

The Concept of Wahdat al-Wujud Ibn 'Arabi's Thought and Its Relevance in Sufism

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Received: Nov 13, 2024	Revised: Nov 15, 2024	Accepted: Dec 26, 2024	Online: Dec 26, 2024
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ABSTRACT

This study examines the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud in Ibn 'Arabi's thought and its relevance to modern Sufism. Wahdat al-Wujud is a metaphysical view that asserts that the entire universe is merely a manifestation of the singular and absolute existence of God. The research employs a qualitative method with a literature review approach to analyze Ibn 'Arabi's thought through his major works such as Futuhat al-Makkiyah and Fushush al-Hikam, and to explore criticisms of this concept, particularly from figures such as Ibn Taymiyyah. The findings indicate that Wahdat al-Wujud has not only had a significant impact on the development of classical Sufism but also remains relevant in modern Sufi practices, especially in spiritual practices that emphasize human unity and awareness of God. Despite theological criticisms, particularly concerning accusations of pantheism, Wahdat al-Wujud continues to be a foundational principle in many mystical practices and understandings within Islam. This study offers a new perspective on the application of Wahdat al-Wujud in contemporary spiritual life and its contribution to modern understandings of Sufism.

Keywords: *Ibn 'Arabi, Islamic Thought, Wahdat al-Wujud*

Journal Homepage <https://journal.ypidathu.or.id/index.php/ijnis>

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How to cite: Hidayat, F. Y. (2024). The Concept of Wahdat al-Wujud Ibn 'Arabi's Thought and Its Relevance in Sufism. *Journal of Noesantara Islamic Studies*, 1(6), 325-334. <https://doi.org/10.70177/ijnis.v1i6.1306>

Published by: Yayasan Pendidikan Islam Daarut Thufulah

INTRODUCTION

Sufism, or tasawuf, is the esoteric dimension of Islam that focuses on seeking spiritual closeness to Allah through self-purification, dhikr (remembrance of God), and mystical practices (Akbar et al., 2024; Aldahadha & Al Dwakat, 2025; Hussein, 2024; Qodir, 2024; Widiastuti & Lubis, 2024). The origins of Sufism can be traced back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), when he and his companions practiced a simple, devout life, concentrating on an inner relationship with God. At this early stage, the term “tasawuf” did not exist, but concepts such as zuhud (asceticism) and taqwa (piety) laid the foundation for later Sufi practices.

Sufism began to develop as a distinct science in the 8th and 9th centuries CE. During this period, significant figures such as Hasan al-Basri (642–728 CE) emerged,

known for popularizing zuhud and a simple life as a means of drawing closer to Allah. Subsequently, Sufi figures like Rabi'ah al-Adawiyyah (717–801 CE) introduced the concept of mahabbah (divine love) as the foundation of the spiritual journey, emphasizing love for Allah without seeking paradise or fearing hell.

In the 9th and 10th centuries CE, Sufism began to transform from ascetic practices to more philosophical inquiries, influenced by the integration of Greek philosophy into the Islamic world (Farque, 2024; Ifraq, 2024; Mahmud, 2024). A major figure of this period was Al-Junaid al-Baghdadi, who introduced the concepts of fana' (self-annihilation) and baqa' (eternity) in the Sufi spiritual experience. Other prominent Sufis such as Al-Hallaj (858–922 CE) proposed the concept of Anā al-Ḥaqq (I am the Truth), considered a form of unity with God. However, Al-Hallaj was executed for allegedly crossing theological boundaries in Islam.

The golden age of Sufism occurred during the 12th to 14th centuries CE, when Sufism reached its peak in scholarship and more structured organization. One of the greatest figures in Sufi history is Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE), whose work *Ihya' Ulum al-Din* successfully integrated Sufi teachings with orthodox Islamic theology, making it an integral part of Islamic intellectual tradition (Alsoos & Dihstelhoff, 2024; Ben Jedidia & Hamza, 2024; Berger et al., 2025; Hussain et al., 2024). During this period, figures such as Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240 CE) also emerged, introducing the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud (Unity of Existence), which posits that everything that exists is merely a manifestation of the singular and absolute existence of God. Ibn 'Arabi became one of the most influential figures in the development of philosophical Sufism.

Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240 CE), a prominent Sufi and philosopher, proposed various profound concepts related to existence and the relationship between humans and God. One of Ibn 'Arabi's most influential and controversial ideas is Wahdat al-Wujud or Unity of Existence. Through this concept, Ibn 'Arabi explained that the entire universe and all its creatures are merely manifestations of the singular and absolute existence of God. This thought became a foundation in Sufism and influenced various Islamic spiritual practices.

