



Tahafut al-Falasifah as a Critique of Paradigms: A Philosophical Analysis from the Perspective of Modern Science

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to reread Al-Ghazali's Tahafut al-Falasifah not merely as a theological polemic text, but as a critique of scientific paradigms that has profound relevance to modern philosophy of science. Al-Ghazali's critique of rationalist claims, particularly regarding causality, the eternity of the world, and the limitations of reason, is positioned as an attempt to shake the established epistemic foundations of his time. A qualitative-comparative approach is used by analyzing the primary text of Tahafut hermeneutically, then connecting it with the thoughts of modern philosophers such as David Hume, Karl Popper, and Thomas Kuhn. The results of the study show that Al-Ghazali had already presented an epistemological awareness that aligns with the discourse of the paradigm shift in science. He emphasized that causal relationships are not absolute certainties, but rather habits that can change according to transcendental will. This perspective finds resonance in the development of contemporary science, particularly in quantum physics and the philosophy of science, which emphasize the tentative nature of knowledge. Furthermore, Al-Ghazali's paradigm critique also carries ethical implications: knowledge must always be based on moral values and spiritual awareness to avoid being trapped in scientific arrogance. Thus, Tahafut al-Falasifah can be understood as a laboratory for epistemological criticism that remains relevant for building a paradigm of modern science that is humble, reflective, and humanity-oriented. This research emphasizes the importance of integrating revelation, reason, and science in formulating a new direction for Islamic philosophy and its contribution to the global discourse on the philosophy of science.

Keywords: *Al-Ghazali, Tahafut Al-Falasifah, Paradigm Criticism, Philosophy Of Science, Modern Epistemology*



INTRODUCTION

Al-Ghazali's *Tahafut al-Falasifah* is often positioned as a classic text that marks the intellectual tension between Islamic theology and the Greek philosophy adopted by Muslim philosophers. In it, Al-Ghazali critiques twenty philosophical doctrines that he considers contradictory to the basic principles of Islamic teachings. However, rereading this text solely in terms of the theology versus philosophy contestation diminishes its significance (Abdullah, 2020). Because, in fact, *Tahafut* can be understood as a profound critique of the paradigm of thinking that claims a monopoly on truth through rationality alone.

In the tradition of modern philosophy of science, especially since Thomas Kuhn introduced the concept of paradigm shift, the discourse on science is no longer seen as a linear accumulation of truth. Instead, it moves through paradigm shifts that interpret, dismantle, and replace each other. Interestingly, long before this discourse emerged in the 20th century, Al-Ghazali, through *Tahafut*, had already offered a similar critique: that the established philosophical system of his time should not be considered final, but rather open to testing, correction, and even replacement (Hakim, 2022).

Al-Ghazali's critique of the concept of causality is the most relevant example to contemporary philosophical debates. He rejected the absolute causal relationship held by the philosophers, asserting that the order of the universe depends on God's will, not on the inevitable laws of nature (Nasr, 2021). This perspective, when contextualized, echoes the skepticism in modern physics towards classical determinism, especially after the advent of relativity theory and quantum mechanics, which overhauled the understanding of linear causation.

Through this approach, *Tahafut* can be read as a text that not only combats philosophy but also warns against the absolutization of reason. Al-Ghazali is not anti-rational, but rather asserts that reason has limits that must be balanced by revelation. From the perspective of modern science, this stance aligns with the epistemological awareness that the scientific method, while effective, is incapable of answering metaphysical questions or the normative values that underlie human life (Lamusu & et al, 2025).

Contextualizing Al-Ghazali's paradigm critique in the modern era is crucial because we live in a world that still often glorifies science as the sole source of truth. The secularization of



ANJASMORO

ISLAMIC INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

knowledge in the West, for example, has given rise to scientism, which views reality solely from an empirical-rational perspective. Yet, recent developments in the philosophy of science demonstrate the limitations of science, both in explaining meaning, values, and the purpose of life. This is where the relevance of *Tahafut* finds renewed momentum. Furthermore, rereading *Tahafut* as a paradigm critique opens up space for dialogue between the Islamic tradition and global philosophical discourse (Hidayatullah, 2019). Al-Ghazali presented a model of internal criticism that was rooted in scientific authority and spirituality, yet at the same time capable of challenging the dominant knowledge architecture of his time.

