

Love and existence in Mawlana by Mustafa Çevik

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Hüner yoktur kal dilinde.

Asıl hüner hâl dilinde.

Çûn miftâh-ı kalp onun özünde.

Anlatılamazı anlatır gönül dili.

İnsan bedenden gayrıdır.

Onda gizli hakikatler vardır

Gönlünden hakikat nurları yansır.

Görünmezi gösterir gönül dili.

This book challenges the notion that there is a universal method of philosophizing that should be applied uniformly. The author argues that while philosophy may follow a universal, comprehensive method, it must also consider local values and beliefs. The issue of philosophy's locality is examined through the work of Mawlana Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (d. 672/1273), who, as the author points out, is often viewed as a Sufi and a poet. While Rumi's writings have been evaluated in the context of poetry and Sufism, they have not been extensively studied in the field of the philosophy of religion. The author offers a comparative analysis of Rumi's views on the philosophy of being and love, using the terminology of existentialist thinkers such as Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Sartre. The similarities and differences between these perspectives are clearly conveyed.

A key strength of the book is that the author provides a clear framework and purpose, making the text accessible to readers. This is



reflected in the section titled "A Few Words about the Purpose and Framework of the Study." Çevik states that his primary aim is to explore whether Mawlana's concept of humanity's return to God can be considered an existential way of thinking. Furthermore, in discussing whether philosophy, particularly the philosophy of religion, can be localized, the author aims to show that it is possible to develop a universal philosophy from local patterns and ideas. Çevik argues that a philosopher of religion should base their work on the religious understanding of their own society. Given this, the question of "Why undertake this journey?" becomes clear. The next question is: how will this journey, with its clear purpose, be carried out? Although the author provides a detailed explanation, it can be summarized as follows:

-Mawlana's epistemology is examined without repeating the basic concepts of epistemology that can be found in any introductory philosophy text.

-The terminology of the Western existentialist tradition is used to redefine concepts from the distinct tradition of Sufism.

Before getting into the main topic, Çevik states that the question of what is existential philosophy is a difficult one to answer. According to the author, although there are common themes in the system of thought accepted as existential philosophy, it is not possible to come across two philosophers who deal with these same themes. The author attributes the reason why they are mentioned in the same category to the fact that they deal with a common theme. This statement of the author can be supported by giving an example from 'Ala'ad-dawla as-Simnani (d. 736/1336), who lived in the same period as Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240) in the field of Sufism. Although Simnani has poems that reflect the understanding of the unity of being, he still harshly criticized Ibn al-'Arabī based on the view of the unity of being (Kasım, 2002, pp. 204-232).

Before the first section, Çevik addresses an important issue such as whether the truth can be known or not, as a preparation for the next topic. It can be said that this method is appropriate. Because the concept of vü-cûd (existence), which the early Sufis used in the sense of finding or knowing, has gained a new interpretation in time by being expressed as being or existing. So much so that this relationship they established



between being and existing, and finding and knowing, has always continued (Demirli, 27-48). Therefore, it can be easily said that it is appropriate for the author to adopt such a method.

Çevik begins this section by asking whether reason and senses can mediate a person's reaching the absolute truth. He states that there are groups with both ideas. The important point that draws attention here is that the author addresses the issue of faith and certainty. Indeed, Sufis likened certainty, which is a superior rank between knowledge and certainty, to the establishment of faith in the heart and evaluated it in a spiritual dimension (Kelâbâzî, 1979, p. 163; Yüksel, 2018, 229-247)). Again, they expressed faith as the external of knowledge and knowledge as the internal of faith (Halil, 2016, p. 95). The author touches upon the fact that for Sufis, knowing and believing is a process that a person must go through, and that "a person must know himself, his 'self'", which is a common point in Sufism and philosophy. He also states that Socrates' words "know yourself" have been very influential throughout the history of thought, and that his approach, that is, person's turning to himself/herself, aims to give meaning to his/her own existence or to discover the existing meaning by living it.

