



Text and context in interpreting philosophical traditions: Global and islamic perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Background: The interpretation of texts in philosophical studies reflects an epistemological dynamic that extends beyond mere literal meaning, encompassing the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which texts are situated. This complexity underscores the evolving nature of textual meaning across different eras and intellectual traditions. **Methods:** This study employs a comparative approach to analyze interpretive methodologies within Western and Islamic schools of philosophy. It focuses on selected hermeneutical frameworks to explore how texts are reinterpreted in relation to changing historical and cultural contexts. **Findings:** In Western hermeneutics, approaches such as Gadamer's fusion of horizons and Ricoeur's narrative symbolism highlight the active interplay between the reader and the text. These perspectives emphasize meaning as a dialogical process shaped by both historical consciousness and linguistic structures. In contrast, the Islamic tradition offers interpretive models like Fazlur Rahman's double movement, Abdullah Saeed's contextual hermeneutics, and Mulla Sadra's tafsir hikmah (philosophical exegesis), which strive to reinterpret revelation within the frameworks of modernity, spirituality, and rationality. These methods reflect an ongoing engagement with divine texts in light of contemporary challenges. **Conclusion:** The comparison reveals that both Western and Islamic philosophical traditions recognize the critical role of context in the process of textual interpretation. However, they are grounded in distinct theological assumptions and methodological orientations, which shape their respective hermeneutical outcomes. **Novelty/Originality of this article:** This study contributes to the field by bridging philosophical hermeneutics from two major intellectual traditions—Western and Islamic—demonstrating their convergences in contextual sensitivity while highlighting their foundational differences. It offers a nuanced understanding of how meaning is negotiated across cultural and religious boundaries.

KEYWORDS: context; islamic philosophy; text interpretation.

1. Introduction

Philosophical inquiry is not solely oriented toward abstract concepts; it is also deeply intertwined with texts as representations of discourse, tradition, and intellectual thought. In the process of interpretation, texts do not stand in isolation but are always situated in relation to their context. Consequently, interpretation within philosophical schools—both global and Islamic—serves as a dialectical arena between text and social reality. The interpretation of texts within the realm of philosophy is a complex process that involves a wide range of methodological approaches, which continue to evolve over time. Hermeneutics, as a branch of philosophy concerned with the theory and method of interpretation, plays a central role in this process (Mabrur & Abas, 2023). Various schools

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of philosophy have introduced distinct perspectives and methods for understanding texts, each contributing a unique viewpoint on meaning and its significance across diverse contexts (Pernando et al., 2022).

The process of interpretation goes beyond extracting literal meaning; it also requires a comprehensive understanding of the historical, social, and cultural contexts surrounding a text. In Qur'anic studies, three primary approaches to interpretation are commonly identified: textual, contextual, and hermeneutical. The textual approach emphasizes linguistic analysis and a literal comprehension of the text. In contrast, the contextual approach focuses on the external circumstances of the text, including the social and historical settings during the time of revelation. Meanwhile, the hermeneutical approach centers on the process of understanding and interpreting the meaning of the text by taking into account the broader social, cultural, political, and historical backgrounds that inform it (Hanif, 2023).

Since antiquity, philosophers have grappled with fundamental questions regarding how to understand and interpret philosophical texts. This process involves not only comprehending the written words but also uncovering deeper meanings often hidden beneath layers of linguistic, conceptual, and contextual complexity. Hermeneutics, as a branch of philosophy concerned with the theory and methodology of interpretation, has become an essential tool in this endeavor. As a method for interpreting philosophical texts, hermeneutics has evolved into a vital instrument across various academic disciplines (Sidik & Sulistyana, 2021).

A text never exists in a vacuum; it is always embedded within a network of social, cultural, historical, and intellectual contexts that shape its meaning and understanding. Within the tradition of philosophy, textual interpretation has evolved through various epistemological and ontological approaches that emphasize the significance of the relationship between the interpreter and the text. Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, for instance, introduces the concept of the "fusion of horizons"—a dialogical process between the historical horizon of the text and the existential horizon of the interpreter. This notion asserts that understanding is never purely objective or absolute, but is inherently historical and intersubjective (Gadamer, 2011). In the Islamic context, the tradition of *tafsir* also reflects a complex and evolving dynamic, ranging from classical textual approaches to contextual interpretations that seek to integrate divine revelation with the challenges and values of modernity (Hidayatulloh, 2024).

2. Methods

This study employs a comparative qualitative method to examine interpretive practices within both Western and Islamic philosophical traditions. By analyzing primary and secondary sources, it focuses on selected hermeneutical models—such as Gadamer's "fusion of horizons," Ricoeur's narrative theory, and Abū Zayd (2005) critical hermeneutics—to explore how philosophical texts are reinterpreted in different historical, cultural, and epistemological contexts.

