

Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology: A New Path to Understanding Tafsir

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the interpretation (Tafsir) of the Qur'an through the integration of the three main pillars of the philosophy of science—ontology, epistemology, and axiology—as a novel conceptual framework to achieve a more comprehensive and contextual understanding of Qur'anic interpretation. Conventional Tafsir studies have typically focused on textual methodologies such as Tafsir bi al-ma'tsur and Tafsir bi al-ra'y, with less emphasis on the philosophical foundations concerning the nature of textual existence, the sources and justification of interpretive knowledge, and the embedded values relevant to contemporary issues. The philosophical approach positions Tafsir not merely as a textual interpretive practice, but as an epistemic endeavor that considers the ontological reality of revelation, the epistemological relationship between reason and revelation, and the axiological implications of hermeneutics within modern social contexts. Using a qualitative descriptive method based on critical literature analysis from primary and secondary sources in Tafsir and philosophy of science, the findings demonstrate that this integrative framework bridges classical Tafsir traditions with the interpretive demands of the present era and expands Tafsir into a multidisciplinary and socially relevant field. The study's contribution lies particularly in emphasizing the axiological dimension as a crucial aspect of Tafsir studies that not only interprets the text but also directs its values toward practical implementation in the social life of both the Muslim community and broader society.

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INTRODUCTION

The study of interpretation as a scientific discipline not only requires language skills and textual hermeneutics but also demands a deep understanding of the philosophy of science as a conceptual foundation capable of framing the interpretive process in scientific, systematic, and critical terms (Alicia Hanna Fadilla et al., 2025; Juliwansyah & Ahida, 2022; Liu et al., 2025; Marcos, 2021; Moch. Salman Alfarizi & Khozin, 2024). The philosophy of science provides an *ontological* framework for understanding the essence of texts as revelation, an *epistemological* one to formulate principles and methods for obtaining authentic interpretive knowledge, and an *axiological* one as a foundation for values in interpretation that remain relevant to today's socio-cultural realities (Harahap & Hamka, 2023; Setia Hartati et al., 2024; Tisnawati et al., 2024). The role of philosophy as a methodological basis appears in contemporary studies affirming that integrating philosophical thought into interpretive methods enriches understanding of the Qur'anic text's meaning in rational, reflective, and progressive ways, enabling responses to modern life's challenges (Ghofururrohim et al., 2024; Haidari, 2024; Johnderose et al., 2024).

For example, empirical research in Islamic studies journals demonstrates that philosophy offers a strong methodological basis for hermeneutic approaches, rational ethics, and the *epistemology* of revelation in contemporary interpretation, thereby expanding *Tafsir*'s relevance to modern societal problems.

Previous studies have explored various dimensions of Qur'anic interpretation and its relationship with philosophical foundations. Research by Dewi Taviana Walida (2022) examined the *ontology*, *epistemology*, and *axiology* of Islamic studies, highlighting their application in understanding religious texts but without specifically focusing on *Tafsir* as a distinct hermeneutical discipline. Hasani (2023) investigated the philosophy of science in religious studies, touching upon *Tafsir* and *sharia*, yet his work remained largely theoretical without proposing an integrated tripartite framework for contemporary exegesis. In the realm of *Tafsir* methodology, Sufyan Muttaqin et al. (2021) conducted an *epistemological* study of contemporary interpretation models, analyzing works like *al-Tafsīr al-Wasīt*, but did not systematically incorporate *ontological* and *axiological* dimensions. Similarly, Fayzul Hayat and Abubakar (2023) explored the integration of revelation and reason in contemporary *Tafsir epistemology*, emphasizing rational-hermeneutic approaches but leaving the *ontological* nature of the text and the value-oriented aims of interpretation underexplored. Furthermore, Ahmad Mahfud et al. (2022) conducted an *ontological-epistemological* and *axiological* investigation into interpretive schools (*mazāhib al-tafsīr*), offering valuable insights into classical methodologies, yet their study did not fully develop a unified philosophical pathway bridging classical tradition with modern interdisciplinary demands. These studies collectively underscore a significant gap: while aspects of the philosophy of science have been discussed in relation to *Tafsir*, a comprehensive, systematic integration of *ontology*, *epistemology*, and *axiology* as a coherent new paradigm for understanding and practicing *Tafsir* in the contemporary era remains largely unarticulated.

