

Research Article

Al-Ghazali's Framework of Occasionalism in Tahafut al-Falasifah as a Critique of Contemporary Relativism

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Abstract. The contemporary intellectual landscape is dominated by postmodern relativism, which, by denying universal truth claims and moral values, creates a metaphysical vacuum that fragments public discourse and undermines the foundations of science, ethics, and religion. This crisis stems from a secular worldview that excludes a transcendent ground for reality. Problem: The central problem is the philosophical inadequacy of relativism and the need for a robust metaphysical foundation for objectivity. This research asks how Al-Ghazali's occasionalism can be formulated as a systematic critique of this relativism. This study employs a qualitative library research design, utilizing analytical, interpretative, and constructive methods. It involves a tripartite analysis: reconstructing Al-Ghazali's occasionalism from Tahafut al-Falasifah, deconstructing the internal contradictions of contemporary relativism, and synthesizing the two to build a coherent critique. The research

demonstrates that Al-Ghazali's framework, which rejects necessary causality and posits God as the sole Efficient Cause who sustains reality through consistent habits ('adah), provides a viable metaphysical foundation for objectivity. This directly counters the self-referential paradoxes and moral vacuity of relativism by grounding universal order and truth in a Divine Consciousness. The study concludes that Al-Ghazali's occasionalism serves as a powerful metaphysical antidote to contemporary relativism. Its primary contribution is a novel synthesis that bridges classical Islamic and modern philosophy, positioning Al-Ghazali's thought as a living resource for reclaiming objectivity and escaping the postmodern labyrinth.

Keywords: Occasionalism, Al-Ghazali, Relativism, Metaphysical Foundation, Objectivity

Abstrak. Lanskap intelektual kontemporer didominasi oleh relativisme pascamodern yang, dengan menolak klaim kebenaran dan nilai moral universal, menciptakan vakum metafisika yang memecah belah wacana publik dan meruntuhkan fondasi sains, etika, dan agama. Krisis ini berakar pada pandangan dunia sekuler yang mengesampingkan landasan transenden bagi realitas. Masalah sentralnya adalah ketidakcukupan filosofis relativisme dan perlunya fondasi metafisik yang kokoh untuk objektivitas. Penelitian ini menanyakan bagaimana okasionalisme Al-Ghazali dapat diformulasikan sebagai kritik sistematis terhadap relativisme ini. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kepustakaan kualitatif dengan metode analitis, interpretatif, dan konstruktif. Metode ini melibatkan analisis tiga tahap: merekonstruksi okasionalisme Al-Ghazali dari Tahafut al-Falasifah, mendekonstruksi kontradiksi internal relativisme kontemporer, dan mensintesis keduanya untuk membangun kritik yang koheren. Temuan: Penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kerangka kerja Al-Ghazali, yang menolak kausalitas niscaya dan menempatkan Tuhan sebagai Satu-satunya Sebab Efisien yang menopang realitas melalui kebiasaan ('adah) yang konsisten, menyediakan fondasi metafisik yang viable untuk objektivitas. Hal ini secara langsung membantah paradoks self-referential dan kehampaan moral relativisme dengan mendasarkan tatanan dan kebenaran universal pada Kesadaran Ilahi. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa okasionalisme Al-Ghazali berfungsi sebagai penangkal metafisik yang ampuh bagi relativisme kontemporer. Kontribusi utamanya adalah sintesis baru yang menjembatani filsafat Islam klasik dan filsafat modern, memposisikan pemikiran Al-Ghazali sebagai sumber daya yang hidup untuk merebut kembali objektivitas dan keluar dari labirin pascamodern.

Kata kunci: Okasionalisme, Al-Ghazali, Relativisme, Fondasi Metafisik, Objektivitas.

