ontological systems in Islamic metaphysics – *Wahdat al-Wujud*. According to him, true existence belongs only to God, while all other beings are manifestations of divine self-disclosure (*tajalli*). Ibn Arabi writes: “He who knows himself knows his Lord”. This statement reflects the ontological connection between human existence and divine reality. Jalaluddin Rumi interprets existence through divine love. According to him, the human soul experiences constant longing because it has been separated from its original source. The famous symbol of the reed flute in the *Masnawi* expresses this longing for return to the divine origin: “Listen to the reed, how it tells the story of separation”. For Rumi, the highest meaning of existence is union with the Divine.

In today’s global world, spiritual emptiness, individualism, and moral crisis are increasing. Sufi ontology encourages inner harmony, spiritual purification, and divine love [28]. In particular, the teachings of Rumi, Al-Ghazali, and Naqshband play an important role in the moral education of youth, guiding them toward spiritual perfection, tolerance, and ethical responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Ontological and epistemological views in Islamic philosophy and Sufism represent one of the richest metaphysical traditions in world philosophy. While Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina developed rational foundations of existence, Al-Ghazali,

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Suhrawardi, Ibn Arabi, and Rumi enriched ontology with spiritual experience [29].

Sufi concepts such as *ma'rifa*, heart, soul, *kashf*, and *irfan* explain the human process of perceiving divine reality. In this tradition, knowledge is not merely theoretical but also spiritually transformative. The theory of *Wahdat al-Wujud* demonstrates the unity of existence rooted in a single divine source. Sufi metaphysics encourages human beings to understand their inner world and achieve harmony with divine truth. In the context of contemporary civilization and its moral crisis, Islamic ontology and Sufi epistemology are becoming increasingly relevant [30]. They guide humanity toward spiritual harmony, ethical responsibility, and moral perfection.

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