

**THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY  
AND THE CONCEPTUAL FEATURES OF SUFI GNOSEOLOGY**

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ABSTRACT	KEYWORDS
<p>The problem of knowledge has occupied a central place in the history of philosophy since antiquity. Philosophers from Ancient Greece, the Islamic intellectual tradition, and modern European schools attempted to explain the nature, source, limits, and methods of human cognition. Within this broad epistemological discourse, Sufi gnoseology emerged as a unique spiritual-philosophical approach that emphasized inner purification, divine illumination, and mystical intuition as essential means of attaining truth. This article examines the historical development of epistemology and analyzes the conceptual foundations of Sufi gnoseology. Particular attention is devoted to the philosophical views of Jalal al-Din Rumi, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Najmiddin Kubro, and Bahouddin Naqshband.</p>	<p>Epistemology, Sufi gnoseology, mystical cognition, ma'rifa, qalb, ruh, kashf, irfan, Jalaluddin Rumi, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Najmiddin Kubro, Bahouddin Naqshband, spiritual purification, divine illumination.</p>

**Introduction**

The problem of knowledge has always occupied a decisive place in philosophical thought. From the earliest philosophical systems of Ancient Greece to contemporary theories of cognition, philosophers have sought to answer fundamental questions concerning the nature, source, possibility, and limits of human knowledge. Epistemology, as the branch of philosophy devoted to the study of knowledge, investigates how human beings perceive reality, distinguish truth from illusion, and establish certainty regarding existence.

In the history of philosophy, the relationship between the subject and the object has remained one of the central epistemological problems. Ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle attempted to explain the process of cognition through rational inquiry and metaphysical speculation. Plato associated true knowledge with the world of eternal forms, while Aristotle emphasized empirical observation and logical reasoning. Later, medieval Islamic philosophers integrated Greek philosophy with Islamic theology and developed sophisticated theories concerning reason, revelation, and spiritual cognition.

## Material and methods

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, Sufism introduced a distinctive epistemological perspective. Sufi gnoseology emphasized that true knowledge could not be attained solely through rational or sensory means. Instead, genuine understanding required spiritual purification, self-discipline, and divine illumination. Sufi thinkers argued that the heart (qalb) possesses a special capacity for perceiving metaphysical truths inaccessible to ordinary rationality.

The conceptual foundations of Sufi epistemology are deeply connected with such notions as ma'rifa (gnostic knowledge), ruh (spirit), irfan (mystical wisdom), and kashf (unveiling). These concepts reflect the Sufi conviction that knowledge is not merely intellectual but existential and transformative. In this tradition, knowing the truth implies spiritual transformation and closeness to God.

The relevance of Sufi gnoseology in the modern world is particularly significant. Contemporary civilization faces numerous spiritual and moral crises generated by materialism, technological alienation, social fragmentation, and the decline of ethical values. In such conditions, Sufi philosophy offers an alternative worldview centered on compassion, spiritual harmony, tolerance, and self-knowledge. The teachings of Sufi thinkers continue to inspire scholars, educators, and young people seeking moral orientation and spiritual meaning[1].

Jalal al-Din Rumi, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Najmiddin Kubro, and Bahouddin Naqshband occupy a special place in the development of Sufi gnoseology. Their works profoundly influenced Islamic philosophy, theology, ethics, and literature. Rumi emphasized divine love as a means of transcending the duality between subject and object. Al-Ghazali critically examined rational philosophy and argued for the superiority of spiritual experience. Ibn Arabi elaborated the metaphysics of unity and introduced a sophisticated theory of mystical cognition. Najmiddin Kubro developed psychological and spiritual methods for inner purification, while Bahouddin Naqshband stressed silent remembrance and ethical discipline.

The present study aims to analyze the historical evolution of epistemological thought and to investigate the conceptual features of Sufi gnoseology. The article examines the relationship between rational and mystical cognition, the role of the heart in spiritual knowledge, and the significance of divine illumination in the Sufi tradition. Furthermore, the study explores the modern importance of Sufi epistemology for the moral and spiritual education of contemporary youth[2].