INTRODUCTION

The intellectual landscape of the 21st century is significantly shaped by postmodern currents of thought that position relativism as one of their central epistemological pillars.¹ In the domains of ethics and epistemology, this view asserts that truth claims and moral values are neither absolute nor universal, but rather the products of socio-cultural constructions or individual perspectives tied to specific

¹ Muhammad Diaz Supandi et al., "Caliphate Paradigm as an Antithesis to Imperialism: A Theological and Geopolitical Analysis in the Discourse of Islamic and Western Civilizations," *JIS: Journal Islamic Studies* 3, no. 2 (2025): 119–30, <https://doi.org/10.71456/jis.v3i2.1394>.

contexts.² As a consequence, discourses on truth are often reduced to mere competitions among "narratives," lacking a solid metaphysical framework to justify their validity. This situation generates a crisis of meaning in which the objective foundations of science, ethics, and religion become increasingly fragile, leading to disorientation and fragmentation in public discourse.³

This contemporary crisis of relativism can be traced to the metaphysical vacuum produced by the modern secular project.⁴ By excluding God or a Transcendent Principle from the ontological center of reality, the universe is perceived as an autonomous and closed web of cause-and-effect relations. Within such a framework, no space remains for a "First Cause" or for transcendent moral laws, ultimately leading to the conclusion that all worldviews possess equal and incommensurable foundations.⁵ Modern Western philosophy, in several of its manifestations, encounters an epistemic impasse because it has lost a firm ground for distinguishing between subjective opinion and objective truth.⁶

Confronting this impasse, the classical Islamic intellectual tradition offers relevant critical resources, having long anticipated and responded to similar challenges through rigorous metaphysical dialectics. One of the central figures in this tradition is Imam Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE). In his magnum opus, *Tahafut al-Falasifah (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)*, Al-Ghazali launches a fundamental critique of the Muslim Peripatetic philosophers, such as Ibn Sina and Al-Farabi, whom he accuses of deviation through doctrines like the eternity of the world and the denial of bodily resurrection, while constructing a framework of occasionalism that affirms the absolute dependence of nature on the Divine Will.

Within this context, the present study is grounded in a central question: How can Al-Ghazali's framework of occasionalism, as articulated in *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, be formulated as a systematic and relevant critique of contemporary relativism? This question is elaborated into several subsidiary inquiries: (1) How does Al-Ghazali conceptualize the relationship between causality and the Divine Will in his occasionalist structure? (2) At what points do the epistemological foundations of contemporary relativism conflict with the metaphysical premises of Al-Ghazali's

² Muhammad Jahanzeb Khan and Uddin Faheem, "Ruh, Nafs, Aqal, Qalb and Spiritual Intelligence: Towards Al-Ghazali Model of Psychospiritual Development," *Towards Pakistan Research Journal of Social Sciences* 3, no. March (2024): 28–29.

³ M. Alfanny Fahmil Ulum and Muhammad Fahmi, "The Concept of Qalbu Education According to Imam Ghazali," *Maharot: Journal of Islamic Education* 7, no. 2 (2023): 190, <https://doi.org/10.28944/maharot.v7i2.1405>.

⁴ Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena To The Metaphysics Of Islam* (malaysia: Penerbit UTM Press, 2014), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=PKugBQAAQBAJ>.

⁵ Syed Hussein. Alatas, *Imperialisme Intelektual, Ilham Book* (Malaysia: Ilham book, 1985), <https://doi.org/10.1177/00905917231155289>.

⁶ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Liberalisasi Pemikiran Islam," *Tsaqafah* 5, no. 1 (2007): 1–28.

occasionalism? (3) What implications does his framework offer for reconstructing the lost foundations of objectivity in modern discourse?

In general, this research seeks to build a constructive dialectic between classical Islamic philosophy and contemporary philosophical thought. Specifically, its objectives include: first, reconstructing Al-Ghazali's framework of occasionalism in *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, with particular focus on his rejection of "necessity" within natural causal laws; second, critically analyzing the metaphysical assumptions of contemporary relativism that constitute its internal fragility; and third, synthesizing both analyses to demonstrate how the concept of the "Single Cause" (God) in occasionalism provides a firm metaphysical foundation for objectivity, which the relativist paradigm is incapable of accommodating.

The urgency of this research lies in its potential to bridge the temporal and cultural divide between the classical Islamic intellectual tradition and the dilemmas of contemporary philosophy. Amid the stagnation of debates on relativism within Western philosophical circles, Al-Ghazali's perspective offers a radical "alternative paradigm." His critique operates not only at the epistemological level but penetrates the metaphysical roots of the problem. Thus, this study is not only relevant to Islamic studies but also contributes to the broader philosophical discourse seeking a way out of the postmodern labyrinth.

