

SUFISTIC EPISTEMOLOGY IN QUR'ANIC INTERPRETATION: AHMAD SANUSI'S *RAWḌAT AL-'IRFĀN* IN THE SUNDANESE CONTEXT

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol28no1.6>

Abstract

In navigating the complexities of the modern era, a profound understanding of religious teachings is increasingly vital to provide moral and existential guidance in human life. A central aspect of Islam is understanding the Qur'an, which serves as a foundational source of spiritual and moral guidance. Sufistic epistemology offers a distinctive framework for interpreting the Qur'an, emphasizing mystical dimensions and inner experiences. This study investigates Sufistic epistemology as reflected in Qur'anic exegesis in the *Nusantara* context, focusing on K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's *Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān*. Employing a qualitative approach, this study examines the characteristics of Sufi

Article

History:

Acceptance date: 5 March 2026

Available Online: 30 June 2026

Funding: This work was supported by Directorate of Islamic Higher Education of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and LPDP

Competing interest: The author(s) have declared that no competing interest exists.

epistemology within the Nusantara exegetical tradition through an analysis of *Tafsir Rawdat al-'Irfān fi Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān* authored by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi of Sukabumi, West Java. The findings reveal that Sanusi's interpretative framework integrates three interrelated dimensions of Sufi epistemology: ethical (*tasawuf akhlāqī*), philosophical (*tasawuf falsafī*), and experiential (*tasawuf 'irfānī*) epistemologies. These dimensions are manifested through the integration of rational interpretation (*tafsir bi al-ra'y*), spiritual consciousness, ethical transformation, and experiential knowledge of God (*ma'rifah*). The study further demonstrates that *Rawdat al-'Irfān* represents a distinctive model of Nusantara Qur'anic exegesis that synthesizes local Islamic intellectual traditions with Sufi epistemological principles. This research contributes to the broader discourse on Qur'anic interpretation by highlighting an alternative epistemological paradigm beyond the dominant legalistic and scientific approaches in contemporary Islamic scholarship.

Keywords: Epistemology; Sufism; *Rawdat al-Irfan fi Ma'rifat al-Qur'an*; Qur'anic exegesis; K. H. Ahmad Sanusi.

Khulasah

Dalam mendepani kerumitan era moden, pemahaman terhadap ajaran agama menjadi semakin penting sebagai panduan hidup manusia. Aspek teras dalam Islam ialah penghayatan terhadap al-Quran yang berfungsi sebagai sumber utama bimbingan spiritual dan moral. Dalam konteks ini, epistemologi sufistik mengemukakan satu kerangka dasar yang unik untuk mentafsirkan al-Qur'an dengan menekankan dimensi kerohanian dan pengalaman dalam (esoterik). Sehubungan itu, kajian ini menyelidiki epistemologi sufistik yang dizahirkan dalam tafsir al-Qur'an di Alam Melayu, dengan memberikan tumpuan khusus kepada karya K.H. Ahmad Sanusi, iaitu kitab *Rawdat*

al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, kajian ini meneliti ciri-ciri epistemologi sufi dalam tradisi tafsir Nusantara melalui analisis terhadap *Tafsir Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān* karya K.H. Ahmad Sanusi dari Sukabumi, Jawa Barat. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa kerangka pentafsiran Ahmad Sanusi mengintegrasikan tiga dimensi utama epistemologi sufi, iaitu epistemologi akhlaki (*tasawuf akhlāqī*), falsafi (*tasawuf falsafī*), dan irfani (*tasawuf 'irfānī*). Ketiga-tiga dimensi ini terserlah melalui gabungan tafsiran rasional (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*), kesedaran spiritual, transformasi akhlak dan pengetahuan pengalaman terhadap Allah (*ma'rifah*). Kajian ini juga mendapati bahawa *Rawḍat al-'Irfān* mewakili model tafsir al-Quran Nusantara yang unik dengan menggabungkan tradisi intelektual Islam tempatan dan prinsip epistemologi sufi. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada wacana tafsir al-Quran dengan mengetengahkan paradigma epistemologi alternatif yang melangkaui pendekatan fiqh dan saintifik yang dominan dalam keserjanaan Islam kontemporari.

Kata kunci: Epistemologi; Tasawuf; *Tafsir Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'an*; tafsir al-Quran; K. H. Ahmad Sanusi.

Introduction

Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) constitutes a central discipline in Islamic studies, concerned with interpreting the Qur'an as a sacred and authoritative text. Over centuries, Muslim scholars have produced diverse interpretations shaped by varying intellectual frameworks and socio-cultural contexts. Among these approaches, the Sufi perspective occupies a distinctive position, emphasizing inner experience (*dhawq*) and spiritual insight (*kashf*) as complementary modes of understanding the Qur'an. Sufism, as the spiritual dimension of Islam, seeks a deeper comprehension of divine revelation through practices such

as meditation (*murāqabah*), remembrance (*dhikr*), and ethical refinement.

In the Nusantara context, the spread of Islam has been closely intertwined with Sufi traditions, particularly through adaptive and culturally accommodating modes of *da'wah*.¹ Simuh categorizes the interaction between Islam and local culture into two typologies: non-compromising and compromising. The former emphasizes strict adherence to Islamic norms, often resisting local cultural expressions, whereas the latter adopts a more accommodative approach, allowing for contextualization and cultural integration. This second typology is strongly associated with Sufi traditions, which historically facilitated the acceptance of Islam in the region.² In contrast, the compromising typology adopts a more inclusive and adaptive stance, accommodating local cultural practices in its approach to *da'wah*. This perspective is rooted in the notion of Islam as a universal religion, where its teachings can be contextualized rather than applied rigidly. It emphasizes a symbolic relationship between Islam and local culture, fostering mutual enrichment and harmony. While the first typology is commonly associated with Islamic jurisprudence, the second is predominantly reflected in the realm of Sufism.

The adoption of a Sufi approach in the dissemination and teaching of Islam in the Nusantara logically necessitated the development and proliferation of Sufi literature, manifesting in diverse patterns and variations. This intellectual trajectory would naturally suggest the emergence of numerous Sufi-oriented Qur'anic exegeses

¹ Ibrahim Elshahat, Abdullatif Ahmadi Ramchahi, and Mohd Yakub @ Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff, "Theistic Evolutionists' View of the Words Bashar and Insān in the Qur'an: A Critical Analysis," *Afkar: Journal of 'Aqidah & Islamic Thought* 21(2) (2019), 103–140.

² Simuh, *Sufisme Jawa: Transformasi Islam ke Mistik Jawa* (Yogyakarta: Yayasan Bentang Budaya, 1996), 67–68.

in the region. Despite the significant role of Sufism in the Islamization of the Nusantara, its influence is not proportionally reflected in the development of Qur'anic exegesis. As noted by Islah Gusmian, until the late twentieth century, Indonesia had not produced a Qur'anic exegesis explicitly characterized by a strong Sufi orientation. This observation reveals a discrepancy between the widespread use of Sufi approaches in *da'wah* and their limited articulation within the formal tradition of *tafsīr*.³

This indicates that the presence of Sufi-style exegesis does not directly correspond to the use of Sufism as a *da'wah* approach. In Indonesia, Sufi-style exegeses are less prominent compared to exegeses rooted in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and scientific perspectives.⁴ According to Rakhmat, this phenomenon is understandable, as many Indonesian Muslims harbor stigmatized views of Sufi exegesis, with some even considering it heretical.⁵

From the researcher's perspective, the existence of Sufi-oriented exegesis in the Nusantara archipelago mirrors the historical proliferation of Sufi literature, which emerged as a structural necessity to support Sufism's role in *da'wah* (proselytization) activities. Several Sufi-style exegeses identified in this study include: (1) *Tanbīh al-Māshī al-Mansūb ilā Tarīq al-Quṣṣāṣ* by 'Abd al-Ra'uf al-Sinkili (d. 1693 CE); (2) *Fayḍ al-Raḥmān fī Tarjamat Tafsīr Kalām Mālik al-Dayyān* by Muhammad Salih ibn

³ Islah Gusmian, "Tafsir Al-Qur'an di Indonesia: Sejarah dan Dinamika," *Nun: Jurnal Studi Alquran dan Tafsir di Nusantara* 1(1) (2015), 1–32.