The present study is based on historical-philosophical, comparative, hermeneutic, and textual methodologies. These approaches make it possible to investigate the evolution of epistemological ideas from antiquity to contemporary philosophy and to reveal the conceptual foundations of Sufi gnoseology.

The historical-philosophical method was employed to analyze the development of epistemological theories in Ancient Greek, Islamic, and modern European philosophy. Through this method, the study traces the transformation of ideas concerning the nature of knowledge, the relationship between reason and experience, and the interaction between subject and object. Particular attention was devoted to the transition from rationalistic models of cognition to mystical and spiritual approaches within the Islamic intellectual tradition[3].

The comparative philosophical method was used to compare rational cognition and mystical cognition. This approach enabled the identification of similarities and differences between classical Western epistemology and Sufi gnoseology. Rationalist philosophers generally viewed knowledge as a product of logical reasoning and empirical observation, whereas Sufi thinkers emphasized intuition, inner

experience, and divine illumination. Comparative analysis demonstrates that Sufi epistemology represents not a rejection of reason but an attempt to transcend its limitations.

Hermeneutic methodology played a central role in interpreting classical Sufi texts. Since Sufi literature often employs symbolic language, allegory, metaphor, and poetic imagery, hermeneutic interpretation is necessary for understanding the deeper philosophical meanings embedded in these works. The study examines selected passages from the writings of Jalal al-Din Rumi, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Najmuddin Kubro, and Bahouddin Naqshband[4].

Textual analysis was conducted on major Sufi manuscripts and philosophical treatises. Among the primary sources analyzed were Rumi's "Masnavi-yi Ma'navi," Al-Ghazali's "Ihya Ulum al-Din" and "Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal," Ibn Arabi's "Fusus al-Hikam," and classical Naqshbandi writings. Qur'anic verses and Hadiths frequently cited by Sufi scholars were also examined in order to understand the theological foundations of mystical cognition.

The study additionally relies on contemporary academic literature in philosophy, religious studies, Islamic studies, and comparative epistemology. Modern scholarly interpretations provide important perspectives concerning the relevance of Sufi gnoseology in contemporary intellectual and social contexts.

The interdisciplinary nature of the research allows for a comprehensive analysis of Sufi epistemology not only as a religious doctrine but also as a philosophical system with profound implications for ethics, psychology, spirituality, and education.

## **Discussion and results**

The history of philosophy demonstrates that the problem of knowledge has always remained central to intellectual inquiry. Ancient Greek philosophers laid the foundations of epistemology by examining the nature of truth, certainty, and rational understanding.

Socrates considered self-knowledge to be the basis of wisdom. His famous statement, "Know thyself," reflected the conviction that genuine knowledge begins with inner reflection. Plato further developed epistemological theory by distinguishing between the world of sensory appearances and the world of eternal ideas. According to Plato, sensory perception produces only opinion (doxa), whereas true knowledge (episteme) concerns eternal and unchanging forms[5].

Aristotle criticized Plato's excessive idealism and emphasized empirical observation and logical classification. For Aristotle, knowledge emerges through the interaction between sensory experience and rational abstraction. His logical works greatly influenced both Islamic and European philosophy. In medieval Islamic civilization, philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd integrated Greek rationalism with Islamic theology. They developed sophisticated theories concerning intellect, revelation, and metaphysics. However, purely rational approaches were later criticized by Sufi thinkers who argued that intellectual reasoning alone could not lead to ultimate truth.

Modern European philosophy further transformed epistemological discourse. René Descartes emphasized methodological doubt and rational certainty, declaring, "Cogito, ergo sum" ("I think, therefore I am"). John Locke defended empiricism and described the mind as a "tabula rasa." Immanuel Kant attempted to synthesize rationalism and empiricism by arguing that knowledge results from the interaction between sensory experience and a priori structures of consciousness[6].

