

***KALĀM JADĪD*: A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON NEW APPROACHES TO ISLAMIC THEOLOGY**

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Abstract: Modernity, shaped in large part by Western colonial expansion, has significantly influenced the development of Islamic intellectual traditions, particularly *‘ilm al-kalām* (the science of Islamic theology). One of its most visible consequences is the emergence of renewal (*tajdīd*) projects that seek to reformulate Islamic theology in response to modern intellectual and social challenges. These efforts often generate tensions with classical theological frameworks and result in diverse, and frequently competing, methodological orientations. This study examines the epistemological foundations of these competing formulations of *kalām jadīd* by situating them within the historical relationship between *kalām* and *manṭiq*. It argues that many contemporary theological projects appropriate modern philosophical tools without adequately engaging the classical integration of logic as an internal epistemic framework of Islamic theology. Using a qualitative approach informed by Alfred Schutz’s phenomenology, the study analyses the meaning-making processes and modes of knowledge construction among modern Muslim theologians. The findings indicate that contemporary *kalām* often suffers from methodological fragmentation and epistemological inconsistency due to the absence of a shared and robust methodological framework. The study concludes that critical re-engagement with the historical role of *manṭiq* is essential for strengthening the epistemological foundations and intellectual coherence of contemporary Islamic theology.

Keywords: *Kalām jadīd, modernity, mantiq, renewal, theological methodology*

INTRODUCTION

One of the essential efforts in sustaining the religion’s vitality is the preservation of Islamic faith (*‘aqīdah*). This is because it constitutes a fundamental pillar of Islamic law (*sharī‘ah*) and significantly influences the dynamics of social life. Throughout its historical

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development, Islamic theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*) has played a pivotal role in formulating rational arguments to address crises of belief among Muslims.¹ Initially, the discipline emerged as an intellectual response to theological disputes – such as debates concerning the nature of God and human agency, the doctrines of divine unity (*tawhīd*) and justice (*‘adl*), as well as the problem of predestination (*taqdīr*). Scholars in this field generally contend that the roots of these theological discourses can be traced to the early formative period of Islam.²

The theological sects frequently involved in early Islamic theological debates include the Mu‘tazilah, Ash‘ariyyah, Māturīdiyyah, Shi‘a, Qadariyyah, and Jabbariyyah. Each school has advanced its own claims to truth supported by distinct lines of reasoning. Their fragmentation into multiple strands was largely a consequence of divergent methodological approaches to the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth when addressing major theological questions widely discussed during the formative period of Islam. This phenomenon resonates with Georg Lukács’ assertion that every thinker is a “child of their time” (*ibn waqtihi*),³ where intellectual production must be understood as historically conditioned. This issue becomes evident in the modern period, when several Muslim intellectuals – such as Hasan Hanafī, Ahmad Khān, and Hassan Yusofiān – contended that contemporary theological concerns differ fundamentally from those of the classical era. Debates regarding the existence and nature of God, atheism, *mu‘jizāt* (miracles), and metaphysical substances are viewed as increasingly irrelevant or insufficient in responding to the socio-political crises faced by Muslim societies today. From their perspective, the ideological challenges confronting the modern Muslim world require new conceptual tools and thematic orientations within *kalām*. Consequently, these scholars argue that the epistemological framework of Islamic theology must be reformulated to ensure its continued relevance in addressing the realities of modern and contemporary contexts.

Considering the innovative contributions of these thinkers, contemporary Islamic theology has witnessed a renewed dialectical vitality expressed in more contextual and socially grounded forms. Theological discourse has been rearticulated through logical and demonstrative methodologies, enabling it to engage critically with the intellectual and existential challenges that emerged in the post-European Enlightenment era while retaining its dialectical essence within contemporary realities. Even so, the deeply rooted intellectual tradition of *kalām* remains resistant to rapid transformation; its classical frameworks cannot be easily restructured merely on the basis that their premises are increasingly perceived as less relevant to present-day concerns. This tension reveals a critical paradox: on one hand, the inherited apparatus of classical *kalām* represents a vast epistemic reservoir that has shaped Muslim theological identity for over a millennium; on the other hand, the continuity of this tradition demands intellectual renewal capable of addressing emergent epistemological, ethical, and civilisational challenges. Reformulating Islamic theology, therefore, is not merely an exercise in discarding the old and adopting the new, but an endeavour to synthesise

¹ Jeffrey R. Halverson, *Theology and Creed in Sunni Islam* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 16.

² Jan Thiele, “Recent Scholarship in the Field of Kalām,” *Studia Islamica* 113, no. 2 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1163/19585705-12341378>.

³ Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (P. Cassier, 1920), 85.

tradition and change through a historically conscious and epistemologically responsible methodology.

In this regard, the present study examines the underlying factors that account for the diversity of approaches among contemporary Muslim theologians in articulating and contextualising *kalām jadīd*. Central questions arise from this phenomenon: What explains these divergent orientations, and can the conceptual assumptions they advance legitimately serve as an independent epistemological foundation for modern *kalām*? This study contends that contemporary attempts to reformulate *kalām* emerge primarily from intellectual and socio-civilisational crises in the Muslim world – crises increasingly perceived as irresolvable through the metaphysical frameworks inherited from classical theology. Such developments reflect a paradoxical dynamic: while modern *kalām* aims to reassert theological relevance, it simultaneously operates under the shadow of colonial influence, which historically displaced God from the centre of epistemic engagement and reoriented intellectual enquiry toward secular frameworks. While the contributions of contemporary theologians have undeniably revitalised theological discourse and reopened space for *kalām* in modern thought, this study contends that such efforts have yet to culminate in a fully developed *kalām jadīd*. One of the primary limitations lies in persistent epistemological gaps, particularly insufficient engagement with the historicity of classical *kalām* and its dynamic process of intellectual interaction with external traditions, such as the incorporation of Hellenistic logic (*manṭiq*). This historical experience demonstrates that methodological borrowing, when integrated with the repertoire of Islamic scholarly tradition and accompanied by an epistemic consensus among scholars, can generate a shared methodological language capable of regulating disagreement and sustaining intellectual rigour. In contrast, the current landscape of modern *kalām* often reflects fragmented theoretical constructions, shaped by subjective orientations and lacking a common epistemic framework that can systematically organise theological debate.

Building on this observation, the development of *kalām jadīd* requires more than selective adoption of modern philosophical tools; it demands the formulation of a coherent and internally structured epistemological foundation. The integration of external methodologies should not remain merely instrumental or retrospective but must evolve into an epistemic infrastructure that enables sustained and cumulative knowledge production. This transformation presupposes continuity with the intellectual heritage of *kalām*, ensuring that innovation remains rooted in tradition while critically rearticulating it in light of contemporary challenges. Moreover, a clear teleological orientation is essential, as methodological integration should ultimately strengthen the rational articulation of theological questions, particularly those concerning divinity and core doctrinal concerns. Accordingly, this study proposes that *kalām jadīd* can only achieve a solid epistemological grounding when it succeeds in synthesising methodological coherence, epistemic consensus, historical continuity, and clarity of purpose within an integrated framework. Without synthesis, contemporary theological efforts risk remaining theoretically fragmented and