⁴ Annas Rolli Muchlisin & Khairun Nisa, "Geliat Tafsir 'Ilmī di Indonesia: Dari Tafsir *al-Nūr* Hingga Tafsir Salman," *Millati: Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 2(2) (2017), 239–257.

⁵ Jalaluddin Rakhmat, *Tafsir Sufi al-Fatihah* (Bandung: Rosdakarya, 2019), 101.

'Umar al-Samarani (d. 1903); (3) *Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm Adji Wiwitan Qur'an Suci* (1920) by Hasan Mustafa; (4) *Tafsīr Qur'an Jāwī* (1925) by Dara Masyitah (Solo); (5) *Suluk Tegesipun Patekah*; (6) *Suluk Suraosipun Patekah*; (7) *Samudera al-Fātiḥah* by Mpu Wesi Geni (Solo); (8) *Tafsīr Melayu Sūrat al-Kahf* by 'Abd al-Wāḥid Karī Mūda ibn Muḥammad Šiddīq (Makassar); (9) *Majmū'at al-Rasā'il* by Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ghawth; (10) *Syi'ir Jāwī Budi Utami Warna-Warni* by Muhammad Jamal al-Din Ahmad; (11) *Tafsīr 'Amalī* by Muhammad Qayyim Ya'qub; (12) *Tafsīr Šūfī al-Fātiḥah* by Jalal al-Din Rahmat (Bandung); (13) *Tafsīr al-Qiṣṭās al-Mustaqīm* by Husayn al-Nawawi (Cirebon); (14) *Tafsīr Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān* by Ahmad Sanusi (Sukabumi); and (15) *Tafsīr al-Ibrīz* by Bisri Mustafa (Rembang).⁶

The researcher predicts that this list will expand as further studies are conducted, reflecting a growing recognition of Sufi exegesis's contribution to the intellectual and spiritual traditions of the Nusantara. The researchers posit that the Sufi-style Qur'anic exegesis in the Nusantara exhibits greater creativity and diversity compared to other interpretative styles. Among the fifteen identified Sufi-style exegeses, this study focuses on *Tafsīr Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān* by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi from Sukabumi, West Java. This particular exegesis is representative of the West Java region, which demographically and religiously differs from Central and East Java. West Java is characterized by a distinct Islamic identity and has experienced frequent horizontal conflicts related to religious issues. In contrast, East Java is relatively more homogeneous and demonstrates a lower incidence of religiously motivated horizontal conflicts.

⁶ Ahmad Zainal Abidin & Thoriqul Aziz, *Khazanah Tafsir Nusantara: Para Tokoh dan Karya-karyanya* (Yogyakarta: IRCISOD, 2018), 8–10.

K.H. Ahmad Sanusi, a distinguished scholar from Sukabumi, West Java, made substantial contributions to Islamic education and Qur'anic exegesis. His work, *Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān*, is notable for integrating a Sufi approach to interpreting the Qur'an. This exegesis holds particular significance as one of the earliest Qur'anic translations in Indonesia, rendered in a local language, specifically Sundanese.

Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi warrants scholarly investigation due to its unique integration of a Sufi-oriented methodology deeply rooted in the Nusantara socio-religious landscape. Rather than operating strictly within conventional exegetical boundaries, this work functions as a locus of spiritual praxis, embedding sufistic elements to facilitate an esoteric decoding of the sacred text. Methodologically, *Rawḍat al-'Irfān* aligns with the *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* (intellectual/rational exegesis) tradition, as it systematically employs rational inquiry to uncover the hidden (*bāṭin*) dimensions of the Qur'an. Sanusi's approach maintains a precise equilibrium between textual fidelity (*naql*) and intellectual discourse (*'aql*), thereby constructing an interpretive paradigm that bridges rigorous scholasticism with profound spiritual reflectivity. Furthermore, this exegesis adopts a flexible framework in which the author explores the Qur'an's dimensions through personal contemplation (*tafakkur*) while contextualizing Islamic teachings within local cultural frameworks.

The marginalization of Sufi-oriented exegesis within the Nusantara landscape stems from the hegemony of competing interpretative paradigms, most notably legalistic (*fiqh*) and technocratic-scientific frameworks. While the broader field of Qur'anic hermeneutics inherently operates on an infinite horizon of semantic possibilities, jurisprudential and positivist-scientific interpretations impose rigid, restrictive structures that

curtail interpretive elasticity. This structural dominance of legalistic and scientific commentaries correlates with the proliferation of conservative and occasionally radical religious discourses, thereby fundamentally alienating scriptural exegesis from the lived, localized cultural realities of the archipelago. As theorized by Simuh, such dogmatic epistemic frameworks systematically exclude indigenous cultural matrices, a trajectory that stands in stark contrast to the intrinsically syncretic and pluralistic nature of sufistic hermeneutics.

Meanwhile, Islam was historically embraced across the Nusantara archipelago largely due to the ingenuity of its propagators, who strategically utilized Sufi approaches to engage with local populations. These considerations underscore the profound significance of the present research. This study anticipates not only delving into the epistemological frameworks of sufistic-style *tafsīr*, a conventional scholarly focus, but also proposing a model for religious understanding that is organically rooted in and aligned with the cultural ethos of the Nusantara. Furthermore, it aims to project Islam's inherent moderation (*wasatīyyah*) and universality as *rahmatan li al-'ālamīn* (a mercy to all creation).

Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design using a textual contextual approach to examine Sufi epistemology in Qur'anic interpretation within the Nusantara context. The primary object of analysis is *Tafsīr Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān* by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi. This *tafsīr* is selected based on three main considerations. First, it represents a significant local intellectual product within the Nusantara Islamic tradition, particularly reflecting the Sundanese scholarly milieu, and thus provides a relevant context for understanding how Qur'anic interpretation is shaped by local socio-religious dynamics. Second,

although *Tafsīr Rawḍat al-'Irfān* can be classified as *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*, that is, an interpretative approach emphasizing reasoned judgment rather than reliance solely on transmitted reports, this work demonstrates an integration of rational reflection with spiritual sensitivity, making it particularly suitable for examining Sufi epistemology.

Rather than classifying *Rawḍat al-'Irfān* strictly under the classical rubric of *tafsīr ishārī* (allusive exegesis), this study conceptualizes the text as an instantiation of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* (intellectual/rational exegesis) that implicitly operationalizes sufistic epistemological dimensions. These dimensions encompass inner spiritual awareness, ethical refinement, and experiential cognition (*dhawq*). This taxonomy enables a critical exploration of how Sufistic modes of inquiry function within a non-allusive, non-sectarian exegetical framework unique to the Nusantara intellectual tradition. To examine this paradigm, the research design utilizes a dual-source data matrix, where the primary corpus is drawn directly from the textual data of K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's *Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān*, while the secondary literature comprises global and regional scholarship on Islamic esoteric traditions, Qur'anic hermeneutics, Southeast Asian intellectual history, and Islamic epistemology.

Data analysis is conducted using a descriptive qualitative method combined with the *verstehen* (understanding) approach, operationalized through an interpretive process aimed at uncovering the subjective meanings embedded within the exegete's discourse.⁷ In practical terms, *verstehen* is applied by (1) closely reading selected interpretative passages, (2) reconstructing the exegete's horizon of meaning by considering linguistic

⁷ Tsutomu Kumazaki, "Theory of Mind and Verstehen (Understanding) Methodology," *History of Psychiatry* 27(3) (2016), 289–295.

expressions, symbolic language, and contextual references, and (3) interpreting how spiritual experiences and inner awareness are articulated within the rational structure of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*.

The analytical procedures involve identifying relevant passages, classifying themes related to epistemological dimensions (such as sources of knowledge, modes of understanding, and the role of intuition), and interpreting how these elements reflect a Sufi epistemological framework. Through this process, the study seeks to demonstrate how Sufi epistemology is embedded in the text's interpretative logic, rather than appearing as an explicit doctrinal or *tafsīr ishārī* formulation.

