

**AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN METAPHYSICS AND THEOLOGY IN ISLAMIC  
PHILOSOPHY**

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**ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ЭПИСТЕМОЛОГИЧЕСКОГО АНАЛИЗА  
ВЗАИМООТНОШЕНИЙ МЕТАФИЗИКИ И ТЕОЛОГИИ В  
ИСЛАМСКОЙ ФИЛОСОФИИ**

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**Abstract.** This article offers an epistemological account of how metaphysics (ilahiyyat) and theology (kalam) relate in Islamic philosophy. Reading al-Farabi, Avicenna, al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, and Mulla Şadra comparatively, it proposes three models – separation, subordination, and integration – framed by “method – source – normativity.” The analysis shows that the boundary between demonstrative metaphysics and dialectical theology shifts historically, reflecting different standards of justification grounded in causality, necessity, and self-evidence. The study maintains a neutral scholarly stance.

**Keywords:** metaphysics, kalam, demonstration, dialectic, typology, Islamic philosophy

**Аннотация.** Данная статья предлагает эпистемологический анализ соотношения метафизики (ilahiyyat) и теологии (kalam) в исламской философии. На основе сравнительного прочтения трудов аль-Фараби, Ибн Сины, аль-Газали, Ибн Рушда, Фахр ад-Дина ар-Рази и Муллы Садры предлагаются три модели их взаимодействия – разделение, подчинение и интеграция, рассматриваемые в координатах «метод – источник – нормативность». Анализ показывает, что граница между демонстративной

метафизикой и диалектическим каламом исторически изменчива и определяется различными критериями эпистемического обоснования, связанными с представлениями о причинности, необходимости и самоочевидности. Исследование выдержано в нейтральной научной перспективе.

**Ключевые слова:** метафизика, калам, доказательство, диалектика, типология, исламская философия

### Introduction

Within the tradition of Islamic philosophy, the term *ilahiyyat* developed along two distinct but interconnected trajectories. The first refers to philosophical metaphysics, understood as the highest part of philosophy and concerned with the study of being qua being and its universal principles. The second designates *kalam*, a systematic practice aimed at the rational defense of doctrinal claims through logical argumentation and dialectical reasoning. The relationship between these two intellectual traditions has been interpreted in different ways across historical periods and schools of thought: in some contexts they are sharply distinguished, in others one is subordinated to the other, while in still others they are integrated into a single epistemic framework.

The central research problem of this article is to reconstruct the epistemological foundations of this relationship. Specifically, it examines how metaphysics and *kalam* differ and interact with respect to (1) sources of knowledge (reason, experience, and first principles), (2) modes of proof (*burhan*—demonstration, *jadal*—dialectic, *khitāba*—rhetorical persuasion), and (3) governing epistemic norms such as necessity, causality, and teleology. Rather than treating the issue as a doctrinal dispute, the article approaches it as a problem in the theory of knowledge and scientific classification.

To this end, the study undertakes a comparative analysis of major figures in Islamic intellectual history, including al-Farabi, Avicenna, al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, and Mulla Ṣadra [1-6]. Their positions are examined alongside contemporary scholarly interpretations offered by modern researchers such as Dimitri Gutas, Oliver Leaman, Richard Frank, and Sabine Schmidtke [7-9]. This comparison makes it possible to identify both continuity and transformation in the epistemic boundaries between philosophy and theology.

The article argues that the interaction between metaphysics and *kalam* can be analytically described through three recurring models: separation, subordination, and integration. Each model reflects a specific understanding of epistemic authority, proof standards, and normative aims. By mapping these models historically and conceptually, the study seeks to clarify how Islamic

thinkers negotiated the limits of rational demonstration and dialectical reasoning within a broader philosophical framework.

Throughout the analysis, a neutral and descriptive scholarly stance is maintained. The article does not engage in the evaluation of religious beliefs as such; instead, it focuses on methodological and epistemological issues relevant to the philosophy of science and the history of philosophy. In this sense, the discussion aims to contribute to contemporary debates on the plurality of rational methods and the structure of philosophical inquiry.

## Results.

### **First Result: On the Subject and Aim of Metaphysics**

According to al-Farabi, metaphysics investigates being qua being and examines first principles and causes within the classification of the sciences. Its main epistemic criterion is the validity of demonstrative proof (*burhan*). Avicenna advances this framework by presenting metaphysics as a universal ontological inquiry that culminates in knowledge of the Necessary Existent. In his account, epistemic priority is given to the self-evidence of the concept of existence (*wujud*) and to the construction of demonstrative reasoning from first principles. Within this tradition, *ilahiyat* refers to the philosophical dimension of metaphysics rather than to doctrinal theology. [1, pp. 115–132; 2, pp. 21–45].

### **Second Result: On Method and Purpose in Kalam**

Kalam develops normative strategies for the rational defense of doctrine through dialectical reasoning. Its dominant modes of argument are dialectic (*jadal*) and rhetoric (*khiṭaba*), although some theologians seek to approach demonstrative certainty. Al-Ghazali's analysis of causality illustrates this approach: necessary causal connection is replaced by possibility and customary regularity, reflecting epistemic caution rather than anti-rationalism. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi further expands this tendency by reformulating metaphysical concepts within the methodological standards of kalam. [3, pp. 217–249; 5, vol. 1, pp. 55–90].