Again, Çevik states that the fundamental problem of Sufism is not to know but to be, and that according to Sufis, reason and knowledge do not constitute faith, cannot determine the subject of faith, and this understanding of faith has no criterion. The author also states that for Mawlana, knowing is to proceed with a passionate love, not reasoning that leads to judgment. He conveys that for Mawlana, the issue is not to know but to be.

The author, drawing from the view that philosophy is an activity aimed at discovering being rather than merely researching it, notes that for Marcel, as well as for Rumi, the focus is on being rather than knowing throughout his entire philosophical thought (p. 43). To clarify this point, the author includes a story from the Masnavi titled "The Story of the Philologist and the Sailor." In this story, a conceited scholar asks the sailor, "Have you ever studied syntax?" When the sailor replies that he has not, the scholar arrogantly tells him, "Half of your life has been wasted." The sailor, hurt but silent, waits until a storm throws the ship into a whirlpool. At that moment, the sailor turns to the scholar and asks, "Do you know how to



swim?" The scholar responds, "I don't. Don't look for fins in me." The sailor replies, "Then your whole life is wasted, for the ship is sinking. What's needed now is the knowledge of survival, not grammar. If you know how to survive, dive into the sea without fear" (Masnavi, 1988, I, 2845b).

Çevik begins the first section of the book under the heading "Criticism of Rationality in the God-Human Relationship," dividing it into five subheadings. The first subheading addresses systematic thought and Mawlana. Here, the author discusses existentialist philosophers who view systematicity as an obstacle to freedom and notes that many share this opinion. In fact, subjectivity and individual inner freedom are considered prerequisites for reaching truth by all existentialist thinkers, particularly Kierkegaard. Çevik highlights Kierkegaard's critique of Hegel's purely rational system, explaining that the most evident reason for Kierkegaard's opposition is that Hegel's system overlooks the freedom necessary for a person to choose themselves, which Kierkegaard views as the ontological foundation of existence.

Çevik notes that it is challenging to speak of a systematic framework in Mawlana's thought, even within the context of Sufism. He points out that Mawlana opposed the methodologies of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and tafsir (Quranic exegesis), in a way similar to existential philosophers (p. 37). The author explains that Mawlana's replacement of the theological and monotonous understanding of Islam, as outlined by fiqh, with a focus on individual freedom, stems from his use of knowledge and knowing in a performative sense as "being." Mawlana made humans the subject of knowledge and knowing, allowing them to shape their own inner world. Under this section, Çevik discusses subjectivity, a theme Mawlana emphasizes in his works. Mawlana's opposition to methodological imposition arises from his rejection of a universal "essence" applicable to all people. The author notes that Kierkegaard's claim that "subjectivity is truth" or "truth is subjective" does not align with Mawlana's perspective (p. 45). An example of this is Mawlana's statement that jurists create a barrier between themselves and God through their focus on what is permissible or impermissible, a point elaborated on in later sections (p. 60).

The second subheading addresses the question of whether the universe, created by Allah to be known, is independent of Him. In this



section, the author examines Mawlana's views on the matter, comparing them with the thoughts of David Hume. Çevik explains that Mawlana believed the functioning of the universe is not independent of God. However, this does not imply that the universe and its beings are the same as God. Mawlana saw the cause-effect relationship in the universe as a chain of continuous interaction, emphasizing the importance of looking at causes collectively rather than individually (p. 48). According to the author, Mawlana's theory of causality shares similarities with Hume's perspective. In both Mawlana's and Hume's views, the relationship between cause and effect is merely apparent, lacking the deterministic necessity often assumed in causal relationships.

Another topic addressed in the first section is the problem of evil and the paradox created by a reasoning style that seems valid at first glance. The author approaches the problem of evil, which has long sparked debates between theism and atheism, in a unique way within a classical context. According to the author, Mawlana believes that everything is created with a purpose. If all beings are known through their opposites, the same paradox and conflict also apply to goodness. Mawlana holds that there is a unity of purpose within opposites, and he explains the persistence of evil despite the unity of God by referencing the dualistic understanding of God in Zoroastrianism (p. 54). Based on the principle that everything exists through its opposite, it can easily be said that all beings in the universe come to life through their opposites.