This parallels the spirit of contemporary philosophy, which rejects claims of a single truth, whether in the form of modernism or positivism. Therefore, examining *Tahafut al-Falasifah* from the perspective of modern philosophy of science is not merely a historical endeavor, but also a hermeneutical step to connect classical texts with contemporary intellectual problems. This process allows us to understand that Al-Ghazali's critique did not stop in the Middle Ages, but continues to dialogue with issues of epistemology, cosmology, and scientific methodology in the modern era. Therefore, this study proposes a new reading: *Tahafut al-Falasifah* as a paradigm critique. A work capable of inspiring cross-era reflection on the limits of rationality, the vulnerability of the absolutization of knowledge, and the importance of integrating reason, revelation, and human experience. Through this analysis, we can see Al-Ghazali's contribution not only to the Islamic treasury but also to the global philosophy of knowledge that continues to seek a balance between certainty, doubt, and meaning.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a critical-comparative philosophical analysis. *Tahafut al-Falasifah* by Al-Ghazali serves as the primary source, while modern philosophical literature (Thomas Kuhn, Karl Popper, Imre Lakatos, Paul Feyerabend) and contemporary cosmological and epistemological studies serve as secondary sources (Rohmaniyah, 2025). The main objective of this research is to reread *Tahafut* not merely as a classical polemical text, but as a paradigm critique that can interact with the discourse of modern philosophy of science. The approaches used include philosophical hermeneutics, namely interpreting the text by considering the historical context and new horizons of meaning; analysis



ANJASMORO

ISLAMIC INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

of scientific paradigms, by linking Al-Ghazali's critique of rationalist philosophy with Kuhn's paradigm shift theory and Popper's falsification; and epistemological critique, by examining the relevance of Al-Ghazali's ideas about causality, the eternity of the world, and the limitations of reason through the perspective of modern science.

Data were collected through analytical and selective literature studies, then analyzed descriptively-analytically, comparatively-critically, and synthetically-conceptually. This process created an argumentative bridge between the legacy of classical Islamic thought and contemporary global philosophical debates (Amruddin, 2022). The uniqueness of this methodology lies in its attempt to position *Tahafut al-Falasifah* as a laboratory for paradigm criticism, not simply an apologetic text. Thus, this research is expected to enrich studies of Al-Ghazali and provide new contributions to the philosophy of science, particularly regarding the dialogue between rationality, revelation, and modern science.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Recontextualization of *Tahafut al-Falasifah*

Al-Ghazali's monumental work, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, is often narrowly understood as the "killer of philosophy" or as a turning point in the decline of rationality in Islam. This narrative has been repeatedly passed down in intellectual history textbooks, leading the text to be viewed merely as a classic polemic between theology and philosophy. However, when read with a new perspective, *Tahafut* does not merely close off space for thought, but rather opens the way for a critique of the absolutist claims generated by the dominant intellectual paradigm of its time. This recontextualization breathes fresh life into the classic text, ensuring its continued relevance in global philosophical conversations (Renaldi, 2025).

In the context of modern philosophy of science, Al-Ghazali's critique of the philosophers can be seen as parallel to Thomas Kuhn's discourse on paradigm shift. Al-Ghazali rejected the rationalist philosophical systems of Ibn Sina and Al-Farabi as final constructs of knowledge. For him, every system has limitations that can collapse when tested with new perspectives, an awareness that has become the foundation of contemporary philosophy of science. In other words, *Tahafut* can be understood as an epistemological exercise in continually questioning truth, not simply a rejection of philosophy.



Furthermore, Al-Ghazali's critique of deterministic causality that fire inevitably burns cotton, for example offers a perspective that rejects the absolutism of natural law. This argument has found resonance in modern physics, where quantum theory replaced Newtonian determinism with probability and uncertainty. This means that *Tahafut* does not stop at medieval polemics, but can engage in dialogue with modern science in challenging claims to sole certainty (Rizky, 2022).