Despite these developments, many philosophers recognized the limitations of rational cognition. Existentialist and phenomenological thinkers later emphasized subjective experience, consciousness,

and the inner dimensions of human existence. In this regard, Sufi gnoseology represents an important alternative epistemological paradigm that integrates reason, spirituality, and existential transformation. Sufi gnoseology is grounded in the belief that ultimate truth cannot be fully grasped through ordinary intellectual methods. According to Sufi thinkers, rationality is valuable but limited. The human intellect can analyze phenomena and construct logical systems, yet it cannot penetrate the deepest metaphysical realities.

Sufis therefore distinguish between external knowledge (*'ilm*) and inner knowledge (*ma'rifa*). External knowledge concerns religious law, philosophy, and empirical sciences. Inner knowledge, however, is obtained through spiritual purification, divine grace, and mystical experience[7].

The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes reflection, contemplation, and spiritual insight. One of the most significant verses for Sufi epistemology states:

**“Indeed, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest”** (Qur'an 13:28).

This verse suggests that the heart possesses a special role in perceiving truth and attaining spiritual tranquility.

Another verse states:

**“We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them that it is the Truth”** (Qur'an 41:53).

Sufi thinkers interpreted this verse as evidence that self-knowledge and inner contemplation are essential pathways toward divine knowledge.

The Prophet Muhammad also emphasized the spiritual dimension of cognition. A famous Hadith states: **“He who knows himself knows his Lord.”**

Although scholars debate the chain of transmission of this narration, it became extremely influential in Sufi philosophy and was frequently cited by mystics.

One of the central concepts of Sufi gnoseology is *ma'rifa*, usually translated as “gnostic knowledge” or “inner knowledge.” Unlike ordinary intellectual understanding, *ma'rifa* involves direct experiential awareness of divine reality.

Al-Ghazali played a crucial role in developing the philosophical foundations of *ma'rifa*. After experiencing a profound spiritual crisis, he concluded that purely rational philosophy could not provide certainty. In his autobiographical work “*Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*” (“*Deliverance from Error*”), he writes:

“The Sufis are those who uniquely follow the way to God, their way being the best of all ways.”

Al-Ghazali argued that true certainty arises through spiritual experience and divine illumination rather than abstract reasoning alone.

Rumi also emphasized the superiority of experiential knowledge over purely intellectual speculation. In the “*Masnavi*,” he writes:

“The intellect says: ‘The six directions are limits.’ Love says: ‘There is a way beyond.’”

This statement reflects the Sufi conviction that divine love transcends rational limitations and opens the path toward higher forms of understanding[8].

According to Sufi teachings, *ma'rifa* requires spiritual discipline, ascetic practice, remembrance of God (*dhikr*), meditation, and moral purification. The seeker gradually overcomes egoism, worldly attachment, and spiritual ignorance.

## Conclusion

The problem of knowledge has remained one of the most fundamental issues in the history of philosophy. From Ancient Greek rationalism to modern epistemological theories, philosophers have continuously sought to understand the nature, source, and limits of human cognition. Within this broad intellectual tradition, Sufi gnoseology occupies a unique and profound position. Sufi epistemology emphasizes that true knowledge cannot be reduced to sensory perception or rational analysis alone. While reason remains important, ultimate truth requires spiritual purification, inner transformation, and divine illumination. Concepts such as ma'rifa, qalb, ruh, kashf, and irfan reveal a comprehensive understanding of human cognition that integrates intellectual, emotional, ethical, and spiritual dimensions.

The philosophical ideas of Jalal al-Din Rumi, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Najmuddin Kubro, and Bahouddin Naqshband significantly enriched world philosophy. Their teachings demonstrated that knowledge is not merely theoretical but transformative. The human being attains truth through self-knowledge, moral discipline, and spiritual awakening. Sufi gnoseology also offers valuable insights for contemporary society. In an age marked by materialism, moral crisis, and spiritual alienation, Sufi teachings promote compassion, tolerance, ethical responsibility, and inner harmony. These values possess special importance for the education and spiritual development of modern youth.

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