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THE ROLE OF ISLAMIC MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN SHAPING SOCIAL MINDSETS FOR CLIMATE CRISIS MITIGATION

Muhammet Caner Ilgaroglu¹

ABSTRACT

Modern industrial practices and consumer-driven economies have disrupted the balance between humanity and nature, undermining the harmony that once characterised their interdependence. This anthropocentric worldview has generated profound ecological imbalances and accelerated the dynamics of climate change. Considering the severe implications of this crisis of humankind, raising awareness and aligning consumption with ecological parameters has become an urgent prerequisite for a sustainable future. Within this context, the insights of Islamic philosophers—particularly on nature, humanity, and economic ethics—remain highly relevant. This study employs content analysis to three major works of Islamic moral philosophy—Ibn Miskawayh’s *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī’s *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, and Kınalızāde ‘Alī’s *Akhlāq-i ‘Alā’ī*—to examine how Islamic virtue ethics can inform and reshape individual and collective attitudes toward the climate emergency. The findings

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demonstrate that Islamic moral philosophy offers vital guidance for harmonising environmental behaviour with ethical values, demonstrating that this integration can meaningfully address the global climate crisis. Rooted in the core virtues of justice (*‘adl*), contentment (*qanā‘ah*), and compassion (*rahmah*), it provides a strong ethical foundation for sustainable environmental practice. Integrating these virtues into contemporary climate strategies can enhance community engagement and strengthen broader efforts to mitigate the climate crisis.

KEYWORDS: Islamic Moral Philosophy, Climate Crisis, Social Mindset Transformation, Justice (*al-‘adl*), Contentment (*al-qanā‘a*), Compassion (*al-rahma*).

1. INTRODUCTION

Existing within a framework of physical laws and moral values grounded in natural balance, human beings—understood as bio-psycho-social entities—engage in a dynamic, reciprocal relationship with the natural world, mutually shaping and being shaped by it. The contours of this relationship reflect broader social attitudes and belief systems.² As active participants in the ecosystem, human beings, like all other living organisms, exert a transformative influence on the environment.³ While historical records attest to millennia-long climatic fluctuations, contemporary global warming is predominantly

² Andrew S. Goudie and Heather A. Viles, *The Earth Transformed: An Introduction to Human Impacts on the Environment* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 21.

³ Muhammet Caner Ilgaroglu, “Money-Hedonism from Ibn Khaldun’s Notion of Morality,” *Cumhuriyet Theology Journal* 23, no. 3 (2019): 1337, doi:10.18505/cuid.615224.

anthropogenic, driven by industrialisation and a consumerist ethos.⁴ Although political and economic factors often dominate climate discourse, underlying these are individual habits and lifestyle choices that substantially impact ecological well-being. The prevailing societal mindset—driven by comfort and self-gratification—constitutes a core driver of environmental degradation and the ensuing climate crisis.⁵ As a result, the contemporary climate crisis assumes an existential dimension, disrupting not only the natural equilibrium but also economic systems and consumption patterns. Addressing this multifaceted crisis, therefore, requires more than technological or political solutions; it demands a moral awakening grounded in ethical reflection and individual responsibility.⁶

Humanity thus faces an unprecedented ecological crisis brought about by its own actions—one that fundamentally threatens the conditions for sustainable life on Earth. This global emergency has led many religious traditions, including Islam, to engage more directly in discourses on environmental responsibility and ethics.

In this context, seminal contributions in Islamic environmental thought provide valuable insights for addressing these challenges. Seyyed Hossein Nasr emphasises the spiritual and cosmological dimensions of nature, critiquing the desacralisation of the natural world in modernity and offering an Islamic framework grounded in metaphysical harmony, divine order, and ethical responsibility.⁷

⁴ Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–1207, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1720120>; Taciano L. Milfont, “Global Warming, Climate Change, and Human Psychology,” in *Psychological Approaches to Sustainability: Current Trends in Theory, Research and Practice*, ed. Victor Corral et al. (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2010), 45.

⁵ Abid Rashid Gill, Muhammad Abrar Ul Haq, Afrasiyab Arshad, Farheen Akram. "Pro-Environmental Habits and Ecological Responsibilities." 2022 International Conference on Decision Aid Sciences and Applications (DASA) (2022): 1737-1742. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1109/dasa54658.2022.9764986>.

⁶ Allen Thompson, “Anthropocentrism: Humanity as Peril and Promise,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*, ed. Stephan M. Gardiner and Allen Thompson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 79.

⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man*

Osman Bakar further develops this perspective through the classical concept of *al-tawhīd*, highlighting nature as al-Qurʾān *al-takwīnī* and advocating for a moral-spiritual order in ecological thinking.⁸ Mawil Izzi Dien systematically links Qurʾānic and Prophetic teachings to ecological ethics, stressing *al-amānah* (trust) and *al-mīzān* (balance) as foundational principles for sustainable practices.⁹ Fazlun Khalid complements this work by demonstrating practical applications of Islamic environmental ethics in Muslim communities.¹⁰ Other scholars, including Lisa Wersal, Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, and Odeh Rashed Al-Jayyousi, emphasise Islamic moral principles for environmental stewardship, underscoring the sacredness of nature and human responsibility.¹¹

(Chicago: ABC International Group, Inc., 1997); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study* (London: World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd., 1976); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1987); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964); Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islam and Environmental Crisis," *MAAS Journal of Islamic Science* 6, no. 2 (1990): 31–51; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Spiritual and Religious Dimensions of the Environmental Crisis, Temenos Academy Papers*, no. 12 (London: Temenos Academy, 1999).

⁸ Osman Bakar, *The History and Philosophy of Islamic Science* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1997); Osman Bakar, *Qurʾanic Pictures of the Universe: The Scriptural Foundation of Islamic Cosmology* (Brunei Darussalam: UBD Press and IBT, 2016); Osman Bakar, *Environmental Wisdom for Planet Earth: The Islamic Heritage* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya and Islamic Book Trust, 2022).

⁹ Mawil Izzi Dien, *The Environmental Dimensions of Islam* (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2000); Mawil Izzi Dien, "Islamic Environmental Ethics, Law, and Society," in *Islamic Perspectives on Science and Society*, ed. (London: Routledge, 1996); Mawil Izzi Dien, *Islamic Law: From Historical Foundations to Contemporary Practice* (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁰ Fazlun Khalid, *Signs on the Earth: Islam, Modernity and the Climate Crisis* (Markfield: Kube, 2019); Fazlun Khalid, *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Lisa Wersal, "Islam and Environmental Ethics: Tradition Responds to Contemporary Challenges," *Zygon* 30, no. 3 (1995): 451–59; Soumaya Pernilla Ouis, "Islamic Ecotheology Based on the Qurʾān," *Islamic Studies* 37, no. 2 (1998): 151–81; Odeh Rashed Al-Jayyousi, *Islam and Sustainable Development: New Worldviews* (Gower, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315589947>

Building on this foundation, this study explores the potential contribution of Islamic moral philosophy to climate crisis mitigation by analysing three classical texts: Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī*, and Kınalızāde 'Alī's *Akhlāq-i 'Alā'ī*. These texts offer layered moral insights relevant to individual conduct, economic attitudes, and social relationships. At the heart of this inquiry lie three core virtues: justice (*al-'adl*), as an ontological principle sustaining equilibrium; contentment (*al-qanā'a*), as a normative guide in ethical consumption; and compassion (*al-rahma*), as a moral disposition shaping the human–nature relationship. By foregrounding these values, the study examines how Islamic moral philosophy can contribute to transforming societal mindsets and promoting sustainable environmental practices.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of climate change, as articulated in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, encompasses “a change in climate that occurs, directly or indirectly, as a result of human activities that alter the composition of the atmosphere, in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods.”¹² Discussions surrounding a potential global climate crisis have been sparked by the problems arising from climate change and the pervasive threats it poses worldwide.¹³ Indeed, the emergence of activist discourse on the climate crisis aims to underscore the gravity and urgency of climate-related changes induced by natural disasters precipitated by anthropogenic global warming.¹⁴ Termed as a “climate

¹² United Nations, *United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, UN Doc. FCCC/INFORMAL/84 (1992); Belemir Şengül and Gökhan Murat, “Küresel İklim Krizinin Sosyal Boyutu ve Sosyal Politika Önlemleri,” *Süleyman Demirel University Visionary Journal* 15, no. 41 (2024): 344, <https://doi.org/10.21076/vizyoner.1310015>

¹³ David Archer and Stefan Rahmstorf, *The Climate Crisis: An Introductory Guide to Climate Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 7.

¹⁴ Diana Stuart et al., “The Climate Crisis as a Catalyst for Emancipatory Transformation: An Examination of the Possible,” *International Sociology* 35, no. 4

emergency” by *Oxford Languages*, the concept denotes a situation necessitating immediate action to mitigate or halt climate change and forestall potential irreversible environmental degradation.¹⁵

The surge in global carbon emissions, serving as the primary environmental driver of the climate crisis, poses a shared challenge to humanity. Investigations into its underlying causes reveal a rapid escalation in global carbon emissions in the mid-twentieth century, accompanied by a stark rise in numerous socio-economic indicators.¹⁶ Termed the “Great Acceleration”, this phenomenon reflects the tripling of the world’s population from approximately 2.5 billion to nearly 7.5 billion today, alongside a GDP per capita growth rate that far outpaces population increase.¹⁷

In addition to its environmental ramifications, the climate crisis engenders profound socio-economic, socio-cultural, and political repercussions. Socially, it precipitates health challenges stemming from food and water scarcity, exerting direct impacts on the physical and emotional well-being of communities, and causing subsequent economic hardship and displacement due to livelihood disruptions.¹⁸ Compounding these concerns, projections from the World Bank indicate that between 35 and 122 million individuals may fall into poverty by 2030 as a result of climate change.¹⁹

The anthropogenic climate crisis thus represents the paramount challenge confronting both the planet and humanity. The endeavour to combat this crisis entails a multifaceted struggle,

(2020): 436, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0268580920915067>.

¹⁵ Şengül and Murat, “Küresel İklim Krizinin Sosyal Boyutu,” 345.

¹⁶ Albert J. Gabric, “The Climate Change Crisis: A Review of Its Causes and Possible Responses,” *Atmosphere* 14, no. 1081 (2023): 5, <https://doi.org/10.3390/atmos14071081>

¹⁷ Gabric, “The Climate Change Crisis,” 5-6.

¹⁸ Rebecca Gasper et al., “Social and Economic Impacts of Climate Change on the Urban Environment,” *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 3, no. 3 (2011): 154, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosust.2010.12.009>

¹⁹ Stephane Hallegatte et al., “Poverty and Climate Change: Introduction,” *Environment and Development Economics* 23, no. 3 (2018): 12, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1355770X18000141>

encompassing biological, ecological, industrial, geographical, astrophysical, economic, and sociological dimensions. While macro-level interventions by states through energy, industrial, and economic policies, constitute pivotal aspects of this struggle, the responsibility ultimately rests with individuals, highlighting the socio-economic and socio-cultural dimensions of the crisis.²⁰

Human behaviour and lifestyle represent social factors that exert long-term, cumulative effects on the sustainability of ecological systems. Climate change has therefore become a central focus within the social sciences, since human activities—through unsustainable behavioural patterns—form the foundation of the crisis. Accordingly, addressing the global climate crisis requires a profound transformation of the social mindset.²¹

Such a transformation necessarily encompasses the moral dimension of the crisis, because individuals' interactions with the ecosystem are directly shaped by their social and ethical orientations. Meaningful progress can thus be achieved only through a broad-based transformation of social mentality.²²

By reshaping perspectives on nature, the world, life philosophies, consumption habits, and the broader relationship with the universe, a process of socio-economic and socio-cultural renewal may emerge—gradually mitigating, and ultimately reducing, the adverse effects of the climate crisis.

In this context, morality, as the cornerstone of the social mindset, stands out as a dynamic cognitive attribute that enables individuals to regulate their reflexive mechanisms, to comprehend themselves and the universe, understand nature and social dynamics, and organise their practical lives effectively in accordance with ethical and ecological awareness.

²⁰ Parul Rishi, “Behavioural Transformation for Sustainability and Pro-Climate Action,” in *Managing Climate Change and Sustainability through Behavioural Transformation* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), 140.

²¹ Rishi, “Behavioural Transformation for Sustainability,” 141.

²² Peter Newell et al., *Changing Our Ways: Behaviour Change and the Climate Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Morality, as conceptualised in Islamic thought, encompasses both social relations and the natural essence of humanity. The root of the word, “*khulq* (moral character)”, signifies both creation, and serves as the origin of the term “*khalq* (creation)”, indicating social phenomena.²³ In this regard, ethics is twofold: first, it is grounded in relations with nature; and second, it is rooted in social relations.

Prominent figures in Islamic moral philosophy, including Ibn Miskawayh, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, and Kınalızāde ‘Alī, delineate the concept of *al-‘ilm al-akhlāq* (the study of morals) as encompassing *tadbīr al-naḥs* (individual moral discipline), *tadbīr al-manzil* (management of household and familial ethics), and *tadbīr al-mudun* (governance of societal and political morality).²⁴ Their moral principles, organised under these three main headings, offer significant contributions to the transformation of the social mindset essential for addressing the climate crisis.

The review of the literature highlights how societal mindset transformation may be achieved, emphasising the need for a balanced, harmonious, and just social order in both the inner and outer worlds. It also underscores compassionate attitudes towards nature and other beings, alongside an economic life shaped by *qanā‘a* (contentment). These works are selected for their comprehensive treatment of morality, defining it as “a state of the *naḥs* enabling action without conscious deliberation, partly innate and partly acquired through habit,” and acknowledging its malleability through education.²⁵

Significant progress against the climate crisis can be made by transforming consumption patterns and lifestyles through moral attitudes and behaviours that reshape the socio-economic orientations.

²³ al-Rāghib al-Iṣḥāhānī, *Al-Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur‘ān*, ed. Ṣafwān ‘Adnān Dāwūdī (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1992), s.v. “ḥ-l-q.”

²⁴ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tartīb al-Sa‘adat (The Order of Happiness)*, ed. al-Suyuti (Cairo, 1928), 59.

²⁵ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, ed. Hasan Temim (Beirut: n.p., 1398 [A.H.]); Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Akhlāk-i Nāṣiri/The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. George Michael Wickens (London: Routledge, 1964); Kınalızāde ‘Alī, *Akhlāq-i ‘Alā‘ī*, ed. Mustafā Koç (Istanbul: Turkish Manuscripts Association Publications, 2014).

The findings provide valuable insights into fostering such transformation in contemporary society through virtues such as justice (*al-‘adl*), contentment (*al-qanā‘a*), and compassion (*al-rahmah*).

Before delving into this inquiry, reflecting on the human-induced causes of climate change and their roots in human nature is beneficial for understanding the subject. Human beings are multidimensional entities, and human subjectivity constitutes a realm of tension. Instinct, emotion, and cognition create an existential struggle within the human psyche amidst, their differing demands shaping the nature of the mind through dialectical processes. Even in rational decision-making, the human mind cannot escape the influence of this tension and the effects of different faculties. Essentially, all of these faculties play an active role in the complex processes of the mind and moral judgments.

In the Qur’ānic context, there exists a juxtaposition between *hawā* (whim or desire) and *‘aql*. The concept of *hawā*’s assertiveness is governed by rational processes, manifesting as a consciousness of “*taqwā*”. According to this perspective, while *hawā* may incline individuals towards certain desires, *‘aql* serves to regulate and restrain these inclinations. The desires of *hawā*, under the supervision of *‘aql*, transform into virtues. Conversely, when *hawā* when disciplined by *‘aql*, are transformed into virtues; conversely, when *hawā* dominates without the governance of *‘aql*, it disrupts balance and leads to vice.²⁶

As such a being, humanity's excessive consumption habits and use of natural resources as if they were unlimited have disrupted natural balance and accelerated climate change. Natural balance constitutes a nuanced equilibrium encompassing multifaceted processes, often complex and occasionally chaotic, shaped not only by natural phenomena but also by the active participation of living organisms. For instance, microorganisms are critically influential in maintaining ecological balance.²⁷

²⁶ Abdallah Rothman, Adrian Coyle. "Toward a Framework for Islamic Psychology and Psychotherapy: An Islamic Model of the Nafs." *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 5 (2018): 1737-1739. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-018-0651-x>

²⁷ Richard L. Gruner and Damien Power, “Mimicking Natural Ecosystems to Develop

All contemporary evidence clearly demonstrates the magnitude of human impact on nature and the potential peril it poses for the planet's future. There is therefore, a growing need to reassess Islamic philosophers' ideas about justice, contentment, and compassion within both ontological and ethical contexts.

The following section will, accordingly, consider how these concepts appear and are interpreted in the works of the philosophers examined in this study.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1. Justice (*al-‘adl*)

In Islamic thought, justice (*al-‘adl*) is regarded as a fundamental principle forming the central axis of all cosmic, moral, and legal order. Rooted in the Arabic trilateral root ‘*a-d-l*, the term conveys meanings such as balance, order, harmony, and placing things in their proper position.²⁸ The Qur’ān employs this concept especially to describe the nature of divine action: “Indeed, Allah does not wrong even as much as an atom’s weight”²⁹; “Indeed, Allah loves those who act justly.”³⁰ In this context, justice is not merely a moral ideal but also a divine attribute (*ṣifah ilāhiyyah*) that manifests God’s will through a universal order (*mīzān*): “And the heaven He raised, and He set up the balance—that you do not transgress within the balance.”³¹

In the hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), justice is also presented as a supreme moral position. He states, for example: “The most beloved of people to Allah on the Day of Judgment will be the just ruler.”³² Moreover, the Qur’ān describes the Prophet as a

Sustainable Supply Chains: A Theory of Socio-Ecological Intergradation,” *Journal of Cleaner Production* 149 (2017): 258, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.02.109>

²⁸ al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Al-Mufradāt fī Ghārīb al-Qur’ān*, s.v. “‘-d-l.

²⁹ *The Qur’ān*, trans. M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4:40.

³⁰ *The Qur’ān*, 60:8.

³¹ *The Qur’ān*, 55:7-8.

³² Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Ḥadīth no. 1827.

messenger who establishes justice: “We sent Our messengers with clear proofs and sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that people may uphold justice.”³³

As contemporary thinkers such as Toshihiko Izutsu and Khaled Abou El Fadl have pointed out, justice in Islam is primarily an ontological principle—embedded in the very structure of existence.³⁴ In this respect, justice is a foundational order ensuring the internal harmony of creation and the coherence of human action.

Islamic philosophers—especially al-Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, and later Ibn Miskawayh—did not conceive of justice merely as social equality but as a metaphysical equilibrium among the parts of the *nafs*, the classes of society, and the degrees of existence. According to al-Fārābī, justice is the state in which everything is in its proper place according to its nature and merit (*li-yu ‘īā kulla shay’ in ḥaqqahu*).³⁵ This understanding corresponds directly with Qur’anic admonitions to maintain proportion, balance, and restraint. As Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas articulates, the Islamic worldview defines justice as “a state of affairs wherein everything is in its right and proper place.”³⁶ This understanding reflects divine wisdom and human moral responsibility.

Balance, order, and harmony constitute the foundational principles of justice. When justice is understood as a pure, abstract concept independent of its particular manifestations, the unity of these principles becomes clear.³⁷ In Islamic thought, justice extends beyond

³³ *The Qur’ān*, 57:25.

³⁴ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur’ān* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 45; Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 32.

³⁵ Al-Farabi, *Ara’ Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila*, ed. Ali Bu Mulhim (Beirut: Dar wa Maktabat al-Hilal, 1995), 85-94; Richard Walzer, *On the Perfect State (Mabadi’ Ara’ Ahl al-Madina al-Fadila)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 155-168; Al-Farabi, *Ideal Devlet*, trans. Muhammet Caner Ilgaroglu (Istanbul: Divan Publications, 2023), 67-68.

³⁶ Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization [ISTAC], 1993), 25-27.

³⁷ Morris Ginsberg, “The Concept of Justice,” *Philosophy* 38, no. 144 (1963): 101,

narrow ethical concerns to encompass metaphysical and theological dimensions, serving not only as a moral ideal but also as a structural principle governing both the cosmos and human society, as Majid Khadduri emphasises.³⁸ In this way, *al-‘adl* offers a comprehensive framework for reorienting humanity’s relationship with the environment in accordance with divine order.

From this perspective, Islamic thought prioritises the establishment of justice as its fundamental aim; the virtues intersect with the justice, for moral actions inherently seek to establish it. For example, moderation, which we will be addressed later, signifies temperance, and is likewise rooted in justice. Moderation entails upholding justice in action and intention. Similarly, contentment embodies a form of economic justice, where one should neither indulge in excess nor fall short for what is sufficient. This principle explicitly adheres to the equilibrium that justice demands.

Approached in relation to contemporary climate issues, this perspective constitutes a robust philosophical and ethical framework offering profound solutions. Despite revolutionary changes in modern social, political, and economic structures, human nature, inclinations, internal conflicts, and desires remain constant. While the external form of the world may change, the underlying principle of order persists.

Morality is central to this understanding because it makes theoretical justice visible through human agency. Moral principles become tangible through human action. In this regard, the human being represents the transitional passage between the static nature of theory and the dynamism of the natural world. Therefore, principles and values depend on human entactment for their realisation.

Ibn Miskawayh’s conception of justice is articulated through the functioning of the *nafs*, which he regards as the source of human action. Justice is realised through the harmonious operation of the rational faculty alongside the bodily faculties of anger and desire.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0031819100060101>

³⁸ Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 6-8.

Emphasising the doctrine of the mean, Miskawayh defines justice as the capacity to maintain a balanced course, avoiding both deficiency and excess, and as a state of proximity to unity. Within this framework, justice manifests in individual virtue and in measured, balanced social behaviour. A just person consistently demonstrates fairness in all situations. Ibn Miskawayh categorises justice into divine, natural, and conventional forms, while also highlighting voluntary justice, referring to the regulation of human relations in accordance with balance.³⁹

According to al-Ṭūsī, justice is the most perfect, achieved through balanced and measured conduct in both social and individual action, while other virtues are secondary in relation to it. This view is supported by Ibn Miskawayh's "circle and centre" metaphor: the central point represents virtue, while the countless surrounding points represent vice. Virtue is limited and focused; vice is boundless. Kınalızāde also endorses this perspective. This framework is especially relevant in transforming social consciousness in response to the climate crisis. A just-centred ethic requires maintaining balance in environmental decisions and behaviours, avoiding excessive consumption and unjust use of resources. Adherence to virtue resembles movement along a single straight line; whereas deviations are limitless, illustrating how a justice-centred approach can offer stability, and ethical clarity in addressing contemporary social and environmental challenges.⁴⁰

3.2. Contentment (*al-qanā'a*)

In Islamic thought, contentment (*al-qanā'a*) is a principled virtue that

³⁹ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq wa Tathrīb al-A'rāq*, ed. Ibn al-Haṭīb (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-'Asriyya, 1398/1977), 125; Ibn Miskawayh, *Risāla fī Maḥiyyat al-'Adl* (An Unpublished Treatise of Miskawayh on Justice), ed. M. S. Khan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1964), 11-13.

⁴⁰ Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī, *Ahlāq-i Nāṣirī*, ed. Ali Rıza Haydarı and Mücteba Mīnovī (Tehran: Şirket-i Sīhamī, 1373 [A.H.]), 108-09; Kınalızāde 'Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alāī*, trans. Fahri Urhan (Ankara: Turkish History Association Publications, 2014), 123-28.

reflects an individual's spiritual maturity, ethical moderation, and alignment with divine balance. Derived from the Arabic root *qani'a*, meaning "to be satisfied" or "to accept sufficiency," the term describes the *nafs*'s voluntary restraint from excess and its inclination to be satisfied with what is necessary. Although *al-qanā'a* does not appear explicitly in the Qur'ān, its essence is embedded in verses promoting moderation, discouraging extravagance, and encouraging reliance upon God: "Eat and drink, but do not be excessive. Indeed, He does not love the extravagant"⁴¹; "Whoever places their trust in God, He will suffice for them."⁴²

The Prophetic tradition affirms this principle. The Prophet Muḥammad (PBUH) said: "Wealth is not in the abundance of possessions; true wealth is the richness of the *nafs*."⁴³ This inner richness is understood as the foundation of a dignified and fulfilled life. Contentment, therefore, is not a passive resignation to poverty, but an active moral safeguard against greed, extravagance, and spiritual imbalance.

Islamic moral philosophers such as Ibn Miskawayh, al-Ṭūsī, and Kınalızāde developed this Qur'ānic and Prophetic ethos into systematic moral frameworks. Ibn Miskawayh identifies contentment, particularly regarding food, drink, and adornment, as the practical expression of justice and chastity. He writes, "Contentment means not being excessive in food, drink and decorations"⁴⁴. For him, this virtue should be cultivated from early childhood. He advises that children be taught that food is not for indulgence, but for maintaining health: "All foods are created solely for our physical health and survival. They are like medicine used to alleviate hunger. Just as medicine is not taken for pleasure, neither should food be. It should be consumed in sufficient quantities to sustain health and prevent illness"⁴⁵.

Miskawayh's moral vision offers a compelling response to the

⁴¹ *The Qur'ān*, 7:31.

⁴² *The Qur'ān*, 65:3.

⁴³ Al-Bukhārī. *Al-Ṣaḥīḥ*. Cairo: Dār al-Hadīth, 1931–1932, Ḥadīth no. 6446.

⁴⁴ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 25.

⁴⁵ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 30.

excesses of consumerist societies. He maintains that moderation remains a viable solution to the moral and environmental crises of modern life. According to him, pleasure-seeking, ignorance, and unchecked desire are key obstacles to moral excellence. His framework advocates a transformation of collective consciousness, essential for addressing ecological imbalance. In affluent societies, individuals often struggle to regulate their desires, leading to the overconsumption of resources and disruption of natural equilibrium.

Al-Ṭūsī, echoing this concern, identifies four moral flaws that corrupt economic behaviour: miserliness, extravagance, ostentation, and ill intention. All these behaviours undermine the virtue of contentment, which he associates with ethical moderation in spending.⁴⁶

Kinalizāde furthers this discourse by warning against conflating genuine contentment with concealed avarice. He argues that some individuals appear modest in their lifestyle yet hoard wealth—an act he classifies not as virtue but as miserliness. True contentment, he explains, consists in the *nafs*'s graceful acceptance of basic needs—food, drink, and clothing—without seeking more than suffices. He describes it as: “the *nafs*'s easy acceptance of food, drink, clothing and similar things, and of all things that come one's way and meet one's needs,” emphasising a minimalist ethic rooted in humility and gratitude. This outlook, he argues, is not about accumulating goods but about willingly renouncing excess.⁴⁷

In this sense, contentment becomes a moral posture of active patience, self-regulation, and disciplined sufficiency. It is an inward orientation that acknowledges divine apportionment, resists the compulsion for more, and sustains ethical balance. Within the broader cosmic and natural order, contentment emerges as a virtue of consumption that governs humanity's relationship with the environment. The harmony between the human biological structure

⁴⁶ Al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri / The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. George Michael Wickens (London: Routledge, 1964), 196.

⁴⁷ Kinalizāde 'Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alāī*, 387–397.

and natural balance is disrupted by hedonism and excess—leading not only to health issues such as obesity, but also to climate disturbances, including abnormal temperature and precipitation patterns.

In today’s world, characterised by excess and ostentation, the virtue of contentment stands as a guiding principle for a meaningful and sustainable life. Miskawayh, al-Ṭūsī, and Kınalızāde converge on the notion that moderation in consumption, guided by reason and ethical restraint, is essential for both moral flourishing and environmental stewardship. Their shared insight invites a reassessment of humanity’s relationship with material goods and promotes an ethic of sufficiency. By embracing contentment as a lived principle—anchored in moderation, gratitude, and restraint—humanity may recover the spiritual and ecological balance necessary for a virtuous and sustainable existence.

3.3 Compassion (*al-raḥma*)

In Islamic thought, compassion (*al-raḥmah*) is regarded not merely as an emotional inclination or a form of human kindness, but as a foundational principle that encompasses all existence and constitutes the essence of both creation and divine action. This concept is intrinsically linked to two of the most frequently mentioned divine names in the Qur’ān—*al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm*. The phrase “*Bismillāhi’r-Raḥmāni’r-Raḥīm*”, which opens nearly every *sūrah*, illustrates the universal scope of compassion as both a divine attribute and an active metaphysical force. The Qur’ān states, “My mercy encompasses all things”⁴⁸, affirming that compassion is not merely a quality of God, but the very ontological foundation of existence. The Prophet Muḥammad is similarly described as “a mercy to the worlds”⁴⁹, while his statement “Those who do not show mercy will not be shown mercy”⁵⁰ frames compassion as a moral imperative at both

⁴⁸ *The Qur’ān*, 7:156.

⁴⁹ *The Qur’ān*, 21:107.

⁵⁰ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ḥadīth no. 6013

individual and societal levels.

Classical Islamic philosophers and ethicists—most notably Ibn Miskawayh, al-Ṭūsī, and Kınalızāde—systematised these Qur’ānic and Prophetic foundations within a comprehensive philosophical framework, treating compassion as both an ontological principle and an ethical virtue. In their view, compassion manifests across several interconnected domains: in God’s act of creation, in the harmony of the cosmos, in the preservation of life, and in human relations with other beings and the natural world.⁵¹ Thus, *al-rahmah* is understood as a cosmic force of cohesion that sustains both metaphysical order and ethical balance.

Accordingly, in Islamic thought, *al-rahmah* is considered the softening dimension of justice, the affective side of wisdom, and the sustaining force behind the continuity of the existential order. It is simultaneously a manifestation of God’s absolute benevolence and a moral responsibility entrusted to humanity as free and rational agents. In this respect, compassion serves as a comprehensive ethical framework that bridges the realms of the individual and society, God and humanity, and nature and morality.⁵²

This understanding positions *al-rahmah* as a foundational principle that integrates metaphysical cosmology with ethical stewardship. Within the context of climate ethics, compassion emerges as a guiding virtue, urging reverent care and moral responsibility toward all forms of life and the delicate balance that sustains them.

Viewed in this light, Kınalızāde’s assertion—“According to philosophers, all beings exist and survive thanks to compassion. Compassion pervades everything. No being is deprived of unity, nor is it devoid of inclination or compassion”⁵³—encapsulates the ontological dimension of compassion. For him, compassion is not merely a divine method of governance but an essential, immanent divine attribute that permeates all levels of existence. In this view,

⁵¹ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 53-54; Al-Ṭūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, 118-119; Kınalızāde ‘Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alâi*, 188-190.

⁵² Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifā), 370-373.

⁵³ Kınalızāde ‘Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alâi*, 491-492.

existence finds its meaning through the compassion that imbues it, and utilising existence in the service of compassion aligns with the ultimate purpose of creation. Kınalızāde further asserts, “Even plants and inanimate objects possess a form of compassion and affection. All ores and accidents are nourished by it”⁵⁴, reinforcing the idea that compassion is a constitutive metaphysical principle.

He also argues that actions devoid of compassion contradict the very nature of existence. The act of cursing, which signifies the absence of compassion, is, in his view, a distortion of one’s ontological role. He warns: “Cursing humans and animals is something believers must avoid strictly; it is clearly prohibited by the supreme Sharī‘a”⁵⁵. For Kınalızāde, as vicegerents (*khalīfa*) on earth, humans are divinely tasked with extending compassion not only to fellow humans but to all living beings. His stance is grounded in both the foundational teachings of Islam and the ethical worldview derived therefrom.

Ibn Miskawayh offers a complementary yet distinct approach. He defines compassion as a voluntary inclination of the *nafs*, arising spontaneously rather than through coercion. It reflects humanity’s capacity for empathy, solidarity, and social cohesion. In his words: “Compassion is the state of agreement that the *nafs* shows towards others spontaneously, not by force.”⁵⁶ This interpretation highlights the spiritual nature of compassion while also situating it within the framework of social harmony and moral responsibility.

Given Ibn Miskawayh’s broader emphasis on justice as both an individual virtue and the overarching principle connecting all virtues, compassion can be seen as a manifestation of justice.⁵⁷ Unlike Kınalızāde’s ontological focus, Miskawayh positions compassion within the realm of horizontal human relationships—as an extension of ethical empathy. He writes: “Charity is helping friends and those who deserve it, sharing goods and food with them, and it arises from compassion.” Furthermore, he warns: “An unmerciful person is unjust

⁵⁴ Kınalızāde ‘Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alâi*, 474.

⁵⁵ Kınalızāde ‘Alī, *Ahlak-ı Alâi*, 498.

⁵⁶ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 15.

⁵⁷ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 440.

to himself, his friends, and everyone around him,” and “The worst of people is the one who does injustice to himself, then to his friends and tribe, and finally to all people and living beings”.⁵⁸ These statements underscore compassion’s essential role in realising justice and preventing harm at every level of human interaction.

Al-Ṭūsī frames compassion not merely as a personal sentiment but as a reflection of divine justice and a fundamental principle of cosmic balance. He explains that the natural order—exemplified by the proportional relations between the elements—is made possible by God’s wisdom and mercy. For instance, although water and air differ in quantity, they are equal in quality. Were this balance disturbed, one element would overwhelm the other, and the harmony of the universe would collapse. Yet, “thanks to the wisdom and mercy of the Creator,” he writes, “everything has been created in such a way that the four elements are compatible and equal in strength and quality so as not to destroy one another. A slight excess in one causes a proportional diminution in the other”.⁵⁹

Al-Ṭūsī associates this balance not only with divine knowledge but also with moral intentionality. Compassion, in this sense, becomes a moral model for human action. His statement—“Compassion is the deepest emotion that strengthens social bond” — captures this understanding. For Ṭūsī, the same compassion that preserves cosmic harmony should govern social relations and interpersonal conduct. Thus, compassion is not merely an individual virtue but a social force that fosters solidarity, equilibrium, and cohesion within human communities.⁶⁰

In conclusion, the writings of Kınalızāde, Ibn Miskawayh, and al-Ṭūsī converge to present *rahmah* as a multi-dimensional concept: a reflection of divine justice, a metaphysical principle sustaining creation, and a moral imperative underpinning social harmony. This layered understanding reinforces the centrality of compassion in

⁵⁸ Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahzīb al-Akhlaq*, 115-117.

⁵⁹ Al-Ṭūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, 196.

⁶⁰ Al-Ṭūsī, *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*, 196-197.

Islamic ethical and cosmological thought, offering a timeless framework for aligning individual conduct with universal balance.

4. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of Islamic moral philosophy, both justice and morality are not confined to abstract ethical ideals, but are intimately rooted in the material, embodied, and cosmological dimensions of existence. Unlike many strands of modern Western ethical thought that often separate the moral from the physical, Islamic thought maintains a principled continuity between the ontological order and moral action. This integration allows for a more holistic and comprehensive understanding of human existence (*al-insān*) and its relationship with the broader environment (*tabī'a*), including the natural world and all its living systems.

The interweaving of moral and metaphysical concepts in Islam enables a distinct vantage point from which to address global ecological crises, such as climate change. In Islamic thought, morality is conceptually connected to the dual notions of *khalq* (creation/form) and *khulq* (character/disposition), reflecting the intrinsic link between how the human being is fashioned and how he or she ought to act. Similarly, justice is linked with the Qur'ānic notion of *mīzān* (balance), a concept that conveys ontological harmony, proportionality, and ethical equilibrium. This nexus of creation, character, and balance furnishes Islamic ethics with a robust framework to evaluate not only interpersonal relations, but also the human role as a steward (*khalīfa*) of the Earth.

Within this intellectual and ethical structure, contentment (*al-qanā'a*) and compassion (*al-rahmah*) emerge as the practical and emotional extensions of justice and morality. Contentment, as the moral embodiment of moderation (*i'tidāl*) in the economic sphere, offers an alternative to the insatiable consumption patterns that dominate modern consumer societies. Compassion, on the other hand, extends the principle of justice beyond formal fairness, incorporating dimensions of mercy, care, and love in both human and ecological

relations. These values, deeply rooted in Qur'ānic and Prophetic teachings, represent more than individual virtues—they are guiding principles that foster balance and moral sensitivity in the relationship between humanity and nature.

Furthermore, the emphasis on the inner equilibrium of the *nafs* within Islamic virtue ethics provides fertile ground for rethinking climate ethics from a person-centred perspective. As highlighted throughout this article, drawing on thinkers such as Ibn Miskawayh, al-Ṭūsī, and Kınalızāde, the cultivation of individual virtues—especially justice, contentment, and compassion—is seen as the key to collective moral transformation. While technological solutions to climate change may evolve, the fundamental nature of the human being, along with their inner moral struggles, remains constant. Therefore, the human-centred approach found in Islamic ethics retains enduring relevance and applicability.

It is precisely this emphasis on moral responsibility, grounded in the ontological reality of *al-'adl*, that underpins a theological imperative to preserve the natural order. The Qur'ān explicitly warns against upsetting the balance of creation. In light of this, the preservation of the equilibrium between humans and nature—and, by extension, the safeguarding of the habitats of other creatures—is not merely an environmental concern, but a moral obligation tied to the very structure of creation.

The Islamic notion of *al-qanā'a*, when viewed through this lens, offers a moral paradigm that resonates with the growing appeal of minimalist and sustainable living. Rather than promoting ascetic withdrawal, it encourages a conscious limitation of desire, which is both ethically sound and environmentally sustainable. It confronts the excesses of consumerism not through legal prohibition, but through spiritual refinement and ethical interiority.

Compassion (*al-rahmah*) in this framework is not limited to emotional empathy or interpersonal kindness; it is a metaphysical principle that reflects divine mercy and manifests as moral responsibility toward all beings. It builds a bridge between the human and the natural, the divine and the worldly. As one of the core

meanings of Islam itself is "peace," this peace is not merely the absence of conflict, but a positive harmony rooted in justice and compassion. Establishing such peace with nature demands not only rational management but also the cultivation of virtues such as mercy, forbearance, and love.

In this expanded moral horizon, compassion surpasses the bounds of interpersonal ethics and becomes a virtue that frames human interaction with the natural world. It promotes a vision of social and ecological harmony that is anchored in the sacred, offering an integrated ethic that transcends utilitarianism and policy-based solutions. Within this vision, Islamic moral thought presents a spiritually infused and philosophically robust path toward environmental stewardship, urging a transformation in both lifestyle and worldview in response to the climate crisis.



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FUNDAMENTAL THINKING TERMS IN THE QUR'ĀN: A CONNOTATIVE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR ISLAMIC EPISTEMOLOGY

Jamal Ahmed Bashier Badi¹

ABSTRACT

This study addresses a significant scholarly gap concerning a lack of a comprehensive framework for systematically examining the connotative dimensions of fundamental Qur'ānic terms related to thinking (*tafakkur*, *ta'aqqul*, *tadabbur*, *tafaqquh*) and knowledge (*'ilm*, *ma'rifah*). While the presence and importance of these terms in Qur'ān are widely acknowledged, existing scholarship has tended to prioritise their denotative or literal meanings, often focusing on a restricted subset of these terms, particularly those associated with Qur'ānic epistemological discussions. As a result, insufficient attention has been given to the contextual and connotative significance of these terms and to how their deeper semantic layers articulate the Qur'ān's holistic worldview of thinking and knowledge. Consequently, this study proposes an innovative connotative analytical framework that categorises Qur'ānic thinking terms into four distinct semantic dimensions. It employs a qualitative method of textual analysis, drawing upon classical and contemporary Qur'ānic

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tafsīr literature, alongside studies on Qur'anic terminology (*muṣṭalaḥāt Qur'āniyyah*), as its primary sources of data. The study demonstrates that a connotative and contextual interpretation of these terms reveals the dynamic, multi-layered, and holistic system of thought that characterises the Qur'ānic approach to human cognition and epistemology. Overall, it provides a comprehensive overview of these terms as foundational building blocks of an Islamic holistic epistemological framework of thinking and knowledge.

KEYWORDS: Fundamental Qur'ānic Terms, Connotative Meanings, Conceptual Thinking, Analytical Framework, Islamic Epistemology.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Qur'ān's linguistic richness and stylistic features have been the subject of extensive scholarly and devotional study for centuries.² While its fundamental terms play a pivotal role in shaping Islamic theology, law, ethics, and spirituality, their meanings and applications have evolved across time, resulting in diverse interpretations and modes of engagement. Despite the centrality of these terms to the overall message of the Qur'ān, there remains a noticeable lack of comprehensive and systematic analytical frameworks—particularly in the English Language, —for examining them as the core conceptual terms of the Qur'ān, especially those related to the intertwined notions of knowledge and thinking. This constitutes a significant scholarly gap, as such frameworks are essential for exploring, at a deeper level, the implications of Qur'ānic “knowledge and thinking” terms for contemporary Muslim life. The Qur'ānic foundational terms—such as *tafakkur* (thinking), *ta'aqqul* or *'aql* (reasoning), *tadabbur*

² See Balil Abd al-Karim, *Qur'anic Terminology: A Linguistic and Semantic Analysis* (International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT), 2017).

(contemplation), and *tafaqquh* (deep understanding)—capture various levels and dimensions of human psycho-cognitive and spiritual dispositions. They underscore the profound importance that the sacred text assigns to intellectual inquiry, reflective engagement, and the pursuit of wisdom. From the perspective of this study, these terms (and additional expressions discussed in subsequent sections) are not merely linguistic units; rather, they represent expansive conceptual structures that convey the Qur’ān’s holistic viewpoint on the nature, scope and implications of thinking and knowledge. Although previous scholarship has offered valuable analyses of several Qur’ānic terms³—primarily focusing on their literal or denotative meanings⁴—such studies often do not provide systematic frameworks capable of uncovering their deeper, multi-layered, and connotative dimensions. In addition, only a limited set of these fundamental terms has typically been examined.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to address this academic lacuna by proposing a novel analytical framework designed to transcend the predominant approaches restricted to denotative meanings and general interpretation. By exploring a wider range of fundamental Qur’ānic terms, this study contends that the Qur’ānic discourse on knowledge is far more nuanced than a simple glossary of terms might imply. The Qur’ān uses these expressions across diverse contexts to instruct humanity on how to engage with the world thoughtfully and attentively, encouraging deep reflection upon the realities of existence. In doing so, the Qur’ān aims to cultivate a culture of intellectual inquiry and moral excellence. Thus, those endowed with sound intellect are described as *ulū al-albāb*⁵—individuals who harmoniously integrate rational reflection with spiritual remembrance of God while contemplating the natural phenomena around them.⁶ In

³ Abd al-Karim, Qur’anic Terminology, 6–8.

⁴ Ortiqova, Dilnoza. “Linguistic Insights into Qur’anic and Hadith Discourse: A Study of Lexical Choices and Cultural Implications.” *Akademicheskie Issledovaniia v Sovremennoi Nauke* 3, no. 38 (2024): 16–19.

⁵ Al-Baqarah 2:269.

⁶ Hassan, M. K. *Natural Science from the Worldview of the Qur’an* (Kuala Lumpur:

the view of this study, the absence of systematic analytical approach has contributed to a fragmented understanding of the holistic intellectual significance of these terms within the Qur'ānic worldview. The contextual usage⁷ and connotative meanings of words play a major linguistic role in shaping their conceptual impact⁸ within a text and in influencing readers' cognitive and spiritual responses.⁹

For this reason, the study employs a qualitative method of textual analysis, drawing upon classical and contemporary Qur'ānic commentaries as well as on Quranic terminology as its data sources. It proposes an analytical framework that categorises Qur'ānic thinking terms into four connotative dimensions —positive, subjective, negative, and neutral. Through this framework, the study seeks to systematically classify and critically analyse these terms, offering a structured analytical lens for uncovering the depth and breadth of meaning embedded in the sacred text. It provides fresh insights into the psycho-cognitive, spiritual, and ethical implications of these fundamental Qur'ānic terms. Overall, this paper addresses the current absence of a comprehensive analytical framework capable of systematically examining the connotative dimensions of Qur'ānic thinking terms. Beyond identifying a wider range of these terms than those discussed in earlier scholarship, the study highlights the significant ways in which Qur'ānic linguistic devices—particularly its fundamental thinking-related expressions—shape Islamic thought and practice in contemporary times. In doing so, it bridges the gap between the Qur'ān's historical context and its enduring relevance to the modern world.

Institut Terjemahan dan Buku Malaysia Berhad, 2018), 37.

⁷ Haqi Ismael Mohammed and Hanan Qadir Amin. "The Linguistic Context and Its Effect on Meaning in Interpretation: Al-Baghawi's Tafsir as a Model." *Aran Journal for Language and Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2025): 24–35.

⁸ Orna Peleg, Rachel Giora, and Ofer Fein. "Contextual Strength: The Whens and Hows of Context Effects." In *Experimental Pragmatics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2004), 172–186.

⁹ Thonthowi, T., and M. D. Muslim. "I'jāz al-Qur'an in Linguistic Perspective and Its Impact on Readers." *Insyirah: Jurnal Ilmu Bahasa Arab dan Studi Islam* 7, no. 1 (2024): 117–132.

1.1. Literature Review

The study of Qur'ānic terminology related to knowledge and thinking is rooted in a rich intellectual tradition that extends from classical exegesis to contemporary interdisciplinary inquiry.¹⁰ This review first acknowledges and critically engages with the foundational contributions of a classical scholar, al-Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 1209 CE), alongside selected modern studies on Qur'ānic terminology and linguistic analysis. It then demonstrates how the present study engages with and builds upon these earlier works, as well as more recent scholarly contributions, thereby positioning its proposed analytical framework as a distinctive and significant advancement in the study of Qur'ānic epistemology.

1.2. The Classical Foundation: al-Fakhr al-Rāzī's Pioneering Contribution

Al-Fakhr al-Rāzī (d. 606H/1209 CE) stands as a towering figure in Islamic theology and philosophy, widely regarded as a reviver of the faith in his century. His monumental exegetical work, *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (also known as *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*), remains one of the most authoritative commentaries on the Qur'ān in history. More importantly, his analysis of a Qur'ānic verse on knowledge in Sūrah al-Baqarah, which represents one of the earliest systematic attempts to treat fundamental Qur'ānic terms as conceptual categories, especially in relation to knowledge and the cognitive disposition of the human being.

A number of important works have been devoted to Qur'ānic terms, themes, and concepts in an effort to uncover the richness of meaning embedded in the sacred text and to facilitate its

¹⁰ Muh Barid Nizarudin Wajdi, Nur Ifitahul Husniyah, Victor Imaduddin Ahmad, Miftakhul Ilmi Suwignya Putra, and Ahmad Muhtar Syarofi. "Understanding the Qur'an Holistically: An Interdisciplinary Study of Qur'anic Language and Linguistics." *BASA Journal of Language and Literature* 3, no. 1 (2023): 11–17.

understanding¹¹. These include al-Rāḡib al-Isfahānī's *al-Mufradāt fi ḡarīb al-Qur'ān* (in Arabic), Sayyid Abū al-A'īn Moudūdī's *Qur'ān kī chār bunyādī iṣṭilāḡāt* (in Urdu) and Mustansir Mir's *Dictionary of Qur'ānic Terms and Concepts* (in English), among others. Nevertheless, a pioneering effort to systematise Qur'ānic terms related specifically to knowledge and human cognition can be traced most clearly to al-Fakhr al-Rāzī. His intellectual originality and comprehensive approach are evident in his discussion of Qur'ān 2:29, where he identifies twenty-nine terms¹² that he considers synonymous with knowledge (*al-ilm*), though only seventeen of these appear explicitly in the Qur'ān. Across several pages, he examines these terms in detail, exploring their meanings, implications, and points of contrast. This analysis opened a wide horizon for understanding the multi-faceted nature of Qur'ānic epistemological concepts and demonstrated an early awareness of the layered semantic structure of Qur'ānic language.

At the same time, al-Rāzī's discussion was not intended to establish a comprehensive analytical framework for articulating these terms within a systematic, multi-dimensional connotative structure. While his work offers profound insights, it does not develop a formal methodology for categorising or analysing the connotative dimensions of these terms. Nonetheless, his contribution constitutes a crucial classical foundation for modern inquiries into Qur'ānic epistemology, exemplifying the intellectual rigour required to approach the subject.

Building upon al-Rāzī's pioneering contribution, the present study extends this line of inquiry by identifying a substantially larger corpus of Qur'ānic thinking-related terms, amounting to forty in total. It further expands the analytical scope by examining their contextual usage, connotative dimensions, and epistemological implications. In doing so, the study underscores both the originality and the scholarly necessity of developing a systematic framework capable of capturing

¹¹ Gowhar Quadir Wani. "Qur'anic Terminology: A Linguistic and Semantic Analysis, by Balil Abd al-Karim." *Al-Bayan: Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 16, no. 2 (2018): 1.

¹² Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, *Tafsir al-Kabir*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), 222–226.

the depth and complexity of Qur'ānic discourse on knowledge and thinking.

1.3. Modern Linguistic and Semantic Studies on the Qur'ān

Beyond the classical scholarship, modern studies have approached the Qur'ān from a range of linguistic and conceptual perspectives. Nevertheless, a comprehensive and systematic analytical framework dedicated specifically to Qur'ānic *thinking-related terms* remains largely absent. Existing studies often address broader linguistic or rhetorical features without isolating and theorising the epistemological significance of these terms. For instance, Hassan's *A Pragmatic Analysis: Implications of Lexical Choices in Translating Quranic Rhetoric*¹³ underscores the crucial role of pragmatics in Qur'ānic linguistic research. He defines pragmatics as the study of how context contributes to meaning and highlights the considerable challenges involved in translating the Qur'ān. Hassan correctly observes that a “significant loss of meaning” may occur when lexical choices fail to capture the rhetorical and contextual force of the original Arabic text. His findings demonstrate that a deep understanding of Qur'ānic vocabulary and its contextual usage is essential for accurate translation. While his study provides valuable insights into Qur'ānic rhetoric and translation, it does not focus specifically on *thinking-related terms* as conceptual units. The present study addresses this gap by concentrating on Qur'ānic terms associated with thinking and knowledge, offering a more targeted analysis of their connotative and pragmatic dimensions relevant to both interpretation and translation.

Closely related to this line of inquiry is *Understanding the Qur'ān Holistically: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Language and Linguistics of the Qur'ān*.¹⁴ This work advocates a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to Qur'ānic studies, with particular

¹³ Hassan Badr Hassan. “A Pragmatic Analysis: Implications of Lexical Choices in Translating Qur'ānic Rhetoric.” *Advances in Language and Literary Studies* 11, no. 3 (2020): 1.

¹⁴ See Wajdi et al., “Understanding the Qur'an Holistically.”

attention to linguistic and literary features. It systematically identifies rhetorical and stylistic devices that convey layered meanings within the text, highlighting the importance of interpreting fundamental terms in their textual contexts. The study also points to the lack of methodological standardisation in Qur'ānic linguistic research, which often results in fragmented interpretations. The present study responds to this challenge by proposing a structured analytical framework that foregrounds the connotative dimensions of key Qur'ānic thinking terms, enabling a more coherent and systematic understanding of their conceptual implications.

Similarly, Abd al-Karim Balil's *Qur'anic Terminology: A Linguistic and Semantic Analysis*¹⁵ argues that an adequate understanding of the Qur'ān is impossible without careful examination of its terminology and conceptual vocabulary. Bālīl rightly emphasises the role of context, noting that the meaning of a term varies according to its usage and thematic associations. While his work provides a valuable and extensive glossary of Qur'ānic terms accompanied by semantic analysis, it does not engage in a focused exploration of *thinking* or *epistemological* terms as a distinct conceptual field. Despite its significant contribution to Qur'ānic lexical studies, Bālīl's work does not offer a specialised or critical framework for analysing Qur'ānic epistemology or the Qur'ānic approach to cognition.

Nevertheless, the present study builds upon Bālīl's foundational insight that usage determines conceptual relevance,¹⁶ extending it into a multi-dimensional analytical framework. By systematically categorising and analysing a corpus of Qur'ānic terms related to knowledge and thinking, the study advances beyond general terminological surveys and offers a focused conceptual investigation into the Qur'ānic epistemological worldview.

Another notable contemporary contribution is *I'jāz al-Qur'ān from a Linguistic Perspective and Its Impact on Readers*.¹⁷ Unlike

¹⁵ See Abd al-Karim, *Qur'anic Terminology*.

¹⁶ Abd al-Karim, *Qur'anic Terminology* (2017), 3, 4, 9, 10, 13.

¹⁷ See Thonthowi and Muslim, "I'jāz al-Qur'an in Linguistic Perspective."

many earlier studies that emphasise the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān primarily in terms of content, this work highlights the aesthetic and expressive power of Qur'ānic language. Through analysis of letters, words, sentences, and textual structures, the authors examine the linguistic dimensions of *i'jāz al-Qur'ān* and its impact on diverse audiences, including scholars, thinkers, philosophers, and lay readers. While the study offers valuable insights into the Qur'ān's stylistic and rhetorical excellence, it does not treat Qur'ānic terms—particularly thinking-related terms—as conceptual entities with epistemological implications. Nor does it propose a comprehensive framework for analysing the connotative dimensions of such terms as part of the Qur'ān's multi-layered approach to thought and knowledge. In contrast, the present study directly addresses these limitations by developing a systematic analytical framework that captures the connotative, contextual, and epistemological dimensions of Qur'ānic thinking terms.

1.4. Studies on Thinking in the Qur'ān

Beyond linguistic and terminological analyses, a number of modern studies have examined the Islamic perspective on thinking as articulated in the Qur'ān.¹⁸ A general overview of these insightful

¹⁸ Jamal Badi and Mustapha Tajdin, *Creative Thinking: An Islamic Perspective* (Kuala Lumpur: International Islamic University Malaysia, 2004); Khoshman Hassan Ali, "Words Denoting Thinking in the Holy Qur'an," *College of Basic Education Research Journal* 2, no. 2 (2006): 33–52; Mohammad Hashim Kamali, "Reading the Signs: A Qur'anic Perspective on Thinking," *Islam & Science* 4, no. 2 (2006): 141–165; Abdul Wahab Mahmoud Hanaisha, "Thinking and Its Development through the Holy Qur'an" (PhD diss., 2009); Jamal Badi, "'Thinking' Terminologies from a Qur'anic Perspective and Their Impact on Human Intellectual Development," *International Journal of Arab Culture, Management and Sustainable Development* 2, no. 1 (2011): 41–54; Mohd Shuhaimi Ishak and Wan Mazwati Wan Yusoff, "Thinking from the Qur'anic Perspective," *Al-Shajarah* 20, no. 1 (2015); Thoraya E. Abdel-Maguid and Rabie E. Abdel-Halim, "The Qur'an and the Development of Rational Thinking," *Urology Annals* 7, no. 2 (2015): 135–140; Awil Hashi, "Revisiting Critical Thinking through a Qur'anic Lens," *Al-Burhān: Journal of Qur'an and Sunnah Studies* 8, no. 1 (2024): 22–41.

studies indicates that they collectively present a holistic thinking approach, integrating ethical, moral, and spiritual dimensions into the traditional critical thinking frameworks. However, while the studies establish *what* the Qur'ān promotes in terms of thinking, they generally do not examine *how* the Qur'ān linguistically and conceptually constructs this approach, nor do they systematically analyse the implications of its thinking-related terminology for the coherence of its overall message. More specifically, despite valuable insights into Qur'ānic ethics and cognition, a critical gap remains: the absence of a detailed, term-by-term linguistic and semantic analysis of Qur'ānic thinking vocabulary. This omission results in a fragmented understanding of the comprehensive intellectual mechanisms embedded in the Qur'ānic text. Even studies that explicitly address Qur'ānic terminology related to thinking tend to focus on a limited selection of terms, often without offering an integrated framework through which these terms can be analysed holistically as conceptual building blocks of the Qur'ānic epistemology. As a result, the deeper connotative, contextual, and relational dimensions of these terms—and their collective role in shaping the Qur'ānic approach to thinking—remain underexplored.

Consequent upon this, the present study aims to provide linguistic and conceptual evidence that substantiates and refines the broader claims made in earlier scholarship regarding the Qur'ānic approach to thinking. By proposing an analytical framework that systematically examines more than forty Qur'ānic thinking-related terms, this study supplies the foundational data necessary to demonstrate the Qur'ān's structured and intentional approach to cultivating intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. It advances Qur'ānic studies beyond a general appreciation of linguistic richness and ethical orientation towards a more integrated understanding of the Qur'ān's epistemological architecture. This is achieved through a contextual and connotative analysis of Qur'ānic terminology related to thinking and knowledge, highlighting the interconnections among these terms and their cumulative conceptual significance.