However, the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud has also generated theological debates throughout the history of Islam. Many scholars and theologians consider this view potentially problematic, especially regarding the blurring of boundaries between God and creation. For example, scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah criticized this thinking as a form of pantheism, which equates God with His creation, something opposed by orthodox Islamic teachings (Bin Che Nordin, 2024; Suleimān et al., 2024). Nevertheless, Wahdat al-Wujud remains a crucial pillar in the study of Islamic philosophy and spirituality, particularly in the development of modern Sufism, where Sufi practices increasingly focus on spiritual experience and union with God.

Several studies relate to the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud. Research by S. Saad (2006) focuses on critiques of Wahdat al-Wujud from figures such as Ahmad Sirhindi and Ibn Taymiyyah, highlighting criticisms of Ibn 'Arabi's ideas. Studies by M.R. Fuadi (2013) and K. Mustamain (2020) tend to focus on the ontological aspects and conceptual

influence of Wahdat al-Wujud on philosophy or Sufi poetry, without specifically examining its contemporary relevance in modern Sufi practices. On the other hand, E.I.I. Purnamanita (2023) explores Wahdat al-Wujud from a theoretical-philosophical approach, delving into its role within philosophical Sufism. This research specifically highlights the contemporary relevance of the concept, examining how it is applied in spiritual practices within modern Sufism and its impact on current Islamic spiritual understanding. Thus, this study aims to fill the gaps left by previous research by examining Wahdat al-Wujud in a more holistic and contemporary manner, considering not only theoretical perspectives but also its application and impact on the spiritual lives of Muslims today. By analyzing primary and secondary sources related to Ibn 'Arabi's thought and critiques of it, this research hopes to provide new contributions to understanding the development of Sufism and spiritual thought in Islam.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative method with a library research approach to explore Ibn 'Arabi's thought regarding the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud and its relevance in Sufism. This method was chosen because Ibn 'Arabi's ideas are extensively documented in his writings, and analyzing secondary literature that explains his concepts is essential for achieving a comprehensive understanding. The stages of this research method include: (1) Data Collection. The data used in this study consists of two types: Primary Data, obtained from Ibn 'Arabi's works, such as *Futuh al-Makkiyah* and *Fushush al-Hikam*, which are the main foundations for understanding the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud (Abror et al., 2024; Lamallam, 2025; Mustapha et al., 2024). These works are analyzed to identify Ibn 'Arabi's views on the relationship between God and the universe, as well as the principle of the unity of existence that he proposed. Secondary Data is obtained from various modern literature discussing Ibn 'Arabi's thought and its influence in the world of Sufism. Important works such as those by William Chittick and Henry Corbin will be used to strengthen the analysis and provide a modern perspective on the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud (Corbin, 1969). Additionally, critiques of this concept from scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah will also be examined to understand the debates surrounding this idea (Taimiyah, 1997). (2) Data Analysis. The data analysis in this research is conducted using the content analysis method, a technique used to understand the meanings contained in texts and to clarify the concepts present in the reviewed literature. This study will focus on several aspects as follows: (3) Data Validity. To ensure data validity, this research will use source triangulation techniques. This is done by comparing the understanding of Wahdat al-Wujud from various sources, both classical works and modern analyses, to ensure that the conclusions drawn truly reflect Ibn 'Arabi's original ideas (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, all the data used comes from reliable sources, such as academic works published by reputable publishers, scholarly journals, and interpretations by experts in Sufism and Islamic philosophy. Thus, this research is expected to have strong validity and can serve as a reference for future studies related to Wahdat al-Wujud.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Wahdat al-Wujud in Ibn 'Arabi's Thought

The concept of Wahdat al-Wujud can be explained as the view that God is the single reality that is the source of everything. According to Ibn 'Arabi, everything in this world is merely a manifestation or appearance of God, but in essence, only God truly exists. In other words, the existence of all beings has no independent reality but is a reflection of the One Divine Existence (Alhayyani, 2024; Tawil, 2025; Zuhdi & Nasir, 2024). This concept asserts that the entire universe and everything within it is merely a reflection of God's existence. All creatures, objects, and events we see or experience, according to Ibn 'Arabi, are simply forms of God's manifestation in various forms. While each entity appears different, in essence, they all originate from the same source God. Therefore, the experience of life in this world is a journey toward the realization of God's Oneness, where all dualities or differences are merely illusions that must be transcended. In this view, the spiritual goal of human beings is to achieve ma'rifah (true knowledge) of God and to realize that all existence is one with Him.

