



Review Article

Muslim Philosophical Perspectives on Universe

Dr Rifat Aman

Sr. Assistant Professor, Department of Education, GCW Nawakadal, Srinagar, Kashmir, India

Corresponding Author: *Dr Rifat Aman

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20069468>

Abstract

This paper explores Muslim philosophical perspectives on the universe as a divinely orchestrated system, synthesizing rational, theological, and mystical interpretations from key thinkers. Ibn Sina depicts a geocentric cosmos of nested spheres eternal supra-lunar etherial realms and corruptible sub-lunar elements driven by Aristotelian physics yet unified under a single divine unmoved mover enacting celestial glorification through God's command. In contrast, Al-Ghazali champions creationism, temporal finitude, and occasionalism, refuting eternalism via his *Tahafut al-Falasifa* and the Kalam cosmological argument, which logically posits an absolute, singular Creator sustaining all events through omnipotent will, viewing the universe as signs (*ayat*) for spiritual insight. Complementary views include Al-Farabi's Neoplatonic emanative hierarchy, Ibn Rushd's rational harmony of natural laws and faith, Suhrawardi's illuminationist light metaphysics, Mulla Sadra's transubstantial motion in a dynamic flux, Ibn Arabi's *Wahdat al-Wujud* unity of being, and Allama Iqbal's purposeful, evolving cosmos infused with *Khudi* (self), rejecting illusionary negation for material reality as a stage for human ego development toward divine intimacy. Collectively, these perspectives affirm the universe's purposeful teleology, hierarchical unity (*Tawhid*), and role in ethical-spiritual ascent, reconciling philosophy with Islamic revelation.

Manuscript Information

- ISSN No: 2583-7397
- Received: 12-04-2026
- Accepted: 26-04-2026
- Published: 07-05-2026
- IJCRM:5(3); 2026: 75-79
- ©2026, All Rights Reserved
- Plagiarism Checked: Yes
- Peer Review Process: Yes

How to Cite this Article

Rifat A, Muslim Philosophical Perspectives on Universe. Int J Contemp Res Multidiscip. 2026;5(3):75-79.

Access this Article Online



www.multiarticlesjournal.com

KEYWORDS: Muslim philosophy, universe cosmology, Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, Kalam argument, emanation, Wahdat al-Wujud, Khudi, Tawhid, transubstantial motion.

INTRODUCTION

Ibn Sina envisages a universe that is one in number, finite in extent, and spherical in shape. The cosmos is divided in to two realms. First, the supra-lunar region of eternal, immutable, ingenerated and incorruptible celestial sphere, and second, the sub-lunar region of the four elements subject to generation and corruption. On this model, the universe is structured as a set of nested spheres, all centred upon the centre of the universe, which coincides with the earth's centre. Nearest the centre are the sub-lunar spheres of earth, water, air and fire. It is within

these spheres that all fundamental changes involving the elements occur, such as locomotion, alternation, growth and diminution, generation and corruption. Beyond those four central spheres are the nesting crystalline solid but transparent spheres made of fifth element, ether that carry around and move the celestial bodies, namely the moon, the sun, all the planets, and the fixed stars.

Ibn Sina corroborates his theses with a set of arguments, mostly a priori in kind and largely derived from the Aristotelian physical system. The geocentric thesis, the arrangement of the

spheres, the immobility and spherical shape of the earth, and the impossibility of other universe similar to ours are all explained in terms of Aristotelian theories of natural and forced motions, simple and composite motions, and circular and rectilinear motions. Ibn Sina differs from Aristotle, however, when it comes to the metaphysical question as to what causes the celestial motions. Whereas Aristotle posited forty-seven or fifty-five unmoved movers, Ibn Sina not only reduces the number in to one single unmoved mover of all, but also gives a non-Aristotelian explanation for celestial phenomena from a religious point of view, saying that the circular movements of celestial spheres is meant for glorification (*tasbih*) and is due to Divine Command (*li amr Allah*).

AL-Ghazali's Perspective

Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, a prominent Persian theologian, philosopher, and mystic of the Islamic Golden Age, had a profound influence on Islamic thought, particularly regarding the nature of the universe and its relation to God. His views on the universe are deeply rooted in Islamic theology and are a significant part of his broader philosophical and theological framework. Below is a detailed overview of Al-Ghazali's perspective on the universe:

The Nature of the Universe:

Creationism: Al-Ghazali strongly upheld the Islamic doctrine of creationism, emphasizing that the universe is a created entity. He argued that the universe did not exist eternally and was brought into existence by God's will. This view is in direct opposition to the Aristotelian concept of the universe as eternal, a view that was held by many philosophers of his time.