The research approach is analytical and descriptive, aiming to identify both convergences and divergences in interpretive strategies across traditions. Emphasis is placed on understanding the philosophical foundations that guide textual interpretation, including rational inquiry, contextual awareness, and the dynamics of reader-text interaction.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Text interpretation in western philosophy

The interpretation of texts in Western philosophy has undergone a long and complex historical and conceptual development, spanning from scholastic traditions to

contemporary hermeneutics. Initially rooted in biblical exegesis, early hermeneutics gradually evolved into a philosophical theory of understanding and meaning. Prominent branches within the Western tradition include Classical Hermeneutics (Schleiermacher and Dilthey), Philosophical Hermeneutics (Gadamer), Critical Hermeneutics (Habermas), and Deconstruction (Derrida).

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) developed hermeneutics as the art of understanding—not only of sacred texts but of all forms of human communication. He distinguished between grammatical interpretation (focused on the linguistic structure of a text) and technical or psychological interpretation (aimed at grasping the author's intention) (Schleiermacher, 1998). Dilthey (2019) expanded this approach by establishing hermeneutics as a scientific method within the social sciences, emphasizing the necessity of situating the subject within its historical context to achieve authentic understanding.

Gadamer critiques objectivist approaches to interpretation, arguing that understanding is always the result of a “fusion of horizons”—a convergence between the horizon of meaning embedded in the text and the horizon of knowledge possessed by the interpreter (Gadamer, 2011). In truth and method, he asserts that no understanding is free from preunderstanding, and that it is precisely through the dialogical engagement between horizons that meaning emerges. In his critique, Gadamer departs radically from traditional views by refusing to grant absolute authority to either the text or the interpreter. Instead, he opens up a space for an ethics of dialogue and affirms the historicity of meaning.

Jürgen Habermas introduced a critical dimension to hermeneutics by emphasizing the necessity of liberating texts from hidden ideologies. As he argues, understanding must be accompanied by a critical reflection on the power structures embedded within both social systems and their practices. For Habermas, hermeneutics remains interpretive, but it must also be emancipatory in nature.

The theory of deconstruction seeks to examine the allocation of power relations embedded not only in the written words of a text but also in the boundaries produced by the illusion of formal meaning and the underlying nature of the text itself. It takes a more radical stance in asserting that interpretation is always active and, in some sense, deceived by its own constructs. Deconstruction argues that there is no single, authoritative claim within a text, as every text is always open to multiple interpretations—each accompanied by suppressed or deferred meanings (*différance*). In this context, it is important to emphasize that deconstruction does not seek to invalidate meaning, but rather acknowledges the profound complexity and multiplicity of meanings contained within every fragment of a text. Hermeneutics is the dominant method in Western philosophy for interpreting texts. Hans-Georg Gadamer emphasizes that understanding is the result of a “fusion of horizons” between the reader and the text. The reader's horizon is not an empty space; it is shaped by historical experience that influences how the text is understood. Consequently, the meaning of a text is neither singular nor final (Gadamer, 2011). Gadamer introduced the concept of *Horizontverschmelzung*, or “fusion of horizons”, to describe the dialogical process between the historical horizon of the reader and that of the text (Vessey, 2009). In this view, understanding is not the reproduction of an original meaning but the creation of a new meaning that emerges from the interaction between reader and text (Gadamer, 2011). For instance, the reinterpretation of Descartes' statement “*Cogito, ergo sum*” by existentialist philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre illustrates how meaning can shift depending on the reader's horizon. Sartre did not read this phrase as the foundation of rationalism, but rather as a basis for subjective existence, where the individual is free and responsible for the meaning they create (Sartre & Macomber, 2007). Paul Ricoeur developed the idea that texts create a “new world” that is not entirely dependent on the author's original intention. For Ricoeur, texts are open, symbolic, and narrative in nature (Ricoeur, 1976). In the case of the Prometheus myth, Ricoeur interpreted the story not merely as a myth, but as a symbol of rebellion against the absolute authority of meaning—an interpretation deeply relevant to discourses of resistance against modern totalitarianism (Ricoeur, 1981). Ricoeur also emphasized the importance of distancing in hermeneutics—namely, the reader's ability to take critical distance from the text in order

to grasp deeper meanings (Ricoeur, 2016). This approach enables the reader not only to understand the text in its original context but also to apply its meaning in contemporary settings (Ricoeur, 2016).

3.2 Text interpretation in the tradition of islamic philosophy integration between text, context, and reason

In the Islamic tradition, textual interpretation is not confined to linguistic analysis or literal exegesis; rather, it has undergone significant philosophical development. Since the classical era, Islamic thinkers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, and Ibn Rushd have advanced philosophical approaches to interpreting revealed texts. These approaches do not merely transmit the meaning of the Qur'anic text but emphasize rationality, logic, and metaphysical structures as integral components of Qur'anic interpretation. One of the key characteristics of Islamic philosophical interpretation is the integration of text (*nass*) and reason (*'aql*). Philosophers such as Al-Farabi developed the theory of the "active intellect" (*al-'aql al-fa'al*) as a means of attaining a deeper understanding of divine revelation (Pernando et al., 2022). In this context, the text is regarded as a living and dynamic entity, whose meaning can continuously be explored through rational and contextual approaches.