Findings and Discussion

Kitab *Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān*

The exegetical work *Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān*, authored by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi, is systematically structured into two volumes, covering *Juz'* 1–15 and *Juz'* 16–30, respectively. The compilation of the first volume was a collaborative effort involving approximately thirty students who regularly participated in Sanusi's scholarly circles (*halaqah*). During these sessions, the students meticulously recorded the Qur'anic verses, along with their respective translations and interpretative commentaries. This raw material was subsequently organized and verified by the scribe (*kātib*) Muḥammad Busyro before receiving Sanusi's definitive approval for publication. Following Busyro's passing, the editorial responsibilities were assumed by Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā, thereby ensuring the preservation, continuous

transmission, and multiple subsequent printings of the text.⁸

This collaborative compilation process reflects not only Sanusi’s pedagogical commitment but also a structured intellectual method in preserving and disseminating Qur’anic interpretation. The second volume, in contrast, was compiled directly by Sanusi. Although the original manuscript later deteriorated, its content was preserved through transcription and recopying processes, demonstrating the text’s continued scholarly significance.⁹

Methodologically, this *tafsīr* employs the *ijmālī* approach, characterized by concise and general explanations that prioritize clarity and accessibility. The interpretation focuses on essential elements such as lexical meanings, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and brief contextual explanations. This approach enables the text to communicate Qur’anic messages in a simplified yet meaningful manner, ensuring that they are easily understood by a broad audience.¹⁰

From an epistemological perspective, *Rawḍat al-‘Irfān* can be categorized as *tafsīr bi al-ra’y* (interpretation based on intellectual reasoning), given its emphasis on analytical exposition rather than an exclusive reliance on transmitted reports (*tafsīr bi al-ma’thūr*). Crucially, its interpretative style does not align with any specific ideological or sectarian school of thought; instead, it

⁸ Nuzula Ilhami, “Epistemologi Tafsir *Rawḍat al-‘Irfān fī Ma’rifat al-Qur’ān* Karya K.H. Ahmad Sanusi” (Master’s Thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, 2017), 125.

⁹ Irfanudien Irfanudien, Solahudin Solahudin & Rumba Triana, “Metodologi Tafsir *Rawḍat al-‘Irfān fī Ma’rifat al-Qur’ān* (Studi Analisis Kitab Tafsir Karya K.H. Ahmad Sanusi),” *Cendikia Muda Islam: Jurnal Ilmiah* 2(3) (2023), 243–264.

¹⁰ Fadlil Munawwar Manshur, “Ajaran Tasawuf dalam *Rawḍat al-‘Irfān fī Ma’rifat al-Qur’ān* Karya Kiai Haji Ahmad Sanusi: Analisis Semiotik dan Resepsi” (PhD Dissertation, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2012), 152.

reflects an integrative and holistic mode of understanding. This neutrality indicates that Sanusi's exegesis operates within a flexible hermeneutical framework that accommodates multiple dimensions of meaning without privileging a single doctrinal orientation.

Despite this inclusive orientation, the *tafsīr* demonstrates a rigorous analytical engagement with various thematic domains, including jurisprudential (*fiqh*), theological, and ethical discourses. For instance, verses pertaining to ritual practices such as prayer (*ṣalāh*), almsgiving (*zakāh*), fasting (*ṣawm*) and pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) are interpreted in a highly practical and context-sensitive manner. Similarly, discussions on social transactions (*mu'āmalah*) and spiritual life are articulated in ways that dynamically bridge textual meanings with the lived social realities of the Nusantara community.¹¹

Structurally, this *tafsīr* unifies the Qur'anic text, its Sundanese translation, and interpretative commentary. The translation is literal yet precise, preserving semantic accuracy while contextualizing the message within the local language. Positioned alongside the text, the interpretative explanations follow the ترتيب of the *'Uthmānī muṣḥaf*, maintaining strict fidelity to the Qur'an's canonical structure. Importantly, the explanatory style remains concise and avoids excessive elaboration, indicating a deliberate methodological choice to prioritize clarity over speculative interpretation. Additional elements such as *asbāb al-nuzūl*, verse counts, and linguistic details are included not merely as supplementary information but

¹¹ Mohd Manawi Mohd Akib et al., "Penciptaan Jiwa dari Sudut Ilmu Tafsir dan Falsafah Islam: Tumpuan Terhadap Pemikiran Fakhri al-Dīn al-Rāzī," *Afkar: Journal of 'Aqidah & Islamic Thought* 24(1) (2023), 231–252.

as integral components that support a holistic understanding of the text.¹²

Overall, this methodological and structural configuration demonstrates that *Tafsīr Rawḍat al-'Irfān* is far more than a merely descriptive work; it is an interpretative model that seamlessly harmonizes textual fidelity, rational analysis, and contextual accessibility. This integration reinforces its significance as a definitive example of Nusantara *Qur'anic* exegesis, one that operates robustly within a *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* framework while remaining receptive to broader epistemological dimensions, including implicit Sufi orientations.¹³

Moreover, in his *tafsīr*, KH Ahmad Sanusi integrates critical contextual data, including the *asbāb al-nuzūl* (the circumstances of revelation), verse counts, and the breakdown of individual letters within the text. This auxiliary context is deliberately provided to enrich the reader's comprehension of each interpreted verse. Collectively, these elements underscore a systematic and holistic methodology underpinning the compilation of *Tafsīr Rawḍat al-'Irfān*.

Sufistic Style in the Book of *Tafsīr Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qu'ran*

The *Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qu'ran* by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi is a *tafsīr* that prominently exhibits a Sufi orientation, emphasizing the spiritual dimensions inherent in understanding the Qur'anic text. Epistemologically, Sufism functions within three principal frameworks: moral Sufism (*tasawwuf akhlāqī*), philosophical Sufism

¹² Tuhfah Maoludi, "Kaarifan Lokal dina Tafsir Sunda *Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qu'ran* Karya K.H. Ahmad Sanusi" (Master's Thesis, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, 2022), 130.

¹³ Ungaran Rashid, Fadzilah Din & Abdul Salam Muhamad Syukri, "The Concept of Peace in the Bible and the Qur'an: A Comparative Study," *Afkar: Journal of 'Aqidah & Islamic Thought* 22(2) (2020), 239–278.

(*taṣawwuf falsafī*), and gnostic Sufism (*taṣawwuf 'irfānī*). It is these three epistemological paradigms that underpin the exploration and interpretation of spirituality throughout *Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'an*.

These frameworks are particularly instrumental in providing a comprehensive understanding of Sufism, constituting a holistic approach to achieving profound insights into Islamic spirituality. Moral Sufism (*taṣawwuf akhlāqī*) emphasizes cultivating ethical behavior and personal character, drawing heavily on al-Ghazali's teachings; it focuses squarely on the purification of the heart (*tazkiyah al-naḥs*) and the refinement of individual morality. Meanwhile, philosophical Sufism (*taṣawwuf falsafī*) adopts a more intellectual and rational paradigm, as pioneered by scholars such as Ibn Arabi.¹⁴ This framework explores metaphysical inquiries into the nature of divinity, employing rigorous logic and contemplative reasoning. Concurrently, gnostic Sufism (*taṣawwuf 'irfānī*) focuses on direct mystical experience and the pursuit of spiritual proximity to the Divine. This experiential approach necessitates intense inner reflection alongside the structured practice of *dhikr* (remembrance).¹⁵ The Sufi epistemology in the *Kitab Tafsīr Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'an* is elaborated in detail as follows:

a) *Taṣawwuf Akhlāqī*

Rather than merely defining *taṣawwuf akhlāqī* as a combination of Sufism and ethics, this study approaches it as an epistemological framework through which moral meaning is constructed in the interpretation of the Qur'an.

¹⁴ Hajam Hajam, "Teaching Scientific Tasawuf in the Islamic Education System: Exploring Kiai Ahmad Khotib Insights," *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 15(3) (2023), 131–155.

¹⁵ Hajam and Teguh Saumantri, "Concept of God, Humanity and *Insān Kāmil*: *Ḥall al-Rumūz wa-Mafātīḥ al-Kunūz* Manuscript of Ibn 'Arabī," *al-A'raf: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam dan Filsafat* 20(1) (2023), 145–175.

