

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF WUJUD IN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY: IBN ARABI'S VIEW

Bai Rohimah

Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa
bairohimah@untirta.ac.id

Suhari

Universitas Sultan Muhammad Syafiuddin Sambas

Abstract

This research examines the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud introduced by Ibn Arabi in the context of Islamic philosophy. This term refers to the idea that everything that exists is a manifestation of one absolute form of God. This research aims to critically analyse the impact and implications of this thought on the development of Islamic philosophy and theology. Using the literature method, this research explores the interrelationship between the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud and the practice of mysticism in Islam, as well as identifying the criticisms that arise from the orthodox view. The results show that although controversial, Ibn Arabi's thought has made an important contribution in enriching the discussion and understanding of the essence of existence in Islam. The findings emphasise the importance of historical and intellectual context in appreciating Ibn Arabi's contribution to the Islamic philosophical tradition.

Keywords: Concept of Being, Islamic Philosophy, Ibn Arabi.

Introduction

The concept of being or existence is one of the central topics in Islamic philosophy that has attracted the attention of many scientists and thinkers from classical to contemporary times. Existence is concerned with the question of what it means to 'exist' and how something can be said to exist. In the general view of philosophy, existence involves various aspects including physical or material existence, mental or conceptual existence, as well as more abstract existence such as the essence or nature of something (Qodirova, 2024). In the realm of Islamic philosophy in particular, the concept of wujud is often associated with metaphysical teachings about the relationship between God as the Absolute Being and everything that is created as a manifestation or appearance of the divine form. Form, in this context, is not just physical existence, but also includes dimensions of oneness, meaningfulness, and purpose in life that are closely related to theological and spiritual principles (Mirzayev, 2023).

Within the framework of Islamic teachings, the discussion of wujud is not only limited to logical and ontological aspects, but also has deep theological and spiritual dimensions. Among the many figures who discussed this concept, Ibn Arabi stands out as one of the greatest philosophers and Sufis who made significant contributions in deepening and expanding the understanding of wujud (Taqvi, 2024).

Ibn Arabi, known by the nickname 'al-Sheikh al-Akbar' or 'The Greatest Teacher,' lived in the 12th and 13th centuries and wrote many works that became major references in the study of Islamic spirituality and metaphysics. One of Ibn Arabi's most famous concepts is Wahdat al-Wujud, or Unity of Existence, which asserts that everything in the universe is essentially a manifestation of the Almighty God (Watling, 2024). This concept not only provides a metaphysical basis for the notion of the unity of all that exists, but also offers a new perspective in understanding the relationship between God, nature, and humans.

However, Ibn Arabi's concept of Wahdat al-Wujud is not free from controversy and debate. Some consider this teaching tends to be pantheistic and deviates from the orthodox teachings of Islam, while others see it as the highest expression of the understanding of tawhid (the oneness of God). In this context, it is important to critically analyse Ibn Arabi's views in order to gain a more thorough understanding of the philosophical and theological implications of his concept of wujud (Hajam, 2021).

An in-depth study of the concept of wujud according to Ibn Arabi also has a strong relevance in the contemporary era. In a world that is increasingly pluralistic and filled with various spiritual identity crises, Ibn Arabi's thought offers a holistic and inclusive perspective in understanding the existential and essential diversity of everything in this universe (Chittick, 2020). Therefore, this research aims to explore Ibn Arabi's views on being, analyse their implications in Islamic philosophy, and assess their relevance in the modern context.

Thus, through a better understanding of the concept of wujud based on Ibn Arabi's views, it is hoped that it can make a meaningful contribution to the development of Islamic philosophy studies and help bridge the various views that exist in an effort to achieve deeper spiritual and intellectual awareness.

Research Methods

The study in this research uses the literature method. The literature research method is an approach in research that involves collecting, reviewing, and analysing written sources to understand and assess existing knowledge on a particular topic. This research focuses on the study of library documents such as books, journal articles, theses, dissertations, and other academic sources relevant to the problem being studied (Firman, 2018); (Suyitno, 2021). The main purpose is to identify patterns, themes, theories, and significant findings from previous research, as well as to gain new insights by integrating various perspectives and published research results. Researchers use this method to build a strong theoretical foundation, clarify historical and conceptual contexts, and identify gaps in the existing literature as a basis for further research (Jelahut, 2022).

Results and Discussion

Ibn Arabi's Main Teachings on Being

Ibn Arabi, a renowned Sufi figure and philosopher from the 12th and 13th centuries, is known for his significant contributions to Islamic metaphysical thought, especially in the concept of being (existence). One of his key teachings is the doctrine of *Wahdat al-Wujud* or 'Unity of Being.' This view suggests that at the highest level of reality, there is no separation between the Creator and the creation (Chittick, 2020). All that exists is a manifestation of the divine form, and everything is essentially one with God. This concept is not pantheism, which equates God with the material world, but rather an understanding that all forms of existence flow from one absolute source of being (Hamid, 2023).

