



THE FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE CONCEPTUAL FEATURES OF SUFI EPISTEMOLOGY

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Article history:	Abstract:
Received: 30 th March 2026 Accepted: 28 th April 2026	The problem of knowledge has long been considered one of the central issues in philosophy. Ancient Greek philosophy, Islamic thought, and modern European philosophy have all attempted to explain the essence, sources, and possibilities of human cognition. Within this epistemological process, Sufi epistemology occupies a special place. Sufism emphasizes that true knowledge is attained not only through reason but also through the purification of the heart, spiritual perfection, and divine inspiration. This article analyzes the historical development of epistemology and the conceptual foundations of Sufi epistemology. The philosophical views of Jalaluddin Rumi, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Najmuddin Kubro, and Bahauddin Naqshband are thoroughly examined. In addition, concepts such as enlightenment, heart, soul, unveiling (kashf), and irfan, as well as the relationship between rational and mystical cognition, are analyzed. The results of the study show that Sufi epistemology plays an important role in human spiritual development, moral education, and the formation of modern youth consciousness.
Keywords: Epistemology, Sufi epistemology, enlightenment, heart, soul, kashf, irfan, Jalaluddin Rumi, al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Najmuddin Kubro, Bahauddin Naqshband, spiritual purification, divine inspiration.	

INTRODUCTION.

The problem of knowledge has always occupied a central place in the history of human thought. Throughout all periods of the history of philosophy, thinkers have sought to explain how human beings come to know truth, what the sources of knowledge are, and what the limits of cognition might be. Epistemology emerged as a philosophical discipline that specifically studies these issues.

Ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle laid the earliest conceptual foundations of the theory of knowledge. Socrates' famous idea "Know thyself" highlights the connection between knowledge and inner reflection [1]. Plato associated true knowledge with the world of ideas, while Aristotle placed special emphasis on experience and logical analysis [2].

In Islamic philosophy, epistemological issues gained even broader significance. Thinkers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd attempted to reconcile Greek philosophy with Islamic thought by explaining the relationship between reason and revelation [3]. However, representatives of Sufism emphasized that true knowledge is attained not only through reason but also through the heart and the soul.

Sufi epistemology places internal and spiritual forms of cognition at its center. In Sufism, concepts such as "ma'rifa" (spiritual knowledge), "kashf" (unveiling), "irfan" (gnosis), "heart," and "soul" are considered important epistemological categories. These concepts express the idea that a person perceives divine truth through the heart and inner experience [4].

In today's era of globalization, humanity is facing moral crisis, ethical decline, and spiritual emptiness. In particular, among young people, individualism, consumerism, and spiritual alienation are increasing. In such conditions, Sufi philosophy appears as an important spiritual source that calls for inner purification, patience, love, and tolerance [5].

The philosophical views of Jalaluddin Rumi, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Najmuddin Kubro, and Bahauddin Naqshband have had a profound impact not only on Islamic philosophy but also on world philosophical development. Rumi sought to dissolve the boundaries between subject and object through divine love, while Al-Ghazali demonstrated the limitations of reason and promoted the idea of spiritual perception through the heart [6].

The main aim of this article is to analyze the historical development of epistemology and the conceptual features of Sufi epistemology.



MATERIALS AND METHODS.

This study was conducted using historical-philosophical, comparative, hermeneutic, and textological methods. These methodological approaches made it possible to deeply analyze the historical development of epistemological views and the essence of Sufi epistemology.

The historical-philosophical method was used to study the problem of knowledge in ancient Greek philosophy, Islamic thought, and modern European epistemology. This approach made it possible to identify historical transformations between rational and mystical forms of cognition [7].

The comparative-philosophical method was used to analyze the differences and similarities between rational knowledge and Sufi knowledge. While rationalism considers logic and experience as the basis of knowledge, Sufism regards purification of the heart and divine inspiration as the true source of knowledge [8].

The hermeneutic method was applied in interpreting symbolic meanings in the works of Jalaluddin Rumi, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, and other Sufi thinkers. Since symbolic language, metaphors, and allegories are widely used in Sufi texts, their deep interpretation is of great importance.

DISCUSSION AND RESULTS.

The problem of knowledge has always occupied a central place in the history of philosophy. Socrates emphasized that self-knowledge is the primary source of wisdom [10]. Plato associated true knowledge with eternal forms, while Aristotle explained cognition through experience and logical reasoning, making a significant contribution to the formation of scientific epistemology.

In Islamic philosophy, epistemological ideas became even more developed. Al-Farabi regarded reason as a perfect tool of cognition, while Ibn Sina elaborated the stages of sensory and intellectual knowledge [4]. However, Sufi thinkers argued that true knowledge is attained through the heart rather than reason alone.