The original contribution of this research is that the application of Al-Ghazali's occasionalism as a specific analytical instrument for deconstructing contemporary relativism remains largely unexplored in existing academic studies. Rather than serving merely as a historical comparative study, this research aims to position *Tahafut al-Falasifah* not as a static historical artifact but as a living and applicable philosophical resource. Its principal contribution is the articulation of a coherent metaphysical argument: that without acknowledging the Divine Will as the sole true efficient cause, any claim to objective truth will inevitably drift within the currents of relativism, whereas Al-Ghazali's solution offers a metaphysical foundation for escaping this dilemma.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative library research design, operating within the tradition of philosophical and theological inquiry.⁷ The methodological approach is primarily analytical, interpretative, and constructive, aiming not to generate new empirical data but to engage in a rigorous conceptual and textual analysis of existing philosophical works. The core of this research involves a systematic examination of primary and secondary sources to reconstruct Al-Ghazali's arguments in *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, critically deconstruct the premises of contemporary relativism, and

⁷ Prof Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif Kualitatif Dan R&D*, Bandung: Alfabeta (Bandung: ALFABETA, 2019).

synthesize a coherent philosophical response. This methodology is deemed most appropriate as the research questions are fundamentally metaphysical and epistemological in nature, requiring deep textual exegesis, logical analysis, and theoretical synthesis rather than statistical measurement or observational data collection.⁸

The data collection procedure is structured into three concurrent streams, corresponding to the main dimensions of the investigation. The first stream involves a close reading of the primary source, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, utilizing a reputable English translation alongside key commentaries to ensure a faithful understanding of Al-Ghazali's occasionalist framework. The second stream entails gathering and analyzing seminal texts from prominent proponents of contemporary relativism and postmodern thought, such as Richard Rorty, Jean-François Lyotard, and their critics, to accurately map their epistemological and metaphysical assertions. The third stream consists of consulting secondary scholarly literature that bridges Islamic philosophy and Western thought, which will provide critical perspectives and facilitate the dialectical synthesis proposed by this study. All collected data, comprising philosophical texts, journal articles, and scholarly books, will be cataloged and analyzed for key arguments, concepts, and potential points of critical engagement.

Data analysis will be conducted through a multi-layered process of hermeneutic interpretation and philosophical argumentation. Initially, a descriptive-analytical method will be used to reconstruct Al-Ghazali's doctrine of occasionalism, focusing on his critique of necessary causality and his concept of Divine Habit (*'adah*). Subsequently, a critical-internal method will be applied to deconstruct the arguments for relativism, exposing their self-referential contradictions and metaphysical shortcomings. The final and most crucial analytical phase involves a synthetic-constructive approach, where the reconstructed Ghazalian framework will be systematically placed in dialogue with the deconstructed problems of relativism. This will be achieved through comparative analysis and philosophical reasoning to demonstrate how Al-Ghazali's metaphysics provides a viable foundation for objectivity, thereby fulfilling the research aim of formulating a robust and theistically-grounded critique of contemporary relativism.

The Biography of Imam al-Ghazali

Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, traditionally known in Western scholarship as Algazel, stands as one of the most monumental and influential figures in the intellectual history of Islam. Born circa 1058 in Tus, Khorasan (in modern-day Iran), he was a Persian scholar whose comprehensive expertise

⁸ M.Si. Drs. Albert Lumbu et al., *METODOLOGI PENELITIAN* (Padang: CV Dunia Penerbitan Buku, 2021).

spanned Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), theology (kalam), philosophy, logic, and mysticism (Sufism). After initial education in his hometown, he studied under the distinguished jurist and theologian Imam al-Haramayn al-Juwayni in Nishapur, where he quickly distinguished himself as a brilliant mind. His exceptional abilities led him to the court of the powerful Seljuk vizier, Nizam al-Mulk, who, recognizing his genius, appointed him in 1091 to the most prestigious academic position of the age: a professorship at the Nizamiyya Madrasa in Baghdad.⁹ This appointment marked the peak of his scholarly career in the formal, institutional sense, establishing him as a leading authority in the Shafi'i school of law and earning him the honorific title "Hujjat al-Islam" (Proof of Islam), a testament to the high esteem in which he was held by his contemporaries.