Temporal Finitude: According to Al-Ghazali, time itself began with the creation of the universe. He rejected the idea of an infinite past and maintained that the universe has a temporal beginning. The world, in his view, is contingent and relies entirely on God for its existence.

God's Relationship with the Universe:

Occasionalism: Al-Ghazali is known for his defense of occasionalism, the belief that all events in the universe occur due to God's direct intervention. He argued that what we perceive as cause and effect in the natural world is not the result of any intrinsic power in the objects themselves but rather the continuous will of God. For example, when fire burns cotton, it is not due to the inherent properties of fire but because God wills the fire to burn the cotton at that moment.

Divine Omnipotence: Al-Ghazali emphasized God's absolute power and sovereignty over the universe. He argued that God's will is the ultimate cause of all that happens, and nothing in the universe occurs without God's decree. This view was intended to reinforce the belief in God's omnipotence and the dependence of all creation on Him.

Critique of Philosophers:

Incoherence of the Philosophers (Tahafut al-Falasifa): One of Al-Ghazali's most famous works is his critique of Islamic philosophers, particularly those influenced by Greek philosophy, such as Avicenna (Ibn Sina). In this work, Al-

Ghazali argues against the philosophers' belief in the eternity of the world and their views on causality. He posits that these views undermine the concept of divine creation and lead to a denial of God's active role in the universe.

Refutation of Eternity: Al-Ghazali dedicated significant effort to refuting the idea that the universe is eternal. He believed that the notion of an eternal universe contradicts the fundamental Islamic tenet of creation *ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing). For Al-Ghazali, accepting the eternity of the world would mean denying God's ability to create and control the universe.

The Role of the Universe in Spiritual Life:

A Veil or a Sign: In Al-Ghazali's view, the physical universe can either be a veil that distracts believers from God or a sign that leads them to recognize God's greatness. He believed that the material world has no intrinsic value but can be instrumental in guiding believers toward spiritual awareness and understanding.

Mysticism and the Universe: Al-Ghazali also incorporated mystical elements into his understanding of the universe. He viewed the natural world as a manifestation of divine attributes and saw contemplation of the universe as a way to draw closer to God. The universe, in this mystical perspective, is not just a physical creation but a reflection of the divine reality.

The Universe and Human Knowledge:

Limits of Human Reason: Al-Ghazali was skeptical of the ability of human reason alone to fully comprehend the nature of the universe and God. He argued that while reason has its place, it must be complemented by revelation and divine guidance. The mysteries of the universe, according to Al-Ghazali, are ultimately beyond human understanding and can only be truly grasped through spiritual insight and revelation.

Epistemology: In his epistemology, Al-Ghazali stressed that true knowledge comes from God and that the senses and intellect are fallible. He believed that while the study of the universe can lead to knowledge, it is only through divine illumination that one can achieve certainty.

Cosmological Views:

Cosmos as a System of Signs: Al-Ghazali viewed the universe as a system of signs (*ayāt*) that point to the existence and attributes of God. For him, everything in the universe, from the smallest atom to the largest celestial body, serves as a reminder of God's creative power and wisdom.

Rejection of Astrology: Al-Ghazali rejected the idea that the stars and planets have any control over human destiny. He argued that such beliefs detract from the belief in God's omnipotence and lead to a form of shirk (associating partners with God).

Significance of the Kalam Cosmological Argument

The Kalam cosmological argument is significant because it seeks to demonstrate the existence of God using reason and logic. It is an *a priori* argument, meaning it does not rely on empirical evidence to prove its premises. Instead, it depends on logical deductions from self-evident truths. This makes it a

powerful argument for the existence of God, as it does not rely on scientific evidence, which can change over time.

Furthermore, the Kalam cosmological argument has influenced Islamic theology and philosophy. Al-Ghazali's argument formulation has been accepted by almost all later Muslim theologians and has significantly influenced medieval Latin thinking. The argument has also been adopted by Christian theologians such as William Lane Craig, who has used it to defend the existence of God in contemporary debates.

Al Ghazali's argument proved the existence of One Absolute Creator.

The Kalam cosmological argument formulated by Al-Ghazali seeks to demonstrate the existence of God using reason and logic. The argument rests on the premise that the universe had a beginning and that anything that begins to exist must have a cause. Al-Ghazali argues that this cause must be God, the only entity that can account for the creation of the universe. The argument's significance lies in its use of logic and reason to demonstrate the existence of God and its influence on Islamic and Christian theology and philosophy.

In conclusion, we must appreciate that Ghazali's argument points to an absolute Creator of everything else and not a triune God. Ultimately, through the Kalam argument, Al Ghazali points to a Creator who is absolutely one (not divisible), independent, eternal, and doesn't create other Gods or is created by other Gods.

