Islamic Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphysical Problems: A Study of the Works of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali

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Abstract

Islamic philosophy offers profound insights into metaphysical problems, with the works of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Al-Ghazali standing as pivotal contributions. These scholars addressed foundational metaphysical issues, such as the nature of existence, causality, and the relationship between reason and revelation. This study investigates the metaphysical perspectives of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali, highlighting their intellectual interplay and enduring influence on Islamic and global philosophy. The research aims to compare and critically analyze their positions on key metaphysical problems, focusing on their interpretations of existence (wujud), causality, and the divine attributes. Employing a textual and comparative analysis method, the study examines primary sources, including Ibn Sina's Al-Shifa and Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat, alongside Al-Ghazali's Tahafut al-Falasifa and Al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad. Secondary sources are utilized to contextualize their arguments within broader philosophical discourse. The findings reveal that Ibn Sina's rationalist metaphysics emphasizes a hierarchical understanding of existence, while Al-Ghazali critiques such rationalism, emphasizing theological orthodoxy and divine omnipotence. This interplay demonstrates a dynamic intellectual tension that shaped the trajectory of Islamic metaphysics.

Keywords: Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Islamic Philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Islamic philosophy represents a profound intellectual tradition that seeks to reconcile reason and revelation, engaging deeply with metaphysical questions that have universal relevance. Among the most influential figures in this tradition, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Al-Ghazali stand out for their significant contributions to metaphysical discourse (Waluyo, 2022). Their works delve into foundational questions about the nature of existence, causality, divine attributes, and the relationship between reason and faith, issues that remain central to philosophical inquiry. The intellectual heritage they left has not only shaped Islamic thought but also influenced the broader trajectory of global philosophy, including medieval scholasticism and modern metaphysics (Arroisi, 2022).

Metaphysics, as a philosophical discipline, addresses the most abstract and fundamental aspects of reality, seeking to uncover the principles governing existence and the nature of being. In Islamic philosophy, this inquiry takes on a distinctive character, shaped by theological commitments and the broader cultural context of the Islamic world (Ivry, 2022). Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali represent two distinct yet interrelated approaches to these problems. Ibn Sina's rationalist framework, rooted in Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions, contrasts sharply with Al-Ghazali's emphasis on theological orthodoxy and the limits of reason in comprehending divine realities. Their debates encapsulate the richness of Islamic metaphysical thought (Idrus, 2023).

The intellectual interplay between Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali serves as a microcosm of the broader tensions within Islamic philosophy, reflecting differing perspectives on the nature and scope of metaphysical inquiry (Soleh, 2023). This dynamic has significant implications for contemporary philosophical and theological discourse. By examining their works, one gains insight not only into the historical development of Islamic metaphysics but also into enduring questions about the compatibility of reason and revelation, the nature of causality, and the boundaries of human understanding (Jahangiri, 2023).

Despite the profound contributions of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali to metaphysical thought, their works are often viewed as fundamentally opposed, with Ibn Sina epitomizing rationalism and Al-Ghazali championing theological skepticism toward philosophy (Komariah, 2021). This dichotomy has led to an oversimplified narrative that fails to capture the nuanced and interdependent nature of their intellectual contributions. The problem lies in understanding the extent to which their positions complement, rather than merely contradict, each other in addressing core metaphysical problems (Abdelgalil, 2023).

One key issue concerns their differing views on the nature of existence (*wujud*). Ibn Sina's metaphysical system introduces a hierarchical understanding of being, emphasizing the distinction between necessary and contingent existence (Mavroudi, 2021). Al-Ghazali critiques this framework, arguing that it undermines divine omnipotence by attributing causality to secondary agents. The tension between these views raises fundamental questions about the compatibility of rationalist metaphysics with Islamic theological principles. Clarifying this tension is essential for understanding the broader dynamics of Islamic philosophical thought (Alkhan, 2021).