methodologically unregulated, thereby limiting their capacity to produce systematic and enduring formulations of belief.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Shiblī Nomānī (d. 1914) was the earliest scholar to explicitly introduce the term *‘ilm al-kalām al-jadīd*, arguing that while classical theology focus on defending beliefs against doctrinal objections, modern enquiries increasingly concern the historical, cultural, and moral dimensions of religion.⁴ His observation implies that traditional *kalām*, which is largely confined to metaphysical themes, had become less responsive to modern intellectual challenges. Nomānī’s formulation subsequently inspired later theological renewal projects. A major contribution was made by the Iraqi theologian ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Rifā‘ī, who edited a volume titled *‘Ilm al-Kalām al-Jadīd* as a foundational effort to advance contemporary theological discourse, bringing together diverse thinkers such as Hasan Hanafi, Fazlur Rahman and others.⁵ Another contribution appears in the work of Hassan Yusofiān, whose Persian treatise on *kalām jadīd*, later translated into Arabic and Indonesian, extends earlier renewal efforts by incorporating new thematic concerns rather than offering a wholly original framework. Despite these contributions, it appears that no comprehensive and systematic enquiry has yet been undertaken to establish the necessary epistemological foundations for *kalām jadīd*. Existing scholarship tends to emphasise theoretical development and thematic expansion, while paying insufficient attention to the epistemic architecture and defining characteristics of *kalām* as a discipline. This tendency is evident in the collection of writings compiled by al-Rifā‘ī, most of which prioritise constructive proposals rather than the epistemological prerequisites required to ground a modern theological framework.⁶ Although these methodological initiatives broaden the scope of theological enquiry, their epistemic orientations remain fragmented and incomplete. Hanafi’s historical-archaeological approach, for example, offers an important corrective to the ahistorical character of classical *kalām*, yet it risks reducing theology to a socio-political discourse when metaphysical foundations are treated as secondary or left underdeveloped.⁷ Likewise, Thahir’s application of Hegelian dialectics introduces a dynamic logic of thesis–antithesis–synthesis into theological reasoning, but its largely unmediated reliance on Western philosophical constructs raises critical questions regarding its suitability as an authentically Islamic epistemic framework.⁸

Discussions of *kalām jadīd* are closely associated with Adi Setia and the Attasian school, which builds on Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas’ project of the Islamisation of knowledge.

⁴ Shiblī Nomānī, *Ilm al-Kalām Al-Jadīd* [New Kalām] (Markaz Qaumi li al-Tarjama, 2012), 18.

⁵ Abdul Jabbar al-Rifā‘ī, “Mukaddima” [Introduction], in *Naḥw Ilm Kalām Jadīd*, ed. Abdul Jabbar al-Rifā‘ī (Markaz Dirāsa Falsafah al-Dīn, 2016), 12.

⁶ Ibid., 7.

⁷ Hasan Hanafi, “Naḥw Ilm Kalam Jadid” [Toward a New Kalām], in *Ilm Al-Kalām al-Jadīd*, ed. Abdul Jabbar al-Rifā‘ī (Markaz Dirasa Falsafa al-Din, 2016), 219–25.

⁸ Lukman Thahir, “The New Theology: Constructing Critical Islamic Theology Based on Hegel’s Dialectic Theory,” *HUNafa: Jurnal Studia Islamika* 17, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.24239/jsi.v17i1.585.84-103>.

In *Kalām Jadīd, Islamization & the Worldview of Islam*, Setia identifies al-Ghazālī as the principal intellectual precursor of *kalām jadīd*. He argues that *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* inaugurated an integrative synthesis of *kalām*, philosophy, *taṣawwuf*, *fiqh*, and *uṣūl al-fiqh*, thereby situating the rational sciences (*‘aqliyyāt*) within the normative framework of revelation and the Prophetic tradition (*naqliyyāt*).⁹ Setia further contends that *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah* marked the emergence of a *new philosophical kalām*, as al-Ghazālī effectively “theologised” philosophy while simultaneously “philosophised” *kalām*. He extends this narrative by portraying al-Suhrawardī’s *Ḥikmah Ishrāqiyyah* as a Hellenistic tradition gradually assimilated into Islam and by interpreting Ibn Khaldūn’s observations in support of his conception of *kalām jadīd*.¹⁰ On this basis, Setia proposes three intellectual mechanisms – *engagement*, *neutralisation*, and *appropriation* – as the normative process through which Islamisation and *kalām jadīd* operate. However, while intellectually suggestive, his formulation remains epistemologically underdeveloped, as it does not clearly specify the conceptual criteria or methodological foundations that distinguish *kalām jadīd* from the broader project of the Islamisation of knowledge.

Adi Setia's treatment, however, falls short of providing a concrete conceptual framework for the formulation of *kalām jadīd*. Instead of articulating the methodological and epistemological contours of a renewed theology, his discussion is largely devoted to advancing the Islamisation of knowledge as an extension of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas’ intellectual project.¹¹ This article argues that these two enterprises – the Islamisation of knowledge and *kalām jadīd* – should not be treated as interchangeable, since they differ in their respective objectives, epistemological commitments, and analytical domains.

In another respect, Ramon Harvey stands out among the scholars discussed for seriously situating Māturīdī thought within a sustained and methodologically accountable dialogue with modern intellectual paradigms. He proposes a calibrated comparative framework that preserves the internal logic of the classical tradition while engaging contemporary epistemological concerns. This approach offers notable analytical clarity and precision, yet its strong reliance on logical and linguistic analysis risks underrepresenting the transcendental and revelatory dimensions central to Islamic theology.¹²

By contrast, other contemporary scholars tend to focus on diagnosing modern social crises or conceptual shifts in *kalām* without systematic engagement with the classical corpus. As a result, their reconstructions of *kalām jadīd* often rest on selective readings that remain detached from the epistemic foundations of premodern theology, producing proposals that appear methodologically shallow and historically discontinuous. Despite its strengths,

⁹ Adi Setia, “*Kalam Jadid, Islamization, and The Worldview of Islam: Applying the Neo-Ghazalian, Attasian, Vision*,” *Islam and Science* 10, no. 1 (2012), 8–9.

¹⁰ Ibid., 9. Refer to Ibn Khaldūn’s translated quotation on page 9. The translator adds the word “new” in square brackets as an interpretive addition, indicating it does not appear in the original text.

¹¹ Afifi Al-Akiti, “The Negotiation of Modernity through Tradition in Contemporary Muslim Intellectual Discourse,” in *Knowledge, Language, Thought, and the Civilization of Islam*, ed. Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud and Muhammad Zainiy Uthman (UTM Press, 2010), 121–27.

¹² Ramon Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Māturīdī Theology*, Edinburgh Studies in Islamic Scripture and Theology (Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 74.

Harvey's reconstruction also faces limitations. His attempt to portray al-Māturīdī as a distinctly non-foundationalist theologian relies on a sharp separation between al-Māturīdī and later Māturīdī scholars,¹³ which can appear forced. Moreover, he does not sufficiently situate al-Māturīdī within the broader *kalām* landscape beyond the Ḥanafī tradition, thereby narrowing the scope of his epistemological claims. Finally, Harvey's use of modern philosophical tools – particularly analytical philosophy and phenomenology – lacks clear historical grounding within the Māturīdī tradition, raising the risk of anachronism. Consequently, these tools function more as external interpretive lenses than as methodologies organically integrated into *kalām*, leaving an epistemological gap between method and theological substance.