The muslim philosophers offer a wide range of perspectives on universe, reflecting their efforts to reconcile Islamic theology with philosophical inquiry.

Al-Farabi (872–950)

Al-Farabi, known as the "Second Teacher" (after Aristotle), developed a cosmological system heavily influenced by Neoplatonism. He viewed the universe as a hierarchy of emanations from the First Cause, or the Necessary Being (God). In this hierarchy, the universe is an ordered structure of celestial spheres, each governed by an intellect. The human soul is part of this cosmic order, with the ultimate goal of attaining unity with the Active Intellect.

Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (1126–1198)

Ibn Rushd, often referred to as the "Commentator" for his extensive work on Aristotle, defended the compatibility of philosophy and religion. He opposed al-Ghazali's critique and argued that the universe operates according to natural laws established by God, and that these laws can be understood through reason. For Ibn Rushd, the study of the natural world (science) is a way to understand God's creation, and philosophy is a tool to interpret divine truths.

Suhrawardi (1154–1191)

Suhrawardi, the founder of the Illuminationist philosophy, offered a mystical interpretation of the universe. He proposed that the universe is a manifestation of divine light, with all beings existing in a hierarchy of illumination. This cosmology blends metaphysics with spiritual experience, suggesting that the universe is a series of lights descending from the Divine

Light, with each level representing a degree of separation from the source.

Mulla Sadra (1571–1640)

Mulla Sadra, a key figure in Islamic philosophy, introduced the concept of *transubstantial motion*, which suggests that the universe is in a constant state of flux and transformation. He combined metaphysics with a deep spiritual understanding, proposing that the universe is a dynamic and ever-changing reality, with all beings moving towards a higher state of existence. Mulla Sadra's philosophy emphasizes the unity of existence and the interconnectedness of all things in the universe.

Ibn Arabi (1165–1240)

Ibn Arabi, a prominent Sufi philosopher, provided a mystical interpretation of the universe, emphasizing the concept of Wahdat al-Wujud (the Unity of Being). He believed that the entire universe is a manifestation of God's essence, and that all existence is one, with apparent multiplicity being an illusion. For Ibn Arabi, the universe is a reflection of the divine, and understanding it requires a deep, spiritual insight rather than just intellectual reasoning.

Allama Iqbal's Perspective:

The General structure of the universe in which we live, the nature of man's relationship with it and his place in it, are questioned that have formed by subject of speculations down the ages. Philosophy and religion have explored these problems from their own individual standpoints and perhaps they will never continue to agitate human minds, in the light of advances made by science and theoretic reason.

Iqbal one of the profoundest thinkers that have emerged from the Muslim Community during the last two centuries, has elaborated his views on these questions in his poetical works. He points out, after the Quran, that the universe is not the result of a mere creative sport. It is enthused with a serious purpose.

We have not created the heavens and earth and whatever is between them in sport. We have not created them but for a serious end: but the greater part of them under stands it not.

The world is not unreal, illusory or Maya, Iqbal, influenced by the Islamic ideas, rejects all those theories which speak of this world in negative term, and regard it to be as insignificant and the result of mere creative sport or Maya, deserving any to be renounced. He bitterly criticized Plato and other thinkers who are mad after a super sensuous world and denounce this world of sense experience. The world cannot be rejected as false or unreal. It is a reality to be reckoned with. In it lies fulfillment of the dreams and aspirations of those who inhabit it ^[23].

“Verily in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the succession of the night and of the day, are signs for men of understanding, who standing and sitting, and reclining, bear God in mind and reflect on the creation of the heavens and of the earth, and say; oh; our lord; thou has not created this in vain”.

Iqbal holds that the world of material object is not meaningless. There is a lot to be learnt from the moon and the stars, the sun and the showers, the rivers and mountains. Even the least

important things carries a meaning for those who see it and try to understand it. Our experience reveals to us three main levels the level of matter, the level of life and the level of consciousness, the subject matter of physics, biology and psychology respectively. The existence of an object which we see, feel, touch and smell, cannot be challenged, the material world in which we live exists before us, and is shaped and remodelled by us.

The reality behind the universe, according to Iqbal, is an all powerful consciousness. He calls it self or Khudi. The entity is the creator of the world. It means that the universe is the result of the creative activity of the world – self. And it is through his activity that the world self is striving to realize the idea of bringing about the birth of perfect man and the society of perfect human beings. We are thus not to under estimate the material world.