In Islamic thought, ethical conduct (*akhlāq*) is concerned not only with normative prescriptions of good and bad actions but also with the cultivation of inner states that guide human behavior toward divine approval.¹⁶

Within this framework, *taṣawwuf akhlāqī* signifies an epistemological mode wherein moral truth is accessed through the systematic purification of the self and the refinement of inner awareness. This paradigm shifts ethics from a purely normative domain into an experiential and transformative process. Consequently, ethical action (*'amaliyyah*) is treated not merely as external legalistic compliance, but as the outward manifestation of an inner spiritual state, one continuously shaped by rigorous self-discipline and the remembrance of God.¹⁷

Therefore, *taṣawwuf akhlāqī* is not merely a theoretical field of study; it requires practical application and personal commitment to master. It must be implemented throughout the course of human life to truly its essence. The significance of *taṣawwuf akhlāqī* in shaping moral character is reinforced by the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH):

إِنَّمَا بُعِثْتُ لِأَتَمِّمَ صَالِحَ الْأَخْلَاقِ

Indeed, I have been sent (with the aim) to perfect moral glory. (Ahmad & al-Bayhaqi).¹⁸

¹⁶ Audah Mannan, "Esensi Tasawuf *Akhlāqī* di Era Modernisasi," *Aqidah-Ta: Jurnal Ilmu Aqidah* 4(1) (2018), 36–56.

¹⁷ Muhammad Nur and Muhammad Iqbal Irham, "Tasawuf dan Modernisasi: Urgensi Tasawuf *Akhlāqī* pada Masyarakat Modern," *Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 25(1) (2023), 107–120.

¹⁸ Ahmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-Kubrā*, ed. Muḥammad 'Abd al-Qādir 'Atā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003), 10:323, no. 20782; *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, no. 7480; Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal* (Cairo: Mu'assasat Qurṭubah, n.d.), 2:381, no. 8952.

From an epistemological standpoint, *taṣawwuf akhlāqī* in Sanusi's *tafsīr* reflects an integrative model of knowledge that combines rational interpretation (*tafsīr bi al-ra'y*) with experiential insight. Ethical teachings are not derived solely from textual analysis but emerge through a dialogical process between text, reason, and inner spiritual awareness. This demonstrates that Sufi elements are embedded implicitly within the interpretative logic, rather than appearing as explicit *tafsīr ishārī* expressions.¹⁹ Here is evidence of *taṣawwuf akhlāqī* in KH. Ahmad Sanusi's *tafsīr*:

ذَلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢٠﴾

This is the Book about which there is no doubt, a guidance for those conscious of Allah.²⁰

Rather than merely affirming the Qur'an's authority, Sanusi constructs the meaning of this verse by linking the absence of doubt (*lā rayb fīh*) to an ethical and spiritual condition of the reader. His interpretation of the term *rayb* does not stop at its literal meaning of "doubt," but extends it into a moral-spiritual domain in which certainty (*yaqīn*) becomes a prerequisite for receiving divine guidance.²¹

This interpretative move demonstrates that meaning is not derived solely from the semantic content of the verse, but from the interaction between the text and the inner state of the believer. In this sense, guidance (*hudā*) is not universally accessible, but epistemologically conditioned by the quality of *taqwā*, which reflects an inner ethical and

¹⁹ Rafli Kahfi, Siti Nur Aisyah, and Hijriyah Hijriyah, "Klasifikasi Tasawuf: 'Amalī, Falsafī, Akhlāqī," *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Konseling* 5(1) (2023), 1120–1130.

²⁰ Surah al-Baqarah 2: 2.

²¹ Rifa Tsamrotus Sa'adah, "Ahmad Sanusi's *Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rīfat al-Qur'ān*," *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 8(2) (2019), 133–146.

spiritual disposition.²² From a Sufi perspective, this emphasis reflects a key element of *taṣawwuf akhlāqī*, where moral integrity is rooted in the harmony between the outward (*ẓāhir*) and inward (*bāṭin*) dimensions of faith. The critique of hypocrisy, reinforced by the reference to Qur'an al-Nisā' 4:145, serves not only as a warning but as an epistemological boundary that separates genuine knowledge of the Qur'an from superficial engagement with it:

إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ فِي الدَّرَكِ الْأَسْفَلِ مِنَ النَّارِ وَلَنْ تَجِدَ لَهُمْ نَصِيرًا ﴿٢٣﴾

Indeed, the hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of the Fire and never will you find for them a helper.²³

Thus, Sanusi implicitly embeds Sufi elements by framing the Qur'an as a source of guidance accessible only through inner purification and ethical consistency. This indicates that understanding the Qur'an is not a purely cognitive act, but a transformative process that requires the alignment of belief, action, and spiritual awareness. The epistemological implication of this interpretation is significant: it positions certainty (*yaqīn*) and ethical integrity as conditions for valid knowledge, thereby challenging purely formal or legalistic approaches to tafsīr. In this model, knowledge of the Qur'an emerges from a synthesis of textual understanding and spiritual experience, reflecting a Sufi epistemological orientation within a *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* framework.

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

Who believe in the unseen, establish prayer, and spend out of what We have provided for them.²⁴

²² Jajang A. Rohmana, "Polemik Keagamaan dalam Tafsir *Malja' al-Tālibīn* Karya K.H. Ahmad Sanusi," *Suhuf* 10(1) (2017), 25–57.

²³ Surah al-Nisā' 4:145.

²⁴ Surah al-Baqarah 2:3.

Sanusi's interpretation of the phrase *wa mim mā razaqnāhum yunfiqūn* is not limited to a juridical obligation of almsgiving, but is constructed as a moral-spiritual process that links material action with inner purification. Rather than treating charity (*infāq* and *zakāt*) as merely a legal duty, he frames it as an epistemic practice through which the believer transforms both wealth and the self. This interpretative approach reveals how meaning is produced through the integration of external action (*'amal*) and internal disposition, a key feature of *taṣawwuf akhlāqī*. Wealth, from this perspective, is not neutral; it is imbued with ethical and spiritual implications, as it can carry negative traits such as greed (*bukhl*) if not purified through giving.

Sanusi emphasizes that *zakāt* and charity function as mechanisms of purification. However, this purification should be understood not only in material terms, but as a process of disciplining the self and reorienting the heart toward divine consciousness. The prophetic tradition regarding miserliness reinforces this point, but within Sanusi's interpretative logic, it operates as a moral-epistemic warning rather than merely a normative injunction.

From a Sufi perspective, the act of giving becomes a form of spiritual knowledge, as it enables the individual to detach from worldly attachment and cultivate sincerity (*ikhlas*). This indicates that Sufi elements are embedded implicitly in the interpretation, particularly in the emphasis on inner purification, ethical refinement, and the transformation of intention.

K.H. Ahmad Sanusi believed that every possession a person holds inherently contains the rights of others, particularly those in need. In this regard, *zakāt* is not merely a social obligation but also a mechanism for cultivating spiritual awareness. *Zakāt*, in this view, purifies wealth from impurities, as material possessions often

harbor the filth of base desires, such as greed (stinginess). This is regarded as an impurity both in this world and the hereafter. With respect to the impurity of stinginess (*bachil*), a person who is miserly is not only disliked by others but also by Allah the Almighty. As the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said:

وَالْبَخِيلُ بَعِيدٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ بَعِيدٌ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ بَعِيدٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ قَرِيبٌ مِنَ النَّارِ

The stingy person is far from Allah and far from humans and far from heaven and close to hell.²⁵

The following is further emphasized by the words of Allah the Almighty:

خُذْ مِنْ أَمْوَالِهِمْ صَدَقَةً تُطَهِّرُهُمْ وَتُزَكِّيهِمْ بِهَا وَصَلِّ عَلَيْهِمْ إِنَّ صَلَاتَكَ سَكَنٌ لَهُمْ وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٣١﴾

Take, [O, Muhammad], from their wealth a charity by which you purify them and cause them increase, and invoke [Allah 's blessings] upon them. Indeed, your invocations are reassurance for them. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.²⁶

K.H. Ahmad Sanusi strengthens his arguments with various proofs, including those directly relevant to the ongoing discussion. He extensively references verses from the Qur'an, which serve as strong support for his views. In addition to these Qur'anic references, he cites widely accepted Hadiths that are directly pertinent to the topic at hand. Among these proofs are those that describe the wrongdoings of those who refuse to give *zakāt*, emphasizing that wealth inherently contains the rights for

²⁵ Abū 'Īsā Muḥammad ibn 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, ed. Bashshār 'Awwād Ma'rūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1998), 4: 343, no. 1961; Al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 13:431, no. 10877; Muḥammad ibn 'Amr al-'Uqaylī, *al-Du'afā' al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1984), 4: 349.