Overall, the reviewed studies seem to show that while there is research on various dimensions of the Qur'ānic language, no major attention is given to the key thinking terms and their implications remains limited. This is not to discount earlier studies that have demonstrated the Qur'ān's unique linguistic character, its contextual depth, and its impact as a revelatory and intellectually transformative text. Nor does it diminish the value of studies that offer broad semantic or linguistic insights into Qur'ānic discourse.

Nevertheless, no comprehensive framework has yet been developed to systematically analyse the connotative dimensions of Qur'ānic thinking terms as a means of understanding the Qur'ān's multi-layered approach to thought. While several studies explore thinking from Qur'ānic perspectives, few have examined the holistic epistemological implications of the Qur'ān's fundamental thinking-related vocabulary. The significance of the current study, therefore, lies in its connotative analysis of the meanings of these terms; it specifically focuses on their positive, subjective, negative, and neutral dimensions. By analysing these terms as core concepts for the Qur'ānic approach to thinking, it seeks to uncover the depth and breadth of meaning embedded within the sacred text.

2. A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR THE QUR'ĀNIC FUNDAMENTAL THINKING TERMS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROPOSED ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

To address the fragmentation evident in existing studies of Qur'ānic thinking-related terminology and to offer a more holistic understanding of the Qur'ān's intellectual framework, this study proposes a novel analytical model. Grounded in the crucial distinction between denotative and connotative meanings, the framework is premised on the view that the Qur'ān employs a spectrum of connotations in its thinking-related terms in order to guide believers' understanding of good and evil, divine attributes, and human responsibility.

Denotative meaning refers to the literal and relatively stable definition of a term, whereas connotative meaning encompasses the associated, subjective, and context-dependant dimensions that shape a word's impact and resonance. Almost all words have both types of meaning.¹⁹ Most lexical items possess both dimensions. However, it is the connotative aspect of language that “plays a crucial role in how we communicate and understand each other ... Choosing words with the right connotations helps ensure our message resonates with the audience and avoids unintentional negative reactions.”²⁰ By attending to connotative meanings,²¹ subtle layers of discourse can be uncovered, allowing texts to be interpreted in ways that reflect their intended ethical and conceptual orientations.

Approaching the fundamental thinking terms of the Qur’ān through this methodological lens enables a deeper engagement with the nuanced messages embedded within its discourse on cognition and moral reasoning. It facilitates a more refined theological reflection and supports the development of a comprehensive moral framework. Most previous studies—particularly those in English—either privilege denotative meanings or approach connotation indirectly, often in the context of translation studies²² or general semiotic analyses of Qur’ānic language, such as examinations of colour symbolism.²³

¹⁹ Ali Albashir Mohammed Alhaj. “Translating Some Qur’anic Connotative Meanings into English: A Socio-Pragmatic Comparative Study.” *Journal of Literature, Languages, and Linguistics* 41, no. 3 (2018): 47–65.

²⁰ Khamidovna, N. N. “Words That Paint a Picture.” *Miasto Przyszłości* 47 (2024): 1175–1178.

²¹ Muhammad Erdy. “The Origins, Theories, and Linguistic Development of the Qur’an.” *Jurnal Kajian Islam* 2, no. 1 (2025): 13–22.

²² Majda B. A. Abdelkarim and Ali A. M. Alhaj. “Probing Meaning Loss in the Translation of Arabic Qur’anic Connotative Words into English: A Linguistic Semantic Perspective.” *Theory and Practice in Language Studies* 13, no. 10 (2023): 2644–2651.

²³ Mona Al-Shraideh and Ahmad El-Sharif. “A Semiotic Perspective on the Denotation and Connotation of Colours in the Qur’an.” *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 8, no. 1 (2019): 18.

The proposed framework is therefore not intended as a descriptive catalogue of terms, but as an analytical tool that serves as the primary interpretive lens through which Qur'ānic terms related to knowledge and thinking are examined. Its objective is to articulate a holistic Islamic epistemological perspective grounded in the Qur'ān's linguistic and conceptual structure.

Moving beyond purely literal meanings, the framework identifies four connotative categories—positive, subjective, negative, and neutral—based on careful analysis of contextual usage and linguistic patterns within the Qur'ānic text.²⁴ Through a systematic review of the Qur'ān, the study identifies forty terms associated with knowledge and conceptual thinking. While the fourfold categorisation emerges inductively from Qur'ānic usage, the analysis is informed by established insights from linguistic and semantic theory.²⁵ These terms are treated as fundamental conceptual units that collectively reflect how the Qur'ān represents diverse dimensions of human psychocognitive processes and moral dispositions.

Positive Connotation: This category refers to terms that evoke favourable associations, commend virtuous qualities, and denote concepts regarded as inherently good and praiseworthy within the Islamic worldview. Such terms inspire hope, encourage moral excellence, describe divine perfection, and promise reward for obedience to God. They form the ethical and moral foundation of the Qur'ānic vision of human flourishing.

²⁴ See Pipin Armita, "Mapping the Contextual Meanings of the Qur'an Using Artificial Intelligence: A Data-Driven Tafsir Approach," *Al-Mashadir: Journal of Qur'anic Sciences and Tafsir* 1, no. 1 (2025): 11–23; Ali Albashir Mohammed Alhaj, "Translating Some Qur'anic Connotative Meanings into English"; Muhammad Erdy, "The Origins, Theories, and Linguistic Development of the Qur'an"; Wajdi et al., "Understanding the Qur'an Holistically" (2023); Abd al-Karim, *Qur'anic Terminology* (2017), 3, 4, 9, 10, 13.

²⁵ In addition to the above, see Şaban Çepik, "Positive, Neutral, and Negative Evaluation in Connotation," *IBSU Scientific Journal* 1, no. 1 (2006): 144–147.

Subjective Connotation: This category includes terms whose moral or theological significance varies according to context. Although their core meanings may remain constant, their evaluative force depends on their association with other terms, the intention behind their use, and their situational placement within the text. These terms may assume either positive or negative implications, with their connotation shaped by ethical orientation and contextual framing.

Negative Connotation: This category comprises terms that evoke unfavourable associations, describe morally blameworthy qualities, or refer to actions and states of mind condemned within the Islamic ethical framework. Such terms function as warnings, delineate prohibited conduct, highlight the consequences of disobedience, and underscore the importance of adherence to divine guidance.

Neutral Connotation: This category refers to terms that, in their ordinary usage, do not inherently carry strong positive or negative emotional valence. Their connotative force arises almost entirely from the context in which they appear, often to indicate the improper or ineffective use of a cognitive faculty. Although all Qur'ānic terms possess some theological significance by virtue of their revelatory context, certain terms function primarily as foundational conceptual vocabulary, acquiring ethical or evaluative meaning only through contextual association and textual positioning.

2.1. The Connotative Dimensions of Qur'ānic Thinking Terms

The table below presents a synoptic overview of the proposed analytical framework for examining fundamental Qur'ānic terms related to knowledge and thinking. It expands the linguistic, analytical, and contextual scope of key terms that articulate the spectrum of human cognitive processes and dispositions as portrayed in the Qur'ān.

Table 1: Connotative Dimensions of Qur’ānic Thinking Terms

Connotative Dimension	Description	Associated Terms	Analytical Purpose
Positive	Terms that inherently evoke favourable associations and describe admirable intellectual, moral, or divine qualities. They encourage virtue, wisdom, and reflective engagement and serve as foundational elements of Islamic ethical and epistemological thought.	<i>al-‘ilm, yatafakkarūn, ya‘qilūn, al-tadabbur, al-ḥikma, ulū al-albāb, al-fahm, al-nuhā, al-yaqīn</i>	To identify the core virtues underpinning intellectual, spiritual, and moral development in the Qur’ān.
Subjective	Terms whose evaluative meaning is context-dependent and may assume either positive or negative connotations depending on intention, usage,	<i>al-zann, al-muḥājja, al-īḥā’, al-jadal, al-sam‘, al-ḥiqh, al-ibṣār</i>	To demonstrate the Qur’ān’s nuanced and context-sensitive approach to human cognition and moral reasoning.

	and ethical orientation.		
Negative	Terms that evoke unfavourable associations and describe cognitive or moral states leading to misguidance, error, or spiritual harm. They function as warnings against intellectual negligence and ethical deviation.	<i>al-rayb, al-tahayyur, al-'amah, zuyyina, sawwalahu, hasiba</i>	To illustrate the Qur'ānic condemnation of intellectual and spiritual failures and their consequences.
Neutral	Terms that are not inherently positive or negative but acquire evaluative significance through contextual association, often highlighting the proper or improper use of human faculties.	<i>al-fu'ād, al-aḥlām, al-shu'ūr, al-ma'rifa, al-qalb</i>	To show how the Qur'ān employs human cognitive faculties as indicators of faith, awareness, and moral accountability.

2.2. Qur'ānic Fundamental Terms on Knowledge and Thinking

The table below presents a comprehensive overview of the identified Qur'ānic terms related to knowledge and thinking and their proposed classification within the analytical framework developed in this study.

Table 2: Qur'ānic Fundamental Terms on Knowledge and Thinking

Term (Arabic)	Denotative Meaning (English)	Connotative Category	Qur'anic Verse
<i>al-ilm</i>	Knowledge	Positive	al-Baqarah 2:120
<i>yatafakkarūn</i>	Reflecting/giving thought	Positive	al-Ra'd 13:3
<i>ya'qilūn</i>	Reasoning	Positive	al-Baqarah 2:164
<i>al-tadabbur</i>	Contemplation	Positive	Muhammad 47:24
<i>al-tadhakkur</i>	Remembrance	Positive	al-An'ām 6:126
<i>al-tawassum</i>	Discernment	Positive	al-Ḥijr 15:75
<i>al-muḥāwarah</i>	Dialogue/discussion	Positive	al-Mujādilah 58:1
<i>darasta</i>	Studying/learning	Positive	al-An'ām 6:105
<i>al-bāl</i>	Mind/inner state	Positive	Muhammad 47:2
<i>al-i'tibār</i>	Consideration/reflection	Positive	al-Nūr 24:44
<i>al-ḥikmah</i>	Wisdom	Positive	al-Baqarah 2:269

Term (Arabic)	Denotative Meaning (English)	Connotative Category	Qur'anic Verse
<i>ulū al-albāb</i>	People of understanding	Positive	al-Zumar 39:18
<i>al-naẓar</i>	Observation	Positive	al-Ghāshiyah: 88:17
<i>al-fahm</i>	Understanding	Positive	al-Anbiyā' 21:79
<i>dhī hijr</i>	Intellect/restraint	Positive	al-Fajr 89:5
<i>al-nuhā</i>	Intelligence	Positive	Ṭā Hā 20:54
<i>al-ra'y</i>	Judgement/opinion	Positive	Yūnus 10:78
<i>al-idrāk</i>	Perception	Positive	al-An'ām 6:103
<i>al-dhikr</i>	Remembrance	Positive	al-Qamar 54:17
<i>al-dirāyah</i>	Awareness / familiarity	Positive	al-An'ām 6:68
<i>al-yaqīn</i>	Certainty	Positive	al-Baqarah 2:4
<i>al-ẓann</i>	Assumption/conjecture	Subjective	al-Najm 53:28
<i>al-muḥājjah</i>	Argumentation	Subjective	al-Baqarah 2:258
<i>al-īhā'</i>	Inspiration	Subjective	al-Naḥl 16:68
<i>al-jadal</i>	Debate	Subjective	al-Kahf 18:56
<i>al-sam'</i>	Hearing	Subjective	al-Isrā' 17:36
<i>al-fiqh</i>	Comprehension	Subjective	al-Tawbah 9:122

Term (Arabic)	Denotative Meaning (English)	Connotative Category	Qur'anic Verse
<i>al-ibṣār</i>	Insight	Subjective	al-Ḥajj 22:46
<i>al-rayb</i>	Doubt	Negative	al-Baqarah 2:2
<i>al-taḥayyur</i>	Confusion	Negative	al-An'ām 6:71
<i>al-'amah</i>	Blind wandering	Negative	al-An'ām 6:110
<i>zuyyina</i>	Deceptive beautification	Negative	al-Naḥl 16:24
<i>sawwalahu</i>	Enticement	Negative	Yūsuf 12:18
<i>ḥasiba</i>	Misjudging	Negative	al-Kahf 18:47
<i>al-fu'ād</i>	Heart (inner faculty)	Neutral	al-Naḥl 16:78
<i>al-aḥlām</i>	Minds/reasoning	Neutral	Yūsuf 12:44
<i>al-shu'ūr</i>	Awareness	Neutral	al-Baqarah 2:9
<i>al-ma'rifah</i>	Knowledge (recognition)	Neutral	al-A'rāf 7:51
<i>al-qalb</i>	Heart	Neutral	al-Baqarah 2:7
<i>yastanbiṭūnah u</i>	To infer/derive	Positive	al-Nisā 4:83

In the subsequent sections, each of these terms is analysed comparatively alongside others within the same connotative category, with attention to their contextual usage, semantic nuance, and epistemological implications within the Qur'anic worldview.

2.3. An Analytical Exploration of Qur'ānic Thinking Terms

The analytical framework proposed in this study represents a distinctive contribution to the examination of the identified Qur'ānic terms. Most of the existing scholarship tends to examine these terms in isolation, without situating them within a comprehensive framework capable of capturing the full range of their connotative and contextual usage. In contrast, the present study adopts a systematic and integrative approach that enables a cohesive analysis of these terms and reveals their conceptual interconnectedness within the Qur'ānic discourse. It is structured around the four connotative categories—positive, subjective, negative and neutral—demonstrating how the proposed framework provides a comprehensive understanding and implications of the Qur'ān's intricate discourse on human cognition. More importantly, it provides a holistic perspective on the Qur'ān's comprehensive approach to human understanding, showing how spirituality, intellectual reflection, and moral responsibility are presented not as separate domains, but as an integrated ethical and cognitive system within the Islamic worldview.

2.4. The Positive Dimensions and Categories

The Qur'ān employs a range of positively connoted thinking terms not merely as descriptive vocabulary, but as a deliberate rhetorical and epistemological strategy that reflects a multi-layered Islamic approach to intellectual and spiritual development. However, this is not a simplistic, one-dimensional perspective; the sheer number of terms identified in this study suggests the high value that the Qur'ān places on intellectual pursuit. More specifically, it indicates a holistic ecosystem of interrelated cognitive activities that emphasise a multifaceted pursuit of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.

At the core of this are terms like *al-ilm* (knowledge) and *al-yaqīn* (certainty), the latter representing the culmination of profound understanding. A closer analysis reveals that these terms are not interchangeable synonyms but rather denote a progressive hierarchy of knowing. In classical Islamic epistemology, *al-yaqīn* unfolds through

three ascending stages: *'ilm al-yaqīn* (knowledge of certainty), *'ayn al-yaqīn* (eye of certainty), and *ḥaqq al-yaqīn* (truth of certainty). This epistemic structure elevates knowledge beyond a purely cognitive exercise, transforming it into a spiritually transformative state. From this perspective, sustained intellectual effort—through learning, reflection, and observation—leads to unshakable conviction, demonstrating a direct causal relationship between intellectual striving and spiritual perfection.

Furthermore, an exploration of the Qur'ānic discourse through its employment of relevant positive connotations of some terms reveals a deep interconnectedness among various cognitive activities. For instance, *tafakkur* (giving thought) denotes an active and sustained process of reflection, while *tadabbur* (contemplating) refers to a more focused and deliberate engagement with the Qur'ān and the signs (*āyāt*) of God. Continuous engagement in these practices transforms the individual into one of the *ulū al-albāb* (people of understanding)—not a static label, but a state of being achieved through persistent intellectual and spiritual labour. Such individuals integrate empirical observation with spiritual remembrance, embodying the Qur'ānic ideal of harmonised cognition. This understanding resonates with classical Sufi traditions, in which *tafakkur* is regarded as a disciplined act of worship that cultivates spiritually enlightened individuals—those capable of discerning wisdom in life's trials and maintaining firm intellectual grounding that is not easily swayed. This close relationship between intellectual action and moral-spiritual state directly challenges any notion of passive or unreflective faith.

In addition, the Qur'ān highlights the faculties and mechanisms through which this elevated understanding is attained. Positively connoted terms delineate the means, tools, and conditions of intellectual growth within a comprehensive epistemological framework. These include: (a) *al-tadhakkur* (remembrance), denoting disciplined intellectual and spiritual recall; (b) *al-tawassum* (discernment), the capacity to perceive deeper meanings beyond surface appearances; (c) *al-muḥāwarah* (discussion) and *darasta* (study), which underscore the social and formal dimensions of

knowledge acquisition. Cognitive readiness is also emphasised through terms such as *al-bāl* (inner mental state), *al-nuhā* (intelligence), and *dhī hijr* (intellect), all of which denote sound mental faculties as prerequisites for the intellectual journey. Likewise, *al-nazar* (observation) and *al-idrāk* (perception) function as sensory and cognitive tools for engaging with reality, while *al-fahm* (understanding) represents the cognitive outcome of this engagement. *Al-ra’y* (considered opinion) signifies the formation of reasoned judgement, distinguishing thoughtful deliberation from superficial impression.

Crucially, *al-dhikr* (remembrance), particularly remembrance of God, serves as the spiritual anchor that ensures intellectual pursuits remain aligned with divine purpose. Terms such as *al-dirāyah* (thorough familiarity) denote advanced awareness, while *istinbāt*—from which *yastanbiṭūnahu* is derived—represents the pinnacle of positive intellectual effort, describing the scholarly process of extracting meaning and legal judgement from revelation. This activity is not only legitimised but highly valued in Islamic thought, reflecting profound trust in human reason when guided by divine principles.

Collectively, these twenty-two positive terms (see Table 3 below) represent interconnected dimensions, stages, tools, and prerequisites that articulate the Qur’ān’s holistic vision of knowledge and thinking, integrating intellectual discipline, moral responsibility, and spiritual awareness.

Table 3: Positive Qur’ānic Thinking Terms and Their Contextual Usage

Term (Arabic)	Denotative Meaning	Contextual Use
<i>al-‘ilm</i>	Knowledge	God teaches Adam the names of all things, establishing knowledge as a divine gift (2:31).

<i>yatafakkārūn</i>	Giving thought	Encourages reflection on divine signs in creation (59:21).
<i>ya 'qilūn</i>	Reasoning	Exemplars benefit only those who use reason (29:43).
<i>al-tadabbur</i>	Contemplating	Urges believers to reflect deeply on the Qur'ān (47:24).
<i>al-tadhakkur</i>	Reminding	Examples are given so people may remember (14:25).
<i>al-tawassum</i>	Discernment	Signs exist for those who discern (15:75).
<i>al-muḥāwarah</i>	Discussion	Exemplifies meaningful dialogue (18:37).
<i>darasta</i>	Study	Refers to studying divine revelation (6:105).
<i>al-bāl</i>	Heart / Mind	God amends the inner state of believers (47:2).
<i>al-i 'tibār</i>	Consideration	Calls for reflective learning from events (59:2).
<i>al-ḥikmah</i>	Wisdom	A great good bestowed by God (2:269).
<i>ulū al-albāb</i>	People of Understanding	Those with sound judgement (2:179).
<i>al-naẓar</i>	Observation	Encourages observing creation (29:20).
<i>al-fahm</i>	Understanding	God grants understanding to Solomon (21:79).
<i>dhī ḥijr</i>	Intellect	Appeals to those of intellect (89:5).
<i>al-nuhā</i>	Intelligence	Lessons are for those of intelligence (20:54).
<i>al-ra 'y</i>	Opinion	Distinguishes reflective judgement (11:27).

<i>al-idrāk</i>	Perception	God perceives all vision (6:103)
<i>al-dhikr</i>	Remembrance	Central cognitive-spiritual act (35:3).
<i>al-dirāyah</i>	Through familiarity	Awareness of revelation (42:52).
<i>al-yaqīn</i>	Certainty	Certainty of the Hereafter (2:4).
<i>yastanbiṭūnahu</i>	To derive/infer	Scholarly extraction of meaning and rulings (4:83).

2.5. The Subjective Dimensions and Categories

Apart from the above positive terms, the Qur’ān also employs a distinct category of subjective thinking terms, which are neither inherently positive nor negative, but whose moral and epistemological value is determined by context, intention and mode of application. This category reflects one of the most significant features of the Qur’ān’s intellectual project: its insistence on moral responsibility in cognition.

A particularly illustrative example is the term *al-zann*. In its negative usage, *al-zann* denotes unfounded assumption or conjecture lacking evidence and is explicitly criticised as epistemically unreliable and spiritually misleading. In contrast, when employed positively, the same term signifies strong conviction or certainty—especially in relation to faith in God and the Hereafter. The distinction between these meanings is not merely linguistic but spiritual and moral. A believer’s *ḥusn al-zann* (positive expectancy grounded in faith) emerges from a sound spiritual state cultivated through remembrance of God (*dhikr*), itself regarded as an act of worship.

Similarly, the terms *al-muhājjah* and *al-jadal*, both associated with argumentation, demonstrate this duality. The Qur’ān condemns argumentation when it is undertaken without knowledge or for the sake of obstinate opposition to manifest truth. At the same time, it explicitly permits—and even encourages—argumentation conducted “in the best manner” (*bi-allatī hiya aḥsan*) when its purpose is to clarify truth

through sound evidence and ethical intent. This distinction establishes that the moral value of debate lies not in the act itself, but in its intellectual integrity, ethical orientation, and evidentiary grounding.

The term *al-īhā'* (inspiration) further illustrates the subjective dimension of Qur'ānic thinking terms. While it denotes divine inspiration that guides prophets toward truth, it is also used to describe the deceptive whisperings of devils, who inspire alluring but misleading speech. The Qur'ān thus differentiates between authentic inspiration and destructive suggestion based on source, purpose, and outcome, reinforcing the necessity of discernment in cognitive reception. Likewise, sensory and cognitive faculties such as *al-sam'* (hearing) and *al-ibṣār* (insight) are presented as morally contingent. Hearing divine guidance may result in obedience or rebellion, depending on the individual's disposition. Similarly, possessing physical sight does not guarantee spiritual insight; one may have eyes yet lack the capacity to truly perceive the signs of God. These examples demonstrate that the epistemic value of human faculties is contingent upon their spiritual orientation and ethical use.

Finally, *al-fiqh* (deep comprehension) exemplifies this subjectivity. While some individuals attain profound understanding, others—despite possessing the same faculties—fail to comprehend due to moral negligence or spiritual resistance. Through this framework, the Qur'ān advances a critical model of intellectual engagement in which intention and ethical orientation take precedence over mere cognitive activity.

Table 4: Subjective Qur'ānic Thinking Terms and Their Dual Connotations

Term (Arabic)	Negative Connotation	Supporting Verse	Positive Connotation	Supporting Verse
<i>al-zann</i>	Unfounded assumption	Indeed, assumption avails	Conviction	Those who are certain

		nothing against the truth. (10:36)		that they will meet their Lord. (2:46)
<i>al-muhājjah</i>)	Argument without knowledge	Why do you argue about that of which you have no knowledge? (3:66)	Argument grounded in knowledge	...those who have argued about that of which you have knowledge. (3:66)
<i>al-īhā</i>	Satanic inspiration	Devils inspiring one another with decorative speech. (6:112)	Divine inspiration	We inspired Joseph... (12:15)
<i>al-jadal</i>	Disputing clear truth	They dispute with you concerning the truth after it has become clear. (8:6)	Ethical debate	Do not argue with the People of the Book except in the best manner. (29:46)

<i>al-sam'</i>	Hearing with disobedience	We hear and disobey. (2:93)	Hearing with obedience	We hear and we obey. (2:285)
<i>al-fiqh</i>	Lack of comprehension	They have hearts with which they do not comprehend (7:179)	Deep understanding	For people who comprehend. (6:98)
<i>al-ibṣār</i>	Lack of insight	They have eyes with which they do not see. (7:179)	Spiritual insight	Then they remember and at once they have insight. (7:201)

This analysis demonstrates that subjective terms function as ethical tests within the Qur’ānic epistemology, revealing whether cognition is exercised in submission or defiance, humility or arrogance, truth-seeking or self-deception.

2.6. The Negative Dimensions and Categories

The Qur’ān employs a carefully structured set of negatively connoted thinking terms to depict the progressive consequences of intellectual and spiritual deviation. Rather than presenting misguidance as a sudden or arbitrary state, the Qur’ānic discourse portrays it as a gradual, step-by-step cognitive and moral decline, rooted in the misuse or neglect of human intellectual faculties.

This process typically begins with *al-rayb* (doubt), a state of inner hesitation and epistemic instability that obstructs an individual’s

willingness to accept truth. Unlike healthy inquiry, *al-rayb* reflects a paralysing uncertainty that weakens conviction and disrupts moral resolve. When such doubt persists, it develops into a condition of intellectual and spiritual disorientation, expressed through terms such as *al-tahayyur* (confusion) and *al-‘amah* (wandering blindly). These terms signify a deeper stage of misguidance in which individuals lose clarity of judgement and become incapable of distinguishing truth from falsehood. The Qur’ān associates this state with a hardened disposition in which cognitive faculties remain intact in form but are rendered ineffective in function.

The primary mechanism driving this deterioration is articulated through the verbs *zuyyina* and *sawwalahu*. The verb *zuyyina* literally means “to make something appear attractive”. Although it is occasionally used positively to describe God’s adornment of creation, it is predominantly employed to characterise Satanic deception—specifically, the act of making falsehood and moral corruption appear appealing. In a related manner, *sawwalahu* refers to the process of enticement or self-deception, often attributed to Satan or the lower self (*nafs*), whereby wrongful actions are rationalised and gradually normalised.

This cumulative process culminates in the state described by *ḥasiba* (misjudging or falsely assuming), in which the misguided individual, having been thoroughly deceived, sincerely believes that their actions are righteous and productive, despite their objective moral failure. The Qur’ān strikingly describes such individuals as those “whose efforts are lost in worldly life while they think that they are doing good work” (18:104). This represents the most perilous stage of misguidance, as the capacity for self-correction is undermined by false moral self-assurance. An ironic contrast is evident between the divine name *al-Ḥasīb* (the Reckoner, the One who gives due account) and the human condition of *ḥasiba*, which reflects an ego-driven miscalculation of one’s moral standing.

Taken together, these negative terms outline a coherent Qur’ānic psychology of misguidance, illustrating how cognitive

deviation progresses from doubt to confusion, from deception to self-delusion, and ultimately to spiritual ruin.

Table 5: Negative Qur’ānic Thinking Terms and the Stages of Misguidance

Term (Arabic)	English Meaning	Role in the Process of Misguidance	Key Verse
<i>al-rayb</i>	Doubt	The initial state of hesitation and uncertainty that prevents embracing truth.	...whose hearts have doubted, and so in their doubt they waver. (9:45)
<i>al-tahayyur</i>	Confusion	The state of intellectual bewilderment caused by the influence of devils.	...like one whom devils have enticed upon the earth, confused. (6:71)
<i>al ‘amah</i>	Wander blindly	A state of spiritual blindness and transgression, unable to see the truth.	... We leave them in their transgression, wandering blindly. (6:110)
<i>zuyyina</i>	Misconceiving	The deceptive act of making evil appear attractive, often attributed to Satan.	Satan made attractive to them what they were doing. (29:38)
<i>sawwalahu</i>	Enticement	The act of enticing or tempting to do	Satan enticed them and prolonged hope

		wrong, leading astray.	for them. (47:25)
<i>ḥasiba</i>	Misperceiving	The final state where one believes their misguided efforts are righteous.	...they think that they are doing good work. (18:104)

This category demonstrates that, within the Qur’ānic epistemological framework, intellectual failure is fundamentally a moral failure. Misguidance arises not from a lack of cognitive capacity, but from the ethical misuse of intellectual faculties. The negative thinking terms thus serve as warnings against complacency, self-deception, and the erosion of moral accountability.

2.7. The Neutral Dimensions and Categories

The Qur’ān’s use of fundamentally neutral cognitive terms constitutes a powerful rhetorical and epistemological strategy for highlighting human moral responsibility. These terms denote God-given faculties that are intrinsically neither virtuous nor blameworthy; rather, their ethical significance emerges from how they are employed. When applied to unbelievers, such terms often acquire a paradoxically negative connotation, not because of any inherent deficiency in human capacity, but because of a deliberate failure to use these faculties in accordance with truth and guidance. In this sense, the Qur’ānic critique targets moral and intellectual neglect, not innate incapacity.

This critique is especially evident in the Qur’ān’s nuanced treatment of the heart and mind. Two key terms are *al-qalb* and *al-fu’ād*, both commonly translated as “heart” but carrying distinct conceptual implications. In Islamic theology, the heart is not merely a physical organ; it is the centre of understanding, moral discernment, and faith. The term *al-qalb* functions as the general designation for the heart and is associated with faith (*īmān*), receptivity, and moral

orientation. Its etymological sense of “turning” or “changing” reflects the heart’s susceptibility to guidance or misguidance.

The Qur’ān repeatedly states that unbelievers possess hearts, yet fail to understand with them (7:179; 22:46). This condition is described metaphorically as the heart being “sealed”, indicating not a biological defect but a self-inflicted spiritual and intellectual paralysis resulting from persistent rejection of truth (2:10; 2:88; 2:93). The Qur’ānic assertion that God “turns their hearts and eyes away” (6:110) must therefore be understood as a consequence of prior moral choice rather than arbitrary deprivation. Disbelief, in this framework, is portrayed as the outcome of wilful cognitive negligence.

By contrast, *al-fu’ād* refers to the heart in a state of intense emotional agitation and is derived from a root associated with “burning” or “kindling”. The Qur’ān employs this term to emphasise moral accountability, declaring that hearing, sight, and the *fu’ād* will all be questioned (17:36). This verse establishes a profound ethical principle: human beings are accountable not only for rational decisions, but also for their emotional dispositions, insofar as these shape perception, judgement, and openness to truth.

Other neutral terms further reinforce this critique. The term *al-aḥlām* (minds) is used rhetorically to question whether the intellect of unbelievers actually compels them toward falsehood (52:32), suggesting a misuse of reasoning rather than its absence. Similarly, *al-shu’ūr* (perception or awareness) and *al-ma’rifa* (recognitive knowledge) are used to expose a critical paradox: despite perceiving or recognising the truth, individuals may still reject it. The Qur’ān explicitly condemns this state, noting that when truth came to them and they recognised it, they nevertheless disbelieved (2:89).

This pattern reveals a consistent Qur’ānic epistemology in which disbelief is framed as an intellectual and moral failure, not a cognitive limitation. Neutral faculties become instruments of either guidance or misguidance depending on human will and ethical orientation. The Qur’ān thus presents unbelief as a conscious refusal to actualise one’s epistemic potential rather than a lack of the necessary faculties.

Table 6: Neutral Qur'ānic Thinking Terms and Their Contextual Functions

Term (Arabic)	Denotative Meaning	Contextual Use	Key Verse
<i>al-fu'ād</i>	Heart (emotional–cognitive faculty)	Accountable inner faculty alongside hearing and sight	Indeed, the hearing, the sight and the heart ... will be questioned. (17:36)
<i>al-aḥlām</i>	Minds	Used rhetorically to criticise corrupted reasoning.	Or do their minds command them to [say] this, or are they a transgressing people?" (52:32)
<i>al-shu'ūr</i>	Perception/awareness	Failure to perceive one's own self-deception.	They seek to deceive Allah and the believers, yet they only deceive themselves, but they fail to perceive it. (2:9)
<i>al-ma'rifa</i>	Recognitive knowledge	Knowing the truth yet rejecting it	But when there came to them that

			which they recognised, they disbelieved in it? (2:89)
<i>al-qalb</i>	Heart (intellectual–moral centre)	Possession of the faculty without its proper use	They have hearts with which they do not understand... (7:179) ...they not travelled through the earth and have hearts by which to reason and ears by which to hear? (22:46)

It is important to acknowledge that the categorisation of Qur’ānic thinking and knowledge terms is informed by predominant usage and contextual patterns, rather than rigid semantic boundaries. Consequently, some terms classified as positive may, in certain contexts, acquire negative connotations, and vice versa. This does not undermine their dominant meaning but rather highlights the dynamic interplay between language and context in the Qur’ān.

For example, *al-‘ilm* (knowledge), while predominantly positive, may evoke negative implications when associated with misguidance (2:102), deception (2:101), denial (2:144; 2:146), or when divorced from practice and ethical commitment (3:71; 3:78). Similarly, terms that are primarily negative—such as *zuyyina*—may

assume a positive connotation in rare contexts, as when God adorns faith in the hearts of believers (49:7).

These shifts underscore a central methodological insight of this study: connotative meaning in the Qur'ān is inseparable from context²⁶ The ethical and epistemological force of a term emerges not only from its lexical root, but from its relational placement within the discourse.²⁷ This reinforces the necessity of a contextual and connotative analytical framework for understanding the Qur'ān's holistic approach to knowledge, thinking, and moral responsibility.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE QUR'ĀNIC FUNDAMENTAL TERMS

The Qur'ān's employment of a wide range of thinking-related terms constitutes a deliberate epistemological strategy aimed at integrating reflection into the very act of recitation and engagement with its verses. Rather than encouraging passive reception, the Qur'ānic discourse seeks to cultivate active cognition, reshape mental attitudes, and foster intellectual openness. Through this process, readers are guided towards deeper appreciation, conscious recognition, and informed acceptance of truth. Thinking, therefore, is not peripheral to the Qur'ānic message but is embedded at the core of its pedagogical and transformative intent.

3.1. How Does the Qur'ān Promote Thinking?

The Qur'ān promotes the use of thinking-related faculties through multiple, interrelated strategies designed to stimulate intellectual engagement, ethical reflection, and the pursuit of wisdom. These strategies collectively reinforce the Qur'ānic vision of a reflective and morally responsible human being.

²⁶ See Stefano Predelli, *Contexts: Meaning, Truth, and the Use of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

²⁷ Deborah Schiffrin, "Discourse Markers."

A. Commanding All Mankind to Use Their Mind Capabilities

The Qur'ān explicitly commands human beings to activate their cognitive capacities and engage critically with revelation. It challenges readers to examine the coherence, consistency, and truth-claims of the Qur'ān itself:

Do they not reflect upon the Qur'ān? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found in it many inconsistencies. (4:82)

This verse exemplifies the Qur'ānic endorsement of reflective inquiry, presenting rational examination as a legitimate and necessary pathway to conviction and faith.

B. Praising Those Who Reflect, Contemplate, and Ponder

In addition to issuing commands, the Qur'ān repeatedly praises individuals who engage in deep reflection and contemplation, particularly in relation to the signs of God in creation:

Those who remember God while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, saying: *'Our Lord, You have not created this in vain. Glory be to You; so protect us from the punishment of the Fire.'* (3:191)

Here, intellectual reflection is presented as inseparable from spiritual remembrance, illustrating the Qur'ānic ideal of integrated cognition that unites reason, devotion, and ethical awareness.

C. Condemning the Neglect or Suppression of Intellectual Faculties

Conversely, the Qur'ān strongly condemns those who deliberately refuse to engage their intellectual faculties or who seek to suppress reflection:

Those who disbelieve say: 'Do not listen to this Qur'ān, and speak noisily over it, so that you may prevail. (41:26)

This verse criticises wilful intellectual obstruction and highlights the moral culpability associated with rejecting thoughtful engagement. The failure to think is thus portrayed not as a neutral omission, but as an ethically charged act of resistance to truth.

D. Employing Rhetorical Questioning to Stimulate Thought

The Qur'ān frequently utilises rhetorical questioning as a powerful pedagogical tool to provoke observation, reflection, and intellectual awakening:

Do you not see that God sends down water from the sky, and then the earth becomes green? Truly God is Subtle, All-Aware. (22:63)

Such questions are not posed to solicit information, but to activate the reader's cognitive faculties and encourage contemplation of natural phenomena as signs (*āyāt*) pointing towards divine wisdom.

E. Cultivating a Reflective and Analytical Mode of Thinking

Beyond specific commands and rhetorical devices, the Qur'ān functions as a comprehensive tool for reflective thinking. It consistently invites believers to engage deeply with its verses, evaluate arguments, and observe empirical evidence within the universe. This

method nurtures critical discernment, enabling individuals to distinguish truth from falsehood and to make ethically informed decisions.

Moreover, the Qur'ān fosters an enduring culture of inquiry and lifelong learning. By encouraging questioning, reflection, and self-examination, it promotes intellectual humility and moral accountability. This introspective orientation urges individuals to scrutinise their beliefs, intentions, and actions, aligning their lives more closely with divine guidance and striving towards continuous personal and ethical refinement.

3.2. Objectives of Employing Multiple Thinking Terms in the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān's employment of multiple thinking-related terms serves a multifaceted epistemological and pedagogical objective, aimed at embedding reflective thought into the very act of reciting, engaging with, and internalising its verses. This linguistic strategy does not merely convey information; rather, it seeks to cultivate intellectual discipline, reshape mental attitudes, and foster openness to truth. The use of diverse thinking terms fulfils several interrelated purposes, as outlined below.

A. Infusing Thinking into the Process of Qur'ānic Recitation

By employing a wide range of terms associated with thinking and cognition, the Qur'ān encourages a dynamic and reflective mode of engagement with its text. Terms such as *yatafakkarūn* (to reflect), *ya'qilūn* (to reason), *al-tadabbur* (deep contemplation), and *al-tadhakkur* (remembrance) describe distinct yet complementary modes of intellectual activity. Each term invites the reader to approach the Qur'ānic discourse from a particular cognitive orientation, thereby fostering a comprehensive and layered understanding of its message.

The frequent repetition of these terms across diverse contexts reinforces their epistemic significance and promotes the habitual

practice of reflection. Through such repetition, the Qur'ān gradually embeds reflective thinking into the reader's cognitive framework, transforming recitation from a ritual act into an intellectually and spiritually engaging process.

B. Cultivating New Mental Attitudes

The Qur'ān's varied thinking terminology also plays a central role in cultivating new mental attitudes oriented towards awareness, insight, and wisdom. For example, terms such as *al-tawassum* (discernment) and *al-naẓar* (careful observation) nurture curiosity and attentiveness, encouraging individuals to observe, question, and reflect upon the world around them.

Similarly, terms such as *al-ḥikmah* (wisdom) and *ulū al-albāb* (people of understanding) emphasise the pursuit of profound insight rather than superficial knowledge, fostering an appreciation for intellectual depth and moral clarity. In addition, terms such as *al-dhikr* (remembrance) and *al-tadhakkur* reinforce mindfulness and spiritual awareness, ensuring that intellectual activity remains anchored in divine guidance and ethical consciousness.

C. Transforming Mindsets and Fostering Open-Mindedness

A further objective of employing multiple thinking terms is to transform entrenched mindsets and promote intellectual openness. Terms such as *al-muḥāwarah* (dialogue) and *al-ra'y* (considered opinion) encourage critical engagement, reasoned discussion, and the evaluation of differing perspectives. This linguistic emphasis supports the formation of well-considered judgments rather than unreflective conformity.

Likewise, terms such as *al-'ilm* (knowledge), *al-fahm* (understanding), and *al-nuhā* (intelligence) underscore the importance of continuous intellectual development and the expansion of human understanding. In parallel, terms such as *al-i'tibār* (taking lesson) and *al-yaqīn* (certainty) encourage ethical reflection and moral

responsibility, directing individuals towards integrity in belief and action.

Importantly, the Qur'ān's use of these terms also cultivates intellectual humility. While encouraging rigorous thinking, terms such as *al-'ilm* and *al-ḥikmah* simultaneously remind individuals of the limits of human knowledge, fostering openness to learning and receptivity to truth. This balance between confidence and humility is central to the Qur'ānic intellectual ethos.

Overall, the Qur'ān's rich and varied discourse on thinking reflects a profound commitment to intellectual inquiry and reflective engagement. The extensive use of diverse thinking terms encourages a multifaceted approach to understanding revelation, nurturing a culture of critical reflection, wisdom, and moral discernment.

It has been observed by Western sociologists that the frequency with which a culture employs terms related to a particular concept often reflects the value it assigns to that concept. This observation is particularly apt in relation to the Qur'ān: the abundance and diversity of thinking-related terminology unmistakably signal the high value placed on reflection, reasoning, and intellectual pursuit within the Islamic worldview. Through this linguistic richness, the Qur'ān positions thinking not as an optional activity, but as an essential pathway to faith, ethical responsibility, and human flourishing.

4. CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that the Qur'ān's discourse on knowledge is not a simplistic aggregation of synonymous terms, but rather a dynamic and interconnected system of thought. A comprehensive analysis of Qur'ānic thinking terms and their connotative dimensions reveals several profound implications for understanding the Islamic intellectual tradition. Most notably, the presence of numerous terms relating to thinking, reflection, and knowledge constitutes a powerful indication of the high value accorded to intellectual engagement within Islamic culture.

This finding aligns with sociological observations that the

frequency and diversity of terms associated with a concept within a culture's lexicon often reflect the significance that culture assigns to it. In this regard, the Qur'ān's abundant use of thinking-related terminology actively cultivates a culture that values creativity, innovation, reflection, and continuous learning. It thus offers a compelling counter-narrative to the widespread misconception that Islam is inherently opposed to intellectual inquiry or critical reasoning.

More significantly, the proposed analytical framework offers a robust methodological tool for scholarly investigation. By systematically analysing the connotative meanings of fundamental Qur'ānic terms, the study demonstrates that the Qur'ān promotes a holistic approach to reasoning that integrates intellectual, ethical, and spiritual dimensions of human life. The analysis of subjective terms, for example, foregrounds the ethical centrality of intention and context, while the conceptual model of intellectual deviation articulated through negatively connoted terms provides a sophisticated psychological and theological critique of spiritual and moral decline. Furthermore, the Qur'ān's use of ostensibly neutral terms to critique moral and intellectual negligence underscores the principle of personal responsibility, which lies at the heart of the Qur'ānic worldview.

This study is therefore not merely an academic exercise, but a substantive contribution that deepens contemporary understanding of the Qur'ān and addresses persistent misrepresentations of Islamic thought. Its findings reaffirm the timeless relevance of Qur'ānic guidance and highlight the central role of intellectual pursuit in Islam's civilisational vision. By introducing a replicable and systematic analytical framework, the paper moves the field beyond descriptive glossaries of Qur'ānic terminology towards a more nuanced, conceptually rigorous, and interpretively rich engagement with meaning and implication.

Future research may build upon this framework to explore other categories of fundamental Qur'ānic terms, including those related to ethics, civilisation, history, and human agency. In particular, the framework offers promising potential for systematic studies of Qur'ānic concepts concerning human civilisations and historical

development, thereby extending its applicability across broader domains of Islamic thought.



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FROM VIRTUOUS CITY TO VIRTUOUS MARKETS: AL- FĀRĀBĪ'S LEGACY IN ISLAMIC ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

Burhan Uluyol¹

ABSTRACT

This study examines al-Fārābī's ethical and political philosophy and its relevance to contemporary Islamic economics and finance. It argues that Islamic finance must move beyond a narrow focus on Sharī'ah-compliant contractual forms and be grounded instead in a comprehensive ethical framework that promotes justice, virtue, and collective well-being. Drawing upon al-Fārābī's concept of the virtuous city (*al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*), the study highlights the centrality of moral education and the role of the state in cultivating ethical economic behaviour. A comparative analysis with modern capitalist and neoliberal paradigms reveals fundamental differences: whereas the latter prioritise market efficiency and profit maximisation, al-Fārābī's framework foregrounds spiritual development, distributive justice, and morally guided governance. The study also examines contemporary challenges in Islamic finance—particularly the predominance of debt-based instruments—and argues that these

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shortcomings may be addressed through a renewed emphasis on risk-sharing and moral values. It concludes that integrating al-Fārābī's ethical-political insights can contribute to the development of a more just, value-oriented Islamic financial system and offer a meaningful alternative to prevailing economic paradigms.

KEYWORDS: al-Fārābī, Ethical theory, Political philosophy, Islamic economics, Islamic finance

1. INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Golden Age, spanning approximately from the eighth to the fourteenth centuries, represents a remarkable period of intellectual, scientific, and cultural flourishing in the Muslim world. Scholars and polymaths from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds contributed to the advancement of human knowledge during this era. Fields such as theology, philosophy, jurisprudence, metaphysics, natural sciences, astronomy, medicine, mathematics, and engineering witnessed transformative developments, many of which later shaped both Islamic and Western intellectual traditions.²

Among the most influential thinkers of this period was Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (c. 870–950), a philosopher, logician, scientist, and musician whose works exerted a profound and lasting influence on Islamic philosophy and beyond. Known in the Latin West as *Alpharabius*, he is widely recognised as *the Second Teacher* (*al-Mu'allim al-Thānī*), a title reflecting his systematic and creative synthesis of Greek philosophy—particularly the works of Plato and Aristotle—within an Islamic intellectual framework. Al-Fārābī was the first Muslim philosopher to construct a comprehensive

² Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

philosophical system encompassing metaphysics, ethics, political theory, cosmology, and logic.³

His contributions to logic earned him recognition as the foremost logician of the early Islamic tradition, extending Aristotelian logic while offering original insights that influenced subsequent Muslim and European philosophers.⁴ Beyond philosophy, al-Fārābī was also a distinguished scientist and an accomplished musician, authoring the seminal *Kitāb al-Mūsīqā al-Kabīr* (*The Great Book of Music*), which explores the mathematical and psychological foundations of music.⁵ Nevertheless, it is al-Fārābī's ethical and political philosophy—most notably his conception of the virtuous city (al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah)—that constitutes the primary focus of this study.

Al-Fārābī's political philosophy represents a distinctive synthesis of Greek metaphysical ideals and Islamic ethical principles. He envisions the virtuous city as being governed by a philosopher-ruler guided by reason and wisdom, in which citizens cooperate to achieve *sa'ādah* (supreme happiness). For al-Fārābī, *sa'ādah* entails not only material prosperity but also moral perfection, intellectual realisation, and communal harmony.⁶ His reflections on governance, justice, and the moral responsibilities of leadership provide enduring normative insights for contemporary Muslim societies seeking ethically grounded models of social and economic organisation. In particular, his framework offers a compelling foundation for Islamic economics and finance, which aspire to integrate moral values, social justice, and economic functionality.

³ Richard Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State: A Revised Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

⁴ Deborah Black, *Logic and Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics in Medieval Arabic Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

⁵ Henry George Farmer, *Historical Facts for the Arabian Musical Influence*. (London: Luzac and Co., 1930).

⁶ Al-Farabi, *Al-Madina al-Fadila* [The Virtuous City], trans. Richard Walzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985).

This article aims to introduce and discuss the philosophical and political thought of al-Fārābī, especially concerning Islamic finance and economics. The article is structured as follows: Section 2 gives a concise overview of al-Fārābī’s life and intellectual contribution after this section, while Section 3 provides the analytical/theoretical framework: from sa‘āda to virtuous markets. And it also juxtaposes al-Fārābī’s ideal of a virtuous economic order against capitalist and neoliberal paradigms, providing a critical review of their ethical and structural differences. Section 4 discusses the practical relevance of his ethical-political framework for Islamic economics and finance. Finally, Section 5 presents the concluding remarks of the article, summarising the findings and pointing out the limitations of this study.

1.1. Intellectual Background and Ethical Foundations of Al-Farabi

Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (870–950 CE), known in the Latin West as *Alpharabius* and revered as the “Second Teacher” (*al-Mu‘allim al-Thānī*) after Aristotle, stands among the most influential thinkers of the Islamic Golden Age. Born in Farab in Transoxiana—most likely of Turkic origin—al-Fārābī played a pivotal role in integrating Greek philosophy, particularly the thought of Plato and Aristotle, into the Islamic intellectual tradition. His work in metaphysics, ethics, and logic laid the foundations of an Islamic philosophical worldview centred on moral perfection and the common good.

Although al-Fārābī wrote extensively on language, logic, and the natural sciences, these disciplines were not ends in themselves. Rather, they served a higher purpose: the cultivation of the intellect as a prerequisite for moral excellence and sound political order. This orientation is most clearly reflected in his *Iḥṣā’ al-‘Ulūm* (*Enumeration of the Sciences*), where he presents a hierarchical

classification of human knowledge that mirrors the gradual ascent of the human soul towards wisdom.⁷

In this work, al-Fārābī begins with the linguistic sciences, which he divides into seven distinct branches: (1) the science of single words, (2) the science of compound expressions, (3) the rules governing single words, (4) the rules governing compound expressions, (5) the science of writing, (6) the science of speech and expression, and (7) prosody or the art of metre.⁸ He concludes his classification with two central Islamic sciences: jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalām*). Jurisprudence, for al-Fārābī, is the science through which one infers legal rulings from the explicit statements of the Lawgiver in cases where no direct textual ruling exists.⁹ Theology, by contrast, concerns the affirmation of revealed beliefs and practices and the refutation of opposing doctrines. Significantly, both disciplines consist of two interrelated dimensions: belief and action.

Logic occupies a central place in al-Fārābī's system, not merely as a technical instrument but as the gateway to sound reasoning, moral judgement, and just governance. His expanded conception of the Aristotelian *Organon*—which includes rhetoric and poetics—reflects his conviction that knowledge worthy of pursuit must cultivate not only demonstrative certainty but also moral perception and civic responsibility. For al-Fārābī, logic equips individuals and communities with the intellectual tools necessary to guide a virtuous social order.¹⁰

While deeply rooted in Aristotelian logic, al-Fārābī's approach incorporates several non-Aristotelian elements. He engaged with issues such as future contingents, the number and relations of logical categories, the relationship between grammar and logic, and alternative forms of inference. He divided logic into two broad domains—concept formation (*taṣawwur*) and assent or proof (*taṣdīq*)—and, following Arabic and Syriac traditions, recognised

⁷ Al-Farabi, *Enumeration of the Sciences*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 3–5.

⁸ Fakhry, *Al-Farabi*, 17–21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17–21.

¹⁰ Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*.

eight divisions of the *Organon*. In addition to Aristotle’s original components, al-Fārābī explicitly included rhetoric and poetics as legitimate branches of logic, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The Eight Parts of the Organon According to al-Fārābī

Division	Explanations
Categories	Examines single terms and their rules
Interpretation	Analyses propositions and compound expressions
Prior analytics	Identifies the rules of syllogistic reasoning
Posterior analytics	Examines demonstrative proofs
Dialectic	Addresses dialectical arguments
Sophistic	Deals with fallacious reasoning
Rhetoric	Examines persuasive discourse
Poetic	Analyses imaginative and poetic discourse

Source: Fakhry (2002), 41-42.

These divisions correspond both to different modes of expression—internal, external, or combined—and to the five modes of reasoning (*qiyās*): demonstrative, dialectical, sophistical, rhetorical, and poetic. Mathematics follows logic in al-Fārābī’s hierarchy of sciences, and he made notable contributions across seven mathematical disciplines: arithmetic, geometry, optics, astronomy, music, the science of weights, and mechanics. Each of these sciences, he argued, contains both theoretical and practical dimensions, linking abstract knowledge with concrete application.¹¹

Al-Fārābī’s ethical writings transcend the elitist tendencies of certain strands of Greek philosophy. In *Taḥṣīl al-Sa’ādah* (*The Attainment of Happiness*), he insists that intellectual realisation is

¹¹ Fakhry, *Al-Farabi*, 42.

inseparable from moral and civic excellence. He identifies four types of virtue—theoretical, reflective, ethical, and political—and maintains that all human beings possess the innate capacity to develop these virtues through education and moral training.¹² This universalist conception of virtue underpins his political ideal of a community oriented towards *sa'ādah* (true happiness), understood as moral perfection, intellectual fulfilment, and social harmony.

This vision finds its fullest expression in *Ārā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah* (The Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City), where al-Fārābī outlines a political order governed by a philosopher-ruler who embodies wisdom, justice, and moral integrity. In this framework, economic activity, governance, and education are inherently value-laden; they are moral instruments directed towards human perfection rather than neutral mechanisms for material gain. The virtuous ruler functions not only as a lawgiver but also as a moral educator, cultivating justice (*'adl*) and the common good (*maṣlaḥah*).¹³

In contrast to Plato and Aristotle, who limited the cultivation of virtue to certain social classes,¹⁴ al-Fārābī rejects the notion that virtue is restricted by birth, wealth, or status. He affirms the essential equality of all human beings and argues that happiness arises from the proper development of bodily faculties, emotional dispositions, and rational capacities. At the core of his philosophy lies a triadic relationship between knowledge, wisdom, and justice: knowledge generates wisdom; wisdom produces virtue; and virtue culminates in social justice.¹⁵¹⁶

¹² Al-Farabi, *Attainment of Happiness*, 12–16.

¹³ Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958).

¹⁴ H. Fikret, and J. Amet, trans. *The Virtuous City* (Ürümqi: Xinjiang People's Health Publication House, 2006). (In Uyghur.)

¹⁵ Fakhry, *Al-Farabi*, 92–93.

¹⁶ Mehmet Asutay, “A Political Economy Approach to Islamic Economics: Systemic Understanding for an Alternative Economic System,” *Kyoto Bulletin of Islamic Area Studies* 14 (2021): 17–39.

This ethical hierarchy provides a powerful normative foundation for contemporary Islamic economics and finance. For al-Fārābī, economic behaviour—like political governance—must be oriented towards moral perfection and collective well-being rather than mere wealth accumulation. By integrating intellectual discipline, ethical virtue, and social responsibility, his vision anticipates a virtue-based political economy in which the pursuit of *sa'ādah* guides individual conduct and institutional design alike. In this sense, al-Fārābī's synthesis of reason and morality offers enduring insights for re-imagining Islamic finance as an ethically grounded system committed to justice, balance, and human flourishing.¹⁷

2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: FROM SA'ĀDA TO VIRTUOUS MARKETS

Although al-Fārābī's ethical and political works were conceived within the intellectual milieu of classical Islamic philosophy, their internal logic offers a compelling normative framework for contemporary Islamic economics and finance. Central to his thought is the pursuit of *sa'āda* (true happiness), which is embedded within a moral system that integrates intellectual perfection with ethical virtue. For al-Fārābī, happiness is not merely a private or spiritual attainment, but a collective condition realised through just institutions, sound governance, and morally guided social interaction.¹⁸

Within this framework, the notion of a “virtuous market” may be understood as a natural extension of the virtuous city (*al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*). Just as the virtuous city emerges from the alignment of political authority, moral education, and social cooperation toward the common good, a virtuous economic order arises when financial institutions, market mechanisms, and regulatory structures are governed by the same ethical principles. In this sense, markets are not

¹⁷ Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Ethics and Finance in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies (IAIS) Malaysia, 2019).

¹⁸ Al-Farabi, *Attainment of Happiness*, 12–16.

value-neutral spaces driven solely by efficiency or profit maximisation; rather, they are moral domains whose legitimacy depends on their contribution to justice, social balance, and human flourishing.

Accordingly, translating al-Fārābī's political ethics into the domain of Islamic economics entails reorienting financial practices toward the higher objectives of moral cultivation and collective well-being. When economic activity is structured to serve *sa'āda*, markets become instruments of virtue rather than mere arenas of exchange, reflecting the ethical coherence that underpins al-Fārābī's vision of a well-ordered society.

3. THE ETHICAL CORE: FROM VIRTUE TO JUSTICE

The harmonious integration of knowledge, virtue (*faḍīlah*), and justice (*'adl*) constitutes the ethical core of al-Fārābī's philosophy, through which human flourishing and societal well-being are nurtured. These three concepts jointly affirm that neither economic nor political institutions can be ethically neutral. Rather, they must be guided by an ethical teleology oriented toward the moral perfection of both individuals and communities.¹⁹ For al-Fārābī, social order is meaningful only insofar as it facilitates the cultivation of virtue and the realisation of justice within a coherent moral framework.