Despite reaching the apex of academic and social prestige, al-Ghazali experienced a profound spiritual crisis in 1095 that would redefine his life and legacy. He underwent a severe period of intellectual and existential doubt, becoming deeply skeptical of the certainty of philosophical knowledge and the motivations behind his own pursuit of fame and status. This crisis led him to abandon his prestigious position in Baghdad, relinquish his wealth, and adopt the life of an ascetic wanderer.¹⁰ He left Baghdad under the pretext of performing the pilgrimage to Mecca, but his journey became a decade-long spiritual quest through Damascus, Jerusalem, and finally back to Tus, dedicated to introspection and Sufi practice. It was during this period of voluntary exile and spiritual purification that he authored his magnum opus, *Ihya' 'Ulum al-Din* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences), a comprehensive work aimed at revitalizing the inner, spiritual dimensions of Islamic practice that he felt had been neglected. His earlier philosophical work, *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), written just before his crisis, remains a landmark critique of Neoplatonic Aristotelianism, particularly its doctrines on the eternity of the world and the denial of bodily resurrection.

After over a decade of seclusion, al-Ghazali was persuaded to return briefly to teaching at the Nizamiyya Madrasa in Nishapur around 1106, likely due to political pressure and a perceived need to guide the community. However, he soon returned to his native Tus, where he established a Sufi lodge (khanqah) and a private school (madrasa), spending his final years in teaching, writing, and spiritual devotion. This final phase of his life represents a synthesis of his vast legal and theological knowledge with the profound spiritual insights he had gained through his mystical experiences. He declined further invitations to return to public life in Baghdad, choosing instead a life of relative solitude. Al-Ghazali died in Tus on 19 December

⁹ Lidia Artika et al., "Biografi Tokoh Tasawuf Al-Ghazali," *Jurnal Kajian Penelitian Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan* 1, no. 2 (2023): 29–55.

¹⁰ Mohd Rosmizi Abd Rahman, "AL-GHAZĀLĪ IN LITERATURE WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO HIS BIOGRAPHY AND THE ISSUE OF FAITH AND GOOD DEEDS Mohd Rosmizi Abd Rahman 1," *Journal of Islamic Social Sciences and Humanities* 8, no. 1 (2016): 63–93.

1111, leaving behind an immense intellectual legacy.¹¹ He is widely regarded as a *mujaddid*, a renewer of the faith, credited with successfully integrating rational theology, orthodox jurisprudence, and authentic Sufism into a cohesive Islamic worldview, whose influence continues to resonate across the Muslim world and in academic circles globally.

Al-Ghazali's Occasionalism and the Metaphysical Foundation of Objective Reality in Tahafut al-Falasifah

In dismantling the metaphysical foundations of Greek philosophy adopted by the Muslim falasifah, Al-Ghazali centers his critique on their conception of causality, particularly their assumption of "necessity" in the relationship between cause and effect. The philosophers believed that fire, as a cause, necessarily and inherently produces its effect, namely burning. In response, Al-Ghazali firmly asserts, "*The connection between what is believed to be the cause and what is believed to be the effect is not necessary (darūrī).*" His central argument is that what we observe is merely the temporal conjunction between two events, not a logical bond that compels one to follow from the other.¹² This rejection of necessity is a crucial first step; by demolishing the idea of absolute certainty in natural laws, Al-Ghazali opens space for divine intervention and the absolute and unrestricted Will of God.

His critique of causal necessity leads to a key concept within his occasionalism: *'adah* or habit. Al-Ghazali argues that what we call "natural laws" are nothing more than habitual patterns created and consistently maintained by Allah SWT. "*The conjunction of what is called the cause and what is called the effect occurs because of God's decision (taqdīr) to create them in succession, not because the cause itself inherently requires it.*" In other words, fire burns cotton not because it possesses an essential property of "burning," but because God, through His habitual practice (*'adah*), creates the event of "burning" concurrently with the contact between fire and cotton. The objective reality we observe is thus a reality ordered by habit, not by necessity.¹³

The logical consequence of this view is the affirmation that God is the sole true "Efficient Cause" in the universe. Every event that occurs, from the simplest to the most complex, is the result of God's direct and instantaneous creative act. Al-Ghazali describes it as follows: "*These causes and effects are subordinated to Him. Nothing else possesses any influence in this universe besides Him.*" Within this

¹¹ Sara Kadir, "Framing Revelation: Exploring Qur'anic Wellbeing with Al-Ghazali," in *Mindfulness and Wellbeing: An Islamic Perspective* (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025), 25–30, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-90190-4_3.

¹² Abu Hamid Al-Ghazzali, *"Ihyā' 'Ulūm Al-Dīn"* (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1995).