Taken as a whole, these approaches underscore the promise and precarity of contemporary attempts to reconstruct *kalām*. While they demonstrate that modern conceptual instruments can open new interpretive horizons, their resulting fragmentation exposes the absence of an integrated epistemological foundation capable of grounding *kalām jadīd* as a coherent discipline rather than as a disparate set of methodological experiments. Accordingly, this study contends that what is most urgently required is not further theoretical proliferation, but the formulation of a critical meta-framework – one that weaves together historical consciousness, philosophical exactitude, and the normative authority of revelation into a unified epistemic architecture through which modern *kalām* can be systematically articulated. Only through this integrative framework can *kalām jadīd* move beyond its provisional and experimental character and emerge as a genuinely coherent theological paradigm, endowed with a comprehensive epistemic structure and capable of sustaining long-term intellectual viability.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative, text-based approach to examine the historicity and epistemological validity of modern Islamic theology through the primary works of selected contemporary Muslim thinkers. The analysis draws on purposively selected primary sources – such as monographs and peer-reviewed articles – supported by secondary literature on Alfred Schutz's social phenomenology.¹⁴ Data was collected through systematic literature review and close textual analysis to identify key epistemic assumptions, argumentative structures, and theological orientations.¹⁵ Schutz's social phenomenology provides the analytical framework, enabling examination of subjective meaning, intersubjectivity, and knowledge construction in modern theological discourse.¹⁶ The analysis integrates

¹³ J. Anwar Qureshi, "Book Review: Transcendent God, Rational World," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 45 (2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1093/JIS/ETAD045>.

¹⁴ Alan Bryman and Edward Bell, *Social Research Methods*, 5th ed. (Oxford University Press, 2019), 141.

¹⁵ Alan Bryman, "Quantitative and Qualitative Research Strategies in Knowing the Social World," in *Knowing the Social World*, ed. Malcolm Williams and Tim May (Open University Press, 1998), 79.

¹⁶ Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World*, 2nd ed., trans. George Walsh (Northwestern University Press, 1967), 154.

interpretive phenomenological reading, historical-critical contextualisation, and evaluation of epistemic coherence to assess the methodological rigour of contemporary Islamic theology.¹⁷

THE GENEALOGICAL TRAJECTORY OF *KALĀM JADĪD*

Before entering this phase of Islamic theological history, it is important to note that contemporary scholarship employs a wide range of terminological designations for *kalām jadīd*. Hassan Yusofiān, for instance, characterises it as “religious philosophy,”¹⁸ whereas Muhaemin Latif renders it as “modern theology” or “neo-theology.”¹⁹ Others, such as Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, describe adjacent developments as forms of “philosophical theology” (*al-lahūt al-falsafī*).²⁰ These variations in nomenclature are not merely semantic; they reflect divergent assessments of the scope, epistemic orientation, and methodological ambition of the project. Despite such discrepancies, *kalām jadīd* may be broadly understood as an emergent discourse aimed at addressing the epistemic and sociocultural challenges generated by the intensified encounter between Islamic thought and modern Western intellectual formations. The discourse began to take shape in the latter half of the 19th century, largely as a critical response to the perceived stagnation of post-classical theology,²¹ and the broader reformist currents (*al-iṣlāḥ al-dīnī*) circulating within Muslim societies.²² Within this context, Shiblī Nomānī stands out as a decisive figure. His interventions elevated these concerns from scattered reflections to a systematic theological agenda, prompting subsequent scholars to engage the project with renewed rigour. First published in 1903 under the rubric *‘ilm al-kalām*, Nomānī’s work sought to reconfigure theological enquiry by incorporating debates that were unprecedented within the classical canon, including reflections on human rights, women’s rights, and collective social entitlements. As Yusofiān observes, this new theological orientation extends into domains such as the sociology, psychology, historicity, and philosophy of religion – fields that earlier theological traditions had largely neglected.²³

This trajectory of rethinking Islamic theology continued into the mid-20th century. In 1964, the Indian thinker Waḥīduddīn Khān, in his influential work *al-Islām Yutaḥaddā* (Islam is Challenged), urged Muslims to liberate themselves from what he viewed as the epistemic hegemony of *kalām qadīm*. For Khān, the conceptual architecture of classical theology no longer possessed the analytical capacity to address the intellectual, scientific, and

¹⁷ Alfred Schutz, *Life Forms and Meaning Structure*, trans. Helmut R. Wagner (Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 120.

¹⁸ In his work, he also acknowledges that some researchers disagree with this interpretation. See the detailed review in Hassan Yusofiān, *Dirāsāt Fī Al-‘Ilm al-Kalām al-Jadīd* [Studies on New Kalām], trans. Hasan Zaraqith (Markaz al-Ḥaḍārah li-Tanmiyat al-Fikr al-Islāmī, 2016), 15, 34.

¹⁹ Muhaemin Latif, *Ragam Paham Dalam Teologi Modern* [Major Trends in New Kalām] (Quantum, 2022), 38.

²⁰ Yusofiān, *Dirāsāt Fī Al-‘Ilm al-Kalām al-Jadīd*, 37.

²¹ Al-Rifā’ī, “Mukaddima,” 45.

²² Fathi Hamid, *Ilm al-Kalām al-Jadīd: al-Mafāhim wa al-Manhaj wa al-Maudū* [New Kalām: Concepts, Methodology, and Scope] (Nohoudh Center for Studies and Research, 2020), 7.

²³ Yusofiān, *Dirasat Fi Al-‘Ilm al-Kalam al-Jadid*, 40.

civilisational pressures of modernity. He therefore called for the formulation of an entirely new theological framework capable of engaging contemporary questions with methodological openness and conceptual precision.²⁴ Yet, as several scholars have noted, Khān's constructive proposals remain markedly disproportionate to the severity of his critique. While his diagnosis of classical *kalām* echoes earlier reformist anxieties and aligns with the broader emergence of *kalām jadīd*, the alternatives he advanced did not achieve the systematic rigour or theoretical depth required to substantiate the radical reorientation he envisioned. Consequently, his contribution is best understood as indicative of a wider impulse toward theological renewal rather than as a fully developed model of modern Islamic theology.

Within the Arab intellectual milieu, the call to reconstruct the understanding of faith acquired distinct articulation through the work of Amin al-Khūlī (d. 1966). Building on the broader reformist impulses discussed above, al-Khūlī contends that *taghayyur* (change) and *tatawwur* (development) in Islam must extend beyond the domains of ritual practice and social transactions. For him, genuine renewal necessarily involves engaging the principles of belief (*al-uṣūl*), for these constitute the foundations on which the vitality and continuity of Muslim faith ultimately depend.²⁵ Al-Khūlī's intervention rests on a historically sensitive reading of theological discourse. He argues that the structures of classical *kalām* were products of socio-intellectual conditions so cannot be treated as timeless or universally binding. In his view, modern theological reasoning should be understood as an ongoing effort to articulate, defend, and render coherent the commitments of faith in accordance with the challenges of each era. Only by doing so, he maintains, can theology fulfil its proper function: safeguarding belief against atheistic tendencies and shielding the religious consciousness of society from the epistemic and existential dislocations generated by modernity.²⁶

A similar impulse toward theological rearticulation can be observed in the work of Jordanian scholar Fahmī Jad'ān. Extending the critiques of classical *kalām* articulated by earlier reformist thinkers, Jad'ān introduces – apparently for the first time in 1976 – the explicit term *'ilm al-kalām al-jadīd* in his study *Usus al-Taḳaddum 'Ind Mufakkirī al-Islām*, particularly in his discussion of what he called *al-tawḥīd al-muḥarrar* (liberated theology). For Jad'ān, the doctrine of *tawḥīd* in the modern period bears a fundamentally new mandate: it must function as an emancipatory force, enabling individuals and communities to actualise forms of religious and civic life that can withstand contemporary moral, social, and humanitarian crises. Yet Jad'ān's argument simultaneously contains a pointed critique of classical theological discourse. He contends that the abstruse debates of traditional *kalām*, with their dense logical apparatus and metaphysical distinctions, exert little to no impact on

²⁴ Wahīduddīn Khān, *Al-Islām Yutahaddā: Madkhal 'Ilmi Li al-Imān* [Islam Challenges: A Scientific Approach to Faith], trans. Zafr al-Islam Khan (Dar al-Buhuth al-Ilmiyya, 1981), 25.