In this respect, *sa'āda* in al-Fārābī's philosophical system is conceptually analogous to *falāḥ* in Islamic economic thought, both denoting holistic well-being and ultimate human success. However, *faḍīlah* (moral excellence) and *'adl* (justice) function as the operative means through which such well-being is attained. These virtues are not abstract ideals but are governed by moral values embedded within the *maqāṣid al-shari'ah* (the objectives of Islamic law), which aim to preserve faith, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth.²⁰ Within this ethical

¹⁹ M. Umer Chapra, *The Islamic Vision of Development in the Light of Maqasid al-Shariah* (Jeddah: Islamic Research and Training Institute, 2018).

²⁰ Hasan Zubair, "Maqasid al-Shari'ah and the Framework of Human Development," *Islamic Economic Studies* 24, no. 2 (2016): 1–27.

architecture, justice is both a moral virtue and a structural principle that regulates social, political, and economic relations.

3.1. The Role of the State and the Moral Economy

In al-Fārābī's political philosophy, the state is not merely a regulatory authority but a moral educator tasked with cultivating virtuous dispositions among its citizens. The ruler, as the embodiment of wisdom and moral insight, is responsible for ensuring distributive justice, equity, and social cooperation. This vision closely resonates with contemporary notions of the moral economy articulated by Islamic economists such as Asutay and Kamali, who emphasise that ethical governance and social justice must form the foundation of economic development and financial intermediation.²¹²²

From an al-Fārābīan perspective, financial markets should therefore function as instruments that facilitate human perfection rather than mechanisms for unchecked material accumulation. Economic activity is evaluated not solely by efficiency or profitability but by its contribution to moral development and social harmony. Ethical principles such as trust (*amānah*), transparency (*bayān*), and social responsibility (*mas'ūliyyah ijtimā'īyyah*) should be reflected in financial contracts, institutional structures, and public policies.

When these virtues are actively cultivated, markets are transformed from arenas of pure competition into spaces of moral cooperation. Such an ethical orientation lays the foundation for what may be described as *virtuous markets*—economic systems that align material exchange with justice, responsibility, and the collective pursuit of human flourishing.

3.2. Conceptual Model: al-Fārābī's Ethical Framework for Islamic Finance

²¹ Asutay, "Political Economy Approach to Islamic Economics," 21.

²² Kamali, *Ethics and Finance in Islam*, 73.

Table 2 synthesises al-Fārābī’s ethical categories with corresponding principles in Islamic economics and outlines their operational implications for Islamic finance and governance. This conceptual model situates Islamic finance within a holistic ethical framework that transcends mere formal compliance with legal contracts. Rather than reducing Sharī’ah compliance to technical conformity, it reorients finance as a moral instrument for cultivating ethical agency, distributive justice, and collective welfare.²³

By integrating classical Islamic moral philosophy with contemporary Islamic economic principles, the model highlights how financial institutions, markets, and governance structures can be aligned with the higher objectives of Islam. In doing so, it transforms finance from a value-neutral mechanism into a purposeful system that contributes to human perfection (*sa’āda*), social harmony, and sustainable economic justice.

Table 2: al-Fārābī’s Ethical Categories and Their Parallels in Islamic

Ethical Dimension	Al-Farabi’s Concept	Parallel in Islamic Economics	Implications for Islamic Finance and Governance
Ultimate Purpose	<i>Sa’āda</i> (true happiness / human perfection)	<i>Falāḥ</i> and <i>maqāṣid al-sharī’ah</i> (holistic well-being)	Finance conceived as a means to moral and social welfare rather than profit maximisation
Moral Agency	<i>Faḍīlah</i> (Virtue)	Ethical leadership and self-discipline	Building trustworthy institutions; prioritising

²³ Masudul Alam Choudhury, *Tawhidi Epistemology and Islamic Economics* (London: Routledge, 2020).

			ethical conduct, accountability, and robust Sharī‘ah governance
Justice	<i>‘Adl</i> (equilibrium and fairness)	Distributive and procedural justice	Promoting risk-sharing instruments (e.g. <i>mushārah</i> , <i>muḍārah</i>); discouraging exploitative debt-based practice
Collective Welfare	<i>Maṣlahah</i> (public interest)	Social responsibility and inclusion	Developing <i>waqf</i> , <i>zakāh</i> , and Islamic microfinance to enhance equity and social cohesion
Governance and Education	<i>Al-Ra’īs al-Fāḍil</i> (the virtuous ruler)	Ethical state and institutional design	The state ensures justice, regulates markets, and nurtures moral education through policy and governance

3.3. Toward a Theory of Virtuous Markets

By integrating the *sa‘āda* with the moral and institutional fabric of markets, al-Fārābī’s ethical theory provides a basis for an Islamic

theory of economic behaviour. A "virtuous market," then, would be the one where financial transactions, institutional behaviour, and state policies are directed at the realisation of moral and social balance.²⁴This paradigm stands in sharp contrast to neoliberal theories that centred on self-interest and efficiency, where moral purpose replaced with utilitarian gain. In practical terms, this analytical framework implies the following:

1. Ethical education and the internalisation of values should be a central priority of economic governance.
2. Islamic financial systems must integrate moral screening, transparency, and social impact into their performance metrics, rather than relying solely on legal compliance.
3. Public policies should be coherent with the core values of Islamic economics, particularly distributive justice and partnership-based contracts that enhance social solidarity.

In sum, al-Fārābī's theoretical architecture subsumes economic rationality within moral rationality. His synthesis of virtue, justice, and collective felicity provides a compelling intellectual and ethical framework for reforming Islamic economics and finance as a genuinely transformative and value-driven system.

3.4. Engagement with Contemporary Scholarship on Islamic Economic Ethics

Over the past few decades, Islamic economics and finance have experienced a significant intellectual shift—from a predominantly legalistic focus on Sharī'ah compliance to a deeper concern with moral substance, social welfare, and value-based governance. This paradigm shift aligns closely with al-Fārābī's holistic vision of ethics, justice, and human flourishing within economic life. Several contemporary scholars have contributed substantively to this converging discourse.

²⁴ Asutay, "Islamic Moral Economy," 3–26.

Through extensive research, Asutay has played a foundational role in reframing Islamic finance within the broader concept of the *Islamic Moral Economy* (IME). He argues that prevailing industry practices—marked by legal formalism and the dominance of debt-replicating instruments—have eroded the ethical core of Islamic finance.²⁵ Asutay therefore calls for a restructuring of the industry within a moral architecture oriented toward human well-being, social justice, and sustainable development. This position resonates strongly with al-Fārābī’s insistence that economic activity must serve the higher purpose of *sa’āda* (human perfection). Asutay’s emphasis on *human-centred development* closely parallels al-Fārābī’s virtue-based economy, in which state and institutional roles include nurturing ethical character and ensuring equitable participation in wealth creation.²⁶

Kamali’s *Ethics and Finance in Islam* remains one of the most systematic articulations of the ethical foundations of Islamic financial practice.²⁷ He argues that authentic Islamic finance must integrate *tazkiyah* (spiritual purification) alongside *‘adl* (justice) and *amānah* (trust), thereby harmonising legal norms with moral consciousness. For Kamali, ethical finance cannot be reduced to regulatory compliance alone; it requires the internalisation of virtue and ethical awareness. This view mirrors al-Fārābī’s conception of the *faḍīl* (virtuous individual) and the *ra’īs al-fāḍil* (virtuous ruler), underscoring their shared belief that sustainable economic systems depend on cultivating moral agents rather than merely enforcing rules.

Hasan extends this critique by examining the institutional structures of Islamic banking and highlighting their limited success in internalising ethical objectives.²⁸ He contends that Sharī‘ah governance must move beyond technical supervision to embody accountability, transparency, and justice as lived values. Hasan

²⁵ Asutay, “Islamic Moral Economy,” 3–26.

²⁶ Asutay, “A Political Economy Approach,” 17–39.

²⁷ Kamali, *Ethics and Finance in Islam*, 52.

²⁸ Zubair, “Shariah Governance and the Ethical Foundations,” 1–27.

positions *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as the operational framework for achieving both efficiency and equity, linking it explicitly to human development in the sense of *falāḥ* (success). His approach closely aligns with al-Fārābī's insistence that institutions and governance mechanisms must translate moral virtues into concrete policies aimed at distributive justice and social balance.

The contributions of Chapra remain central to contemporary moral discourse in Islamic economics.²⁹ In *Islamic Vision of Development in the Light of Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, Chapra argues that material progress without moral reform inevitably produces socio-economic imbalance. He conceptualises development as a multidimensional process encompassing moral, spiritual, and material growth. Accordingly, public policy and finance must be directed toward poverty alleviation and inequality reduction. This vision closely echoes al-Fārābī's model of the virtuous state, where economic prosperity is inseparable from moral education and justice under enlightened leadership. Chapra thus offers a contemporary articulation of al-Fārābī's core principle that *sa'āda* is unattainable without moral order.

From a more meta-theoretical perspective, Choudhury advances a *Tawhīdīc epistemological* framework that integrates knowledge, ethics, and economics under divine unity.³⁰ He critiques mainstream economics for compartmentalising moral and material domains and proposes instead a model of circular causation between ethical values and economic variables. This epistemological unity closely parallels al-Fārābī's fusion of metaphysics and politics: just as knowledge and virtue are inseparable in the virtuous city, morality and economics are interdependent processes in Choudhury's model, jointly oriented toward harmony and justice in society.

Taken together, these scholars converge on the recognition that ethics is not peripheral but foundational to Islamic economics and finance. They collectively advocate a transformation from form to

²⁹ Chapra, *Islamic Vision of Development*, 64.

³⁰ Choudhury, *Tawhīdīc Epistemology and Islamic Economics*, 88.

substance, from compliance to conscience—a transition that al-Fārābī anticipated through his insistence that governance and economic systems must cultivate virtue and justice as pathways to happiness. By engaging with these contemporary debates, the present study positions al-Fārābī not merely as a historical philosopher, but as a living interlocutor in the ongoing reconstruction of Islamic economic thought. His triad of knowledge–virtue–justice offers the moral architecture that contemporary Islamic economic frameworks continue to seek.

3.5. Al-Fārābī’s Political Theory

In addition to his major contributions across diverse fields of human knowledge, al-Fārābī developed a comprehensive political philosophy, articulated most notably in works such as *Ara’ Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila* (The Opinions of the People of the Virtuous City) and *al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya* (The Civil Polity). Central to his political thought is the premise that human beings, in order to survive and attain perfection, are inherently dependent upon cooperation and assistance from others. No individual, according to al-Fārābī, can achieve the perfection they seek in isolation from political association. Human fulfilment, therefore, is inseparable from communal and political life.

On this basis, al-Fārābī distinguishes between perfect and imperfect political associations, each corresponding to different scales of human organisation. He identifies three forms of *perfect* association—large, intermediate, and small—and contrasts them with three corresponding forms of *imperfect* association. These classifications are summarised in Table 3.

Table 3: Associations and Examples of Perfect and Imperfect States

Perfect State - Types of association	Examples
Large association	All human beings in the world at large

Medium association	All different nations or ethical groups
Small association	City-state within a nation
Imperfect State - Types of association	Examples
Large Association	Village
Medium Association	Community
Small Association	Street or family

From these classifications, it becomes evident that political association, for al-Fārābī, is intrinsically linked to the pursuit of life’s ultimate objectives—whether these are true happiness (*sa’āda*), pleasure, or material acquisition. The distinction between perfection and imperfection lies not merely in scale, but in purpose and moral orientation.



Figure 1: Perfect and Imperfect States and Their Associations

Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchical relationship between these associations. It shows that the family constitutes part of a community; communities form villages; villages combine to form cities; cities

constitute nations; and nations together form the world. From this hierarchy, al-Fārābī deduces that true happiness cannot be fully realised within associations smaller than the city. Only at the level of the city does cooperation become sufficiently comprehensive and morally structured to support the pursuit of *sa'āda*. Accordingly, a perfect city is one in which citizens cooperate and support one another in the collective pursuit of true happiness. If all cities within a nation strive toward this end, that nation itself may be regarded as perfect. Likewise, when nations collectively pursue true happiness, the result is a *perfect world*. In contrast, associations such as families, communities, and villages—while necessary—remain incomplete in their capacity to achieve ultimate human fulfilment.

Table 4 further elaborates the defining characteristics of perfect and imperfect states. It demonstrates that the purpose of human life, within al-Fārābī's framework, is not confined to the pursuit of wealth, status, or pleasure, but rather to the realisation of peace, justice, and security at higher levels of social organisation. In this vision, the family serves the community, the community serves the city, the city serves the nation, and nations collectively work toward global peace and prosperity. Perfect nations do not engage in conquest for wealth, bloodshed, or the exploitation of natural resources; instead, they cooperate to establish a world in which humanity may live in peace, security, and shared prosperity.

Table 4: Characteristics of Perfect and Imperfect States

Characteristics of Perfect State	Characteristics of Imperfect State
Pursuit of the ultimate happiness (<i>sa'āda</i>) of all human beings	Ignorant, wayward, depraved, renegade
Knowledge of the First Cause and its attributes	The ignorant city, whose inhabitants neither know nor conceive true happiness

Knowledge of celestial order governed by justice and wisdom	Valuing only bodily health, wealth, pleasure, or unrestricted freedom
Knowledge of human generation and the development of faculties	The city of necessities: pursuit of food, drink, shelter, clothing, and sex merely for survival
Service to society rather than narrow self-interest	The city of ignominy: accumulation of wealth as an end in itself
Collective effort to establish global peace and security	The base city: enslavement to pleasure beyond survival needs
Political order resembling a healthy body governed by reason	The honour city: pursuit of fame, glory, and admiration
Rejection of conquest for wealth or domination	The city of conquest: expansion for power, wealth, or subjugation
Clear recognition of what promotes or destroys happiness	The democratic city: unrestricted freedom without moral hierarchy

Source: Compiled by the author from various sources

In conclusion, al-Fārābī’s political philosophy draws a sharp distinction between the Perfect State and various forms of Imperfect States, each embodying fundamentally different moral and intellectual orientations. The Perfect State is guided by the pursuit of *sa’āda*, wherein both rulers and citizens are committed to cultivating virtue, wisdom, and justice.³¹ Citizens actively engage in understanding divine truths, cosmic order, and human nature, thereby forming an ethical society oriented toward the common good. The state functions analogously to a healthy body, governed by reason and led by a philosopher-ruler who possesses superior intellectual and moral qualities.³² Peace, prosperity, and security, in this framework, arise not

³¹ Al-Farabi, *The Virtuous City*.

³² Muhsin S. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

from domination or material conquest, but from shared purpose and inner fulfilment. Imperfect states, by contrast, emerge from ignorance, moral deficiency, or disordered desires. The City of Ignorance fails to recognise true happiness; the City of Necessities is confined to survival; the City of Ignominy glorifies wealth accumulation; and the Base City is enslaved to pleasure.³³ The Honour City seeks recognition above virtue, while the City of Conquest is driven by domination. Finally, the Democratic City prioritises unrestricted freedom, allowing individuals to pursue desires without ethical or hierarchical restraint.

Within al-Fārābī's framework, these cities fall short of true perfection because they prioritise transient or superficial goals over the moral and intellectual elevation of the human soul. This contrast underscores the enduring relevance of al-Fārābī's virtuous political economy as a normative critique of both historical and contemporary socio-political and economic systems, including modern forms of market-driven governance that lack ethical orientation.³⁴

3.6. Comparison of Al-Fārābī's Virtuous Economic Order with Modern Capitalist and Neoliberal Economic Models

Contrasting al-Fārābī's conception of a virtuous economic order with contemporary capitalist and neoliberal paradigms offers critical insight into the ethical foundations of Islamic economic thought. At the heart of al-Fārābī's philosophy lies the conviction that economic activity must serve a higher moral and intellectual purpose: the attainment of communal felicity (*sa'āda*). This condition is realised when individuals develop their intellectual and spiritual faculties in harmony with the collective well-being of society.³⁵ Economic life, therefore, is not an end in itself but a means toward moral perfection and human flourishing. Within this framework, the ruler of the virtuous city is

³³ Walzer, *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State*.

³⁴ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Science and Civilization in Islam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006).

³⁵ Al-Farabi, *The Virtuous City*.

tasked with guiding society toward justice, virtue, and intellectual enlightenment, a role analogous to Plato’s philosopher-king in the *Republic*.

By contrast, contemporary capitalist economies—particularly under neoliberalism—tend to conceptualise the economy as an impersonal system governed by market forces and individual preferences. The individual is understood as a rational actor motivated primarily by self-interest and utility maximisation.³⁶ Economic success is measured through quantitative indicators such as gross domestic product (GDP), profit margins, and consumption levels. In the United States, for example, neoliberal policy orientations have emphasised market deregulation, capital-friendly tax regimes, and reduced state intervention, premised on the assumption that the “invisible hand” of the market will generate optimal outcomes.³⁷

A central point of divergence between these paradigms concerns the role of the state. Al-Fārābī envisages a morally engaged and activist state, one that actively shapes the ethical character of its citizens and ensures justice within society. This vision is particularly evident in his emphasis on distributive justice, whereby each member of the community receives what is necessary to fulfil their social function and live virtuously. As Rosenthal observes, al-Fārābī regarded the ruler as a form of “divine legislator,” responsible for structuring society in accordance with moral and intellectual principles.³⁸ Neoliberal frameworks, by contrast, significantly curtail the role of the state, restricting it largely to the protection of property rights, contract enforcement, and macroeconomic stability. The Washington Consensus exemplifies this approach, advocating privatisation, fiscal discipline, and trade liberalisation as primary

³⁶ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London: W. Strahan and T. Cadell, 1776).

³⁷ David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³⁸ Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

drivers of economic development, often at the expense of social equity.³⁹

With respect to wealth distribution, al-Fārābī views extreme inequality as a serious threat to the moral integrity of society. He insists that wealth circulation must benefit not only elites but also artisans, labourers, and vulnerable groups. Contemporary neoliberal economies, however, frequently rationalise income inequality as a natural and acceptable consequence of market dynamics. As Thomas Piketty demonstrates, returns on capital have historically outpaced overall economic growth, resulting in persistent and deepening wealth inequality—an outcome fundamentally at odds with al-Fārābī’s ethical vision of economic justice.⁴⁰

Ultimately, the purpose of economic life in al-Fārābī’s framework is spiritual and intellectual fulfilment. Professions and trades exist not merely to secure livelihoods but to contribute to a just and virtuous social order. This perspective resonates strongly with the *maqāṣid al-sharī’ah* (objectives of Islamic law), particularly the protection of faith, intellect, life, lineage, and property. In contrast, capitalist societies often prioritise consumer satisfaction and individual autonomy, giving rise to what Michael Sandel describes as a “market society,” in which virtually all aspects of human life—including education, healthcare, and even personal relationships—are commodified.

A concise comparison between al-Fārābī’s virtuous economic order and modern capitalist and neoliberal models is presented in Table 5.

³⁹ John Williamson, “What Washington Means by Policy Reform,” in *Latin American Adjustment: How Much Has Happened?* ed. John Williamson (Washington, DC: Institute for International Economics, 1990).

⁴⁰ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

Table 5: A Comparison of Al-Fārābī’s Virtuous Economic Order and Modern Capitalist/Neoliberal Models

Dimension	Al-Farabi’s Virtuous Economic Order	Capitalist/Neoliberal Models
Moral Foundation	Grounded in virtue ethics, justice, and the pursuit of human perfection.	Grounded in self-interest, utility maximisation, and market efficiency.
Role of the State	The state is a moral and guiding force, promoting justice and virtue.	The state plays a minimal role; market mechanisms govern resource allocation.
Purpose of Economy	To support the moral and intellectual development of citizens.	To maximise wealth and efficiency; focus is on GDP, growth, and profits.
Distribution of Wealth	Advocates equitable distribution and care for the poor and needy.	Emphasizes merit-based rewards; inequality is tolerated as market-driven.
View of Individual	The individual is part of a harmonious whole, with duties to society.	The individual is a rational, autonomous agent, primarily self-interested.
Ultimate Goal	Achieving communal felicity (<i>sa’āda</i>) and intellectual/moral excellence.	Achieving economic freedom, personal success, and consumer satisfaction.

Sources: compiled by author from various sources

In light of this comparison, al-Fārābī's virtuous economic order emerges as a fundamentally different paradigm from dominant capitalist and neoliberal models. His emphasis on ethical governance, distributive justice, and holistic human development offers a normative alternative that prioritises collective well-being over individual accumulation. This contrasts sharply with neoliberalism, where success is largely defined in terms of market efficiency, personal freedom, and wealth accumulation. Re-examining al-Fārābī's model within contemporary economic discourse enables scholars and policymakers to revisit the moral foundations of economic systems. The novelty of this contribution lies not merely in recovering a classical Islamic perspective, but in rearticulating it as a coherent ethical counter-paradigm to the excesses and moral austerity of contemporary economic dogmas. In doing so, the comparison enriches Islamic economics as a discipline and opens space for developing economic models that are both ethically grounded and socially committed.

4. THE IMPLICATIONS OF AL-FĀRĀBĪ'S ETHICAL AND POLITICAL THEORIES FOR ISLAMIC ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

In contrast to neoclassical economic analysis, Islamic economics and finance do not assume that human preferences, tastes, and behaviour are fixed or exogenously determined. Rather, they are understood as dynamic and morally cultivatable. Islamic ethical norms are not merely descriptive or advisory; they are prescriptive and transformative, intended to shape and reform human conduct. This includes influencing consumption behaviour by discouraging extravagance (*isrāf*) and encouraging moderation (*i'tidāl*).⁴¹ Islamic economics thus seeks to balance individual welfare with collective well-being by embedding moral values and ethical education into economic life, thereby enhancing market functionality within a

⁴¹ Chapra, *Islamic Vision of Development*.

morally sound framework. Within this paradigm, individuals are expected to subject their economic decisions to a moral filter prior to market participation. Consumers are therefore encouraged to restrain wasteful consumption and avoid unjustified claims on scarce resources. This ethical orientation reflects the broader Islamic objective of aligning economic activity with moral responsibility and social justice.

This framework finds a strong philosophical foundation in al-Fārābī's ethical theory, which conceives human beings as inherently social and moral agents whose ultimate purpose (*sa'āda*) can only be attained through the cultivation of virtue.⁴² In al-Fārābī's virtuous city (*al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*), economic activity is not an end in itself but a means to support higher objectives, namely intellectual perfection and spiritual development.⁴³ Accordingly, the state plays a decisive role in facilitating moral transformation by establishing a political and legal order that nurtures virtue, enforces justice, and promotes public interest (*maṣlahah*).⁴⁴ This vision aligns closely with the core objectives of Islamic economics, which extend beyond efficient resource allocation to encompass justice, equity, and ethical conduct in economic transactions.

While both Islamic and conventional financial systems aim to enhance material well-being through resource allocation, Islamic finance places particular emphasis on spiritual and moral well-being. A fundamental distinction lies in the types of financial instruments promoted. Conventional finance relies predominantly on debt-based instruments, typically grounded in interest (*ribā*), whereas Islamic finance advocates partnership-based contracts such as *muḍārabah* and *mushārahah*, which emphasise risk-sharing and real economic activity.⁴⁵ In practice, however, much of contemporary Islamic finance

⁴² Al-Farabi, *The Political Regime (Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madaniyya)*, trans. F. M. Najjar (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002).

⁴³ Al-Farabi, *The Virtuous City*.

⁴⁴ Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation*.

⁴⁵ Abbas Mirakhor and Iqbal Zaidi, "Profit-and-Loss Sharing Contracts in Islamic Finance," in *Handbook of Islamic Banking*, ed. M. Kabir Hassan and Mervyn K. Lewis (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2007), 49–63.

has failed to realise this ideal, relying instead on the legalistic replication of conventional debt instruments under superficial Shari‘ah compliance.⁴⁶ Without the development of genuinely ethical and innovative Islamic financial instruments, the project of Islamising finance risks devolving into a derivative extension of the conventional system rather than constituting a substantive alternative.

One of the principal reasons for the limited adoption of partnership-based contracts is the agency problem arising from information asymmetry and the lack of mutual trust between contracting parties. Unlike interest-based debt, partnership contracts do not guarantee predetermined returns, thereby heightening concerns over moral hazard and opportunistic behaviour.⁴⁷ It is precisely here that al-Fārābī’s emphasis on moral education becomes critically relevant. He maintains that virtues such as trust, justice, honesty, and cooperation can be cultivated through systematic ethical training, enabling society to sustain high-trust institutional arrangements.⁴⁸ For Islamic finance to operate effectively on a risk-sharing basis, it must be embedded within a social environment that internalises these moral values—a goal that necessitates coordinated efforts across education, media, and governance.

The role of the state is therefore central in institutionalising ethical norms. It is the responsibility of the state to prevent injustice, fraud, deception, contractual violations, and infringements on personal dignity and property. This can be achieved through moral education, a balanced system of incentives and sanctions, just legislation, and an impartial judiciary. In al-Fārābī’s theory of the virtuous state, the ruler bears responsibility for the moral and intellectual development of citizens. Such a state enforces justice, curbs corruption, and actively

⁴⁶ Murat Çizakça, *Islamic Capitalism and Finance: Origins, Evolution and the Future* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011).

⁴⁷ Obiyathulla I. Bacha, “The Islamic Interbank Money Market and a Dual Banking System: The Malaysian Experience,” *International Journal of Islamic Financial Services* 1, no. 1 (1999): 10–19.

⁴⁸ Al-Farabi, *The Political Regime*.

encourages virtuous conduct in both public and private life.⁴⁹ This perspective resonates strongly with Chapra's argument that governments must ensure justice in economic transactions through appropriate legislation, incentives, and institutional integrity.⁵⁰ While divine sources such as the Qur'ān and Sunnah provide the moral content, effective implementation and enforcement remain the responsibility of political authority.

Despite the global expansion of Islamic finance in countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, and the Gulf states, the substantive ideals of Islamic economics—risk-sharing, ethical conduct, and social justice—remain largely unrealised. The continued dominance of debt-based contracts and legalistic product engineering undermines the transformative aspirations articulated by classical thinkers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Khaldūn. Addressing these shortcomings requires a more proactive role by the state, including tailored regulatory frameworks, fiscal incentives, and the promotion of ethical norms within financial markets. Ibn Khaldūn's emphasis on a welfare-oriented state, moderate taxation, and respect for property rights closely parallels al-Fārābī's vision of just leadership that safeguards both material prosperity and moral integrity.⁵¹

This discussion underscores the centrality of ethics and governance in constructing an authentic Islamic economic and financial system. Unlike conventional economics, which treats individual preferences as fixed, Islamic economics emphasises the ethical formation of behaviour and consumption patterns. Drawing on al-Fārābī's ethical and political philosophy, this study affirms that human well-being (*sa'āda*) is achieved not solely through material progress, but through the cultivation of virtue, supported by moral education and state institutions.

In summary, al-Fārābī's concept of the virtuous state aligns closely with the foundational principles of Islamic economics and

⁴⁹ Al-Farabi, *The Virtuous City*.

⁵⁰ Chapra, *Islamic Vision of Development*.

⁵¹ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967).

finance, which require a political order committed to justice, honesty, cooperation, and social welfare. Although Islamic finance theoretically promotes risk-sharing instruments such as *muḍārabah* and *mushārakah*, prevailing practices remain heavily debt-oriented. This divergence between theory and practice can be partly attributed to trust deficits and agency problems—challenges that al-Fārābī’s framework addresses through ethical development and moral education. Ultimately, meaningful reform requires active state engagement in embedding Islamic moral values within legal, institutional, and educational systems. Only through this integration of ethical formation and political empowerment can Islamic economics and finance fulfil their transformative promise as a genuine alternative to neoliberal paradigms.

Table 6 synthesises the foregoing discussion into an operational framework that translates al-Fārābī’s ethical–political philosophy into a model for Islamic finance and governance. It demonstrates how key Farabian categories—*sa’āda*, *faḍīlah*, *‘adl*, *maṣlahah*, and *al-ra’īs al-fāḍil*—correspond to the objectives of *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* and inform institutional design within Islamic economics. The framework emphasises that finance in Islam is not merely a technical mechanism for capital allocation, but an ethical enterprise aimed at cultivating virtue and achieving collective felicity.

This model performs three key analytical functions. First, it bridges metaphysical ethics and practical governance, integrating normative ideals with institutional application. Second, it operationalises al-Fārābī’s moral hierarchy across three levels: individual virtue (micro-ethics), institutional justice (meso-ethics), and societal welfare (macro-ethics). Third, it illustrates that economic *sa’āda* emerges from the harmonisation of these levels through ethical education, equitable policy, and socially responsible finance. In this sense, the framework offers a philosophical justification for transforming Islamic finance from a form-driven industry into a

morally grounded economic system, echoing contemporary reformist scholarship by Asutay, Kamali, Hasan, Chapra, and Choudhury.⁵²

Table 6: Al-Fārābī’s Ethical–Political Philosophy as an Operational Model for Islamic Finance and Governance

Ethical Category (Al-Farabi)	Meaning / Function	Corresponding Principle in Islamic Economics	Operational Application in Islamic Finance and Governance
<i>Sa’āda</i> (True Happiness)	Ultimate end of human existence; moral and intellectual perfection	<i>Falāh</i> and <i>Maqāṣid al-Sharī’ah</i> – holistic well-being and balance between material and spiritual needs.	Measure performance through human development and maqāṣid-based indicators
<i>Faḍīlah</i> (Virtue)	Moral excellence cultivated through education	<i>Tazkiyah al-nafs</i> and professional ethics	Promote trust (<i>amānah</i>), transparency, and ethical Sharī’ah governance
<i>‘Adl</i> (Justice)	Social and economic equilibrium	Distributive and procedural justice	Prioritise risk-sharing contracts; discourage excessive leverage

⁵² Asutay, “Islamic Moral Economy”; Kamali, *Ethics and Finance in Islam*; Chapra, *Islamic Vision of Development*.

<i>Maṣlahah</i> (Public Welfare)	Collective interest over private gain	Social inclusion and sustainability	Strengthen <i>zakāh</i> , <i>waqf</i> , and Islamic microfinance
<i>al-Raʿīs al-Fāḍil</i> (Virtuous Leadership)	Moral–intellectual governance	Ethical state responsibility	Implement value-based regulation, incentives, and financial literacy

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the ethical and political philosophy of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī and demonstrated its continuing relevance for contemporary Islamic economics and finance. By critically engaging his conception of the virtuous state (*al-madīnah al-fāḍilah*), moral education, and the intrinsic relationship between knowledge, virtue (*faḍīlah*), and justice (*ʿadl*), the paper has shown that Islamic economics cannot be sustained through Sharīʿah-compliant instruments alone. Rather, it requires a comprehensive ethical and institutional framework that cultivates moral agency, distributive justice, and the common good (*maṣlahah*), ultimately oriented toward human flourishing (*saʿāda*).

The comparative analysis with modern capitalist and neoliberal economic models highlights a fundamental normative divergence. Whereas contemporary economic paradigms prioritise market efficiency, profit maximisation, and individual autonomy, al-Fārābī’s framework situates economic life within a higher moral teleology, where material activity serves intellectual, spiritual, and social perfection. Economic institutions, in this view, are never morally neutral; they are instruments either of virtue and justice or of moral decay. This contrast reinforces the distinctiveness of Islamic

economic thought and its potential to offer a principled alternative to dominant neoliberal orthodoxies.

The study further demonstrates that core Islamic financial instruments grounded in partnership and risk-sharing—such as *muḍārabah* and *mushārah*—presuppose a morally cultivated society. Their marginalisation in contemporary Islamic finance, and the prevailing reliance on debt-based and form-driven instruments, reflect not merely technical constraints but deeper ethical and institutional deficiencies. Al-Fārābī’s emphasis on moral education and virtuous governance provides a compelling explanation for this gap between theory and practice, suggesting that authentic Islamic finance cannot flourish without sustained efforts to cultivate trust, justice, and ethical responsibility at the societal level.

Central to al-Fārābī’s political philosophy is the eradication of injustice, fraud, deception, and moral transgression across all spheres of life, including economic and financial activity. This resonates strongly with the Islamic prohibition of *ribā*, *gharar*, and unjust enrichment, and underscores the necessity of a financial system grounded in transparency, equity, and social purpose. The study therefore highlights the critical role of the state—not merely as a regulator, but as a moral agent responsible for shaping ethical governance, enforcing just laws, and fostering a financial culture oriented toward public welfare rather than narrow self-interest.

At the same time, it must be acknowledged that this research is primarily conceptual and philosophical, drawing on classical texts rather than empirical analysis of contemporary financial systems. Al-Fārābī’s ideas were articulated within a vastly different historical context, and their application to modern, globalised economies requires careful reinterpretation and contextual adaptation. Nevertheless, this limitation does not diminish the value of his ethical insights; rather, it points to the need for future research that translates his moral architecture into concrete institutional reforms, policy frameworks, and evaluative metrics for Islamic finance.

In sum, this study positions al-Fārābī not merely as a historical philosopher, but as a vital intellectual resource for the reconstruction

of Islamic economics and finance. His synthesis of knowledge, virtue, and justice provides a missing moral architecture for moving Islamic finance beyond legal formalism toward a genuinely value-driven system. By integrating ethical cultivation with institutional design and governance, al-Fārābī's vision offers a robust foundation for transforming Islamic economics into a holistic moral economy capable of addressing the ethical, social, and spiritual challenges of the modern world.



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PROCRASTINATION, COMPENSATION, AND MORAL ECONOMY: A CIVILISATIONAL ANALYSIS OF *TA'WĪD* IN ISLAMIC FINANCE

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Che Abdullah³

ABSTRACT

This study critically examines classical and contemporary Muslim scholarly perspectives on compensation (*ta'wīd*) for procrastination in Islamic financing arrangements, with particular reference to its application in Islamic financial institutions. It aims to identify a Shari'ah-compliant and ethically coherent approach that minimises juristic contention while preserving the moral foundations of Islamic finance. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study draws upon classical fiqh sources, contemporary academic literature, juristic resolutions, regulatory documents, and conference proceedings, analysed through a comparative and analytical framework.

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The study finds that classical jurists of the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfi‘ī, and Ḥanbalī schools unanimously rejected the imposition of additional financial penalties on debtors for payment delays. In contrast, contemporary scholarship is divided into three main positions: those who permit compensation, those who prohibit it entirely, and those who allow compensation on the condition that the proceeds are channelled to charitable purposes rather than retained as income by financial institutions. Building upon this third position, the study proposes the establishment of a *tabarru‘* (donation) fund as a practical and ethically grounded mechanism. Under this model, a capable debtor who delays payment would contribute a voluntary donation to the fund upon settlement, while Islamic banks may recover demonstrable actual losses from the same fund.

The proposed framework seeks to reconcile Sharī‘ah compliance with moral accountability, preserve the principle of risk-sharing, and prevent the commercialisation of penalties in Islamic finance. By situating *ta‘wīd* within a broader moral-economic and civilisational perspective, the study contributes to ongoing debates on ethical governance and reform in contemporary Islamic financial practice.

KEYWORDS: *Ta‘wīd*, procrastination, Islamic finance, *tabarru‘* fund, moral economy, Sharī‘ah governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Borrowing and lending constitute fundamental economic practices in all societies and may occur through direct transactions between creditors and borrowers, or through institutional intermediaries such as banks and other financial institutions. In Islamic law, financial transactions undertaken by Muslim debtors and creditors are governed by Sharī‘ah principles that seek to ensure justice, transparency, and the

avoidance of *ribā* (interest).⁴ For a debt contract to be valid, it must comply with these principles, particularly the prohibition of unjust enrichment and exploitative gain. Sharī‘ah requires that a debtor repay his obligation within the agreed period unless he is genuinely insolvent; intentional delay in repayment by a capable debtor is regarded as an act of injustice (*ẓulm*) against the creditor.⁵ Conversely, Sharī‘ah recognises the right of the creditor to seek security for a debt in order to safeguard his financial interest. In this regard, the Qur’ān states: “And if you are on a journey and cannot find a scribe, then let there be a pledge taken.”⁶

In contemporary financial systems, Islamic banks and other Sharī‘ah-compliant institutions offer a wide range of products and services structured primarily around sale-based, lease-based, and partnership contracts.⁷ In sale-based financing, customers typically request the bank to acquire specific assets, such as vehicles or residential properties, which are then sold to the customer on a deferred payment basis, often through instalments. While this structure is Sharī‘ah-compliant in principle, Islamic banks increasingly face the practical challenge of customers who deliberately delay instalment

⁴ Muhammad Ayub, *Understanding Islamic Finance* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, 2007); Benaouda Bensaid, Fadila Grine, Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, and Mohd Yakub Zulkifli Mohd Yusoff, "Enduring Financial Debt: An Islamic perspective," *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research* 13, no. 2 (2013): 162-170; Auwal Adam Saad, and Syed Musa bin Syed Jaafar Alhabshi, "Debt Theories in Islamic Commercial Transactions and their Implications for the Islamic Capital Market," *International Journal of Management and Applied Research* 6, no. 4 (2019): 296-306.

⁵ Muhammad Ayub, *Understanding Islamic Finance*; Mohamad Akram Laldin, Hafas Furqani, Riaz Ansary, Said Adekunle Mikail, and Tawfik Azrak, "Debt from Sharī‘ah and Economic Perspectives: Concepts, Issues and Implications," ISRA Research Paper 81/2015 (Kuala Lumpur: International Sharī‘ah Research Academy for Islamic Finance, 2015).

⁶ Al-Qur’ān, 2:283.

⁷ Muhammad Ayub, *Understanding Islamic Finance*; Bala Shanmugam and Zaha Rina Zahari, *A Primer on Islamic Finance* (Virginia: Research Foundation of CFA Institute, 2009); International Shariah Research Academy for Islamic Finance (ISRA), *Islamic Finance System: Principles and Operations*, 2nd ed. (Kuala Lumpur: ISRA, 2016).

payments despite having the financial capacity to fulfil their obligations. Empirical studies indicate that such intentional procrastination negatively affects bank performance, liquidity management, and shareholder confidence.⁸

At the same time, critics have observed that an excessive emphasis on profit maximisation within Islamic banking risks reproducing the logic of conventional finance and undermining the broader moral objectives of Islamic economics. From a civilisational perspective, Islamic finance is not merely a commercial enterprise but part of a wider ethical-economic system aimed at promoting social justice and alleviating hardship. In this context, Islamic social finance instruments such as *zakāh*, *ṣadaqah*, and *waqf* play a vital role in supporting non-bankable individuals and ensuring that financial practices remain aligned with the maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah, particularly the preservation of wealth and the protection of human dignity.

The central juristic question that arises in cases of deliberate delay by solvent debtors is whether the creditor or financial institution has the right to impose or demand an additional amount as compensation for the delay. In Malaysia, Islamic banks are generally permitted to impose *ta‘wīḍ* (compensation) and *gharāmah* (penalty) on delinquent customers.⁹ However, in practice, most Islamic banks apply *ta‘wīḍ* rather than *gharāmah*. Similarly, Indonesia’s Sharī‘ah supervisory authorities allow the imposition of *ta‘wīḍ* based on actual loss, although no uniform standard or detailed regulatory guideline has been issued to govern its application. In several Middle Eastern

⁸ Atikullah Abdullah, "Late Payment Treatment in Islamic Banking Institutions in Malaysia: A Maqasid Analysis," *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 8, no. 11 (2018): 30-43; Aishath Muneeza, Nur Adibah Zainudin, Ruqayyah Ali, Siti Nadzirah Ibrahim, and Zakariya Mustapha, "Application of *Ta‘wīḍ* and *Gharamah* in Islamic Banking in Malaysia," *The Journal of Muamalat and Islamic Finance Research* 16, no. 1 (2019): 1-16; Muhammad Shahrul Ifwat Ishak, "Sharī‘ah issues on *ta‘wīḍ* in Malaysia," *International Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Finance and Management* 12, no. 4 (2019): 523-531; Zuhaira Nadiyah Zulkipli, "Late Payment Penalty: *Ta‘wīḍ* and *Gharamah* Imposed to Debtor from the Shariah perspective," *Yuridika* 35, no. 1 (2020): 187-210.

⁹ Muneeza *et al.*, "Application of *Ta‘wīḍ* and *Gharamah*," 50.

jurisdictions, only *ta'wīd* is applied,¹⁰ while in some other contexts non-financial punitive measures, such as “name and shame” practices through customer blacklists, are employed.¹¹ As a result, the implementation of compensation mechanisms in Islamic banking varies significantly across jurisdictions, institutions, and regulatory environments, particularly in relation to the concepts of *ta'wīd*, *gharāmah*, and the applicable rates or thresholds. This diversity raises serious Sharī'ah concerns, as the imposition of additional amounts—whether labelled as compensation or penalty—may inadvertently lead to *ribā*-like outcomes if not carefully regulated.¹² Contemporary Muslim scholars remain divided on this issue. While some permit the imposition of additional amounts as compensation or deterrence, others categorically reject it on the grounds that it constitutes prohibited *ribā*.¹³ A third group adopts an intermediate position, allowing compensation under strict conditions designed to prevent unjust enrichment.

Despite the widespread practice of late payment charges in Islamic banking, there remains no universally accepted Sharī'ah-compliant framework for addressing intentional procrastination by capable debtors in a manner that is both ethically sound and juristically

¹⁰ Issa Khan, Abdul Muneem, Fadillah Mansor, Mohd Abd Wahab Fatoni Bin Mohd Balwi, and Md. Mahfujur Rahman, "Critical Review on Issues and Challenges of Malaysian Islamic Financial System," *Journal of Southwest Jiaotong University* 56, no. 2 (2021): 552-567.

¹¹ Muneeza *et al.*, "Application of ta'widh and gharamah," 50.

¹² Ezani Yaakub, Mohamed Azam Mohamed Adil, Asmak Husin, Mohd Dani Muhamad, Mohd Solahuddin Shahrudin, and Nur Hidayah Md Yazid, "Late Payment Charge in Islamic Banks," paper presented at the 5th International Conference on Financial Criminology (ICFC), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, May 28–29, 2012; Muneeza Ameer Ali *et al.*, "Application of Ta'wīd and Gharāmah in Islamic Finance," *Arab Law Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2012): 137–154.

¹³ Mohammad Firdaus Mohammad Hatta, and Siti Akmar Abu Samah, "Compensation and Penalty Imposed on Debt Settlement of Islamic Products," *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah* 5, no. 1 (2015): 7-18; Atikullah Abdullah, "Late Payment Treatment in Islamic,"; Zuhaira Nadiyah Zulkipli, "Late Payment Penalty."

robust. This paper seeks to address this gap by examining classical and contemporary scholarly positions on *ta'wīd* for procrastination and by exploring a principled solution that harmonises Sharī'ah compliance with moral accountability and civilisational objectives in Islamic finance.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, library-based research approach to examine classical and contemporary Muslim scholarly perspectives on compensation (*ta'wīd*) for intentional procrastination in debt settlement within Islamic banking. The qualitative method is appropriate given the juristic and ethical nature of the subject, which requires textual analysis rather than empirical measurement.¹⁴¹⁵¹⁶

Data are drawn from classical fiqh sources representing the four Sunni schools of law (Ḥanafī, Mālīkī, Shāfi'ī, and Ḥanbalī), contemporary scholarly writings, academic journal articles, Sharī'ah standards and resolutions, conference proceedings, and authoritative online materials. The primary sources of Islamic law, namely the Qur'ān and the Sunnah, are also consulted to ground the analysis in foundational Sharī'ah principles.

The study employs a comparative-analytical method to examine and evaluate divergent scholarly positions.¹⁷¹⁸ Contemporary views are analysed across three main approaches: (i) permissibility of compensation, (ii) prohibition of compensation, and (iii) conditional

¹⁴ Issa Khan *et al.*, "Critical Review on Issues."

¹⁵ Issa Khan, Noor Naemah binti Abdul Rahman, Zulkifli bin Mohd Yakub Mohd Yusoff, Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor and Kamaruzaman bin Noordin, "A Narrative on Islamic Insurance in Bangladesh: Problems and Prospects", *International Journal of Ethics and Systems* 34, no 3 (2018): 1-15.

¹⁶ Meguellati Achour, Fadila Grine, and Mohd Roslan Mohd Nor, "Work-Family Conflict and Coping Strategies: Qualitative Study of Muslim Female Academicians in Malaysia." *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 17, no. 10 (2014): 1002-1014.

¹⁷ Md Faruk Abdullah, *Application of Wa'd (Promise) in Islamic Banking Products: A Study in Malaysia and Bangladesh* (PhD diss., Academy of Islamic Studies, Universiti Malaya, 2016).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

permissibility with specific restrictions. These positions are assessed in light of their evidences, juristic reasoning, and consistency with the objectives of Sharī‘ah, particularly the avoidance of *ribā*, the protection of wealth, and the promotion of justice. This approach enables the study to propose a harmonised Sharī‘ah-compliant solution grounded in juristic coherence and ethical considerations.

This methodological approach situates the debate on *ta‘wīd* within the broader civilisational trajectory of Islamic economic thought, treating Islamic finance not merely as a technical legal system but as an ethical–juristic expression of Islamic civilisation concerned with justice, moral responsibility, and social harmony.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Opinions of Classical Scholars on Compensation (*Ta‘wīd*)

Within the classical Islamic legal tradition, the problem of debtor procrastination (*mumāṭalah*) was treated not merely as a contractual breach but as a moral and civilisational concern affecting social trust, justice, and economic order. Pre-modern Muslim jurists addressed delayed repayment within a broader ethical framework that sought to preserve social harmony, protect creditors from injustice, and prevent practices that might evolve into *ribā al-jāhiliyyah*. Consequently, classical scholars across the four Sunni schools refrained from legitimising financial penalties as compensation, opting instead for judicial and moral corrective measures.

Classical Hanafi jurists addressed deliberate procrastination primarily through judicial coercion rather than financial punishment. Al-Kāsānī¹⁹ explains that *ḥabs* (custody) may be imposed as a disciplinary measure against a procrastinating debtor, based on the ḥadīth: “Delay in payment by one who is able renders his honour and

¹⁹ ‘Alā al-Dīn Al-Kāsānī, *Badā‘i‘ al-ṣanā‘i‘* 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1974).

punishment permissible”²⁰. This punishment, however, was not monetary but corrective, intended to restore justice and deter wrongdoing.

The role of the *ḥākim* (judge) was to protect the creditor from injustice by compelling payment through lawful means.²¹ This position is further codified in *Majallat al-Aḥkām al-‘Adliyyah* (Article 998)²², which authorises the court to restrict a debtor’s disposal of property and, if necessary, sell his assets to satisfy outstanding debts, beginning with liquid assets and proceeding incrementally to immovable property.²³

Ḥaidar²⁴ clarifies that such interdiction applies once judicial authority is invoked and that it may extend to both insolvent and deliberately procrastinating debtors. While Imām Abū Yūsuf²⁵ permitted temporary confiscation of property as a form of *ta‘zīr*, Imām Abū Ḥanīfah rejected judicial sale of property without the debtor’s consent, favouring coercion through custody instead. This debate reflects a deep concern for preventing unjust enrichment and avoiding financial penalties resembling interest.

In the Mālikī jurists²⁶ framed procrastination as a moral failing that undermines social credibility. Saḥnūn held that a capable debtor who delays repayment is disqualified from giving testimony, based on the Prophetic declaration that procrastination constitutes injustice. Al-

²⁰ Muḥammad Ibn Ismā‘īl Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Riyad: Dār al-Ḥaḍārah, 2015); Abū Dāwūd Sulaimān Al-Sijistānī, *Sunan abī dāwūd* (Dimashq, Syria: Dār al-Risālah al-‘Ālamīyyah, 2009); Aḥmad Ibn Shu‘aib Al-Nasā‘ī, *Sunan al-Nasā‘ī* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1999).

²¹ ‘Alā al-Dīn Al-Kāsānī, *Badā‘i‘ al-ṣanā‘i‘*.

²² Alī Ḥaidar, *Durar al-Hukkām Sharḥ Majallah al-Aḥkām* (Riyad: Dār ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 2003).

²³ *The Mejelle (Majallah al-Aḥkām al-‘Adliyyah)*, trans. C. R. Tyser, D. G. Demetriades, and Ismail Haqqi Effendi (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2007).

²⁴ Ḥaidar, *Durar al-Hukkām*,

²⁵ Shams al-Dīn Al-Sarakhsī, *Al-Mabsūṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1989); Ḥaidar, *Durar al-Hukkām*.

²⁶ Shams al-Dīn Al-Dusūqī, *Hāshiyah al-Dusūqī ‘alā al-sharḥ al-kabīr* (Al-Qāhirah: ‘Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Shurakā‘uh, n.d.).

Qarāfi²⁷ further classified such conduct as *ḥarām*, emphasising that moral accountability precedes legal enforcement. The Mālikī response thus targeted social standing and ethical responsibility, rather than imposing financial sanctions.²⁸

According to the Shāfi'ī school, a solvent debtor becomes a *mumāṭil* once payment is demanded and unjustifiably delayed.²⁹ The *ḥākim* may then compel payment, including through custody or forced sale of assets, but only to the extent necessary to satisfy the debt.³⁰ Importantly, this judicial authority was exercised with restraint, reflecting a commitment to justice without financial exploitation.

The Ḥanbalī jurists similarly permitted custody of a capable procrastinating debtor. Ibn Qudāmah³¹ maintained that the creditor may persistently demand payment and that judicial custody is a legitimate form of discipline. Al-Buhūti³² clarified that the judge may order immediate payment without necessarily imposing *ḥajr*. Again, no additional monetary compensation was sanctioned.

Across all four schools,³³ a clear civilisational pattern emerges: classical jurists categorically avoided financial penalties for delayed repayment. Their concern was not merely technical legality but the

²⁷ Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad Al-Qarāfi, *Al-Dhakhīrah* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb, 1994).

²⁸ Muḥammad Ibn Aḥmad ibn Rushd, *Al-Muqaddimāt al-Mumahhitād* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-'Islāmī, 1988).

²⁹ Zakariyyā Ibn Muḥammad Al-Anṣārī, *Asnā al-Maṭālib fī Sharḥ Rawḍ al-Tālib* (Cairo: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī, n.d.); Muḥammad Ibn al-Khaṭīb Al-Sharbīnī, *Mughnī al-Muḥtāj* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1997).

³⁰ Muḥammad Ibn Abū al-'Abbās Al-Ramlī, *Nihāyah al-Muḥtāj 'ilā Sharḥ al-Minhāj* (Bairūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2003).

³¹ Muwaffaq al-Dīn 'Abdullāh Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Qudāmah, *Al-mughnī* 3rd ed. (Riyād: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1997).

³² Maṣṣūr Ibn Yūnūs Al-Buhūti, *Sharḥ Munthaā al-Irādāt* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risālah Nāshirūn, 2000).

³³ Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Al-Ṣawī, *Hāshiyah al-Sawī 'alā al-Sharḥ al-Saghīr* (Egypt: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.); Shams al-Dīn Al-Dusūqī, *Hāshiyah al-Dusūqī 'alā al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr*; Muḥammad 'Amīn Ibn 'Ābidīn, *Hāshiyah ibn 'ābidīn - radd al-muḥtār 'alā al-durri al-mukhtār* (Riyād: Dār 'Ālam al-Kutub, 2003); Muḥammad Ibn al-Khaṭīb Al-Sharbīnī, *Mughnī al-muḥtāj*; Muḥammad Ibn Abū Bakr Ibn Qayyim, *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn 'an Rabb al-'Ālamīn* (KSA: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2002).

preservation of an ethical economic order grounded in justice (*‘adl*), trust (*amānah*), and social cohesion. Monetary penalties were viewed as a slippery slope toward *ribā*, particularly *ribā al-jāhiliyyah*, where debt increases due to delay.

Instead, Islamic civilisation relied on non-financial corrective mechanisms—custody (*ḥabs*), interdiction (*ḥajr*), social disqualification, and judicial coercion—aimed at moral reform rather than revenue generation. Even the limited allowance by Abū Yūsuf³⁴, for temporary confiscation was framed as *ta‘zīr*, not compensation.

This classical framework reflects a civilisational ethic of debt in which economic transactions were inseparable from moral responsibility. The objective was to discipline behaviour, restore justice, and safeguard the moral integrity of financial relations. In contemporary Islamic banking, where contractual penalties are normalised, this classical legacy raises a fundamental question: can modern financial mechanisms replicate the moral corrective function of classical jurisprudence without reintroducing *ribā* in another form? Table 1 summarises the positions of the classical schools.

Table 1: Classical Juristic Approaches to Debtor Procrastination (*Mumātalah*)

Criteria	Ḥanafī	Mālikī	Shāfi‘ī	Ḥambalī
Primary Judicial Measures	<i>Ḥabs</i> (custody) and <i>ḥajr</i> (interdiction)	Disqualification from testimony (<i>isqāṭ al-shahādah</i>)	(a) Custody (b) Forced sale of property (c) Judicial sale by <i>ḥākim</i>	(a) Custody (b) Verbal reprimand (c) Judicial compulsion to pay

³⁴ Zayn al-Dīn Ibn Nujaim, *Al-Baḥr al-Rā‘iq* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub ‘Ilmiyyah, 1997); Ibn ‘Ābidīn, *Hāshiyah ibn ‘Ābidīn - Radd al-Muḥtār ‘alā al-Durri al-Mukhtār*; Nizām, *Al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2000).

Financial Compensation / Monetary Penalty	No (exception: temporary <i>ta'zīr</i> according to Abū Yūsuf)	No	No	No
Representative Jurists	‘Alā al-Dīn Al-Kāsānī, Majallah al-Aḥkām al-‘Adliyah, Ḥaidar ‘Alī	‘Abd al-Salām Ibn Sa‘īd Saḥnūn, Aḥmad Ibn Idrīs al-Qarāfi,	Zakariyyā Ibn Muḥammad Al-Anṣārī, Muḥammad Ibn al-Khaṭīb Sharbīnī, Muḥammad Ibn Abū al-‘Abbās Al-Ramlī,	Ibn Qudāmah, Maṣṣūr Ibn Yūnus Al-Buhūfī

Source: Compiled by the author from classical fiqh sources.

The classical jurists uniformly refrained from prescribing financial penalties for debtor procrastination, not merely due to technical legal concerns, but out of a deeper civilisational commitment to preventing the monetisation of moral failure. Financial penalties were viewed as a pathway to *ribā al-jāhiliyyah*, where delay itself becomes a source of profit. Instead, Islamic law developed a corrective framework grounded in moral discipline, judicial authority, and social accountability through non-financial measures such as custody (*ḥabs*), interdiction (*ḥajr*), and disqualification from testimony.

This approach reflects a distinctive Islamic civilisational ethic of finance, in which economic order is sustained through moral responsibility rather than contractual coercion. Justice was pursued by reforming behaviour, not by commodifying default. In contemporary

Islamic banking contexts, these legacy challenges purely technical solutions to delinquency and calls for institutional mechanisms that restore ethical accountability without reintroducing *ribā* in disguised forms. Behavioural interventions, ethical education, and socially embedded compliance frameworks may thus be understood as modern continuations of this classical civilisational logic rather than departures from it.

3.2. Contemporary Scholarly Debates on Compensation (*Ta'wīḍ*) for Procrastination

The global expansion of Islamic banking and finance has generated new juridical and ethical challenges that require renewed scholarly engagement. Among the most contested issues is the question of whether a solvent debtor's deliberate procrastination (*mumāṭalah*) justifies the imposition of financial compensation (*ta'wīḍ*). Unlike the classical jurists, who overwhelmingly rejected monetary penalties, contemporary scholars and Sharī'ah bodies have articulated divergent positions in response to modern institutional realities. These views may be broadly classified into three approaches, two of which are examined below.

3.3. The Permissibility of Compensation for Procrastination

A number of contemporary scholars permit compensation for debtor procrastination, provided that it is strictly limited to actual loss and subject to stringent conditions. Among the most prominent proponents of this view is by Muṣṭafā al-Zarqā³⁵ who argues that compensating a creditor for proven material loss incurred due to a solvent debtor's intentional delay is Sharī'ah-compliant. According to al-Zarqā, neither the primary texts nor the objectives of Sharī'ah (*maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*) prohibit such compensation; rather, general legal principles

³⁵ Muṣṭafā Aḥmad Al-Zarqā, "Hal Yuqbal Shar'an al-Hukm alā al-Madin al-Mumāṭil bi al-Ta'wīḍ alā al-Dā'in?" *Majallah Abḥāth al-Iqtisād al-Islāmī* 2, no. 2 (1985): 102-112.

concerning harm (*ḍarar*) and liability (*ḍamān*) support it. However, he emphasises several critical conditions: the debtor must be solvent, the delay must be deliberate and without Sharī'ah excuse, and compensation must not be stipulated in advance within the contract.