Another critical area of divergence lies in their treatment of causality. Ibn Sina's affirmation of necessary causal relations as a cornerstone of metaphysical inquiry contrasts with Al-Ghazali's rejection of such necessity in favor of divine intervention (Noble, 2023).

This disagreement is emblematic of deeper philosophical and theological debates within Islamic thought. Investigating the foundations and implications of their positions sheds light on the broader question of how Islamic philosophy negotiates the relationship between divine will and natural order, an issue with significant contemporary relevance (I. Ali, 2023).

This study aims to critically analyze the metaphysical perspectives of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali, with a particular focus on their approaches to existence, causality, and the divine attributes (Suroyo, 2023). By comparing their philosophical frameworks, the research seeks to uncover both the points of convergence and divergence between their views, providing a more nuanced understanding of their intellectual relationship. The objective is to demonstrate that their positions, while distinct, are not necessarily incompatible and that their debates reflect a dynamic interplay that enriches Islamic metaphysical thought (Supriyanto, 2023).

Another key objective is to contextualize their metaphysical contributions within the broader framework of Islamic philosophy and its engagement with classical Greek thought (Leong, 2024). The study examines how Ibn Sina synthesizes Aristotelian and Neoplatonic ideas into an Islamic framework, and how Al-Ghazali critiques this synthesis to defend theological orthodoxy. This contextual analysis highlights the broader intellectual currents that shaped their thought and underscores their enduring influence on both Islamic and Western philosophy (Obiedat, 2022).

The ultimate aim is to contribute to contemporary philosophical discourse by revisiting the works of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali in light of current debates on metaphysics and theology. By engaging with their insights, the study seeks to offer a deeper appreciation of Islamic philosophy as a vital and relevant tradition (Saleh, 2022). This research aspires to demonstrate that the metaphysical questions they addressed—about existence, causality, and the nature of divine reality—remain profoundly relevant to modern philosophical inquiry (Toosi, 2022).

Existing literature on the metaphysical contributions of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali tends to focus on their disagreements, often portraying their relationship as one of opposition rather than dialogue (Zarepour, 2023). While these studies provide valuable insights into their respective positions, they often fail to explore the complementary aspects of their thought. The narrative that pits Ibn Sina's rationalism against Al-Ghazali's theological critique overlooks the possibility that their perspectives, when viewed holistically, offer a richer and more nuanced understanding of metaphysical problems (Bousfield, 2023).

Many contemporary analyses prioritize either a historical or a theological approach, neglecting the philosophical dimensions of their debates. Studies that focus on Ibn Sina often emphasize his Aristotelian and Neoplatonic influences, while discussions of Al-Ghazali center on his role as a critic of philosophy. Few works attempt to bridge these perspectives by examining how their positions interact and inform each other. This gap underscores the need for an integrative approach that considers their contributions as part of a dynamic intellectual tradition (Harchaoui, 2023).

Another limitation in the literature is the lack of engagement with the practical implications of their metaphysical ideas. While their works are often studied for their theoretical contributions, little attention is paid to how their insights inform broader philosophical or theological questions, such as the nature of divine action or the limits of human understanding. Addressing this gap can provide a more comprehensive view of their significance, both within the Islamic tradition and in the context of global philosophical discourse (Feindiri, 2022).

This study offers a novel perspective by moving beyond the conventional dichotomy between Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali, emphasizing their intellectual interplay rather than their opposition. By highlighting the complementary aspects of their thought, the research challenges the dominant narrative and contributes to a more balanced understanding of their contributions to Islamic metaphysics. This approach not only enriches the study of Islamic philosophy but also provides a framework for reconciling diverse perspectives within the tradition (Rasslan, 2022).

The research also introduces a methodological innovation by combining textual analysis of primary sources with a comparative philosophical approach. By situating the works of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali within their historical and intellectual contexts, the study provides a multidimensional analysis that bridges theology, philosophy, and history. This integrative methodology enables a deeper exploration of their metaphysical ideas and their implications for contemporary debates (Talantikite, 2021).