²⁵ Amin al-Khūlī, *Manāḥij al-Tajdīd: Fi al-Naḥw Wa al-Balāgha Wa al-Tafsīr Wa al-Adab* [Approaches to Renewal: In Grammar, Rhetoric, and Literature] (Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1961), 47.

²⁶ Amin al-Khūlī, *Al-Mujaddidūna Fi al-Islām* [The Reformers in Islam] (Al-Haia al-'Amma li al-Kitāb, 1996), 52.

the broader Muslim public. Such discussions, he argues, failed to transform societies that lack the epistemic tools to engage in speculative reasoning about the Divine essence, attributes, or the metaphysical distinctions between substances and accidents. In this sense, Jad'ān's intervention not only aligns with the broader modernising genealogy of *kalām jadīd* traced above but also sharpens its critical edge by exposing the sociological limits of classical theological reasoning.²⁷

In 2016, al-Rifā'ī re-engaged this discourse and systematically transformed it into a sustained academic project that, in his view, required rigorous examination through to its conceptual and methodological conclusions, particularly within the conditions of modernity. As previously noted, he compiled the writings of several contemporary Muslim thinkers into a single edited volume, positioning the collection not merely as a documentary effort but as a deliberate intervention in the ongoing project of rethinking Islamic theology. The contributors collectively focus on the reformulation and repositioning of Islamic *kalām* within the epistemic and cultural frameworks of the modern world. As the intellectual initiator of this project, al-Rifā'ī argues that Islamic theology should be understood as a dynamic scientific discipline whose development is analogous to that of other Islamic fields – such as Sufism, literature, philosophy, and Islamic law – none of which could evolve meaningfully without sustained processes of evaluation, internal critique, and epistemological renewal. From this perspective, *kalām* is neither a static repository of inherited doctrines nor a purely defensive enterprise, but a field whose vitality depends on its capacity for self-reflection and methodological reconstruction.²⁸

Al-Rifā'ī argues that Islamic theology, like all forms of knowledge, is historically and socially conditioned, shaped by the political, cultural, and intellectual contexts in which it develops. Consequently, contemporary *kalām* must engage the spirit of its age (*rūḥ al-ʿaṣr*) and remain open to methodological and conceptual contributions from modern disciplines, particularly the humanities.²⁹ He maintains that overcoming defensive attitudes toward modern science is essential, since fields such as hermeneutics, philosophy of science, sociology, psychology, and semiotics now exhibit theoretical sophistication comparable to that of the natural sciences and maintain an organic relationship with theological enquiry.³⁰ Ignoring these developments risks rendering Islamic theology epistemologically stagnant and culturally irrelevant. Thus, *kalām* should not function merely as a reactive defence of faith, but as a constructive framework capable of articulating the relevance of Islamic teachings within modern conditions. Al-Rifā'ī further contends that the historical restriction of critical reasoning within *kalām*, along with the delegitimisation of rational reinterpretation, has led to theological stagnation by disrupting the productive tension between reason and revelation. He

²⁷ Fahmī Jad'ān, *Usus Al-Taḳaddum 'Ind Mufakkir al-Islām Fi al-'Alam al-'Arabī al-Ḥadīth* [The Foundations of Progress in the Thought of Modern Arab Muslim Thinkers], 3rd ed. (Dar al-Surūq, 1988), 61.

²⁸ Al-Rifā'ī, "Mukaddima," 56.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Megan B. Abbas, *Whose Islam? The Western University and Modern Islamic Thought in Indonesia* (Stanford University Press, 2021), 83.

contrasts this decline with the philosophical rigour of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's *al-Tajrīd*, which exemplifies a rational, systematic, and intellectually generative model of theological discourse. This approach, he argues, expanded rather than weakened theological reasoning and influenced later canonical works,³¹ such as *al-Mawāqif*, *al-Maqāṣid*, and *al-Mujallā*. The subsequent marginalisation of this philosophical *kalām* tradition, therefore, should be seen not as inevitable, but as the result of epistemic choices that progressively narrowed the scope and critical vitality of Islamic theology.³²

Taken together, these works constitute compelling historical evidence of the deep and sustained entanglement between philosophy and theological discourse within the classical tradition of *kalām*. For al-Rifāʿī, they demonstrate that philosophical reasoning was not an external intrusion into theology, but an integral methodological resource that once enabled *kalām* to function as a creative and intellectually generative discipline. On this basis, he regards al-Ṭūsī's *al-Tajrīd* as the most significant moment of innovation in the historical development of *kalām*, a mode of enquiry he explicitly characterises as *al-kalām al-falsafī* due to its systematic engagement with philosophical concepts, methods, and argumentative structures. However, this moment of intellectual productivity was neither sustained nor meaningfully extended in subsequent theological writings. He argues that no comparable qualitative transformation occurred either before or after al-Ṭūsī, and the philosophical impetus inaugurated by *al-Tajrīd* gradually lost its creative force. Philosophical innovation within *kalām* effectively entered a prolonged period of stagnation spanning approximately five centuries, from the 9th to 13th centuries AH. This stagnation, he insists, cannot be adequately explained by external historical contingencies alone, but must be traced to internal epistemic failures within the theological tradition.

Central among these failures, as argued by al-Rifāʿī, Ḥasan Ḥanafī, and several other modern scholars, is the growing dominance of *taqlīd* (blind imitation) as a governing intellectual posture among theologians. The normalisation of imitation and doctrinal repetition progressively displaced critical reasoning, methodological experimentation, and philosophical risk-taking, thereby arresting the internal dynamics of scientific development within *kalām*. Consequently, theological debates became increasingly confined to a narrow set of inherited problems, while modes of exposition devolved into repetitive commentarial practices largely devoid of genuine philosophical innovation. In al-Rifāʿī's analysis, this shift marks not merely a decline in intellectual creativity, but a structural transformation of *kalām* – from a critical and exploratory science into a largely self-referential discourse resistant to renewal.

The prolonged condition of epistemic stagnation within *kalām* has not gone unnoticed in contemporary Islamic thought, including in the Indonesian intellectual context. Several Muslim scholars have explicitly identified the legacy of classical theological closure as a central obstacle to the renewal of Islamic theology in the modern era. Among them, Lukman

³¹ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd Al-Aqā'id* [A Compendium of Doctrines], ed. Abbas Mohammed Sulaiman (Alexandria: Dar al-Ma'rifa al-Jāmi'iyya, 1996), 5.

³² Al-Rifāʿī, "Mukaddima," 19–22.