In addition, contemporary challenges in interpreting religious texts grow increasingly complex as social, cultural, and technological transformations affect how people receive, understand, and apply religious teachings. Traditional interpretations oriented solely toward literal or historical approaches often face limitations in providing comprehensive answers to contemporary issues such as pluralism, social justice, gender dynamics, and the ethical implications of modern technology. This encourages academic discussions to pursue a more contextual and philosophical approach to interpretation, including strengthening the *epistemological* aspect—wherein the relationship between revelation and reason, along with contemporary hermeneutic approaches, is considered to address modern problems without undermining the authority of sacred texts. As stated in the *epistemological* study of contemporary interpretation, *Tafsir* should not be merely a static textual activity but an interpretive tool connecting revelation's message with today's dynamic realities, ensuring its contemporaneity and applicability.

Therefore, this study aims to develop a new interpretive framework by systematically integrating the three pillars of the philosophy of science—*ontology*, *epistemology*, and *axiology*—into *Tafsir* studies. It seeks to demonstrate how this integrated approach can provide a more holistic, critical, and contextual understanding of Qur'anic exegesis, bridging classical hermeneutical traditions with contemporary intellectual and social demands. The research is

expected to yield both theoretical and practical benefits. Theoretically, it will enrich the philosophical foundations of *Tafsir* studies and offer a novel paradigm positioning *Tafsir* as an interdisciplinary scientific practice. Practically, the proposed framework can serve as a methodological guide for contemporary *mufassirs*, educators, and Islamic scholars in producing interpretations that are not only textually sound but also socially relevant, ethically grounded, and capable of addressing complex modern challenges such as pluralism, justice, and technological ethics.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research strategy as the primary method. The qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to explore, describe, and analyze in depth the conceptual relationships among *ontology*, *epistemology*, and *axiology* in Qur'anic interpretation studies and their implications for contemporary interpretive understanding. The library research method enabled the collection of data from diverse primary and secondary sources, including classical interpretive works, philosophical literature, academic treatises, scientific journals, and contemporary publications on the epistemology and axiology of religious text interpretation. Data collection proceeded systematically through identification of relevant literature, critical reading, and documentation of key concepts reflecting the interconnectedness of these three philosophical pillars with interpretive practice—including classification of sources by thematic relevance to the research focus. The collected data were then analyzed via descriptive-analytical text analysis, which involved interpreting meanings, patterns, and relationships among ontological, epistemological, and axiological concepts in the interpretive context and integrating these findings into a broader theoretical framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Integration of Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology in *Tafsir*

The *novelty* of this study lies in the systematic integration of philosophy of science into the study of interpretation, which so far in the scientific tradition has mostly focused on classical methodologies such as *Tafsir bi al-ma'tsur* and *Tafsir bi al-ra'y* without conceptual exploration of the philosophy dimension of science. This classical approach, although very important in the scientific history of interpretation, tends to dwell on textual methods without philosophically mapping the essence, source, and value of the interpretive process itself. In this study, the three pillars of philosophy of science — namely *ontology*, *epistemology*, and *axiology* — are not only used as theoretical terminology but conceptually assembled as foundations that allow for a *more holistic understanding of interpretation*, starting from the existence of the reality of revelation (*ontology*), the principle of knowledge of interpretation (*epistemology*), to the value dimension and social implications of the output of interpretation (*axiology*). Thus, this study offers a new paradigm of interpretation that places *Tafsir* not only as a traditional hermeneutic activity but as a more interdisciplinary scientific practice, bringing together theological studies with modern philosophy of science, linguistics, social sciences, and hermeneutics so that interpretation can respond to contemporary challenges more comprehensively. This kind of multidisciplinary approach has also emerged in contemporary studies that see interpretation as

an intellectual practice that must be connected with the social sciences, social sciences, and modern hermeneutic methods in order to present contextual interpretations of current social issues, suggesting that cross-disciplinary integration provides a new perspective in understanding sacred texts in a way that is relevant to the dynamics of the times.

1. Ontology of Interpretation

Classical approaches that do not engage in conceptual exploration of the philosophical dimension of science, although very important in the scientific history of interpretation, tend to dwell on textual methods without philosophically mapping the essence, source, and value of the interpretive process itself.