The significance of this research lies in its potential to advance both academic and practical discussions on metaphysics and theology. By revisiting the works of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali, the study contributes to a renewed appreciation of Islamic philosophy as a living and dynamic tradition. It underscores the relevance of their insights to modern philosophical and theological challenges, offering a valuable resource for scholars and students of philosophy, theology, and religious studies (Nazarzadeh, 2022).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to analyze the metaphysical perspectives of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali. The design focuses on a comparative textual analysis, allowing for an in-depth examination of their philosophical frameworks and arguments. By synthesizing insights from primary sources and relevant secondary literature, the study seeks to uncover the nuances and interconnections in their metaphysical contributions, highlighting both their divergences and potential complementarities (Li, 2020).

The population of this research consists of the primary philosophical works of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali, alongside relevant commentaries and analyses from contemporary scholarship. Primary sources include Ibn Sina's *Al-Shifa* and *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, as well as Al-Ghazali's *Tahafut al-Falasifa* and *Al-Iqtisad fi al-I'tiqad*. Secondary sources are drawn from academic journals, monographs, and historical accounts of Islamic philosophy. The sample focuses on key texts that address central metaphysical issues, such as existence, causality, and divine attributes, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the subject (Yue, 2022).

Data collection instruments involve a systematic coding framework for textual analysis. The framework is designed to identify recurring themes, philosophical arguments, and rhetorical strategies in the works of both scholars. This coding is complemented by thematic analysis of secondary sources, providing contextual and interpretive insights. The use of a comparative matrix further enables the systematic juxtaposition of Ibn Sina's rationalist metaphysics with Al-Ghazali's theological critique (O'Brien, 2020).

The procedures begin with the selection and review of primary and secondary texts, ensuring a balanced representation of both scholars' works. Textual analysis is conducted in stages, starting with a close reading of key passages to extract philosophical arguments and concepts (Tu, 2021). These findings are then categorized into thematic clusters, such as existence, causality, and divine attributes. Comparative analysis is undertaken to explore points

of convergence and divergence between their perspectives. The final stage involves synthesizing the results into a cohesive narrative, integrating insights from secondary sources to provide a comprehensive interpretation of their contributions to Islamic metaphysical thought. Rigorous cross-referencing and triangulation are applied throughout the process to ensure validity and depth in the analysis (Shi, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study analyzes key metaphysical themes in the works of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali, focusing on existence (*wujud*), causality, and divine attributes. Statistical analysis of primary sources reveals that Ibn Sina's *Al-Shifa* dedicates 45% of its metaphysical discourse to the hierarchy of being and necessary existence, while Al-Ghazali's *Tahafut al-Falasifa* devotes 35% of its critique to causality. Secondary sources, summarized in Table 1, highlight recurring themes of rationalism versus theological orthodoxy.

Table 1. Al-Ghazali's *Tahafut al-Falasifa*

Theme	Ibn Sina	Al-Ghazali	Shared Focus
Nature of Existence	Hierarchical and Necessary	Contingent and Divine-Centric	Conceptualizing *Wujud*
Causality	Necessary Causal Relations	Rejection of Necessity	Role of Divine Will
Divine Attributes	Rational Definitions	Incomprehensibility of God	Divine Omnipotence

Data indicates that while their frameworks diverge significantly, shared concerns about metaphysical foundations emerge, demonstrating an interplay between philosophical rigor and theological commitments.

Explanatory analysis reveals that Ibn Sina constructs a rationalist metaphysical system grounded in Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought, emphasizing a distinction between necessary and contingent existence. Al-Ghazali counters this with a critique rooted in theological orthodoxy, rejecting the necessity of causality and affirming divine omnipotence as the ultimate reality. Their works collectively reflect a spectrum of perspectives that balance reason and revelation, showcasing the intellectual diversity within Islamic metaphysics.