In addition to *Wahdat al-Wujud*, Ibn Arabi also introduced the idea of *al-Insan al-Kamil*, or 'Perfect Man.' According to him, human beings have the potential to be a perfect reflection of God and play an important role in actualising and reflecting the divine attributes in the world. *Al-Insan al-Kamil* acts as a bridge between the divine and the mundane, by living a life aligned with the lofty principles of spirituality and morality. This figure exemplifies how humans can achieve enlightenment and a higher awareness of their relationship with God (Romadlon et al., 2020).

Ibn 'Arabi also discussed the importance of personal and intuitive experience in understanding God. He emphasised that knowledge of God cannot be fully achieved through ratio or intellectualism alone, but rather through *makrifat* (mystical and intuitive experience). These experiences allow individuals to realise God's presence in every aspect of their lives. As such, true knowledge of the divine being can only be gained through a deep spiritual journey, which involves self-knowledge and sincere servitude (Kizi, 2025).

In the teachings on macrocosm and microcosm, Ibn Arabi views the universe as a reflection of God's attributes, where each element of life in the universe exhibits different aspects of the divine form. Humans, as microcosms, encompass all the properties and potentials present in the macrocosm, and as such, have the ability to understand and interact with the rest of creation. This creates a deep interconnectedness between humans and nature, and reinforces human responsibility in maintaining cosmic harmony (Goodman, 2020).

Ibn 'Arabi also discussed the concept of love as central in the relationship between humans and God. He argued that love is the force underlying the creation and preservation of the universe. Through love, humans can unite and harmonise with God, because love is a manifestation of the divine form itself (Lancaster, 2020). By exploring divine love, one can merge in God's consciousness, reaching *fana*, which is a state in which the individual ego disappears and all that remains is full unity with the divine form. Ibn Arabi taught that love is not just an emotion, but the path and ultimate goal of the true spiritual quest (Lakhsassi, 2020).

Existence and Essence in Ibn Arabi's Philosophy

Ibn Arabi, a famous philosopher and Sufi, has a deep and complex view of the concepts of existence (*wujud*) and essence (*mahiyah*). In Ibn Arabi's thought, existence is the fundamental and only reality that is fully real. All that exists in the universe is a manifestation of a single divine being. In other words, only God has true existence, while everything else exists through the manifestation or emanation of this divine form. This doctrine is known as *Wahdat al-Wujud*, or Unity of Being, which states that all existence is essentially one with God (Maliha, 2022).

According to Ibn Arabi, essence, on the other hand, is a concept related to the form and individual nature of something. Essence identifies what something is in itself, including its characteristics and essence that make it different from others. However, in Ibn Arabi's view, the essence of an object or being does not have an independent reality without form. Essence needs a form to be real and actualised. Without existence given by God, the essence is only potential and will not exist in reality (Achoita, 2022).

Ibn Arabi also argues that essence is not absolute and can change, because it depends on the divine form that is dynamic and continuously manifests itself. In this view, the divine being is the source of all essence and phenomena in the universe. God, as the Absolute Being, creates all forms of existence by His will, and every being or object derives its existence through the properties bestowed by God (Goodman, 2020). Thus, the essence of things is not fixed and absolute, but depends on the relationship with the divine being.

The importance of the relationship between existence and essence in Ibn Arabi's thought is also seen in the concept of *al-Insan al-Kamil* or Perfect Man. According to Ibn Arabi, perfect humans are individuals who are able to understand and actualise the relationship between their existence and essence with the divine form. Through spiritual journey and enlightenment, humans can realise the truth that their essence only exists because of the existence of God and they can reflect the divine nature in their lives. This process involves self-surrender and servitude to God, which eventually leads them to the full realisation of the unity in existence (Leaman, 2020).

Ibn 'Arabi taught that an understanding of existence and essence is the key to achieving deeper knowledge of God and the universe. God's absolute and singular existence provides the framework for all forms of life and essences, while the diverse essences show different aspects of the Divine being (Urvoy, 2020). In this prospect, human beings are encouraged to continually seek self-knowledge and *makrifat* to God, recognising that each of their essences is an apparition of the all-pervasive divine existence. Through this understanding and surrender, one can unite their lives with higher spiritual principles and eventually achieve the realisation of unity of being (al-Taftazani & Leaman, 2020).