S. Thahir and Amin Abdullah stand out as prominent figures who have articulated sustained critiques of the inherited epistemological structure of classical *kalām* and its limited capacity to address the complex realities faced by contemporary Muslim societies. In his influential article, “The New Islamic Theology,” Thahir undertakes a critical reconstruction of the epistemological foundations of classical Islamic theology, arguing that its continued dominance is no longer adequate for responding to modern socio-cultural and scientific challenges. He contends that classical *kalām* remains largely confined to abstract metaphysical debates, the relevance of which has significantly diminished in a context shaped by empirical sciences, humanistic enquiry, and rapidly evolving social realities. For Thahir, the persistent failure of theological discourse to engage with empirical, historical, and human-centred dimensions of reality has rendered Islamic theology increasingly isolated, normatively fragile, and practically ineffective in the face of contemporary scientific and intellectual developments.³³

While Thahir highlights the emancipatory potential of critical Islamic theology, Amin Abdullah complements this perspective by stressing the historicity and contextual nature of Islamic theological formulations. He argues that *kalām* cannot be understood apart from the social, political, and historical conditions in which it emerges. Treating theology as an ahistorical and fixed system, Abdullah warns, leads to conceptual rigidity and resistance to critical revision, thereby weakening its capacity to address new intellectual and social challenges. The crisis of contemporary *kalām*, in his view, thus lies less in its content than in its epistemological closure. Against this, Abdullah advocates an open and self-corrective theological framework that remains responsive to changing contexts while staying anchored in the Qur’ān’s ethical core. His emphasis on historicity and epistemic openness reinforces the renewal projects of al-Rifā’ī and Thahir, framing modern Islamic theology as a restoration of *kalām*’s original role as a critical, historically conscious, and intellectually responsive discourse.³⁴

Extending this critique, Amin Abdullah argues that contemporary Indonesian Muslim society has encountered at least three dominant theological orientations – development theology, transformative theology, and peace theology – each emerging from distinct socio-historical demands. For him, their emergence exposes the inadequacy of classical *kalām* categories, which have been rigidly standardised in centuries-old textbooks and preserved by traditionalist institutions, to address evolving social realities. To conceptualise this stagnation, Abdullah employs Thomas S. Kuhn’s notion of “anomalies”³⁵ to diagnose the

³³ Thahir, “The New Theology,” 91.

³⁴ M. Amin Abdullah, *Falsafah Kalam Di Era Postmodern* [The Philosophy of Kalām in Post Modern Era] (IRCiSoD, 2022), 8.

³⁵ Kuhn argues that the development of scientific knowledge cannot be understood apart from the dialectical relationship between what he terms “normal science” and “revolutionary science.” Knowledge codified in textbooks constitutes the domain of normal science, within which research proceeds by consolidating established paradigms rather than questioning their foundational assumptions. However, this domain inevitably generates anomalies – unresolved problems, deviations, and conceptual tensions – that remain largely unrecognised or systematically neglected by practitioners operating within the prevailing paradigm.

epistemological limits of established theological paradigms. These anomalies arise when inherited *kalām* concepts fail to engage modern ethical, social, and political challenges, revealing a growing disjunction between theological discourse and lived reality. Consequently, Abdullah concludes that *kalām* has become epistemically insulated and increasingly disconnected from contemporary problems, necessitating not merely doctrinal adjustment but a paradigmatic renewal that reorients theology toward historical responsiveness and practical relevance.³⁶

The differences in the articulation of modern *kalām*, as outlined above, may be understood as a consequence of a process of meaning formation that is centred on the subject's consciousness in responding to the realities it encounters. Within this framework, lived experience and historical context assume a more prominent role in the construction of theological meaning. This perspective suggests that meaning is not regarded as something given a priori; rather, it emerges through the subject's reflective engagement with its lifeworld. By contrast, the process of meaning formation in classical *kalām* cannot be reduced to a purely subjective activity of consciousness. For the *mutakallimūn*, theological meaning arises from a complex interaction among the object of knowledge, the rational structure of the knowing subject, and the normative authority of revelation. Accordingly, the consciousness of a classical *mutakallim* is never epistemically empty when approaching a theological question. Instead, it always engages the object of knowledge through an intellectual horizon that has already been shaped by the cumulative traditions of the Islamic sciences, including Arabic linguistics, *tafsīr*, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and the foundational principles of *uṣūl al-dīn*.³⁷ Accordingly, meaning formation in classical *kalām* cannot be understood solely as a product of individual consciousness. Rather, it emerges through intersubjective processes embedded within the epistemic community of Muslim scholars. Through these processes, the scholarly tradition developed a set of rational principles that functioned as a regulative grammar of theological enquiry, ensuring that theological arguments remained consistent with established methodological and epistemic standards. In this sense, the epistemological orientation of classical *kalām* proceeds from the normative authority of revelation toward the articulation of theological meaning, with reason and the inherited scholarly tradition serving as indispensable mediating frameworks.³⁸ *Kalām jadīd*, by contrast, typically begins with the concrete realities of human existence and historical experience, and only then seeks to reinterpret normative religious teachings in ways that preserve their relevance to the intellectual and social challenges of the contemporary world. However, regardless of internal differences within Islamic thought, modernity has compelled Muslims to adopt rational, factual, and empirical modes of reasoning if they wish to remain relevant in a world where scientific and technological progress is largely shaped by Western civilisation.³⁹ This

See Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 65.

³⁶ Abdullah, *Falsafah Kalam Di Era Postmodern*, 112.

³⁷ Binyamin Abrahamov, *Islamic Theology: Traditionalism and Rationalism* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019) 37.

³⁸ Frank Griffel, *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 270.

³⁹ Johannes Sloek, *Devotional Language* (De Gruyter, 1996), xiv, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110810288>.

condition has sustained ongoing debates over the necessity of a renewed Islamic theology, even as the meaning and objectification of modernity continue to evolve and reshape the formulation of such theological innovations. In this context, Ahmad Khān (d. 1898)⁴⁰ and Nomānī argued for the development of a modern science of *kalām* capable of harmonising Islamic doctrines with the principles of modern science. Such proposals mark a shift in *kalām* from a discipline primarily concerned with past polemics to a dynamic, dialectical discourse addressing contemporary intellectual challenges.⁴¹ However, the ongoing disagreements surrounding *kalām jadīd* highlight unresolved questions regarding its epistemological foundations and methodological legitimacy. Therefore, revisiting the intellectual history of *kalām* is essential for assessing whether the epistemological claims of *kalām jadīd* represent continuity with, or rupture from, the classical tradition.

LOGIC AND CLASSICAL *KALĀM*: RECONSIDERING AN EXTERNAL INTELLECTUAL ELEMENT

The call for *kalām jadīd* is not without historical precedent, as Islamic theology has long demonstrated its capacity to incorporate external intellectual tools in response to new epistemic challenges. One of the most significant examples is the integration of Aristotelian logic (*manṭiq*) into *kalām*, particularly from the classical period onward, as theologians sought to strengthen theological argumentation through systematic rational methods. This historical incorporation of *manṭiq* illustrates that *kalām* has never been a static discipline but a continuously adaptive discourse. Viewed from this perspective, contemporary efforts to reformulate *kalām* in dialogue with modern science can be understood not as a radical rupture, but as part of a recurring pattern within the intellectual history of *kalām* – namely, its selective engagement with dominant forms of knowledge to defend and articulate Islamic doctrine.