²⁶ Surah al-Tawbah 9: 103.

the poor and needy. By referencing these sources, K.H. Ahmad Sanusi underscores the moral and spiritual significance of *zakāt*, emphasizing both its obligatory nature and the severe consequences of neglecting this duty.²⁷

Epistemologically, this interpretation positions ethical action as a valid source of knowledge, where understanding the Qur'an emerges through practice rather than abstraction alone. This challenges purely formalistic or legalistic readings that separate law from spirituality. Instead, Sanusi's tafsīr demonstrates that knowledge is produced through a synthesis of textual guidance, rational reflection, and lived ethical experience.

يَتَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا لَا تُبْطِلُوا صَدَقَاتِكُمْ بِالْمَنِّ وَالْأَذَى كَالَّذِي يُنْفِقُ
مَالَهُ رِئَاءَ النَّاسِ وَلَا يُؤْمِنُ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَمَثَلُهُ كَمَثَلِ صَفْوَانٍ
عَلَيْهِ تُرَابٌ فَأَصَابَهُ وَابِلٌ فَتَرَكَهُ صَلْدًا لَا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَى شَيْءٍ مِّمَّا
كَسَبُوا وَاللَّهُ لَا يَهْدِي الْقَوْمَ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٦٤﴾

O you who have believed, do not invalidate your charities with reminders or injury as does one who spends his wealth [only] to be seen by the people and does not believe in Allah and the Last Day. His example is like that of a [large] smooth stone upon which is dust and is hit by a downpour that leaves it bare. They are unable [to keep] anything of what they have earned. And Allah does not guide the disbelieving people.²⁸

Sanusi's interpretation of this verse moves beyond a moral prohibition against showing off (*riyā'*) to construct a deeper understanding of sincerity (*ikhlas*) as a condition

²⁷ Ahmad Sanusi, *Tafsīr Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rifat al-Qur'ān* (Sukabumi: Yayasan Syamsul Ulum Gunung Puyuh, 2008), 1:290.

²⁸ Surah al-Baqarah 2:264.

for the validity of charitable action. Rather than merely restating the Qur'anic metaphor, he utilizes the imagery of the smooth stone (*ṣafwān*) to illustrate the epistemic emptiness of actions performed without inner sincerity.²⁹

In this interpretative framework, meaning is constructed through the relationship between outward action and inward intention, where the value of charity is determined not by the act itself but by the spiritual state that underlies it. This indicates that charity devoid of sincerity is not simply morally deficient, but epistemologically null, as it fails to produce any enduring spiritual knowledge or transformation.

The metaphor of soil washed away by rain is central to this interpretation. However, Sanusi employs this imagery not merely as a rhetorical illustration, but as a conceptual tool to demonstrate the fragility of actions grounded in *riyā'*. The disappearance of the soil signifies the loss of spiritual meaning, suggesting that insincere acts cannot serve as a foundation for ethical or epistemic development.

From a Sufi perspective, this reflects a core principle of *taṣawwuf akhlāqī*, in which sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*) is regarded as the foundation of all valid action and knowledge. Sufi elements are embedded implicitly through the emphasis on inner purification, self-awareness, and the continuous struggle against ego-driven motives. In this sense, charity becomes a site of spiritual testing, revealing whether the individual's orientation is directed toward God or toward social recognition.

Epistemologically, Sanusi's interpretation challenges formalistic understandings of religious practice by asserting that outward compliance alone does not generate meaningful knowledge. Instead, knowledge of the Qur'an is produced through the alignment of intention,

²⁹ Ahmad Sanusi, *Tafsir Rawḍat al-'Irfān*, 2:331.

action, and spiritual consciousness. This positions sincerity not only as an ethical requirement, but as an epistemic criterion that determines the authenticity of religious understanding.

وَلَيْنَ قُتِلْتُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَوْ مِتُّمْ لَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَحْمَةٌ خَيْرٌ مِّمَّا يَجْمَعُونَ ﴿١٥٧﴾

And if you are killed in the cause of Allah or die - then forgiveness from Allah and mercy are better than whatever they accumulate [in this world].³⁰

Sanusi's interpretation of this verse constructs the concept of *zuhd* not merely as detachment from worldly possessions, but as a reorientation of value grounded in an eschatological consciousness. Rather than presenting worldly wealth as simply temporary, he frames it as epistemologically insufficient, as it fails to provide lasting meaning beyond the limits of human life.

In this interpretative framework, meaning is produced through a contrast between two modes of valuation: material accumulation (*mā yajma'ūn*) and divine grace (forgiveness and mercy). This contrast does not function solely at the moral level, but operates as a cognitive reordering in which true value is recognized through awareness of the Hereafter. Thus, *zuhd* emerges not as the rejection of the world per se, but as a transformation in how the world is understood and valued.³¹

Sanusi emphasizes that worldly wealth cannot accompany a person after death. However, this statement should be read not merely as a reminder of mortality, but as an epistemic critique of attachment to materiality. Attachment to wealth is portrayed as a limitation of knowledge, as it confines human understanding to the

³⁰ Surah Ali-Imran 3:157.

³¹ Sanusi, *Tafsir Rawdat al-'Irfān*, 2: 340.

temporal and visible realm, neglecting the unseen (*al-ghayb*).

From a Sufi perspective, this reflects a central dimension of *taṣawwuf akhlāqī*, where *zuhd* is understood as a condition that enables the purification of perception and the reorientation of the heart toward ultimate reality. Sufi elements are embedded implicitly through the emphasis on inner detachment, spiritual awareness, and the prioritization of divine proximity over material gain. In this sense, renunciation is not an end in itself, but a means of attaining a clearer and more authentic understanding of existence.

Epistemologically, Sanusi's interpretation positions *zuhd* as a mode of knowing that transcends empirical and material frameworks. Knowledge of the Qur'an is not achieved through accumulation, but through detachment that allows the believer to perceive value in terms of divine mercy rather than worldly possession. This challenges materialistic and utilitarian readings of religious life, which equate success with accumulation.

b) Philosophical Sufism

Philosophical Sufism is not merely a synthesis of mystical teachings and philosophical terminology, but represents a distinct epistemological orientation in which rational reflection and intuitive insight are integrated as complementary modes of knowing. Unlike *taṣawwuf akhlāqī*, which emphasizes ethical transformation, philosophical Sufism seeks to articulate metaphysical realities through systematic conceptual frameworks.³²

In this tradition, philosophical language is not adopted for abstraction alone, but functions as a tool to formalize and communicate mystical experience in a structured and intellectually coherent manner. This

³² Alwi Shihab, *Antara Tasawuf Sunni dan Tasawuf Falsafi: Akar Tasawuf di Indonesia* (Bandung: Mizan Media Utama, 2009), 270.

indicates that knowledge of ultimate reality is constructed through a dialogical relationship between reason (*'aql*) and intuition (*kashf*), rather than through either mode in isolation.³³

According to Sa'd al-Din al-Taftazani, philosophical Sufism began to emerge more clearly in the 6th/12th century. However, its historical development should be understood not simply as a chronological evolution, but as an expansion of epistemological engagement with diverse intellectual traditions. The incorporation of Greek, Persian, and other philosophical influences demonstrates an adaptive epistemic strategy in which external concepts are reinterpreted within a Sufi metaphysical framework.³⁴

This adaptive process reflects an important characteristic of philosophical Sufism: its ability to absorb and transform external knowledge without compromising its spiritual orientation. Thus, the preservation of Islamic identity within philosophical Sufism is not achieved through isolation, but through reinterpretation and epistemic integration.³⁵

Key doctrines such as *wahdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence), most prominently associated with Ibn 'Arabi, exemplify this epistemological synthesis. Rather than being understood solely as a metaphysical claim, this concept represents a mode of perceiving reality in which multiplicity is understood as a manifestation of a single underlying existence. The critique by Ibn Taymiyyah

³³ Bisri et al., "Navigating Modern Challenges: The Practical Role of Triple-Relationship of Religious Moderation through an Islamic Perspective," *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization* 14(2) (2024), 286–302.

³⁴ Tongat Tongat, "Formation and Development of Mythico-Philosophy Thinking (Tasawuf Falsafi)," *Proceeding International Seminar of Islamic Studies* 1(1) (2021), 741–764.