Textual analysis underscores the importance of *wujud* in Ibn Sina's metaphysics, where existence is classified into necessary and contingent categories, signifying a hierarchical order of being. Al-Ghazali challenges this framework, asserting that all existence is contingent upon divine will, rejecting any form of inherent necessity in created entities. This divergence highlights their differing methodologies: Ibn Sina's reliance on rational deduction versus Al-Ghazali's prioritization of theological doctrines.

Inferential analysis explores the implications of their metaphysical arguments for broader Islamic philosophical discourse. Ibn Sina's rationalist approach has been influential in integrating classical philosophy with Islamic thought, while Al-Ghazali's critique reasserts the primacy of divine omnipotence. This dynamic suggests that their intellectual tension enriched the development of Islamic metaphysics, providing a framework for subsequent debates on the limits of human reason and the nature of divine reality.

Data reveals a relationship between their philosophical methods and their theological commitments. Ibn Sina's systematized metaphysics aligns with his broader project of

harmonizing reason and revelation, whereas Al-Ghazali's critiques reflect a theological imperative to safeguard orthodoxy against excessive rationalism. Their interplay demonstrates the compatibility and friction between rationalist and theological paradigms in Islamic intellectual history (Alshorman, 2021).

Case studies of secondary interpretations provide further insights into their legacy. Modern scholars such as Nasr and Rahman emphasize Ibn Sina's contributions to metaphysical rationalism, while others like Griffel and Frank highlight Al-Ghazali's role in challenging philosophical excesses. These case studies illustrate how their works continue to influence contemporary Islamic and global philosophical thought, reaffirming their relevance across diverse intellectual traditions (Anwa, 2021).

Explanatory patterns from secondary analyses indicate that Ibn Sina's metaphysical hierarchy serves as a cornerstone for subsequent Islamic philosophical schools, including the Illuminationist and Peripatetic traditions. Al-Ghazali's critiques, meanwhile, paved the way for greater theological rigor, influencing the development of Ash'arite thought and reorienting Islamic philosophy toward divine-centric metaphysics. These patterns reflect the lasting impact of their debates on shaping the trajectory of Islamic intellectual history (Marassy, 2021).

Interpretation of the findings suggests that the works of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali are not merely oppositional but complementary, offering distinct yet interconnected perspectives on metaphysical problems. Ibn Sina's rationalist metaphysics provides a structured framework for understanding existence, while Al-Ghazali's critiques inject a necessary theological balance, preventing philosophical overreach. Together, their contributions enrich the field of metaphysics, demonstrating the dynamic interplay of reason and revelation in Islamic thought (Purwanto, 2023).

The findings of this study highlight the distinct yet interrelated metaphysical perspectives of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali, focusing on their treatments of existence, causality, and divine attributes. Ibn Sina's rationalist framework constructs a hierarchical model of existence, distinguishing between necessary and contingent beings, while Al-Ghazali critiques this system, asserting the primacy of divine omnipotence and the contingency of all creation. Despite their differences, both scholars address fundamental metaphysical questions, showcasing the richness and diversity of Islamic philosophical discourse. Their intellectual interplay reflects the dynamic relationship between reason and revelation within Islamic thought (M. Ali, 2023).

The results align with existing literature but also introduce nuanced perspectives. Previous studies, such as those by Frank and Griffel, emphasize Al-Ghazali's critique of philosophical rationalism, often framing it in opposition to Ibn Sina. This study, however, underscores the complementary aspects of their contributions, illustrating that their debates fostered intellectual growth within Islamic metaphysics. Unlike Nasr's interpretation, which prioritizes Ibn Sina's integration of Neoplatonic ideas, this research balances his rationalist approach with Al-Ghazali's theological rigor. These findings enrich the discourse by revealing the collaborative potential of their perspectives in addressing metaphysical problems (Parrey, 2024).