A similar position is advanced by 'Abdullāh Sulaimān al-Manī'³⁶, who maintains that a procrastinating debtor is legally liable for the creditor's actual loss. He distinguishes this form of compensation from *ribā al-jāhiliyyah* on two principal grounds. First, *ribā al-jāhiliyyah* applies indiscriminately to both solvent and insolvent debtors, whereas compensation applies only to those who are financially capable. Second, *ribā* involves a mutually agreed extension of the debt term, while compensation arises unilaterally as a legal consequence of misconduct.

Likewise, al-Ṣiddīq Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Ḍarīr³⁷ restricts compensation to cases where the bank can demonstrably prove material loss. In the absence of such loss, he argues, no compensation may be claimed. He further cautions that any prior agreement specifying a fixed amount or percentage payable upon delay constitutes *ribā* and is therefore impermissible. While this position seeks to avoid contractual *ribā*, it has been criticised for insufficiently addressing the moral hazard posed by strategic and repeated procrastination in modern banking environments.

From a civilisational perspective, the permissive approach to compensation reflects an attempt to recalibrate classical Sharī'ah principles within the institutional realities of modern financial systems. This position prioritises the protection of economic order, contractual discipline, and the prevention of harm (*ḍarar*) in complex commercial environments where delayed payments may generate measurable systemic costs. By grounding compensation in actual loss

³⁶ 'Abdullāh Sulaimān Al-Manī', *Buḥūth fi al-Iqtisād al-Islāmī* (Beirut: Al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1996).

³⁷ Al-Ṣadīq Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Ḍarīr, "Faskh al-dayn bi al-dayn," (Paper Presented at the 18th Council of Islamic Fiqh Council of Muslim World League, Mecca, 8-12/04/2006),

and restricting it to solvent debtors, proponents seek to preserve justice (*‘adl*) without reviving *ribā al-jāhiliyyah*. Nevertheless, this approach signals a shift from the pre-modern Islamic civilisational emphasis on moral restraint and social trust toward a more regulatory conception of justice, shaped by institutional risk management and financial accountability. As such, it reflects a transitional civilisational logic—one that seeks ethical continuity while adapting Sharī‘ah norms to contemporary banking infrastructures.

3.4. The Impermissibility of Compensation for Procrastination

A second and influential group of scholars rejects compensation for procrastination outright, regarding it as incompatible with Sharī‘ah principles and dangerously proximate to *ribā*. Taqī al-‘Uthmānī³⁸ argues that imposing financial compensation on a debtor finds no basis in the Prophetic tradition. He refers to the well-known ḥadīth: “Delay in payment by one who is able is injustice; his honour and punishment become permissible,”³⁹ and notes that neither ḥadīth scholars nor exegetes have interpreted the term *‘uqūbah* (punishment) to mean financial penalty (*‘uqūbah māliyyah*). Moreover, he stresses that even if punishment were justified, it would fall within the exclusive jurisdiction of the judge (*hākim*), not the creditor or financial institution.

Muḥammad ‘Uthmān Shubair⁴⁰ similarly maintains that imposing compensation—whether through contractual stipulation, unilateral promise, or customary banking practice—is impermissible, as it constitutes an increment over the principal debt and thus amounts

³⁸ Muḥammad Taqī Al-‘Uthmānī, *Buḥūth fī Qaḍāyā Fiqhiyyah Mu‘āṣarah* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2013).

³⁹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*; Al-Sijistānī, *Sunan abī Dāwūd*; Al-Nasā’ī, *Sunan al-Nasā’ī*.

⁴⁰ Muḥammad ‘Uthmān Shubair, "Ṣiyānah al-Madyūniyyāt wa Mu‘āljatuhā min al-Ta’athur fi al-Fiqh al-Islāmī," *Majallh al-Sharī‘ah wa al-Qānūn* 10 (1996): 15-90.

to *ribā*. Nazīh Ḥammād⁴¹ reinforces this position by analogy: even if a procrastinating debtor were likened to a usurper, liability for usufruct would not apply to money, as it is non-rentable. Accordingly, the debtor remains liable only for the principal sum. As an alternative, he advocates non-financial corrective measures, including moral admonition, judicial *ta'zīr*, imprisonment, and court-supervised liquidation of assets.

These scholarly positions are further reinforced by institutional resolutions, The Islamic Fiqh Council⁴² and the International Islamic Fiqh Academy⁴³ have both ruled that financial penalties or compensation for delayed payment are impermissible, regardless of whether such penalties are stipulated contractually. They categorise such practices as *ribā al-jāhiliyyah*. Similarly, the Accounting and Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI) states:

It is not permissible to stipulate any financial compensation, whether in cash or kind, as a penalty clause for a debtor's delay in settling his debt, whether or not the amount is predetermined. This applies to compensation for opportunity loss as well as loss arising from changes in currency value.⁴⁴

This position is institutionally reinforced by the Accounting and Auditing Organisation for Islamic Financial Institutions

⁴¹ Nazīh Ḥammād, "Al-Mu'ayyidāt al-Shar'īyyah li Haml al-Madīn al-Mumāṭil alā al-Wafā' wa Buṭlān al-Hukm bi al-Ta'wīd al-Mālī 'an Darar al-Mumāṭalah," *Majallah Abḥāth al-Iqtisād al-Islāmī* 3, no. 2 (1985): 107-115.

⁴² Islamic Fiqh Council (Al-Majma' al-Fiqhī al-Islāmī) of Muslim World League (MWL). (1989). Meeting no. 11, resolution no. 8.

⁴³ International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). (1990). Meeting no.6, resolution No. 51 (6/2).

⁴⁴ Accounting and Auditing Organization for Islamic Financial Institutions (AAOIFI). *Shariah Standards*. Manama, Bahrain: AAOIFI, latest ed., Sharī'ah Standard No. 3 (Default in Payment by a Debtor), clauses 2/1/2–2/1/3.

(AAOIFI), which explicitly prohibits the stipulation or judicial imposition of financial compensation for delayed debt settlement, classifying such practices as impermissible regardless of whether the amount is predetermined or linked to opportunity cost.

The categorical rejection of financial compensation for procrastination embodies a distinctly classical Islamic civilisational ethic, wherein debt relations are governed primarily by moral accountability rather than monetised sanctions. This position reflects a deep concern with safeguarding the moral economy of Islam from structural mechanisms that normalise profit from delay and hardship. By confining punishment to judicial authority (*ḥākim*), moral admonition, or non-financial coercive measures such as *ta'zīr* and *habs*, this view preserves the Sharī'ah's historical resistance to transforming ethical violations into revenue-generating instruments. Civilisationally, it affirms a vision of Islamic economic life rooted in ethical self-restraint, social solidarity, and the prevention of exploitative asymmetry—principles that characterised pre-modern Islamic commercial civilisation but face increasing strain within modern interest-analogous financial environments.

3.5. Compensation for Procrastination Permissible under Certain Conditions

A third group of contemporary scholars adopts a mediating position by allowing compensation for procrastination (*ta'wīd*) only under strict conditions. These scholars reject automatic or contractualised financial penalties, but permit compensation where the creditor incurs a verifiable actual loss, subject to Sharī'ah-based safeguards. Central to this approach is the principle that such compensation must not constitute income for the creditor or Islamic bank, but should instead be channelled to charitable purposes.

In this regard, Zaharuddin Abd Rahman⁴⁵ and Abdul Sattar Abū Ghuddah⁴⁶ argue that any compensation collected from a procrastinating debtor should be directed to charity rather than retained by the bank. Aishath Muneeza⁴⁷ similarly proposes transferring such amounts to charitable accounts as a means of avoiding *ribā* while preserving contractual discipline.⁴⁸

Zakī al-Dīn Sha‘bān⁴⁹ endorses this position and emphasises that Shari‘ah prioritises non-financial deterrents such as *ta‘zīr* (discretionary punishment), *habs* (custody), or judicial seizure of assets. Likewise, Muḥammad Zakī ‘Abd al-Barr⁵⁰ permits punitive clauses in debt-based contracts provided that the resulting sums are allocated to charitable causes rather than creditors, and he further supports judicial sanctions, including temporary detention, as a deterrent against habitual procrastination.

Likewise, ‘Alī al-Sālūs⁵¹ permits punitive clauses in debt-based contracts provided that the resulting sums are allocated to charitable causes rather than creditors, and he further supports judicial sanctions, including temporary detention, as a deterrent against habitual procrastination.

⁴⁵ Zaharuddin Abd Rahman, "Ruling on Debt Trading in Shari‘ah," *New Straits Times (NST)*, 20 April 2022 <http://zaharuddin.net/senarai-lengkap-artikel/38/58--ruling-on-debt-trading-in-shariah.html>.

⁴⁶ Abdul Sattar Abū Ghuddah, "Debt Issues: Zakah upon Debts and Trading in Debts: An Introduction to Juristic and Practical Issues," paper presented at the 7th Conference of the Shariah Boards of AAOIFI, Manama, Kingdom of Bahrain, May 27–28, 2008.

⁴⁷ Muneeza *et. al.*, "Application of *Ta‘widh* and *Gharamah* in Islamic Banking."

⁴⁸ Sherin Kunhibava, "Claiming *ta‘widh* in Islamic Banking," *Malayan Law Journal Articles* 4, no. 1 (2016): 1-7; Atikullah Abdullah, "Late Payment Treatment in Islamic Banking."

⁴⁹ Zakī al-Dīn Sha‘bān, "Comment on the paper by Muṣṭafā al-Zarqā'," *Majallah Jāmi‘ah al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz: al-Iqtisād al-Islāmī* 1, no. 2 (1989): 215-219.

⁵⁰ Muḥammad Zakī ‘Abd al-Barr, "*Ra‘yun ‘akhar fī: Maḥl al-Madīn*, hal Yulzam bi al-Ta‘wīd?," *Majallah Jāmi‘ah al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz: al-Iqtisād al-Islāmī* 2, no. 1 (1990): 165-171.

⁵¹ Muḥammad Al-Zarqā, and Muḥammad al-‘Alī Al-Qarī, "Al-Ta‘wīd ‘an Darar al-Mumāṭalah fī al-Dayn Baina al-Fiḥ wa al-Iqtisād," *Majallah Jāmi‘ah al-Malik ‘Abd al-‘Azīz: al-Iqtisād al-Islāmī* 3, no. 1 (1991): 23-57.

Nejatullah Siddiqi⁵², however, cautions against any structural linkage between delay and financial gain. To preserve Shari‘ah integrity, he proposes a dual-fund mechanism: one fund to which penalties from procrastinating debtors are contributed, and a separate fund from which creditors may be compensated for demonstrable losses. This institutional separation prevents the monetisation of delay while maintaining market discipline.

From a civilisational perspective, this conditional approach reflects an attempt to reconcile contractual order with ethical restraint. Rather than prioritising financial efficiency alone, it embeds moral accountability, social responsibility, and charitable redistribution into financial governance. Such models resonate with the broader Islamic civilisational ethos in which economic regulation is inseparable from ethical cultivation and communal welfare, thereby preserving trust (*thiqa*), justice (*‘adl*), and social cohesion within Islamic financial systems. Table 2 summarises contemporary scholarly positions on compensation for procrastination and situates them within their broader civilisational orientations.

⁵² Ibid.

Table 2: Opinions of Contemporary Scholars on Compensation for Procrastination

Criteria	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3
General Ruling	Permissible	Impermissible	Permissible with conditions
Core Juristic Reasoning	(a) No explicit <i>nuṣūṣ shar‘iyyah</i> prohibiting compensation (b) Applicable only to solvent debtors (<i>al-mumṭil al-qādir</i>) (c) No prior contractual stipulation	(a) Compensation constitutes <i>ribā</i> (b) No Prophetic evidence for <i>‘uqūbah māliyyah</i> (financial punishment)	(a) Compensation limited to proven actual loss (b) Funds must not accrue to creditor as income (c) Amount channelled to charity (<i>ṣadaqah / tabarru’</i>)
Position on Financial Penalty	Allowed	Prohibited	Allowed only as indirect or charitable mechanism
Civilisational Orientation	Institutional–Regulatory Logic Emphasises contractual discipline, market stability, and harm prevention	Moral–Protective Logic Prioritises safeguarding Islamic moral economy from monetising delay and preventing	Mediating–Ethical Logic Seeks reconciliation between classical moral restraints and contemporary institutional needs through

	(<i>daf' al-darar</i>) within modern financial systems	revival of <i>ribā al-jāhiliyyah</i>	ethical redirection
Key Scholars / Bodies	Muṣṭafā al-Zarqā, ‘Abdullāh Sulaimān al-Manī’, Al-Ṣiddīq Muḥammad al-Amīn al-Darīr	Taqī al-‘Uthmānī, Muḥammad ‘Uthmān Shubair, Nazīh Ḥammād, Islamic Fiqh Council, International Islamic Fiqh Academy, AAOIFI	Zaharuddin Abd Rahman, Abdul Sattar Abū Ghuddah, Zakī al-Dīn Sha‘bān, Muḥammad Zakī ‘Abd al-Barr, ‘Alī al-Sālūs

3.6. The Arguments of Contemporary Jurists in Favour of the Permissibility of Compensation for Procrastination

Contemporary jurists who permit compensation (*ta’wīd*) for intentional procrastination by solvent debtors ground their arguments in Qur’ānic injunctions, Prophetic traditions, and established legal maxims, while framing the issue within the broader objectives of justice, harm prevention, and market order. Their reasoning reflects an attempt to reconcile classical moral norms with the institutional realities of modern Islamic finance.

Among the Qur’ānic evidences cited is the command: “O you who believe, fulfil (your) obligations”⁵³ which underscores the binding moral and legal nature of contractual commitments. A debt constitutes a binding obligation (*iltizām*) upon the debtor according to the agreed terms, and deliberate delay in repayment amounts to a violation of this

⁵³ Al-Qur’ān, 5 :01.

obligation. Similarly, the Qur'ānic injunction to restore trusts to their rightful owners— “Indeed, Allah commands you to render trusts (amānāt) to whom they are due”⁵⁴—establishes timely repayment as a moral duty. In this light, debt repayment is not merely a financial act but an ethical responsibility rooted in *amānah* (trust).

The prohibition against unjust appropriation of property further reinforces this position: “O you who believe, do not consume one another’s wealth unjustly, unless it is through trade by mutual consent”⁵⁵. When a solvent debtor intentionally delays repayment, the creditor is deprived of the lawful use of his property, while the debtor continues to benefit from it without consent. Such conduct constitutes *zulm* (injustice), thereby justifying remedial measures to restore equity between the parties.

This Qur'ānic ethos is reinforced by the well-known Prophetic tradition: “Delay in payment by one who is able is injustice; his honour and punishment become permissible.”⁵⁶ Jurists permitting compensation interpret this ḥadīth as legitimising disciplinary measures against capable procrastinators. In contemporary financial systems—particularly within institutionalised Islamic banking—persistent delays disrupt cash flows, impair fiduciary duties to depositors and investors, and undermine contractual trust.⁵⁷ From this perspective, compensation functions as a deterrent against moral hazard and strategic default rather than as a mechanism for unjust enrichment.

Another Prophetic maxim invoked is: “There should be neither harm nor reciprocating harm” (*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*).⁵⁸ Delayed

⁵⁴ Al-Qur'ān, 4 :58.

⁵⁵ Al-Qur'ān, 4 :29.

⁵⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-bukhārī*; Al-Sijistānī, *Sunan abī Dāwūd*; Al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī*.

⁵⁷ Atikullah Abdullah, "Late Payment Treatment in Islamic Banking"; Muneza *et al.* "Application of *Ta'widh* and *Gharamah* in Islamic Banking"; Zuhaira Nadiah Zulkipli, "Late Payment Penalty: *Ta'widh* and *Gharamah*."

⁵⁸ Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-Aḥkām, ḥadīth no. 2340; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā'ir*; Ibn Hajar al-Asqalānī, *Bulūgh al-Marām*.

payment often imposes tangible costs on financial institutions, including administrative expenses, legal fees, and opportunity costs related to liquidity management. Proponents argue that compensation limited to actual and demonstrable loss aligns with this principle by preventing harm without transforming delay into a source of profit. This reasoning is further supported by the legal maxim: “Harm must be removed” (*al-darar yuzāl*),⁵⁹ which justifies corrective intervention to eliminate avoidable injustice within economic transactions.⁶⁰

Muṣṭafā al-Zarqā⁶¹ develops this argument further by analogising deliberate procrastination to *ghaṣb* (usurpation), insofar as both obstruct the rightful owner from benefiting from his property. Since the effective cause (*illah*) in both cases is the unjust deprivation of usufruct, al-Zarqā contends that liability for loss is justified. Drawing on opinions attributed to Imām al-Shāfi‘ī and Imām Aḥmad⁶², he argues that usufruct is legally protected and compensable when wrongfully withheld. Accordingly, the debtor bears responsibility for losses arising from his misconduct.⁶³

At the institutional level, this reasoning has been reflected in regulatory resolutions. Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), for example, permits Islamic banking institutions to impose late payment charges comprising *gharāmah* (penalty) and *ta’wīḍ* (compensation) as a deterrent against default, provided that compensation corresponds to actual loss. BNM further allows such compensation to be treated as

⁵⁹ Muḥammad Ibn Yazīd Al-Qazwīnī, *Sunan ibn mājah* (Riyād: Maktabah al-Ma‘ārif, 1997).

⁶⁰ Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM), “Resolutions of Shariah Advisory Council Bank Negara Malaysia,” (Kuala Lumpur: Bank Negara Malaysia, 2010, June). <https://www.bnm.gov.my/-/resolutions-of-shariah-advisory-council-bank-negara-malaysia>.

⁶¹ Muṣṭafā Aḥmad Al-Zarqā, “Hal Yuqbal Shar‘an al-Hukm alā al-Madin al-Mumāṭil bi al-Ta’Wīḍ alā al-Dā’in?,” *Majallah Abḥāth al-Iqtiṣād al-Islāmī* 2, no. 2 (1985): 102-112.

⁶² Ibrāhīm Ibn ‘Alī Al-Fayrūzabādī al-Shīrazī, *Al-Muḥadhdhab fī Fiqh al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1995); Wahbah Al-Zuhailī, *Al-Fiqh al-Hanbalī al-Muyassar* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1997).

⁶³ BNM, “Resolutions of Shariah Advisory Council Bank Negara Malaysia.”

income insofar as it reflects verifiable costs incurred due to delay. Similarly, the Shari‘ah Advisory Council of the Securities Commission Malaysia affirms the permissibility of *ta‘wīd* for late repayment in exchange-based contracts (*‘uqūd mu‘āwadhāt*), including relevant *ṣukūk* structures.⁶⁴

From a civilisational perspective, these arguments reflect an institutional–ethical orientation that seeks to preserve market order, contractual integrity, and economic justice without reverting to interest-based mechanisms. Compensation, in this framework, is not conceived as a monetisation of time or debt, but as a corrective tool aimed at safeguarding trust (*amānah*), preventing harm (*ḍarar*), and ensuring the functional sustainability of Islamic financial institutions within a complex modern economy.

3.7. The Arguments of Contemporary Jurists Who Oppose Compensation on Procrastination

Scholars who oppose the imposition of compensation for debtor procrastination argue that Shari‘ah permits the creditor to recover only the principal amount (*ra‘ṣ al-māl*), unless any additional payment is offered voluntarily by the debtor without stipulation.⁶⁵ Any compulsory increase imposed due to delay, they maintain, constitutes *ribā al-jāhiliyyah*, which the Qur‘ān unequivocally prohibits: “Allah has permitted trade and has forbidden *ribā*”.⁶⁶ From this perspective, compensation represents an unlawful increment over the debt, benefiting the creditor merely by virtue of deferment.

⁶⁴ Securities Commission Malaysia, "Resolutions of the Shariah Advisory Council of the Securities Commission Malaysia," (Kuala Lumpur: Securities Commission Malaysia, 2018): 4-5.

⁶⁵ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-bukhārī*.

⁶⁶ Al-Qur‘ān, 2:275.

This position is further reinforced by the ḥadīth that states: “Every debt that leads to profits is usury,”⁶⁷ which classical jurists understood as prohibiting any conditional advantage accruing to the lender.⁶⁸ Accordingly, compelling the debtor to pay compensation for delay is viewed as introducing a prohibited financial gain and thus undermining the moral architecture of Islamic contractual ethics.

Opponents of compensation also invoke the Prophetic maxim “*lā ḍarar wa lā ḍirār*” (“there should be neither harm nor reciprocating harm”),⁶⁹ arguing that while harm must indeed be removed, Sharī‘ah does not mandate its removal through impermissible means. Eliminating harm by enforcing financial compensation, they contend, merely replaces one injustice with another. Had compensation been a valid mechanism, it would have been explicitly applied through judicial authority (*ḥākim*) in classical legal practice⁷⁰. Yet, none of the four Sunnī schools prescribed monetary penalties for procrastination. The well-known ḥadīth—“If one who can afford it delays repayment, his honour and punishment (*‘uqūbah*) become permissible”⁷¹ —is consistently interpreted by classical jurists as authorising non-financial disciplinary measures, such as *ḥabs* (custody) or *ḥajr* (interdiction), rather than *‘uqūbah māliyyah* (financial punishment).⁷² Even within discussions of *ta‘zīr*, the majority of scholars⁷³ rejected confiscatory penalties, with the

⁶⁷ Abū Bakr Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥusain Al-Baihaqī, *Al-Sunan al-Saghīr* (Karachi: Jāmi‘ah al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah, 1989); Abū Bakr Aḥmad Ibn al-Ḥusain Al-Baihaqī, *Al-Sunan al-Kubrā* 3rd ed. (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2003).

⁶⁸ Azman Mohd Noor and Muḥammad Nasir Haron, “A Framework for Determination of Actual Costs in Islamic Financing Products,” *Journal of Islamic Finance* 5, no. 2 (2016): 037-052.

⁶⁹ Al-Qazwīnī, *Sunan ibn Mājah*.

⁷⁰ Al-‘Uthmānī, *Buḥūth fī Qaḍāyā Fiqhiyyah Mu‘āṣarah*.

⁷¹ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*; Al-Sijistānī, *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*; Al-Nasā‘ī, *Sunan al-Nasā‘ī*.

⁷² Al-‘Uthmānī, *Buḥūth fī Qaḍāyā Fiqhiyyah Mu‘āṣarah*.

⁷³ Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Al-Ṣawī, *Hāshiyah al-Sawī ‘alā al-Sharḥ al-Saghīr* (Egypt: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, n.d.); Shams al-Dīn Al-Dusūqī, *Hāshiyah al-Dusūqī ‘alā al-Sharḥ al-Kabīr* (Al-Qāhirah: ‘Īsā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Shurakā’uh, n.d.); Ibn ‘Ābidīn, *Hāshiyat Ibn ‘Ābidīn – Radd al-Muḥtār ‘alā al-Durr al-Mukhtār*; Muḥammad Ibn al-

notable exception of Imām Abū Yūsuf,⁷⁴ who allowed temporary judicial seizure under strict supervision.

From a civilisational perspective, this juristic stance reflects a moral economy prioritising ethical correction over pecuniary coercion. Economic justice, in this view, is preserved not by monetising misconduct but by reinforcing personal responsibility, judicial oversight, and communal moral order. Contemporary scholars such as Taqī al-‘Uthmānī⁷⁵ emphasise that although procrastination has existed across historical periods, no precedent from the Prophetic era or early Islamic civilisation supports compensatory penalties. The absence of such practice underscores a deliberate ethical restraint designed to prevent contractual relations from degenerating into exploitative mechanisms.

3.8. The Arguments of Contemporary Jurists in Favour of Compensation under Certain Conditions

A third group of contemporary scholars adopts a mediating position, recognising the injustice suffered by creditors due to deliberate procrastination while simultaneously safeguarding Sharī‘ah’s prohibition of *ribā*. These scholars accept that harm to the creditor must be addressed, but they categorically reject treating compensation as income for the creditor or financial institution.

Instead, they propose that any compensation imposed be channelled to charitable purposes (*ṣadaqah* or *tabarru’*), thereby severing the causal link between delay and creditor profit. Scholars such as Zaharuddin Abd Rahman, ‘Abdul Sattār Abū Ghuddah, and ‘Alī al-Sālūs argue that this approach preserves the deterrent function of compensation without reproducing the logic of *ribā al-jāhiliyyah*, wherein debtors were pressured to increase their obligations in

Khaṭīb Al-Sharbīnī, *Mughnī al-muḥtāj*; Ibn Qayyim, *I’lām al-Muwaqqi’īn ‘an Rbb al-‘ālamīn*.

⁷⁴ Ibn Nujaim, *Al-Baḥr al-rā’iq*; Ibn ‘Ābidīn, *Hāshiyah ibn ‘Ābidīn - Radd al-Muḥtār ‘alā al-Durri al-Mukhtār*; Nizām, *Al-Fatāwā al-Hindiyyah*.

⁷⁵ Al-‘Uthmānī, *Buḥūth fī Qadāyā Fiqhiyyah Mu’āsharah*.

exchange for extended time.^{76 77} This model draws upon the historical memory of pre-Islamic financial exploitation, encapsulated in the phrase: “Increase the amount, and I will extend the term”⁷⁸. By diverting compensation to charity, the punitive element remains corrective rather than extractive. The debtor is disciplined, creditors are discouraged from profiting from delay, and broader social welfare is simultaneously advanced.

Other scholars, such as Zakī al-Dīn Sha‘bān and Muḥammad Zakī ‘Abd al-Barr, further restrict compensation to cases of verifiable, direct loss, such as penalties incurred by the creditor due to secondary contractual obligations. They emphasise that speculative losses—such as unrealised profits—are not compensable. Alternative sanctions, including *ta‘zīr*, *ḥabs*, or court-supervised liquidation of assets, remain preferable instruments of enforcement.⁷⁹

From a civilisational standpoint, this conditional approach reflects an attempt to reconcile classical moral restraint with the institutional complexities of modern finance. It acknowledges that contemporary banking systems operate within dense networks of obligation and accountability while insisting that ethical boundaries not be crossed. By framing compensation as a social corrective rather than a commercial gain, this position aspires to preserve Islamic finance as a morally distinctive system—one oriented toward justice,

⁷⁶ Zaharuddin Abd. Rahman, “Ruling on Debt Trading in Sharī‘ah,” *New Straits Times* (NST), 20 April 2022, <http://zaharuddin.net/senarai-lengkap-artikel/38/58--ruling-on-debt-trading-in-shariah.html>; ‘Abdul Sattar Abū Ghuddah, “Debt Issues: *Zakāh* upon Debts and Trading in Debts: An Introduction to Juristic and Practical Issues”; Muneeza *et al.*, “Application of *Ta‘wīd* and *Gharāmah* in Islamic Banking.”

⁷⁷ Muneeza *et al.*, “Application of *Ta‘wīd* and *Gharāmah* in Islamic Banking.”

⁷⁸ ‘Ālā al-Dīn ‘Alī Ibn Muḥammad Al-Khāzin, *Tafsīr al-Khāzin - Lubāb al-Ta‘wīl fī Ma‘ānī al-Tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2004); Maḥmūd Ibn ‘Abdullāh Al-Alūsī, *Tafsīr al-Alūsī - Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī* (Beirut: Dār ‘Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, n.d.); Mālik Ibn ‘Anas, *Muwaṭṭa‘ al-Imām Malik* (Beirut: Mu‘assasah al-Risālah Nāshirūn, 2013).

⁷⁹ Zakī al-Dīn Sha‘bān, *Al-Mu‘āmalāt al-Māliyya al-Mu‘āshira fī al-Fiqh al-Islāmī* (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍah al-‘Arabiyyah, 2000); Muḥammad Zakī ‘Abd al-Barr, “Al-Ta‘wīd ‘an al-Mumāṭalah fī al-Dayn,” *Majallat Majma‘ al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*, no. 5 (1988).

trust, and communal responsibility rather than contractual opportunism.

3.9. From Juristic Divergence to Civilisational Coherence

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that contemporary juristic discourse on compensation (*ta'wīḍ*) for intentional procrastination (*mumāṭalah*) in debt repayment may be broadly classified into three approaches: permissibility, impermissibility, and conditional permissibility. Although all three positions draw upon Qur'ānic injunctions, Prophetic traditions, and legal maxims, they diverge significantly in how these sources are interpreted and operationalised within modern financial contexts.

Scholars who permit compensation emphasise Qur'ānic commands to fulfil obligations and render trusts, such as: “O you who believe, fulfil your obligations”⁸⁰ and “Verily! Allah commands that you should render back the trusts to those to whom they are due.”⁸¹ These verses clearly establish the moral and legal duty of the debtor to honour contractual commitments. Likewise, Prophetic reports describing procrastination by a solvent debtor as *ẓulm* (injustice) are cited to justify corrective measures. However, a close reading of the classical juristic tradition reveals that such texts were historically interpreted to justify disciplinary and judicial sanctions rather than financial penalties. With the notable exception of Imām Abū Yūsuf—who permitted the temporary seizure of assets without permanent appropriation—classical jurists did not equate punishment (*'uqūbah*) with monetary extraction.⁸²

⁸⁰ Al-Qur'ān, 05 :01.

⁸¹ Al-Qur'ān, 4 :58.

⁸² Muḥammad Taqī 'Uthmānī, *An Introduction to Islamic Finance* (Karachi: Maktabah Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān, 2002); Issa Khan and Noor Naemah Binti Abdul Rahman, “Mawqif al-Shaykh Muḥammad Taqī al-'Uthmānī fi Mas'alat al-Ta'wīḍ 'an Darar al-Maṭal fi Bay' al-Taqsīt,” *Journal of Fiqh* 7 (2010): 245–258.

Proponents of compensation further invoke the legal maxim “harm must be removed” (*al-darar yuzāl*),⁸³ arguing that creditors suffer material harm through delayed payment. Yet classical *fiqh* demonstrates that harm may be mitigated through multiple non-financial mechanisms, including *habs* (custody), *hajr* (interdiction), forced sale of assets, or judicial enforcement.⁸⁴ These measures reflect a civilisational ethic in which moral discipline precedes monetisation, and justice is enforced through institutional authority rather than contractual penalisation or market coercion.

By contrast, scholars who categorically reject compensation maintain that any increment over the principal debt constitutes *ribā al-jāhiliyyah*, particularly where delay becomes a basis for financial gain. They ground this position in the Qur’ānic prohibition of *ribā*⁸⁵ and in the well-established juristic maxim, derived from Prophetic practice and Companion consensus, that creditors are entitled only to the principal of a loan, and any stipulated benefit constitutes *ribā* unless given voluntarily without prior condition.⁸⁶ This view is further reinforced by the absence of any historical precedent for monetary penalties in classical Islamic adjudication, despite the acknowledged prevalence of deliberate procrastination in early commercial life, where jurists consistently prescribed custodial, judicial, or moral sanctions rather than financial extraction.⁸⁷

⁸³ Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Ashbāh wa al-Nazā’ir fī Qawā’id wa Furū’ Fiqh al-Shafi’iyyah*.

⁸⁴ Nazīh Hammād, “Al-Mu’awwiḍāt al-Shar’iyyah li-Ḥaml al-Madīn al-Mumātil ‘alā al-Wafā’ wa Buṭlān al-Ḥukm bi al-Ta’wīḍ al-Mālī ‘an Darar al-Mumātalah”; Muḥammad Zakī ‘Abd al-Barr, “Ra’yun Ākhar fī: Maṭl al-Madīn, Hal Yulzam bi al-Ta’wīḍ?”; Al-’Uthmānī, *Buḥūth fī Qaḍāyā Fiqhiyyah Mu’āṣarah*.

⁸⁵ Al-Qur’ān, 2:275.

⁸⁶ Ibn Qudāmah, *al-Mughnī*, vol. 6 (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2004), 436; Ibn al-Mundhir, *al-Ijmā’* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyyah, 1999), 58; al-Bayhaqī, *Sunan al-Kubrā*, vol. 5 (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifah, 1994), 350.

⁸⁷ Ibn Rushd, *Bidāyat al-Mujtahid wa Nihāyat al-Muqtaṣid*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 2004), 275–277; al-Kāsānī, *Badā’i’ al-Ṣanā’i’*, vol. 7 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyyah, 1986), 102–104; Muḥammad Taqī al-’Uthmānī, *Fiqh al-Buyū’*, vol. 2 (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 2001), 1026.

The third, mediating position—adopted by several contemporary scholars⁸⁸ and Shari‘ah institutions—allows conditional compensation, provided that it does not accrue as income to the creditor or financial institution. Instead, any additional payment is channelled to charitable purposes. While this approach seeks to avoid *ribā*, it remains vulnerable to criticism insofar as it may resemble pre-Islamic practices if applied mechanically, coercively, or without clear Shari‘ah governance.⁸⁹

In light of these tensions, and guided by the classical civilisational ethos of Islamic law, this study advances a Shari‘ah-supervised *tabarru‘* fund as a principled and reconciliatory solution. Rather than imposing contractual compensation, solvent procrastinating debtors may be required—under transparent Shari‘ah oversight—to make a voluntary contribution to a *tabarru‘* fund upon settlement of the debt. Financial institutions may then recover only verifiable actual losses from this fund, subject to documentation and Shari‘ah supervision, while any surplus is directed towards the poor, the needy, and welfare initiatives. Figure 1 illustrates this proposed framework and its operational logic.

⁸⁸ Zaharuddin Abd Rahman, *Islamic Financial System: Principles and Operations* (Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2011), 355–358; ‘Abd al-Sattār Abū Ghuddah, “Al-Ta‘wīd ‘an al-Mumāṭalah fī al-Mu‘āmalāt al-Māliyyah,” in *Buḥūth fī al-Fiqh al-Mālī al-Mu‘āṣir* (Jeddah: Dār al-Bashīr, 2006), 213–230; Zakī al-Dīn Sha‘bān, *Al-Mu‘āmalāt al-Māliyyah al-Mu‘āṣirah fī al-Fiqh al-Islāmī* (Beirut: Dār al-Nafā‘is, 2000), 425–428; ‘Alī al-Sālūs, *Al-Mu‘āmalāt al-Māliyyah al-Mu‘āṣirah* (Doha: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 2008), 612–618.

⁸⁹ Muḥammad Taqī al-‘Uthmānī, *An Introduction to Islamic Finance* (Karachi: Maktaba Ma‘ārif al-Qur‘ān, 2002), 136–139; Nejatullah Siddiqi, “Islamic Banking and Finance in Theory and Practice,” *Islamic Economic Studies* 13, no. 2 (2006): 1–48.

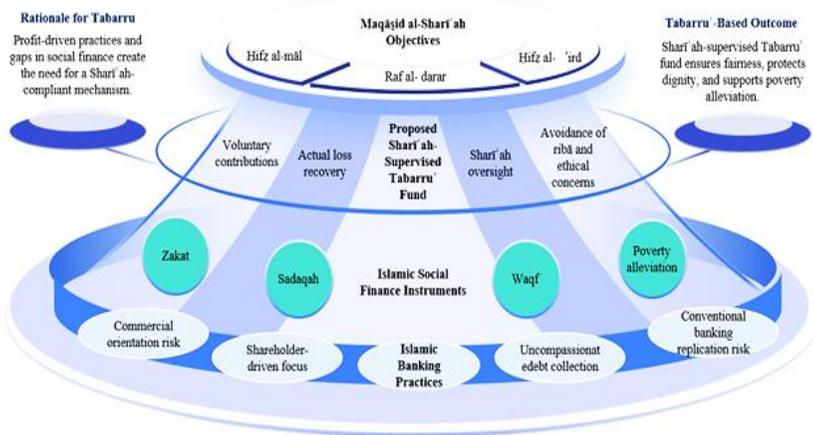


Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating how a Sharī'ah-supervised *tabarru'* fund aligns ethical risk management, Islamic social finance instruments, and the *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah*, particularly *ḥifẓ al-māl* (preservation of wealth) and *raf' al-ḥaraj* (removal of hardship).

This model is supported by al-'Uthmānī,⁹⁰ who argues that any recovery by Islamic financial institutions should be strictly limited to verifiable actual loss and must not generate income from debtor delay. Accordingly, the management of the *tabarru'* fund should remain institutionally and financially separate from the bank's own funds. Banks may submit documented claims to the fund for actual losses arising from late payment, including administrative costs such as reminder notices, communication expenses, and legal processing fees. Similar positions are endorsed by AAOIFI,⁹¹ Muhamad⁹², Zakī al-Dīn

⁹⁰ Al-'Uthmānī, *Buḥūth fī Qaḍāyā Fiqhiyyah Mu'āṣarah*

⁹¹ AAOIFI, *Sharī'ah Standards for Islamic Financial Institutions*.

⁹² Muhamad Rahimi Osman, *Islamic banking system in Malaysia: A study of the legal and Sharī'ah Framework with Special Reference to Debt Financing Products* (PhD thesis, International Islamic University Malaysia, Malaysia, 2007).

Sha‘bān⁹³, Muḥammad Zakī ‘Abd al-Barr⁹⁴, the International Islamic Fiqh Academy⁹⁵ and Majmū‘ah Dallah al-Barakah⁹⁶, all of whom restrict recovery to demonstrable loss, with any surplus directed to charitable and welfare purposes.

Tabarru‘, as a voluntary donation, is unanimously recognised in Islamic jurisprudence and is grounded in the Qur’ānic injunction: “*Cooperate in righteousness and piety.*”⁹⁷ Within this framework, contributions linked to deliberate procrastination function not as punitive extraction but as moral correction, encouraging contractual discipline while simultaneously supporting poverty alleviation and social welfare. In this way, the *tabarru‘* fund operationalises a civilisational ethic that balances financial order with compassion, legality with morality, and institutional stability with social responsibility.

This model aligns with the civilisational logic of Islamic economic ethics in several respects. First, it preserves the prohibition of *ribā* by preventing creditors from profiting from delay. Second, it restores the primacy of moral accountability and social responsibility over contractual penalisation. Third, by integrating the *tabarru‘* fund within the wider ecosystem of Islamic social finance—such as *zakāh*, *ṣadaqah*, and *waqf*—it ensures that mechanisms designed to protect financial stability simultaneously contribute to poverty alleviation and social trust.

From a *Maqāsid al-Sharī‘ah* perspective, this approach safeguards wealth (*ḥifẓ al-māl*), prevents harm (*raf‘ al-ḥaraj*), and upholds justice without reproducing the profit-driven logics characteristic of conventional finance. More broadly, it reflects a

⁹³ Zakī al-Dīn Sha‘bān, "Comment on the Paper by Muṣṭafā al-Zarqā’".

⁹⁴ Muḥammad Zakī ‘Abd al-Barr, “Ra‘yun Ākhar fi: Maṭl al-Madīn, Hal Yulzam bi al-Ta‘wīd?”

⁹⁵ International Islamic Fiqh Academy (IIFA) of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), *Resolution No. 109*, Meeting No. 12 (2000).

⁹⁶ *Majmū‘ah Dallah al-Barakah. Fatāwā Nadawāt al-Barakah*, eds. ‘Abd al-Sattār Abū Ghuddah and ‘Izz al-Dīn (Jiddah: Majmū‘ah Dallah al-Barakah, 1997).

⁹⁷ Al-Qurān, 5:2.

civilisational commitment to balancing discipline with compassion, legality with morality, and financial order with social solidarity. In this sense, the proposed *tabarru* framework does not merely resolve a technical juristic disagreement; rather, it contributes to re-embedding Islamic banking within its ethical and civilisational foundations, where law serves moral purpose and economic practice advances collective well-being.

4. CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that classical Islamic jurisprudence addressed debtor procrastination through a civilisational ethic that privileged moral discipline, judicial authority, and social order over financial extraction. While capable debtors were subject to coercive and reputational measures—such as *ḥabs* (custody), *ḥajr* (interdiction), and public admonition—classical jurists consistently resisted the legitimisation of monetary penalties. This restraint reflects a foundational concern within the Islamic legal tradition: to prevent the monetisation of injustice and to block the re-emergence of *ribā al-jāhiliyyah* through punitive financial instruments.

Contemporary juristic divergence on *ta'wīd* must therefore be understood not merely as a technical disagreement, but as a symptom of a deeper civilisational tension. On one hand lies the ethical architecture of Islamic law, grounded in moral accountability and social justice; on the other lies the operational pressure of modern financial systems that prioritise efficiency, predictability, and risk management. The tripartite division among contemporary scholars—permissibility, impermissibility, and conditional permissibility—reflects competing attempts to negotiate this tension rather than a settled doctrinal consensus.

Within present-day financial environments, persistent default, strategic procrastination, and insolvency create systemic risks that extend beyond individual contracts. They erode trust, distort risk-sharing, and threaten the moral credibility of Islamic financial institutions. From a civilisational perspective, these challenges cannot be resolved through contractual penalisation alone, as Islamic

economics conceives finance not as an autonomous market mechanism, but as an instrument for sustaining social order and ethical conduct.

In response, this study advances a Sharī‘ah-supervised *tabarru‘* fund as a civilisationally coherent mechanism that reconciles juristic plurality with ethical integrity. Rather than institutionalising compensation as a creditor’s entitlement, solvent procrastinating debtors may—under transparent Sharī‘ah governance—make a voluntary contribution to a segregated *tabarru‘* fund upon settlement of their obligations. Financial institutions may recover only demonstrable actual losses from this fund, while any surplus is redirected towards charitable and welfare purposes.

This framework does not represent a procedural compromise, but a principled reorientation. It preserves the prohibition of *ribā* by severing any link between delay and profit, restores moral accountability without commodifying punishment, and embeds Islamic banking within the wider ecosystem of Islamic social finance. In doing so, it aligns with the guidance of AAOIFI, Nejatullah Siddiqi, and the International Islamic Fiqh Academy, all of whom caution against transforming *ta‘wīd* into a routine punitive instrument.

From a *Maqāṣid al-Sharī‘ah* perspective, the proposed model safeguards wealth (*hifz al-māl*), mitigates harm (*raf‘ al-ḥaraj*), and upholds justice while avoiding the profit-driven logic characteristic of conventional finance. More broadly, it reflects a civilisational commitment to balancing discipline with compassion and legality with moral purpose. Islamic banks, as civilisational institutions, must therefore distinguish clearly between deliberate procrastination and genuine incapacity, in accordance with the Qur’ānic injunction to grant respite to the insolvent. Future empirical research should examine how such Sharī‘ah-supervised mechanisms can be operationalised without coercion, ensuring that Islamic finance remains ethically credible, socially rooted, and civilisationally distinctive.



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INTERSUBJECTIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE AND DIVINE FOUNDATIONS IN INDONESIA: A CIVILISATIONAL READING OF IBN KHALDŪN AND KUNTOWIJOYO

Waryani Fajar Riyanto¹

ABSTRACT

Muslim civilisational consciousness has historically evolved through three interrelated phases: the theological (*Islamic*), the political (*Islamdom*), and the socio-historical (*Islamicate*). These phases represent distinct yet interconnected modes of reasoning through which Muslims have understood religion, power, and historical experience. From sociological and historical perspectives, these cycles of civilisational reason were critically examined by Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) and, in the Indonesian context, by Kuntowijoyo (1943–2005). This study addresses two central questions: how do Ibn Khaldūn’s and Kuntowijoyo’s conceptions of civilisational cycles compare, and what implications do their ideas hold for contemporary Indonesian society? Employing a qualitative document-based methodology, the study analyses primary texts—*al-Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldūn and Kuntowijoyo’s writings on the historical periodisation of Indonesian Muslims—using a comparative–evolutionary

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analytical framework. Comparative analysis identifies convergences and divergences in their civilisational reasoning, while evolutive analysis traces the transformation of historical consciousness within Indonesian Muslim society. The study advances the concept of intersubjective social science with a divine foundation, a framework that integrates spiritual consciousness, ethical self-reflection grounded in prophetic ethics, and divine guidance as constitutive elements of social analysis. This approach challenges positivist and secular paradigms in the social sciences by repositioning revelation, morality, and inner ethical awareness as legitimate epistemic sources. By synthesising Ibn Khaldūn's theory of social cohesion and civilisational decline with Kuntowijoyo's prophetic social science, the paper contributes to the development of a civilisationally grounded social science relevant to Indonesia's intellectual and socio-religious context.

KEYWORDS: Ibn Khaldūn, Kuntowijoyo, Civilisational Theory, Islamic Sociology, Prophetic Ethics, Intersubjective Social Science.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Muslims' historical awareness of civilisational periodisation has undergone three major stages, namely the theological, political, and historical-cultural. The theological phase refers to Islam as a doctrine (*Islamic*). Subsequently, Islam is perceived as a caliphate with political authority (*Islamdom*) before subsequently becoming modern states.² Finally, these earlier stages were historically mediated through social and cultural processes, giving rise to what is today conceptualised as

² Muhammad Zainor Ridho, "From Caliphate to Modern State: A Reflection of Ibn Khaldun's Thought", *Ulumuna* 23, no. 1 (2019): 48–70, <https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v23i1.345>.

the Islamicate civilisational sphere.³ According to Tibi⁴ and Bayat,⁵ these three cycles described as *Islam*, *Islamism*, and *Post-Islamism*. In sociological terms, this trajectory corresponds with broader theories of the periodisation of human thought and social consciousness.⁶ Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) was among the earliest thinkers to articulate a systematic theory of the stages of human reasoning and social development. As a polymath, he made foundational contributions not only to sociology but also to history, political thought, philosophy of social science, and jurisprudence. In the present study, however, Ibn Khaldūn is examined primarily through his sociological lens⁷—not to diminish his wider intellectual legacy, but to situate his thought within a civilisational analysis of social reasoning. Ibn Khaldūn identified three principal forms of social cognition: *'aql tamyīzī* (discriminative reasoning), *'aql tajrībī* (empirical reasoning), and *'aql nazārī* (speculative–rational intellect).⁸ Drawing inspiration from Ibn Khaldūn's civilisational sociology,, Kuntowijoyo (1943-2005) proposed a tripartite model of historical consciousness experienced by Indonesian Muslims, namely myth, ideology, and science.⁹ These stages reflect a transition from symbolic religious awareness to ideological mobilisation, and finally to a reflective, knowledge-based engagement with religion and society.

³ See, M. Amin Abdullah, *Islamikasi Indonesia: Filsafat Ilmu Memahami Pancasila* (Islamicate of Indonesia: The Philosophy of Science Understanding Pancasila) (Yogyakarta: Litera Cahaya Bangsa, 2025).

⁴ See, Bassam Tibi, *Islamism and Islam* (London: Yale University Press, 2012).

⁵ See, Asef Bayat, ed., *Post-Islamism: The Changing Faces of Political Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁶ Mukerrem Miftah Shafi, "A Critical Appraisal of Marshal Hodgson's View of Islam Vis-à-Vis Cumulative and Discursive Traditions", *The Journal of Humanity and Society* 1, no. 2 (2018): 33–50, <https://doi.org/10.12658/M0234>.

⁷ Mehmet Soyer and Paul Gilbert, "Debating the Origins of Sociology: Ibn Khaldun as a Founding Father of Sociology", *International Journal of Sociological Research* 5, no. 1 (2012): 13–30, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/264385117>.

⁸ Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah* (Introduction) (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1947), 374.

⁹ Kuntowijoyo, *Identitas Politik Umat Islam* (Islamic Political Identity) (Bandung: Mizan Press, 1997), 66–67.

A sustained comparative analysis between Ibn Khaldūn and Kuntowijoyo has not been adequately undertaken in existing scholarship. While a direct comparison between the two figures may appear disproportionate given their distinct historical and disciplinary contexts, revisiting Ibn Khaldūn's theory of social reason through the interpretive lens of Kuntowijoyo remains both viable and intellectually productive. This is because both thinkers share several foundational convergences. First, both operated within an Islamic worldview grounded in spiritual and ethical values. Second, both sought to integrate Islamic normative principles into the social sciences. Third, both advanced a holistic conception of the human being that preserves the equilibrium between material embodiment and spiritual-rational consciousness. Their primary divergence lies in disciplinary orientation: Ibn Khaldūn approached society as a sociologist, whereas Kuntowijoyo wrote as a historian.

While earlier studies have examined Ibn Khaldūn and Kuntowijoyo independently, few have explored how their respective insights may be synthesised to articulate a divinely grounded, innersubjective social science within a civilisational framework. This study addresses that lacuna. Accordingly, the present research revisits Ibn Khaldūn's thought through the interpretive horizon of Kuntowijoyo in order to examine cycles of civilisational reason and their implications for Indonesian Muslim society.

This study employs qualitative textual analysis.¹⁰ Research data are divided into primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include Ibn Khaldūn's *Kitāb al-'Ibar*,¹¹ *al-Muqaddimah*,¹² and *al-*

¹⁰ Glenn Bowen, "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method", *Qualitative Research Journal* 9, no. 2 (2009): 27–40, <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>.

¹¹ Yves Lacoste, *Ibn Khaldoun, Naissance de l'histoire, Passé Du Tiers Monde* (Paris: Francois Maspero, 1966), 198–99. The term '*ibar*' means 'the permeating reason' or 'semipermeability' as stated in Rolston's words: "*The conflicts between scientific and religious interpretations arise because the boundary between causality and meaning is semipermeable*". Holmes Rolston, *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1987), 1–2.

¹² Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah* (Introduction), 234; P.A. Sorokin, *Society, Culture, and Personality* (New York: Harper, 1947), 31.

Ta'rif bi Ibn Khaldūn,¹³ as well as Kuntowijoyo's *Paradigma Islam* (Islamic Paradigm),¹⁴ *Dinamika Sejarah Umat Islam* (Dynamics of Islamic History),¹⁵ and *Periodisasi Sejarah Kesadaran Keagamaan Umat Islam Indonesia* (Periodisation of the History of Religious Awareness of Indonesian Muslims).¹⁶ Secondary sources consist of authoritative and relevant scholarly literature.¹⁷ Data were thematically categorised and comparatively analysed to identify convergences and divergences in the two thinkers' conceptualisations of social reason.¹⁸ The findings are presented as a conceptual synthesis constituting the study's principal contribution.

1.1. Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) and Kuntowijoyo (1943-2005): Sociologist and Historian

Ibn Khaldun was born in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia in the Middle East, on the 27th of May, 1332 to a genuine Ḥaḍramawt Arab family.¹⁹ In addition to Tunisia, three significant geographical affiliations in Ibn Khaldun's life journey are Algeria, Marrocco, and Egypt.²⁰ Six centuries later, Kuntowijoyo was born in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, one of the eastern countries, on the 18th of September, 1943 to a Javanese

¹³ Walter J. Fischel, *Ibn Khaldun and Tamerlane* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1952), 12–23.

¹⁴ Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi Untuk Aksi (The Islamic Paradigm: Interpretation for Action)* (Bandung: Mizan Press, 1991), 1–10.

¹⁵ Kuntowijoyo, *Dinamika Internal Umat Islam (Internal Dynamics of Muslims)* (Yogyakarta: Shalahuddin Press, 1993), 11–20.

¹⁶ Kuntowijoyo, "Periodisasi Sejarah Kesadaran Keagamaan Umat Islam Indonesia: Mitos, Ideologi, dan Ilmu (Periodization of the History of Religious Awareness of Indonesian Muslims: Myth, Ideology, and Science)", 2001, 1–24.

¹⁷ Felipe Silva Martins et. al., "Secondary Data in Research – Uses and Opportunities", *Revista Ibero-Americana de Estrategia* 17, no. 4 (2018): 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.5585/ijsm.v17i4.2723>.

¹⁸ N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 34–35.

¹⁹ B. Lewis, *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), 825.

²⁰ Robert Irwin, *Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2018).

family that is no longer genuine as it had assimilated with Islam (Javanese-Muslim).²¹ Unlike Ibn Khaldūn, who is widely regarded as the founding figure of sociology, Kuntowijoyo was a historian, humanist, and Muslim intellectual educated within the Muhammadiyah tradition. Ibn Khaldūn passed away in 1406 at the age of seventy-four,²² while Kuntowijoyo died in 2005 at the age of sixty-two.²³

Ibn Khaldūn may be described as a religiously grounded sociologist who articulated a form of Qur'ānic social science, whereas Kuntowijoyo developed what he termed prophetic social science.^{24,25,26} Both figures functioned as social philosophers operating within a civilisational epistemology, though their disciplinary emphases differed.

In constructing their respective social theories, both thinkers adopted a dualistic-equilibrium epistemology,^{27,28,29} maintaining a dynamic balance between material and spiritual dimensions. Ibn Khaldūn employed the dialectic of *badāwah* and *ḥaḍar* (*a'rāb* and

²¹ M. Fahmi, *Islam Transendental: Menelusuri Jejak-Jejak Pemikiran Islam Kuntowijoyo* (Transcendental Islam: Tracing the Traces of Kuntowijoyo's Islamic Thought) (Yogyakarta: Pilar Media Press, 2005), 22.

²² Ibn Khaldun, *Riḥlah Ibn Khaldūn* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2004), 37.

²³ Wan Anwar, *Kuntowijoyo: Karya dan Dunianya* (Kuntowijoyo: His Work and World) (Jakarta: Grasindo Press, 2007), viii.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁵ Anwar Efendi, "Values of Social Sufism in the Short Story "Burung Kecil Bersarang di Pohon" (A Little Bird Nesting on the Tree) by Kuntowijoyo", *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 6, no. 4 (2015): 93, <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2015.v6n4s2p93>.

²⁶ Pradana Boy ZTF, "Prophetic Social Sciences: Toward an Islamic-Based Transformative Social Sciences", *IJIMS, Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 1 (2011): 95–121, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v1i1.95-121>.

²⁷ Moh. Pribadi, *Pemikiran Sosiologi Islam Ibn Khaldun (Ibn Khaldun's Islamic Sociological Thought)* (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2014), 30.

²⁸ Carool Kersten, *Islam in Indonesia: The Contest for Society, Ideas, and Values* (London: Hurst and Company, 2015), 177–188.

²⁹ Kuntowijoyo, *Islam Sebagai Ilmu: Epistemologi, Metodologi, dan Etika* (Islam as a Science: Epistemology, Methodology, and Ethics) (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana Press, 2006), 34.

'*arāb*),³⁰ while Kuntowijoyo articulated the rural–urban *desa-kota* (rural-urban) continuum.³¹

Beyond sociology, Ibn Khaldūn contributed extensively to political economy, law, geography, and jurisprudence, with *Muqaddimah*³² standing as his most influential work. Kuntowijoyo's scholarly focus centred on history, with his doctoral dissertation *Social Change in an Agrarian Society: Madura, 1850-1940*³³ marking a pinnacle of his academic contribution. Arnold Toynbee famously described Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddimah* as "the greatest work of its kind ever created by any mind in any time or place."³⁴ Kuntowijoyo, meanwhile, gained prominence through *Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi untuk Aksi*, which has been recognised by historians as a mature and methodologically sophisticated work.³⁵ Both thinkers employed social philosophy as an analytical instrument. However, Ibn Khaldūn conceptualised stages of human intellect— '*aql hayūlī*, '*tamyīzī*, '*tajrībī*, and '*nazarī*'³⁶—whereas Kuntowijoyo proposed stages of 'human awareness', namely myth, ideology, knowledge.³⁷ In addition, Kuntowijoyo introduced two influential concepts: the

³⁰ Khalil 'Abdul Karim, "*Syari'ah: Sejarah Perkelahian Pemaknaan (Shari'ah: History of the Battle of Meaning)*," trans. Kamran As'ad (Yogyakarta: LKiS Press, 2003), 27–30.

³¹ Kuntowijoyo, *Dinamika Internal Umat Islam (Internal Dynamics of Muslims)*, 21.

³² Pribadi, *Pemikiran Sosiologi Islam Ibn Khaldun (Ibn Khaldun's Islamic Sociological Thought)*, 30.

³³ Muhammad Zainal Abidin, *Paradigma Islam Dalam Pembangunan Ilmu Integralistik: Membaca Pemikiran Kuntowijoyo (The Islamic Paradigm in the Development of Integralistic Science: Reading Kuntowijoyo's Thoughts)* (Banjarmasin: IAIN Antasari Press, 2016), 72.