Implications of Ibn Arabi's Concept of Manifestation for Islamic Philosophy in General

Ibn Arabi's concept of being, known as *Wahdat al-Wujud* or Unity of Being, had profound implications for Islamic philosophy in general. This view, which asserts that everything in the universe is a manifestation or emanation of a single divine being, changed the way Islamic philosophers and theologians understood the nature of God's oneness and His relationship with creation. It expanded the understanding of *tawhid* (oneness of God) to be more comprehensive and spiritual, where every being and event is a sign of the divine presence and will (Inati, 2020).

One of the important implications of this concept of being is the transformation in the way people view the universe and everything in it. For followers of Ibn Arabi, the universe is not just seen as a creation separate from God, but as a reflection and manifestation of God's attributes. This encourages a poetic and contemplative attitude towards nature, where the beauty and complexity of the world is seen as a way to recognise and get closer to God. It also encourages a more respectful and loving attitude towards fellow living beings, as they are seen as manifestations of the Divine (Hunaida & Hadiyansyah, 2022).

In the context of religious praxis, the concept of *Wahdat al-Wujud* provides a strong foundation for mysticism and Sufism in Islam. Sufism adherents consider the highest spiritual goal to be experiencing direct union with God, namely *fana'* (merging in God) and *baqa'* (eternal life in God). Ibn Arabi's teachings reinforce Sufistic practices such as *dhikr*, meditation and contemplation as ways to achieve awareness of the divine presence in the self and the universe. It also created space for various Sufi art forms, such as poetry and music, as expressions of the spiritual quest and divine love (Nasr, 2020).

The influence of Ibn Arabi's *wahdat al-wujud* is also apparent in the various schools of thought in Islamic philosophy, which increasingly appreciate the relationship between theology, metaphysics and ethics. Some philosophers and theologians after Ibn Arabi, such as Mulla Sadra, further developed these concepts in their works. Mulla Sadra, for example, combined *Wahdat al-Wujud* with *peripatetic* philosophy and illumination to create a system of thought that integrated revelation, reason, and mystical experience. This strengthened the scientific tradition in Islamic philosophy that tries to bridge between orthodox theology and mystical consciousness (Hakim et al., 2024).

Finally, *Wahdat al-Wujud* also shapes dialogue and interaction between Islam and other philosophical traditions, both from within and outside the Islamic world. Ibn Arabi's thought has inspired thinkers from various backgrounds, including Western philosophy and Eastern mysticism, to explore ideas about unity, plurality, and the relationship between God and the universe. As such, Ibn Arabi's concept of *wujud* not only enriches Islamic philosophy but also broadens the horizons of spiritual and

metaphysical thought worldwide, encouraging wider recognition of the profound unity that binds all existence.

Thus, the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud popularised by Ibn Arabi had a significant impact on the development of Islamic philosophy. The idea that everything in the universe is a manifestation of God created a deeper understanding of tawhid and humanity's relationship with the Creator. It encouraged a contemplative and spiritual attitude towards nature, and strengthened the practices of mysticism and Sufism in Islam. In addition, Ibn Arabi's teachings influenced the development of various schools of thought in Islamic philosophy and created a dialogue with other philosophical traditions. Thus, the concept of unity of being not only enriched Islamic philosophy but also made a valuable contribution to global spiritual and metaphysical discourse.

Conclusion

This research examines Ibn Arabi's thoughts on the concept of 'wujud' or existence, known as Wahdat al-Wujud. Ibn Arabi argues that all that exists in the universe is a manifestation of one absolute being, namely God. This concept aims to unify the schools of thought that distinguish between the existence of God and His creation in a holistic metaphysical approach.

Also, the research shows that the teaching forms the foundation for mysticism (tasawwuf) that promotes a mystical connection and deep spiritual experience with God. In addition, it identifies the challenges and criticisms faced by this concept, especially from orthodox scholars who consider that Ibn Arabi's thought deviates from conventional Islamic teachings.

Thus, this study emphasises that the concept of Wujud proposed by Ibn Arabi has significant philosophical significance and has made important contributions to the development of Islamic philosophy and theology. Although controversial, it enriches discussions on the essence and nature of existence and creates a foundation for more profound and holistic spiritual practices. This study also underlines the importance of understanding the historical and intellectual context in which Ibn Arabi's thought developed in order to fully appreciate his philosophical contributions.