Physics studies that material world the world revealed by the senses. What do we mean by the matter? The physicist may postulate the theory of imperceptible entities called atoms. He does so because he cannot otherwise explain his sense – experience. The investigation of physics, like any branch of natural science, is empirical. It deals with the facts of experience, that is to say, sense – experience the physicist proceeds with the help of observation and experimentation, without which it would not be possible to make his conclusion verifiable. It thus becomes clear that the role of religious or aesthetic experience in understanding the nature of the world is excluded from the field are physics for the obvious reason that it studies that material world by which we mean the world of things we perceive [24].

Generally speaking, the universe experienced by us, “as a collection of finite things presents itself as a kind of island situated in a pure vacuity to which time, regarded as a series of mutually exclusive moments, is nothing and does nothing” [25]. Such a perceptual or common sense vice of the universe, according to Iqbal, leads to reflecting mind nowhere. The thought of a limit staggers the moment of the mind. “And verily towards the God is the limit” says the Quran. The universe is not extended and limited in an absolute space. Iqbal points it out as the first important indication of the intellectual revolt against the conception of a fixed universe advocated by Aristotle. Aristotle has penetrated deeply into the philosophy of evolution. Then how his universe is fixed. The existence of universe is a scale of being lying between the two extremes The formless matter at the bottom and matter-less form at the top. The world process is a passage from matter to form. But Aristotle’s theory of evolution is logical to temporal. Hence in effect the universe is fixed.

According to Asharite, the world is composed if infinitely small atoms (jawahir) which cannot be further divided. But the numbers of atoms is not fixed. According to Quran the universe is liable to increase. Creative activity of God is ceaseless, and therefore fresh atoms are always being added to the world, leading to its expansion and growth. Atom is independent of existence. Existence is quality imposed upon atom by God. An atom in its essence, therefore aggregation and accumulation of atoms that a thing becomes, generating space and extension. The Asharite theory of creations also supports the doctrine of

accident though Iqbal does not argue much against this view; he rejects it, thinking it to be a kind of materialism. He however, agrees with the Asharits that nothing has a stable nature.

Einstein, whitehead, Russell and Iqbal have a similar way of looking at the structure of the physical world. All of them believe in the dynamic aspect of reality. Iqbal attempts to reconstruct Muslim thought with due regard to the traditions of Islam. Such a reconstruction was not possible without having studies faithfully the recent development in the various domains of human knowledge.

The human personality is the central topic of philosophy for Iqbal. He discusses with keen interest the problem of self, its existence, nature and relation with body. Iqbal is opposed to all those systems of thought which under mine the value of human self. His conception of self is opposed to pantheistic mysticism which regards absorption in universal life as the final aim and salvation of man. Iqbal firmly pleads for self development. Man, Iqbal believes, possesses a prominent position in the universe. This view is also perfectly consistent with the teachings of Quran. He holds that a purely idealistic approach to this problem cannot be of much help. The ego is beyond the domain of matter, yet it has some connection with it. Permanent substance merely on the ground of different mental states that we express by the word “I”. It is through initiative experience alone that the great importance of human ego and its ultimate destiny is revealed. Man is not a stranger to this world. He has gradually emerged out of it. Iqbal thus accepts the idea of evolution which is also perfectly consistent with the teachings of Quran. Iqbal is vehemently opposed to the ideas of self-negation and renunciation. The secret of life does not consist in death, self-negation and other worldliness but in desires and ideals. Apparently Iqbal seems to be opposed to mysticism. Iqbal does not favour any such mystic thought which comes out of depression, which undermines human existence or preaches for self-negation and renunciation and recommends a life of retirement. Iqbal is a follower of the great mystic Rumi. There is a bold affirmation of human ego even in the lesson of infinite ego.

Nature is a living, ever graving organism where growth has no external limit. It is finite but boundless. There is no limit to its extension.

“Nature is to the Divine self as character is to the human self. In the picturesque phase of the Quran it is the habit of Allah”. Thus Iqbal would like to give a fresh spiritual meaning to physical science. The knowledge of nature is the knowledge of God’s behavior. In our observation of nature, we are virtually seeking a kind of intimacy with the absolute ego, and this is only another form of worship [25].

The world with all its detail, is not a final abode of existence. It is just a halting place of the human ego, a state for its reformation and development.

Iqbal says.

**“This world, this riot of colour of sound
This universe which is subject to the rule of death,
This world which is only a temple creator by eyes and ears.
Where in life consists of naught but eating and drinking.
This the first halting stage of the ego.
O’ traveler, this is meant to be thy abode.**

*Advance on after breaking this great barrier.
Salving the mysteries of time and pace
There the essence of existence is not yet void”.*

Muslim philosophers have offered a rich array of perspectives on the universe, ranging from rational and naturalistic views to mystical and metaphysical interpretations. While they differ in their methodologies and conclusions, they all emphasize the universe's connection to the divine and the importance of understanding it as a means to comprehend the nature of God and existence.