³⁴ Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1947), 172.

³⁵ Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi Untuk Aksi (The Islamic Paradigm: Interpretation for Action)*, 7–10.

³⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah (Introduction)*, 374.

³⁷ Kuntowijoyo, "Periodisasi Sejarah Kesadaran Keagamaan Umat Islam Indonesia: Mitos, Ideologi, dan Ilmu (Periodisation of the History of Religious Awareness of Indonesian Muslims: Myth, Ideology, and Science)", 16.

knowledgisation of Islam and prophetic social science.³⁸

According to Kuntowijoyo, the knowledgisation of Islam reconnects text and context so that revelation and historical reality correspond meaningfully.³⁹ Prophetic social science, meanwhile, is grounded in three values: *amr bi al-ma'rūf* (emancipation), *nahy 'an al-munkar* (liberation), and *tu'minūna bi-Allāh* (transcendence). This model seeks to transcend the limitations of liberalism, Marxism, and reductionist religiosity by integrating moral, social, and transcendent dimensions.⁴⁰

This study argues that prophetic social science requires further epistemic deepening through prophetic ethics, defined as the cultivated conscience (*rūh*), moral intuition, and what Peter Berger terms the “sacred canopy.” The sacred canopy functions as a protective moral structure that shields human society from both unrestrained desire and transient materialism. The innersubjective conscience embodies prophetic virtues—*ṣidq*, *amānah*, *tablīgh*, and *faṭānah*—which continue beyond the Prophetic era as ethical dispositions embedded within human moral consciousness.

In this respect, innersubjective social science emerges as a civilisational project, integrating divine orientation, ethical introspection, and historical awareness to guide social analysis. Rather than merely describing society, it seeks to re-anchor social science within a moral–civilisational horizon, where knowledge serves both truth and collective well-being.

³⁸ Media Zainul Bahri, "Expressing Political and Religious Identity: Religion-Science Relations in Indonesian Muslim Thinkers 1970-2014", *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 56, no. 1 (2018): 173, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2018.561>.

³⁹ Kuntowijoyo, *Islam Sebagai Ilmu: Epistemologi, Metodologi, dan Etika (Islam as a Science: Epistemology, Methodology, and Ethics)*, 34.

⁴⁰ Kuntowijoyo, "Ilmu Sosial Profetik: Etika Pengembangan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial (Prophetic Social Sciences: The Ethics of the Development of the Social Sciences)", *Al-Jami'ah* 61, no. 1 (1998): 70, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.1998.3661.63-77>.

2.0. THE CYCLES OF CIVILISATIONAL REASON: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To maintain conceptual focus, only the most relevant aspects of the literature are highlighted here, while further descriptive details are omitted for brevity. Whereas much of the existing scholarship on Ibn Khaldūn and Kuntowijoyo examines cycles of civilisation as historical or sociological phenomena, this study instead foregrounds the cycles of *civilisational reason*—that is, the evolving modes of human cognition, awareness, and epistemic orientation within historical contexts.

Ibn Khaldūn introduced a rich vocabulary to describe the dynamics of social and intellectual life, including *fiṭrah* (innate human nature), *‘aṣabiyyah* (social cohesion),⁴¹ *‘ilm* (knowledge), *badāwah* (nomadic life), *ḥaḍar* (sedentary life), *madīnah* (city), *mujtama‘* (society), *ḥaḍārah* (civilization).⁴² Most significantly for this study, he articulated stages of human intellect: *‘aql hayūlī* (imperfect reason), *tamyīzī* (discriminative reason), *tajrībī* (experimental reason), and *nazarī* (knowledge-based reason). By contrast, Kuntowijoyo developed a distinct yet complementary set of concepts related to the cycles of historical consciousness, including synchronic and diachronic analysis, the three stages of religious awareness,⁴³ the Islamic paradigm, the objectification and knowledgisation of Islam, and prophetic social science.⁴⁴ Although articulated in different terminologies, both thinkers were ultimately concerned with how

⁴¹ Asmat Wazir et. al., "Ibn Khaldun Theory of *‘Aṣabiyyah* and the Rise and Fall of the Mughals in South Asia", *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 2 (2022): 159–169, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol17no2.12>.

⁴² Saleh Ben Tahar Machouche and Benaouda Bensaid, "Ethics in Muslim Writing and Research Methodology: The Case Ibn Khaldun's Scholarly Writing", *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 17, no. 2 (2022): 39–52, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol17no2.4>.

⁴³ Kuntowijoyo, *Metodologi Sejarah* (Historical Methodology) (Yogyakarta: Tiara Wacana Press, 1994), 33–50.

⁴⁴ Bahri, 'Expressing Political and Religious Identity', 173.

human reason evolves within civilisation under ethical and metaphysical guidance.

Ibn Khaldūn may be understood as proposing four cycles of civilisational reason—with the first cycle (*'aql hayūlī*) articulated here as an analytical extension by the present study—namely *'aql hayūlī*, *tamyīzī*, *tajrībī*, and *naẓarī*.⁴⁵ Several Southeast Asian scholars have examined these stages descriptively.⁴⁶ Ismail, for instance, focused on *'aql tamyīzī*, *tajrībī*, and *naẓarī*.⁴⁷ Che Zarrina similarly identified three primary levels: the discriminative, experimental, and theoretical intellects.⁴⁸ Ibrahim interpreted these as introductory, experiential, and speculative modes of reasoning.⁴⁹ However, such readings tend to emphasise intellectual progression toward perfection (*ḥaqīqat insāniyyah*) without fully situating these stages within a broader civilisational epistemology.⁵⁰

In contrast, Kuntowijoyo proposed four cycles of historical reason—again with the fourth stage analytically extended in this study—namely myth, ideology, knowledge, and integration of knowledge. These stages correspond broadly to social formations such as agrarian communities,⁵¹ ideologically mobilised groups, educated

⁴⁵ Annalisa Verza, *Ibn Khaldūn and the Arab Origins of the Sociology of Civilization and Power* (Switzerland: Springer Nature AG, 2021), 170, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-70339-4>.

⁴⁶ Norafifah Ab Hamid et. al., "Studies on Ibn Khaldun by Muslim Scholars in Malaysia", *Afkar Special Issue* 1, no. 2 (2020): 92, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.sp2020no1.3>.

⁴⁷ Ahmad Munawar Ismail, "Pengetahuan dan Pembentukan Manusia Sempurna (Knowledge and Formation of the Perfect Man)", in *Falsafah Ibn Khaldun (Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy)* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan and Buku Malaysia Berhad, 2015), 200.

⁴⁸ Che Zarrina Sa'ari and Mohd. Kamil Hj. Ab Majid, "Epistemologi Islam Menurut Ibn Khaldun", *Jurnal Ushuluddin* 12, no. 1 (2000): 84–85.

⁴⁹ Ibrahim Abu Bakar, "Falsafah dan Klasifikasi Ilmu (Philosophy and Classification of Science)", in *Falsafah Ibn Khaldun* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan and Buku Malaysia Berhad, 2015), 20.

⁵⁰ Ismail, "Pengetahuan dan Pembentukan Manusia Sempurna (Knowledge and Formation of the Perfect Man)", 204.

⁵¹ Kuntowijoyo, "Periodisasi Sejarah Kesadaran Keagamaan Umat Islam Indonesia:

classes, and professional knowledge communities.⁵² These stages correspond broadly to social formations such as agrarian communities, ideologically mobilised groups, educated classes, and professional knowledge communities. The final stage, integration of knowledge, was closely linked to the transformation of Indonesian State Islamic Institutes into State Islamic Universities in the early 2000s. While Ibn Khaldūn and Kuntowijoyo converge on four epistemic stages—‘*aql hayūlī*—myth, *tamyīzī*—ideology, *tajrībī*—knowledge, and *nazarī*—integration—their frameworks differ from other civilisational models such as Bennabi’s triad of man, soil, and time.⁵³

Regarding ‘*aql hayūlī*, Ibn Khaldūn writes: *fī al-hālah al-ūlā qabla al-tamyīz fa-huwa hayūlī li-jahlihi bi-jamī‘ al-ma‘ārif* (in the initial stage before discernment, humans are entirely *hayūlī* because they are ignorant of all knowledge).⁵⁴ Prior to discernment, humans remain at an animalistic level of existence. Through divine benevolence, however, they are endowed with the faculties of hearing, sight, and hearts, as stated in the Qur’ān: “It is He who created for you hearing, sight, and hearts.”⁵⁵ With these faculties, humans enter the stage of ‘*aql tamyīzī*. Ibn Khaldūn explains: *wa hādhā al-fikr innamā yaḥṣul ba‘da kamāl al-ḥayawāniyyah wa yabda’ min al-tamyīz* (human reasoning emerges after the completion of animal faculties and begins with discernment).⁵⁶

The next stage, ‘*aql tajrībī*, refers to knowledge generated through trial, repetition, and lived experience (*tajrīb* deriving from

Mitos, Ideologi, dan Ilmu (Periodization of the History of Religious Awareness of Indonesian Muslims: Myth, Ideology, and Science)", 7.

⁵² Ibid., 3.

⁵³ M. Bennabi, *Šūrut al-Naḥḏah* (The Conditions of the Renaissance) (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), 45; El-Mekdad Shehab and Abdelkouddous Smati, "The Psycho-Sociological Perspective on Civilization: Insights from Malik Bennabi Theory", *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 19, no. 1 (2021): 21–32, <https://doi.org/10.24035/ijit.19.2021.192>.

⁵⁴ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah* (Introduction), 374.

⁵⁵ *The Qur’ān*, chapter 67 (“The Sovereignty”), verse 23.

⁵⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah* (Introduction), 374.

jaraba, to try).⁵⁷ The final stage, *'aql nazarī*, is described by Ibn Khaldūn as the capacity to perceive existence in both its empirical (*shāhid*) and metaphysical (*ghayb*) dimensions.⁵⁸ This dual recognition of material and metaphysical realities necessitates an epistemological apparatus beyond positivist social science. Accordingly, al-Jābirī's tripartite epistemology—*bayānī* (textual-objective), *burhānī* (rational-analytical), and *'irfānī* (spiritual-innersubjective)—offers a complementary framework for analysing Islamic intellectual traditions.⁵⁹

Ziauddin Sardar raises a critical question: how can Muslim societies move beyond the binary of “Westernisation” versus “Islamisation”? He argues for a creative reclamation of Islamic intellectual values through dynamic engagement with other traditions that have partially preserved the Qur'ānic spirit of inquiry. Such reclamation must be forward-looking rather than nostalgic, focusing on renewing and reapplying civilisational principles in contemporary contexts.⁶⁰ This integrative vision requires the full deployment of human faculties—“hearing, sight, and hearts”—including the metaphysical dimension. Ibn Khaldūn refers to this as *ghayb*,⁶¹ while Kuntowijoyo terms it the *transcendental*.⁶²

The recognition of metaphysical reality underscores the necessity of including God as a constitutive element in the development of innersubjective social science, particularly in two interrelated dimensions: (a) ethical orientation toward others within cultural contexts, and (b) mutual perspective-taking achieved through meaningful communication.⁶³

⁵⁷ Ibid., 374.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 374.

⁵⁹ See Muḥammad 'Abīd al-Jābirī, *Takwīn al-'Aql al-'Arabī* (Beirut: al-Markāz al-Thaqāfi al-'Arabī, 1990).

⁶⁰ Ziauddin Sardar and Jeremy Henzell-Thomas, *Rethinking Reform in Higher Education: From Islamization to Integration of Knowledge* (London: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2018), 21.

⁶¹ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah* (Introduction), 374.

⁶² Kuntowijoyo, *Islam Sebagai Ilmu (Islam as Science)*, 34–38.

⁶³ Lynda D. Stone et. al., "The Relational Habitus: Intersubjective Processes in

Finally, a key distinction emerges between the two thinkers. While Kuntowijoyo presents the cycles of civilisational reason in a largely linear progression, Ibn Khaldūn conceptualises them as cyclical and recursive. The sequence moves from *'aql hayūlī* (myth), to *'aql tamyīzī* (ideology), to *'aql tajrībī* (knowledge), and culminates in *'aql nazārī* (integration of knowledge). At this final stage, reality is apprehended through multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinary lenses,⁶⁴ encompassing both *wujūd* (empirical existence) and *ghayb* (metaphysical reality).⁶⁵ This integrative epistemology distinguishes Ibn Khaldūn and Kuntowijoyo from positivist Western social science,⁶⁶ which confines knowledge to empirical objects alone. By contrast, their civilisational frameworks affirm that authentic social understanding must integrate both empirical and metaphysical dimensions, including the recognition of God as a source of meaning, orientation, and ethical order.⁶⁷⁶⁸

Learning Settings", *Human Development* 55, no. 2 (2012): 65–91, <https://doi.org/10.1159/000337150>.

⁶⁴ M. Amin Abdullah, "Religion, Science, and Culture: An Integrated, Interconnected Paradigm of Science", *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 52, no. 1 (2014): 175–203, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2014.521.175-203>.

⁶⁵ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah* (Introduction), 203.

⁶⁶ M. Rodinal Khair Khasri, "Retracted: The Role of Subjects in Kuntowijoyo's Transformative Thought and It's Relevance to the Islamic Social Transformation", *Jurnal Filsafat* 30, no. 2 (2020): 261, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.54911>.

⁶⁷ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah* (Introduction), 374.

⁶⁸ Kuntowijoyo, *Muslim Tanpa Masjid: Esai-Esai Agama, Budaya, dan Politik Dalam Bingkai Strukturalisme Transendental* (Muslims Without Mosques: Essays on Religion, Culture, and Politics Within the Frame of Transcendental Structuralism) (Bandung: Mizan Press, 2001), 9–29.

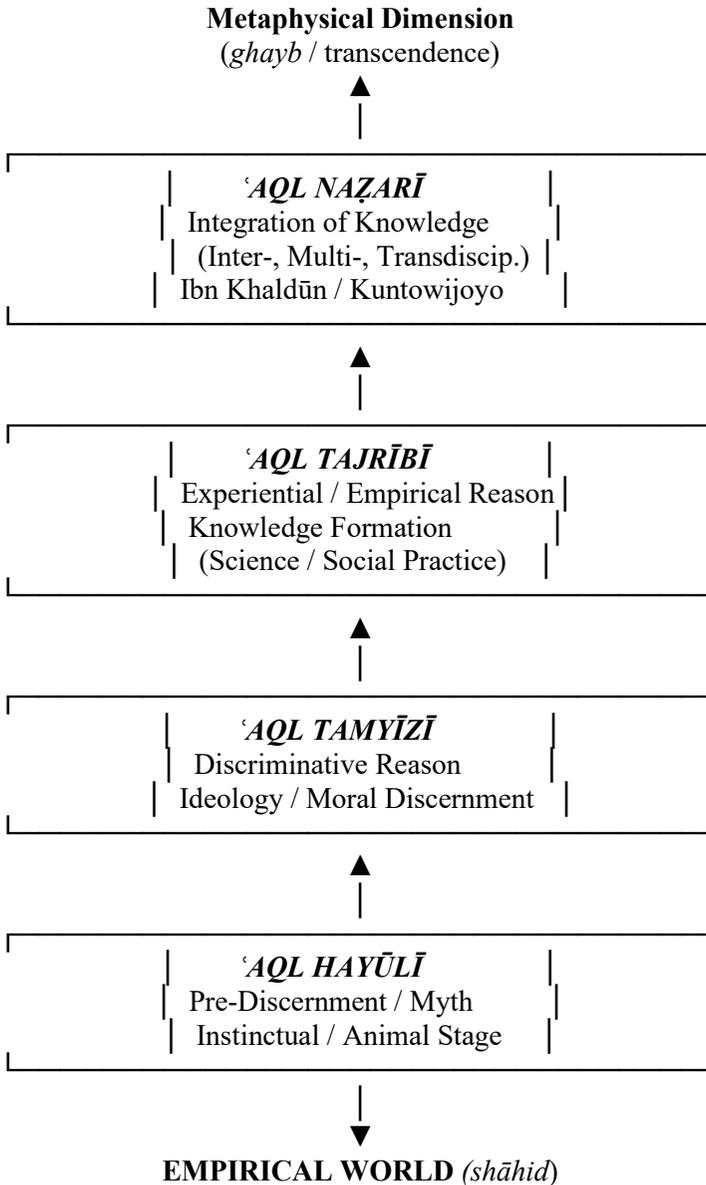


Figure 1: Cycles of Civilisational Reason in Ibn Khaldūn and Kuntowijoyo

Figure 1 illustrates the cycles of civilisational reason as articulated by Ibn Khaldūn and re-read through Kuntowijoyo's historical framework. The model depicts four epistemic stages—'aql hayūlī, 'aql tamyīzī, 'aql tajrībī, and 'aql nazārī—which represent progressive yet cyclical forms of human awareness within civilisation. While the lower stages remain closely tied to empirical reality (*shāhid*), the highest stage ('aql nazārī) integrates empirical and metaphysical dimensions (*ghayb*), enabling a holistic and innersubjective understanding of social reality. This framework demonstrates that Islamic social thought does not terminate at positivist empiricism but culminates in epistemic integration grounded in ethical, spiritual, and civilisational consciousness.

3.0. SOCIAL SCIENCE BASED ON HUMAN-MIND AWARENESS: FROM 'AQL HAYŪLĪ (MYTHICAL PHASE) TO 'AQL TAMYĪZĪ (IDEOLOGICAL PHASE)

To avoid unnecessary repetition, this section summarises the core conceptual framework only once, before applying it comparatively in subsequent sections. Ibn Khaldūn conceptualised the development of human intellect through four stages—'aql tamyīzī, tajrībī, and nazārī⁶⁹—as a means of understanding social and civilisational development. While classical discussions typically focus on the latter three stages, this study retains 'aql hayūlī as a foundational phase to capture the pre-discursive and mythical dimension of social consciousness.

Kuntowijoyo proposed three periods in the development of

⁶⁹ Moh. Pribadi, "Ibn Khaldūn's Social Thought on Bedouin and Ḥaḍar", *Al-Jāmi'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 52, no. 2 (2014): 417–33, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2014.522.417-433>; Moh. Pribadi, "Tahapan Pemikiran Masyarakat Dalam Pandangan Ibn Khaldun", *Sosiologi Reflektif* 11, no. 2 (2017): 29–50.

religious consciousness among Indonesian Muslims: myth, ideology, and science. This study extends his framework by introducing a fourth phase—knowledge integration—thereby allowing a more systematic alignment with Ibn Khaldūn’s epistemological schema. The integration of Ibn Khaldūn’s sociological framework with Kuntowijoyo’s historical periodisation brings together sociology and history into a unified civilisational model grounded in the evolution of human reason and consciousness.

This fourfold model of civilisational reason remains largely unexplored in contemporary Muslim scholarship, with the partial exception of Pribadi’s study, which focuses solely on Ibn Khaldūn’s theory of intellect without engaging its broader historical and civilisational implications. By contrast, the present study examines the cycles of civilisational *reason*—rather than civilisation as a material entity—thereby foregrounding epistemic, moral, and metaphysical dimensions of social development.

Table 1.0 below illustrates the integration of the four cycles of civilisational reason as derived from Ibn Khaldūn and Kuntowijoyo. The phase of *‘aql hayūlī*, corresponding to the mythological period, is marked by indifference to empirical facts, reliance on social consensus as normative authority, irrational modes of reasoning, a localised scope of life (village/*baduwi/kawulo*),⁷⁰ structural modes of analysis, and utopian objectives.

The phase of *‘aql tamyīzī*, corresponding to the ideological period, is characterised by subjective interpretations of reality, prioritisation of group interests, deductive rationality, a national scope centred on urban life (city/*ḥadar/wong-cilik*), cultural methods of analysis, and ambitions of total reconstruction.

The phase of *‘aql tajrībī* corresponds to the emergence of scientific knowledge. It is marked by objectivity, inductive reasoning,

⁷⁰ A.E. Priyono, "Periferalisasi, Oposisi, dan Integrasi Islam di Indonesia: Menyimpak Pemikiran Kuntowijoyo (Peripheralisation, Opposition, and Integration of Islam in Indonesia: Embracing Kuntowijoyo’s Thoughts)", in *Paradigma Islam: Interpretasi Untuk Aksi (slamic Paradigm: Interpretation for Action)* (Bandung: Mizan Press, 1998), 25.

humanitarian norms, empirical research methods, international or cosmopolitan scope (cosmopolitan city/*'umrān*/citizenship), and a commitment to partial reconstruction based on observable realities.⁷¹

The final phase, *'aql nazarī*, represents the integration of knowledge. It is distinguished by intersubjective understanding, global ethical orientation (world city/*tamaddun*/global citizens), abductive reasoning, multidimensional and technological methodologies, integralist analysis, and systemic reconstruction of civilisation. Importantly, these phases do not unfold in a strictly linear fashion.⁷² Within any given period—particularly in the phase of knowledge integration—mythological, ideological, and mono-disciplinary patterns of thought may re-emerge.

In the Indonesian context, the mythological phase (*'aql hayūlī*) was closely associated with agrarian society and persisted until approximately 1900. During this period, religious consciousness was shaped by mystical narratives, such as the myth of the *Ratu Adil* (Just King)⁷³, which emerged as a symbolic response to colonial oppression and poverty.

Table 1.0: Four Cycles of Civilisational Reason of Ibn Khaldun and Kuntowijoyo

⁷¹ Pribadi, *Pemikiran Sosiologi Islam Ibn Khaldun* (Ibn Khaldun's Islamic Sociological Thought), 199.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 200.

⁷³ Damardjati Supadjar, "Konsep Keadilan Sosial di Balik Mitos Ratu Adil (The Concept of Social Justice Behind the Myth of Ratu Adil)", *Jurnal Filsafat* 1, no. 19 (1994): 4–5.

Ibn Khaldun	Kuntowijoyo	Fact	Norm	Character	Scope	Method	Analysis	Objective
' <i>Aql Hayūlī</i>	Myth	Do not care	Social Consensus	Irrational	Local Village <i>Baduwi Kawulo</i>	Structural	Normative	Utopian
' <i>Aql Tamyīzī</i>	Ideology	Subjective	Group Interests	Rational Deductive	Nasional City <i>Ḥaḍar Wong-Cilik</i>	Cultural	Factual	Total Reconstruction
' <i>Aql Tajrībī</i>	Knowledge	Objective	Humanitarian Interests	Inductive	International Cosmopolitan <i>'Umrān Citizen</i>	Research Critical	Empirical	Partial Reconstruction
' <i>Aql Naẓarī</i>	Knowledge Integration	Inter-Subjective	World Interests	Abductive Imagination	Global World City <i>Tamaddun World Citizen</i>	Multi-Dimensional Technological	Integralist	Systemic Reconstruction

Source: (Ibn Khaldun 1947 and Kuntowijoyo 2001

The ideological phase (*'aql tamyīzī*) arose around 1900⁷⁴ and continued until the mid-1960s⁷⁵. This period witnessed the rise of political movements and mass organisations initiated by the trading community, including Syarekat Islam (SI)⁷⁶ and Masjumi⁷⁷, alongside competing ideologies such as Communism and Marhaenism. Whereas the mythological phase centred on charismatic leadership, the ideological phase shifted Islamic activism from rural to urban settings and emphasised organised movements, doctrinal clarity, and collective identity.⁷⁸

Religiosity during the ideological phase was predominantly subjective and legalistic, often prioritising internal coherence over intergroup understanding. While juristic and theological frameworks were crucial at this stage, they proved insufficient for engaging pluralistic and intersubjective realities characteristic of later civilisational phases. This limitation underscores the necessity of moving beyond ideological religiosity towards integrative modes of reasoning capable of accommodating ethical universality, empirical knowledge, and metaphysical awareness.

3.1. Social Science Based on Moral-Intellectual Awareness of Humanity: From '*Aql Tajrībī* (Phase of Knowledge) To '*Aql Naẓarī* (Phase of Knowledge Integration)

The stage that follows *'aql tamyīzī* is the period of knowledge, or *'aql tajrībī*. Whereas the mythological and ideological phases are oriented towards authority, belief, and mobilisation, the defining concern of the

⁷⁴ Kuntowijoyo, "Periodisasi Sejarah Kesadaran Keagamaan Umat Islam Indonesia: Mitos, Ideologi, dan Ilmu (Periodization of the History of Religious Awareness of Indonesian Muslims: Myth, Ideology, and Science)", 5.

⁷⁵ Kuntowiyoyo, *Dinamika Sejarah Umat Islam (Dynamics of Islamic History)* (Yogyakarta: Shalahuddin Press and Pustaka Pelajar Press, 1994), 29–39.

⁷⁶ Kuntowijoyo, "Periodisasi Sejarah Kesadaran Keagamaan Umat Islam Indonesia: Mitos, Ideologi, dan Ilmu (Periodization of the History of Religious Awareness of Indonesian Muslims: Myth, Ideology, and Science)", 9.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

knowledge phase is the systematic cultivation of societal awareness through institutions, disciplines, and methods of inquiry. In this phase, the central organising principle shifts from the *state* to the *system*,⁷⁹ reflecting a transition from ideological mobilisation to structural and epistemic consolidation.

In the Indonesian context, the period of knowledge (*'aql tajrībī*) began to emerge in the 1960s, though its fuller manifestation became visible in the 1990s. A notable institutional marker of this phase was the establishment of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (*Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia*, ICMI), which signalled the growing role of educated Muslim professionals in public life. According to Kuntowijoyo, one of the defining features of this period is the demand for Islam to function as an *objective* religion—accessible beyond confessional boundaries and capable of being articulated in a manner that transcends subjective group interests.

At the global level, this phase coincided with the rise of the Islamisation of knowledge discourse, which sought to reorient modern disciplines through Islamic epistemic and ethical frameworks. Concrete manifestations of this development may be observed in fields such as Islamic economics, Islamic psychology,⁸⁰ applied politics, and contemporary religious thought. Within religious discourse, this period called for Islam to become simultaneously objective in outward engagement and reflexive in inward orientation.⁸¹

Several approaches to Islamisation were articulated by contemporary Muslim thinkers, including Muḥammad Kamāl Ḥassan, Ismā'īl Rājī al-Fārūqī, Seyyed Ḥossein Naṣr, and Syed Muḥammad Naquib al-Attas. Al-Attas defined Islamisation as “the liberation of man first from magical, mythological, animistic, and national–cultural traditions, and then from secular control over his reason and language.”⁸² This formulation underscores the epistemic and moral

⁷⁹ Ibid., 12.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁸¹ Ibid., 14.

⁸² See, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul: A Brief Outline and A Framework for an Islamic Psychology and*

dimensions of the knowledge phase, situating intellectual reform as a prerequisite for civilisational renewal.

The period of knowledge (*'aql tajrībī*) is thus characterised by the imperative for Islam to assume an objective stance as a worldview capable of generating and sustaining social sciences and religious studies. Taha Jābir al-'Alwānī interpreted this objectivity as an awareness of scientific reasoning grounded in ethical responsibility. According to al-'Alwānī, Ibn Khaldūn's intellectual project emerged precisely in response to the stagnation of Islamic civilisation; by founding a science of society, Ibn Khaldūn sought to provide Islamic civilisation with the intellectual and cultural tools necessary for renewed historical agency.⁸³

If subjective religiosity (*'aql tamyīzī*) is marked by committed involvement and insider identification,⁸⁴ objective religiosity (*'aql tajrībī*) assumes the position of reflective observation. Here, the subject is able to adopt an analytical distance, employing scientific methods such as field observation, data collection, comparison, and systematic inquiry. Ibn Khaldūn described this mode of reasoning as *'aql tārikhī 'ilmī*⁸⁵—a historical–scientific intellect capable of discerning patterns within social reality.

The spatial and civilisational scope of *'aql tajrībī* is captured by Ibn Khaldūn's concept of *'umrān*.⁸⁶ The science of *'ilm al-'umrān* integrates three interrelated pillars: the Creator, humanity, and the

Epistemology (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1990); Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Meaning and Experience of Happiness in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1993).

⁸³ Taha Jabir al-Alwani, *Islamic Thought: An Approach to Reform* (London-Washington: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), 52–53.

⁸⁴ Russell T. McCutcheon ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion: A Reader* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999), 33–44.

⁸⁵ Kuntowijoyo, "Periodisasi Sejarah Kesadaran Keagamaan Umat Islam Indonesia: Mitos, Ideologi, dan Ilmu", 19–20.

⁸⁶ Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 184; Baali, *Society, State, and Urbanism: Ibn Khaldun's Sociological Thought* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1988), 11,13; Tarif Khalidi, *Classical Arab Islam: The Culture and Heritage of the Golden Age* (Princeton, N.J: The Darwin Press, 1985), 121.

environment.⁸⁷ Long before modern civilisational theory, al-Fārābī had articulated a conception of civilisation (*‘umrān*) and human settlement (*madaniyyah*) as constitutive of human existence within the broader inquiry into being.⁸⁸ In modern scholarship, this civilisational domain may be analytically paralleled with Marshall Hodgson’s notion of the *Islamicate* (*Islamikasi*).⁸⁹

Hodgson introduced the terms *Islamdom* and *Islamicate* to distinguish religious Islam from the wider social and cultural formations historically associated with Muslim societies.⁹⁰ He restricted the term “Islam” to the religion itself, while employing “Islamicate” to refer to cultural, artistic, intellectual, and social phenomena connected to Muslim civilisation but not reducible to religious doctrine.⁹¹ This analytical distinction resonates with Muslim historical practice, wherein religion and culture were consciously differentiated, even within deeply pious societies.⁹²

The concept of the *Islamicate* is closely related to Islamic universalism or cosmopolitanism.⁹³ The concept of the *Islamicate* is closely related to Islamic universalism or cosmopolitanism. According to Abdurrahman Wahid, Islamic civilisation reaches its creative zenith when a balance is maintained between normative religious commitments and intellectual freedom for all members of society,

⁸⁷ Mahayudin Yahaya, “Umran and Modern Theories of Development: A Comparative Study”, *International Journal of Education and Social Science* 4, no. 7 (2017): 40; Abdul Qayyum Abdul Razak et. al., “The ‘Umranic Thoughts of Ibn Khaldun”, *Afkar* Special Issue 1, no. 1 (2020): 113–136, <https://doi.org/10.22452/>

⁸⁸ Anthony F. Shaker, “Philosophy and Human Inheritance in a Post-Western World”, *Journal of Philosophical Theological Research* 22, no. 85 (2020): 51–68, <https://doi.org/10.22091/jptr.2020.5273.2274>.

⁸⁹ Markus Dressler et. al., “Islamicate Secularities: New Perspectives on a Contested Concept”, *Historical Social Research* 44, no. 3 (2019): 7–34, <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.44.2019.3.7-34>.

⁹⁰ Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Conscience, and History in A World Civilization* (Vol. 1. *The Classical Age of Islam*) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 58.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 89.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 84.

including non-Muslims. Such cosmopolitanism is dynamic and creative, encouraging the pursuit of truth across boundaries while allowing Islamic values to manifest in concrete social forms rather than remaining confined to speculative abstractions.⁹⁴

The fourth phase—knowledge integration (*'aql nazari*)—marks a qualitative transformation in the organisation of knowledge. In Indonesia, this phase began in 2002 with the institutional transformation of State Islamic Institutes (*Institut Agama Islam Negeri*, IAIN) into State Islamic Universities (*Universitas Islam Negeri*, UIN).⁹⁵ This shift signified a move from monolithic disciplinary structures towards integrative epistemic models.⁹⁶ Universities such as UIN Jakarta, UIN Yogyakarta, UIN Malang, UIN Bandung, UIN Makassar, UIN Surabaya, and UIN Semarang developed diverse frameworks—such as reintegration of knowledge,⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Abdurrahman Wahid, *Islam Kosmopolitan: Nilai-Nilai Indonesia dan Transformasi Kebudayaan (Cosmopolitan Islam: Indonesian Values and Cultural Transformation)* (Jakarta: The Wahid Institute Press, 2007), 11.

⁹⁵ Akh Minhaji, *Tradisi Akademik di Perguruan Tinggi (Academic Traditions in Higher Education)* (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2013), 81; Mohammad Muslih and Muhammad Taqiyuddin, "The Integration of Science and Religion: Analysing Research Paradigms in Indonesian State Islamic Universities through A Lakatosian Lens", *Afkar* 27, no. 1 (2025): 165–202, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol27>.

⁹⁶ Deden and Ruswanto Makbuloh, "A Model of the Integration of Science in State Islamic Universities in Indonesia", in *Proceedings of the 1st Raden Intan International Conference on Muslim Societies and Social Sciences (RIICMuSSS)*. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, vol. 492, 2019, 156.

⁹⁷ Azyumardi Azra, "IAIN di Tengah Paradigma Baru Perguruan Tinggi (IAIN in the Middle of the New Paradigm of Higher Education)", in *Problem dan Prospek IAIN: Antologi Pendidikan Tinggi Islam (Problems and Prospects of IAIN: Anthology of Islamic Higher Education)*, ed. Komaruddin Hidayat and Hendro Prasetyo (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Bimbingan Islam, 2000), 13–15; Azyumardi Azra, "Reintegrasi Ilmu-Ilmu Dalam Islam", in *Integrasi Ilmu dan Agama: Interpretasi dan Aksi (Integration of Science and Religion: Interpretation and Action)*, ed. Zainal Abidin Bagir (Bandung: Mizan Press, 2005), 210–11.

integration-interconnection,⁹⁸ tree of knowledge,⁹⁹ wheel of knowledge,¹⁰⁰ cedar cell of knowledge,¹⁰¹ connected twin towers, and diamond gem of knowledge integration models—all of which share a commitment to *theo-anthropo-cosmocentrism*.¹⁰² In Malaysia, a comparable milestone may be identified in the establishment of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC) in 1987.¹⁰³

The period of knowledge integration requires what may be described as *intersubjective religiosity*. Its ethical orientation emphasises values that sustain pluralistic coexistence in a globalised world, including compassion, justice, sincerity, mutual assistance,

⁹⁸ Sutrisno, "Integrating Science and Islam: A Case Study of State Islamic University (UIN) Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia", in *Critical Issues and Reform in Muslim Higher Education*, ed. Rosnani Hasyim and Mina Hattori (Gombak: IIUM Press, 2015), 178–97.

⁹⁹ Imam Suprayogo, *Paradigma Pengembangan Keilmuan Perspektif UIN Malang* (Paradigm of Scientific Development from the Perspective of UIN Malang) (Malang: UIN Malang Press, 2006), 20–25.

¹⁰⁰ Nanat Fatah Natsir, *Pandangan Keilmuan UIN: Wahyu Memandu Ilmu (UIN's Scientific Perspective: Revelation Guides Knowledge)* (Bandung: Gunung Djati Press, 2006), 30–40.

¹⁰¹ Azhar Arsyad, "Buah Cemara Integrasi dan Interkoneksi Sains dan Ilmu Agama (Pine Fruit Integration and Interconnection of Science and Religion)", *Hunafa: Jurnal Studia Islamika* 8, no. 1 (2011): 11–22, <https://doi.org/10.24239/jsi.v8i1.82.1-25>.

¹⁰² Toto Suharto, "The Paradigm of Theo-Anthropo-Cosmocentrism: Reposition of the Cluster of Non-Islamic Studies in Indonesian State Islamic Universities", *Walisongo* 23, no. 2 (2015): 251–282.

¹⁰³ Anton Ismunanto, "Revitalisasi Pendidikan Pemikiran Islam: Studi Kasus Pemikiran al-Attas dan ISTAC Malaysia (Revitalizing Islamic Thought Education: A Case Study of al-Attas' Thought and ISTAC Malaysia)", *Jurnal at-Ta'dib* 11, no. 1 (2016): 145–66, <https://doi.org/10.21111/at-tadib.v11i1.649>.

patience, humility, and concern for the public good.¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵¹⁰⁶ It discourages domination, exclusion, and moral absolutism, advocating instead empathy (*verstehen*), dialogue, non-violence, and solidarity. This phase may be characterised as an enlightened form of rationality—*'aql jadīd istiqlālī'*¹⁰⁷—in which moral consciousness (*akhlāq-budi*) and rational reflection (*'aql-budi*) are harmonised.

Taken together, the four cycles articulated by Ibn Khaldūn—*'aql hayūlī*, *'aql tamyīzī*, *'aql tajrībī*, and *'aql nazārī'*¹⁰⁸—can be coherently aligned with Kuntowijoyo's stages of religious consciousness: mythic, ideological, scientific, and integrative. These cycles represent not merely historical phases but evolving modes of human reason and moral awareness that shape the trajectory of Islamic civilisation across time and space.

3.2. Towards Innersubjective Social Science with a Divine Foundation in Indonesia

In this study, inner-subjective social science refers to a framework that integrates spiritual consciousness, ethical introspection, and divine orientation as foundational elements for interpreting social reality. It is

¹⁰⁴ Kuntowijoyo, "Epistemologi dan Paradigma Ilmu-Ilmu Humaniora Dalam Perspektif Pemikiran Islam (Epistemology and Paradigms of the Humanities from the Perspective of Islamic Thought)", in *Menyatukan Kembali Ilmu-Ilmu Agama dan Umum (Reuniting Religious and General Sciences)*, ed. Jarot Wahyudi (Yogyakarta: Suka Press, 2003), 34.

¹⁰⁵ Kuntowijoyo, "Ilmu Sosial Profetik: Etika Pengembangan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial (Prophetic Social Sciences: The Ethics of the Development of the Social Sciences)", 10.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah (Introduction)*, 6; Fathiyah Hasan Sulaiman, *Pandangan Ibn Khaldun Tentang Ilmu dan Pendidikan (Ibn Khaldun's Views on Science and Education)* (Bandung: Diponegoro Press, 1987), 11; Syed Farid Alatas, "Agama dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial (Religion and Social Sciences)", *Ulumul Qur'an* 5, no. 2 (1992): 45.

¹⁰⁷ Abdullah, "The Intersubjective Type of Religiosity", 79–94.

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Khaldun, *Muqaddimah (Introduction)*, 128–29; Franz Rosenthal, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958), ixxx.

positioned within religion-and-humanities scholarship¹⁰⁹ as a philosophical–civilisational approach, rather than as a purely methodological add-on. In broad terms, religious reasoning in the humanities may be discussed through three registers: subjective, objective, and intersubjective modes of religiosity. Subjective and objective approaches are often associated with modern moral philosophy and epistemology (including post-Kantian trajectories),¹¹⁰ whereas intersubjectivity emerged prominently within phenomenology and hermeneutics as a way to account for meaning that is shared, negotiated, and socially mediated.¹¹¹ In this study, “inner-subjectivity” is introduced as a further deepening of the intersubjective register, drawing on the moral interiority emphasised in prophetic ethics, Sufi moral psychology, and the *‘irfānī* (gnostic–spiritual) epistemic tradition.¹¹² This is not to collapse social science into mysticism, but to argue that civilisationally grounded interpretation must account for both the interior and exterior dimensions of the human being.¹¹³

The period of knowledge integration provides a conceptual opening for an intersubjective orientation to social science. From the perspective of *‘aql nazārī*, reality is approached through two

¹⁰⁹ Abdullah, "The Intersubjective Type of Religiosity", 79–94.

¹¹⁰ An in-depth elaboration on Moral Law can be found in Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (New York: Macmillan, 1985).

¹¹¹ Phenomenology is a kind of philosophical approach which was originally popularised by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938). On its way, it was then developed and used by the study of religions called an approach of Phenomenology of Religion. See more James James L. Cox, *A Guide to the Phenomenology of Religion: Key Figures, Formative Influences and Subsequent Debates* (London: T & T Clark International, 2006).

¹¹² See, Akhmad Hasan Saleh Rahmah and Sri Nur Rahmi, "The Influence of Sufism on Social Practices in Contemporary Muslim Societies: A Case Study in Indonesia", *Journal of Noesantara Islamic Studies* 1, no. 4 (2024): 214–232, <https://doi.org/10.70177/ijnis.v1i4.1396>.

¹¹³ Husni Muadz, *Anatomi Sistem Sosial: Rekonstruksi Normalitas Relasi Intersubjektivitas-Rekognitif Dengan Pendekatan Sistem* (Anatomy of Social Systems: Reconstruction of the Normality of Intersubjective-Recognitive Relations Using a Systems Approach) (Mataram: IPGH Press, 2013), 247.

interrelated dimensions: the empirical (external) and the metaphysical–moral (internal). This differs from classical positivism, which typically restricts analysis to empirically observable objects. Moreover, the knowledge-integration horizon requires a systemic linkage between three relations: (i) subject–object (human–world), (ii) subject–subject (human–human), and (iii) subject–God (human–Divine). This triadic linkage is proposed as a distinctive civilisational feature of knowledge integration, enabling social inquiry to remain empirically attentive while ethically and spiritually oriented.¹¹⁴¹¹⁵

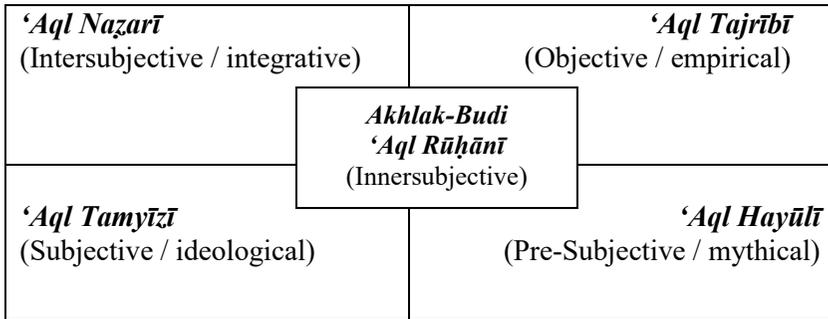


Figure 2.0: Divine-Based Innersubjective Social Science

Figure 2.0 illustrates the interpenetration of four realms of reason—‘aql hayūlī (myth), ‘aql tamyīzī (ideology), ‘aql tajrībī (science/knowledge), and ‘aql nazārī (knowledge integration)—all of which are oriented around a central moral–spiritual axis identified as *akhlak-budi* or *‘aql rūḥānī* (inner-subjective reason). Rather than treating these realms as strictly linear or successive stages, this study conceptualises them as co-present and mutually conditioning registers of civilisational reasoning, capable of recurring cyclically within society.

While Figure 2.0 schematically represents the structural relationship between the four registers of reason and their inner-

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 317–318.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 319.

subjective centre, the following discussion elaborates the philosophical, ethical, and civilisational implications of this configuration, particularly through the concepts of intersubjectivity, innersubjectivity, and divine accountability.¹¹⁶

In this configuration, intersubjective relations remain dialogical and reciprocal, since social actors encounter one another as subjects rather than objects. Yet the figure also foregrounds a vertical axis of meaning, represented by *'aql rūhānī*, which anchors ethical responsibility and moral restraint beyond purely horizontal social negotiation. This inner-subjective axis signifies the interior moral conscience (*akhlak*) that animates outward rational practice (*budi*), ensuring that intellectual, ideological, and scientific reasoning do not operate in ethical isolation.¹¹⁷

In this sense, innersubjectivity functions as a reinforcement of intersubjectivity. It represents a cognitive and moral stance through which scholars navigate the dialogue between objective and subjective dimensions when confronted with the complexities of social life.¹¹⁸ This dialogue spans domains such as science, religion, and culture, and necessitates collaboration across disciplinary boundaries. Accordingly, critical engagement and interdisciplinary critique are not peripheral but integral to deepening social understanding. Intersubjectivity has been articulated through concepts such as *rapprochement*, *intersubjective testability*,¹¹⁹ *family resemblance*,¹²⁰ and *tashkik al-wujūd* (creative imagination),¹²¹ all of which integrate

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 321.

¹¹⁷ *The Qur'ān*, chapter 32 ('The Prostration'), verse 9.

¹¹⁸ Joseph A. Bracken, *Subjectivity, Objectivity, and Intersubjectivity: A New Paradigm for Religion and Science* (Pennsylvania: Templeton Press, 2009), 21–30.

¹¹⁹ Ian G. Barbour, *Issues in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), 50–60.

¹²⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 11. See, also, M. Amin Abdullah, "Metode Filsafat Dalam Tinjauan Ilmu Agama: Tinjauan Pertautan antara Teori dan Praksis (Philosophical Methods in the Review of Religious Studies: An Overview of the Links between Theory and Praxis)", *Al-Jami'ah* 1, no. 46 (1991): 85–86, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.1991.046.82-94>.

¹²¹ Rolston, *Science and Religion: A Critical Survey*, 12–24.

three dimensions of knowing: subjective (firstness), objective (secondness), and intersubjective (thirdness).¹²² Within this study, the intersubjective domain is framed as a “third space” mediating between the empirically grounded sociology of Ibn Khaldūn and the historico-ethical critique articulated by Kuntowijoyo. Whereas subjective–objective relations tend to dominate heroic or rationalistic traditions, intersubjectivity is associated here with the *‘irfānī* or wisdom tradition; their integration is treated as a mode of *ta’wīl ‘ilmī*,¹²³ a scientific–interpretive synthesis that holds empirical inquiry and moral meaning together.

Intersubjective social science¹²⁴ may further be understood as existing within and ‘in-between zone’ (*‘ālam barzakh, mithāl, khayāl*),¹²⁵ also known as Nusantara Social Science or “third space”.¹²⁶ This realm functions as a site where cultural differences intersect, enabling the emergence of new identities through ongoing exchanges among groups shaped by marginalisation and exclusion.¹²⁷ Hybridity,

¹²² Kim Knott, "Insider/Outsider Perspectives", in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. John Hinnells (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 12–15; Kim Knott, "Spatial Theory and Method for Study of Religion", *Temenos* 41, no. 2 (2005): 27–30; Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1988), 225.

¹²³ M. Amin Abdullah, ‘Al-Ta’wil Al-‘Ilmi: Kearah Perubahan Paradigma Penafsiran Kitab Suci (Al-Ta’wil Al-‘Ilmi: Towards a Change in the Paradigm of Interpretation of the Scriptures)’, *Al-Jam’iah* 39, no. 2 (2001): 391, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2001.392.359-391>.

¹²⁴ M. Amin Abdullah, "The Textual-Theological and Critical-Philosophical Approach to Morality and Politics: A Comparative Study of Ghazali and Kant", *Diskursus: Jurnal Filsafat dan Teologi* 4, no. 2 (2005): 151.

¹²⁵ Kholid Al Walid et. al., “Reframing Religious Experience through *‘Ālam al-Mithāl*: A Philosophical and Mystical Perspective in Islamic Thought”, *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf dan Pemikiran Islam* 15, no 1 (2025): 148–171, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2025.15.1.148-171>.

¹²⁶ Baedhowi, "Dinamisasi ‘Ruang antara’ Praktik Kosmologi dan Sufisme Dalam Kesenian: Sebuah Model Kearifan Lokal Komunitas Budaya Lereng Merapi (The Dynamics of the ‘Space Between’ the Practice of Cosmology and Sufism in Art: A Model of Local Wisdom of the Merapi Slope Cultural Community)", 2015, 463.

¹²⁷ Homi K. Bhaba, *Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 2–3.

in this context, is not merely cultural mixture but an ethical strategy for transforming difference into coexistence through shared values, recognition, and restraint.

Beyond this intersubjective horizon, the study identifies the emergence of *innersubjective consciousness* as a further development. This phenomenon arises alongside intersubjective consciousness in the context of integrated-knowledge transformations within Islamic higher education institutions in Indonesia.¹²⁸ Innersubjective consciousness is reflected in the resurgence of spiritually grounded movements that emphasise the cultivation of inner moral integrity (*rūhāniyyah*). Initiatives such as the International Consultation of Islamic Religion (*Musyawahar Internasional Agama Islam*, MIAI), organised by Jam'iyatul Islāmiyah (JmI),¹²⁹ exemplify this trend. Such gatherings bring together academics, bureaucrats, diplomats, and intellectual leaders to reaffirm the importance of strengthening the inner subject through what is sometimes described as *ruhiology* or *ruhioscience*.¹³⁰¹³¹ The moral qualities of *ṣiddīq*, *amānah*, *tablīgh*, and

¹²⁸ Ahmad Muttaqin, "Islam and the Changing Meaning of Spiritualitas and Spiritual in Contemporary Indonesia", *Al-Jami'ah* 50, no. 1 (2012): 23–56, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2012.501.23-56>.

¹²⁹ See, <https://jamiyyatulislamiyah.or.id/>

¹³⁰ Waryani Fajar Riyanto, "The Role of Jam'iyatul Islamiyah Organization in Strengthening Religious Moderation in Indonesia (Systems Theory Approach)", *Millatī, Journal of Islamic Studies and Humanities* 6, no. 2 (2021): 171–188, <https://doi.org/10.18326/mlt.v6i2.6114>.

¹³¹ Achmad Ushuluddin et. al., "Shifting Paradigm: From Intellectual Quotient, Emotional Quotient, and Spiritual Quotient Toward Ruhani Quotient in Ruhiology Perspectives", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 11, no. 1 (2021): 139–162, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v11i1.139-162>. See also, Achmad Ushuluddin et. al., "Understanding Ruh as a Source of Human Intelligence in Islam", *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 11, no. 2 (2021): 103–117, <https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v11i02/103-117>. See Iskandar, "Restorasi Ruhiologi dalam Pendidikan Holistik Abad 21 (Spiritual Restoration in 21st Century Holistic Education)", *Orasi Ilmiah Profesor (Professor's Scientific Oration)* in UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi, 2025, 1–26. Iswandi Syahputra and Waryani Fajar Riyanto, "Ruhani Communication: Revealing Conscience-Based Prophetic Values in Jam'iyatul Islamiyah, Indonesia", *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 1, no. 2 (2025): 1–25.

faṭānah are articulated as prophetic ethical values that inform conscience, integrity, and responsibility in public life. In this framing, innersubjectivity constitutes a “fourth space” that deepens the intersubjective “third space” by explicitly incorporating divine accountability as the foundation of moral reasoning.

The notion of a “divine foundation” may be further clarified through Hassan’s articulation of the Islamic worldview as fundamentally theistic and ethical, in contrast to secularist or atheistic alternatives. This worldview originates in the belief that existence itself is the product of the will, design, and purpose of the One Creator, and that any serious engagement with society and knowledge must therefore begin with an understanding of humanity’s relationship to God.¹³² Within this framework, the ethical dimension is also linked to the concept of *kitāb* inscribed within the human self—an inner moral register that guides conscience and accountability. Here, *kitāb* is understood not merely as textual scripture but as an inward moral inscription embedded in the heart, resisting manipulation and demanding ethical consistency in social relations.¹³³

Against this background, two dominant models of Islamic social science may be identified. The first approaches problems within Muslim societies using modified concepts derived from Western social science. The second goes further by deriving theories, concepts, and methodologies directly from Islamic intellectual history, grounding social science in an Islamic *Weltanschauung*.¹³⁴ Yet both models remain limited if confined to object–subject or subject–object relations alone. Building on Mu‘ādh’s proposal of subject–subject and subject–God relations, this study advances a third model: innersubjective

¹³² Kamal Hassan, "The Islamic Worldview", in *Towards a Positive Islamic World-View: Malaysian and American Perceptions*, ed. A.M. Yaacob and A.F.A. Rahman (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia, 1994), 11–33.

¹³³ Abdullah, "Integritas Penegak Hukum dan Hakim Dalam Perspektif Agama (The Integrity of Law Enforcement Officers and Judges from a Religious Perspective)", 1–28.

¹³⁴ Syed Farid Alatas, "Reflections on the Idea of Islamic Social Science", September 3, 2015, 60–86.

Islamic social science. Within this framework, social reality is interpreted through three integrated forms of awareness—cognitive (subject–object), recognitive (subject–subject), and trans-recognitive (subject–God).¹³⁵

In the Indonesian civilisational context, this triadic model resonates deeply with the nation’s historical synthesis of religion, culture, and moral governance. It aligns with Indonesia’s philosophical self-understanding, in which public reason is neither secularly detached nor theologically coercive, but ethically oriented and spiritually accountable. In this sense, innersubjective social science offers not only an analytical framework but also a civilisational orientation for interpreting Indonesian social life—one that remains empirically attentive, ethically disciplined, and grounded in a shared moral horizon shaped by transcendence.

4.0. CONCLUSION

This study advances the concept of innersubjective social science with a divine foundation as a distinctive contribution emerging from the Indonesian intellectual and civilisational context. Innersubjective social science is understood here as a framework that integrates spiritual consciousness, ethical introspection, and divine orientation as foundational elements in the interpretation of social reality. Through a comparative engagement with the sociological thought of Ibn Khaldūn and the historico-civilisational perspective of Kuntowijoyo, the study demonstrates that neither subjective moral commitment nor objective scientific analysis alone is sufficient to account for the complexity of social life. Rather, their synthesis points towards an innersubjective mode of reasoning that reconnects social knowledge with moral responsibility and transcendental accountability.

The analysis shows that the cycles of civilisational reason—*‘aql hayūlī* (myth), *‘aql tamyīzī* (ideology), *‘aql tajrībī* (scientific knowledge), and *‘aql nazarī* (integration of knowledge)—should not

¹³⁵ Muadz, *Anatomi Sistem Sosial (Anatomy of Social Systems)*, 247.

be read as linear or successive stages. In the Indonesian context, these cycles operate in a circular and spiral manner, frequently overlapping and re-emerging within society. This dynamic pattern reflects Indonesia's plural civilisational experience, where mythic, ideological, scientific, and integrative forms of reasoning coexist and interact rather than replace one another. The study further argues that these four cycles reach their ethical and civilisational maturity when oriented around *akhlak-budi* or *'aql rūḥānī*, which functions as the inner moral-spiritual axis of social reasoning.

By conceptualising *akhlak* as the inner, metaphysical dimension of moral conscience and *budi* as its outward rational and sensory expression, the study situates intersubjective consciousness within a deeper innersubjective horizon. In this sense, intersubjectivity—understood as dialogical and reciprocal engagement among subjects—moves towards innersubjectivity when it is grounded in divine orientation and ethical self-accountability. Because this inner-subjective dimension originates from and must include the role of God, the study characterises it as an innersubjective social science with a divine foundation. This framing does not reduce social science to theology; rather, it restores the moral and spiritual dimensions that discipline reason, restrain power, and orient knowledge towards the common good.

The implications of this study extend beyond theoretical synthesis. It offers a civilisational reading of Islamic social science that is particularly relevant to Indonesia, where religious plurality, cultural hybridity, and moral governance continue to shape public life. By proposing innersubjective social science as an alternative epistemic orientation, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to formulate social sciences that not only explain social phenomena (intersubjective) but also cultivate moral integrity and spiritual awareness (innersubjective). Such an approach holds potential for enriching future research agendas, pedagogical models in Islamic higher education, and broader discussions on civilisational renewal.

Ultimately, this study argues that the development of social science grounded in ethical consciousness and divine accountability is

not a retreat from scientific rigor, but a necessary expansion of it. Innersubjective social science offers a framework in which knowledge serves not only analytical clarity but also human dignity, moral responsibility, and humanity's journey towards God as the Creator.

This study advances the concept of innersubjective social science with a divine foundation as a distinctive contribution emerging from the Indonesian intellectual and civilisational context. Innersubjective social science is understood here as a framework that integrates spiritual consciousness, ethical introspection, and divine orientation as foundational elements in the interpretation of social reality. Through a comparative engagement with the sociological thought of Ibn Khaldūn and the historico-civilisational perspective of Kuntowijoyo, the study demonstrates that neither subjective moral commitment nor objective scientific analysis alone is sufficient to account for the complexity of social life. Rather, their synthesis points towards an innersubjective mode of reasoning that reconnects social knowledge with moral responsibility and transcendental accountability.

The analysis shows that the cycles of civilisational reason—*'aql hayūlī* (myth), *'aql tamyīzī* (ideology), *'aql tajrībī* (scientific knowledge), and *'aql nazarī* (integration of knowledge)—should not be read as linear or successive stages. In the Indonesian context, these cycles operate in a circular and spiral manner, frequently overlapping and re-emerging within society. This dynamic pattern reflects Indonesia's plural civilisational experience, where mythic, ideological, scientific, and integrative forms of reasoning coexist and interact rather than replace one another. The study further argues that these four cycles reach their ethical and civilisational maturity when oriented around *akhlak-budi* or *'aql rūḥānī*, which functions as the inner moral-spiritual axis of social reasoning.