Recontextualizing *Tahafut al-Falasifah* means presenting it as a dynamic (living) text that transcends its time. It is not a rigid monument that freezes reason, but rather a critical mirror that reminds us that every edifice of knowledge, no matter how strong, remains fragile if it is closed off from correction. Thus, Al-Ghazali's legacy can be understood as a major contribution to the global philosophical tradition: teaching the importance of epistemological humility, opening a space for dialogue between revelation, reason, and science, and affirming that truth never stops at a single paradigm.

The Rationalist Philosophical Paradigm Criticized by Al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali, through *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, positioned himself not simply as a theologian who rejected philosophy, but as a critical thinker who dared to challenge the most fundamental assumptions of the rationalist paradigm. His critique was directed at three key doctrines: the eternity of the world, deterministic causality, and God's knowledge of particulars. These three points were not merely part of a metaphysical debate, but rather the foundation that supported the entire edifice of rationalist philosophy (Ramin, 2017). By undermining this foundation, Al-Ghazali seemed to shake the intellectual paradigm that in his time was considered established and almost unchallenged.

First, based on the idea of the eternity of the world, the philosophers held that the universe was eternal, without beginning or end. For Al-Ghazali, this doctrine was dangerous because it obscured God's role as Creator. He asserted that the universe is not eternal, but rather created and can be destroyed at His will. This critique was not only theological but also epistemological: he challenged the absolute claims of rationalism, which ignored the transcendental dimension (Waston, 2025).

Second, in the concept of causality, philosophers believed that cause-and-effect relationships were necessary, for example, that fire inevitably burns cotton. Al-Ghazali rejected



this certainty, stating that it was not fire itself that caused the cotton to burn, but rather God's will that permitted the burning. His rejection was not to negate the order of nature, but to assert that this order was not final, but rather rested on a transcendental source. This perspective would later find resonance in modern science, particularly when classical determinism collapsed in quantum theory (Del Medico, 2024).

Third, regarding God's knowledge of particulars, the philosophers assumed that God only knows reality universally, not in particular detail. Al-Ghazali viewed this view as diminishing God's omniscience. His critique exposed the limitations of rationalist logic, which attempts to subjugate transcendence within the framework of human categories. Thus, he rejected the paradigm that closes off the space of divine mystery (Salahudin, 2021).

The rationalist philosophical paradigm criticized by Al-Ghazali was not actually rejected outright, but rather warned against its transformation into an intellectual dogma that negates revelation. Through *Tahafut*, he asserted that reason remains important, but cannot stand alone without transcendent correction. Thus, Al-Ghazali's critique can be understood as an attempt to maintain a balance: a rationality that is both productive and humble, open to the possibility that truth is broader than what reason alone can grasp.

Critique of Causality as the Axis of Dialogue with Modern Science

Al-Ghazali's critique of causality is one of the most radical and visionary ideas in Islamic intellectual history. He rejected the philosophical view that cause-and-effect relationships are necessary and deterministic. He argued that there is no guarantee that fire will ignite cotton on its own; it is God's will that truly causes the event to occur. This critique not only affirmed God's absolute power but also shook the paradigm of rationalism, which at the time viewed natural law as absolute and unshakable (Maulana, 2020).

Interestingly, this critique resonates in the development of modern science. Quantum theory, for example, demonstrates that causal relationships are not always linear and deterministic. Subatomic phenomena demonstrate the existence of uncertainty, where probability replaces absolute certainty. In this context, Al-Ghazali's views can be reread not as a rejection of science, but rather as a correction to the absolute claims of reason that close itself off to possibilities beyond apparent order. He seems to have opened up space for a more humble epistemology: that natural laws may simply be patterns of habit that can change according to



transcendental will.

The critique of causality also serves as an important entry point for dialogue between classical Islamic philosophy and modern philosophy of science. On the one hand, he cautions against science becoming trapped in rigid mechanistic determinism. On the other hand, he provides an ethical foundation that the order of nature is a trust, not a self-evident certainty. This view is relevant to critique contemporary science, which sometimes falls prey to the "arrogance of knowledge," as if reality can be completely controlled by humans. By positioning causality as a conditional relationship with divine will, Al-Ghazali presents a spiritual perspective that can enrich contemporary scientific discourse (Nurdiana, 2025).