Historical and political contexts in Islam have also played a significant role in shaping textual interpretation. For example, interpretations of the Qur'an during the Umayyad and Abbasid caliphates were often influenced by the political dynamics and ideological leanings of the ruling authorities (Hanif, 2023). In response, thinkers such as Al-Ghazali sought to balance philosophical reasoning with the spiritual principles of Sufism, ultimately forming an integrative approach to religious texts (Sidik & Sulistyana, 2021). In the contemporary era, hermeneutical approaches in Islam have continued to evolve. Thinkers such as Mohammed Arkoun and Nasr Hamid Abū Zayd have proposed interpretive models that emphasize the importance of understanding the Qur'an within modern historical and social contexts. Abū Zayd, for instance, views divine revelation as a form of communication between God and humanity within a specific cultural framework, and thus argues that its interpretation must remain open to the dynamics of time (Gadamer, 2011). Philosophical interpretation in Islam does not stop at literal meaning; rather, it expands the horizon of understanding through epistemological and historical reflection. This creates a dialogical space between past and present, between the sacred text and contemporary human reality.

In the classical Islamic tradition, Qur'anic interpretation is generally distinguished between two main approaches: *tafsir* and *ta'wil*. *Tafsir* focuses on the literal explanation of the text, drawing upon sources such as the Qur'an itself, hadith, and the opinions of the Prophet's companions. *Ta'wil*, on the other hand, emphasizes esoteric or symbolic interpretation, often incorporating philosophical and spiritual approaches. Thinkers such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina integrated Greek philosophy with Islamic teachings to uncover deeper layers of meaning within revelation. Ibn Rushd, for example, stressed the importance of reason in interpreting sacred texts, arguing that if a text appears to contradict rational understanding, it must be interpreted allegorically. This approach illustrates that, from its earliest stages, Qur'anic interpretation in the Islamic tradition has involved an active dialogue between text and reason.

In the modern context, contextual hermeneutical approaches have become increasingly relevant. Abdullah Saeed, a contemporary scholar, developed an interpretive model that takes into account both the historical and social context of revelation as well as contemporary realities. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the ethical objectives of Qur'anic verses and applying them in accordance with the needs of the present age. This approach builds upon the "double movement" theory introduced by Fazlur Rahman, which advocates for first understanding the historical context of revelation and then reapplying its principles within modern circumstances. Both approaches underscore that Qur'anic interpretation must be responsive to evolving social and moral transformations within society (Saeed, 2006).

Nasr Hamid Abū Zayd proposed a critical hermeneutical approach that emphasizes the Qur'an as a text open to multiple interpretations. He argued that sacred texts do not possess a single, fixed meaning; instead, meaning evolves in accordance with the context and the reader's understanding. Abū Zayd highlighted the importance of applying reason and contextual analysis in interpreting the text, while critiquing literalist approaches that neglect social and historical dynamics. His approach invites readers to view the Qur'an as a living text, one that remains relevant across different historical and social circumstances (Abū Zayd, 2005).

Amina Wadud, a Muslim feminist scholar, developed a hermeneutical approach that emphasizes the principles of justice and gender equality in interpreting the Qur'an. She critiques traditional patriarchal interpretations and advocates for a rereading of the sacred text that takes into account the experiences and perspectives of women. Wadud employs a holistic method that integrates linguistic analysis, historical context, and ethical principles to interpret verses related to gender. Her approach seeks to promote a more inclusive and just understanding of the Qur'an for all of humanity (Wadud, 1999).

In an effort to develop a more comprehensive interpretation of the Qur'an, several scholars have proposed interdisciplinary approaches that integrate fields such as linguistics, history, sociology, and philosophy. This approach seeks to understand the sacred text not only from a theological perspective but also through social and cultural lenses. As a result, Qur'anic interpretation can become more responsive to the challenges and needs of contemporary society (Supena, 2024).

3.3 Basic concepts of hermeneutics and text interpretation

Academic studies on Islamic hermeneutics, particularly in the context of Qur'anic interpretation, remain relatively underexplored in a deep and systematic manner. Efforts to construct an analytical, coherent, and comprehensive examination of the theories, discourses, classifications, and developments of Islamic hermeneutics—including their application in practical tafsir—continue to pose a significant challenge. The complexity of this field is further compounded by its interdisciplinary nature, often overlapping with other academic disciplines. As a result, studies on tafsir and Islamic hermeneutics are frequently perceived as vague, difficult to approach, and in need of a serious interdisciplinary methodology (Alak, 2023). Hermeneutics, as a branch of philosophy focused on theories and methods of interpretation, plays a vital role in textual understanding. Derived from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, meaning "to interpret" or "to translate," hermeneutics is originally associated with the mythological figure Hermes, the messenger between gods and humans. From a hermeneutical perspective, interpreting the Qur'an involves not only understanding the text and its historical context but also incorporating the subjective experiences, perceptions, and interpretive frameworks of the reader. Hermeneutics acknowledges the dynamic interaction between text and reader and recognizes how individual experience and social context shape the understanding and application of Qur'anic messages in everyday life (Hanif, 2023).