Ibn 'Arabi uses the term al-Haqq (The Truth) to refer to God and khalq (creation) to refer to everything that is created. He states that between al-Haqq and khalq, there is a very close relationship because all creation originates from God and exists only through His Existence. However, this does not mean that creation is God in a literal sense; rather, they exist in complete dependence on God.

This thought demonstrates that creation, while not God, cannot be separated from God. They attain their existence and being only through His will and existence. In Ibn 'Arabi's view, God is the source of everything, and all that exists is merely a manifestation of God, but not identical to Him. Creation is dependent on God for its existence, while God is the independent, absolute Being who requires nothing (Ayash et al., 2024; Borrillo, 2025; Yacoob, 2024). This relationship illustrates the connection between the Absolute (God) and the relative (creation), where creatures must realize that their existence is meaningful only in relation to al-Haqq (The Truth). Furthermore, Ibn 'Arabi emphasizes that the spiritual path humans must follow is to recognize this interconnectedness, seeing everything as signs of God that reflect His Oneness. Each creation becomes a reflection of God's attributes, allowing humans to know God through His creations without equating them with God Himself.

This thought is based on interpretations of several verses from the Qur'an, such as in Surah Al-Hadid (57:3), which mentions that God is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. This verse, in Ibn 'Arabi's view, shows that God encompasses everything, both visible and hidden (Ergİnlİ, 2024; Kozah, 2024). This interpretation explains that God not only encompasses all aspects of visible life (the manifest) but also includes everything hidden (the hidden), both in the physical and spiritual dimensions. Thus, God is the source of the beginning and the end of existence, present in all aspects of creation while transcending its boundaries. According to Ibn 'Arabi, this reinforces the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud, where God not only creates the world but is also present in every

manifestation of His creation, even though He remains transcendent and not confined by those manifestations.

This understanding leads humans to the realization that, to know God deeply, they must look beyond the apparent and comprehend the spiritual essence of everything. Every phenomenon in the universe is a reflection of God's attributes, and in this process, humans must strive to recognize God through His signs, both outwardly and inwardly. This interpretation encourages humans to realize that God's presence is not limited to specific dimensions but encompasses all of existence, both visible and invisible.

The Relevance of Wahdat al-Wujud in Sufism

The concept of Wahdat al-Wujud has had a significant influence on the development of Sufism. It has become the foundation for many mystical practices and understandings in Islam, particularly in relation to the quest for union with God. Through meditation, dhikr (remembrance of God), and other spiritual exercises, a Sufi strives to erase the ego and realize that everything is part of the divine unity (Cherif, 2025; Gianniti, 2024). This influence is evident in various Sufi traditions that emphasize the direct experience of God. Sufis believe that by following the correct spiritual path, they can reach the level of ma'rifah, or deep recognition of God. In this process, practices such as dhikr (constant remembrance of God) and fana' (annihilation of the self into the Divine Will) serve as means to obliterate the ego or limited self, so that only the awareness of God's Oneness remains.

Through the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud, Sufis are encouraged to see all phenomena in this world as manifestations of God and to release the view of duality between the created and the Creator. This profound mystical experience aims to achieve union with God, not physically, but spiritually and consciously, where a person realizes that nothing has reality except through the existence of God. This view has greatly influenced art, poetry, and philosophy in the Islamic world, where many Sufi works focus on the themes of divine love and the pursuit of unity with God.

Ibn 'Arabi emphasized the importance of ma'rifah, or inner knowledge, which is attained through direct experience of God, rather than through intellectual knowledge alone. He argued that a Sufi must transcend the duality between God and creation, realizing that in the ultimate reality, there is no separation between the two (Chittick, n.d.). Ma'rifah cannot be achieved through logic or theoretical study alone but through profound and personal spiritual experience. In Ibn 'Arabi's view, true knowledge is the direct experience of God, where a Sufi does not merely understand God as an entity separate from the world, but feels His presence in every aspect of life. Thus, the separation between God and creation is an illusion created by the limitations of human perception.

Ibn 'Arabi stressed that the path to ma'rifah involves a process of self-purification and the elimination of the ego, where a Sufi must let go of the view that they are separate from God. Only then can a Sufi realize that the entire universe, including themselves, is a manifestation of God's existence. This awareness elevates a Sufi to a higher spiritual level,

where they no longer perceive a distinction between the Creator and the created but understand that both are aspects of the same reality. Ultimately, the Sufi's goal is to achieve fana' (annihilation of the self in God), where they dissolve into the consciousness of God's absolute Oneness.