Therefore, the critique of causality is not merely a metaphysical debate of the past, but rather a dialogue that bridges the gap between Islamic intellectual heritage and modern epistemology. It demonstrates that truth cannot be monopolized by a single paradigm, but rather is the result of a dialectic between reason, empirical experience, and transcendental consciousness. Thus, Al-Ghazali's legacy lives on, not as a rejection of science, but as a guide to prevent science from losing its ethical direction and awareness of its limitations.

Al-Ghazali and Epistemological Consciousness

Al-Ghazali holds a unique position in the history of Islamic philosophy due to his courage in questioning the limits of human knowledge. He not only criticized the philosophers but also challenged the arrogance of reason, which claims to be able to reach absolute reality. Al-Ghazali's epistemological awareness arose from a long intellectual and spiritual journey, from logic to philosophy to Sufism, and gave rise to the view that true knowledge is only possible through acknowledging human epistemic limitations. Here, he presents a model of dual consciousness: critical of the absolute claims of reason, yet open to transcendental horizons (Pramasto, 2019).

This epistemological awareness is clearly evident in *Tahafut al-Falasifah*. Al-Ghazali does not simply reject causality or the metaphysical premises of philosophy, but rather dismantles its epistemic foundations. He asserts that what we call "natural law" is essentially just a custom maintained by God. Thus, the claims of certainty of science and rationalist philosophy are shifted to probabilities that are always open to divine intervention. This awareness introduces a dimension of epistemological humility, recognizing that reason cannot be the sole judge of truth.

The relevance of this idea becomes even more apparent when placed in the context of



modern science. Quantum physics, chaos theory, and even contemporary philosophy of science (Hume, Popper, Kuhn) demonstrate that human knowledge is always tentative, partial, and open to revision (Festaria, 2023). In this light, Al-Ghazali appears not as an enemy of philosophy, but as a reminder that claims to certainty must be accompanied by an awareness of limitations. This epistemological awareness gives rise to a wiser intellectual attitude: critical, humble, and open to the complexities of reality.

Thus, Al-Ghazali's legacy is not only relevant for the study of Islamic theology or philosophy, but also for building a more reflective scientific paradigm. He taught that knowledge is not merely the accumulation of data and theories, but also an awareness of the spaces of ignorance that invite humility. In a modern world often mired in the arrogance of science, Al-Ghazali's voice is once again crucial: that true knowledge arises when reason, faith, and existential experience go hand in hand.

Tahafut as a Critique of Scientific Paradigms

Al-Ghazali's monumental work, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, is often understood simply as a theological polemic against rationalist philosophy. However, when reread through the lens of modern science, *Tahafut* actually represents a critique of the paradigm that predates contemporary epistemological discourse. Al-Ghazali not only rejects the content of the philosophers' arguments, but also challenges the epistemic foundations they built: that reason can be the source of final truth and that natural laws are necessarily valid. By raising fundamental questions about the legitimacy of scientific claims, he was in effect shifting the dominant paradigm of his time.

Just as Thomas Kuhn emphasized the importance of paradigm shifts in the development of science, Al-Ghazali had already demonstrated that every edifice of knowledge rests on assumptions that can collapse when tested. His critique of causality, the eternity of the world, and the limitations of reason demonstrated that the rationalist paradigm is not neutral but is fraught with questionable metaphysical claims (Mailin & et al, 2025). Thus, *Tahafut* can be read as a “paradigm crisis” in the Islamic intellectual tradition that opened up space for a new epistemology: openness to revelation, spiritual experience, and the possibility of transcendental intervention in natural law.

In the context of modern science, *Tahafut's* paradigm critique is relevant for challenging



the determinism of positivistic science, which often assumes that reality can be fully controlled by humans. The emergence of quantum physics, chaos theory, and Popper's falsification demonstrates that even scientific knowledge is tentative, never final. Thus, Al-Ghazali appears visionary: he teaches that science always operates within a horizon of limitations, and epistemological awareness must accompany every claim to truth (Andri et al., 2025).