The primary function of hermeneutics is to bridge the gap between text and reader, especially when the text originates from a different cultural, historical, or linguistic context. This process involves a dialectical interaction among three central elements: the author, the text, and the reader. As a branch of philosophy concerned with the theory and methodology of interpretation, hermeneutics plays a crucial role in textual analysis. Etymologically, the term *hermeneutics* derives from the Greek word *hermeneuein*, meaning "to interpret" or "to translate" (Palmer, 1969). The term is also closely linked to Greek mythology, where Hermes, the messenger god, served as an intermediary between the divine and the human. Hermes's role symbolizes the transformation of meaning from one form to another, reflecting the very essence of hermeneutics: the effort to translate, interpret, and comprehend messages or meanings embedded in texts or symbols (Grondin & Weinsheimer, 1994).

3.4 Historical development of hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has undergone a significant evolution—from a method for interpreting sacred texts to an analytical tool across various academic disciplines. By the 17th century, its application had expanded beyond religious texts, and in the 19th century, key figures such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey further extended its scope into the humanities. Historically rooted in the interpretation of religious scriptures—especially within the Judeo-Christian tradition—hermeneutics gradually experienced major conceptual transformations. Schleiermacher broadened the discipline by emphasizing the importance of understanding a text within both the historical and psychological context of its author (Schleiermacher, 1998). Dilthey (2019) advanced this further by introducing hermeneutics into the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), arguing that the interpretation of texts and cultural phenomena must differ from the methods of the natural sciences, as it involves the subjective experience of human beings (Rickman, 1979).

Hans-Georg Gadamer revolutionized hermeneutics by emphasizing that interpretation is not merely an effort to uncover the original meaning of a text, but rather a dialogical process that continually evolves between the reader and the text. This process, which he termed the “fusion of horizons”, refers to the merging of the interpreter’s historical context with that of the text (Gadamer, 2011). Meanwhile, Paul Ricoeur developed a critical hermeneutical approach that integrates *understanding* (*Verstehen*) with *explanation* (*Erklären*), and highlights the role of symbol and narrative in shaping interpretation (Ricoeur, 1981). Hermeneutics has also been influenced by post-structuralist thought, particularly through the work of Jacques Derrida, whose concept of deconstruction reveals that meaning within a text is always open-ended and never fixed (Derrida, 1995). Thus, hermeneutics functions not only as a method of interpretation, but also as a philosophical reflection on the nature of meaning and understanding across diverse contexts, including literature, theology, law, and the social sciences.

3.5 Methodological approaches in text interpretation

Textual interpretation is not a simplistic activity, but rather a complex process that requires a well-defined methodological framework. In the context of Qur’anic interpretation, methodology serves as a systematic guide to comprehensively understand the divine message—both from textual and contextual perspectives. As discussed in *Jurnal Millati*, the historical dominance of textualist models in Islamic exegesis has prompted scholars such as Abdullah Saeed to propose contextual approaches that are more sensitive to socio-historical dimensions (Ridwan, 2016). The development of contemporary tafsir methodologies is not solely driven by academic needs, but also as a response to the challenges of modernity. As societies undergo cultural, social, and intellectual transformations, new interpretive approaches continue to emerge in order to address present-day issues while maintaining the authenticity of the sacred text. Across various schools of philosophy, scholars have developed diverse methodological approaches to textual interpretation, each offering distinct epistemological and ethical foundations.

3.5.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology does not view the text as a passive object with fixed meaning, but rather as an open field in which meaning is actively constituted by the reader within the context of their consciousness. This aligns with the phenomenological concept of intentionality, which asserts that human consciousness is always directed toward something—in this case, the text being read. The reader does not merely receive meaning, but experiences, interprets, and reflects upon it through their engagement with the text. Therefore, each act of reading is unique, shaped by the reader’s horizon of experience, cultural background, and lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) (Husserl et al., 1982). In further developments by Husserl’s student, Hans-Georg Gadamer, the phenomenological approach

became a foundational basis for philosophical hermeneutics. Gadamer introduced the concept of “fusion of horizons”, which describes the meeting point between the reader’s horizon of meaning and that of the text. This process emphasizes that understanding is never final; it continually evolves along with the dynamics of the reader’s consciousness and historical context (Gadamer, 2011). Thus, a phenomenological approach to interpretation opens a dialogical space between text and reader, where meaning is not merely discovered but also created through lived experience.