¹³ Imam Ghazali, *Tahafut Al Falasifah: Kerancuan Para Filsuf* (yogyakarta: Grup Relasi Inti Media, 2015), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=gJleDwAAQBAJ>.

framework, the entire causal chain that appears to us is but an illusion; what truly exists is a series of discrete yet orderly moments of creation wholly dependent on the Creator. This is the metaphysical foundation of occasionalism: reality is objective and ordered because it is willed by a supremely Rational Divine Subject.

To reinforce his argument, Al-Ghazali uses compelling hypothetical examples, such as miracles. He contends that if causal relationships were necessary, then miracles—such as the Prophet Ibrahim not being burned by fire would be impossible. However, because this relationship is grounded in divine habit, Allah possesses absolute freedom to alter that habit whenever He wills. *"Nothing in reason makes it impossible for Him to create satiety without food, or death without decapitation..."* These examples not only defend the possibility of miracles but also underscore God's absolute freedom over His creation. Objective reality, therefore, is "conditional" upon His Will, not "absolute" based on autonomous natural laws.¹⁴

Furthermore, Al-Ghazali challenges the philosophers' claim that knowledge of cause and effect is rational and a priori. He argues that our knowledge of this relationship is actually empirical and a posteriori, obtained through repeated sensory experience. *"The conjunction between what is called the cause and what is called the effect is known neither through reason nor through sensory perception, but through repeated experience."* The implication is that the human intellect cannot deduce the effect from the cause; it can only record the patterns established by God. Thus, the claim of science to explain "why" something happens is mistaken; science can only describe "what" usually happens, while the "why" remains the secret of the Divine Will.

From this deconstruction, Al-Ghazali constructs a metaphysical foundation for an objective reality, yet one whose foundation is theological. The objectivity and order of the universe, which make science possible derive from the consistency of the Divine Will and the habits (*'adah*) He has established, not from the internal laws of matter. Reality is objective because it is created by a consistent Divine Subject, not because it follows independent rules. *"Everything has its appointed time (ajal) and its decreed measure (qadar)."* This order is evidence of Divine Wisdom (*hikmah*) and Consciousness, not proof of the autonomy of nature.

However, it must be emphasized that Al-Ghazali's occasionalism does not negate the usefulness of science in studying God's "habits." Scientific knowledge remains valid and beneficial as long as it understands its limits namely, as a catalog of *'adah* or *sunnatullah*, not as an explanation of actual causal power. *"Denying the causal power of causes does not imply denying their existence. Causes do exist, but they possess no influence (ta'thīr)."* In essence, Al-Ghazali distinguishes between a "cause" as a preceding event and a "cause" as an agent with inherent causal power.

¹⁴ Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, *Misykat: Refleksi Tentang Islam, Westernisasi & Liberalisasi* (Jakarta: INSISTS, 2012).

He accepts the former and rejects the latter. This distinction makes possible an operational science that studies the patterns of God's creative activity.

The Internal Contradictions of Contemporary Relativism and the Quest for a Lost Foundation

Contemporary relativism, in its radical epistemic and moral forms, presents itself as a liberating project, freeing human thought from the tyranny of absolute claims and grand narratives. Its core premise asserts that truth and moral values are not discovered but constructed, contingent upon cultural, historical, or individual perspectives.¹⁵ This position, often rooted in a post-modern skepticism toward meta-narratives, argues that no framework—be it religious, scientific, or philosophical—can claim privileged access to a universal, objective reality. Consequently, all knowledge claims are deemed relative to their specific conceptual schemes, and the very notion of a single, overarching truth is dismissed as an illusion of power or cultural hegemony. This epistemological stance purports to foster pluralism and tolerance by invalidating any ground from which one worldview could authoritatively judge another.¹⁶

However, a rigorous philosophical examination reveals a fundamental and inescapable paradox at the heart of this project: the self-referential inconsistency of its core assertion. The claim that "all truth is relative" itself purports to be a non-relative, universally applicable truth.¹⁷ If the statement is true, then it must apply to itself, rendering it merely a relative opinion within a specific cultural or intellectual context, thereby stripping it of any universal normative force to compel assent. Yet, it is precisely as a universal injunction that it is proposed and gains its critical power. This performative contradiction is the foundational crack that destabilizes the entire edifice, revealing that the relativist, in the very act of arguing for relativism, must implicitly rely on the very objective ground they explicitly deny.¹⁸