### **Third Result: A Typology of Relationships**

The analysis identifies three models of interaction between metaphysics and kalam:

Separation model: metaphysics and kalam function as independent disciplines with distinct aims and methods, preserving strict demonstrative standards (al-Farabi, Avicenna).

Subordination model: either metaphysics is subordinated to theological normativity or kalam is adjusted to demonstrative criteria. Ibn Rushd exemplifies the latter by insisting on demonstrative standards in philosophical debate.

Integration model: in Mulla Şadra's thought, metaphysics, logic, and other forms of theoretical inquiry are unified within a comprehensive framework of hikma. [1; 2; 4, vol. 1, pp. 5–30; 6, vol. 1, pp. 12–40].

#### **Fourth Result: Recalibration of Epistemic Criteria**

Across historical developments, key concepts such as causality, necessity, and possibility are reinterpreted, and the boundary between demonstration and dialectic is repeatedly redrawn. Al-Ghazali's critique of necessary causation privileges epistemic probability over strict necessity, while Ibn Rushd defends demonstrative reasoning as the proper standard for evaluating skeptical claims. [3, pp. 229–241; 4, vol. 2, pp. 270–298].

#### **Fifth Result: Contemporary Readings**

Recent scholarship (D. Gutas, O. Leaman, R. Frank, S. Schmidtke) examines the metaphysics–kalam relationship through scientific classification, standards of justification, and historical context. This approach enables a neutral reconstruction of epistemic typologies rather than confessional interpretations.

### **Discussion**

This section examines key epistemological positions concerning the relationship between metaphysics and theology in Islamic philosophy through concise textual references and critical analysis.

First, Avicenna defines the primary task of metaphysics as the study of being insofar as it is being and the demonstrative justification of knowledge of the Necessary Existent through strict proof (burhan) [Avicenna, pp. 27–35]. From an epistemological standpoint, this method is logically strong, as it proceeds from self-evident principles toward necessary conclusions. Its main difficulty, however, lies in the historical and conceptual variability of philosophical categories, which raises the problem of how claims of self-evidence can be verified intersubjectively across different intellectual contexts.

Second, al-Ghazali's critique of causality challenges the assumption of a necessary connection between cause and effect, arguing instead that what is observed is a consistent conjunction established by experience [al-Ghazali, pp. 229–241]. Methodologically, this position introduces a valuable form of epistemic caution, preventing unwarranted metaphysical certainty. At the same time, it potentially restricts the scope of demonstrative necessity and weakens the explanatory power of metaphysical reasoning grounded in causal analysis.

Third, Ibn Rushd's insistence on restoring demonstrative standards aims to shift philosophical and theological debates from dialectical reasoning (jadal) to strict demonstration (burhan) [Averroes, vol. 1, pp. 5–30; vol. 2, pp. 270–298]. This move can be understood as a form of methodological purification: once

standards of proof are clearly defined, the epistemic relationship between metaphysics and theology becomes more transparent and open to rational evaluation.

Fourth, in the works of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, philosophical concepts are reformulated within kalam-based normative frameworks while maintaining logical distinctions between the two disciplines [Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, vol. 1, pp. 55–90]. This approach illustrates the possibility of controlled integration, where the boundaries between philosophy and theology are preserved but rendered intellectually permeable.

Finally, Mulla Ṣadra's wisdom-based synthesis (ḥikma) presents a multilayered epistemic structure in which rational demonstration retains its internal coherence while being situated within a broader framework that requires shared rational and conceptual standards [Mulla Ṣadra, vol. 1, pp. 12–40]. In this model, integration does not undermine methodological rigor but recontextualizes philosophical proof within an overarching epistemic unity.

From this perspective, the proposed typology demonstrates its scholarly value in three respects. First, the separation model prevents methodological confusion by keeping metaphysical and theological inquiry within distinct epistemic standards. Second, the subordination model clarifies normative priority and aligns argumentation accordingly. Third, the integration model requires explicit methodological protocols for translating concepts, logical forms, and categories between traditions. All three models operate within a neutral academic framework and avoid engagement with doctrinal or confessional claims.

**Conclusion.** This study has examined the epistemological relationship between metaphysics and theology in Islamic philosophy by analyzing their subject matter, methods, and standards of justification. Through a comparative reading of major figures—ranging from al-Farabi and Avicenna to al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, and Mulla Ṣadra—the article has shown that the boundary between philosophical metaphysics (ilahiyyat) and theological discourse (kalam) is neither fixed nor uniform, but historically and conceptually dynamic.

The proposed typology—separation, subordination, and integration—demonstrates that differences between metaphysics and theology arise primarily from divergent epistemic commitments, especially regarding the nature of causality, necessity, and the role of demonstration versus dialectical reasoning. While strict separation preserves methodological clarity, subordination highlights normative priority, and integration offers a structured framework for epistemic cooperation without dissolving disciplinary distinctions.

By focusing on epistemological criteria rather than doctrinal positions, this analysis contributes to a clearer understanding of how philosophical and theological reasoning interact within Islamic intellectual history. The study also suggests that classical debates on demonstration, normativity, and epistemic authority remain relevant for contemporary discussions in philosophical methodology. Ultimately, the findings support a neutral scholarly approach in which metaphysics and theology are assessed according to their respective epistemic standards, rather than through confessional or ideological frameworks.

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