3.5.2 Structuralism

The structuralist approach situates language as a system of signs composed of the signifier and the signified. In the context of textual interpretation, meaning is no longer dependent on the author’s intent or the reader’s response, but rather on how the signs within a text form a coherent internal structure. Meaning, therefore, is differential—it arises not from individual elements in isolation but from their relational position within the structure. As such, structural analysis often employs linguistic models to trace binary oppositions, codes, and conventions that constitute the text (Saussure, 1959). In both religious and literary studies, structuralism has introduced a new way of understanding sacred or classical texts by treating them as “closed systems” that can be analyzed objectively. For example, in Biblical or Qur’anic studies, this approach allows researchers to map narrative structures, identify repetitive patterns, and trace symbolic networks that remain consistent throughout the scripture—without being immediately constrained by theological or ideological frameworks (Pernando et al., 2022). However, this approach has also been subject to criticism for its tendency to neglect external factors, such as historical context, reader psychology, or authorial intention.

3.5.3 Post-structuralism

Jacques Derrida, as a leading figure of post-structuralism, introduced the concept of deconstruction—a reading strategy aimed at dismantling binary oppositions within a text and revealing that meaning is inherently ambiguous, contradictory, and never final (Ahmad & Abd Muid, 2020). According to Derrida, every text contains internal tensions that render it perpetually open to multiple interpretations. He rejected the notion of a fixed center or singular authority within a text and famously asserted that “there is nothing outside the text”, emphasizing that meaning is always produced within the play of signs (Derrida, 1995). Foucault (1972), another influential thinker, focused more on the relationship between text, discourse, and power. He argued that textual interpretation is never neutral but is always shaped by the systems of knowledge and power relations dominant in a given historical period. Through his genealogical and archaeological analyses of discourse, Foucault revealed how texts are utilized to either sustain or subvert particular social structures (Foucault, 1972). Thus, post-structuralism invites us to view the text not as a container of singular truths, but as a contested field of meanings, resisting the reductive closure often imposed by structuralist approaches.

3.5.4 Critical hermeneutics

Jürgen Habermas asserts that textual interpretation must not be divorced from the social, historical, and ideological contexts in which it is embedded. He rejects traditional hermeneutic approaches for being overly focused on subjective understanding and instead proposes a more reflective and critical methodology. From this perspective, reading a text must involve revealing the hidden power relations and examining how texts are employed to legitimize structures of domination within society (Habermas, 1972). Critical hermeneutics demands that readers become actively aware of the social and political dimensions of meaning and strive to liberate themselves from ideological manipulation. Habermas emphasizes that the primary objective of critical hermeneutics is

emancipation—the liberation of the reader from conditions of distorted communication. Interpretation, therefore, is not merely the act of understanding a text's meaning; it also involves creating the conditions for ideal communication, wherein all participants can express their perspectives rationally and free from coercion. This approach is particularly relevant in the analysis of religious, political, or cultural texts that contain embedded power dynamics, as it opens a space for social transformation through conscious and reflective reading.

3.6 Context in the interpretation of philosophical texts

Understanding context is a fundamental foundation in the interpretation of philosophical texts. Context does not merely serve as a background; it actively shapes the meaning and direction of a text's interpretation. The following outlines three primary dimensions of context that influence the interpretation of philosophical texts.

Historical context refers to the time period, events, and intellectual movements that form the backdrop of a text's production. No philosophical thought emerges in a vacuum; rather, it arises in response to particular historical circumstances. Understanding the historical context enables interpreters to grasp the original intentions of the author and to avoid misinterpretations caused by anachronism or temporally inappropriate readings. For instance, ancient Greek philosophy was deeply shaped by the sociopolitical conditions of Athens, while European Enlightenment thought emerged as a response to feudalism and ecclesiastical dogma. By considering the historical context, interpreters can trace the motivations, challenges, and objectives that underlie a text's creation (Jandung, 2024).

Social context encompasses the structures, norms, and social relations prevailing at the time a text was written. Elements such as social class, gender, and power relations significantly influence both the content of the text and its interpretation. An interpretation that is sensitive to social context considers how societal dynamics, social practices, and specific sociopolitical issues are reflected in the text and shape its meaning (Ismail, 2022). For example, Dilthey (2019) emphasized the importance of understanding the social conditions and psychological background of both the author and the society in which the text emerged, in order to produce a more comprehensive and humanly relevant interpretation (Ismail, 2022). As social structures evolve, the meanings attributed to a text may also shift over time.

Cultural context encompasses the beliefs, values, practices, language, religion, and artistic expressions that prevail within a society at the time a text is composed. It shapes worldviews, symbolism, and the layers of meaning embedded within the text (Cahyadi, 2023). For instance, Eastern and Western philosophies developed within vastly different cultural frameworks; thus, interpreting philosophical concepts from these traditions requires a deep understanding of their underlying cultural values and practices. In religious or literary contexts, an awareness of symbols, rituals, and local traditions is crucial to ensure that interpretation remains faithful to the intended meaning of the author or the originating community. Without proper consideration of the historical, social, and cultural contexts, the interpretation of philosophical texts risks becoming superficial, flawed, or even misleading. Context enables interpreters to uncover the background, motivations, and relevance of philosophical thought while also bridging the gap between past and present understanding. In this way, context serves as a crucial tool for grasping the essence, uniqueness, and contemporary significance of philosophical legacies in addressing the challenges of the modern era (Cahyadi, 2023).