This contradiction extends into the realm of moral judgment, where relativism faces its most politically and ethically consequential crisis. If moral frameworks are truly incommensurable and no trans-cultural standard exists, then the relativist is left without a coherent philosophical basis to condemn practices like genocide, slavery, or systemic oppression, except by appealing to their own culturally

¹⁵ Mohammad Eka Yulianto, Arqom Kuswanjono, and Agus Himmawan Utomo, "Serat Kalatidha Sebagai Kritik Ronggowarsito Terhadap Paradigma Relativisme," *Ganaya: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Humaniora* 8, no. 1 (2025): 306–23.

¹⁶ Harda Armayanto, "Problem Pluralisme Agama," *Tsaqafah* 10, no. 2 (2014): 325, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tsaqafah.v10i2.191>.

¹⁷ Yoyo Hambali, "The Concept of Man in Ibn Sina 's Philosophy of Education," *Turats* 11, no. 1 (2015): 63–82.

¹⁸ Muhammad Alif Rahmadi, "Theory of Mind on Ghazali and Ibn Qayyim Al Jauzi Perspective: Analysis Model on Islamic Psychology," *Psychosophia: Journal of Psychology, Religion, and Humanity* 4, no. 2 (October 30, 2022): 80–93, <https://doi.org/10.32923/psc.v4i2.2500>.

contingent preferences. To label such practices as "objectively wrong" is to betray the relativistic premise.¹⁹ The relativist may personally abhor such acts, but their philosophy provides no rational argument against another culture or individual that deems them morally permissible or even virtuous. This moral vacuity demonstrates that relativism, in its pursuit of tolerance, ultimately undermines the possibility of any principled defense against the most intolerable evils.

The epistemological doctrine of incommensurability, which suggests that different conceptual schemes are so fundamentally distinct that they cannot be rationally compared or evaluated against a common standard, similarly collapses under its own weight.²⁰ The very act of identifying, describing, and comparing different conceptual schemes as "incommensurable" requires a meta-language or a neutral vantage point that the theory itself declares impossible.²¹ To claim that two worldviews are fundamentally separate and untranslatable presupposes a level of understanding of both that transcends their purported isolation. This act of comparison implicitly affirms a shared logical space and a capacity for rational adjudication that the theory explicitly denies, thereby deconstructing its own premise.²²

Beneath these logical inconsistencies lies a profound metaphysical vacuum. Relativism typically emerges from a naturalistic or post-metaphysical worldview that has systematically eliminated any transcendent ground for reality, value, or consciousness.²³ In a universe devoid of telos or divine intellect, where human minds are understood as accidental byproducts of blind physical processes, the very idea of "truth" as a correspondence between mind and reality becomes inexplicable. If our cognitive faculties are merely adaptive tools for survival, there is no reason to trust them as reliable guides to objective truth, only as instruments for reproductive success. Thus, relativism is the logical outcome of a metaphysics that has discarded the possibility of a universal ground, yet it fails to provide a sustainable alternative foundation for knowledge or ethics.²⁴

This metaphysical void often leads to what is, in practice, a tacit and unacknowledged fideism, where certain cultural norms, political ideologies, or

¹⁹ Rooseno Hertanto Nur Afif Ardani, Sulfi Amalia, "RELATIVISME BUDAYA DALAM HAK ASASI MANUSIA," *Cakrawala Hukum* 15, no. 1 (2017): 30–46.

²⁰ Mohammad Muslih Sujiat Zubaidi, *Kritik Epistemologi Dan Model Pembacaan Kontemporer* (Yogyakarta: LESFI, 2018).

²¹ Ku Arrohmah and Pudji Rahmawati, "Kritik Postmodernisme: Hubungan Postmodernisme Terhadap Agama Islam," *JURNAL PENELITIAN MULTIDISIPLIN BANGSA E-ISSN* 1, no. 5 (2024): 337–44.

²² Yaacob Solehah and Najmuddin Hairunnaja, "Rene Descartes (1596-1650) Dan Metode Cogito," *Jurnal of Usuluddin* 27 (2008): 121–40.

²³ Alatas, *Imperialisme Intelektual*.