³⁵ Abdul Aziz Dahlan, "Tasawuf Sunni dan Tasawuf Falsafi: Tinjauan Filosofis," *Journal Ulumul Qur'an* 6(1) (2009), 31–50.

highlights the tension between different epistemological paradigms, revealing that debates surrounding *waḥdat al-wujūd* are fundamentally debates about the nature and limits of knowledge itself.³⁶

Similarly, the concept of *al-insān al-kāmil*, developed by 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili, reflects an epistemological model in which the human being becomes a locus of divine manifestation and knowledge. In this framework, knowing God is inseparable from knowing the self, indicating a reflexive structure of knowledge that is characteristic of Sufi thought.³⁷ From an epistemological perspective, these concepts demonstrate that philosophical Sufism operates through a unitive mode of knowing, where distinctions between subject and object, knower and known, are reconfigured. This contrasts with discursive and dualistic models of knowledge that dominate purely rational or legalistic traditions.³⁸

Within the context of Sanusi's *tafsīr*, philosophical Sufism does not appear in an explicitly doctrinal form; however, its epistemological influence can be detected in the integration of rational interpretation with implicit spiritual insight. This suggests that Sanusi's interpretative method, while formally categorized as *tafsīr bi al-ra'y*, remains open to deeper metaphysical orientations that resonate with philosophical Sufi thought.³⁹

³⁶ Moh Bakir, "Studi Tafsir tentang Dimensi Epistemologi Tasawuf," *Kaca (Karunia Cahaya Allah): Jurnal Dialogis Ilmu Ushuluddin* 9(1) (2019), 4–21.

³⁷ Sumanta, "The Values of Perfect Human Beings in the Dignity Seven of *Insān Kāmil*," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 12(4) (2021), 286–301.

³⁸ Muhamad Afiq Abd Razak & Mohd Anuar Ramli, "The Concept of '*Umūm al-Balwā* in the Shade of *Taşawwuf*: Wisdom Between Concession (*Rukḥṣah*) and Being Abstinence (*Wara'*)," *Afkar: Journal of 'Aqidah & Islamic Thought* 20(1) (2018), 213–228.

³⁹ Dheen Mohamed Mohamed Meerasahibu, "Some Early Definitions of *Taşawwuf*: Exploring the Centrality of Abū Yazīd *al-Bisṭāmī* in

An example of philosophical Sufism can be found in the interpretation of the Qur'an by KH Ahmad Sanusi:

أُولَئِكَ عَلَىٰ هُدًى مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

Those are upon [right] guidance from their Lord, and it is those who are the successful.⁴⁰

Sanusi's interpretation of this verse constructs guidance (*hudā*) not merely as doctrinal correctness, but as a transformative state of consciousness that reflects a deeper awareness of divine reality. Rather than limiting success (*al-muflihūn*) to external adherence, he frames it as the culmination of an inner realization that aligns human perception with divine truth.

This interpretative move indicates that meaning is produced through a shift from outward categorization to inward realization, a hallmark of philosophical Sufi epistemology. In this context, guidance becomes an epistemic condition, where knowledge is inseparable from spiritual awareness. Sanusi proceeds to classify disbelief (*kufr*) into several types, including denial, ignorance, hypocrisy, and stubborn rejection. However, this classification should not be read merely as a theological taxonomy, but as a gradation of epistemic failure in responding to truth.

Each type of *kufr* reflects a different mode of epistemological obstruction: ignorance limits access to knowledge, arrogance distorts recognition of truth, and hypocrisy fractures the relationship between knowledge and authenticity. Thus, disbelief is constructed not only as a moral deviation, but as a disruption in the process of knowing Allah the Almighty:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ ءَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

Its History," *Afkar: Journal of 'Aqidah & Islamic Thought* 23(1) (2021), 197–250.

⁴⁰ Surah al-Baqarah 2:5.

Indeed, those who disbelieve - it is all the same for them whether you warn them or do not warn them - they will not believe.⁴¹

Sanusi interprets this condition not as mere stubbornness, but as the closure of epistemic receptivity, where the individual becomes incapable of engaging with truth. This is further reinforced in the subsequent verse:

خَتَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ سَمْعِهِمْ وَعَلَىٰ أَبْصَارِهِمْ غِشَاوَةٌ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٧﴾

Allah has set a seal upon their hearts and upon their hearing, and over their vision is a veil. And for them is a great punishment.⁴²

The notion of the "sealed heart" is reinterpreted within a Sufi framework as a state of spiritual blindness, where the *al-qalb* (heart) can no longer receive divine illumination. Rather than a purely theological statement, this represents an epistemological condition in which the capacity for knowing is obstructed by ego (*nafs*) and desire.

From a philosophical Sufi perspective, this condition reflects the absence of inner purification necessary for perceiving reality beyond its ظاهر (external form). Sufi elements are embedded implicitly through the emphasis on the heart as the locus of knowledge and the necessity of removing inner veils to access divine truth.⁴³

Furthermore, Sanusi's interpretation of guidance in verse 5 can be connected to a unitive mode of knowing, resonating with the concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, where true understanding involves recognizing the underlying unity of existence. In this sense, success is not merely

⁴¹ Surah al-Baqarah 2:6.

⁴² Surah al-Baqarah 2:7.

⁴³ Mat Jalil, "Falsafah Hakikat Iman, Islam dan Kufur," *Ath Thariq: Jurnal Dakwah dan Komunikasi* 2(2) (2019), 389–405.

behavioral, but ontological and epistemological, reflecting a realization of divine presence.

Epistemologically, this interpretation establishes a clear distinction between two modes of knowing: one grounded in openness, humility, and spiritual awareness, and another constrained by ego, ignorance, and attachment. Knowledge of the Qur'an is thus contingent upon the condition of the heart, rather than solely on intellectual capacity.

In the Qur'an, various paths are presented for humans to contemplate the possibilities of the afterlife, as expressed in the following verse:

أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تُمْنُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾ ءَأَنْتُمْ تَخْلُقُونَهُ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْخَالِقُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

Have you seen that which you emit? Is it you who creates it, or are We the Creator?⁴⁴

This verse humanity that it is Allah SWT who grants life, particularly through the creation of children. Many couples may try to conceive, yet are unable to bear children, which underscores the point that the power to create life rests solely with Allah the Almighty. The following verse reinforces this idea:

أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تَحْرُثُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾ ءَأَنْتُمْ تَزْرَعُونَهُ أَمْ نَحْنُ الزَّارِعُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾

And have you seen that [seed] which you sow? Is it you who makes it grow, or are We the grower?⁴⁵

Thus, it is universally acknowledged that only Allah causes growth, as there are many instances where plants are planted but do not grow. Both of these verses point to the broader reality of the afterlife. The first verse alludes to the creation of human life, specifically addressing the process of sperm formation, which originates from the essence of food. Some medical scholars even state that

⁴⁴ Surah al-Waqi'ah 56:58-59.

⁴⁵ Surah al-Waqi'ah 56:63-64.

from 70 bites of food, one drop of blood is produced, and from 70 drops of blood, one drop of semen is formed. From this semen, a clot of blood is then created, followed by the development of a lump of flesh, and ultimately, a human being is born. This intricate process demonstrates the power of Allah, who orchestrates all of these stages. It serves as a reminder that Allah alone has the authority to grant and take life, affirming His supreme power over all creation.

The second verse is likened to the process of planting seeds in the earth and watering them. Logically, one might expect the seed to decay, since the earth is inherently associated with decay and, in most cases, water promotes the rotting of organic matter. However, contrary to this expectation, the earth and water do not cause decay; instead, they facilitate the growth of the seed into a plant. This process reflects the extraordinary power of Allah SWT. If Allah the Almighty has the power to cause seeds to grow, then certainly, He also possesses the power to resurrect all humans, even those who have been buried.

According to K.H. Ahmad Sanusi, the primary message of this verse is that humans do not have the power to create life, even though they may make efforts, such as through the union of husband and wife. Only Allah has the authority to determine whether a human being will be born, demonstrating His immense and limitless power. This verse serves as a reminder for humanity to recognize that all things in this universe, including the creation of life, are entirely under the will of Allah the Almighty.