By conceptualising *akhlak* as the inner, metaphysical dimension of moral conscience and *budi* as its outward rational and sensory expression, the study situates intersubjective consciousness within a deeper innersubjective horizon. In this sense, intersubjectivity—understood as dialogical and reciprocal engagement

among subjects—moves towards innersubjectivity when it is grounded in divine orientation and ethical self-accountability. Because this inner-subjective dimension originates from and must include the role of God, the study characterises it as an innersubjective social science with a divine foundation. This framing does not reduce social science to theology; rather, it restores the moral and spiritual dimensions that discipline reason, restrain power, and orient knowledge towards the common good.

The implications of this study extend beyond theoretical synthesis. It offers a civilisational reading of Islamic social science that is particularly relevant to Indonesia, where religious plurality, cultural hybridity, and moral governance continue to shape public life. By proposing innersubjective social science as an alternative epistemic orientation, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to formulate social sciences that not only explain social phenomena (intersubjective) but also cultivate moral integrity and spiritual awareness (innersubjective). Such an approach holds potential for enriching future research agendas, pedagogical models in Islamic higher education, and broader discussions on civilisational renewal.

Ultimately, this study argues that the development of social science grounded in ethical consciousness and divine accountability is not a retreat from scientific rigor, but a necessary expansion of it. Innersubjective social science offers a framework in which knowledge serves not only analytical clarity but also human dignity, moral responsibility, and humanity's journey towards God as the Creator.



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AMERICAN PURITAN ENCOUNTERS WITH ISLAM: FAITH, CIVILISATION, AND EARLY AMERICAN REFLECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The melodramatic tone of Barbary captivity narratives enabled influential Puritan ministers such as Cotton Mather and John Cotton to consolidate a distinct Christian identity in deliberate contrast to a perceived Muslim Other. This article examines how such Puritan portrayals of Islam were shaped by theological anxieties and moral self-definition rather than sustained engagement with Islamic intellectual traditions. It further interrogates whether Puritan assumptions about Islam were grounded in objective knowledge or primarily reflected subjective projections. To situate these portrayals within a broader civilisational and ethical context, the study introduces the works of Aḥmad Bābā al-Timbuktī, Muḥammad al-Maghīlī, Ḥusayn Efendi, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn ‘Arabī—figures who articulated sophisticated moral, legal, and metaphysical conceptions within the Islamic tradition. Their reflections on justice, moral order, spiritual

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unity, reason, and love reveal a markedly different ethical landscape from the one constructed in Puritan discourse. Through a comparative reading of Puritan texts and Islamic thought, the article argues that early modern encounters with Islam were characterised by a complex interplay of subjective distortion and ethical projection, in which each tradition interpreted the Other through its own moral and spiritual categories.

KEYWORDS: Puritanism, Barbary captivity narratives, Islam, Early American theology, Cross-cultural encounters.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the early modern period, narratives of Barbary captivity —accounts written by European and American sailors, merchants, and adventurers enslaved by North African polities collectively referred to as the Barbary States—circulated widely in colonial America. These texts constituted one of the earliest and most influential channels through which early Americans encountered Islam and North African societies. Captivity narratives such as those by James Leighton and Thomas Pellow, offered vivid depictions of life under Muslim authority, frequently emphasising physical suffering, moral danger, and religious difference. While often presented as factual testimonies, these narratives were deeply shaped by Puritan imagination and theological concerns, and thus functioned not merely as historical records but as socially constructed narratives imbued with moral and religious meaning.

Puritan communities were intensely preoccupied with the moral regulation of communal life and therefore interpreted captivity experiences through a theological and providential lens. For Puritan ministers, the suffering of captives were not simply an unfortunate historical circumstance but a divinely ordained trial—an allegorical reenactment of biblical narratives and a demonstration of the ongoing

struggle between Christian and non-Christian forces. In *Magnalia Christi Americana*, for example, Cotton Mather portrays captivity as a manifestation of divine providence, in which God permits His chosen people to suffer at the hands of Muslims in order ultimately to test and reaffirm their faith.² Similarly, John Cotton and other Puritan leaders employed captivity accounts to warn against apostasy, to promote perseverance, and to reinforce a moral dichotomy between a spiritually enlightened Christian world and a threatening Islamic “other”.³ In this way, captivity narratives became a performative space in which Puritan theology dramatised the tension between religious fidelity and worldly adversity.

This article examines how Barbary captivity narratives shaped Puritan perceptions of Islam and contributed to the construction of a distinctive Puritan identity. While existing scholarship has explored the literary features of these narratives and their historical significance within early American society,⁴ there has been less scholarship probing the theological concepts that Puritans brought to bear upon these narratives, and even less still that placed the texts within a frame of interrogation that acknowledged the role of civilisation as an evaluative category. By foregrounding this dimension, the present study investigates how early modern

² Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana; or, The Ecclesiastical History of New England from Its First Planting in the Year 1620, unto the Year of Our Lord 1698*, ed. Thomas Robbins (Hartford: Silas Andrus & Son, 1853), Book VII, 25.

³ John Cotton, *God's Promise to His Plantation* (London: William Jones, 1630), 7–9. See also *The Way of Life* (London: Thomas Underhill, 1641), 22–24.

⁴ Daniel J. Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570–1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Daniel J. Vitkus, ed., *Piracy, Slavery, and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives from Early Modern England* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, Empire and the World, 1600–1850* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002); Paul Baepler, *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

encounters with Muslims functioned as a mirror through which Puritans articulated a Christian “self” in contrast to an Islamic “other”, thereby revealing underlying civilisational anxieties and moral hierarchy’s operative in the early American context.

Methodologically, this study employs qualitative textual analysis and close reading of primary sources, including Barbary captivity narratives, Puritan sermons, and pastoral writings. These are supplemented by secondary scholarship in early American religious studies to situate the texts within their broader theological and historical contexts. Particular attention is given to recurring typologies, rhetorical strategies, and moral tropes through which Puritan ministers framed Islam as a rival civilisation. This approach also enables a comparative engagement with classical Islamic thinkers, allowing for an examination of both contrast and convergence in ethical, moral, and theological perspectives.

The article proceeds by first reviewing the existing scholarship on Barbary captivity narratives and Puritan theological frameworks. It then identifies the conceptual gap that emerges from the absence of a sustained civilisational analysis. The subsequent discussion explores how Puritan encounters with Islam contributed to enduring stereotypes that cast Islam as a civilisational threat, while simultaneously introducing Islamic thinkers from the same historical milieu who articulated sophisticated visions of justice, reason, moral order, and love. By juxtaposing Puritan representations with Islamic intellectual traditions, the study seeks to illuminate the dissonance between Puritan cultural assumptions and the ethical realities of Islamic thought. Before turning to these comparative reflections, it is therefore necessary to outline the literary and historical conditions under which Barbary captivity narratives emerged, using both textual analysis and a comparative civilisational perspective.

2. METHODOLOGICAL AND INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

2.1 Barbary Captivity Narratives as Inter-Civilisational Texts

To understand the ideological weight carried by Barbary captivity narratives, it is first necessary to clarify the distinctive features and functions of this genre. Accounts of captivity in Barbary, widely published during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, provide a particularly revealing archive for examining early American engagements with Islam. These narratives describe how European and American sailors and travellers were captured and enslaved by North African polities such as Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli, often remaining in captivity for extended periods before being ransomed. One of the most frequently cited examples is Thomas Pellow, who recounts more than twenty-three years of captivity in Morocco, emphasising both the physical hardship and psychological strain endured by Christian captives.⁵ A similar emphasis on suffering, moral threat, and religious difference appears in James Leighton's account.⁶

Published widely as pamphlets and books in colonial America, these narratives collectively shaped popular understandings of Islam and Muslim societies. Importantly, these texts often blended narrative, moral lesson, and cultural observation, making them crucial artifacts for understanding early American perceptions. For Puritan audiences, captivity narratives were not merely entertaining or sensational accounts; they functioned as didactic texts imbued with theological meaning. They blended narrative description with moral instruction

⁵ Thomas Pellow, "The History of the Long Captivity and Adventures of Thomas Pellow, in South Barbary," in *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*, ed. Paul Baepler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 82.

⁶ Alexander Leighton, "A True and Faithful Account of the Captivity of Alexander Leighton," in *White Slaves, African Masters: An Anthology of American Barbary Captivity Narratives*, ed. Paul Baepler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 19.

and cultural observation, making them powerful instruments for shaping religious consciousness. Within these texts, Islamic civilisation was frequently portrayed as a comprehensive system—legal, religious, political, and social—set in sharp contrast to Christian norms. Laws, modes of worship, governance, and everyday practices were repeatedly juxtaposed with Puritan ideals, reinforcing the perception of Islam as a rival moral order. In this way, the Islamic world appeared simultaneously fascinating, threatening, and theologically intelligible within a Puritan framework.

The civilisational dimension of these narratives is particularly evident in captives' portrayals of Muslim societies as integrated moral systems governed by laws and customs distinct from those of Christian Europe. Pellow, for instance, remarks that Muslims “follow the Koran with a zeal that leaves no room for mercy to those of another faith,”⁷ These descriptive passages helped to affirm that Islam was more than an alternate form of spirituality; it was rather an entirely different civilisation, with its own moral order that required careful interpretation by the Christian audience. Samuel Sewall similarly reflects on this perceived civilisational divide when he writes that captives find themselves “in a strange land where laws are not our laws, God is not worshipped as our God, and custom rules where conscience ought.”⁸ This reflection is striking: it places Islam not only as a religious rival but as a separate civilisation with its own social, legal, and moral traditions.

Puritan ministers further reinforced this civilisational framing through typological and providential interpretations. Cotton Mather, for example, likened Barbary captivity to the Babylonian exile, arguing that God permitted His faithful to suffer under “infidel” rule in order to test and strengthen their faith.⁹ In the same manner, John Cotton interpreted captivity in typological terms by portraying the enslavement of Christians in Muslim lands as a divinely ordained trial

⁷ Pellow, *The History of the Long Captivity*, 112.

⁸ Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall*, ed. M. K. Bates (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1878), 2:45.

⁹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), vol. 2, 67.

analogous to Israel's exile ("As our fathers were carried into Babylon, so now are the servants of God snatched into the lands of the Saracen, that they may learn patience, obedience, and the efficacy of prayer"¹⁰). In addition of the portrayal of the difficulties faced by the captives, these interpretations placed their accounts in a perpetual confrontation between Christian civilisation and non-Christian civilisation. It is, therefore, important to note that these captivity narratives were not just texts employed to passive reports but were active texts involved in shaping the Puritan imagination of global civilisation. They created an imaginative moral and geographic religious geography where Islam occupied a threatening space.

2.2 Scholarly Gaps: Inter-Civilisational and Islamic Perspectives

Although a substantial body of scholarship exists on early American captivity narratives, much of that scholarship has approached these texts primarily from literary and historical perspective, often neglecting more robust theological and civilisational interpretations. Paul Baepler and Timothy Marr, for instance, have analysed narrative structures of various captivity accounts and the cultural impact of the narratives, while others, including Thomas Kidd, have examined broader American views of Islam. Yet comparatively little attention has been given to the theological frameworks through which Puritans interpreted these narratives, and even less to the ways in which Islam was constructed as a civilisation rather than merely a religious other.

The Puritan engagement with captivity narratives was inherently inter-civilisational. By interpreting Muslim societies through biblically grounded hermeneutics, Puritan ministers simultaneously interpreted distant events and local communal identity. Cotton Mather, for instance, presents Islam as a powerful and complex civilisation, yet one ultimately judged by its deviation from Puritan theology. The difference emphasised is not merely doctrinal but civilisational—an alternative social and moral order perceived as

¹⁰ John Cotton, *Spiritual Exercises* (London: n.p., 1647), 115.

fundamentally incompatible with Puritan norms.

The absence of a sustained civilisational framework in existing scholarship has led to an underestimation of the depth of Puritan intellectual engagement with Islam, however mediated and polemical that engagement may have been. Captivity narratives are often treated as anecdotal or sensationalist texts rather than as theological and ideological instruments that shaped early American worldviews. This study addresses that lacuna by adopting a synthetic method that integrates literary analysis, theological interpretation, and inter-civilisational comparison.

In addition, few studies place Puritan readings of Islam in dialogue with Islamic intellectual traditions of the same or earlier periods. By juxtaposing Puritan theological hermeneutics with classical Islamic thought, this article seeks to illuminate both divergence and convergence in ethical, moral, and spiritual concerns. Having situated the captivity narratives historically and identified the limitations of existing scholarship, the discussion now turns to the theological frameworks through which Puritans interpreted Islam, beginning with their apocalyptic and typological readings.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 Puritans and Apocalyptic Interpretations

The Puritans' interpretive engagement with Islam was shaped decisively by their profound attachment to Scripture. As J. I. Packer famously described them, the Puritans constituted a "Bible movement," for whom Scripture functioned as the ultimate source of knowledge and authority.¹¹ John Bunyan's well-known preference for the Bible over the universities of Oxford and Cambridge exemplifies this conviction. Within this worldview, all historical events—including encounters with Islam—were interpreted through biblical

¹¹ J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), "Puritanism as a Bible Movement," 34–39.

categories. Puritan interpretations of Islam were therefore deeply typological and apocalyptic. Modern scholars have noted that early Protestant understandings of Islam were driven less by empirical engagement with Islamic texts than by biblical exegesis. Timothy Marr, for instance, observes that Puritan views of Islam were shaped largely by scriptural prophecy and typological speculation rather than by informed study of Muslim theology.¹² As a result, Islam was interpreted within a distinctly Protestant “theology of difference,” in which Muslims were cast as heretical agents within a providential drama.

This hermeneutical approach proved highly influential. Khalid Bekkaoui has shown that such interpretations later contributed to justificatory narratives for colonial expansion, framing global conflict as a struggle between good and evil.¹³ Nabil Matar similarly demonstrates that, for many Protestant writers, Islam was not a faith to be understood but a heresy to be refuted and an apocalyptic instrument of divine punishment. Muslims—particularly the Ottomans—were viewed as agents in the unfolding of eschatological history rather than as historical actors with their own theological traditions.”¹⁴

In other terms, Islam was viewed through the lens of eschatology and heresiology. This position is not surprising when we consider that New England’s devout were taught, through Gospel interpretation, that the “false prophets [...] in the desert” against whom Jesus warned in Matthew were understood to allude to Muḥammad.¹⁵ The Ottoman Empire, in this framework, was further perceived as an apocalyptic sign of divine punishment in the end times.

This mode of interpretation was sufficiently powerful that it

¹² Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 93.

¹³ Khalid Bekkaoui, "Introduction: The Lure of the Dark Ages," in *The Lure of the Dark Ages: Fantasies and Fictions of the Time-Slip Genre*, ed. Khalid Bekkaoui (Fez: Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdallah University Press, 2010), 15.

¹⁴ Nabil Matar, *Islam in Britain, 1558–1685* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 15.

¹⁵ Matthew 24:24–26 (King James Version).

became embedded within early American theological thought. It was widely adopted and disseminated by ministers and divines through sermons, church teaching, and published writings. Cotton Mather, like many of his contemporaries, operated firmly within this interpretive tradition. In *The Glory of Goodness*, for instance, Mather portrays the suffering of Christian captives under what he terms “Turkish barbarity” as a microcosmic reflection of the broader cosmic struggle between the Church and the forces of Antichrist.¹⁶ Employing typological interpretation, he comments on the account of a Christian captive enslaved by Turkish masters:

The Lord shewed his marvelous Power in the deliverance of a poor Englishman, who had been long in cruel Bondage under the Turks; and this I would have all the Israel of God observe, that they may see how the Almighty still rescues his people from the talons of Antichrist.”¹⁷

Typological readings of captivity clearly preoccupied Mather’s theological imagination. Accordingly, in *Magnalia*, he similarly interprets the sufferings of the New England saints and the “perils among the heathen” as manifestations of the Church’s ongoing eschatological struggle.¹⁸ For Mather, Scripture remained the primary lens through which such circumstances were to be understood: the conflictual relationship between Puritan New England and the Ottoman world was read, through Old Testament prophecy, as part of a divinely ordained historical narrative anticipating God’s ultimate triumph over the “powers of darkness.”

Mather was by no means unique in adopting this apocalyptic framework. Jonathan Edwards, another prominent Puritan theologian, likewise interpreted the hardships endured by Christian captives in the hands of those he referred to as “Black-a-moors” through an eschatological lens. For Edwards, such trials were signs

¹⁶ Cotton Mather, *The Glory of Goodness: Or, The Goodness of God Celebrated; In Remarkable Passages of His Providence* (Boston: Printed by Samuel Green for Benjamin Harris, 1690).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁸ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), vol. 1, 15–17.

of the imminent establishment of God's kingdom. He taught that "the trials of God's children, whether from heathen hands or from worldly oppression, serve to purify and prepare them; and the day shall come when the ungodly shall be overthrown, and the Lamb shall reign without rival."¹⁹

It would be mistaken to assume that Puritan theological criticism amounted merely to a denunciation of the suffering of white Christians. Rather, the purpose of their apocalyptic vision was twofold. First, it offered profound spiritual consolation to those affected by Barbary enslavement. By teaching that suffering formed part of God's temporary providential design, captives were encouraged to interpret their ordeal as a test of election and faith. According to writers such as Cotton Mather, the suffering of Christian captives at the hands of what he termed "Turkish barbarity" signified God's ongoing intervention to rescue His people from evil. Mather writes that "the Lord shewed his marvelous Power in the deliverance of a poor Englishman [...] that all the Israel of God might observe how the Almighty still rescues his people from the talons of Antichrist."²⁰

The eschatological vocabulary employed here—particularly terms such as *deliverance*, *the Israel of God*, and *Antichrist*—transforms individual affliction into a typological re-enactment of the cosmic struggle between Christ and the forces of darkness. Such rhetoric offered consolation not only to readers but especially to Barbary captives themselves, enabling them to interpret their suffering as participation in the grand narrative of salvation rather than as meaningless hardship.

Second, Puritan preachers explicitly linked contemporary political events to God's providential plan, thereby producing a discourse that fused religious ethics with social and civilisational critique. In sermons and captivity narratives alike, the figure of the

¹⁹Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 1: Freedom of the Will, ed. Paul Ramsey* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), 115.

²⁰Cotton Mather, *The Glory of Goodness*, 23.

“Turk” functioned less as a concrete historical agent than as a symbolic representation of humanity estranged from divine truth. As Nabil Matar has observed, Protestant writers in England and America engaged with Islam not out of genuine interest in its theology, but rather as a contrasting moral exemplar against which they measured their own spiritual condition.

The eschatological framework that interwove political events with divine providence thus generated a worldview in which religious morality, imperial rivalry, and civilisational self-definition converged. Through captivity narratives and apocalyptic sermons, Puritan theologians constructed an interpretive lens in which spiritual warfare and imperial competition were inseparably intertwined.

3.2 Implications for Inter-Civilisational Understanding

Beyond their religious significance, Barbary captivity narratives carried far-reaching civilisational implications, shaping how Puritans assessed Muslim society as a competing moral and social order. Historians have observed that New England Puritans were deeply captivated by these accounts; many circulated widely and achieved remarkable popularity, even becoming best-sellers. Puritan preachers exploited captivity narratives not only for typological interpretation of Scripture, but also as instruments for constructing Muslims as civilisationally inferior. Through these texts, Islam was portrayed as a spiritual danger and a moral threat, while Muslim societies were framed as hostile environments surrounding God’s chosen people.

In this process, Puritan ministers repeatedly extrapolated the image of Barbary corsairs to Muslims more broadly, contributing to a generalised demonisation of Islam. Such discourse unsurprisingly laid the groundwork for enduring narratives of cultural contrast. A telling example appears in John Atkins’s *A Voyage to Guinea*, where early eighteenth-century English perceptions of Africans and Muslims converge within a civilisational hierarchy: “We were all seized with violence and led away as prisoners; our cries were of no avail; the

infidels treated us as though we were cattle.”²¹ Narratives of this bleak tenor reveal the intersection of religious prejudice and racialised discourse characteristic of early modern captivity literature.²²

Puritan ministers were quick to mobilise such narratives to extract moral lessons from captivity. In *Magnalia*, Mather describes the experience of Christian captives in North Africa as follows: “The Lord hath permitted His people to taste the bitterness of heathen oppression, that their faith might be purified, and their hearts be drawn nearer unto Him.”²³ Here, captivity is interpreted not in historical or political terms, but theologically. Mather seizes the opportunity to frame suffering at Muslim hands as evidence of divine providence rather than as the outcome of geopolitical conflict. These narratives thus served to portray Islam not merely as a different religion, but as a contrasting civilisation—an alternative moral and social order against which Christian identity was sharpened. From a civilisational perspective, such interpretations reinforced a binary worldview: Christian society was imagined as spiritually superior, while Muslims were cast as dangerous adversaries. The way Puritan ministers deployed captivity narratives further deepened a gulf that had already existed for centuries between Christian and Islamic worlds, transforming theological difference into civilisational antagonism.

One phenomenon that particularly intensified Puritan anxiety was conversion to Islam, commonly referred to in early modern discourse as “turning Turk.” Reports of captives converting to Islam were sufficiently frequent to provoke alarm, prompting Puritan divines to respond strategically. Rather than focusing on those who had converted—often under coercion—preachers emphasised steadfastness among those who remained faithful. In this context, Increase Mather warned that “To be forced to bow unto the gods of the heathen is to have the very soul assaulted; yet patience and

²¹ John Atkins, *A Voyage to Guinea, Brazil, and the West Indies; in His Majesty's Ships, the Swallow and Weymouth* (London: C. Ward and R. Chandler, 1735), 74.

²² See Nabil Matar, *Britain and Barbary, 1589–1689* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 121–124.

²³ Mather, *Magnalia*, 489.

steadfastness shall preserve the faithful unto the end.”²⁴ As scholars have noted, such rhetoric linked physical coercion to spiritual assault, reinforcing the Calvinist doctrine of perseverance of the saints.²⁵ By celebrating the resistance of captives against their Muslim oppressors—portrayed as both powerful and morally misguided—Puritan ministers reassured their communities of their divine election. Faithfulness under duress was presented as confirmation of covenantal status. Within this framework, Islam functioned not merely as an external enemy but as a civilisational foil through which Puritan identity was reaffirmed. As Thomas Goodwin famously described the godly community, they were “Children of Light walking in Darkness,”²⁶ a phrase that encapsulated the Puritan self-understanding of spiritual election amid a fallen and hostile world.

This civilisational contrast is articulated most explicitly in the writings of Jonathan Edwards, one of the most influential Puritan theologians. Edwards framed Christianity and Islam as rival civilisations grounded in opposing epistemologies. He argued that Christianity emerged in regions illuminated by divine revelation and reason, whereas Islam originated among peoples dwelling in what he described as intellectual and spiritual darkness.²⁷ Christianity, he claimed, spread through rational persuasion and enlightenment; Islam, by contrast, was propagated by coercion, ignorance, and the sword. Through such rhetoric, theological judgment seamlessly transformed into civilisational hierarchy.²⁸

²⁴ Increase Mather, *A Relation of the Troubles Which Have Happened in New-England by Reason of the Indians There, from the Year 1614 to the Year 1675* (Boston: John Foster, 1677), 23.

²⁵ See Michael P. Winship, *Godly Republicanism: Puritans, Pilgrims, and a City on a Hill* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 198–201.

²⁶ Thomas Goodwin, *An Exposition of the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: R. Dawlman, 1645), 23.

²⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption*, ed. John F. Wilson, vol. 9 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 370–372.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 398.

Edwards' discourse exemplifies how Puritan theology merged spiritual concerns with cultural evaluation. Christianity was presented not merely as a revealed religion, but as the embodiment of reason, learning, and moral order. Islam, conversely, was depicted as its antithesis—an empire of coercion, ignorance, and moral obscurity. These texts, widely circulated in colonial America and frequently preached from pulpits, profoundly shaped communal consciousness. They reveal how early American encounters with Islam contributed to a civilisational imagination in which religious identity, moral hierarchy, and cultural superiority were inseparably intertwined.

3.3 Islamic Moral and Legal Thought: A Counterpoint to Puritan Representations

Puritan writers made little effort to understand Islam from within its own theological and moral universe. The recurrent portrayal of North African Muslims as “barbarous,” “tyrannical,” or “enslaved by passion” reflected a distorted image shaped largely by Calvinist soteriology rather than by sustained engagement with Islamic sources. Drawing upon their Puritan heritage, New England divines assumed that any non-Christian civilisation was morally deficient and, unless conforming to Christian norms, ultimately excluded from salvation. When contrasted with Islamic intellectual sources from the same period, this representation appears deeply asymmetrical: it reveals a sharp disjunction between the Puritans' moral self-image and the rational, juridical, and religious traditions that structured early modern Islamic civilisation.

Islamic theological and legal writings from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries articulate a moral vision fundamentally at odds with Puritan depictions of Muslim society. Across diverse regions of the Islamic world, scholars grounded ethics and governance in principles of justice, communal responsibility, and divine law. A salient example is the fifteenth-century North African jurist Muḥammad al-Maghīlī (d. c. 1505). In his treatise *Tāj al-Dīn fīmā yajibū 'alā al-mulūk* (“The Crown of Religion Concerning What Is

Required of Kings”), al-Maghīlī insists that rulers are fully accountable before God and bound by divine law. “The king,” he argues, “must rule rightfully over his subjects, the powerless must be defended, and God’s law must be the only law reigning; one can say that when justice is gone the world order is no more.”²⁹ Political authority, in this framework, is morally legitimate only insofar as it safeguards justice and the welfare of the community. Such arguments directly challenge Puritan portrayals of Muslim rulers as inherently tyrannical or lawless and demonstrate that ethical governance lay at the heart of Islamic political thought.

A similar emphasis on justice appears in the work of the West African scholar Aḥmad Bābā al-Timbuktī (1556–1627), one of the most prominent jurists of Timbuktu. In his *Mi’rāj al-Ṣu’ūd ilā nāyl ḥukm mujallab al-Sūdān* (“The Ladder of Ascent toward Comprehending the Legal Ruling on the Enslavement of the Blacks”), composed partly in response to the trans-Saharan slave trade, Aḥmad Bābā articulates a strikingly egalitarian vision of the law. He affirms that enslavement is legitimate only under narrowly defined legal conditions and declares that “No one shall be subjected to slavery but legitimately; for all believers in God, whether black or white, Arab or non-Arab, are equal to Him in their being God’s slaves.”³⁰ He condemns slavery justified on racial grounds as a violation of divine justice (*‘adl*) and as a threat to communal harmony. Such positions stand in direct contradiction to Puritan stereotypes of the “slave Muslim” as a symbol of moral degeneration.

This conception of divine accountability was further elaborated in the Ottoman context by Ebussu’ūd Efendi (1490–1574),

²⁹ Muḥammad al-Maghīlī, quoted in Vasileios Syros, “Al-Maghīlī, Machiavelli, and the Micro-Politics of an Early Modern African Regime: Comparative Reflections on Islamic and Christian Political Thought,” *Philosophy East and West* 65, no. 4 (2015): 1174.

³⁰ Aḥmad Bābā al-Timbuktī, *Mi’rāj al-Ṣu’ūd ilā Nāyl Ḥukm Majlūb al-Sūd* [*The Ladder of Ascent in Obtaining the Legal Ruling on Imported Blacks*], in John Ralph Willis (ed.), *Slaves and Slavery in Muslim Africa*, vol. 1 (London: Frank Cass, 1985), 113.

one of the empire's most influential jurists. Ebussu'ūd maintained unequivocally that political authority was constrained by the *sharī'ah*, asserting that “the sultan is subject to the law of God; his order is valid only as far as it is in line with the *sharī'a*.”³¹ Sovereignty, in this view, was neither arbitrary nor despotic but morally circumscribed by transcendent norms. These legal and ethical frameworks undermine Puritan claims that Islamic governance lacked moral order and reveal instead a sustained concern with justice, restraint, and responsibility.

Puritan misrepresentation extended beyond law and governance to the question of reason. Contrary to the stereotype of Muslims as irrational or driven by blind obedience, Islamic thinkers had long debated the relationship between reason (*aql*) and revelation (*wahy*). Far from being opposed, these faculties were frequently understood as complementary paths to divine truth. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058–1111), whose influence extended across North Africa and the Ottoman world, articulated this synthesis with particular clarity. In *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* (“The Revival of the Religious Sciences”), he famously compares reason to sight and revelation to light: “Reason is like the eye, and the Law is like the light; the eye is useless without light, and light is wasted upon one who has no eye.”³² The metaphor is striking here: reason and Scripture are deeply intertwined, as the rational faculty is an inner manifestation of divine wisdom which enlightens a believer to discern moral truth. Clearly, he points out that “The aim of knowledge is to transform the soul, not to multiply words.”³³ Al-Ghazālī's synthesis of reason and revelation shows that Islamic thought differs greatly from Puritan portrayals of Islam as a religion of unquestioning acceptance or illogical submission.

An even more profound challenge to Puritan caricatures appears in the mystical philosophy of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (1165–

³¹ Ebussu'ūd Efendi, *Risāla fī Ḥukm al-Sultān wa al-Sharī'a* [Treatise on the Authority of the Sultan and the Sharī'a], Istanbul, 1560s, f. 12r.

³² Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1967), 37.

³³ al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, 3:22.

1240). Puritan narratives routinely depicted Muslims as devoid of love, compassion, or spiritual depth. Yet Ibn ‘Arabī articulated a metaphysical vision grounded in *waḥdat al-wujūd* (the unity of being), according to which all existence manifests the divine reality in diverse forms. In the *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam* (“Bezels of Wisdom”), he writes: “My heart has become capable of every form: it is a pasture for gazelles, a monastery for monks, a temple for idols, and the Ka‘ba for the pilgrim. I follow the religion of Love; whichever way its camels take, that is my religion and my faith.”³⁴ Far from promoting fanaticism or rigidity, Ibn ‘Arabī presents love as the core of religious truth and spiritual realisation. His concept of the *al-insān al-kāmil* (the Perfect Human) further affirms that knowledge, when illuminated by divine guidance and purified of ego, becomes the highest means of discerning God’s attributes.

Taken together, these examples reveal that the Puritan image of Islam was not an objective assessment but a subjective construction shaped by captivity narratives and theological presuppositions. Early modern Islamic thought, as articulated by figures such as al-Maghīlī, Aḥmad Bābā, Ebussu‘ūd Efendi, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn ‘Arabī, offered a coherent moral, legal, and spiritual framework centred on justice (*‘adl*), ethical governance, rational discernment, and love. From a civilisational perspective, the Puritan portrayal of Islam as spiritually deficient or politically chaotic emerges less as a reflection of Islamic reality than as a projection of Christian anxieties and identity formation in the early Atlantic world.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Barbary captivity narratives, when read through the lens of Puritan theology, played a significant role in shaping early American religious imagination. Far from being neutral records of individual suffering, these accounts were actively

³⁴ Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, ed. A. Afifī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya al-Kubrā, 1946), 191.

instrumentalised by influential Puritan figures such as Cotton Mather and John Cotton to reinforce a sharply demarcated Christian identity defined against a perceived Muslim “other.” Grounded in doctrines of divine election and providential trial, Puritan sermons and writings portrayed Muslim societies as monolithic, barbaric, and ignorant—representations that functioned less as historical descriptions than as polemical constructions serving theological and communal ends.

By juxtaposing these portrayals with the intellectual traditions of Islamic civilisation that the Puritans largely dismissed, this article has shown that such representations were culturally constructed rather than accurate reflections of Islamic thought. The sophisticated works of Muslim scholars such as al-Ghazālī, Ibn ‘Arabī, Aḥmad Bābā al-Timbuktī, Muḥammad al-Maghīlī, and Ebussu‘ūd Efendi reveal a civilisation deeply engaged with questions of justice, ethical governance, reason, and spiritual refinement. African and Ottoman scholars in particular articulated moral frameworks centred on *‘adl* (justice) and divine accountability, while al-Ghazālī’s synthesis of reason and revelation and Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics of love challenge Puritan depictions of Islam as irrational or morally deficient.

Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of a comparative, inter-civilisational approach to early modern cross-cultural encounters. Puritan interpretations of Islam emerge not as neutral assessments of a rival civilisation but as projections of their own theological anxieties and identity formation. Their sermons and captivity literature exerted a lasting influence on Western perceptions of Islam, contributing to enduring narratives of religious and civilisational opposition. Recognising these dynamics enables a more critical deconstruction of inherited historical biases and deepens our understanding of how religious literature continues to shape moral imagination, cultural boundaries, and inter-civilisational discourse.



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CONSTRUCTING THE MUSLIM SCHOLAR'S ETHOS: A FRAMEWORK OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY BASED ON THE ISLAMIC INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

Wan Mohd Khairul Firdaus Wan Khairuddin¹, Wan Nur Izzati Wan
Nor Anas² and Abdul Hanis Embong³

ABSTRACT

Academic integrity constitutes a foundational pillar in the advancement of knowledge and the moral sustainability of civilisation. Within the Muslim intellectual tradition, ethical scholarship has historically been understood not merely as procedural compliance but as the cultivation of a scholarly ethos grounded in moral and spiritual responsibility. This article seeks to formulate a conceptual model of

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academic integrity rooted in the Islamic intellectual tradition by articulating the ethical foundations of the Muslim scholar's ethos. Employing qualitative content analysis, the study examines primary sources—the Qur'ān and Sunnah—alongside selected works of classical and contemporary Muslim scholars. The analysis identifies key ethical dispositions central to scholarly integrity, including *ikhlaṣ* (sincere intention), *amānah* (trustworthiness and responsibility), *ṣidq* (truthfulness), *ʿadl* (justice), *ijtihād* (intellectual diligence), *tawāḍuʿ* (humility), *taʿzīm al-ʿilm* (reverence for knowledge), and *taqwā* (God-consciousness). These virtues are shown to remain critically relevant in addressing contemporary challenges to academic integrity, including authorship misconduct, instrumentalisation of knowledge, and ethical erosion in research cultures. On this basis, the article proposes a conceptual model that integrates Islamic ethical values into scholarly practices of research, writing, and knowledge dissemination. It argues that the pursuit of knowledge in Islam is fundamentally an act of *ibādah*, requiring moral excellence alongside intellectual rigour. The study concludes that revitalising the Muslim scholar's ethos through the Islamic intellectual tradition offers a constructive civilisational framework for strengthening academic integrity and nurturing an ethically grounded knowledge-based society.

KEYWORDS: Academic integrity, Muslim scholar's ethos, Islamic intellectual tradition, Ethics.

1.0. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary academia faces a range of challenges that increasingly test the integrity of its practitioners.⁴ Issues such as plagiarism, data

⁴ Jen Tindale et al., "Connecting Generic Academic Integrity Modules to Professional Integrity through Curriculum Design," in *Academic Quality and Integrity in the New Higher Education Digital Environment* (Elsevier, 2023), 55–73, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-323-95423-5.00005-3>.

falsification, conflicts of interest, and the abuse of academic authority have become more visible across global higher-education systems. This integrity crisis not only undermines the credibility of academic institutions but also threatens the reliability, continuity, and moral purpose of knowledge production itself. In this context, renewed attention to ethical and moral foundations in academic life has become both urgent and unavoidable.⁵

Academic integrity constitutes a core pillar of institutional credibility and scholarly excellence. It reflects a commitment to honesty, fairness, accountability, and responsibility across teaching, learning, research, and publication.⁶ In Malaysia, the higher-education sector has expanded rapidly over recent decades, marked by a substantial increase in institutions, academic programmes, and student enrolment.⁷ However, this quantitative growth has been accompanied by growing concern over declining academic integrity. Incidents of plagiarism, data fabrication and falsification, inadequate research supervision, assessment bias, and pedagogical misconduct have increasingly entered public and academic discourse.⁸ Such developments not only damage institutional reputation but also raise

⁵ Guy J. Curtis and Joseph Clare, “Academic Integrity Scholarship: The Importance of Theory,” in *Second Handbook of Academic Integrity*, ed. Sarah Elaine Eaton, Springer International Handbooks of Education (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 1651–69, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-54144-5_164.

⁶ Jon M. Werner, “Academic Integrity and Human Resource Development: Being and Doing,” *Human Resource Development Review* 21, no. 2 (June 2022): 249–57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15344843221078505>.

⁷ Morshidi Sirat and Chang Da Wan, “Higher Education in Malaysia,” in *International Handbook on Education in South East Asia*, ed. Lorraine Pe Symaco and Martin Hayden, Springer International Handbooks of Education (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2024), 609–31, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-8136-3_14-1; Nur Sheilla Saida Abdullah, Mohamad Zuber Abd. Majid, and Sheerad Shahid, “Learning of Higher Education and Economic Growth in Malaysia,” *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 12, no. 6 (June 2022): Pages 28–38, <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBS/v12-i6/13948>.

⁸ S. D. Sivasubramaniam et al., “Unethical Practices within Medical Research and Publication – An Exploratory Study,” *International Journal for Educational Integrity* 17, no. 1 (December 2021): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-021-00072-y>.

serious concerns regarding graduate quality and the broader project of national human-capital development.

In recognition of these concerns, Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) introduced the *National Code of Conduct for Research Ethics* in 2010 as a reference framework for ethical research practices across higher-education institutions.⁹ Despite this initiative, reports of academic-integrity violations persist, suggesting that policy implementation alone has been insufficient. The absence of regular revisions to address emerging challenges—particularly those arising from technological developments such as artificial-intelligence-assisted writing, contract cheating, and predatory publishing—has further limited its effectiveness.¹⁰ Moreover, existing frameworks tend to remain largely procedural, with minimal socio-cultural or religious contextualisation, despite Islam being the religion of the Federation and Islamic values being frequently invoked in public discourse.

Empirical studies and media reports continue to document widespread unethical practices, including plagiarism, falsification of findings, supervisory abuse of power, and assessment malpractice. These trends indicate that existing regulatory frameworks have struggled to cultivate internalised ethical commitment, often relying instead on compliance mechanisms and punitive deterrence. Consequently, adherence to integrity is frequently motivated by fear of sanction rather than by moral conviction or spiritual responsibility.¹¹

⁹ Wan Mohd Khairul Firdaus Wan Khairudin et al., "Ethical Issues in Academic Authorship: A Study on Group Writing," *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 11, no. 1 (2022): 226–31, <https://doi.org/10.36941/ajis-2022-0020>.

¹⁰ Hooi Yan See et al., "Addressing Procedural Challenges of Ethical Review System: Towards a Better Ethical Quality of Clinical Trials Review in Malaysia," *Accountability in Research* 26, no. 1 (January 2019): 49–64, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08989621.2018.1556646>; Md Sozon et al., "Academic Integrity Violations in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review from 2013–2023," *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, ahead of print, July 16 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-12-2023-0559>.

¹¹ Asama Mukherjee, "Revisiting the Ethical Aspects in Research Publications," *International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Scope* 1, no. 1 (January 2020):

Globally, academic integrity has become a rapidly expanding field of research. Much of the literature focuses on defining academic integrity, categorising violations, identifying contributory factors among students and staff,¹² and proposing prevention strategies through policy enforcement, ethics education, and institutional culture-building. However, these studies are predominantly grounded in Western secular frameworks that emphasise rule-based compliance, honour codes, or external accountability mechanisms.¹³

For Muslim societies, the Islamic intellectual tradition—spanning more than fourteen centuries—offers a rich and largely underutilised ethical reservoir for addressing contemporary academic challenges. Within this tradition, knowledge (*‘ilm*) is inseparable from faith (*īmān*) and action (*‘amal*), and the pursuit of knowledge is regarded as an act of worship (*‘ibādah*) requiring sincerity (*ikhhlās*), trustworthiness (*amānah*), and accountability before God.¹⁴ Classical Muslim scholars upheld integrity as an essential condition of scholarly legitimacy, embedding ethical conduct within the very ontology and purpose of knowledge.¹⁵

27–29, <https://doi.org/10.47857/irjms.2020.v01i01.005>.

¹² Guy J. Curtis and Joseph Clare, “Academic Integrity Scholarship: The Importance of Theory,” in *Second Handbook of Academic Integrity*, ed. Sarah Elaine Eaton, Springer International Handbooks of Education (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 1651–69, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-54144-5_164; Muammer Maral, “A Bibliometric Analysis on Academic Integrity,” *Journal of Academic Ethics* 22, no. 4 (December 2024): 665–87, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10805-024-09519-6>.

¹³ Joy Levine and Vanessa Pazdernik, “Evaluation of a Four-Prong Anti-Plagiarism Program and the Incidence of Plagiarism: A Five-Year Retrospective Study,” *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education* 43, no. 7 (October 2018): 1094–105, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2018.1434127>; Antoni Cerdà-Navarro et al., “Academic Integrity Policies against Assessment Fraud in Postgraduate Studies: An Analysis of the Situation in Spanish Universities,” *Heliyon* 8, no. 3 (March 2022): e09170, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e09170>.

¹⁴ Abdulkadir Salaudeen, “Islam and Secularism,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, ahead of print, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5161399>.

¹⁵ Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, “The ‘Ulama’: Challenges, Reforms, and New Patterns of Social Relevance,” in *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam*, 1st ed., ed. Armando Salvatore et al. (Wiley, 2018), 543–60, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118527719.ch26>.

Despite this rich heritage, a significant gap persists between Islamic ethical ideals and present academic realities in many Muslim-majority contexts. Phenomena such as uncritical imitation (*taqlīd*), weakened cultures of originality, and rising cases of academic misconduct within Islamic higher-education institutions point to a gradual erosion of the traditional scholarly ethos.¹⁶ These challenges are further intensified by globalisation, the commercialisation of education, and rapid technological transformation. While Muslim scholars such as Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas have foregrounded *adab* as the epistemic and moral foundation of Islamic education, and Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud has articulated the culture of knowledge and the role of the university in Islam, these insights have yet to be systematically integrated into contemporary academic-integrity frameworks.¹⁷ Rosnani Hashim's work on Islamic educational philosophy further reinforces this ethical tradition, yet its translation into operational models of academic integrity remains limited.¹⁸ Classical works by scholars such as al-Ghazālī, al-Zarnūjī, and Ibn Jamā'ah, alongside historical studies by Makdisi and Rosenthal, provide a strong ethical and institutional foundation for Islamic scholarship. More recent studies have begun to address emerging challenges, including artificial intelligence and academic authenticity. However, most existing discussions remain fragmented, focusing on isolated virtues or general ethical exhortations without articulating a coherent, operational model of the Muslim scholar's ethos.

Furthermore, contemporary studies on Islamic ethics often do not engage directly with the academic-integrity literature, nor do they offer integrated frameworks capable of informing policy, curriculum

¹⁶ Ahmed Fekry Ibrahim, "Rethinking the Taqlīd Hegemony: A Conceptual-Historical Approach," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 136, no. 2 (December 2021), <https://doi.org/10.7817/jameroriesoci.136.2.285>.

¹⁷ Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, *The Educational Philosophy and Practice of Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas: An Exposition of the Original Concept of Islamization*.

¹⁸ Rosnani Hashim, "Intellectualism in Higher Islamic Traditional Studies: Implications for the Curriculum," *American Journal of Islam and Society* 24, no. 3 (July 2007): 92–115, <https://doi.org/10.35632/ajis.v24i3.426>.

design, and institutional culture. In particular, there is a notable absence of models that both (i) synthesise classical *adab al-‘ilm* literature with modern integrity scholarship and (ii) respond explicitly to contemporary threats such as AI-generated text, contract cheating, and predatory academic practices.

This article seeks to address these gaps by developing a conceptual framework of academic integrity grounded in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Its contribution lies in: (a) synthesising core ethical virtues from classical Islamic scholarship into a cohesive model of the Muslim scholar’s ethos; (b) situating this model in critical dialogue with dominant Western academic-integrity paradigms; and (c) drawing practical implications for policy, pedagogy, and institutional culture within higher-education systems seeking to cultivate *tarbiyyah*- and *adab*-based approaches to integrity.

Accordingly, this study aims to identify and analyse the core principles underpinning academic ethics in the Islamic intellectual tradition, while examining how these principles may respond to contemporary challenges—technological, institutional, and moral—to foster academic integrity in a holistic and sustainable manner.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, text-oriented methodology integrating thematic analysis and conceptual analysis. The data sources are divided into primary and secondary materials. The primary sources comprise the Qur’ān, interpreted with reference to selected authoritative *tafsīr* works, and the Sunnah, accessed through recognised *ḥadīth* compilations and classical commentaries. The secondary sources include seminal classical texts on *adab al-‘ilm* and scholarly conduct, such as al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, al-Zarnūjī’s *Ta’līm al-Muta‘allim*, and Ibn Jamā‘ah’s *Tadhkirat al-Sāmi‘ wa al-Mutakallim*, alongside contemporary scholarship on Islamic education and professional ethics.

Text selection followed a purposive sampling strategy, guided by three criteria: (i) the text explicitly addresses the ethical nature,

responsibilities, or conduct of scholars and students; (ii) it has exerted sustained influence within the mainstream Sunni educational tradition; and (iii) it is frequently cited in contemporary discussions of Islamic pedagogy and ethics. In addition, selected international literature on academic integrity—most notably Bretag’s work on academic integrity standards¹⁹ and Fishman’s contributions through the International Center for Academic Integrity—was examined to provide a comparative perspective drawn from dominant Western integrity frameworks.²⁰

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, relevant passages addressing scholarly virtues, responsibilities, and ethical transgressions related to knowledge were identified and thematically categorised. Second, recurring ethical themes were clustered into broader conceptual domains reflecting the semantic architecture of the scholar’s ethos, namely: spiritual foundations, ethical virtues, and scholarly practices. Third, these domains were synthesised into a concentric-ring conceptual model of the Muslim scholar’s ethos, interpreted through the integrative lenses of *tawhīd* and *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*.

This methodological approach enables the formulation of a normative yet analytically grounded framework that remains faithful to the Islamic intellectual tradition while engaging meaningfully with contemporary academic-integrity discourse.

3.0 FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study in three interrelated movements. First, Academic Integrity Frameworks: Western Models and Islamic Ethos maps dominant policy-based approaches in contemporary higher education and contrasts their underlying assumptions with a theocentric Islamic vision of scholarship. Second,

¹⁹ Tracey Bretag, “An International Definition of Student Plagiarism,” *International Journal for Educational Integrity* 4, no. 2 (2008): 15–24.

²⁰ Tricia Bertram Gallant and Teddi Fishman, *Academic Integrity in the Twenty-First Century: A Teaching and Learning Imperative* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2014).

The Ethical Pillars of the Muslim Scholarly Ethos distils, from the Qur'an, Sunnah, and classical works on *adab al-'ilm*, a set of core virtues that together constitute the inner moral architecture of the Muslim scholar. Third, Towards an Islamic Framework of Academic Integrity synthesises these insights into a coherent model that can inform policy, curriculum, and institutional practice within Malaysia's higher education system.

3.1. Academic Integrity Frameworks: Western Models and Islamic Ethos

In contemporary higher education discourse, academic integrity is predominantly conceptualised within a secular Western epistemic horizon that privileges institutional rationality, legalism, and procedural governance.²¹ Integrity is operationalised through academic-honesty policies, honour codes, and regulatory instruments that classify and police misconduct, including plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, collusion, and contract cheating.²² Bretag, for instance, advances a “whole-of-institution” paradigm in which core values—such as honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, and courage—are institutionalised through policy architecture, quality-assurance mechanisms, and organisational culture. Likewise, the International Center for Academic Integrity frames integrity as an institutional commitment that must be made visible through explicit definitions, sanctions, and adjudicative procedures.²³

²¹ Rosie MacLachlan, “Academic Integrity: A ‘Threshold Value’ for Higher Education?,” in *Worldviews and Values in Higher Education: Teaching, Learning, Curricula, and Assessment*, ed. Madasu Bhaskara Rao, Abhilasha Singh, and Pulaparthi Mallika Rao (Bingley, Emerald Group Publishing Ltd., 2024), 69–80, <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-80262-897-520241005>.

²² Katy Dineen and Loretta Goff, “Two Sides of the Same Coin: A Taxonomy of Academic Integrity and Impropriety Using Intellectual Virtues and Vices,” *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education* 49, no. 7 (2024): 935–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2024.2340641>.

²³ Tracey Bretag and Saadia Mahmud, “A Conceptual Framework for Implementing Exemplary Academic Integrity Policy in Australian Higher Education,” in *Handbook*

Underlying these formulations is a distinct philosophical and anthropological configuration. The academic subject is imagined as an autonomous individual embedded in a quasi-contractual relationship with both the institution and the scholarly community. Integrity is therefore framed as fidelity to agreed norms, where normativity is justified not by metaphysical or theological claims, but by considerations of fairness, professionalism, and the efficient functioning of the epistemic system. The moral vocabulary is intentionally thin, procedural, and deontic: it prioritises rule compliance, due process, and proportional sanction rather than substantive accounts of virtue, character, or ultimate purpose. In this sense, academic integrity in dominant Western discourse becomes a juridified construct that translates ethical concerns into administrable categories.²⁴

The contributions of this model are nonetheless significant. It offers conceptual clarity and operational precision. By standardising categories of misconduct, it enables cross-institutional benchmarking, comparative empirical research, and the development of policy templates and training modules.²⁵ It also renders integrity “governable”, in the Foucauldian sense, by making breaches calculable, reportable, and sanctionable within bureaucratic apparatuses of quality assurance and risk management.²⁶ In many

of Academic Integrity, ed. Tracey Bretag (Springer Singapore, 2016), 463–80, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-098-8_24.

²⁴ Annemarie Davis, “Academic Integrity in the Time of Contradictions,” *Cogent Education* 10, no. 2 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2289307>; Tracey Bretag, “Defining Academic Integrity: International Perspectives — Introduction,” in *Handbook of Academic Integrity*, ed. Tracey Bretag (Springer Singapore, 2016), 3–5, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-098-8_76.

²⁵ Erica J. Morris and Jude Carroll, “Developing a Sustainable Holistic Institutional Approach: Dealing with Realities ‘on the Ground’ When Implementing an Academic Integrity Policy,” in *Handbook of Academic Integrity*, ed. Tracey Bretag (Springer Singapore, 2016), 449–62, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-098-8_23; Özgür Çelik, “Developing a Multipronged Academic Integrity Policy Writing Tool for Secondary Schools,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 100 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2023.102807>.

²⁶ Jayne Bye, “Foucault and the Use of Critique: Breaching the Self-Evidence of

systems, this has had the salutary effect of shifting integrity from a marginal, ad hoc concern to a central component of institutional strategy, accreditation processes, and performance indicators.²⁷

However, when viewed through a broader ethical and epistemological lens, the structural limits of this approach become apparent. Where integrity is primarily secured through external instruments—codes of conduct, surveillance technologies, text-matching software, reporting channels, and penalty regimes—the model tends to generate what may be described as a compliance rationality.²⁸ The operative question for many actors becomes how to avoid violation or detection, rather than how to live truthfully in relation to knowledge, others, and self. Moreover, the heavy accent on formal rules and procedures displaces more fundamental inquiries into character formation, the cultivation of intellectual virtues, and the ordering of loves and fears that underwrite any stable commitment to truth. Ethics is, in effect, flattened into governance.

The Islamic intellectual tradition approaches integrity from a qualitatively different starting point. It does not treat knowledge as a neutral commodity, nor does it imagine the educational institution as a

Educational Practices,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 28, no. 4 (2015): 394–414, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2014.916003>.

²⁷ Hedeliza Pineda, “Stakeholders’ Perceptions of the Impact of Accreditation of Science Curricula of Higher Education Institutions,” *International Journal of Advanced and Applied Sciences* 10, no. 7 (2023): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.21833/ijaas.2023.07.001>; Menard Musendekwa, “Blueprints for Excellence in Higher Education Accreditation: Frameworks and Models for Success,” in *Global Perspectives on Quality Management and Accreditation in Higher Education*, ed. Arshi Naim et al. (Hershey, IGI Global, 2025), 1–23, <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-9481-6.ch001>; Miltiadis Demetrios Lytras and Andreea Claudia Șerban, eds., *Academic Accreditation and Evaluation in Higher Education: Practices, Experiences, and Quality Assurance* (Hershey, IGI Global, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-5608-1>.

²⁸ Oscar Capdeferro Villagrasa, “Anti-corruption performance of codes of ethics and conduct: The role of administrative law,” *Revista General de Derecho Administrativo* 54 (2020): 1–30; David Borsook and James L. Bernat, “Headache Professional Societies: Ethical Challenges and Suggested Solutions,” *Headache* 57, no. 8 (2017): 1273–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/head.13147>.

value-free marketplace of ideas²⁹ Knowledge (*‘ilm*) is construed as an *amānah* that originates from God and is entrusted to the human being under conditions of accountability in this world and the next.³⁰ The pursuit, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge are therefore inscribed within an ontology of worship, obedience, and eschatological responsibility. In such a configuration, the language of rights, duties, and sanctions remains intelligible, yet it is always nested within a thicker theological and moral narrative that ties epistemic activity to *tawhīd* and to the higher objectives of the *sharī‘ah*.³¹

Conceptually, Western models of academic integrity and the Islamic scholarly ethos therefore constitute distinct regimes of normativity. In the former, integrity is largely engineered from the outside inwards, through architectures of regulation, detection, and deterrence designed to shape behaviour.³² In the latter, integrity is envisaged as radiating from the inside outwards, beginning with a transformed heart, a settled consciousness of God, and a habituated orientation towards truth and justice, which then manifests in speech, judgement, and scholarly practice. Both regimes affirm honesty and fairness, yet they locate the ground and telos of these commitments in different places: one in an immanent social contract, the other in a transcendent covenant.

²⁹ Amra Sabic-El-Rayess, “Epistemological Shifts in Knowledge and Education in Islam: A New Perspective on the Emergence of Radicalization amongst Muslims,” *International Journal of Educational Development* 73 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.102148>; Khoiruddin, Salminawati, and Usiono, “Kepribadian Pendidik Muslim Dalam Perspektif Filsafat Pendidikan Islam,” *Munaddhomah* 4, no. 1 (2023): 71–80, <https://doi.org/10.31538/munaddhomah.v4i1.333>.

³⁰ Miftachul Huda et al., “Al-Zarnūjī’s Concept of Knowledge (‘Ilm),” *SAGE Open* 6, no. 3 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016666885>.

³¹ Uthman Mohammed Mustapha Kannike and Abdulgafar Olawale Fahm, “Exploring The Ethical Governance Of Artificial Intelligence From An Islamic Ethical Perspective,” *Jurnal Fiqh* 22, no. 1 (2025): 134–61, <https://doi.org/10.22452/fiqh.vol22no1.5>.

³² Andrés Mejía and Maria Fernanda Garcés-Flórez, “What Do We Mean by Academic Integrity?,” *International Journal for Educational Integrity* 21, no. 1 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40979-024-00176-1>.

For Muslim-majority higher education systems that import Western-derived integrity frameworks, this divergence is not merely abstract. If policies and codes are transplanted without critical engagement with the theological, ethical, and epistemological resources of the Islamic tradition, dissonance may emerge between the official discourse of institutional documents and the lived moral imagination of students and staff.³³ Under such conditions, integrity policy risks being perceived as technocratic, external, and culturally disembedded—operating more as a compliance regime than as an expression of the community’s deepest convictions about truth, knowledge, and responsibility before God.

A more coherent trajectory, therefore, is not to abandon global best practice, but to re-situate it within a broader theocentric ethos of scholarship. The analytical strength and procedural robustness of Western frameworks can be retained, yet they must be subordinated to—and animated by—a richer moral and spiritual architecture that speaks meaningfully to *tawhīd*, *taqwā*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah*. In such a view, institutional rules and enforcement mechanisms are necessary instruments, but they are not sufficient foundations: they presuppose a prior work of character formation and spiritual orientation.³⁴ It is precisely this deeper level that the Islamic scholarly tradition seeks to address. The next section turns from the comparative policy plane to the inner architecture of the Muslim scholarly ethos and explicates the core ethical pillars that, taken together, constitute a substantive, virtue-centred basis for any framework of academic integrity in Muslim contexts.