²⁴ Muhamad Rezi Maman Rahman Hakim, Satibi, "Modernisme Islam Dan Perkembangan Intelektualisme Islam," *Jurnal Al Ashriyyah* 9, no. 01 (2023): 21–31.

individual sentiments are elevated to the status of unquestionable axioms. Lacking an objective foundation, the relativist must still operate in the world, and thus they often cling to their chosen values with a dogmatic fervor that mirrors the absolutism they critique.²⁵ The "will to power" subtly replaces the "will to truth," as persuasive rhetoric and social coercion become the only arbiters in a world without rational foundations. This results not in genuine pluralism, but in a fragmented landscape of competing subjective certitudes, each incapable of justifying itself beyond its own circular assumptions.²⁶

The practical consequences of this philosophical position are evident in the contemporary fragmentation of public discourse, where claims are often evaluated not by their coherence or evidence but by their alignment with tribal identities. The concept of a shared reality disintegrates, replaced by a marketplace of "narratives" whose validity is determined by their utility to a particular group's social or political objectives. Science itself, once the paradigm of objective inquiry, is often reduced to just another narrative, its claims of universality dismissed as a mask for Western hegemony. This erosion of common epistemological ground makes collective action, reasoned debate, and social cohesion increasingly difficult, as no appeal to a common good or objective fact can carry authoritative weight.

The internal critique of contemporary relativism exposes it as a self-defeating and philosophically untenable position. Its core assertions are self-referentially incoherent, its moral implications are paralyzing, and its epistemological tools are insufficient for their own task. It thrives on the deconstruction of traditional foundations but offers nothing but a vacuum in their place, a vacuum that is inevitably filled by unexamined dogmas or raw power.²⁷ This critical diagnosis is not merely a logical exercise; it is a necessary prologue. By meticulously mapping the aporias and failures of relativism, this analysis clears the ground and demonstrates the urgent need for a robust metaphysical foundation. It is this very need that prepares the stage for a retrieval of a pre-modern framework, such as Al-Ghazali's occasionalism, which offers a coherent account of a universally objective reality grounded in a transcendent, divine intellect.

Synthesizing Al-Ghazali's Occasionalism as a Metaphysical Antidote to Relativism

The intellectual landscape of the 21st century is significantly shaped by postmodern currents of thought that position relativism as one of their central epistemological pillars. In the domains of ethics and epistemology, this view asserts

²⁵ Yuliana Alfiyatin Adin Lazuardy Firdiansyah, "KAUSALITAS DALAM PERSPEKTIF TEOLOGI," *EL Banani: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Peradaban Islam* 13, no. 1 (2023): 254–71.

²⁶ Solehah and Hairunnaja, "Rene Descartes (1596-1650) Dan Metode Cogito."

²⁷ Mohd Syahmir Alias, "Tasawur Pemikiran Saintifik Ibn Al-Haytham," *Sains Humanika* 1, no. 2 (2014): 179–87.

that truth claims and moral values are neither absolute nor universal, but rather the products of socio-cultural constructions or individual perspectives tied to specific contexts. As a consequence, discourses on truth are often reduced to mere competitions among "narratives," lacking a solid metaphysical framework to justify their validity. This situation generates a crisis of meaning in which the objective foundations of science, ethics, and religion become increasingly fragile, leading to disorientation and fragmentation in public discourse.

This contemporary crisis of relativism can be traced to the metaphysical vacuum produced by the modern secular project. By excluding God or a Transcendent Principle from the ontological center of reality, the universe is perceived as an autonomous and closed web of cause-and-effect relations. Within such a framework, no space remains for a "First Cause" or for transcendent moral laws, ultimately leading to the conclusion that all worldviews possess equal and incommensurable foundations. Modern Western philosophy, in several of its manifestations, encounters an epistemic impasse because it has lost a firm ground for distinguishing between subjective opinion and objective truth.

Confronting this impasse, the classical Islamic intellectual tradition offers relevant critical resources, having long anticipated and responded to similar challenges through rigorous metaphysical dialectics. One of the central figures in this tradition is Imam Al-Ghazali (1058–1111 CE). In his magnum opus, *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), Al-Ghazali launches a fundamental critique of the Muslim Peripatetic philosophers, such as Ibn Sina and Al-Farabi, whom he accuses of deviation through doctrines like the eternity of the world and the denial of bodily resurrection, while constructing a framework of occasionalism that affirms the absolute dependence of nature on the Divine Will.²⁸

Within this context, the present study is grounded in a central question: How can Al-Ghazali's framework of occasionalism, as articulated in *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, be formulated as a systematic and relevant critique of contemporary relativism? This question is elaborated into several subsidiary inquiries: (1) How does Al-Ghazali conceptualize the relationship between causality and the Divine Will in his occasionalist structure? (2) At what points do the epistemological foundations of contemporary relativism conflict with the metaphysical premises of Al-Ghazali's occasionalism? (3) What implications does his framework offer for reconstructing the lost foundations of objectivity in modern discourse?