The best example of this is the human being, who embodies all created opposites as a summary of the universe. As the author discussed earlier, when humans become aware of themselves, they understand the universe, and when they understand the universe, they recognize the Creator. In other words, the human is the key concept in the relationship between God, the universe, and humanity. Therefore, when a person uncovers their essence, they realize that the existence of evil is a necessary condition for the functioning of the universe, due to divine justice. Çevik supports this idea by quoting Mawlana multiple times, illustrating that evil, as the opposite of good, is a normal fact of life. One such quotation is: "Where there is a problem, there goes the cure, where there is poverty, there goes the blessing. Poison is strength for the snake. For others, it is trouble, death"



(Mevlânâ, *Mesnevî*, III, 262) (p. 54). The author concludes this section by summarizing Mawlana's view: the world into which humans are thrown, and the world within them, consist of contrasts and conflicts. To know and exist, there must be two beings: the finite and the infinite. Similarly, for humans to understand existence, they must experience the paradoxes and contradictions inherent in life (p. 56).

In terms of ontological truth, humans are the key to understanding the relationship between God, the universe, and humanity. The author's emphasis on the concept of the human in the first subheading, and later on the relationship between God and humans, demonstrates a well-organized method. In this section, the author also addresses an essential distinction before moving on to the concept of the unity of existence: the difference between pantheism and the unity of existence (pp. 57-58). The author asserts that it is uncertain whether Rumi was a proponent of the unity of existence. In fact, based on the evidence found in Rumi's works, it can be argued that he did not adhere to this concept. The misconception that Mawlana was a *wahdat al-wujudist* (unity of existence advocate) stems from the widespread belief that Ibn al-‘Arabî's understanding of *wahdat al-wujud* dominates all schools of Sufism. Although the author does not delve directly into Mawlana's stance on the unity of existence, he addresses the topic within the context of his broader discussion, suggesting that understanding Mawlana's ideas requires examining whether they align with this framework.

While it is not possible to cover all points here, a slight objection from the Sufi perspective could arise regarding two issues mentioned by the author under this heading.

Firstly, it is important to note that Ibn al-‘Arabî did not use the term *wahdat al-wujud* (unity of existence) in his works. This concept was developed later by his followers and commentators to clarify Ibn al-‘Arabî's ideas. By doing so, they aimed to protect Ibn al-‘Arabî from criticisms suggesting that the term was inadequate or erroneous (Demirli, “*Vahdet-i vücûd*,” XLII, 431-435). Therefore, the fact that Rumi, who lived during a period close to Ibn al-‘Arabî, did not explicitly mention this concept in his works does not necessarily mean that he was not a proponent of *wahdat al-wujud*. Additionally, Rumi's assertion that all other beings are relative and



shadow-like compared to God indicates that his thought reflects the unity of existence. Ibn al-‘Arabî, too, discusses the relationship between the universe and God as akin to the relationship of a shadow to its source (İbnü’l-Arabî, 1946, 101; Büsra, 11/3, 1091-1111).

Çevik, aware that such objections might arise, addresses them in his work. He argues that Rumi’s symbolic style when expressing his Sufi unity of thought has often led scholars to mistakenly categorize him within Ibn al-‘Arabî’s school of unity. According to Çevik, most of Rumi’s statements that might seem to reflect the unity of existence actually pertain to Rumi’s understanding of truth. Rumi’s notion of truth is not an epistemological process based on sensory data or rational inferences. Rather, Rumi perceives truth as an existential and active process, where an individual must transcend the self in the face of the transcendental Self. The author explains that Rumi attributes inner human suffering to the preservation of the self in opposition to the transcendental Self. Therefore, Çevik asserts that interpreting Rumi’s thought as akin to *wahdat al-wujud* or pantheism, based solely on expressions that echo such ideas, would be inaccurate. He clarifies that Rumi’s expressions refer not to an ontological unity but rather to "a unity formed by the experience of the particular self-dissolving in the presence of the absolute/universal self during a profound spiritual experience" (pp. 61-62).