³³ Ibrahima Diallo, “Introduction: The Interface between Islamic and Western Pedagogies and Epistemologies: Features and Divergences,” *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* 7, no. 3 (2012): 175–79, <https://doi.org/10.5172/ijpl.2012.7.3.175>.

³⁴ Oksana Braslavska et al., “Ensuring Research Excellence: The Indispensable Role of Academic Integrity,” *Premier Journal of Science* 14 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.70389/PJS.100128>; Tony Mayer and Nicholas Steneck, eds., *Promoting Research Integrity in a Global Environment* (Singapore, World Scientific Publishing Co., 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1142/8102>.

3.2. The Ethical Pillars of the Muslim Scholarly Ethos

The scholarly ethos within the Islamic tradition constitutes a distinctive epistemological framework in which intellectual rigour is organically integrated with divine consciousness. Anchored in the creed of *tawhīd*—the affirmation of God’s absolute oneness—this paradigm rejects a strict sacred–profane dichotomy and positions the pursuit of knowledge, whether in the natural sciences, humanities, or religious studies, as an act of worship and devotion to God.³⁵ This integrated framework is built upon several mutually reinforcing ethical pillars that serve as both guide and safeguard for scholars in their intellectual vocation.

1. *Ikhhlās*

The pulse of all Islamic scholarly activity is *ikhhlās* (sincerity of intention). It is not merely a moral prerequisite, but the ontological foundation that gives meaning and value to intellectual endeavour. This foundation is affirmed in the well-known ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī: “Actions are judged by intentions”³⁶ The ḥadīth establishes sincere intention—seeking God’s pleasure alone—as a primary condition for the acceptance and blessing of an act. Al-Ghazālī, in *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, describes *ikhhlās* as *rūḥ al-‘ilm*, the “soul” and lifeblood of knowledge.³⁷ Without *ikhhlās*, knowledge becomes vulnerable to spiritual maladies such as *riyā’* (ostentation) and *‘ujb* (vanity and self-admiration). In practical terms, a sincere scholar selects a research topic not primarily for popularity or funding potential, but for its ethical urgency and its contribution to truth and public benefit. *Ikhhlās* also liberates the scholar from ego-driven attachments: when the pursuit of *al-ḥaqq* (truth) is ultimate, one is

³⁵ Ismail Raji Al-Faruqi, *Islamic Thought and Culture*. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islāmic Thought, 1982.

³⁶ Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Edited by Muḥammad Zuhayr ibn Nāṣir al-Nāṣir. Vol. 1. Beirut: Dār Ṭawq al-Najāh, 2002.

³⁷ Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid. *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 2009.

more prepared to acknowledge error, accept critique, and revise conclusions in light of stronger evidence.³⁸

2. *Amānah*

The concept of *amānah* (trust) elevates scholarly responsibility to an ontological and moral horizon. The Qur'an describes the "Trust" as a weight from which the heavens, earth, and mountains recoiled, yet humanity undertook it.³⁹ For the scholar, this trust includes the ethical management, development, and dissemination of knowledge with integrity. Ibn Khaldūn, in *al-Muqaddimah*, links human responsibility to accountability before God as the ultimate giver of knowledge.⁴⁰ *Amānah* also entails intellectual honesty towards oneself: sustained self-critique, disciplined method, and openness to being wrong. Among the clearest betrayals of *amānah* is *sariqah 'ilmiyyah* (plagiarism), which classical scholars such as Ibn Jamā'ah treated as *khiyānah 'ilmiyyah*—a form of intellectual treachery that corrupts the reliability of knowledge transmission and violates scholarly trust.⁴¹

3. *Ṣidq*

The principle of *ṣidq* demands congruence between inner conviction, speech, and action. The Qur'an exhorts believers to "be with the truthful" (*al-ṣādiqīn*).⁴² In a scholarly context, *ṣidq* functions as the backbone of epistemic integrity: it requires accuracy in reporting, honesty in interpretation, transparency in method, and refusal to manipulate evidence. A salient historical analogue is the discipline of

³⁸ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah. *Madārij al-Sālikīn bayna Manāzil Iyyāka Na'budu wa Iyyāka Nasta'īn*. Edited by Muḥammad al-Mu'taṣim billāh al-Baghdādī. Vol. 2. Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1996.

³⁹ Al-Qur'an 33:72

⁴⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, 'Abd al-Raḥmān. *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*. Trans. Franz Rosenthal. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

⁴¹ Ibn Jamā'ah, Badr al-Dīn. *Tadhkirat al-Sāmi' wa al-Mutakallim fī Adab al-'Ālim wa al-Muta'allim*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1935.

⁴² Al-Qur'an 9:119.

al-jarḥ wa al-ta'dīl in ḥadīth studies, where narrators' truthfulness (*ṣidq al-rāwī*) was treated as a non-negotiable criterion for reliability.⁴³ This demonstrates how seriously the Islamic tradition views the connection between personal character and intellectual trustworthiness. Al-Jurjānī defines *ṣidq* as *muwāfaqah bayn al-zāhir wa al-bāṭin*—harmony between outward conduct and inward reality.⁴⁴ A truthful scholar, therefore, cannot sustain hypocrisy whereby academic claims and lived practice diverge.

3. 'Adl

The principle of 'adl (justice) is enjoined in the Qur'an: "Indeed, God commands justice and excellence."⁴⁵ In scholarly discourse, 'adl entails fairness in evaluation, balanced representation of alternative arguments, avoidance of misquotation or straw-manning, and resistance to prejudice and ideological distortion. Al-Fārūqī, within his project on the Islamisation of knowledge, links 'adl to epistemic justice: the obligation to recognise and correct ideological biases that deform knowledge claims.⁴⁶ 'Adl also relates to *wasāṭiyyah* (moderation), praised as a trait of the Muslim community,⁴⁷ functioning in intellectual life as a guardrail against extremes of rigid literalism or relativistic dissolution.⁴⁸

4. Ijtihād

The Islamic scholarly tradition demands *jiddiyyah* (seriousness) and sustained intellectual struggle, encapsulated in the concept of *ijtihād*.

⁴³ Brown, Jonathan A. C. *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim: The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon*. Leiden: Brill, 2007.

⁴⁴ Al-Jurjānī, 'Alī ibn Muḥammad. *Kitāb al-Ta'rifāt*. Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān, 1983.

⁴⁵ Al-Qur'an 16:90.

⁴⁶ Al-Faruqī, Isma'il Raji. *Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan*. Herndon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1982.

⁴⁷ Al-Qur'an 2:143.

⁴⁸ Al-Qaradawi, Yusuf. *Fiqh al-Wasāṭiyyah al-Islāmiyyah wa al-Tajdīd*. Kaherah: Dār al-Shurūq, 2010.

This commitment is grounded in the Qur’anic promise: “Those who strive for Us—We shall surely guide them to Our ways.”⁴⁹ The verse implies that intellectual illumination is not accidental but the fruit of disciplined, methodical, and ethically guided effort.

Classical pedagogical texts consistently emphasise diligence and perseverance. Al-Zarnūjī, in *Ta’līm al-Muta’allim*, stresses *mudāwamah* (continuity of effort) and *istighrāq* (deep immersion) as essential conditions for genuine learning.⁵⁰ Knowledge, in this view, is not acquired through shortcuts or instrumental manipulation, but through sustained moral and cognitive discipline. Islamic intellectual history offers numerous illustrations of this ethos. Figures such as Imām al-Shāfi’ī devoted decades to mastering multiple disciplines before being recognised as authorities capable of independent reasoning. Intellectual legitimacy, therefore, was inseparable from ethical endurance.⁵¹

Within the context of academic integrity, *ijtihād* functions as a direct antidote to practices such as plagiarism, contract cheating, and superficial scholarship. It affirms that originality, effort, and intellectual honesty are moral obligations, not merely professional expectations.

5. *Tawāḍu’*

Tawāḍu’ (humility) emerges naturally from an awareness of the vastness of divine knowledge and the finitude of human understanding. The Qur’an cautions against arrogance and intellectual conceit: “Do not turn your cheek in contempt towards people, nor walk arrogantly upon the earth.”⁵²

Al-Ghazālī warns explicitly against *‘ujb al-‘ālim*—the

⁴⁹ Al-Qur’an 29:69.

⁵⁰ Al-Zarnūjī, Burhān al-Dīn. *Ta’līm al-Muta’allim Ṭarīq al-Ta’allum*. Kaheerah: Maktabah al-Qāhirah, 1947.

⁵¹ Hallaq, Wael B. *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

⁵² Al-Qur’an 31:18.

arrogance of the learned—which he regards as one of the most destructive spiritual diseases afflicting scholars.⁵³ Humility, in contrast, safeguards epistemic integrity by restraining overconfidence, dogmatism, and premature certainty.

A frequently cited embodiment of *tawāḍuʿ* is Imām Mālik ibn Anas, who reportedly answered “*lā adrī*” (“I do not know”) to the majority of questions posed to him on one occasion.⁵⁴ Far from signalling ignorance, this response reflected profound intellectual integrity and reverence for truth. In academic terms, *tawāḍuʿ* legitimises uncertainty, encourages methodological caution, and fosters openness to critique—qualities essential for ethical scholarship.

6. *Taʿzīm al-ʿIlm*

The Islamic tradition accords knowledge an inherently sacred status, viewing it as a divine light rather than a neutral instrument. The Qurʾan declares: “God will raise those who believe and those who have been given knowledge by degrees.”⁵⁵ This elevation is not merely social but moral and spiritual.

This veneration of knowledge, or *taʿzīm al-ʿilm*, is manifested in various practices that preserve its sanctity and dignity.

One of the clearest manifestations of *taʿzīm al-ʿilm* is the emphasis on *sanad* (chains of transmission), which preserve not only textual accuracy but ethical accountability. Makdisi has shown that institutions such as the *madrasah* cultivated rituals—most notably the granting of *ijāzah*—that certified not only mastery of content but moral fitness to teach and transmit knowledge.⁵⁶ The act of teaching was thus a trust conferred by persons, not merely a credential granted by

⁵³ Al-Ghazālī, Abū Hāmid. *Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn*. Vol. 3. Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifah, 2008.

⁵⁴ Rosenthal, Franz. *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1970.

⁵⁵ Al- Qurʾan 58:11.

⁵⁶ Makdisi, George. *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981.

institutions.

In contemporary academic contexts, *ta'zīm al-'ilm* challenges the commodification of knowledge and resists predatory publishing practices, citation manipulation, and the reduction of scholarship to metrics and rankings. It restores dignity to learning as a moral vocation rather than a transactional enterprise.

7. *Taqwa*

All the preceding ethical pillars are ultimately enveloped and oriented by *taqwā*—God-consciousness and reverent awareness of divine accountability. The Qur'an states: "Only those among God's servants who possess knowledge truly fear God."⁵⁷ This verse establishes a direct relationship between knowledge and moral responsibility.

Taqwā functions as a teleological compass, aligning scholarly activity with its ultimate purpose: seeking God's pleasure and promoting human flourishing. It acts as an internal ethical regulator, ensuring that knowledge is pursued, applied, and disseminated in ways consistent with the higher objectives of the *sharī'ah*. Scholars guided by *taqwā* routinely engage in *maṣlahah–mafsadah* (benefit–harm) analysis, evaluating the social, moral, and existential implications of their work.⁵⁸ In emerging domains such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and data science, *taqwā* demands that innovation be tempered by ethical foresight. The question is not merely whether something can be done, but whether it should be done, and at what moral cost.

Taken together, these eight pillars form an integrated ethical architecture that the Islamic tradition describes as *ḥirāsāt al-'ilm*—the safeguarding of knowledge. As Ibn 'Abd al-Barr cautioned, "Knowledge without *adab* is like fire without fuel."⁵⁹ This paradigm

⁵⁷ Al-Qur'an 35:28.

⁵⁸ Osman Bakar. *Classification of Knowledge in Islam: A Study in Islamic Philosophies of Science*. Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2005.

⁵⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Yūsuf. *Jāmi' Bayān al-'Ilm wa Faḍlih*. Ed. Abū al-Ashbāl al-Zuhayrī. Vol. 1. Dammam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1994.

reaffirms the ontological unity between the pursuit of *al-haqq* (truth) and accountability before the Ultimate Truth.

3.3. Towards an Islamic Framework of Academic Integrity

Building upon the preceding analysis, this study proposes an Islamic framework of academic integrity articulated through a concentric-circle model. This model foregrounds an internally driven, virtue-based approach that contrasts sharply with secular compliance-oriented paradigms.

3.3.1. The Conceptual Framework for Islamic Academic Integrity

The proposed framework is structured as a series of concentric circles, each representing an interdependent dimension of integrity within an Islamic worldview (Figure 1).

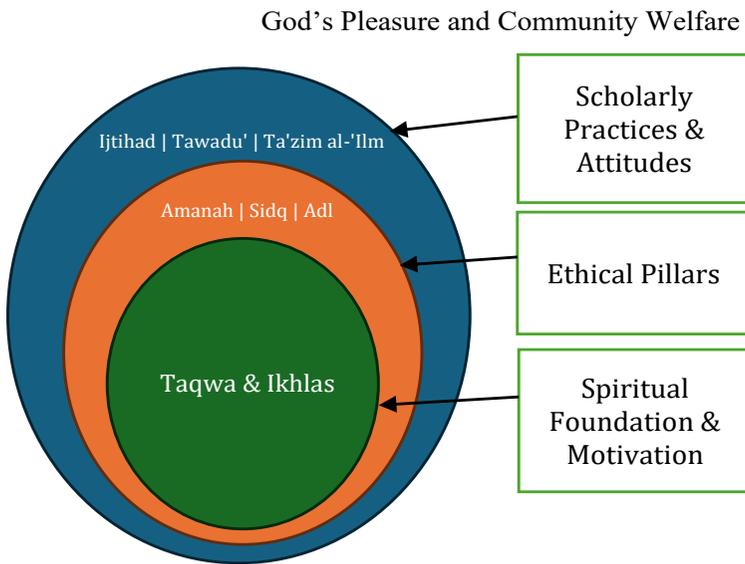


Figure 1: Islamic Model of Academic Integrity

The innermost circle—*taqwā* and *ikhhlās*—constitutes the spiritual foundation that animates all scholarly activity. It represents the internal moral motivation that answers the fundamental question of *why* knowledge is pursued. The middle ring—*amānah*, *ṣidq*, and *‘adl*—comprises the ethical pillars that translate spiritual consciousness into stable moral dispositions. The outer ring—*ijtihād*, *tawādu‘*, and *ta‘zīm al-‘ilm*—captures the visible scholarly practices through which integrity becomes socially manifest.

Integrity thus flows outward from the heart while simultaneously being reinforced through ethical action. This bidirectional movement reflects the Islamic conception of *tazkiyah al-nafs*, in which inner purification and outward conduct mutually reinforce one another.

Unlike secular models that prioritise deterrence through surveillance and sanction, this framework asserts that genuine academic integrity emerges from internal moral formation. External rules remain necessary, but they are insufficient without a cultivated ethical self. Within this model, practices such as plagiarism, data fabrication, predatory publishing, and contract cheating are not merely policy violations but moral betrayals of *amānah* and failures of *taqwā*.

Taqwā functions as the ultimate internal check, reminding scholars that divine knowledge encompasses intention as well as action. It instils a durable sense of accountability that transcends institutional monitoring, encouraging sincerity even in the absence of surveillance. In this way, the Islamic model offers not only a corrective to contemporary integrity crises, but a civilisational vision of scholarship grounded in worship, responsibility, and moral excellence.

At the heart of the model lie *taqwā* (God-consciousness, piety, reverential awe) and *ikhhlās* (sincerity and purity of intention for the sake of God). This inner core represents the fundamental spiritual motivation—the ultimate *why*—that animates the pursuit of knowledge and the commitment to integrity. It posits that genuine academic integrity does not originate in fear of sanction or institutional surveillance, but in an inwardly cultivated awareness of divine

omniscience and accountability. From this perspective, scholarly conduct is oriented primarily towards seeking God's pleasure rather than merely satisfying procedural requirements.

The middle circle of the model comprises the ethical principles that translate this inner spiritual consciousness into stable moral dispositions governing scholarly conduct. These include *amānah* (trustworthiness and responsibility), which underscores the scholar's obligation towards knowledge itself, as well as towards teachers, students, peers, and society; *ṣidq* (truthfulness and honesty), which demands unwavering commitment to accuracy, transparency, and intellectual sincerity in all academic endeavours, from research design to the reporting of findings; and *ʿadl* (justice and fairness), which ensures impartiality in evaluation, faithful representation of opposing arguments, and resistance to bias, favouritism, or epistemic injustice.

The outermost circle represents the visible scholarly practices and attitudes through which integrity becomes socially manifest. These include *ijtihād*, understood here not in its strictly juridical sense but as disciplined intellectual exertion and original scholarly effort; *tawāduʿ* (humility), which cultivates openness to correction, acknowledgement of limitation, and respect for the contributions of others; and *taʿzīm al-ʿilm* (reverence for knowledge), which safeguards the dignity of learning against commodification, instrumentalisation, and unethical exploitation.

Encircling the entire model is the broader Islamic intellectual culture, which ideally nurtures an environment conducive to ethical scholarship. The ultimate aspiration of this culture—and of the model itself—is the attainment of God's pleasure and the promotion of communal well-being. The concentric structure thus reflects a holistic and integrated vision of academic integrity driven primarily by *tazkiyah al-naḥs* (moral and spiritual self-purification). This orientation stands in marked contrast to dominant secular frameworks that prioritise external deterrence through punitive measures and regulatory control.

Within this framework, academic misconduct—such as

plagiarism, fabrication, predatory publishing, and unethical collaboration—is not merely a procedural violation but a moral failure rooted in the erosion of *amānah* and *taqwā*. In particular, contract cheating is categorically rejected as a grave betrayal of trust, undermining both the integrity of assessment and the formative purpose of education.

Taqwā thus functions as the ultimate internal check and balance, continually reminding scholars that God is All-Knowing and All-Seeing, fully aware of intentions as well as actions. This consciousness engenders a profound sense of accountability that encourages sincere effort, deters falsehood, and sustains ethical commitment even in the absence of external monitoring. In this way, the Islamic model offers a durable moral foundation for academic integrity that transcends mere compliance and anchors scholarly practice in spiritual responsibility.⁶⁰

3.3.2. Towards a *Tarbiyyah*-Based Higher Education: Policy and Practice for Academic Integrity

The implementation of an Islamic model of academic integrity requires higher education institutions to move beyond procedural compliance and to embrace a normative framework rooted in *adab*. In the contemporary higher education context, challenges such as the *publish or perish* culture, the commercialisation of education, the rise of artificial intelligence in academic writing, and global ranking pressures have increasingly displaced the ethical considerations that should anchor the pursuit of knowledge.

Curriculum reform constitutes the first critical dimension. Existing academic integrity modules are often reduced to technical directives—such as “do not plagiarise” or “follow citation standards”—while neglecting the philosophical and spiritual

⁶⁰ Abdullah Khan, and Abdulaziz Mohammed Al-Ahdal. "Islamic Perspectives on Academic Integrity in the Age of Artificial Intelligence." *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 7, no.1 (2023): 45–68.

dimensions of knowledge. The Islamic intellectual tradition demonstrates that integrity is inseparable from intention and purpose. Imām al-Ghazālī stressed that *ikhhlās* (sincerity) and *adab* constitute the very “soul” of knowledge, while Imām al-Shāfi‘ī exemplified *ijtihad* (intellectual diligence) and scholarly honesty by openly acknowledging his own limitations.⁶¹ Accordingly, courses on academic integrity in higher education institutions should be reimagined as formative experiences that cultivate spiritual, ethical, and intellectual virtues, explicitly linking the pursuit of knowledge to responsibility before God and society.

Second, institutional policy should be restructured to incorporate the objectives of *Maqāsid al-Sharī‘ah*. Research guidelines ought to be evaluated in terms of their capacity to safeguard intellect (*hifz al-‘aql*) by rejecting data fabrication, protect religion (*hifz al-dīn*) by avoiding misleading or ethically compromised studies, preserve lineage (*hifz al-nasl*) through the ethical treatment of human research participants, and safeguard wealth (*hifz al-māl*) by ensuring the responsible and transparent use of research funding.⁶² Classical Muslim scholars embodied these principles in practice: Ibn Khaldūn, in *al-Muqaddimah*, underscored that scholarly trust (*amānah*) is inseparable from social responsibility,⁶³ while Ibn Jamā‘ah condemned plagiarism as a form of betrayal more grievous than the theft of material property.⁶⁴

Third, academic performance appraisal requires a fundamental recalibration. Contemporary systems that privilege output quantity often incentivise practices such as “salami slicing” and engagement with predatory publishing outlets. An Islamic model of

⁶¹ Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥamid. *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, n.d., vol. 1, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, 36–38.

⁶² al-Shāfi‘ī, Abū Ishāq. *al-Muwāfaqāt fī Uṣūl al-Sharī‘ah*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, n.d., vol. 2, 8–12.

⁶³ Ibn Khaldūn. *al-Muqaddimah*. Translated by Franz Rosenthal. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967, 436–438.

⁶⁴ Ibn Jamā‘ah, Badr al-Dīn. *Tadhkirat al-Sāmi‘ wa al-Mutakallim fī Adab al-‘Ālim wa al-Muta‘allim*. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 2003, 63–65.

academic integrity, by contrast, insists on evaluative frameworks that integrate ethical considerations into scholarly assessment. Relevant indicators may include adherence to ethical standards in supervision and authorship, the societal benefit (*maṣlahah*) of research, commitment to mentorship grounded in *adab*, and demonstrable humility (*tawāḍuʿ*) in collaborative work. Imām Mālik’s well-known practice of responding *lā adrī* (“I do not know”) exemplifies integrity over vanity, reminding contemporary academia that intellectual honesty outweighs superficial productivity.⁶⁵

Beyond curriculum, policy, and appraisal, successful implementation also necessitates a multifaceted ecosystem of integrity. First, ethical leadership (*qudwah ḥasanah*) is indispensable: academic leaders and mentors must embody the principles they advocate, as their conduct sets the moral tone for students and junior scholars alike. Second, holistic curriculum reform should embed ethical reflection across disciplines rather than confining integrity to isolated modules. Such integration ensures that ethical awareness permeates both teaching and research practices. Third, reward systems must be reformed. Excessive reliance on numerical metrics often undermines integrity; instead, institutional incentives should recognise honesty, ethical authorship, responsible supervision, and meaningful community contribution.⁶⁶ Finally, open and sustained dialogue should be institutionalised to normalise discussion of integrity challenges, ethical dilemmas, and best practices. Such dialogue not only promotes transparency but also reinforces collective responsibility for academic standards.⁶⁷

Taken together, these reforms would reposition higher

⁶⁵ Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr. *Jāmi‘ Bayān al-‘Ilm wa Faḍlihi*. Beirut: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 1994, vol. 2, 56–57.

⁶⁶ Müller, Jerry Z. *The Tyranny of Metrics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018, 1–19.

⁶⁷ Al-Ghazālī, Abū Ḥāmid. *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, n.d., vol. 1, Kitāb al-‘Ilm, 45–52; Bretag, Tracey, et al. “A Framework for Academic Integrity.” *International Journal for Educational Integrity* 7, no. 2 (2011): 3–11.

education institutions not merely as centres of knowledge dissemination, but as institutions of *tarbiyyah* committed to the cultivation of virtuous scholars. Drawing upon the intellectual and ethical legacy of the Muslim scholarly tradition, academic integrity would no longer be externally imposed but would emerge as an intrinsic moral and spiritual consciousness—one that harmonises the pursuit of truth with responsibility before the Divine and society.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The Islamic intellectual tradition offers a profound and enduring repository for articulating a Muslim scholar's ethos grounded in integrity, responsibility, and moral purpose. By re-centring academic integrity within the spiritual foundations of *taqwā* and *ikhlas*, this study advances a holistic framework that moves beyond procedural compliance and addresses the deeper moral, epistemological, and civilisational dimensions of scholarly life. The proposed model demonstrates that integrity in knowledge production is not merely a regulatory concern but a manifestation of the scholar's covenantal responsibility before God, society, and future generations.

In an era marked by technological disruption, metric-driven academic cultures, and the instrumentalisation of knowledge, the Islamic scholarly ethos offers a critical corrective. It reframes academic integrity as an inwardly cultivated disposition that radiates outward into ethical research practices, just governance of institutions, and responsible engagement with emerging technologies. By anchoring scholarly conduct in *Maqāṣid al-Sharī'ah* and the unity of knowledge and action, this model responds not only to contemporary integrity crises but also to the broader erosion of meaning and trust in modern higher education.

At the civilisational level, reviving this ethos contributes to the reconstruction of an ethical knowledge order in Muslim societies—one in which universities function not merely as sites of credential production but as institutions of *tarbiyyah* committed to the formation of virtuous scholars and the cultivation of public good. Re-embedding

academic integrity within the Islamic worldview thus represents a strategic intervention in civilisational renewal, aligning intellectual excellence with moral accountability and positioning higher education as a cornerstone of ethical civilisation-building in the twenty-first century.

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REVIEW ESSAY

THE AIMS AND ETHICS OF SCHOLARLY WRITING: REFLECTIONS FROM IBN KHALDŪN'S MUQADDIMAH (VI:33)

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ABSTRACT

This essay provides a critical analysis of Ibn Khaldūn's perspectives on the aims and purposes of scholarly composition as articulated in the *Muqaddimah*. For Ibn Khaldūn, writing transcended mere technical execution; it represented the highest form of scholarly communication, preserving knowledge across generations and ensuring that science and learning benefit those “who are absent and live at a later time.” Accordingly, he delineated seven legitimate aims of composition, from the creation of new sciences to the judicious abridgement of extensive works. These aims, he contended, protect scholarship from distortion, plagiarism, and superficial repetition, while affirming its status as a trust (*amānah*) to be fulfilled with integrity in the service of truth and future generations. This essay contextualises these reflections within the intellectual milieu of the fourteenth century, characterised by the

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proliferation of commentaries and indiscriminate abridgements. It demonstrates how Ibn Khaldūn’s critique addressed the risks of stagnation in scholarship. It highlights the continued relevance of his insights to contemporary academic discourse, including the pressures of “publish or perish” and issues of academic integrity. In this way, the essay affirms Ibn Khaldūn’s enduring contribution to authentic scholarship and to an ethical conception of authorship, which remains essential to both the Islamic intellectual tradition and the broader endeavour of civilisation-building.

KEYWORDS: Scholarly writing, Responsible authorship, Academic integrity, Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*.

1. INTRODUCTION

Authorship has consistently served as a measure of scholarly integrity. In both Ibn Khaldūn’s era and the present, the act of writing is imbued with significant responsibility. For Ibn Khaldūn, literary composition was not merely a technical task but constituted the highest form of human communication. Unlike speech, which disappears once uttered, writing preserves knowledge beyond the author’s mind and renders it accessible to others, including those separated by time and place. He further asserts that writing is a noble pursuit, as it conveys the most elevated aspects of human thought—namely, science and knowledge. Consequently, scholars are obliged to record their insights in written form so that “all those who are absent and live at a later time may have the benefit of them.” Those who undertake this task are recognised as authors, and their works persist across regions and eras.² From this standpoint, it is the scholar’s duty to preserve knowledge with clarity, originality, and honesty.

² Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal, 3 vols. (New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1958), 3:282.

The issues identified by Ibn Khaldūn remain highly pertinent. Contemporary academia faces the pressures of “publish or perish,” which frequently prioritises quantity over quality. Plagiarism, including the unethical appropriation of student theses and the proliferation of repetitive or derivative publications, undermines the fundamental purpose of scholarship and erodes trust within academic institutions. The practices Ibn Khaldūn criticised in the fourteenth century—such as superficial abridgements, self-serving authorship, and works that contribute little to the advancement of knowledge—are mirrored in current debates on academic integrity. His reflections emphasise that the ethics of writing concern not only form but also substance, determining whether scholarship advances truth, originality, and civilisation, or devolves into a pursuit of reputation characterised by ostentation (*riyā’*), pride (*kibr*), and conceit.³

Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406), one of the most original minds in the Islamic intellectual tradition, offers a systematic reflection on the aims, methods, and ethical considerations of scholarly composition. In *the Muqaddimah* (The Introduction),⁴ composed in 1377 as the opening volume of his *Kitāb al-‘Ibar*, he devotes a significant section in Chapter VI that reads: “*The Purpose That Must Be Kept in Mind in Literary Composition and That Alone Are to Be Considered Valid.*”⁵ His observations reveal the intellectual standards expected of scholars and highlight the moral imperatives underpinning authorship and transmission of knowledge.

This essay analyses Ibn Khaldūn’s perspectives on the

³ In Islamic ethics, *riyā’* (ostentation) refers to performing deeds for the sake of human recognition rather than divine approval, while *kibr* (pride) denotes arrogance and self-exaltation. Both are condemned in the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth. The Qur’ān warns against arrogance (*kibr*), and Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ said: “He who has in his heart an atom’s weight of pride (*kibr*) will not enter Paradise” (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Īmān*, 147). The Prophet ﷺ also warned: “Verily, what I fear most for you after me is ostentation (*riyā’*) and hidden lusts.” Additionally, Sunan Ibn Mājah records: “Whoever seeks knowledge that should be sought for the sake of Allah the Almighty, but only to gain some worldly benefit, he will never taste the fragrance of Paradise.”

⁴ All references to the *Muqaddimah* in this essay are to the English translation by Franz Rosenthal, published in three volumes by Pantheon Books in 1958.

⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:281-288.

purposes of scholarly writing⁶ with particular attention to the seven aims he identified as constituting legitimate composition. This discussion elucidates his commitment to the systematic organisation of knowledge, the advancement of intellectual inquiry, and the moral responsibility of scholars to make substantive contributions. Additionally, the essay demonstrates the continued relevance of his insights for contemporary conceptions of academic integrity and the responsible transmission of knowledge, situating these within the broader ethical context of Islamic civilisation and intellectual culture.

2. IBN KHALDŪN IN CONTEXT: INTELLECTUAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To understand Ibn Khaldūn's reflections on the aims and purpose of scholarly writing, it is essential to situate them within the intellectual and cultural environment of his time. Born in Tunis in 1332, Ibn Khaldūn lived through a period of political turbulence and intellectual transition in the Maghrib and the broader Islamic world. The fourteenth century was marked by dynastic instability, recurrent warfare, and shifting centres of power between North Africa, Andalusia, and the Mamlūk Sultanate in Egypt. These upheavals profoundly shaped his life and thought. Ibn Khaldūn served in various courts as a diplomat, judge, and scholar, while repeatedly experiencing exile, suspicion, and shifting patronage. Against this backdrop, Ibn Khaldūn developed a keen awareness of the rise and decline of civilisations, a theme that would become central to his *Muqaddimah*.

The intellectual climate he inherited was equally complex. By Ibn Khaldūn's time, many of the classical disciplines of Islamic scholarship had reached full maturity. The sciences of jurisprudence

⁶ Rosenthal translates Ibn Khaldūn's expression as "literary composition" (*Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:281 ff.). The Arabic manuscripts use terms such as *ta'lif* (authorship, composition) or *taṣnīf* (classification, scholarly writing), though the exact wording in this passage differs slightly across editions. Given the chapter's focus on the sciences (*'ulūm*) and the responsibilities of scholars, "scholarly writing" is adopted here as a more fitting translation than "literary composition," which in modern English tends to suggest belles-lettres rather than scientific or academic works.

(*fiqh*), theology (*kalām*), philosophy (*falsafah*), and grammar (*naḥw*) had been refined and developed over centuries of rigorous debate. Yet this very maturity introduced new challenges. Knowledge was increasingly transmitted through layers of commentaries, super-commentaries, and abridgements, a phenomenon often described as “commentary culture.” While such works were intended to clarify and preserve earlier texts, they frequently multiplied complexity and fostered a sense of intellectual stagnation. For Ibn Khaldūn, the proliferation of glosses and summaries often obscured, rather than illuminated the essence of a discipline.⁷

Within this context, Ibn Khaldūn’s focus on the ethics and objectives of scholarly composition acquires particular significance. He maintained that scholarship should not be limited to the transmission of inherited materials but must involve critical and responsible engagement with the tradition and its texts. He criticised scholars who pursued prestige by making superficial alterations to earlier works, cautioning that such practices undermine the integrity of knowledge. Instead, he advocated for originality, clarity, and moral responsibility in authorship—standards that he systematically articulated in his discussion of the valid aims of scholarly writing.

The *Muqaddimah* itself exemplifies his reformist intent. In it, Ibn Khaldūn not only surveyed the sciences of his time but also proposed a new “science of civilisation” (*ilm al-‘umrān*) to explain the social, economic, and political dynamics of human history. His methodological emphasis on causation, social structures, and patterns of rise and decline marked a radical departure from traditional chronicle writing. This spirit of critical innovation is inseparable from his reflections on composition. Hence, the *Muqaddimah* itself embodies the very qualities he advocates—systematic organisation, clarity of purpose, critical engagement with sources, and a strong sense

⁷ Ibn Khaldūn develops this concern further in two subsequent chapters of the *Muqaddimah*, where he warns that the proliferation of derivative works risks stifling genuine learning: Section 34, “The Great Number of Scholarly Works (Available) is an Obstacle on the Path to Attaining Scholarship,” and Section 35, “The Great Number of Brief Handbooks (Available) on Scholarly Subjects is Detrimental to (the Process of) Instruction.” See Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:288–291.

of the scholar's ethical obligations.⁸

His reflections also align with the broader ethical vision of the Islamic intellectual tradition, which regards the preservation and transmission of knowledge as both a moral responsibility and a trust (*amānah*) for the societies and future generations. Knowledge (*'ilm*) is understood as a divine gift and a sacred trust, and scholars are described as heirs of the prophets (*warathat al-anbiyā'*). Ibn Khaldūn's insistence that authors avoid plagiarism, distortion, and unnecessary verbosity reflects this deeply moral conception of scholarship. By enumerating the legitimate aims of scholarly writing, he sought to reorient his peers toward practices that would renew the life of the intellect and protect it from decline. His reflections on scholarly composition are vital and integral to his broader vision for intellectual and civilisational revival. By framing authorship as an act of service to *'ilm* and moral responsibility to societies and future generations, Ibn Khaldūn challenges the complacency of his contemporaries and offers a timeless standard for integrity in

⁸ The *Muqaddimah* was composed in the span of five months during Ibn Khaldūn's self-imposed retreat at Qal'at Ibn Salāmah, a fortress near Tilmisan in present-day Algeria. His "Introduction" is poised and lucid, carefully outlining how he intends to approach his subject. In the Preface, Ibn Khaldūn begins, following the conventions of classical Islamic scholarship, with an invocation of God before turning to the subject that most captured his attention: history, which he acknowledges as a difficult field. He identifies the deficiencies he perceived in the works of earlier historians, noting their tendency to transmit reports uncritically or to neglect essential aspects of explanation. Against this backdrop, he sets out the objectives of his own work and explains the distinctive method he intends to adopt. He outlines not only his critical approach to sources, highlighting the gaps, errors, and distortions he sought to correct, but also the principles by which he organised his materials. His arrangement of chapters, while orderly, departed in significant ways from customary methods, signalling his effort to establish a more rigorous framework for historical inquiry. Ibn Khaldūn further clarifies that he divided his work into an "Introduction and Three Books", each devoted to a different dimension of his comprehensive study. Having carefully reviewed his work before presenting it to the judgment of scholars and statesmen, he closes his Preface with words of humility, entrusting his endeavour to God's guidance and expressing his hope that it might prove beneficial. See Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 1:6–14.

scholarship.

3. WRITING AND THE COMMUNICATION OF HUMAN THOUGHT

Ibn Khaldūn does not begin his reflections on scholarly composition by immediately listing its aims. Instead, he opens with a more fundamental question: what is writing, and why does it matter for the communication of knowledge? In his view, writing represents the second stage of human communication, following speech. While speech enables the exchange of ideas among those present, writing preserves those same thoughts for people who are absent or who live long after the author. It is this permanence that makes writing indispensable to scholarship.

For Ibn Khaldūn, the noblest function of writing lies in its role as a vehicle for the sciences (*'ulūm*). He notes that scholars imparted their thoughts and wisdom by writing them “so that all those who are absent and live at a later time may have the benefit of them.” In this way, writing transforms knowledge into a civilisational resource. It ensures that what might otherwise remain fleeting reflections or oral exchanges becomes part of a shared intellectual heritage. Everywhere in the world, he observes, written works are numerous and passed down among all peoples and in all ages.

By commencing his discussion of composition in this manner, Ibn Khaldūn emphasises the civilisational significance of authorship. Writing is not merely the act of recording words; it constitutes a trust (*amānah*). Once a thought is committed to writing, it becomes part of a transmission chain that influences how future generations comprehend a subject. This responsibility is substantial, as distortion, plagiarism, or careless repetition not only impact the present but also compromise the intellectual legacy of civilisation.

From this perspective, Ibn Khaldūn’s emphasis on the aims of composition becomes more comprehensible. If writing is the vehicle through which knowledge persists, it must be protected from misuse and corruption. Works that fail to contribute new insights, merely repeat content without clarity, or appropriate the efforts of others,

undermine the fundamental purpose of scholarly writing. Consequently, Ibn Khaldūn maintains that scholars must write with originality, structure, and integrity. For him, effective authorship is not solely a matter of style or technique but constitutes a moral obligation to convey truth with rigour and discipline. He subsequently delineates the seven valid aims of scholarly composition, effectively presenting a taxonomy of authorship. Having established the significance of writing for the sciences, he addresses a practical question: under what circumstances does a scholarly work merit composition?

4. THE SEVEN AIMS OF SCHOLARLY WRITING

If writing is a trust that preserves the sciences over time, then not all forms of authorship are warranted. Ibn Khaldūn contends that scholars must clarify their intentions and write only when their work genuinely advances or elucidates knowledge. Authorship should address genuine epistemic needs and ensure the responsible preservation and transmission of knowledge. Accordingly, he identifies seven aims that, in his view, constitute legitimate authorship. These aims are not arbitrary; instead, they reflect his conviction that writing must create, clarify, correct, or preserve knowledge in ways that benefit both contemporaries and future generations. These aims encompass the founding of new sciences as well as essential tasks such as organising existing material, integrating dispersed problems, and producing careful abridgements.

4.1 The Invention of a New Science

Ibn Khaldūn begins with what he regards as the highest aim of authorship: the invention of a new science or the systematic organisation of an existing field. Such a contribution, he argues, secures knowledge for future generations by giving it clarity, order, and coherence. To establish a discipline requires originality of thought and rigour of method, with problems clearly defined and material arranged into distinct chapters and sections.

As an example, Ibn Khaldūn points to the emergence of *uṣūl al-fiqh*. Before Imām al-Shāfi‘ī’s *al-Risālah* in the late second/eighth century, legal discussions were scattered across collections of *ḥadīth* and juristic opinion. By systematising these into a coherent science of legal theory, al-Shāfi‘ī laid down a foundation later refined by Ḥanafī and Mālikī jurists. For Ibn Khaldūn, this illustrates how a discipline is born when scattered insights (or materials) are drawn into an ordered whole. This opening aim reflects his conviction that scholarship must be constructive and enduring. In modern terms, it speaks to the responsibility of scholars to define their fields with clarity so that inquiry may continue to grow upon firm foundations.

4.2 The Interpretation of Difficult Works

The second aim of scholarly writing, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is the interpretation and clarification of earlier works that are difficult to understand. He explains that “God may open understanding of them [difficult subjects] to him [the scholar]. He will then wish to communicate his knowledge to someone else who may perhaps have difficulties with (the same problems), so that all those who are worthy may have the benefit of [his knowledge].”⁹

In this way, the scholar does not merely echo previous ideas but acts as an interpreter, rendering dense or abstruse works accessible to a broader circle of readers. A classic example is the long tradition of commentaries and glosses on Ibn Sīnā’s *al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, whose compressed arguments required careful exposition. Similarly, in Islamic jurisprudence and grammar, foundational texts often attracted explanatory works that allowed students to follow subtle reasoning step by step.

The relevance of this aim remains clear today. Much of academic work still revolves around interpreting dense or specialised texts, whether classical writings or complex theoretical works in modern disciplines. Commentaries, explanatory studies, and translations continue to play a vital role in making knowledge

⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:285.

accessible to broader audiences. By emphasising this aim, Ibn Khaldūn acknowledges that scholarship involves not only invention but also interpretation. From this point, he moves to a third legitimate purpose of writing: the correction of earlier mistakes.

4.3 The Correction of Errors in Earlier Works

Another valid aim of scholarly writing, Ibn Khaldūn notes, is to correct inaccuracies or mistakes that may be found in the works of even the most renowned and authoritative scholars. Since knowledge, once written, is transmitted across generations, it becomes incumbent upon the later scholar, provided he has clear and indisputable proof, to identify and rectify such errors. His duty, Ibn Khaldūn insists, is not merely to recognise the mistake privately but to record his discovery in writing, so that others may learn from his explanation and avoid perpetuating error.

For Ibn Khaldūn, this corrective role is not incidental but integral to the preservation of sound knowledge. The principle resonates strongly with scholarly practice today. Peer review, editorial oversight, and the production of critical editions are all driven by the same conviction that knowledge must not be left to error. In an era of digital information where inaccuracies can circulate globally within moments, his insistence on correction as a scholarly duty remains as urgent as ever.

4.4 The Completion of an Incomplete Discipline

The fourth valid aim of authorship, as Ibn Khaldūn explains, arises when a discipline remains incomplete. “A particular discipline may be incomplete, [with] certain problems or details indicated by the division of the subject of the discipline requiring treatment. The scholar who becomes aware of the fact will want to supply these lacking problems, in order to perfect the discipline by having all its problems and details treated and leaving no room for deficiency in it.”¹⁰ Here, the scholar’s

¹⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:285-286.

role is not to invent something entirely new, but to perceive gaps in an existing discipline and complete it so that it reaches maturity. In doing so, he strengthens the coherence of the subject and ensures that later generations inherit a discipline free from serious omissions.

Islamic intellectual history provides many illustrations of this task. Jurists expanded legal theory to address novel cases not treated by earlier manuals, while grammarians elaborated on points of syntax that earlier works had left underdeveloped. In philosophy and medicine, too, later scholars often perfected disciplines by supplying missing discussions, thereby transforming what might otherwise have remained partial into a complete science. For modern readers, this resonates with the continuing need to refine disciplines as knowledge advances. Academic fields today still evolve through the sustained work of scholars who identify blind spots, incorporate new perspectives, and fill in neglected areas. Ibn Khaldūn reminds us that this effort is not peripheral but central to the health of the present and future scholarship.

4.5 The Reorganisation of a Subject (Within a Discipline)

A further aim of scholarly writing, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is the reorganisation of a subject (*mawḍūʿ*) whose problems may have been treated without proper order. As he explains:

“The problems of a particular science may have been treated without the proper arrangement into chapters and without order. The scholar who becomes aware of that (situation) will arrange and improve on the problems and put every problem in the chapter where it belongs.”¹¹

This task of rearranging and systematising ensures that issues are classified under their appropriate headings, eliminating disorder and aiding both teaching and comprehension. Without such an order, even sound knowledge risks remaining scattered and confusing to the

¹¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:286.

student. Ibn Khaldūn illustrates this with jurisprudence. In the *Mudawwanah* and the *‘Utbīyyah*, problems of law were often placed under unsuitable headings, obscuring their proper context. Later jurists, such as Ibn Abī Zayd, undertook the effort of restructuring *Mudawwanah* (the *‘Utbīyyah* remained unimproved), thereby clarifying the material and making the discipline more coherent and pedagogically effective.

In modern scholarship, this aim remains vital. From the compilation of encyclopaedias and reference works, to the structuring of curricula and taxonomies, the reorganisation of knowledge within subjects makes it possible for scholars and students alike to engage with material in a more systematic and intelligible way.

4.6 The Organisation of Scattered Problems into a New Discipline

Ibn Khaldūn identifies another legitimate aim of composition in the reorganisation of dispersed issues into a unified body of knowledge. At times, individual questions or problems are addressed in isolation, appearing across various works without coherence. A discerning scholar may perceive the connections between them and gather these scattered elements into a new, self-contained discipline. In doing so, he creates order where there was fragmentation, giving later students a clear structure in which to pursue study.

This, Ibn Khaldūn notes, represents a creative moment in the development of knowledge: when a keen mind discerns underlying unity and redefines the intellectual map of the sciences. Such acts of consolidation do not merely serve convenience; they mark turning points in scholarly history, opening new paths of inquiry and enabling subsequent generations to advance learning with greater clarity.

For example, Ibn Khaldūn notes how the science of literary criticism (*bayān*) emerged in this way. Problems of style, eloquence, and expression were originally discussed within grammar, rhetoric, and poetry, but were only later collected into a distinct discipline with its own principles and framework.

In modern contexts, a similar pattern can be observed. The rise of the computer science discipline, for instance, is crystallised out of

mathematics, engineering, and logic into an autonomous discipline with its own distinct identity. Thus, for Ibn Khaldūn, scholarly creativity is not confined only to preserving or correcting knowledge; it also extends to the generation of new sciences through the careful reorganisation and integration of scattered problems and insights.

4.7 The Abridgement of Voluminous or Lengthy Scholarly Works

The final aim of scholarly composition, according to Ibn Khaldūn, is the abridgement (*mukhtaṣar*) of extensive works. Knowledge is sometimes preserved in lengthy treatises that, while comprehensive, may overwhelm students or hinder accessibility. In such cases, it becomes a service to distil the material into a more concise form, provided this is done without distortion or loss of meaning. Abridgement, then, is not about carelessly cutting down a text but about retaining its essential insights while removing excessive detail or repetition.

For Ibn Khaldūn, this function reflects the scholar's responsibility to facilitate learning for others. While some will study comprehensive works, many benefit from carefully produced summaries that make the essential points more accessible. The Islamic tradition itself abounds with such examples. Al-Ghazālī's *Ihyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* inspired numerous abridgements, the most famous being Ibn al-Jawzī's *Minhāj al-Qāṣidīn* and its later condensation *Mukhtaṣar Minhāj al-Qāṣidīn* by Ibn Qudāmah. Similarly, in jurisprudence, almost every major *madhhab* (school of law) produced authoritative *mukhtaṣarāt* to provide students and jurists with concise guides that captured the essence of longer, more complex manuals.

In contemporary contexts, the same principle underlies the production of reliable handbooks, textbooks, or encyclopaedic summaries that condense vast bodies of scholarship into accessible formats. From student companions to digital knowledge repositories, abridgement remains an enduring way for scholars to fulfil their task: transmitting knowledge faithfully while ensuring a wider audience can grasp it.

The seven aims articulated by Ibn Khaldūn are not merely

theoretical ideals but serve as practical standards. Their significance is particularly evident in his own authorship of the *Muqaddimah*. This work not only theorises about the purpose and ethics of writing but also exemplifies these principles in practice.

5. THE WRITING OF THE *MUQADDIMAH*: ORIGINALITY AND THE ETHICS OF COMPOSITION

Ibn Khaldūn not only identifies the legitimate aims of writing; he also *practices* them, offering his own work as evidence that meaningful authorship is possible even in times of civilisational uncertainty. His commitment to organising scattered insights, clarifying inherited knowledge, and proposing new frameworks reflects a deep confidence in the power of the written word to guide, reform, and renew. He is not content to follow others; he assumes the risk of originality and the accountability that comes with it.

The originality of the *Muqaddimah* lies not only in its content but in its deliberate break with uncritical imitation (*taqlīd*). Ibn Khaldūn distinguishes his method from that of earlier historians and philosophers, whom he faults for either failing to verify their sources or repeating ideas without testing them against observable realities. His critique of historical writing is especially pointed, as he censures credulity, the absence of methodological discipline, and a failure to distinguish surface appearances from underlying causal patterns.¹² The *Muqaddimah* is therefore both a *meta-history* and a bold experiment in reframing the terms of scholarly inquiry. In doing so, Ibn Khaldūn implicitly fulfils the first and highest of his seven authorial aims: the creation of a new discipline (*ilm al-‘umrān*) that reorganises knowledge on more rigorous foundations.

His self-awareness as an author, attuned to both the purpose and the consequences of writing, is evident throughout the text. The *Muqaddimah* not only introduces his philosophy of history but it also surveys other sciences such as logic, theology, jurisprudence, and

¹² Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal. See his “(Foreword)”, 1:6-10, and the “Introduction”, 1:15-68.

grammar. This synoptic vision exposes the fragmentation of knowledge in his time while seeking to reintegrate the sciences within a unified civilisational framework. In this sense, he also fulfils the sixth aim of scholarly composition, which is the gathering of scattered problems into a coherent discipline. The *Muqaddimah* thus brings together insights from history, social and political thought, economic behaviour, education, and the study of environment and climate (ecology) into a single reflective structure that anticipates many themes of later social science.

Other aims from his sevenfold taxonomy are likewise evident. His reinterpretation of historical reports and legal reasoning, guided by critical scrutiny and attention to causes, advances the objective of *correcting* earlier errors. His reordering of historical narrative by causal patterns rather than mere chronology advances the aim of *reorganising* a subject whose prior treatment lacked method. Even in style, the *Muqaddimah* alternates between compressed summaries and more expansive discussion, at times emphasising the value of a later *abridgement* (*mukhtaṣar*), a subtle nod to yet another of his valid aims of authorship.

In this way, the *Muqaddimah* functions not only as a theoretical treatise but also as a practical demonstration of responsible authorship, wherein the principles Ibn Khaldūn advocates are realised in his own work. This perspective underscores the ongoing relevance of his reflections, especially in contemporary discussions of academic integrity, originality, and the fundamental purpose of scholarship.

6. CONCLUSION

Ibn Khaldūn warns that the true purposes of authorship must remain central, as they distinguish genuine scholarship from distortion and deceit. Departing from these aims by superficially altering another's work, omitting material essential to a discipline, or filling pages with trivialities constitutes not innovation but arrogance and dishonesty. Notably, he cites Aristotle's dictum: "Everything else is either

superfluosness or greed.”¹³ This observation remains directly relevant to the persistent problem of scholarly malpractice, a challenge that continues to confront modern academia.

In an era when academic integrity faces increasing scrutiny due to issues such as plagiarism, replication, fabricated data, and the commodification of research outputs, Ibn Khaldūn’s words demonstrate that these crises are not unprecedented, though they may now occur on a larger scale. His emphasis on intention, epistemic rigour, and respect for knowledge as a sacred trust provides a compelling counterpoint to the instrumentalisation of scholarship for reputation, rankings, or profit. His closing reflections offer not only a taxonomy of authorial objectives but also an ethical charter, asserting that scholarship must serve truth rather than vanity, and that scholars must remain vigilant against the temptations of expedience.

For Ibn Khaldūn, writing entails a responsibility that extends into the future. Scholarly writing should not be regarded as merely technical or neutral; rather, it fundamentally shapes the preservation, interpretation, and trajectory of human knowledge. From this perspective, his conception of authorship remains a vital resource for reconsidering the aims and practices of scholarship across eras, offering both a critique of complacency and a model of integrity. Furthermore, Ibn Khaldūn’s assertion that authorship serves as both a safeguard against the loss and corruption of knowledge and as a trust essential to the cultivation of civilisation establishes a compelling standard for evaluating contemporary scholarly practice.

Ibn Khaldūn concludes his discussions with a humble prayer: “*We take refuge in God from doing what an intelligent person ought not to do. God guides us to the things that are most correct.*”¹⁴ Such conclusions, common in many classical works, serve as reminders that scholarship in the Islamic tradition was never severed from devotion to God. The pursuit of knowledge was regarded as a form of *‘ibādah*.

¹³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:287. See further in Franz Rosenthal, *The Technique and Approach of Muslim Scholarship* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1947), 64.

¹⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, trans. Rosenthal, 3:287-288.

In contrast, much of contemporary authorship is shaped by competition, self-interest, and the pressures of academic metrics, often neglecting humility and self-reflection.

Given current debates on plagiarism, research misconduct, and the erosion of academic integrity, Ibn Khaldūn's closing words remain highly relevant. They emphasise that true scholarship must be grounded in sincerity, humility, and a sense of accountability before God. A true scholar writes not to display personal brilliance, but to serve a purpose greater than individual recognition. This spiritual dimension has largely receded in contemporary academic norms, where the focus on impact and innovation often overshadows sincerity and self-reflection. Reviving a culture of prayerful humility is not a romanticisation of the past, but a means of recovering a moral compass essential for preserving the integrity of Islamic learning and scholarly endeavour.

Finally, the *Muqaddimah* serves as a reminder that contemporary scholarship should be rooted in originality, clarity of purpose, humility, and a profound sense of accountability before God. Through its sophisticated intellectual contributions, ranging from methodological critique to disciplinary innovation, the *Muqaddimah* stands as both a constructive blueprint and a living testimony to responsible authorship. Ibn Khaldūn does not merely prescribe scholarly principles; he embodies them through the structure, objectives, and originality of his own work, as discussed earlier in this essay. In redefining the aims and ethics of scholarly composition, Ibn Khaldūn challenges scholars of every generation to consider not only *what* they are writing, but also *why*, for *whom*, and to *what* end. These questions remain highly relevant, especially as the production of knowledge accelerates while its ethical orientation, meaningful application, and civilisational significance are increasingly debated.



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MANUSCRIPT STUDIES

DISCOVERIES FROM A CHARMING MINIATURE MANUSCRIPT: A 16TH CENTURY VOLUME OF HAFEZ'S GHAZALS

Amir H. Zekrgoo¹

ABSTRACT

The Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas Library (SMNAL) at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC, IIUM) houses a remarkable collection of Hafez's *ghazals*, compiled in a charming miniature-sized manuscript from the 16th-century Safavid Iran. Its exquisite lacquer binding, adorned with colorful floral motifs; the creatively developed page layouts that, while maintaining overall visual unity, vary to meet the aesthetic demands of each page; and the consistently excellent quality of Nasta'liq calligraphy throughout the volume make this manuscript truly exceptional.

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The absence of *rekābeh* (catchwords), as well as the fact that each page contains a carefully selected five or six self-contained couplets – complete in itself – and that the two illuminated opening folios along with four miniature paintings in the Isfahani style are later additions, all suggest that the pages may have originally been intended for a *muraqqa* ‘ (album).

This essay is divided into seven distinct sections. “About the Manuscript” provides essential information on the volume. Its aesthetic and codicological features are examined under a few headings, namely “Binding,” “Illuminations,” “Layout,” and “Illustrations.” Additional markings on the manuscript reveal traces of two former owners prior to its acquisition by ISTAC in the 1990s; these are discussed under “Barker’s Remarks” and “Seals.” Finally, “Physical Condition” offers an account of the volume’s deterioration and subsequent restorations. The essay is accompanied by twenty-two images, selected and photographed by the author.

KEYWORDS: Hafez; Persian manuscript; Safavid period; lacquer binding; page layout

1.0 ABOUT THE MANUSCRIPT



Figure 1: Selected ghazals of Hafez, Safavid Iran, sixteenth century (ISTAC–IUM Collection).

This charming miniature-sized manuscript of the selected *ghazals* by Hafez displays various artistic features, from its captivating jewel-like binding, to creatively developed layout compositions that vary in different pages, and its fine Nasta‘liq calligraphy that soothes the eye.

The general information about the manuscript is provided in the following table.

Accession no.	SMNAL. Persian MSS-145
Title, Author	<i>Ghazals</i> of Hafez, by Shams al-Din Hafez Shirazi
Date and place	16 ^h century, Iran
Language	Persian / Farsi
Style of script	Excellent <i>Nasta'liq</i> in black ink
Dimensions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Size with cover: 14 x 9.3 cm ▪ Page size: 13.5 x 9 cm ▪ Text area: 10.7 x 6 (including the borders).
Pages, Line per page	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 115 folios, 10 or 12 lines per page
Binding	Colourful lacquer binding adorned with vivid floral and foliated designs.
Illuminations	Two intricately illuminated <i>sarlowhs</i> , sharing a similar overall composition on pages 1-L and 2-R.
Illustrations	Four exquisite miniature paintings executed in the Isfahan school.
Seals	Seal impression of a previous owner appears two times on the obverse and reverse of page 115
Physical Condition	Overall good condition, with minor traces of deterioration, water stain, ink smudging, and restoration.