They have also historically offered a rich and varied understanding of the universe, integrating religious teachings with philosophical reasoning. Here's a summary of key perspectives:

Creation and Cosmology:

- The universe is created by Allah, who is both the ultimate cause and the sustainer of all existence. Creation is not random but purposeful, reflecting the wisdom and will of God.
- The concept of 'khalq'(creation) signifies that the universe had a beginning and will have an end, both determined by divine decree.

Hierarchy of Being:

- Many Muslim philosophers, influenced by Neoplatonism, viewed the universe as a hierarchical structure of existence. The 'One' or 'Necessary Being' (Allah) is at the top, followed by a series of emanations, including the 'Intellect' (Aql) and the 'Soul'(Nafs), which ultimately lead to the material world.
- This hierarchy reflects a gradation from pure being and intelligence to less perfect forms of existence, with the material world being the lowest.

The Role of Intellect:

1. Intellect (Aql) plays a central role in understanding the universe. Philosophers like Al-Farabi and Avicenna (Ibn Sina) argued that human intellect, when properly cultivated, can comprehend the universal order and the divine principles underlying it.
2. The highest human achievement is to reach the level of the 'active intellect', where one can fully grasp the truths of the universe and align oneself with divine wisdom.

Time and Eternity:

3. Time is a created entity and a measure of change in the physical world. Muslim philosophers debated whether the universe was created in time (with a specific temporal beginning) or whether it existed in some form eternally with God as its necessary sustainer.
4. Eternity belongs to Allah alone, while the universe, being created, is contingent and finite, even if it seems temporally infinite.

Unity and Multiplicity:

5. The universe is seen as a manifestation of the divine unity (Tawhid). Despite the apparent multiplicity and diversity in the world, everything ultimately points back to the oneness of God.
6. This notion is expressed in the interconnectedness of all things, where the material world is not independent but constantly reliant on divine sustenance.

Purpose and Teleology:

7. The universe has a teleological structure, meaning that everything in it has a purpose, ultimately leading back to God. The material world serves as a means for spiritual and intellectual growth, guiding humans toward understanding and fulfilling their purpose as God's vicegerents on Earth.
8. Philosophers like Al-Ghazali emphasized that the ultimate purpose of the universe is to serve as a sign of God's existence, wisdom, and mercy.

Ethical Implications:

- Understanding the universe in this way has ethical implications. Humans are responsible for aligning their actions with the divine order, recognizing their role in the cosmos, and striving to live virtuously in accordance with divine will.

This integration of metaphysical, ethical, and cosmological views created a comprehensive philosophical system that sought to explain the universe in a way that harmonized with Islamic teachings.

REFERENCES

1. Arif S. The universe as a system: Ibn Sina's cosmology revisited. 2009.
2. Darras MA. Islamic eco-cosmology in Ikhwan al-Safa's view. Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies. 2012.
3. Hayani S, Saputra A, Amin S. Pandangan Al-Ghazali tentang qadim dan baharu alam semesta. Substantia: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin. 2019.
4. Lacey R. An 11th century Muslim's syncretistic perspective of cosmology: Abū al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri's philosophical-poetic reflections in Luzūm mā lā yalzam on make-up and dynamics of the universe. Muslim World. 1995.
5. Nisa R. Esensi alam semesta dalam perspektif falsafah pendidikan Islam. Jurnal Ilmiah Al-Hadi. 2020.
6. Peters T, Iqbal M, Haq S. God, life, and the cosmos: Christian and Islamic perspectives. 2005.
7. Ritonga MS. Penciptaan manusia. FITRAH Jurnal Kajian Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman. 2018.
8. Siraj FM. Kosmologi dalam tinjauan failasuf Islam. 2014.
9. Ungu ES, Harry KD, Royani I, Tanjung N. Hakikat alam semesta dalam perspektif filsafat pendidikan Islam. El-Mujtama: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat. 2023.
10. Yasmin YE, Soleh AK. The nature of the universe in Al-Kindi's metaphysical perspective and its coherence with Qur'anic evidence. JAQFI Jurnal Aqidah dan Filsafat Islam. 2024

Creative Commons (CC) License

This article is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution–Non-Commercial–No Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license. This license permits sharing and redistribution of the article in any medium or format for non-commercial purposes only, provided that appropriate credit is given to the original author(s) and source. No modifications, adaptations, or derivative works are permitted under this license.