3.7 Case studies and practical applications

3.7.1 Interpretation of religious texts

The interpretation of religious texts, particularly the Qur'an, cannot be separated from the historical, social, and cultural contexts in which the text was revealed and interpreted.

Hermeneutics, as a philosophical approach to textual understanding, has become an essential tool in uncovering the deeper meanings of the Qur'an, while also preventing reductive readings rooted in rigid literalism. Within this framework, sacred texts are not seen as static entities but as living discourses engaged in a dynamic relationship with humanity across time. For instance, Nasr Hamid Abū Zayd argues that a hermeneutical approach to the Qur'an allows for pluralistic, historical, and critical interpretations, rejecting the absolutism of any single school of thought (Abū Zayd, 2005). In contemporary developments, this approach has been increasingly reinforced by the incorporation of social, linguistic, and semiotic elements into Qur'anic exegesis. For instance, research by Afsaruddin (2020), demonstrates that the interpretation of the Qur'anic concept of *jihad* is highly contingent upon the sociopolitical context surrounding the interpreter.

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ

Which means, “*And fight in the way of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress limits, for indeed, Allah does not love transgressors.*”

This verse is frequently cited as a key reference in discussions of *jihad* as a form of defensive warfare. In its early context of revelation in Medina, the Muslim community was under threat and confronted with real dangers posed by the Quraysh. Thus, *jihad* was initially understood as a means of self-defense rather than an act of aggression. However, as noted by Afsaruddin, the interpretation of this verse in contemporary discourse is heavily influenced by prevailing political conditions and global narratives. In modern contexts, while some groups interpret this verse to justify violence, progressive Muslim scholars such as Afsaruddin emphasize the ethical foundations, proportionality, and the pursuit of social justice within the concept of *jihad*. Thus, hermeneutics offers a conceptual framework that enables an ethical and transformative reading of sacred texts in today's globalized world (Afsaruddin, 2020).

3.7.2 Qur'an hermeneutics

Qur'anic hermeneutics emphasizes understanding the Qur'an through the lens of philosophical hermeneutics, considering both the divine author's intention and the historical context of revelation. This approach integrates modern hermeneutical theory into Islamic thought, representing a significant advancement in the methodology of Qur'anic interpretation. While some scholars reject hermeneutics in Qur'anic studies, others argue that hermeneutics is essential to make religious texts more dynamic, contextual, and relevant to contemporary society (Ahmad, 2022). Nasr Hamid Abū Zayd, for instance, advocated for recontextualizing the Qur'an in the modern age, proposing a new paradigm based on modern literary theory to open the Qur'an to broader interpretations beyond institutional authority (Nabil, 2020). Similarly, Muhammad Syahrur emphasized that the Qur'an is not limited to early Muslim generations or Arab society, but is intended for all people across time, requiring a dynamic interpretation that aligns with the spirit of each era. The integration of Qur'anic hermeneutics into higher Islamic education curricula, including in Indonesia, reflects the growing recognition of its importance in contemporary Qur'anic interpretation. While some scholars advocate for hermeneutics as a necessary approach to understanding the Qur'an in modern contexts, others remain skeptical of its full application (Arrasyid et al., 2024). Prominent Muslim thinkers such as Nasr Hamid Abū Zayd and Hassan Hanafi have developed hermeneutical approaches to interpreting the Qur'an, focusing on contextual analysis and uncovering new meanings that are relevant to contemporary issues (Furqan & Sakdiah, 2022). The debate surrounding hermeneutics in Qur'anic studies continues, with some scholars arguing that hermeneutics has the potential to enrich traditional interpretive methods, while others express concern about its compatibility with the well-established Islamic scholarly tradition (Azmi, 2022). Despite

this controversy, hermeneutics has undeniably contributed to the advancement of Qur'anic studies and interpretive methodology.