The relevance of Wahdat al-Wujud is also evident in modern Sufi practices, where contemporary Sufis often emphasize the unity of humanity and spiritual oneness as part of the awareness of God's presence in every aspect of life (Abu Zayd, 2004). In a social context, this concept can be interpreted as a call to appreciate diversity and tolerance, recognizing that all differences ultimately stem from the same source, which is God.

Modern Sufi practices show that Wahdat al-Wujud is not only related to individual mystical experiences but also has profound social implications. Awareness of God's Oneness and the unity of all creation encourages Sufis and their followers to see all of humanity as a single spiritual family that is interconnected (Aisyahrani et al., 2024; Ivanyi, 2025; Jamshed et al., 2024; Yunpeng & Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff, 2024). Differences in ethnicity, religion, culture, and language are seen as manifestations of God's creativity, all of which originate from the same One Existence.

In practice, this fosters values such as tolerance, harmony, and respect for diversity. A Sufi who is conscious of the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud strives to transcend prejudice and differences, understanding that everything is essentially an expression of God. This also inspires concrete actions in daily life, where contemporary Sufis actively promote interfaith dialogue, peace, and social justice, driven by the belief that all human beings hold equal value in the eyes of God.

Criticism of Wahdat al-Wujud

Despite its significant influence in the world of Sufism, the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud is not without criticism, both from traditional and modern scholars. One of the main criticisms comes from the thinker Ibn Taymiyyah, who believed that Ibn 'Arabi's understanding tended to approach pantheism, the belief that God and the universe are one and the same (Taimiyah, 1997). Ibn Taymiyyah rejected this notion, arguing that it could lead to a denial of God's transcendence.

For Ibn Taymiyyah, God's transcendence is an essential aspect of Islamic theology that must be preserved. According to him, God is above all creation and cannot be viewed as identical to the beings He created (Gholami & Altobrando, 2024; Oğuz et al., 2024; Yurtseven, 2024). Equating God with the universe could obscure the distinction between the Creator and His creation, thus eliminating the clear separation between the two. In Ibn Taymiyyah's view, this could lead to dangerous theological consequences, such as diminishing God's greatness and majesty.

Additionally, Ibn Taymiyyah argued that Wahdat al-Wujud could potentially lead to deviations in religious understanding, where people might mistakenly interpret unity with God as justification for equating themselves with God or even denying the distinction between God and creation. For him, this concept contradicts the fundamental teachings of Islam, which emphasize a clear separation between the Creator and the creation. In this

traditional view, God remains transcendent and utterly distinct from all that He has created, while creatures only exist by His will.

Moreover, throughout the history of Islamic thought, Wahdat al-Wujud has been debated by scholars of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and theology, who were concerned that this concept could lead to misunderstandings among the general public regarding the relationship between God and His creation. Wahdat al-Wujud is a mystical doctrine that asserts that everything in the universe is a manifestation of God's existence. In this view, there is no reality separate from God; all that exists is part of the Divine reality. However, scholars of fiqh and theology feared that this teaching could confuse and obscure people's understanding of the relationship between God and His creation. They worried that this doctrine could lead to interpretations that equate God with His creation, which could conflict with the principles of tawhid (the oneness of God) in Islam.

In this context, the debate surrounding Wahdat al-Wujud often reflects the tension between more esoteric mystical views and the clearer and more systematic orthodox understanding of Islamic theology. While there have been various perspectives in the history of Islamic thought regarding the relationship between God and His creation, it is important to recognize that this debate also represents an effort to preserve the integrity of Islamic teachings from potential deviations in interpretation.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud introduced by Ibn 'Arabi has had a profound influence on the development of Sufism and Islamic spirituality. Wahdat al-Wujud teaches that the entire universe is merely a manifestation of the singular Divine Being, and that everything ultimately depends on Him. This concept has become the foundation for many mystical practices in Islam, especially in the Sufi's quest for spiritual union with God.

However, Wahdat al-Wujud has sparked theological debates throughout history, particularly from scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah, who criticized this thought as being close to pantheism. These critiques reflect concerns that the concept might blur the line between God and creation, potentially leading to misunderstandings in the understanding of Islamic creed (Aqidah).

On the other hand, the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud remains relevant in modern Sufi practice. This understanding of the unity of existence contributes to a more inclusive spiritual perspective, appreciating diversity and strengthening the relationship between humanity and God in contemporary life. Overall, this research provides a holistic view of the relevance and impact of Wahdat al-Wujud in both classical and modern Sufi practice, while also opening the door for further studies on its application in the contemporary Islamic world.

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