In the final section of the first chapter, the author introduces a timeless question in philosophical history: What relationship exists, or should exist, between faith and reason? Çevik notes that Mawlana does not accept reason as a definitive guide in understanding ultimate truths, particularly faith-based truths. For Mawlana, faith is a lived and factual experience rather than an epistemological deduction or rational conclusion. Çevik summarizes Mawlana’s perspective by arguing that reason has limited functionality in relation to faith-based truth, which Mawlana sees as a direct experience rather than a rational conclusion: Mawlana’s conception of faith is not about logically questioning the existence of God but about embracing an understanding rooted in love and participation in the transcendental Self. God, having "thrown" humanity into the world, has not abandoned them; instead, He opens Himself up to them, inviting humanity into His



presence. For Mawlana, faith is essentially the willingness to respond positively to this divine call.

The second part of the work, composed of three sections, delves into the issue of existence and essence in humans, with the discussion organized under three subheadings. The first section focuses on the qualitative differences between existence and essence. Çevik asserts that the problem of existence and essence has been one of the most contested and intricate topics in the history of philosophy. The author notes that ancient philosophy centered around the question of what existence fundamentally is (*arkhe*). Alongside this inquiry, the issue of whether existence has an essence was also debated. Çevik highlights that this issue was articulated by Ibn Sina (Avicenna) in the following manner: existence is a quality of essence. Given that qualities are relational, a distinction between existence and essence is established. To illustrate, if we consider existence as a quality of essence, it is comparable to saying, "The pen is short," where shortness is a quality of the pen. Similarly, in the proposition "The pen exists," existence is treated as a quality of the pen. Çevik points out that such an understanding of existence has been a topic of prolonged debate and that it is difficult to determine an absolute answer regarding which understanding of existence is correct.

After analyzing the proposition "The pen exists" from the perspectives of Sunni theologians, Islamic philosophers, and Sufis, the author explains that Mawlana did not engage in deep philosophical analyses concerning the nature of existence and essence. Rather, Rumi approached these two concepts in a more straightforward, almost superficial manner. The primary question in Mawlana's thought, as Çevik explains, revolves around what fundamentally makes a human being human. In the later sections, the author emphasizes that the essence of a human being is variable and that incidental events (accidents) can influence this essence, illustrating a cyclical relationship between essence and accidents.

From Mawlana's perspective on existence and essence, Çevik underscores the idea that each individual possesses an essence that is mutable from birth. After clearly explaining these concepts, the author provides an in-depth exploration of the issue of priority and posteriority concerning existence and essence. Çevik argues that, in existentialist thought,



existence precedes essence, meaning that humans first come into the world, and only later develop their essence. Just as existentialist thinkers like Sartre and Kierkegaard argue that existence precedes essence and that freedom is necessary for shaping one's essence, Çevik maintains that Mawlana also shares this notion that existence precedes essence. In support of this claim, Çevik notes that Mawlana explores the question of "which comes first, existence or essence?" in relation to humanity, and illustrates this point by including a story from Rumi (p. 84).

According to the author, in Rumi's thought, the essence of a human being is given as a potential, yet it must be rediscovered and cultivated. Çevik points to one of Rumi's quatrains (Divan-ı Kebir, 2007, 1366-40b) as evidence of this, where man clearly demonstrates that he first attains physical existence and then finds his essence within himself. While the author acknowledges a resemblance between Rumi and Sartre on the notion that existence precedes essence, he notes that the relationship between existence and essence in Rumi is somewhat different from Sartre's existential distinction. In Rumi's view, the relationship between existence and essence does not rely solely on the principle of priority and posteriority. Certainly, Rumi agrees that existence precedes essence, but Çevik argues that this relationship is constructed differently in his philosophy. For Sartre, the precedence of existence over essence is an effort to demonstrate that humans are not subject to divine influence in any way. In contrast, for Rumi, the precedence of existence over essence represents the elevation of humans from their current state, with this elevation being continuous.