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ وَسِعَ كُرْسِيُّهُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَا يَئُودُهُ حِفْظُهُمَا وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿٢٢٠﴾

Allah - there is no deity except Him, the Ever-Living, the Sustainer of [all] existence. Neither drowsiness overtakes Him nor sleep. To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth. Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is [presently] before them and what will be after them, and they encompass not a thing of His knowledge except for what He wills. His Kursi extends over the heavens and the earth, and their preservation tires Him not. And He is the Highest, the Greatest.⁴⁶

An intriguing aspect of the verse above is the explanation of Allah's *al-Kursī*, which is why this verse is commonly referred to *Āyat al-Kursī*. According to K.H. Ahmad Sanusi, *Āyat al-Kursī* is regarded as the essence of all the verses in the Qur'an, encapsulating the greatness, majesty, power, and perfection of Allah SWT. This verse articulates the nature of His divinity, His absolute authority, and His sovereignty over all creation. Therefore, *Āyat al-Kursī* highlights the unparalleled status and omnipotence of Allah in a profound and comprehensive manner.⁴⁷

As noted by Sadie, a comparison is made between the heavens, the earth, and Allah's *al-Kursī*, in which the entire universe is described as a mere ring in comparison to the *al-Kursī*, and the *al-Kursī*, when compared to the *'Arash* (Throne of Allah), is like the heavens and the earth. Additionally, a narration states that the length of each *al-Kursī* is equivalent to the combined length of the seven layers of the heavens and the earth. This description underscores the grandeur and vastness of Allah's power, illustrating that even the heavens and the earth are minuscule in comparison to His divine attributes.

⁴⁶ Surah al-Baqarah 2:255.

⁴⁷ Sanusi, *Tafsir Rawḍat al-'Irfān*, 2:340.

The *al-Kursī* is said to be carried by four angels, each holding a part of it. These angels have distinct appearances and roles in supplicating for the welfare of Allah's creation: one angel resembles the appearance of Prophet Adam and prays for sustenance and rain for humanity; the second angel resembles a galoedra (a type of bird) and prays for sustenance for all birds; the third angel resembles a cow and prays for sustenance for all domesticated animals; and the fourth angel resembles a tiger and prays for sustenance for all wild animals. It is narrated in some reports that between those who carry the Throne and those who carry the *al-Kursī*, there are seventy veils (or barriers) of light, with each veil being as thick as a journey of five hundred years. Were it not for these veils, the beings who carry the *al-Kursī* would be consumed by the overwhelming light emanating from the Throne.⁴⁸

In Ahmad Sanusi's *tafsīr*, the verse concerning the *al-Kursī* is considered the essence of all the verses in the Qur'an, as it encapsulates the majesty and perfection of Allah. Some interpretations describe Allah's *al-Kursī* as so vast that the heavens and the earth are merely a small part of it, emphasizing the immense power and greatness of Allah SWT. Furthermore, the *al-Kursī* is carried by four angels, each with specific duties, highlighting the pivotal role of angels in the regulation of the universe. The throne itself is described as being separated from everything else by seventy veils of light, signifying the overwhelming grandeur and magnificence of Allah's presence.

c) *Taşawwuf 'Irfānī*

Unlike *taşawwuf akhlāqī*, which emphasizes ethical refinement, *taşawwuf 'irfānī* represents a higher epistemological orientation in which knowledge of God (*ma'rifah*) is attained through direct inner realization rather

⁴⁸ Ahmad Sanusi, *Tamshīyyat al-Muslimīn fī Tafsīr Kalām Rabb al-'Ālamīn* (Sukabumi: Al-Ittihad, 2003), 515.

than discursive reasoning alone. In this framework, the self is no longer perceived as an independent agent, but as a locus through which divine action is manifested.⁴⁹ Sanusi's interpretation of Surah al-Fatihah 1:5 (*iyyāk na'bud wa iyyāk nasta'īm*) constructs worship not merely as ritual practice, but as a total existential orientation grounded in absolute dependence on God.

Rather than limiting *'ibādah* to formal acts, he defines it as the ultimate humility and total exaltation of God, thereby transforming worship into an experiential realization of servitude. This interpretative move demonstrates that meaning is constructed through the dissolution of the distinction between action and divine agency, where human acts are understood as manifestations of God's will. Consequently, true worship is not defined by external performance, but by the degree to which the individual recognizes the ontological dependence of all actions on God.

Sanusi also addresses the issue of seeking help (*isti'ānah*). However, rather than framing it as a rigid prohibition or allowance, he reinterprets it within a hierarchical model of causality, where all forms of assistance ultimately originate from God. This allows for the acceptance of intermediary practices such as *tawassul*, while maintaining theological coherence, thereby avoiding reductive accusations of shirk.

From an *'irfānī* perspective, this reflects a deeper epistemological principle: that apparent multiplicity in causation does not negate the unity of divine agency. Thus, Sufi elements are embedded implicitly through the emphasis on unity (*tawhīd*), inner realization, and the transcendence of superficial distinctions between means

⁴⁹ Ibnu Farhan and Ahmad Tajuddin Arafat, "Tasawuf, *'Irfānī*, dan Dialektika Pengetahuan Islam," *Tasamuh: Jurnal Studi Islam* 13(2) (2017), 217–248.

and source. Furthermore, Sanusi's emphasis on *ma'rifah* positions knowledge of God as the ultimate goal of interpretation, where understanding the Qur'an is inseparable from spiritual transformation. This suggests that interpretation operates not only at the level of linguistic meaning, but at the level of existential realization.

The key teachings derived from this interpretation, such as awareness of divine attributes, reliance (*tawakkul*), and the pursuit of guidance (*hidāyah*), should not be read merely as prescriptive doctrines, but as stages in an epistemological journey toward divine knowledge. Epistemologically, *taṣawwuf 'irfānī* in Sanusi's *tafsīr* establishes a non-dual mode of knowing, in which the distinction between knower, knowledge, and the known becomes increasingly unified. This challenges purely rationalistic or formalistic approaches to *tafsīr*, which treat knowledge as external and detached from the subject.⁵⁰

Additionally, Surah Ali-'Imran (3:191) further emphasizes the importance of reflection and submission to Allah's will:

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ
السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَطْلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ
النَّارِ ﴿١٩١﴾

Those who remember Allah while standing, sitting or [lying] on their sides, and give thought to the creation of the heavens and the earth, [saying], "Our Lord, you did not create this aimlessly; exalted are You [above such a thing]; then protect us from the punishment of the Fire."⁵¹

⁵⁰ Sanusi, *Tamshiyat al-Muslimīn*, 561.

⁵¹ Surah Ali 'Imran 3:191.

Sanusi's interpretation of this verse constructs a unified epistemological model that integrates remembrance (*dhikr*), reflection (*tafakkur*), and supplication as interconnected modes of knowing. Rather than treating these elements as separate acts of devotion, he presents them as a continuous process through which the believer internalizes divine presence and meaning. In this framework, meaning is not derived solely from intellectual contemplation of the cosmos, but from the dynamic interaction between cognitive reflection and spiritual awareness. The act of remembering Allah in all states (*qiyām*, *qu'ūd*, and *junūb*) indicates that knowledge is not situational but existential, encompassing the entirety of human experience.⁵²

Sanusi highlights that individuals who engage in such practices embody specific ethical and spiritual qualities. However, these qualities should not be understood merely as moral prescriptions, but as indicators of an epistemological disposition characterized by continuous awareness of God. The emphasis on *dhikr* reflects an inward orientation that sustains consciousness of the divine, while *tafakkur* functions as a reflective process that interprets the signs (*āyāt*) of God in creation.⁵³

From a Sufi perspective, this integration reflects a core principle of *taṣawwuf 'irfānī*, where knowledge is attained through the harmonization of *al-qalb* (heart), *al-'aql* (intellect), and experiential awareness. Sufi elements are implicitly embedded through the emphasis on constant remembrance, contemplative insight and recognition of divine purpose in all aspects of existence. The supplication in the verse "*Our Lord, you did not create this in vain*"⁵⁴ represents a moment of epistemic realization, where

⁵² Ramli Cibro, "From *Wujūdiyyah* to *Ma'rifah*: The Genealogy of Ḥamzah Faṣṣūrī's Sufism," *At-Taḥkīr* 12(1) (2019), 27–44.

⁵³ Sanusi, *Tafsīr Rawḍat al-'Irfān*, 2:431.

⁵⁴ Surah Ali 'Imran 3:191.

reflection culminates in the recognition of divine intentionality and human dependence. This indicates that true understanding is not merely analytical, but transformative, leading to humility, repentance, and existential reorientation.