3.7.3 Interdisciplinary approach: a study of mafâtîḥ-al-ghayb interpretation

The Tafsir Mafâtîḥ al-Ghayb adopts an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates various fields of knowledge. This approach demonstrates that textual interpretation can be enriched by insights from multiple academic disciplines. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi's Tafsir Mafâtîḥ al-Ghayb serves as a classical example of an interdisciplinary Qur'anic exegesis. This work not only relies on traditional Islamic sciences but also integrates philosophy, logic, medicine, and the natural sciences to elucidate the meanings of Qur'anic verses. In contemporary studies, al-Razi's work is often regarded as a prototype of cross-disciplinary tafsir that moves beyond mere textualism (Fangesty et al., 2024; Muallifah et al., 2022). Modern and contemporary Qur'anic exegesis in Indonesia has evolved by adopting a more contextual and interdisciplinary approach, emphasizing socio-cultural aspects (*adabi ijtimai'i*) in interpretation (Fangesty et al., 2024). This approach aims to make the Qur'an more relevant to contemporary life by incorporating hermeneutics and various modern academic disciplines such as philosophy, semantics, anthropology, and sociology (Wadud, 1999). Scholars like Hassan Hanafi and Muhammad Shahrur have critiqued classical interpretations, proposing hermeneutics as a comprehensive method for addressing contemporary issues. Modern tafsir seeks to revive the Qur'an's role as a guide for human life by blending traditional and rational exegesis (*bil ma'tsur* and *bil ra'yi*) with thematic and contextual methodologies (Nasr, 2007). This approach aims to improve the condition of Muslims, harmonize Islam with modernity, and incorporate modern scientific knowledge into the study of the Quran.

3.8 Examples of interpretations of verses from various schools of philosophy

Here are several examples of Qur'anic verses that are frequently interpreted by schools of Islamic philosophy, particularly by philosophers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Rushd (Averroes), and Suhrawardi. Philosophical interpretations typically combine reason (*'aql*) and revelation, and employ metaphysical concepts such as the reality of existence (*wujūd*), the soul (*nafs*), the active intellect (*'aql fa'āl*), and emanation (*fayḍ*).

هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣﴾

Which means: "He is the First and the Last, the Apparent and the Hidden, and He is All-Knowing of everything."

Philosophers such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) interpret this verse as a depiction of God as *Wājib al-Wujūd* (the Necessary Being). The terms "First" and "Last" refer to God as both the First Cause (*al-'Illah al-Ūlā*) and the Ultimate End (*al-Ghāyah*). Meanwhile, "Apparent" and "Hidden" signify that God is both the source of all manifestations (*tajallī*) and the transcendent reality beyond all things.

بَدِيعُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِذَا قَضَىٰ أَمْرًا فَإِنَّمَا يَقُولُ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿١١٧﴾

Which means: "Allah is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and when He decrees something, He only says "Be!" and it is."

Philosophers such as Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina employed the concept of emanation (*al-fayḍ*) to explain the creation of the universe. Creation did not occur through a physical

process, but rather through a metaphysical outflow (emanation) from the First Intellect (*al-'Aql al-Awwal*), which originates from God. The divine command "*kun*" ("*Be!*") is understood as a tiered metaphysical process of creation.

ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

Which means: "*And He breathed His spirit into it [human beings].*"

Philosophers distinguish between the soul (*nafs*) and the intellect (*'aql*). The human soul is believed to originate from the Divine Spirit (*rūḥ ilāhī*), which is immaterial and eternal. In his works *Al-Najāt* and *Al-Ishārāt*, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) explains that the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) is capable of attaining knowledge through its connection with the Active Intellect (*'aql fa'āl*).

وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ حَبْلِ الْوَرِيدِ ﴿١٦﴾

Which means: "*And We are closer to him than his jugular vein.*"

Sufi-philosophers such as Ibn Arabi—though not strictly part of the formal philosophical schools—interpreted this verse as referring to God's nearness to human beings through spiritual knowledge (*ma'rifah*). Meanwhile, philosophers like Suhrawardi, the founder of the Illuminationist (*Ishrāqī*) school, emphasized that God's closeness is expressed through the imagery of Light upon Light (*nūr 'alā nūr*, Qur'an 24:35).

اللَّهُ نُورُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

Which means: "*Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth...*"

The Illuminationist (*Ishrāqī*) school of Suhrawardi interprets "light" (*nūr*) as the essence of being. God is regarded as the Absolute Light (*nūr al-anwār*), while all other beings are lights that emanate from Him. This verse serves as the epistemological foundation for the concept of "annihilation" (*fanā'*) in Illuminationist philosophy, in which knowledge is attained through the effacement of the self in the presence of divine light.

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ ۝ لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ ۝ لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ ۝

Which means: "*Say: He is Allah, the One...*"

Philosophers such as Ibn Rushd (Averroes), in his work *Faṣl al-Maqāl*, emphasize that *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God) must be understood through rational inquiry. God is "*Aḥad*" (One) in a simple and indivisible sense (*basīṭ*), without parts or composition—distinct from concepts such as Trinity or divine plurality.

3.9 Philosophical interpretation of qur'anic verses: a contemporary approach to islamic hermeneutics

Contemporary philosophy has significantly influenced the way Muslims interpret Qur'anic verses. Various philosophical movements—such as post-structuralism, phenomenology, and posthumanism—have introduced new approaches to understanding religious texts. These interpretive methods reject the notion of a singular, fixed meaning, and instead emphasize the importance of social, political, cultural, and linguistic context. Interpretations grounded in contemporary philosophy, whether applied to religious texts like the Qur'an or broader social realities, differ markedly from classical approaches. This is primarily due to their critique of modern rationalism, their focus on context, and their integration of current issues such as technology, ecology, and social justice. Below are some key features and examples of such contemporary philosophical interpretations.