In European philosophy, Descartes introduced the famous proposition "I think, therefore I am," laying the foundations of rationalism [2]. John Locke viewed experience as the source of knowledge, while Immanuel Kant attempted to synthesize rationalism and empiricism.

Nevertheless, many philosophers acknowledged the limitations of reason. At this point, Sufi epistemology emerges as an important philosophical paradigm that places inner spiritual experience at the center of cognition. Sufi epistemology emphasizes that divine truth can be perceived through

the heart. In Sufism, a distinction is made between external knowledge ("ilm") and inner knowledge ("ma'rifa") [13].

The Qur'an states: **"Verily, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find rest"** (Surah Ar-Ra'd, 13:28).

This verse highlights the epistemological significance of the heart.

Another verse states:

"We will show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves" (Surah Fussilat, 41:53).

Sufi thinkers interpreted this verse as evidence that self-knowledge leads to the understanding of divine truth.

One of the central concepts of Sufi epistemology is "ma'rifa." Ma'rifa is not ordinary knowledge but direct experiential awareness of divine truth through the heart.

Al-Ghazali argued that rational philosophy alone cannot lead to absolute truth. In his work *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, he writes: "The most correct path to truth is the way of the Sufis" [5].

Rumi explains ma'rifa through love: "The intellect sees boundaries, but love sees infinity" [6].

According to Sufism, ma'rifa is achieved through purification of the self, remembrance (dhikr), contemplation, and spiritual discipline.

In Sufism, the heart is not merely a biological organ but a spiritual center that receives divine truth [7].

A hadith states: "In the body there is a piece of flesh; if it is sound, the whole body is sound..."

Najmuddin Kubro emphasized that purification of the heart leads to the development of inner perception. Rumi compares the heart to a mirror: "The heart is a mirror; if you polish it, truth will be reflected" [8].

In Sufi epistemology, the soul (*ruh*) is also a key epistemological category. The Qur'an states:

"They ask you about the soul. Say: the soul is of the command of my Lord" (Surah Al-Isra, 17:85).

According to Ibn Arabi, the soul is a manifestation of divine existence within human beings. His concept of *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of being) suggests that all existence is connected to a single divine reality [9].

Jalaluddin Rumi is one of the greatest representatives of Sufi philosophy. He considers love as the highest form of knowledge [2]. According to Rumi, divine love liberates a person from egoism and material attachment. In his work *Masnavi*, he describes human spiritual development through numerous symbolic stories. Rumi's teachings today are



regarded as an important philosophical source promoting tolerance, humanism, and spiritual harmony.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali is one of the most important thinkers who critically examined rationalism in Islamic thought. Although he initially studied philosophical sciences in depth, he later turned to Sufism as a result of a spiritual crisis [23]. According to al-Ghazali, true knowledge is obtained through a divine light bestowed upon the heart by Allah.

Ibn Arabi is one of the greatest representatives of Sufi metaphysics. His doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* emphasizes the unity of existence with the divine essence [4]. Ibn Arabi connects epistemology with ontology. In his view, self-knowledge leads to the understanding of divine truth.

Bahauddin Naqshband is a thinker who integrated Sufism with everyday life. He introduced the principle "Dil ba yor, dast ba kor" ("The heart with God, the hand at work"), emphasizing that the human heart should be with God while the hands remain engaged in productive labor [5].

The Naqshbandi tradition combines spiritual purification not with withdrawal from society, but with active social engagement.

In today's era of globalization and technogenic civilization, humanity faces a spiritual crisis. Among young people, spiritual emptiness, individualism, and alienation are increasing. Sufi epistemology, however, encourages inner purification, tolerance, compassion, and moral perfection [6]. The teachings of Rumi and al-Ghazali remain important sources for the spiritual development of modern youth.

CONCLUSION.

The problem of knowledge is one of the most important epistemological issues in the history of philosophy. From ancient Greek philosophy to modern philosophy, thinkers have attempted to explain the nature and sources of knowledge. Sufi epistemology, however, goes beyond purely rational understanding and emphasizes that knowledge can also be attained through the heart, soul, and divine inspiration. Concepts such as "ma'rifa," "heart," "soul," "kashf," and "irfan" form the key categories of Sufi epistemology. The ideas of Jalaluddin Rumi, al-Ghazali, Ibn Arabi, Najmuddin Kubro, and Bahauddin Naqshband have made a significant contribution to world philosophy and spiritual thought. Their teachings serve as an important theoretical foundation for understanding the inner world of human beings, achieving spiritual purification, and attaining moral perfection.

In modern society, Sufi epistemology plays an important role in the moral education of youth, the development of tolerance, ethical consciousness, and humanistic values. Thus, Sufi epistemology remains one

of the deepest and richest philosophical-spiritual systems in the history of human thought, preserving its relevance today.

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