Thus, Tahafut should not be seen as a text hindering the development of science, but rather as a laboratory for epistemic critique that enriches the philosophy of science. It teaches that paradigms are not merely theoretical tools, but horizons of meaning that shape how humans understand reality. By positioning Tahafut as a critique of scientific paradigms, we find a crucial bridge between the classical Islamic intellectual tradition and the challenges of modern philosophy of science, a dialogue across time that remains relevant for building a science that is humble, reflective, and open to the complexities of reality.

Integration of Revelation, Reason, and Science

The intersection of revelation, reason, and science has always been a major topic of discussion in human civilization. On the one hand, revelation serves as a source of transcendent truth that provides ethical and spiritual direction. On the other hand, reason serves as a critical instrument for understanding, interpreting, and testing reality. Meanwhile, science offers systematic methodological tools for exploring empirical phenomena. The three, when positioned integratively, are not mutually exclusive entities, but rather epistemic nodes that can complement each other (Dwiatmaja et al., 2024).

The integration of revelation, reason, and science is not merely a formal compromise but rather a creative synthesis that builds new horizons of knowledge. Revelation serves to protect science from materialistic reduction and epistemological arrogance, while reason ensures that understanding of revelation is not trapped in rigid dogmatism. Science itself provides a concrete space for testing hypotheses, enriching interpretations, and simultaneously expanding the horizons of reason and faith (Yulianti, 2024). In this harmony, knowledge is not seen merely as an accumulation of facts, but also as a path to wisdom and a meaningful life.

This integration is increasingly relevant in the era of digital disruption, which demands critical literacy and global ethics. Amidst the flood of information, revelation presents normative values, reason filters truth, and science guides empirical evidence. These three form a solid



epistemological tripod for building a civilization: one that is not only technologically intelligent but also morally and spiritually wise (Nasim, 2024).

Thus, the integration of revelation, reason, and science is not a utopia, but rather an urgent necessity. It enables humans not only to understand reality but also to place it within a broader framework of values. From this point, a complete paradigm of knowledge is born: rational without losing faith, empirical without forgetting ethics, and spiritual without ignoring reality. This integration is the answer to the crisis of modern civilization, which is often trapped in a narrow dichotomy between religion and science.

Global Implications of Al-Ghazali's Paradigm Critique

Al-Ghazali's critique of paradigms in *Tahafut al-Falasifah* cannot be limited to the context of classical Islamic history. He presents ideas with universal resonance, especially in the face of today's global epistemological crisis. By rejecting the claims of absolute certainty of rationalist philosophy and emphasizing the limitations of reason, Al-Ghazali seems to signal that every system of knowledge, no matter how sophisticated, remains tentative. This awareness is crucial in the modern world, which is often trapped in the "arrogance of science," as if reality can be fully mapped by empirical methods (Soleh, 2009).

The first global implication is the emergence of a cross-traditional epistemological awareness. Al-Ghazali's critique opens a dialogue with the thought of Western philosophers such as Hume, Popper, and Kuhn, who all questioned the certainty of causality and the finality of knowledge. This demonstrates that the classical Islamic heritage can stand alongside global philosophy, not as an adversary, but as a partner in building a more humble and reflective paradigm of knowledge (Abdullah, 2020).

Second, Al-Ghazali's paradigm critique emphasizes the urgency of the ethical dimension in science. By debunking the deterministic claims of the *falasifah*, he reminds us that knowledge is never value-free. This message is relevant for the contemporary era, when advanced technology often advances faster than the ethics that govern it. Al-Ghazali's critique can be read as a global call for science to always be based on moral and spiritual awareness, so that science is not merely a tool of power, but a means for the benefit of humanity (Muslimin & Suharmanto, 2024).