Ontologically integrative, the Qur'anic text is positioned not merely as a collection of linguistic symbols, but as a reality that possesses, a unique ontological existence: in the form of revelation believed to come from God and at the same time immersed in the structure of human language, meaning, and interpretive tradition. The ontology of interpretation questions "what exactly is a sacred text" and how its existence interacts with reality—that is, whether the same text still has a singular meaning, or whether its existence is multi-dimensional because of its involvement with the meaning of humanity. The understanding of the essence of this text determines the conceptual foundation for any attempt at interpretation, because ontology affirms that sacred texts are reality that stands as objects of study that interact with the reader and its historical context dynamically.

Thus, the ontology of interpretation does not simply offer a theoretical definition of what a text is, but becomes the methodological foundation that determines the character of interpretation and the novelty of the contribution of interpretation in understanding the reality of human life.

Here is a concrete example of a Qur'anic verse interpreted by relating the historical context (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) and the social situation of Arab society at the time of revelation — which is relevant to your description of the ontology of *Tafsir* (the text interacts with historical reality):

Case Example: Prohibition of Drinking *Khamr* (Liquor)

In the classical and contemporary tradition of interpretation, a number of verses related to the prohibition of drinking *khamr* show how the historical context of Arab society is an important part of the meaning of the verse:

a. Surat Al-Baqarah (2:219)

Meaning: They ask you about *khamr* and gambling. Say: "In both there is a great sin and some benefit to man, but the sin of both is greater than the benefit."

This verse appears in the context when the companions asked the Prophet Muhammad about alcohol and gambling, which were the social customs of the people of Medina in the early period of Islam. The verse answers that question by pointing out that *khamr* has benefits but the sin or harm outweighs the benefits. This understanding is more than a literal text — it responds to the real social customs of those days, when people were still so accustomed to drinking alcohol that it was slowly necessary to point out the moral and social dangers of the practice.

b. Surat An-Nisa' (4:43)

Meaning: O you who believe, do not approach the prayer while you are drunk until you realize what you are saying.

This verse has historically been interpreted as a response to the practice of drinking *khamr* that is still rampant when the time for prayer arrives. The context is the first attempt to limit such negative behavior in the worship hall — the command "do not approach prayer while drunk" — thus showing how revelation responds to the social realities of Muslims who are still adapting to the new teachings.

c. Surat Al-Ma''idah (5:90-91)

Meaning: Indeed, Satan only intends to stir up enmity and hatred among you through liquor and gambling and to prevent you from remembering Allah and praying, then will you not stop?

The next stage is a stricter prohibition on *khamr* which states that *khamr* and gambling are "*rijsun min a'malish shayṭān*" (excrement from satan's work) and a command to avoid them. This can be understood in the context of the already more established development of the Muslim community — from the beginning the behavior was commonplace, then gradually warned against and finally banned completely.

Such an analysis not only reads the text linguistically, but also considers the socio-historical situation (e.g., the customs of the Arab society at the time, the conversation of the Prophet with the Prophet, and the needs of the growing Muslim community) as part of *asbāb al-nuzūl*. It reflects how the ontology of the Qur'anic text interacts with historical and social relations to produce richer and more relevant interpretations.

In the hadith books Musnad Ahmad, and Sunan Abī Dāud and at-Tirmiẓī it is mentioned that 'Umar bin Khaṭṭab once prayed to Allah, "O Allah, give us a satisfactory explanation on the matter of khamar." So, after reciting verse 219 of Surah al-Baqarah/2, the Messenger of Allah recited the verse to him, but he still did not feel satisfied, and he continued to pray as mentioned above. Similarly, after verse (43) of Surah an-Nisā'/4. But after the 90th and 91st verses of Surah al-Mā'idah/5 were revealed, he was called and those verses were recited to him. He felt satisfied. After the recitation came to the word of Allah: فَهُنَّ أَنْتُمْ مُنْتَهُونَ Then will you stop (from doing the work)? The companions including 'Umar bin Khaṭṭab replied اَنْتَهَيْنَا، اَنْتَهَيْنَا Meaning: "We stop, we stop." (<https://quran.nu.or.id/al-maidah/91>)

2. Epistemology of *Tafsir*

Interpretation is an effort to dialogue texts and contexts so that the content of the Qur'an is relevant to the context (Muhammad Alwi HS 2019 Research). Furthermore, he mentioned that philosophy and interpretation are both work efforts that use human reason, so the two are closely related. Of course, still hold on to the truth so that the results of interpretation do not deviate from the content that Allah wills.