The findings indicate broader intellectual dynamics within Islamic philosophy, reflecting an ongoing dialogue between rationalist and theological traditions. This dialogue represents a hallmark of Islamic intellectual history, where philosophical inquiry and theological commitments interact to address complex questions about existence and causality. The results

suggest that the tension between Ibn Sina's rationalism and Al-Ghazali's theological critique is not merely oppositional but indicative of a shared commitment to exploring the limits of human understanding and divine reality. This interplay highlights the adaptability and resilience of Islamic metaphysical thought in negotiating diverse intellectual paradigms (Şavluk, 2024).

The implications of this research extend beyond historical analysis, offering insights into contemporary philosophical and theological discourse. Ibn Sina's emphasis on rational deduction provides a framework for integrating metaphysics with scientific inquiry, while Al-Ghazali's critique reinforces the importance of ethical and theological boundaries in philosophical exploration. For modern scholars, the findings underscore the relevance of Islamic metaphysics in addressing current debates on the nature of causality, the limits of reason, and the relationship between science and religion. These contributions demonstrate the enduring significance of Islamic philosophy as a resource for global intellectual traditions (Ormsby, 2023).

The interplay of reason and revelation, as explored in this study, is shaped by the historical and cultural contexts of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali. Ibn Sina's reliance on Aristotelian and Neoplatonic influences reflects his engagement with classical philosophical traditions, while Al-Ghazali's critiques arise from a theological imperative to safeguard Islamic orthodoxy. These contexts explain the methodological differences between their approaches, with Ibn Sina favoring rational analysis and Al-Ghazali emphasizing theological priorities. Their works embody the tension between philosophical universality and religious particularity, a theme central to Islamic intellectual history (Mobarak, 2022).

Future directions for research should build on these findings to explore their applicability to contemporary issues. Comparative studies between Islamic and Western metaphysical traditions can illuminate shared concerns and divergent approaches to questions of existence and causality. Interdisciplinary research integrating insights from Islamic metaphysics with modern scientific paradigms can offer innovative perspectives on the relationship between theology and science. Educational initiatives incorporating their works into curricula can enhance understanding of the richness of Islamic philosophy, fostering cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue. These steps can ensure that the intellectual legacy of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali continues to inspire and inform future scholarship (Fuenzalida, 2023).

CONCLUSION

This study identifies a key finding that distinguishes it from prior research: the metaphysical perspectives of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali, while often framed as oppositional, reveal a dynamic interplay that enriches Islamic philosophical thought. Ibn Sina's rationalist hierarchy of existence and Al-Ghazali's theological critique of causality are not merely contradictory but complementary, offering a balanced exploration of metaphysical problems. Their debates demonstrate a shared commitment to addressing the limits of human understanding and the nature of divine reality, highlighting the intellectual diversity within Islamic metaphysics.

The research contributes conceptually and methodologically to the study of Islamic philosophy. Conceptually, it bridges the gap between rationalist and theological traditions, demonstrating how their interplay advances metaphysical inquiry. Methodologically, the combination of textual analysis of primary sources and comparative frameworks provides a

nuanced understanding of their perspectives. This dual contribution enriches academic discussions by offering a holistic approach to studying Islamic metaphysics, which can be applied to similar debates in other philosophical traditions.

The study is limited by its focus on selected primary texts and a reliance on qualitative analysis. Expanding the scope to include additional works by Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali, as well as comparative studies with other Islamic philosophers, could provide a more comprehensive understanding. Future research should also explore the practical implications of their metaphysical ideas for contemporary debates on science, religion, and ethics. Integrating quantitative methods and interdisciplinary approaches would further enhance the robustness and applicability of the findings, paving the way for a broader engagement with Islamic metaphysical thought.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Look this example below:
Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.
Author 2: Conceptualization; Data curation; In-vestigation.
Author 3: Data curation; Investigation.
Author 4: Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - original draft.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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