Third, this critique inspires an integrative paradigm that transcends the dichotomy between religion and science. The modern world requires an epistemological model capable of



combining rationality, empiricism, and spirituality. Al-Ghazali's perspective opens up space for an alternative paradigm that can serve as a global reference: a paradigm that places science within a transcendental horizon, while simultaneously encouraging scientific innovation without losing its ethical direction (Fadil & et al, 2025).

Thus, the global implications of Al-Ghazali's paradigm critique are relevant not only to Muslims but also to human civilization as a whole. He taught that true knowledge arises from epistemological humility, the integration of reason, empirical experience, and revelation, and the awareness that science must side with humanity. From this, *Tahafut al-Falasifah* emerges not merely as a classic text but as a lasting contribution of Islam in shaping the direction of global science.

New Directions for Islamic Philosophy Research

Research on Islamic philosophy has often been trapped between two extremes: glorifying the past or merely criticizing the classical heritage. Both, while important, often fail to address the needs of a changing era. In the era of globalization and digital disruption, Islamic philosophy is required to find a new direction: not merely rehashing the legacy of ancient thought but also recontextualizing it within the framework of contemporary epistemological, social, and ecological challenges (Harahap et al., 2025). This new direction demands the courage to connect classical treasuries with the dynamics of modern science, without losing the normative roots of Islam.

One important new direction is the reading of Islamic philosophy within the framework of modern philosophy of science. Figures such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Al-Ghazali can be understood not only within theological horizons but also within global conversations about scientific paradigms, methodology, and epistemology. Through this approach, Islamic philosophy can contribute to international dialogue on the limits of knowledge, the crisis of positivistic science, and even the ethics of technology (Muhibbuddin, 2025). In this way, Islamic philosophy is no longer confined to the realm of "historical studies," but rather emerges as a source of inspiration for the development of contemporary philosophy of science.

Another direction is the interconnection of Islamic philosophy with global issues such as ecology, bioethics, and digital technology. Metaphysical critiques of causality, the concept of the interconnectedness of creatures, and the idea of the unity of being can provide a philosophical basis for formulating environmental ethics or spiritually-based technological regulation. This



ANJASMORO

ISLAMIC INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

innovation allows Islamic philosophy to address the needs of the times, rather than simply preserving old narratives.

Furthermore, the new direction of research in Islamic philosophy also demands an interdisciplinary methodological approach. Islamic philosophy needs to be read alongside anthropology, sociology, cognitive science, and even ecological studies. By opening itself to interdisciplinary dialogue, Islamic philosophy will find new vitality: it will not only live in the academic sphere but also provide concrete answers to global humanitarian problems. Thus, the new direction of research in Islamic philosophy is a reconstruction that is grounded in heritage but also looks forward. It demands the courage to reinterpret, connect, and project classical ideas into a modern context. From this point, Islamic philosophy is not merely an intellectual heritage, but a creative energy capable of guiding global civilization toward a more reflective, ethical, and humane horizon of knowledge.

CONCLUSION

A study of *Tahafut al-Falasifah* shows that Al-Ghazali was not only a theologian confronting philosophy, but also a thinker who exposed the limitations of the scientific paradigm of his time. By challenging the absolute claims of rationalism and rejecting causal determinism, he presented an epistemological awareness that finds relevance in the discourse of modern philosophy of science. His critique can be seen as the embryo of the paradigm shift idea later popularized by Thomas Kuhn, as well as an ethical correction to the tendency of science to often fall into deterministic arrogance. The implications of this reading go beyond mere classical intellectual battles. *Tahafut* opens up a space for dialogue between Islamic heritage and global discourse, demonstrating that the Islamic intellectual tradition has a significant contribution in shaping critical awareness of science. The awareness that natural laws are tentative, that scientific truth is always open to revision, and that knowledge requires a transcendental horizon are universal messages that lead to a more humble and ethically oriented scientific paradigm.

Thus, *Tahafut al-Falasifah* should not be viewed as an obstacle to scientific progress, but rather as a paradigm critique that leads to epistemological reconstruction. It teaches that the integration of revelation, reason, and science is not a utopia, but rather an urgent need for global civilization. From this perspective, Al-Ghazali's legacy is not only relevant but also vital for



building a more reflective, ethical, and humane modern science.

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