The author addresses how humans begin to form their essence in the final part of the second section. For Rumi, the author argues, "what is" refers to the physical structure of a person in this world, but this physical state is not of great importance. What truly matters is the process of becoming "what one should be." Rumi contrasts the "body" (what is) with the "essence" or "self" (what one should become). Çevik highlights that Rumi conceptualizes humans as raw material, which will eventually take shape and gain function. In this context, Rumi emphasizes that a human being must contemplate "himself" or "herself" to discover their true essence or self.



According to the author, for Rumi, existence begins with becoming truly human, which transcends the mere physical structure. Rumi does not regard someone who has not realized their true existence as a complete person. The key to realizing one's existence, in Rumi's philosophy, is to cease to exist in the face of Absolute Being. To exist, or to accept one's existence, is to recognize that one does not truly exist when compared to the Absolute. For Rumi, the process of beginning to exist is intrinsically tied to the act of ceasing to exist in relation to the Absolute Being.

In examining the topics discussed in the third section of the book, it becomes evident that many of the subjects previously addressed in other sections are revisited under distinct subheadings. This arrangement gives the reader the impression that the narrative is approaching its conclusion, further illustrating the well-structured plot of the work.

The first topic covered in this five-subheading section is the problem of non-existence and existence. As noted earlier, a person begins to exist through annihilation. The author identifies a fundamental paradox in Rumi's thought: the intertwined coexistence of the infinite "transcendent self" with the finite physical body. The initiation and sustenance of existence hinge on the distress caused by this paradox. To transcend this condition, one must become non-existent in the presence of the Absolute Self. Çevik explains that in the journey of existence, Mawlana distinguishes between two selves: one before freedom, still tethered to bodily desires and the physical realm, and one after freedom, which transcends the self and connects with the transcendent self (p. 102).

The author further elaborates that, according to Mawlana, the term "mine" implies being shackled, suggesting that the pathway to elevate oneself from the confines of the self to a state of unity with the divine is through love and longing. A story quoted from the *Masnavi* succinctly encapsulates this idea. In the tale, the guest who claims, "You are the beloved who captured my heart," is met with the response, "Oh me, come in; the house is too small for two." This exchange illustrates that the self must dissolve in the presence of Absolute Existence, as two selves cannot coexist in a single heart or being. Consequently, Sufis advise that one should remove everything from the heart except for God Almighty and make room solely for Him.



In the second subheading, which discusses the awareness of self in the context of annihilation, the author posits that self-knowledge is a principle of wisdom inherited from Socrates. Quoting the hadith, “He who knows himself, knows his Lord,” a saying frequently referenced among Sufis, Çevik emphasizes that self-knowledge represents the culmination of existential inquiry and encapsulates existential philosophy. He begins this section with the questions: “Is knowing oneself equivalent to recreating oneself or creating oneself? Or is it merely recognizing the hidden treasure within?” The author notes that Socrates viewed the knowledge of truth as innate, suggesting that knowing is akin to remembering. Similarly, Mawlana asserts that humans exist in the world to transcend the dominance of the flesh, interpreting self-knowledge as awareness of one’s temporary and limited condition in light of the infinity and perfection of transcendent existence. Here, Çevik stresses that neither Mawlana nor Kierkegaard understands truth through reason; instead, truth is something to be experienced. In this context, the author concludes that the second interpretation is indeed possible: knowing oneself means recognizing the hidden treasure within.

The third heading addresses the complex relationship between freedom and existence, particularly through the lenses of Mawlana and Sartre, both of whom caution against the dangers of defining and labeling freedom. According to the author, Sartre views freedom as the negation of what exists; it is the act of declaring what is not while remaining within the realm of existence. He posits that an individual, cast into existence from nothingness, is condemned to be free. In this framework, freedom equates to the opportunity to make choices amidst the void. Conversely, Mawlana suggests that an individual must mature through the confidence that comes with choosing what is bestowed upon them, endeavoring to create their own essence.