This discussion calls for critical reassessment of the historical formation of Islamic theology, particularly its capacity to appropriate and Islamise external intellectual traditions such as Aristotelian logic and atomistic reasoning employed in arguments for the existence of God. This process exemplifies what Amin Abdullah conceptualises as historicity,⁴² Adi Setia's Islamisation,⁴³ and what Hasan Hanafī terms as *tārīkhiyya*,⁴⁴ underscoring that theological reasoning in Islam has always been historically situated rather than epistemologically isolated. In this sense, *kalām* cannot be understood as a static or purely normative discipline, but as a dynamic intellectual project shaped by ongoing encounters with dominant forms of knowledge. The *mutakallimūn* did not limit their enquiries to strictly

⁴⁰ Muhammad Khalid Masud, "Iqbal's Approach to Islamic Theology of Modernity," *Al-Hikmat* 27, no. 1 (2007), 5–9.

⁴¹ Christian W. Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan: A Reinterpretation of Muslim Theology* (Vikas Publishing House, 1978), 310.

⁴² Abdullah, *Falsafah Kalam Di Era Postmodern*, 48.

⁴³ Adi Setia, "Three Meanings of Islamic Science: Toward Operationalizing Islamization of Science," *Islam and Science* 5, no. 1 (2005), 32.

⁴⁴ Hanafī, "Naḥw 'Ilm Kalām Jadīd," 222.

theological questions; rather, they engaged critically with domains later categorised within the Western scientific tradition as philosophy, including metaphysics, physics, epistemology, and ethics. This broader engagement challenges the assumption that *kalām* functioned merely as a reactive or defensive discourse. Instead, it operated as a rational framework capable of transforming philosophical concepts to serve theological purposes.⁴⁵ As demonstrated by Ali Sāmī al-Nashār (d. 1980) in *Manāhij al-Baḥth ‘inda Mufakkirī al-Islām*, the integration of syllogistic logic (*‘ilm al-manṭiq*) and methodological principles that informed *uṣūl al-fiqh* reveals that the influence of Greek philosophy on *kalām* was neither incidental nor uncritical, but the result of a selective and methodologically conscious assimilation within an Islamic epistemological framework.

Building on the argument that *kalām* historically evolved through selective engagement with external intellectual traditions, al-Nashār notes that Islamic intellectual history records logic (*manṭiq*) as one of the earliest scientific heritages appropriated by Muslims, particularly during the Umayyad period (661–750 CE). Early encounters with Greek logic—mediated through figures such as Theophrastus and Eudemus—introduced hypothetical syllogism (*al-aqyisa al-sharṭiyya*) into Islamic theological reasoning.⁴⁶ This assessment is reinforced by Ṣā’id al-Andalusī, who identifies logic and astronomy as the first philosophical sciences to attract Muslim scholarly attention,⁴⁷ and by Ibn Kathīr, who situates the entry of *‘ulūm al-awā’il* within the first Hijri century in the context of Muslim territorial expansion.⁴⁸ The growing prominence of logic is further reflected in the sustained engagement of Muslim scholars with Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, a text that structured debates on definition (*ta’rīf*) and conceptualisation (*taṣawwur*).⁴⁹ Its Arabic reception as *al-Kulliyāt al-Khamsa* provided the *mutakallimūn* with a systematic framework for classifying beings (*al-mawjūdāt*) and articulating theological arguments, including those concerning the existence of God. This

⁴⁵ Thiele, “Recent Scholarship in the Field of Kalām,” 16.

⁴⁶ Ali Sāmī al-Nashār, *Manāhij al-Baḥth ‘inda Mufakkirī al-Islām* [Research Methodologies of Muslim Thinkers], 3rd ed. (Dar al-Nahda al-Arabiyya, 1983), 27.

⁴⁷ Sa’id Al-Andalusī, *Ṭabaqāt Al-Umam* [The Categories of Nations] (al-Matba’a al-Katālikia, 1912), 85.

⁴⁸ Beyond this evidence, al-Nashār points to additional historical data indicating that logic (*manṭiq*) was the earliest Greek intellectual heritage encountered by Muslims during the Umayyad period. This early reception set the stage for the long-term development of logical theory within the Islamic intellectual tradition. In this regard, Khaled El-Rouayheb, a Harvard-based historian of logic, provides a detailed account of the transformation of logical discourse from Aristotle’s *Organon* to the emergence of Avicennian logic, whose authority gradually superseded the Aristotelian model between the ninth and tenth Islamic centuries. Under Avicenna, logic underwent a decisive reconfiguration, marking a departure from strict Aristotelian exegesis toward an independent systematic framework, most notably articulated in *al-Shifā’*. Rather than merely transmitting Aristotelian syllogism, Avicenna redefined the structure and function of logical reasoning within the Arabic tradition. Avicennian turn became the basis for subsequent critical engagement, particularly in the work of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who analysed, revised, and extended Avicenna’s logical concepts in a manner analogous to Avicenna’s critique of Aristotle. Al-Rāzī’s reformulation of logic was subsequently adopted by later *mutakallimūn*, for whom it provided a foundational methodological framework for theological argumentation. See Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Soun Al-Manṭiq Wa al-Kalām ‘an Fannay al-Manṭiq Wa al-Kalām* [Safeguarding Reason and Theology from the Disciplines of Logic and Kalām] (Maktaba al-Khanji, 1976), 12; Khaled El-Rouayheb, “Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World,” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Springer, 2020), 686.

⁴⁹ Cristina D’Ancona, “Porphyry, Arabic,” in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Springer, 2020), 1058.

historical trajectory confirms that logic was not merely transmitted into *kalām*, but critically integrated as a constitutive epistemological instrument within its theological reasoning.

Aristotelian logic entered Islamic theology not through direct adoption but through a prolonged process of critical epistemological reformulation, beginning with Avicenna (d. 1037) in the 11th century.⁵⁰ While preserving Aristotle's theory of syllogism, Avicenna substantially reconstructed it by developing conditional and disjunctive syllogisms, systematically classifying hypothetical propositions, and grounding logical enquiry in the method of *taḥqīq* (verification) rather than textual adherence to Aristotelian authority. In this way, logic ceased to be merely an interpretation of Greek philosophy and became an independently verified intellectual system capable of addressing the epistemological needs of the Islamic scholarly tradition.⁵¹

During the 12th and 13th centuries, Avicenna's reconstruction of logic was refined and integrated into *kalām* by theologians, most notably Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210). Moving beyond Aristotle's *Organon*, al-Rāzī reoriented logic toward the systematic analysis of conception (*taṣawwur*) and assent (*taṣdīq*), while further developing syllogistic theory and embedding logical reasoning within theological methodology. His approach was continued by later scholars such as al-Khūnajī, al-Ṭūsī, al-Abharī, and al-Kātibī, establishing logic as an integral component of theological scholarship.⁵² By the 13th and 14th centuries, this synthesis had become fully institutionalised in the eastern Islamic tradition. Major theological works, including *Tajrīd al-'Aqā'id*, *Ṭawālī' al-Anwār*, and *al-Mawāqif*, integrated logic, epistemology, and metaphysics into theological enquiry, demonstrating that Aristotelian logic – having been critically reformulated by Avicenna and refined by al-Rāzī – had become a shared methodological framework rather than an external philosophical instrument. Although eastern and North African traditions differed in their engagement with philosophy, both operated within the same broadly accepted logical paradigm.⁵³

From the 15th to the 16th centuries, the tradition produced fewer original logical summae and shifted toward commentaries, glosses, and pedagogical manuals. Nevertheless, this transition reflected not the abandonment of logic but the consolidation of an established methodological consensus. The continuing centrality of Avicennian-Rāzian logic throughout the post-classical period demonstrates that successful incorporation of an external intellectual tradition into *kalām* depended on centuries of critical reformulation, epistemological verification, and gradual disciplinary institutionalisation.⁵⁴ This historical trajectory provides an important comparative framework for evaluating contemporary *kalām jadīd*, suggesting

⁵⁰ Henrik Lagerlund, "Syllogism," in *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Henrik Lagerlund (Springer, 2020), 1236.