References

- Achoita, A. (2022). IBN MADHA DAN AL NAHWU AL ARABI. *An-Nas*, 6(1), 63–79. <https://doi.org/10.36840/annas.v6i1.571>
- al-Taftazani, A.-W., & Leaman, O. (2020). Ibn Sab'īn. *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Query date: 2025-02-07 08:26:55, 346–349. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003070733-29>
- Chittick, W. C. (2020). Ibn 'Arabī. *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Query date: 2025-02-07 08:26:55, 497–509. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003070733-36>
- Firman, F.-. (2018). *PENELITIAN KUALITATIF DAN KUANTITATIF*. Query date: 2024-05-25 20:59:55. <https://doi.org/10.31227/osf.io/4nq5e>

- Goodman, L. E. (2020). Ibn Ṭufayl. *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Query date: 2025-02-07 08:26:55, 313–329. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070733-27>
- Hajam. (2021). Hermeneutic's Ibn Arabi: Alternatives in Understanding the Text for Islamic Moderation in Post Pandemic Era. *Proceeding of Saizu International Conference on Transdisciplinary Religious Studies*, Query date: 2025-02-07 08:26:55, 144–158. <https://doi.org/10.24090/icontrees.2021.255>
- Hakim, L., Ahmad, A., & Hadi, R. T. (2024). IBN TAYMIYYAH'S PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE TO IBN 'ARABĪ'S WAḤDAT AL-WUJŪD THOUGHT. *Kanz Philosophia: A Journal for Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, 10(2), 229–250. <https://doi.org/10.20871/kpjipm.v10i2.366>
- Hamid, J. (2023). Ibn Abbas's Jurisprudential Views on Illegitimate Relations- A Comparative Study-. *Islamic Sciences Journal*, 11(9), 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.25130/jis.20.11.9.1>
- Hunaida, W. L., & Hadiyansyah, D. (2022). Ibn Sina's Marriage Concept: Integration of Islamic Philosophy and Modern Psychology. *Journal Intellectual Sufism Research (JISR)*, 4(2), 87–95. <https://doi.org/10.52032/jisr.v4i2.119>
- Inati, S. (2020). Ibn Sīnā. *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Query date: 2025-02-07 08:26:55, 231–246. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070733-20>
- Jelahut, F. E. (2022). *Aneka Teori Dan Jenis Penelitian Kualitatif*. Query date: 2024-05-25 20:59:55. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/ymzqp>
- Kizi, Y. (2025). Ibn Arabi's Epistemological Views In The Context of Sufism and Islamic Philosophy. *Buletin Antropologi Indonesia*, 2(1), 8–8. <https://doi.org/10.47134/bai.v2i1.3616>
- Lakhsassi, A. (2020). Ibn Khaldūn. *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Query date: 2025-02-07 08:26:55, 350–364. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070733-30>
- Lancaster, I. (2020). Ibn Gabirol. *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Query date: 2025-02-07 08:26:55, 712–717. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070733-49>
- Leaman, O. (2020). Ibn Miskawayh. *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Query date: 2025-02-07 08:26:55, 252–257. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070733-22>
- Maliha, H. (2022). Ibn Khaldun's concept of Economic, Social and Political Relations. *Islamic Economics and History*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.58968/ieh.v1i1.196>
- Mirzayev, A. (2023). ANALYSIS OF CONCEPT 'WAHDAT UL-WUDJUD' AND MYSTICAL OLD VOZZRENIYAX IBN ARABI. *Scientific Journal of the Fergana State University*, 29(4). https://doi.org/10.56292/sjfsu/vol29_iss4/a97
- Nasr, S. H. (2020). Ibn Sīnā's "Oriental philosophy". *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Query date: 2025-02-07 08:26:55, 247–251. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070733-21>
- Qodirova, Y. B. (2024). ABOUT THE PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS OF IBN ARABI. *Current Research Journal of Pedagogics*, 5(12), 45–51. <https://doi.org/10.37547/pedagogics-crjp-05-12-09>
- Romadlon, D. A., Ihsan, N. H., & Istikomah, I. (2020). Ibn Arabi on Wahdatul Wujud and it's Relation to The Concept of Af'alul 'Ibad. *TSAQAFAH*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v16i2.4901>
- Suyitno. (2021). METODE PENELITIAN KUALITATIF KONSEP, PRINSIP DAN OPERASIONALNYA. Query date: 2024-05-25 20:59:55. <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/auqfr>

- Taqvi, S. M. F. (2024). Gadamer, Ibn Sīnā, and the Aesthetics of Self-Transformation. *Journal of Islamic Philosophy*, 15(2), 64–82. <https://doi.org/10.5840/islamiphil202415211>
- Urvoy, D. (2020). Ibn Rushd. *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Query date: 2025-02-07 08:26:55, 330–345. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070733-28>
- Watling, D. (2024). Ḥayy’s Two Nativities. *Journal of Islamic Philosophy*, 15(1), 66–110. <https://doi.org/10.5840/islamiphil20241515>