The epistemology of *Tafsir* that discusses how and with what knowledge the holy text of the Qur'an is understood and interpreted by the *mufassir*, it is not enough to know that *Tafsir* is an attempt to only explain the meaning of the text. Epistemology of interpretation works to trace the sources, methodology, validity criteria, and rationality used. This epistemological perspective arises from the need to face the challenges of the ever-evolving socio-cultural reality, so that interpretation is not just an activity of copying meaning but a constructive and

hermeneutic intellectual activity. The approach of interpretation no longer monopolizes textual methods alone (*Tafsir bi al-ma'tsur*), but has developed to include contextual backgrounds, rational reasoning (*aql*), and interactions between texts, historical contexts, and social realities experienced by readers of religious texts.

Here is an example of an epistemological interpretation:

a. QS. Al-Mā'idah (5): 44–47 — Justice in the Legal and Administrative System

These verses speak of judges who are obliged to establish laws based on what Allah has revealed, which historically appeared in the context of pre-Islamic Arab societies that often ignored justice and equality and were influenced by the *'asabiyah tradition*. Contextual interpretation research using Abdullah Saeed's approach shows that in order to understand the historical meaning of this verse, it is necessary to analyze the socio-political conditions of the early Islamic period when conflicts such as between the Banu Quraizhah and the Banu Nadzir became the background for the descent of this verse. From this approach, universal values of justice and equality can be drawn which are then contextualized with the needs of contemporary political and administrative systems in modern countries, including Indonesia, so that this verse is not read textually normatively but as a source of moral values governing a fair legal system (Nafisatul Mu'awwanah:2017).

The contextuality of this interpretation is because the interpretation does not stop at the literal text, but includes the history of the descent of the verse and the reality of the government in the time of the Prophet. In addition, interpreters relate the meaning of the verse to the needs of the contemporary legal system, not just the formal laws of the past.

b. QS. An-Nisa' (4):34 — Contextual Interpretation of Gender Relations

This verse, which is often discussed in relation to the relationship between husband and wife, has become one of the objects of contextual interpretation because traditional literary understandings are often considered irrelevant or problematic in contemporary social contexts. Contextual approaches by modern mufassir (e.g., studies of contemporary interpretations conducted in a number of studies) try to consider the social life background of early Arab societies as well as the reality of today's gender positions in order to understand the meaning of verse in a more balanced way. Contextual interpretation attempts to look at past social patriarchal structures, the context of *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and then formulate an understanding that considers the principle of gender justice and its relevance in the modern era.

In the case of this, the approach used is not just word-for-verse, but explores the social, cultural, and gender roles of the revelation period. In addition, the interpretation also considers the modern view of equality and respect for human dignity through moral philosophy and rationality.

3. Axiology of Tafsir

While epistemology questions the means and sources of knowledge in interpretation, axiology of interpretation places moral values and goals that are to be achieved through the process of interpreting the Qur'an. From an axiological point of view, interpretation is not just a descriptive or theoretical activity, but is tied to the goals of ethical, practical, and social values in the life of the people. This study of axiology departs from the philosophy of values (axiology), which philosophically explores what is considered value in interpretation — both

morally, socially, and humanly. In the context of Islam, these values are sourced from the Qur'an and Sunnah which guide the ummah in ethics, aesthetics, and social life, so that interpretation acts as a bridge between the text and the practical values that are the purpose of revelation itself.

Axiological research in the study of interpretation shows that good interpretation is not only analyzing the meaning of language or historical context but is oriented towards achieving the values of justice, humanity, and contemporary problem-solving. This means that the *mufassir* must consider normative values in his hermeneutic process: that is, the values inherent in each verse of the Qur'an and how they can be translated into moral actions and social policies in modern life. The axiology of interpretation, thus, becomes the normative foundation that provides the objective direction for epistemology and methodology of interpretation—that interpretation must produce a contribution of value to society, not just linguistic decomposition.

In addition, studies that combine ontology, epistemology, and axiology in *mazāhib Tafsir* show that differences in approaches to interpretation often lie in the values they prioritize—which in turn influences interpretation of the Qur'anic text and its social implications. The axiology of interpretation in this kind of study seeks to avoid the sacralization of exclusive and subjective thinking, and encourages appreciation of the plurality of interpretations that bring moderate and dialogical values among the ummah.