⁵¹ Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works*, 2nd ed., Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science 89 (Brill, 2014), 216.

⁵² Al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ Al-Mawāqif* [Commentary on al-Mawāqif] (Matba'at al-Hajj Muharram Affandi, n.d.), 217.

⁵³ Ayman Shihadeh, "Al-Rāzī's Commentary on Avicenna's Pointers: The Confluence of Exegesis and Aporetics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Khaled El-Rouayheb and Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016), 314.

⁵⁴ El-Rouayheb, "Logic in the Arabic and Islamic World", 30.

that the integration of modern philosophy and the social sciences requires a similarly explicit and internally coherent epistemological transformation if it is to function as an organic component of theological reasoning rather than as an external methodological addition.

THE HISTORICAL STAKES OF *KALĀM JADĪD*

The progressive integration of Aristotelian logic into *kalām* was not a neutral or purely technical development; it reflected a conscious epistemological commitment to grounding theological doctrines in demonstrative and systematically justified forms of reasoning. Muslim theologians did not merely adopt Aristotelian logic as a convenient argumentative instrument but reconfigured it to serve the aims of defending, articulating, and stabilising Islamic beliefs within changing intellectual contexts. Moreover, classical *mutakallimūn* did not appropriate logic as an autonomous instrument of reasoning. Rather, they critically evaluated and integrated it within the broader epistemological framework of the Islamic sciences. The validity of logical principles was assessed against the conceptual apparatus developed by the Islamic intellectual tradition. Hence, logic did not function as an independent epistemic authority but as an auxiliary instrument subordinated to the normative authority of revelation and the methodological commitments of the Islamic scholarly tradition. This orientation is evident in the works of al-Rāzī and al-Ghazālī,⁵⁵ both of whom accepted Aristotelian logic insofar as it enhanced the rigour of theological reasoning, while simultaneously subjecting it to critical scrutiny, selective appropriation, and reinterpretation whenever its underlying assumptions were deemed incompatible with the epistemological foundations of Islamic theology.

The historical trajectory underscores a crucial implication for contemporary debates surrounding *kalām jadīd*. Any attempt to renew Islamic theology while neglecting the historical role of *manṭiq* risks weakening its epistemological foundations. A critical re-engagement with the history of logic–*kalām* nexus is therefore not a nostalgic return to premodern frameworks, but a necessary step toward reconstructing a robust and self-conscious rational theology capable of addressing modern intellectual challenges.

Building on this historical insight, contemporary projects of *kalām jadīd* reveal a striking contrast in orientation and methodological coherence. Many modern reformulations of *kalām* marginalise, or even bracket, discussions of the unseen (*mughayyabāt*), particularly theological discourse concerning God. The rationale for this shift is readily apparent: debates about Divine attributes or metaphysical realities are often regarded as lacking direct empirical relevance to concrete social life, although the purpose of this shift remains open to debate. Modern theologians therefore tend to reorient *kalām* toward addressing pressing social crises, aspiring to render it an instrument for ethical critique and societal reform. Accordingly, proponents of *kalām jadīd* reconstruct classical theology through the selective appropriation

⁵⁵ See, for instance, Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mi'yār al-'Ilm* [The Criterion of Knowledge] (Dar al-Minhaj, 2016), 20; Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *al-Mulakhkhaṣ Fī al-Mantiq Wa al-Ḥikmah* [The Compendium of Logic and Philosophy], vol. 1 (Ihya Center for Research and Studies, 2021), 34.

of modern intellectual tools and discourses. Yet, despite their shared reformist impulse, these modern innovations suffer from a notable lack of methodological clarity. While there is broad agreement on certain slogans – most prominently the claim that theology should be “human-centred” rather than God-centred – the conceptual and epistemological foundations of this reorientation remain underdeveloped. As a result, modern theological projects frequently diverge, and at times openly contradict one another, in substance and method. The question of how frameworks such as humanism, philosophy of religion, or human rights can be coherently integrated into *kalām* as internally consistent methodological components remains largely unresolved. This situation stands in sharp contrast to the classical integration of *manṭiq* into *kalām*, where logical theory provides a shared epistemic grammar that regulates theological disagreement and ensures argumentative discipline. Although contemporary theologians are often united by a common diagnosis – namely, the crisis of Islamic intellectual life under the impact of modern science and the legacy of Western colonialism – their responses fail to converge into a coherent methodological paradigm. Instead, theological innovation proceeds in a fragmented manner, with each thinker constructing social reality through an idiosyncratic theological language. Consequently, rather than clarifying the contours of *kalām jadīd*, this plurality of uncoordinated approaches risks further obscuring its discourse and weakening its epistemological foundations.

The methodological fragmentation becomes even more apparent when modern *kalām* is examined in light of the philosophical tools it selectively appropriates. A wide range of modern philosophical approaches – such as phenomenology, historical archaeology, hermeneutics, and other frameworks originating in Western philosophy – have been developed with rigorous and internally coherent methodological systems. In their original intellectual contexts, these approaches function not merely as interpretive techniques, but as comprehensive epistemological programs that regulate how knowledge is produced, justified, and evaluated. It is therefore unsurprising that several contemporary Muslim theologians, particularly those trained within Western academic traditions, have sought to employ these tools in the construction of a new *kalām*. Concrete examples can be found in the works of figures such as Harvey, whose theological reflections are deeply informed by phenomenology and analytical philosophy, and Amin Abdullah, whose project draws extensively on historical archaeology as a mode of intellectual critique. At first glance, these engagements appear to signal a decisive methodological advance beyond classical theological frameworks. Yet, on closer inspection, the role of these modern philosophical tools remains largely instrumental and ancillary. Rather than being systematically integrated to the internal structure of *kalām* argumentation, they tend to function primarily as devices for re-reading and re-narrating the historical trajectory of Islamic intellectual traditions.