Epistemologically, Sanusi's interpretation challenges the separation between knowledge and devotion by asserting that understanding the Qur'an requires both intellectual reflection and spiritual discipline. Knowledge emerges through a cyclical process: remembrance sustains awareness, reflection deepens understanding, and supplication affirms existential dependence on God.

The verse from Surah al-Baqarah (2:21) further emphasizes the essential connection between worship and righteousness:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

O mankind, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, that you may become righteous⁵⁵

Sanusi's interpretation of this verse constructs worship (*ibādah*) not merely as ritual obligation, but as an epistemological pathway through which الإنسان (human) comes to recognize divine reality and attain *taqwā*. Rather than limiting worship to prescribed acts, he frames it as a comprehensive orientation that integrates awareness, gratitude, and ethical discipline. The distinction between *uṣūl* (foundational acts) and *furū'* (derivative practices) is not presented merely as a legal classification, but as a hierarchical structure of meaning in which outward practices are rooted in an inner consciousness of servitude.

⁵⁵ Surah al-Baqarah 2:21.

This indicates that ritual acts derive their significance from an underlying epistemic awareness of God's sovereignty and human dependence.

Sanusi emphasizes gratitude for bodily faculties such as sight, hearing, and speech. However, this emphasis should not be understood solely as moral encouragement, but as a cognitive reorientation in which the human body itself becomes a site of recognizing divine *نعمة* (blessing). Gratitude (*shukr*) thus functions as an epistemic act, transforming perception of the world from possession to divine trust. From a Sufi perspective, this reflects an implicit integration of *taṣawwuf akhlāqī* and *taṣawwuf 'irfānī*, where ethical practice and inner awareness converge in the act of worship. Sufi elements are embedded through a deliberate emphasis on sincerity (*ikhhlās*), detachment from worldly illusions (*zuhd*), and the recognition of divine favor (*ni'mah*) in all dimensions of existence.

Sanusi's characterization of the world as a "prison" for believers further develops this framework. Rather than a purely ascetic statement, this metaphor functions as an epistemological critique of worldly attachment, highlighting the limitations of a reality perceived solely through material desire. The believer's restraint is thus not deprivation, but a reconfiguration of perception in which ultimate value is relocated from the temporal to the eternal.

In contrast, the apparent "freedom" of disbelievers is interpreted as an epistemic illusion, where unrestrained desire obscures awareness of divine reality. This reinforces a dual epistemic model: one grounded in disciplined awareness and another in unreflective immersion in materiality.⁵⁶ Epistemologically, Sanusi's interpretation

⁵⁶ William C. Chittick, *Imaginal Worlds: Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 210.

positions worship as a transformative process in which knowledge is produced through practice, gratitude, and restraint. Understanding the Qur'an is therefore not achieved through abstract reasoning alone, but through embodied engagement with divine commands.

The impact of worship, accompanied by gratitude for all the blessings that Allah has granted, is that He promises to increase our piety. There is nothing that can save us from the fire of Hell except our worship of Allah, as He has promised the reward of Paradise for those who worship Him. This is emphasized in another verse:

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ مَغْفِرَةٌ وَأَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٥٧﴾

Allah has promised those who believe and do righteous deeds [that] for them there is forgiveness and great reward.⁵⁷

In addition, K.H. Ahmad Sanusi offers a distinct perspective on human life on Earth, emphasizing that humans must always worship Allah the Almighty. He reminds us that the most precious things on Earth, such as gold and silver, have not been abundantly provided for our benefit. He stresses that these material riches are not intended for our ultimate good, and that the wealth of the world is created for us, even though the world itself is a prison for the believers.

Even if they are wealthy, believers remain bound by the commands of Allah and His Messenger. Moreover, even if they are prosperous in this world, the rewards of Paradise, on the Day of Judgment, will far outweigh the transient pleasures of the material world. As such, this world, despite its wealth and luxuries, is still considered a prison for those who truly understand. For them, Paradise is infinitely more beautiful and fulfilling than anything this world can offer.

⁵⁷ Surah al-Ma'idah 5:9.

Conversely, within this theological framework, the mundane world functions as an existential paradise for disbelievers, precisely because they operate outside the normative constraints of Islamic law, such as the categories of *ḥarām* (prohibited) and *makrūh* (reprehensible), while remaining indifferent to *fard* (obligatory) or *sunnah* (recommended) actions. Unbound by religious obligations, their lived experience is dictated primarily by immanent desires. Consequently, despite the inherent tribulations of earthly life, this worldly existence is conceptualized as a comparative heaven relative to the eschatological retribution awaiting those who reject faith.

When we understand that the wealth, beauty, and pleasures of this world are metaphorically described as a prison, it becomes evident how much more delightful and beautiful Paradise must be. Therefore, it is essential not to forget to seek Paradise through faith, repentance, and worship of Allah SWT. If we become distracted by the pursuit of worldly pleasures, we risk facing endless suffering in the Hereafter, ultimately becoming inhabitants of the eternal fire of hell.⁵⁸

K.H. Ahmad Sanusi emphasizes that worship is the only way to save humans from the Hellfire. Without worship, humans will not receive Allah's help and will not attain true happiness in the hereafter. This serves as a reminder of the importance of continually engaging in worship and maintaining piety in our daily lives, so that we remain under Allah's protection and guidance.

Conclusion

The Sufi epistemology in the *Tafsīr Rawḍat al-'Irfān fī Ma'rīfat al-Qur'ān* by K.H. Ahmad Sanusi provides a profound understanding of the spiritual dimensions of knowledge. In this interpretation, three key epistemological frameworks are presented. The first is the

⁵⁸ Sanusi, *Tamshiyat al-Muslimīn*, 560.

epistemology of *taṣawwuf akhlāqī*, which pertains to the understanding of morality and ethics that Muslims must practice in their daily lives. *Taṣawwuf akhlāqī* emphasizes the cultivation of good character, rooted in the practical application of religious values. K.H. Ahmad Sanusi links teachings from the Qur'an to the efforts required for self-improvement, including qualities such as honesty, patience, humility, and care for others. This perspective is consistent with the principles of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul), a central concept in Sufism, which emphasizes the importance of purifying the heart and enhancing one's relationship with both Allah SWT and fellow human beings.

Second, the epistemology of *taṣawwuf falsafī* refers to knowledge of God acquired through deep thought and philosophical reflection. In K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's *tafsīr*, this dimension facilitates a deeper exploration of the meanings behind the verses of the Qur'an through a rational and intellectual approach. This interpretation draws on the framework of Sufi thought, which is rooted in the teachings of great Sufis such as al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi.⁵⁹ These scholars not only emphasized the importance of spiritual experience but also sought to explain and understand the nature of God through logic, metaphysics and philosophical inquiry. Third, the epistemology of *taṣawwuf 'irfānī* focuses on direct mystical experience with God. This dimension encompasses a more personal and inner spiritual journey, where knowledge of God is attained through practices such as contemplation, meditation, and spiritual exercises in

⁵⁹ Syafwan Rozi, "Understanding the Concept of Ecosufism: Harmony and the Relationship of God, Nature and Humans in Mystical Philosophy of Ibn 'Arabī," *Ulumuna* 23(2) (2019), 242–265.

silence and remembrance (*dhikr*).⁶⁰ In K.H. Ahmad Sanusi's *tafsīr*, this epistemology is not limited to the inner aspects of spiritual life; it also explores how such mystical experiences can transform a person's interactions with the external world.

Through his *tafsīr*, K.H. Ahmad Sanusi explores the meanings of the Qur'an using a Sufi approach, particularly *taṣawwuf akhlāqī*, which emphasizes the moral and ethical dimensions of everyday life. The significance of this contribution lies not only in its deep understanding of religious teachings but also in its role in reinforcing the foundation of Islamic moderation. K.H. Ahmad Sanusi offers a modern perspective on Sufism, highlighting that the pursuit of spirituality involves not only the transcendence of the self to unite with God but also the human responsibility, as God's vicegerent, to improve relationships with others. In this view, spirituality is not an escape from the world but a call to engage with it responsibly, fostering a harmonious balance between devotion to God and ethical responsibility toward fellow human beings.

Acknowledgement

This research was funded by the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education of the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia and LPDP.

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⁶⁰ Hammis Syafaq et al., "Reconstructing Islamic Epistemology: Bridging Metaphysics, Reason, and Revelation," *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 14(2) (2024), 240–269.

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