Thus, the axiology of interpretation is a crucial philosophical component to ensure that the activities of interpretation produce not only knowledge of the text, but also ethical values, useful goals, and moral orientations that make a positive contribution to the formation of civilized societies and civilizations.

Here is an axiological example:

a. QS. Al-Hujurāt (49): 6–13 — The Value of Social Ethics and Human Interaction

Surah *Al-Hujurāt* of the above verses are widely interpreted as a source of fundamental social ethical values in social life, such as *information verification (tabayyun)*, *justice in resolving conflicts*, *mutual respect*, *the prohibition of ridicule*, and *the principle of brotherhood*. In the study of contemporary interpretation, these values are not just textual norms but *are practically binding on communication ethics*, prevention of social conflicts, and *community harmony* in a diverse society. Interpretations like this show how these verses contain moral values that are relevant in the contemporary social context, including in facing digital challenges such as hoaxes, polarization, and intergenerational communication that often causes social friction.

b. QS. An-Nahl (16): 90 — The Value of Justice, Goodness, and Shunning Evil

This verse is often a reference in the study of Tafsir that emphasizes the ethical and social goals of the Qur'an, namely spreading justice, doing good, and preventing evil. A comparative study of classical commentary by Al-Alūsī and Al-Thabathabā'ī shows how these values are universal moral values that should be used as a guideline for life in daily social interactions and create good social order. The interpretation of this verse is often associated with the implementation of these values in real life — for example, in human relations, a fair legal system, and social governance that respects shared rights and obligations.

The above examples show that axiological interpretation does not stop at understanding literal meaning but also considers how the values contained can direct individual behavior and social order.

The New Paradigm: The Path of Philosophy of Science in *Tafsir*

In the study of philosophy of science, ontology, epistemology, and axiology are not just abstract terms but are conceptual foundations that shape the way scientists understand the object of study, the source of knowledge, the method of study, and the moral values to which the science is intended. In general, ontology in the philosophy of science answers what constitutes the reality and object of knowledge (e.g., the essence of the text of the Qur'an and the reality of its interpretation in Islamic studies), epistemology discusses how knowledge is acquired, validated, and understood, while axiology highlights what knowledge is used for as well as what value it produces for human life — included in the context of the interpretation of sacred texts. Studies in the context of Islam affirm that these three dimensions do not stand alone but become an integrated framework that strengthens each other in building knowledge that is not only methodologically correct but also ethically and socially meaningful for Muslim society. For example, the study of Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology and its actualization in Islamic studies shows that in the realm of Islamic science (including *Tafsir*) the three dimensions of philosophy of science "are important frameworks in understanding and applying the Qur'an in social situations" because ontology defines the reality of objects (text and context), epistemology establishes the basis and means of acquiring knowledge of interpretation, and axiology evaluates the values contained and their practical influence in the lives of the people.

In this perspective, the new paradigm of interpretation as a philosophical path of science means that the study of interpretation is no longer stuck on a purely textual approach, but becomes a comprehensive scientific discipline: starting with the existential understanding of the text (ontology), continuing with the selection and use of valid sources of knowledge (epistemology), and ending with the assessment and application of moral and social values (axiology)) taken from the text. This kind of approach is especially important in the contemporary era where the interpretation of sacred texts is confronted with complex issues such as cultural plurality, global ethical challenges, and modern society's need for contextual and practical interpretations. Therefore, combining these three philosophical domains of science makes *Tafsir* not only an exploration of literal meaning, but also a scientific paradigm that is able to connect texts, empirical experiences, and ethical values in the lives of the people.

CONCLUSION

Integrating ontology, epistemology, and axiology into Qur'anic interpretation (*tafsir*) offers a comprehensive framework to address contemporary scientific and practical challenges by viewing *tafsir* not merely as textual explanation but as a dynamic reality of meaning embedded in social contexts. Ontologically, it captures the living essence of texts; epistemologically, it bridges classical sources (e.g., texts and *hadiths*) with contextual modern methods, enabling interpretations that tackle issues like pluralism, social justice, and national harmony in contexts such as Indonesia while preserving authenticity; and axiologically, it embeds moral, ethical, and social values for real-world application among Muslims and broader communities. This tripartite approach enriches theoretical discourse and positions *tafsir* as an

adaptive, socially relevant instrument. For future research, scholars could empirically test this framework through case studies of *tafsir* applications in digital media ethics or global migration, quantifying its impact on community cohesion via mixed-methods analysis.

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