In this sense, they operate retrospectively – clarifying past developments or exposing hidden assumptions – without generating a forward-looking methodological framework capable of sustaining theological reasoning in a continuous and cumulative manner. This limitation is especially striking when contrasted with the historical role played by *manṭiq* in classical *kalām*. Aristotelian logic was not adopted simply as a hermeneutical lens for

interpreting earlier theological debates; it was transformed into a shared epistemic infrastructure that shaped theological enquiry, regulating the formulation of problems, the structure of arguments, and the criteria of validity. If one reconsiders the historical development of *manṭiq*, it becomes apparent that Muslim logicians in the Eastern regions, in a relatively simultaneous manner, incorporated discussions of philosophy, semantics, and Avicenna's philosophical system – including its logical apparatus – into their scholarly works.⁵⁶ This phenomenon signifies not merely an act of intellectual appropriation, but points to the emergence of a form of epistemic consensus among Muslim scholars concerning the legitimacy of integrating philosophical elements into the discipline of *ilm al-kalām*, even though, at its incipient stage, such integration remained circumscribed by geographical and cultural parameters. This consensus subsequently evolved into a consolidated socio-intellectual reality, insofar as it was systematically articulated within their scholarly corpus without relinquishing the principle of verification (*taḥqīq*). Eventually, the integration cannot be reduced to a purely eclectic undertaking; instead, it engenders a coherent intellectual tradition while simultaneously constituting its own epistemological foundations. The construction of meaning in *kalām jadīd* reflects an expanded stock of knowledge, to borrow Alfred Schutz's terminology. Unlike classical *kalām*, which was grounded primarily in the epistemological horizon of the Islamic sciences, modern Muslim theologians incorporate modern philosophy, the social sciences, hermeneutics, and contemporary human concerns in their theological reflections. This expanded epistemological horizon has generated more diverse interpretations of revelation, as the interpretive process is no longer governed by a single dominant methodological framework. Consequently, meaning-making in *kalām jadīd* has become increasingly pluralistic. The pluralisation, however, cannot be explained solely by the incorporation of new intellectual disciplines. It also reflects a more fundamental transformation in the mechanism through which theological meaning is constituted within the theologian's consciousness. As a result, the regulative grammar that functioned in the classical *kalām* tradition as a shared epistemological framework – guiding theological reasoning and delimiting the range of legitimate interpretations – has gradually weakened. The transformation should not be understood as implying an opposition between revelation and human experience. Rather, it signifies a shift in the epistemological point of departure through which theological meaning is constituted.

From this vantage point, the historical trajectory may be construed as a paradigmatic model for the subsequent development of *kalām*, particularly in relation to endeavours aimed at integrating methodological instruments derived from other intellectual traditions. Nonetheless, the success of this integrative enterprise presupposes the continuity of an intellectual-historical construction as well as consolidation of consensus among theologians, as concretely manifested in the sustained production of scholarly works over a determinate period. Furthermore, a teleological orientation must be situated as a crucial aspect in interpreting the process of integrating *manṭiq* to the tradition of *kalām*. The integration

⁵⁶ Khaled El-Rouayheb, "Arabic Logic After Avicenna," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Logic*, ed. Catarina Dutilh Novaes and Stephen Read (Cambridge University Press, 2016), 81–85.

undertaken by Muslim theologians in the Eastern regions was not merely methodological in character but also contributed significantly to providing a rational foundation for theological discourse, particularly regarding the concept of divinity and eschatological issues in Islam. In this context, *manṭiq* functioned as an epistemic instrument that enabled the emergence of alternative forms of argumentation through rational avenues, which had previously been predominantly governed by textual (*naṣṣ*-based) approaches. Accordingly, the shift from the dominance of textual authority toward the strengthening of reason-based argumentation should not be construed as a substitution, but as a complementary process that enriches the argumentative structure of *kalām*.⁵⁷ The crucial issue, therefore, is not simply whether a particular methodological approach can be incorporated into Islamic theology, but whether it can be critically appropriated within the epistemological framework of the Islamic intellectual tradition, in much the same way that *manṭiq* (logic) was historically assimilated into *kalām*. Such appropriation should not merely expand the methodological repertoire of theology; rather, it should enhance the rational articulation of theological doctrines while remaining grounded in the normative commitments of the Islamic scholarly tradition. Only through this process can contemporary theology develop formulations that are epistemologically coherent and intellectually capable of addressing the complexities of the modern world.

By comparison, the contemporary use of phenomenology, hermeneutics, or historical archaeology rarely reaches this level of integration. These tools remain external to *kalām*, insufficiently theorised in relation to its core epistemological commitments, and incapable of generating a common methodological language among modern theologians. Consequently, despite the availability of highly sophisticated philosophical methodologies, *kalām jadīd* continues to suffer from an unresolved methodological deficit. The problem is not the absence of intellectual resources, but the failure to transform these resources into an internally coherent epistemological framework comparable to the classical synthesis of logic and theology. This reinforces the central argument of this study: that the renewal of *kalām* cannot be reduced to the eclectic adoption of modern philosophical methodologies. Rather, it requires critical re-examination of the historical processes through which the *kalām* tradition appropriated, integrated, and transformed external intellectual disciplines within the epistemological framework of the Islamic sciences. In this regard, the integration of *manṭiq* (logic) provides a significant methodological precedent. Its incorporation into *kalām* did not occur through uncritical acceptance but through a process of critical evaluation that reconfigured logic as an instrumental discipline serving the rational articulation of theological doctrines while remaining grounded in the normative authority of revelation and the broader Islamic scholarly tradition. Accordingly, the primary challenge facing *kalām jadīd* is not simply the search for new methodologies, but the development of an epistemological framework capable of integrating such methodologies into Islamic theology without compromising its internal coherence and normative foundations.

⁵⁷ Musa Akrami, "From Logic in Islam to Islamic Logic," *Logica Universalis* 11, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11787-017-0158-3>.

CONCLUSION

Considering the preceding discussion, the efforts of modern Muslim theologians to formulate *kalām jadīd* deserve recognition. These projects have revitalised theological debate and brought *kalām* into conversation with contemporary intellectual and social concerns. Nevertheless, a critical evaluation suggests this renewal remains methodologically incomplete. The fundamental distinction between classical *kalām* and *kalām jadīd* lies in the epistemological structures that govern the formation of theological meaning. In *kalām jadīd*, historical experience and the realities of human life are the primary point of departure for constituting theological meaning through the reflective consciousness of the subject. By contrast, classical *kalām* locates theological meaning within a shared epistemic framework that brings revelation, reason, and the Islamic scholarly tradition into a coherent relationship. This framework not only guides the process of interpretation but also establishes the criteria for the validity of theological reasoning, as exemplified by the historical integration of *manṭiq* (logic) into the discipline of *kalām*. Consequently, the regulative grammar of classical *kalām* was the epistemological mechanism that sustained methodological coherence and disciplined theological reasoning. *Kalām jadīd*, by contrast, was characterised by an increasingly pluralised epistemological horizon, in which no single shared regulative framework exercises comparable authority over the production and validation of theological meaning.

Building on the foregoing analysis, it can be asserted that the project of *kalām jadīd* necessitates the formulation of more robust and well-directed epistemological criteria. The renewal of theology cannot be adequately achieved through the partial or eclectic adoption of various modern philosophical tools; rather, it must be grounded in an internally structured methodological coherence. In this regard, the historical experience of integrating *manṭiq* into classical *kalām* demonstrates the importance of the emergence of an epistemic consensus among theologians, which enables the establishment of a “shared methodological language” capable of regulating differences and sustaining argumentative discipline. Furthermore, the integration of methodologies derived from outside the tradition must not remain confined to an instrumental function or merely be a retrospective rereading of intellectual history; instead, it must be transformed into an epistemic infrastructure capable of supporting the sustained and cumulative production of theological knowledge. This process also presupposes continuity in the construction of intellectual history, such that innovation remains rooted in the tradition while simultaneously rearticulating it in a critical manner. Accordingly, *kalām jadīd* will attain a solid epistemological foundation only insofar as it succeeds in synthesising methodological coherence, an integrated intellectual consensus of Islamic scientific tradition, historical continuity, and clarity of purpose within an integrated framework.

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