Qur'an Surah An-Nisa (4):34 has been one of the most revisited verses through the lens of hermeneutics of equality. Traditionally, this verse has been interpreted to mean that men are the maintainers or leaders of women. However, Amina Wadud (1999) offers a reinterpretation grounded in women's lived experiences and the socio-historical context, challenging literal readings that reflect patriarchal bias. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's framework of deconstruction, Wadud deconstructs dominant structures of meaning and emphasizes the necessity of an interpretation that is liberatory and justice-oriented.

In Surah Al-Ikhlās (112:1–4), God is affirmed as "The One and Only," with nothing comparable to Him. Existentialist interpretations view this oneness not merely as a theological assertion, but as a declaration of authentic being. Thinkers such as Heidegger, through the concept of *Dasein*, and Sartre, with the idea that existence precedes essence, position the human being in a dialogical search for meaning in relation to the Divine (Nasr, 2007).

Qur'an Surah Al-Baqarah (2:30) discusses the creation of humankind as God's vicegerent (*khalifah*) on Earth. A linguistic-philosophical approach, particularly that of Ludwig Wittgenstein, views the term "*khalifah*" as part of a language-game, meaning its significance is contingent upon the context in which it is used. Accordingly, the concept of *khalifah* is not static but is open to reinterpretation in light of contemporary developments.

Qur'an Surah Al-Hijr (15):26 states that human beings were created from dry clay. In the era of post-humanism, this verse has been re-examined by philosophers such as Donna Haraway, who questions the boundary between humans and machines through the concept of the cyborg. This interpretation invites renewed reflection on human identity amid technological revolution (Haraway, 2013).

Qur'an Surah Ar-Rum (30):41 discusses the corruption that has appeared on land and sea as a result of human actions. Environmental philosophies such as deep ecology, developed by Arne Naess, interpret this verse as a spiritual warning against anthropocentrism and a call to care for nature. Within this framework, the verse is seen as a summons to ecological and spiritual responsibility (Hope & Young, 1994).

The Table 1 highlights the fundamental differences between contemporary philosophical interpretation and classical philosophy across three key aspects: methods, objectives, and sources. In terms of methods, contemporary philosophy relies on approaches such as deconstruction and radical hermeneutics, which aim to question and reinterpret established meanings. In contrast, classical philosophy employs emanation and Aristotelian logic, focusing on structured reasoning and metaphysical principles. Regarding objectives, contemporary philosophy seeks to critique power structures and advocate for social justice, whereas classical philosophy is primarily concerned with understanding the metaphysics of God. Finally, the sources of these two traditions also differ significantly. Contemporary philosophy draws heavily from cultural, technological, and political contexts, while classical philosophy is rooted in sacred texts and pure reason. This comparison underscores the shift from a metaphysical and universal orientation in classical thought to a more critical, contextual, and socially engaged approach in contemporary philosophy.

Table 1. The difference between contemporary philosophical interpretation and classical philosophy

Aspect	Contemporary Philosophy	Classic Philosophy
Methods	Deconstructions, Radical Hermeneutics	Emanation, Aristotelian Logic
Objective	Criticism of Power, Social Justice	Understanding the Metaphysics of God
Source	Cultural, Technological, and Political Contexts	Sacred Texts and Pure Reason

4. Conclusions

Understanding texts, especially in philosophical studies, cannot be separated from the significant role of context. A text is not a static entity that stands alone; rather, it is something that remains alive and dynamic within the space of history, culture, and social change. In the Western philosophical tradition, hermeneutic theory has evolved into a philosophical approach that emphasizes the importance of the reader's involvement in the interpretive process. Every meaning that emerges is not merely a reproduction, but the result of a dialogue between the reader's horizon and that of the text.

Meanwhile, within the Islamic intellectual tradition, various schools of thought such as the Mu'tazilah, Peripatetic, Illuminationist (*Isyraqi*), and Transcendent Theosophy (*Hikmah Muta'aliyah*) demonstrate the richness and breadth of reasoning traditions in interpreting revelation. Thinkers like Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina laid the foundations for rational thought within religion, Al-Ghazali offered critical reflections on philosophy while still recognizing the role of reason, and Mulla Sadra proposed a profound synthesis between reason, spirituality, and religious intuition.

In the contemporary era, thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman and Abdullah Saeed stress the importance of re-reading revealed texts by taking into account modern social contexts. This does not mean reducing the meaning of the texts, but rather enriching interpretation so that it remains in harmony with the developments of the times.

Ultimately, both Western and Islamic philosophies show that the meaning of a text is always open to reinterpretation. The differences in approach are manifestations of the diverse epistemologies that have evolved within these two great traditions. Indeed, it is from this diversity that we learn that contextual, reflective, and time-conscious interpretation is the key for texts to remain relevant and continue to serve as meaningful guides for life.

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