In general, this research seeks to build a constructive dialectic between classical Islamic philosophy and contemporary philosophical thought.²⁹ Specifically, its objectives include: first, reconstructing Al-Ghazali's framework of occasionalism in *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, with particular focus on his rejection of "necessity" within

²⁸ Abdarraḥmān al-Ḥalīl ibn Aḥmad Al-Farāhīdī, *Kitāb Al-'Ayn* (Beirut, Lebanon: Mu'assasat al-'A'lamī li-l-maṭbū'āt, 1988), <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=NNGbvwEACAAJ>.

²⁹ Ghazali, *Tahafut Al Falasifah: Kerancuan Para Filsuf*.

natural causal laws; second, critically analyzing the metaphysical assumptions of contemporary relativism that constitute its internal fragility; and third, synthesizing both analyses to demonstrate how the concept of the "Single Cause" (God) in occasionalism provides a firm metaphysical foundation for objectivity, which the relativist paradigm is incapable of accommodating.

The urgency of this research lies in its potential to bridge the temporal and cultural divide between the classical Islamic intellectual tradition and the dilemmas of contemporary philosophy. Amid the stagnation of debates on relativism within Western philosophical circles, Al-Ghazali's perspective offers a radical "alternative paradigm." His critique operates not only at the epistemological level but penetrates the metaphysical roots of the problem. Thus, this study is not only relevant to Islamic studies but also contributes to the broader philosophical discourse seeking a way out of the postmodern labyrinth.³⁰

The original contribution of this research is that the application of Al-Ghazali's occasionalism as a specific analytical instrument for deconstructing contemporary relativism remains largely unexplored in existing academic studies. Rather than serving merely as a historical comparative study, this research aims to position *Tahafut al-Falasifah* not as a static historical artifact but as a living and applicable philosophical resource. Its principal contribution is the articulation of a coherent metaphysical argument: that without acknowledging the Divine Will as the sole true efficient cause, any claim to objective truth will inevitably drift within the currents of relativism, whereas Al-Ghazali's solution offers a metaphysical foundation for escaping this dilemma.

CONCLUSION

This study has systematically demonstrated that Al-Ghazali's occasionalist framework from *Tahafut al-Falasifah* provides a powerful and coherent metaphysical critique of contemporary relativism. The research successfully answered its central problem by first deconstructing the internal contradictions of relativism, exposing its self-referential paradoxes, moral vacuity, and the epistemological crisis stemming from its metaphysical vacuum. The analysis then established how Al-Ghazali's conception of divine causality directly addresses these shortcomings: by rejecting necessary relationships in nature and positing God as the sole Efficient Cause, his system offers an objective foundation for reality that is both universal and dynamically sustained. This synthesis resolves the relativist impasse by showing that objectivity does not require autonomous natural laws but can be grounded in the consistent creative act of a Divine Consciousness, thereby re-establishing a firm basis for truth claims, moral values, and scientific inquiry that relativism systematically undermines.

³⁰ Adin Lazuardy Firdiansyah, "KAUSALITAS DALAM PERSPEKTIF TEOLOGI."

Ultimately, this research confirms that Al-Ghazali's occasionalism serves as a vital metaphysical antidote to the contemporary crisis of relativism. The formulation of his framework as a critical tool successfully bridges an eleventh-century Islamic intellectual tradition with twenty-first-century philosophical dilemmas, offering a paradigm that reclaims objectivity without succumbing to rigid dogmatism. By positioning the Divine Will as the ultimate ground of reality's order and intelligibility, Al-Ghazali provides a compelling alternative to the fragmented landscape of competing narratives, demonstrating that a theistically-oriented metaphysics can coherently resolve the problems that leave secular modern philosophy at an impasse. This study thus not only contributes a significant philosophical synthesis but also affirms the enduring relevance of classical Islamic thought in addressing fundamental contemporary intellectual challenges.

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