Çevik notes that, while both thinkers begin their exploration of existence with nothingness, their understandings of responsibility diverge significantly. For Mawlana, individuals are accountable to God, who created them and placed them in the world. In contrast, Sartre argues that individuals are responsible primarily to themselves and to humanity. Moreover, the author highlights differences in their concepts of freedom: Sartre



disregards the factors contributing to a person's freedom, whereas Mawlana considers them essential. Despite these differences, Çevik identifies similarities, emphasizing that true human value is contingent upon attaining the consciousness of choice. He also remarks that this consciousness is neither permanent nor continuous; rather, it represents a fleeting state of mental awareness.

Another significant topic in this section is the exploration of the self versus the transcendental "self." Çevik poses the question, "What is the 'self?'" and quotes Kierkegaard's assertion that "the self is the relationship that is attached to itself," emphasizing the self's internal orientation within this relationship. He notes a similar perspective in Rumi's thought, asserting that a person must navigate oppositional forces to discover an existential exit. The author posits that exiting this paradox is a continual process rather than a completed action. Furthermore, he emphasizes that, according to Rumi, the individual's self-acts as an obstacle to realizing the transcendental self, and failing to achieve this realization constitutes a betrayal of one's true nature.

Çevik elaborates on Mawlana's views by drawing comparisons with the thoughts of Husserl, Sartre, Gabriel Marcel, and Kierkegaard. He asserts that Mawlana considers the elimination of the psychophysical self and the embrace of the transcendental self as fundamental to human existence. The author likens Mawlana's phenomenological approach to Husserl's method of bracketing, noting that while Husserl's inquiry seeks epistemological truths, Mawlana's reduction is rooted in a factual reassessment (p. 122). Moreover, he points out that in Kierkegaard's framework, attaining faith requires the sacrifice of a beloved, while in Mawlana's view, it necessitates the sacrifice of the self to reach the transcendental self (p. 124).

Following the analysis of Rumi's thought within the context of existential philosophy, the author titles the book "Distress and Leap" as a means of self-reflection. He asserts that the anxiety and longing for one's birth and future propel an individual toward contingency—an existence devoid of purpose. Through this experience of anxiety and longing, a person recognizes the inherent meaninglessness of life, and this awareness becomes the active consciousness that directs them toward authentic existence (p. 129).



The author argues that if life were binding and compelling rather than contingent, discussions of freedom and the existential process would be moot. The inherent contingency of life and our individual experiences compel us to make choices and recreate ourselves. In Rumi's perspective, the distress stemming from anxiety and longing can be alleviated through love. For Rumi, love is an intrinsic tendency; whatever one loves ultimately leads back to God. Consequently, this distress culminates in the dissolution of the self, which is limited by the physical body, and facilitates a connection with the transcendental self. The author notes that, according to Mawlana, the phrase "you cannot find it" obstructs the path to God, emphasizing that hope is rooted in faith and love for the transcendental self.

The author also highlights Mawlana's assertion that desire is the root of all troubles. This notion marks the initiation of both the leap and the quest for freedom. Desire, in this context, relates more to what individuals aspire to become rather than what they currently possess. The concepts of "distress" and "leap" are encapsulated in the longing (distress) felt by the lover searching for their beloved, alongside the desire to merge with the beloved and be annihilated in that union (leap). The soul, yearning to return to its origin, remains in distress as long as it is ensnared by the physical realm. When a person condemns the soul, a leap toward their origin occurs, signifying a profound transformation. The author references a story from Mawlana that illustrates how experiencing distress, akin to the soul's struggle to return to its original state, facilitates purification and ultimately leads one to God.

In conclusion, the author discusses the locality of philosophy and seeks solutions throughout the book. Instead of addressing broad issues and concepts common across various disciplines, the approach of focusing on a singular individual and specific subject matter proves to be insightful and effective in exploring this vital theme. This method enhances the understanding of the topic at hand. The author also begins each chapter subheading with a well-crafted introduction that effectively outlines what Mawlana will convey and his overall attitude toward the subject. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the author for emphasizing that those engaging in the philosophy of religion should ground their inquiries in the religious understanding of their societal context.



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