2.0 BINDING

The first attractive feature of this fine manuscript is its charming colourful lacquer binding. Adorned with vivid floral and foliated designs, framed within a border decorated with delicate floral patterns in golden and black, each panel is an artistic masterpiece in itself. Though its shiny surface is damaged with deep cracks, the aesthetic quality remains intact. The binding of this manuscript displays a skillful restoration. The original front and back of the binding are preserved, while the damaged spine is replaced with plane black leather support (Figure 2).



Figure 2: The style of rendering the flowers and technical details indicate Mid-Safavid era, late 16th century.

3.0 ILLUMINATION

The two intricately illuminated *sarlowhs* in this manuscript share a similar overall composition. Curiously, they appear on opposite sides of the same leaf—p. 1-L and p. 2-R—yet neither is accompanied by any text. Although consistent in size and style with the rest of the manuscript, these pages show clear indications of being later additions, intended to provide a formal opening for the volume — an intention that ultimately remained unrealised. (Figures 3 and 4)



Figure 3 and 4: Details of *sarlowhs*: page. 1-L (left), page. 2-R (right)

A close inspection of pages 1-L and its reverse, 2-R reveals that the ornate *sarlowhs* were skillfully pasted onto a blank page that had originally been prepared with layout outlines for couplets, in the same manner as the other folios. On page 1-L, an attempt was made to fill the surrounding space with red paint, possibly to create a visually striking opening; however, this embellishment was never completed (Figure 5). On the reverse, page 2-R, a more advanced approach is evident (Figure 6).



Figure 5 (page 1-L): Unfinished opening page (*iftitāh*) with later interventions

This page demonstrates an attempt to transform an ordinary page into a grand opening (*iftitāh*), a plan that was ultimately left unfinished. A *sarlowh* was carelessly pasted onto the page, which is then framed by a wide maroon border featuring sketchy floral designs at the top. On the left margin, a large letter “A,” casually written and circled, may have served as a guide for decorative motifs yet to be added. Barker’s name, written in blue pen in his own hand at the top edge of the page, together with additional pencil notations beneath the *sarlowh*, suggests that he may originally have intended to use the page as a flyleaf.

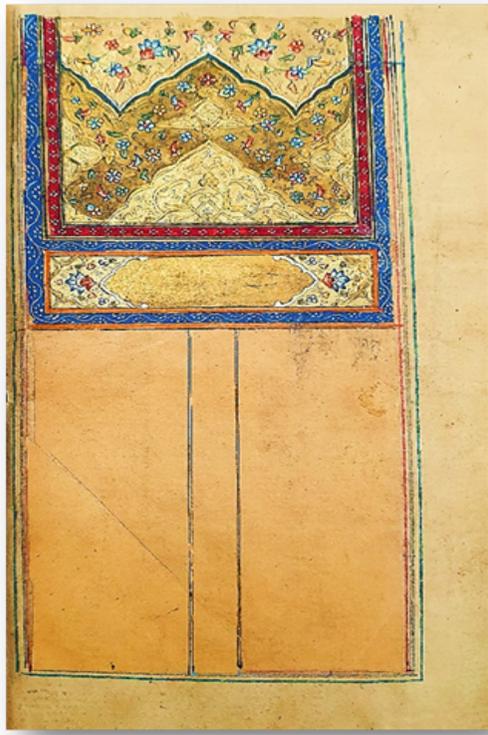


Figure 6 (page 2-R): Unfinished opening page (*iftitāh*) with affixed *sarlowh*.

This page carries a beautifully executed *sarlowh*, prepared separately and affixed to the upper portion of the page, with a width precisely matching that of the manuscript's text block. Its upper edge extends above the layout border, in accordance with traditional *iftitāh* page design. Below this, within the defined text area, a distinct orangish-toned sheet was pasted to conceal the original ruling for couplets. This overlay is divided into two columns and intended to accommodate the opening *ghazal* in the customary format; however, this plan was likewise left unfinished.

4.0 LAYOUT

A creative idea has been employed to develop a well-planned layout template throughout the manuscript. The template emerges with different variations according to aesthetic considerations, as well as the number of couplets selected for the specific pages.

To develop this flexible template, the text block is elegantly divided into distinct sections. On most pages, the following arrangement is adopted: at the center lies the largest area, reserved for four lines (two couplets) composed diagonally in a *chalipā* layout. Horizontal couplets are placed in the top and bottom rectangles, while the narrow side-panels contain vertically written verses—running top-down along the right margin and bottom-up along the left. These divisions—subject to slight variations from page to page—are meticulously outlined in gold and enclosed within double black lines. This compartmentalised structure often creates small blank squares and rectangles that contribute to the aesthetic balance of the composition. Such defined empty spaces are typically filled with colorful decorative motifs—an indication of the careful planning undertaken by the artist or the project's commissioner (Figures 7 and 8).

It is worth noting that such elaborate composition is more characteristic of calligraphic panels produced for *muraqqa'* albums. The fact that each folio is visually and textually self-contained—and that each showcases a selective excerpt of only five or six couplets from a *ghazal*, in contrast to the average length of Hafez's *ghazals* which typically range from seven to ten couplets—suggests that the original intention of the commissioner may not have been to produce a complete *dīvān*. Rather, it appears more likely that the aim was to assemble an exquisite *muraqqa'* album. This assumption is further supported by the absence of *rekābeh* (catchwords)—a traditional Persian manuscript practice in which the first word (or part of it) from the next page is written in the bottom corner margin of the preceding page to ensure correct pagination. The lack of such pagination markers reinforces the idea that the folios were not initially conceived as part of a continuous manuscript.

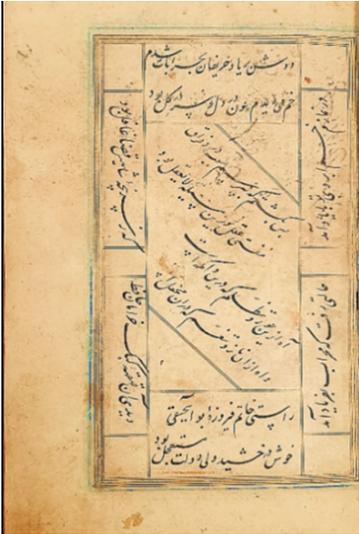


Figure 7: (page 2-L):
Empty spaces are reserved for
illuminative ornamentation

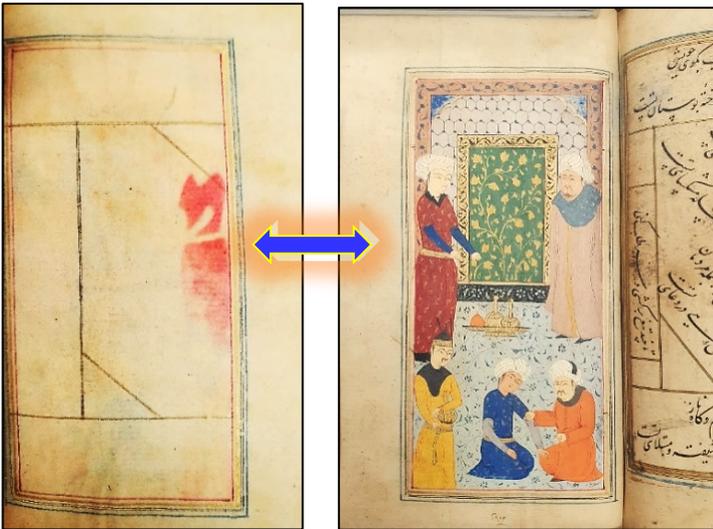
The four corner areas of the text block—two small vertical rectangles along the sides and two larger triangular spaces—were deliberately left blank to allow for additional illuminative ornamentation, intended to further enhance the visual and aesthetic richness of the composition (Figure 7).



Figure 8: (page 3):
Different yet
harmonious layouts
of opposite pages

These two facing pages (Figure 8) exhibit different yet harmonious layouts, with the right-hand page containing ten lines, while the left-hand page accommodates twelve.

The entire text blocks of Figures 9 and 10 are framed with multiple fine lines in gold, black, red, and green. On many folios, these border colours have faded, likely due to frequent handling and the natural aging of the manuscript. Interestingly, the reverse sides of illustrated pages are blank, although the same template outlines have been drawn on them, suggesting that they may have been prepared for future completion or embellishment.



Figures 9 and 10:

The blank page on the left (p. 91-R) features a layout template that is simpler in design than the more elaborate compositions found on other pages. In addition, the wet red pigment used for the standing figure on the illustrated facing page (p. 90-L) has bled through the paper, leaving a faint silhouette of the figure visible on the reverse side.

5.0 ILLUSTRATIONS

The manuscript is adorned with four exquisite miniature paintings executed in the Isfahan school. The depiction of faces, indication of style of outfits, and some architectural features suggest Turkish influences. The paintings appear on pages 17-R, 43-L, 65-R, and 90-L (Figures 11, 12, 13, and 14).

Several factors suggest that these illustrations are later additions to the volume:

- a) Each painting appears on an independent leaf, with the reverse side left blank;
- b) The subject matter of paintings bears no direct connection to the *ghazal* on the adjacent pages; and
- c) The remarkably well-preserved and vibrant condition of the painted surfaces contrasts sharply with the overall aging and deterioration visible throughout the rest of the manuscript.

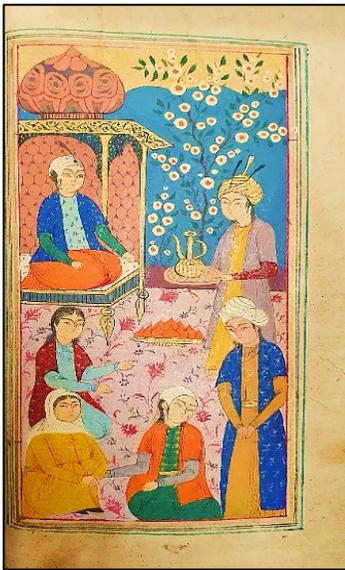


Figure 11: p. 17-R

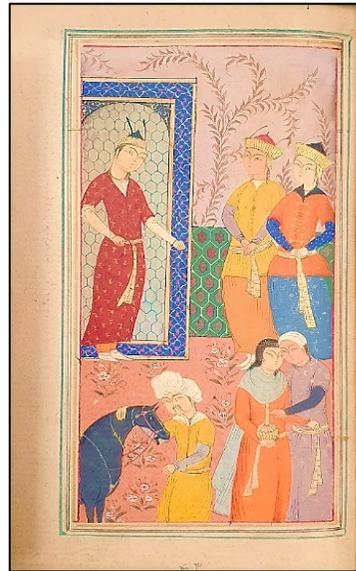


Figure 12: p. 43-L



Figure 13: p. 65-R

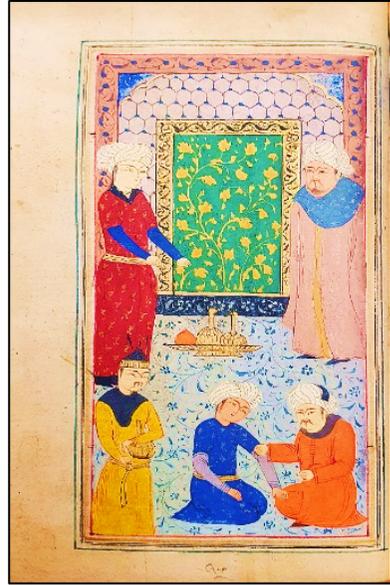


Figure 14: p. 90-R

There are additional marks on the manuscript that enhance our understanding of its history and provenance. These include the remarks of its last owner, Abdul Rahman Barker, and a seal impression belonging to one of the manuscript's earlier owners.

Barker's Remarks

The handwriting of the manuscript's last known owner, Muhammad 'Abd al-Rahman Barker, appears in two places. It is found first on the flyleaf—added during the most recent rebinding—where it is written in Urdu script (Figure 15).

His handwriting also appears on p. 1-L (see Figures 3 and 5).

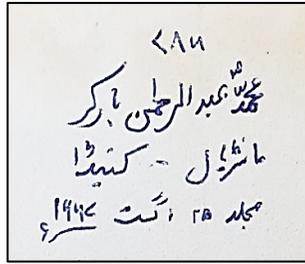


Figure 15: Flyleaf inscription recording rebinding. Barker recorded the date and place as 25 August 1967, Montreal, Canada. The inclusion of the term *mujallad* (“bound”) indicates that the manuscript had been formally rebound at that time, possibly under Barker’s supervision or commission, before it entered the ISTAC collection in the 1990s.

6.0 SEALS

Seal impression of a previous owner appears two times on the obverse and reverse of page 115 of the manuscript, carrying a devotional phrase (Figure 16). Barker’s handwritten note on the flyleaf indicates that the seal is dated 1206 AH (1791–92 CE). However, this date has not yet been independently verified.

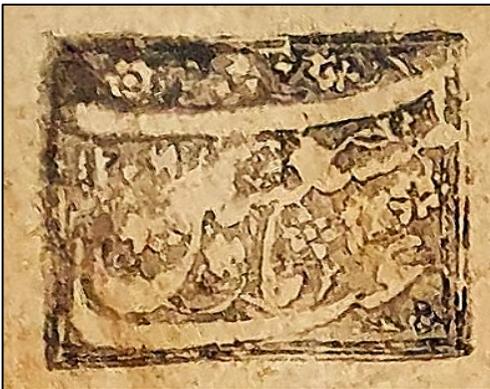


Figure 16;
Previous owner’s seal
with supplicatory
inscription

This seal, executed in fine *Nasta'liq* script against a floral ground, bears the inscription: *Yā Ghiyāth al-mustaghthīn*, meaning “O Helper of all those who seek help.” The phrase constitutes a prayer or supplication, invoking God as the ultimate source of aid in times of distress.

7.0 PHYSICAL CONDITION

The manuscript is in an overall good condition. The volume has undergone restoration, and is given a new binding by adding a plain leather spine to its original colourful lacquer binding. The handwritten text by Abd al-Rahman Barker – it’s previous owner before moving to ISTAC’s SMNA Library – suggests that the new binding, and some restorations were perhaps done while in his possession in August 1967. A thorough inspection of the manuscript shows traces of water stain, ink smudging, discolouring and charring of paper along the rule lines – likely a chemical reaction to the copper-based pigment Verdigris (Figures 17 to 21).



Figure 17 (page 43): Visible signs of ageing and restoration appear near the centre of the folio, particularly along the stitching at the spine.



Figure 18 (Page 60): Ink smudging and poor restoration
Significant ink smudging, paper deterioration and discolouration, as well as an unsympathetic restoration involving the pasting of paper over the original page, are clearly visible.



Figure 19 (page 29-L): Some pages, display a distinct greenish tone that contrasts with the overall warm ochre hue of most folios. This discolouration may result from a chemical reaction caused by verdigris – a copper-based pigment – used in the ruling lines that frame the text block.

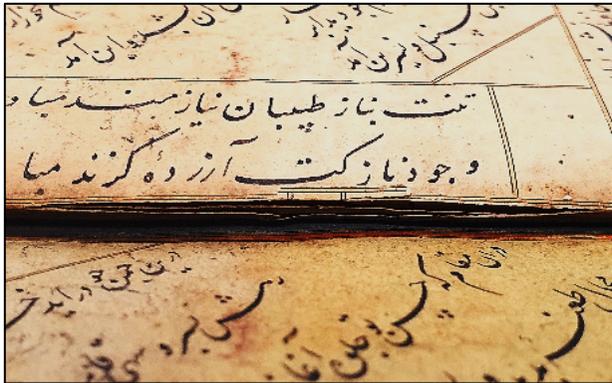


Figure 20 (page 29-L): The corrosive effect of verdigris—used in the ruling lines—combined with the pressure exerted by the tight binding, has led to localised charring and deterioration of the paper.

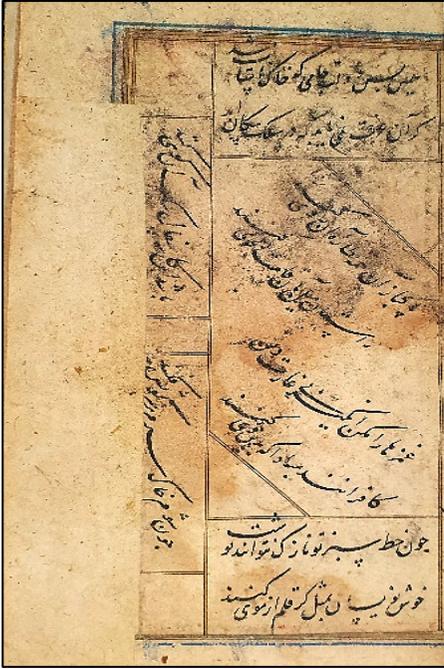


Figure 21 (page 111-L):
Careless restoration of
the outer margin of a
damaged page

Restoration work is evident on page 111-L, where a paper patch has been applied to reinforce the damaged outer margin. Residual darkened areas in the upper half of the page mark earlier deterioration.

7.1. Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Mostafa Rostami of the University of Mazandaran for his expert opinion on the dating and attribution of the manuscript's lacquer binding. I am also deeply thankful to Mr. Ahmad Zaki and the dedicated staff of the SMNA Library at ISTAC, whose support and assistance greatly facilitated the smooth progress of this research.



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MANUSCRIPT STUDIES

THE POTENTIAL OF ULU MANUSCRIPTS IN BENGKULU PROVINCE: A PRELIMINARY STUDY ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ULU WRITING TRADITION AND THE ULU ORAL TRADITION IN BENGKULU CITY

Nyayu Soraya¹, Alimron², Maryamah³

ABSTRACT

This study examines the cultural potential of Ulu manuscripts in Bengkulu Province, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the Ulu writing tradition and the oral tradition in Bengkulu City. Employing codicological, palaeographical, and textual analyses, the research documents manuscripts inscribed on bamboo, bark, and paper, encompassing a wide range of contents,

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including customary law, prayers, medicinal knowledge, oral poetry, and genealogical narratives. These materials reflect not only the intellectual and cultural richness of the local community but also the dynamic interaction between orality and literacy. The findings indicate that Ulu manuscripts functioned as repositories of knowledge, instruments of ritual and religious practice, and markers of cultural identity. Oral tradition animated and sustained the texts, while the manuscripts preserved and institutionalised oral knowledge, demonstrating a continuous interplay between spoken and written culture. Nevertheless, the preservation of these manuscripts faces significant challenges, including material deterioration, inadequate cataloguing, and limited public awareness. As a preliminary investigation, this study underscores the scholarly importance of Ulu manuscripts within the context of Malay–Islamic heritage and calls for further interdisciplinary research, systematic digitisation, and their integration into broader studies of Islamic civilisation and regional identity.

KEYWORDS: Ulu manuscripts, Bengkulu, Oral tradition, Writing tradition, Malay–Islamic heritage.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, manuscript studies have been increasingly recognised as a pivotal field for uncovering cultural and intellectual legacies, particularly in Southeast Asia, where the Malay world has long sustained a rich tradition that intertwines oral and written forms of knowledge. Manuscripts are not merely physical artefacts; they function as vital repositories of collective memory, knowledge systems, and cultural identity.⁴ Within this broader heritage, the Ulu

⁴ Gareth Richards, “The Travelling Text: Manuscripts, Print Culture and Translation in the Making of the Malay World,” *Discourses, Agency and Identity in Malaysia* 13 (October 24, 2021): 59–103, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4568-3_3.

manuscripts produced historically by communities in South Sumatra, Bengkulu, and Lampung constitute an important yet comparatively understudied corpus. Written in the indigenous Ulu or Ka-ga-nga script, these manuscripts encompass a wide range of themes, including genealogies, customary law (*adat*), religious practices, traditional medicine, and oral poetry.⁵ As such, they represent a valuable entry point for understanding how local communities in Bengkulu and its surrounding regions articulated their worldview, preserved their heritage, and transmitted knowledge across generations.⁶

Ulu manuscripts, however, also played a significant role in the spread and preservation of Islamic teachings, particularly in Bengkulu. These manuscripts served as important vehicles for the transmission of Islamic knowledge, serving not only as repositories of local traditions but also as documents that recorded and formalised Islamic practices. The Ulu script was used to transcribe religious texts, prayers, and teachings, ensuring that Islamic knowledge was preserved in a form that could be passed down across generations. In this way, Ulu manuscripts contributed to the development of Islamic literacy in the region, enabling communities to engage with Islamic teachings in written form and supporting the broader process of Islamisation in Bengkulu.

Although Ulu manuscripts provide concrete testimony to the intellectual traditions of the region, Bengkulu's oral heritage remains of equal importance.⁷ Folklore, pantun, ritual chants, and proverbial expressions have historically coexisted with written culture, functioning as vital channels for the transmission of ethical

⁵ Sarwit Sarwono, Didi Yulistio, and Amril Canhras, "Naskah-Naskah Ulu-Islam Pada Masyarakat Di Provinsi Bengkulu (Ulu-Islamic Manuscripts Preserved in the Society in Bengkulu Province)," *Mozaik Humaniora* 19, no. 2 (December 19, 2019): 229–42.

⁶ Sarwono, Yulistio, and Canhras.

⁷ Budi Agung Sudarmanto, "Revitalisasi Sastra Lisan Dan Pemertahanan Bahasa Daerah: Studi Kasus Sastra Lisan Rejung Dan Guritan Di Sumatera Selatan," *JSSH (Jurnal Sains Sosial Dan Humaniora)* 4, no. 2 (2020): 111–20, <https://doi.org/10.30595/jssh.v4i2.8593>.

values, collective memory, and social cohesion.⁸ Rather than existing in isolation, the written and oral traditions have functioned in a complementary relationship: manuscripts often formalised oral expressions, while oral traditions gave vitality and continuity to the knowledge recorded in texts.⁹ Examining this interplay is thus crucial for understanding how Bengkulu's communities negotiated the boundaries of memory, performance, and textualisation.

Despite their cultural significance, research on Ulu manuscripts, particularly in Bengkulu Province, remains limited when compared with the more extensively studied Malay manuscript traditions of Aceh, Minangkabau, and the Malay Peninsula. Previous scholarship has tended to privilege philological concerns such as transliteration and codicology, with relatively little attention to the socio-cultural contexts in which the manuscripts were embedded. Likewise, the relationship between the Ulu writing tradition and the oral practices of the communities that produced and safeguarded them has received scant scholarly focus. This lacuna underscores the need for a preliminary study that considers Ulu manuscripts not merely as textual artefacts but as dynamic components of a continuum linking oral and written culture.

The preservation of Ulu manuscripts and the survival of oral traditions also bear significant implications for heritage studies in the Malay world. UNESCO underscores that safeguarding cultural heritage requires balanced attention to both tangible elements, such as manuscripts, and intangible forms, including oral traditions, rituals, and performances.¹⁰ Recognising this interdependence, the present study seeks to enrich understandings of Bengkulu's cultural identity within the broader framework of Malay-Islamic civilisation, while aligning with scholarly calls to integrate manuscript research with the study of performance, ritual, and oral

⁸ Walter J Ong and John Hartley, *Orality and Literacy* (Routledge, 2013).

⁹ Amin Sweeney, *A Full Hearing: Orality and Literacy in the Malay World* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987).

¹⁰ UNESCO, "Education in a Multilingual World," 2003.

narrative traditions.¹¹

Accordingly, this preliminary investigation explores the potential of Ulu manuscripts in Bengkulu Province by tracing the interconnections between the Ulu writing system and oral traditions in Bengkulu City. It lays the groundwork for further inquiry at the intersection of philology, anthropology, and heritage studies, situating Bengkulu within wider networks of Malay intellectual and cultural history. Ultimately, the study highlights the urgency of preserving and revitalising both written and oral traditions as interdependent legacies that continue to shape Bengkulu's cultural identity today.

2.0 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in several theoretical perspectives that provide a foundation for examining the relationship between Ulu manuscripts and the oral tradition in Bengkulu. Philology offers the primary lens for understanding Ulu manuscripts as textual artefacts, enabling the analysis of script, language, and textual variations that reveal the intellectual and cultural practices of the community. Alongside philology, oral tradition studies are employed to capture the living dimensions of folklore, chants, *pantun*, and proverbs that continue to shape the identity and worldview of local communities. Furthermore, the research draws on the field of heritage studies, particularly the distinction between tangible heritage (manuscripts as material texts) and intangible heritage (oral traditions as performances and cultural expressions). These theoretical perspectives together highlight the need to approach Ulu manuscripts not as isolated textual relics but as part of a broader cultural ecosystem.

¹¹ T.E Behrend, "Manuscript Production in Nineteenth-Century Java. Codicology and the Writing of Javanese Literary History," *Bijdragen Tot de Taal-, Land- En Volkenkunde* 149, no. 3 (1993): 407–37, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27864482>.

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative approach appropriate for a preliminary study of cultural heritage. Data collection relies on literature review, field observation, and semi-structured interviews with cultural practitioners and local custodians of tradition. In addition, document analysis is conducted to examine the physical features, content, and functions of existing Ulu manuscripts. As a preliminary investigation, the methodology emphasises exploration and description rather than exhaustive cataloguing. This design allows for identifying key themes, patterns, and challenges that will form the basis for further, more comprehensive studies.

2.1 Heritage and Oral Tradition Framework

The study of Ulu manuscripts in Bengkulu cannot be separated from the broader framework of cultural heritage, which encompasses both tangible and intangible dimensions. Tangible heritage comprises physical artefacts such as manuscripts, monuments, and architecture that embody a society's material culture. In this regard, Ulu manuscripts represent a unique form of written heritage, serving as visible evidence of intellectual traditions, local knowledge systems, and cultural memory inscribed in the Ulu or Kaganga script. Philology, as the study of ancient texts, plays a crucial role in understanding the authenticity, preservation, and intellectual significance of these manuscripts. By analysing the script, language, and textual variations, philology helps scholars uncover the historical and cultural practices of the Ulu community, allowing them to trace the development of these manuscripts over time.

On the other hand, intangible heritage includes oral traditions, performing arts, rituals, and knowledge practices that are transmitted across generations through speech, performance, and social interaction. In Bengkulu, traditions such as pantun, folklore, chants, and ritual expressions are living forms of intangible heritage that complement and give meaning to the textual content of Ulu manuscripts. The role of oral traditions in preserving knowledge and maintaining cultural continuity is vital, as these traditions not only

provide the living context in which the manuscripts were produced but also give them ongoing relevance. Through oral performance, these traditions keep the knowledge inscribed in the manuscripts alive, ensuring that it is not only remembered but also actively used within the community.

Together, these two dimensions of heritage highlight the interconnectedness of written and oral practices in sustaining cultural identity. The oral tradition serves to sustain the relevance of the manuscripts, while the written tradition safeguards the continuity of oral knowledge by formalising it in a more durable form. This interaction between the two forms of knowledge preservation creates a dynamic cultural ecosystem in which both written and oral forms are indispensable.

This conceptualisation aligns with the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which emphasises that cultural heritage is not limited to monuments and artefacts but also includes “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills” that communities recognise as part of their cultural legacy. UNESCO also stresses the importance of safeguarding heritage in both its tangible and intangible forms to foster cultural diversity and human creativity.¹² By situating Ulu manuscripts within this dual framework, this study underscores that manuscripts are not merely relics of the past but are embedded within a living continuum of oral and written traditions. Preserving Ulu manuscripts, therefore, requires not only the physical conservation of the texts but also the revitalisation of the oral practices that sustain their meaning within the community.

2.2 Methodological Implications

This research adopts a qualitative approach that combines codicological, palaeographical, and textual analysis.¹³ The

¹² UNESCO, “Education in a Multilingual World.”

¹³ James T Collins, *Bahasa Melayu Bahasa Dunia: Sejarah Singkat* (Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2005).

codicological and palaeographical perspectives focus on the external features of the manuscripts, such as writing material, dimensions, script styles, and overall condition, while the textual analysis investigates the content and themes preserved in the manuscripts. These methods are instrumental in understanding the physical and intellectual dimensions of Ulu manuscripts. The use of philology enables a deeper understanding of the authenticity and evolution of the Ulu script and its significance within the local cultural context.

Fieldwork was conducted in 15 villages in Bengkulu Province identified as potential locations for Ulu manuscripts. The selection of villages was based on preliminary information from local informants and village leaders, as well as on the presence of *langar*, traditional raised wooden structures often used to store sacred or cultural objects. Data collection involved surveys, direct documentation of manuscripts, and interviews with owners or custodians, particularly customary leaders responsible for safeguarding village heirlooms.¹⁴

To systematise the documentation, each manuscript was assigned a unique catalogue code. The code consisted of two components separated by a hyphen. The first part contained three capital letters representing either the owner's name (for family-held manuscripts) or the village name (for community-held manuscripts). The second part consisted of a sequential number corresponding to the number of manuscripts preserved by that family or village. For example, a family named Asrip with eight manuscripts received the codes ASR-01 through ASR-08, while Teni Wama's single manuscript was recorded as TEW-01. Manuscripts found in Atas Tebing village were coded ATB-01 to ATB-04.

The codicological analysis focused on measuring the manuscripts, assessing their physical condition, examining the script styles and diacritical marks, and identifying the languages used. In parallel, the textual analysis involved reading and interpreting the contents of the manuscripts, which included genealogical records,

¹⁴ Stefan Titscher et al., *Metode Analisis Teks Dan Wacana* (Yogyakarta: Pusaka Pelajar, 2009).

customary laws, oral poetry, ritual knowledge, and Islamic texts. These combined approaches allow the study to document both the material and intellectual dimensions of the Ulu manuscripts, while simultaneously situating them within the broader context of Bengkulu’s oral traditions and cultural heritage. Through these methodologies, the study aims to understand how Ulu manuscripts are both products of their time and continue to engage with the community’s oral traditions, preserving and passing on cultural knowledge.

Table 1: Villages and Informant

No	Village	Number of Manuscripts	Catalogue Code	Owner / Informant
1	Atas Tebing	4	ATB-01 to ATB-04	Village residents / community
2	Teni Wama	1	TEW-01	Teni Wama (individual)
3	Asrip	8	ASR-01 to ASR-08	Asrip family
4	Lubuk Aur	3	LBA-01 to LBA-03	Village residents / community
5	Pasar Seluma	2	PSE-01 to PSE-02	Village residents / community
6	Sumber Jaya	5	SBJ-01 to SBJ-05	Village residents / community
7	Talang Empat	6	TLE-01 to TLE-06	Village residents / community
8	Sungai Serut	2	SSR-01 to SSR-02	Village residents / community

9	Pino Raya	3	PRI-01 to PRI-03	Village residents / community
10	Karang Anyar	4	KAY-01 to KAY-04	Village residents / community
11	Kota Manna	5	KMA-01 to KMA-05	Village residents / community
12	Ujan Mas	3	UJM-01 to UJM-03	Village residents / community
13	Selagan Raya	2	SLR-01 to SLR-02	Village residents / community
14	Padang Bano	1	PBN-01	Village residents / community
15	Air Rami	4	ARM-01 to ARM-04	Village residents / community

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the core findings of the study and interprets them in relation to the research objectives and existing literature. The discussion is organised into several sub-sections to provide a systematic analysis of the data, including the codicological and palaeographical features of the Ulu manuscripts, their textual content, and their broader cultural significance. Each sub-section highlights patterns, variations, and notable observations, linking them to previous studies and theoretical frameworks to contextualise the results within the scholarly discourse on manuscript studies and cultural heritage.

3.1 The Historical Context of Ulu Manuscripts in Bengkulu

The Ulu script, also known as Surat Ulu or Aksara Ulu, is an ancient writing system that emerged in the 13th century in the interior regions of Sumatra, particularly along the upper reaches of the Musi River. This script is a derivative of the Pallava script from India, which was utilised during the Srivijaya Kingdom era. The Ulu script was employed to write manuscripts in Malay and other Sumatran languages, serving as a medium for recording various aspects of local culture and knowledge.¹⁵

Over time, the Ulu script underwent adaptations to suit local dialects and cultural nuances. These adaptations led to variations in the script's characters and orthographic conventions across regions. For instance, the Ulu script used in the Rejang region exhibits distinct characteristics compared to that used in other areas, reflecting the localised evolution of the script.¹⁶

The primary materials for writing Ulu manuscripts included tree bark, bamboo, and palm leaves. These materials were commonly used in the interior regions of South Sumatra, such as in the Serawai area of Bengkulu province. The manuscripts often contained texts related to traditional medicine, genealogies, customary laws, and Islamic teachings, indicating the script's role in preserving and transmitting cultural and religious knowledge.¹⁷

The distribution of Ulu manuscripts is concentrated in the interior regions of Bengkulu and South Sumatra. These areas, characterised by their geographical isolation, maintained strong cultural traditions and a high level of literacy among the local populations. The manuscripts were typically preserved as family

¹⁵ Ayu Fitriani, "Hadir Sejak Abad Ke-12 M, Ini Dia Sejarah Aksara Ulu Di Lubuk Linggau," 2024, https://silamparivt.disway.id/read/9035/hadir-sejak-abad-ke-12-m-ini-dia-sejarah-aksara-ulu-di-lubuk-linggau?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

¹⁶ Aksara Ulu, "Sejarah Aksara Ulu Sumatera Selatan," 2022, https://aksaraulusumsel.id/sejarah?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

¹⁷ Sarwit Sarwono and Ngudining Rahayu, "Traditional Medicine Knowledge in the ULU Manuscripts of Bengkulu," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 13, no. 19 (2023): 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.7176/RHSS/13-19-01>.

heirlooms or community treasures, underscoring their significance in the cultural identity of these communities

The Ulu script represents a vital component of the cultural heritage of Bengkulu and South Sumatra. Its historical development, regional variations, and the distribution of its manuscripts provide valuable insights into the linguistic, cultural, and intellectual history of the Malay Archipelago.

no	fungsi	Default	Muba	Oku-timur	Lubuk linggau	Muara-enim
1	ka menjadi ki					
2	ka menjadi ke					
3	ka menjadi ko		Huruf o menjadi u			
4	Ka menjadi ku					
5	ka menjadi k					
6	ka menjadi kan					
7	Ka menjadi kar					
8	ka menjadi kang					
9	Ka menjadi kah					
10	ka menjadi kai					
11	Ka menjadi kau					

no	bacaan	default	Ms. Ban yaasin	Oku-timur	Lubuk linggau	Muara Enim.
1	Ka					
2	ga					
3	nga					
4	ta					
5	da					
6	na					
7	pa					
8	ba					
9	ma					
10	ca					
11	ja					
12	nya					
13	a					
14	sa					
15	ra					
16	la					
17	wa					
18	ya					
19	ha					
20	ngka		-	-		-
21	ngga		-	-	-	-
22	nta		-	-	-	-
23	nda			-		
24	mpa		-	-	-	-
25	mba			-		
26	nca		-	-	-	-
27	nja		-	-	-	
28	rha		-	-	-	-

Figure 1: Basic Letter Variants of the Ulu Script

In Bengkulu Province, surveys have identified Ulu manuscripts in

19 villages and 1 urban ward. These are distributed across Kaur (2 villages), South Bengkulu (3), Seluma (10), Lebong (1), Rejang Lebong (1), North Bengkulu (1), and Bengkulu City (1 ward). In total, researchers documented 74 manuscripts, with the majority (41) preserved in Seluma Regency.¹⁸

Most manuscripts were inscribed on bamboo, though others were inscribed on *gelumpai* bamboo, bark, rattan, or coconut shells. They are generally preserved as family or village heirlooms, but many are in poor condition due to inadequate storage. Families often keep them in kitchens, attics, or small prayer houses (*langgar*), making them vulnerable to smoke, insects, and humidity. Damage includes cracks, fading, peeling, and surface darkening, rendering some texts illegible. For instance, several bamboo manuscripts from Talang Kabu, Talang Tingi, and Lubuk Betung are almost unrecognisable, while rattan manuscripts from Padang Jawi remain intact but unreadable due to blackened surfaces.¹⁹



Figure 2: Bark Manuscript (*Naskah Kayu*)

¹⁸ Sarwono, Yulistio, and Canhras, “Naskah-Naskah Ulu-Islam Pada Masyarakat Di Provinsi Bengkulu (Ulu-Islamic Manuscripts Preserved in the Society in Bengkulu Province).”

¹⁹ Ngudining Rahayu, “Literasi Dan Naskah Ulu Abad XX Pada Berbagai Kelompok Etnik Di Bengkulu,” *Wacana: Jurnal Penelitian Bahasa, Sastra Dan Pengajaran* 14, no. 2 (2007): 124–38, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/228578665.pdf>.



Figure 3: Coconut shell manuscript from Lubuk Betung Village²⁰

Furthermore, the transmission of these manuscripts has not always been accompanied by literacy in the Ulu script. As a result, many inheritors preserve the manuscripts as sacred symbols rather than as active sources of knowledge.²¹ Nevertheless, they remain valuable for understanding Bengkulu's cultural and intellectual history, particularly in relation to medicine, customary law, and Islamic traditions.

Thus, Ulu manuscripts in Bengkulu are not merely textual records but living cultural artefacts that embody literacy, spirituality, and identity. Their widespread distribution across the province highlights both the historical extent of Ulu literacy and the urgent need to preserve this heritage for future generations.

3.2 Functions and Contents of Ulu Manuscripts

The Ulu manuscripts contain a diverse range of texts that reflect the multifaceted life of the communities in Bengkulu. Their contents include customary laws (*hukum adat*), prayers and religious invocations (*doa*), traditional medicine and healing practices (*pengobatan*), oral poetry (*syair*), and genealogical records

²⁰ Sarwono, Yulistio, and Canhras, "Naskah-Naskah Ulu-Islam Pada Masyarakat Di Provinsi Bengkulu (Ulu-Islamic Manuscripts Preserved in the Society in Bengkulu Province)."

²¹ Sarwono, Yulistio, and Canhras.

(*silsilah*). These manuscripts were not merely literary artefacts but served multiple functions within society.

Socially, they acted as repositories of communal knowledge and guidelines for maintaining order and tradition. Religiously, they preserved spiritual practices, rituals, and Islamic teachings, facilitating the transmission of moral and ethical values across generations. Culturally, they functioned as symbols of identity and continuity, embedding local wisdom, artistic expression, and historical memory into the fabric of everyday life. Through these manuscripts, the communities maintained a tangible link between the past and the present, ensuring that knowledge, customs, and beliefs were safeguarded and passed down systematically.²²

One notable category among these texts is medicinal manuscripts, which record practical knowledge of diseases and traditional healing methods. These works are strongly believed to have originated from the Serawai scriptorium.

For example, MNB 07.01 consists of a single bamboo log, measuring 53 cm in length and 9 cm in diameter, entitled *Usuran Sunup*. Its provenance and acquisition date by the museum remain unknown. MNB 07.09, another bamboo log (51.4 cm long and 8 cm in diameter), bears the title *Ubat-Ubatan* at the beginning of the text. This manuscript comes from Muara Dua Village, South Bengkulu, and was acquired by the Bengkulu State Museum on September 19, 1997.

Meanwhile, MNB 07.15, a bamboo manuscript measuring 42.5 cm in length and 6.7 cm in diameter, is titled *Tangas Sunup*. Originating from Sibak Village, Ipuh, North Bengkulu, it was obtained on December 23, 1997, and remains in good condition.²³

²² S.O Robson, *Principles of Indonesian Philology* (Dordrecht-Holland: Forris Publication, 1988).

²³ Sarwono and Rahayu, "Traditional Medicine Knowledge in the ULU Manuscripts of Bengkulu."



Figure 4: *Tangas Sunup*

The study of these medicinal manuscripts demonstrates how local communities not only preserved practical medical knowledge but also intertwined it with ritual practices, prayers, and broader cultural understandings. This highlights the role of Ulu manuscripts as holistic media of transmission, combining social, religious, and cultural dimensions in a single unified tradition.

One of the uncatalogued manuscripts at the Bengkulu State Museum, made of folded tree bark measuring 11×7 cm, contains excerpts from several Qur'anic chapters, including *Al-Fatihah*, *Al-Nas*, *Al-Falaq*, *Al-Ikhlās*, and a passage from *Al-Baqarah* commonly known as *Ayat al-Kursi*. Meanwhile, manuscripts identified as Mal 6884 (L.Or. 12.255) consist of half-folio leaves arranged in two columns: the left column is written in Jawi script, and the right column provides its transliteration in Ulu script.

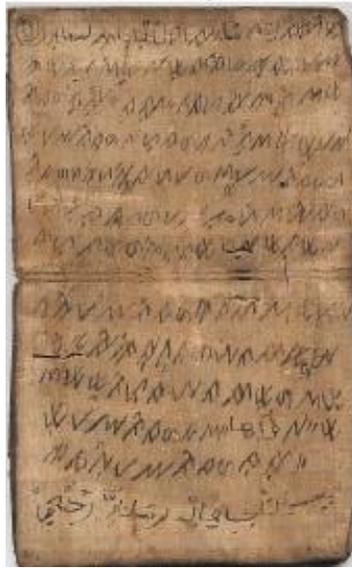


Figure 5: Two pages of manuscript MNB 1740, written in Ulu and Arabic²⁴

Another example of a prayer preserved in the Ulu manuscripts can be found in Manuscript E1 Peti 93, written on folded tree bark measuring 14 × 13.5 cm. The text is inscribed on both sides of the bark, with an Arabic prayer rendered in Ulu script. On the second page, ten lines of supplication appear, including a prayer for safety, such as “*alahuma anseli nauripi dulu hubil hubur ansilin nurripi janatin nain*” Furthermore, Manuscript E86 P97, composed on a bamboo tube (*gelumpai*), contains a dialogical text closely connected to the teachings of Islamic law (*Sharī‘ah*).

The phenomenon of bilingualism in Ulu manuscripts demonstrates that their writers not only mastered the Ulu script but also knew Arabic and Jawi. This indicates a complex level of literacy, in which they may be classified as functionally literate

²⁴ Rahayu, “Literasi Dan Naskah Ulu Abad XX Pada Berbagai Kelompok Etnik Di Bengkulu.”

persons²⁵, capable of engaging in reading and writing for both personal needs and community development. Unlike Jawi and Arabic manuscripts in the Malay tradition, Ulu manuscripts were not primarily intended as institutionalised learning materials. Instead, they served as a medium of communication, documentation of cultural knowledge, and transmission of messages within groups familiar with Ulu and Arabic/Jawi scripts.

Historically, Ulu texts were rooted in oral traditions and social practices and were influenced by Arabic and Jawi writings. Thus, Ulu manuscripts functioned not only as cultural records but also as representations and mediums for the transformation of cultural knowledge within their society.²⁶

3.3 Oral Tradition and Its Interplay with Writing in Bengkulu

The cultural landscape of Bengkulu is deeply rooted in oral tradition, expressed through diverse forms such as folklore, *pantun* (rhymed verse), *mantra* (incantations), and *peribahasa* (proverbs). These oral genres not only served as artistic expressions but also functioned as vital instruments for transmitting knowledge, values, and collective memory across generations.²⁷ Oral tradition preserved communal wisdom and reinforced social norms long before literacy became widespread, ensuring that cultural identity and moral frameworks were maintained within society.²⁸

The emergence of Ulu manuscripts illustrates the dynamic interplay between orality and writing. Oral traditions provided the “life” and cultural content that were later documented in writing, while manuscripts offered a means of formalising and preserving

²⁵ Agneta Lind, *Literacy for All: Making a Difference* (Paris: Unesco, 2008).

²⁶ Wahyu Rizky Andhifani and Nor Huda Ali, “Tradisi Islam Dalam Prasasti Dan Naskah Ulu Di Wilayah Pasemah, Sumatera Selatan, Indonesia,” *Berkala Arkeologi* 41, no. 1 (2021): 55–68, <https://doi.org/10.30883/jba.v41i1.599>.

²⁷ Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices* (Routledge, 2003).

²⁸ James Danandjaja, *Folklor Indonesia: Ilmu Gosip, Dongeng, Dan Lain-Lain* (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 2002).

oral knowledge in a more enduring medium.²⁹ This interaction reflects a two-way process: writing safeguarded the continuity of oral heritage, and oral performance sustained the relevance of the manuscripts in everyday cultural practice.

Concrete examples from Bengkulu demonstrate this relationship. Healing incantations, religious prayers, and narrative folklore that were once transmitted orally found their way into bamboo and bark manuscripts, ensuring their preservation and enabling intergenerational transmission in both oral and written modes.³⁰ Thus, the coexistence of orality and literacy highlights how Bengkulu's cultural knowledge was not merely archived but also continually revitalised through social performance and textual recording.

3.4 Potentials and Challenges in Preservation

The Ulu manuscripts hold significant potential as primary sources for understanding the cultural and intellectual heritage of the Malay-Islamic world. These manuscripts are not merely textual artefacts but serve as repositories of religious knowledge, customary law, healing practices, and oral traditions that shaped the sociocultural fabric of Bengkulu and South Sumatra. As such, they offer invaluable insights into the historical interplay between Islam and local traditions, contributing to a broader understanding of regional identity and cultural continuity.³¹

Despite their potential, the preservation of Ulu manuscripts faces several pressing challenges. Physically, many manuscripts are fragile, often inscribed on bamboo or bark, which are highly vulnerable to decay, insect damage, and environmental conditions. Institutionally, cataloguing and systematic documentation remain

²⁹ Ong and Hartley, *Orality and Literacy*.

³⁰ Sarwono and Rahayu, "Traditional Medicine Knowledge in the ULU Manuscripts of Bengkulu."

³¹ Virginia Matheson-Hotter, *Writing a New Society: Social Change through the Novel in Malay* (Brill, 2021).

limited, hindering accessibility for researchers and the safeguarding of knowledge for future generations.³² Socially, public awareness of the cultural and historical significance of these manuscripts remains minimal, thereby reducing community involvement in preservation efforts. Without increased recognition and collaborative conservation initiatives, much of this heritage risks deteriorating or being lost.

Thus, balancing the potential of Ulu manuscripts as cultural and scholarly resources with the challenges of preservation requires integrated strategies that involve scholars, heritage institutions, and local communities.

4.0 CONCLUSION

This study highlights the close interconnection between written and oral traditions in the cultural history of Bengkulu and South Sumatra, as reflected in the Ulu manuscripts. Far from static texts, the manuscripts emerged from a dynamic interplay of oral performance, local wisdom, and Islamic influence, shaping their contents and functions in society. They served as cultural bridges, formalising oral traditions in writing while simultaneously being revitalised through oral recitations and practices.

The findings underscore the broader significance of Ulu manuscripts for Malay world studies. They provide valuable insights into how local communities negotiated identity, religion, and cultural continuity, thereby contributing to the larger corpus of Malay-Islamic heritage. The manuscripts not only preserve knowledge of customary laws, medicine, and genealogy but also embody the intellectual creativity and adaptability of the communities that produced them.

Given their importance, further research is essential to deepen understanding of their linguistic, cultural, and historical

³² Henri Chambert-Loir, *Khazanah Naskah: Panduan Koleksi Naskah-Naskah Indonesia Sedunia* (Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 1999).

dimensions. At the same time, urgent preservation efforts are required to safeguard these fragile texts from physical deterioration and neglect. Finally, integrating Ulu manuscripts into the study of Islamic civilisation and regional heritage would enrich both academic discourse and cultural identity, ensuring that these unique legacies continue to inform present and future generations.



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BOOK REVIEWS

CARL SHARIF EL TOBGUI. *IBN TAYMIYYA ON REASON AND REVELATION: A STUDY OF DAR' TA'ĀRUḌ AL-'AQL WA-L-NAQL*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020. 444 pp. ISBN 9789004412866.

Akeem Olayinka Kazeem¹

The book is essentially the author's attempt to capture Ibn Taymiyyah's approach to resolving the long-standing, and arguably "constructed" dichotomy between revelation and reason that had preoccupied Muslim theologians and philosophers for over six centuries prior to Ibn Taymiyyah. The author pursues this objective through an analytical study of what may be regarded as Ibn Taymiyyah's ten-volume magnum opus, *Dar' ta'āruḍ al-'aqlwa-l-naql* (Refutation of the Contradiction between Reason and Revelation) – henceforth referred to as *Dar'*. The volume provides a detailed and systematic account of the implicit underlying philosophy and methodology that undergird how Ibn Taymiyyah addresses the question of the compatibility of reason and revelation (*in Dar'*).²

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² Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation: A Study of Dar'*

Against this backdrop, this paper presents a brief overview of the book's treatment of Ibn Taymiyyah's approaches and postulations on this issue based on its analyses of the *Dar'*. It necessarily attempts specific critiques of the author's method and makes some recommendations for the book.

The author, Carl Sharif El-Tobgui, Ph.D., is an Associate Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies and Director of the Arabic Language Program, Near Eastern and Judaic Studies department, Brandeis University, Waltham, London, U.K. His scholarly interest is Islamic thought with a special focus on theology, law, and jurisprudence. He brought his expertise to bear in this monograph study on Ibn Taymiyyah.

Prior to this work by El-Tobgui, there had been no major academic attempt in Western scholarship to provide a comprehensive study of *Dar'*. Except for Yasir Kazi, who examines selected arguments advanced by Ibn Taymiyyah against the so-called "universal rule" and offers a detailed analysis of Ibn Taymiyyah's notion of *fiṭrah* in *Dar'*, the few available studies either address only parts of the work or consist of partial translations.

Central to El-Tobgui's volume is a demonstration of how Ibn Taymiyyah deals with the question of "rational objections to the plain sense of revelation." The author attempts to capture the methodologies employed by Ibn Taymiyyah to debunk the commonly adopted "universal rule" (*al-qānūn al-kullī*). This rule, as it had come to be formulated by the time of the famous Ash'arī theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in the 6th/12th century, implies "that in the event of a conflict between reason and revelation, the dictates of reason be given priority and revelation be reinterpreted accordingly via *ta'wīl* (i.e., reinterpretation)." The justification for this rule is predicated on "the consideration that it is the reason that grounds our assent to the truth of revelation", therefore, "any gainsaying of reason in the face of a revealed text would undermine reason and revelation together."

An intellectual engagement of this magnitude is very

Ta'arūḍ al-'Aql wa-l-Naql (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 4,13.

worthwhile. According to the author, this is because *Dar'* concerns itself mainly with, perhaps, the most compelling project that goes beyond Ibn Taymiyyah himself. Besides, the tension between revelation and reason, and related issues—keenly examined by Ibn Taymiyyah in *Dar'*—are arguably considered key problems of Islamic modernity. The author believes that both the “textually-based advocates” and the “liberal-minded” protagonists, in the contemporary Muslim world, are much concerned with the appropriation of human rationality vis-à-vis the primacy and eternal truth of the revelation, namely the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth.

While this might not be immediately obvious as issues of reason and revelation, a closer consideration of the questions of science and revelation, the tension between shariah and secular visions of law and system of government, or biotechnological products and Islamic juristic position, one would begin to see the issue in this context. This is because these realities have been genuine sources of dilemmas for Muslims in the contemporary period, and “the root of all these issues can be traced to the deeper lying tensions with which Ibn Taymiyyah grappled when confronting the delicate question of the relationship between reason and revelation in his own day” (p. 19).

In the author's view, the contemporary challenges also emerge—strikingly—from a similar intellectual trajectory. Whereas the earlier encounter originated with Greek philosophy, today it arises from a modern civilisation that is itself intellectually descended from Greece. The central question, therefore, remains unchanged: “How might the tension once more be resolved between the relentless vicissitudes of the times and a Book whose adherents believe was sent down by an eternal God into our world of time and space on the tongue of a prophet some fourteen hundred years ago?” (p.19).

This comparison is both significant and persuasively drawn. Despite differences in scope and historical context, El-Tobgui convincingly demonstrates that the epistemological problems addressed by Ibn Taymiyyah bear close resemblance to the intellectual challenges confronting contemporary Muslims, and that the source of these tensions appears, in important respects, to be the same.

Another noteworthy strength of the study lies in the author's treatment of Ibn Taymiyyah's arguments in *Dar'*. The book is organised into two main parts, each comprising three chapters, in addition to an introduction, two appendices, and two glossaries. Part One examines Ibn Taymiyyah's biographical background and the historical antecedents of the theological debates to which he devoted *Dar'* as a sustained intellectual project. It also provides an extensive analysis of Ibn Taymiyyah's arguments against the entrenched dichotomy between reason and revelation, with particular attention to his methodology, motives, and argumentative strategies, all of which are presented with clarity.

In Part Two, the author turns to Ibn Taymiyyah's alternative theory of language. Here, the volume demonstrates how Ibn Taymiyyah reframes the conventional distinction between literal and figurative language, thereby transcending the alleged contradiction between the two. The fundamental theological issues that motivated the composition of *Dar'*—including the question of the divine attributes, accusations of anthropomorphism, and the limits of figurative interpretation—are examined in detail, particularly in Chapter Six.

The author provides insight into how Ibn Taymiyyah seeks to preserve God's comprehensibility (i.e., His conceivability and knowability to us) through the application of the principles and methods of Ibn Taymiyyah's philosophy. In the author's view, "elements of Ibn Taymiyyah's theory of language, his ontology, and his epistemology eventually converge in a synthesis that is meant to accommodate a robust and rationally defensible *affirmationism* vis-à-vis the divine attributes while yet avoiding the *tashbīh* (i.e., an unacceptable assimilation of comparing God to man) that the Islamic philosophical and later theological traditions so often presumed such *affirmationism* to entail."

The book illustrates, with great prowess and clear analysis, Ibn Taymiyyah's philosophy and methodology. However, the author might have missed some cruxes on certain issues. This is because the book does not cross-reference the position of Ibn Taymiyyah with

many of his other writings or passages, even when Ibn Taymiyyah has also raised some of those issues he discussed elsewhere in *Dar'*. As a justification, the book claims that “given the length of the *Dar'* itself, together with the vastness of Ibn Taymiyyah’s larger oeuvre and his well-known habit of addressing the same issue in many separate places, a systematic cross-referencing of the primary sources would have hardly been feasible” (p. 15).

The author might seem justified in his approach; however, the fact remains that he might also have missed out, if not mistaken, on some points in Ibn Taymiyyah’s postulation, as he (i.e., Ibn Taymiyyah) is better read intertextually. A particularly good instance is the concept of *fiṭrah*, which the author seems “to conflate with reason” (p. 260). This has been better discussed in other writings of Ibn Taymiyyah. However, the caveat by the author is a ground for this critique. For instance, he said, “the current study should be seen primarily as an exposition and analysis of the *Dar'* as a discrete work, not as a study of everything Ibn Taymiyyah has written on the topic of reason and revelation” (p. 15).

Nonetheless, the author has achieved his objective in contributing to “the growing field of post-classical Islamic scholarship—at the beginning of which Ibn Taymiyyah stands – by laying a new brick in the edifice of our still nascent understanding of what is, in fact, turning out to be a rich and productive phase of Islamic thought” (p.12).

Overall, the book will be of considerable value to a wide range of students and scholars, offering an outstanding scholarly analysis of key issues in Islamic theology and philosophy. Its sustained engagement with medieval Islamic thought and post-classical intellectual history also renders it relevant beyond the immediate field of Ibn Taymiyyah studies. Moreover, the work will be accessible to non-specialists and informed lay readers, as the philosophical and theological questions addressed in *Dar'* possess a universal significance that transcends both historical periods and religious communities.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	
ء	ب	پ	پ	ز	ز	ز	ز	گ	—	g	g	g
ب	ب	ب	ب	ژ	—	—	ʒ	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	پ	پ	پ	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m	m
ت	ت	ت	ت	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ث	—	—	ṯ	ش	sh	sh	ʃ	ه	h	h	h¹	h¹
ث	th	th	th	س	ʃ	ʃ	ʃ	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḏ	ḏ	ḏ	ی	y	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	—	-a²
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al³	—	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	—	—	—	—	—
د	ḏ	ḏ	ḏ	غ	gh	gh	ḡ	—	—	—	—	—
ذ	—	—	ḏ	ف	f	f	f	—	—	—	—	—
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	k	—	—	—	—	—
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	—	—	—	—	—

¹ – when not final
 ² – at in construct state
 ³ – (article) al - or l-

VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iy (final form i)	iy (final form i)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uvv
	و	uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	ا	u	u or ū
	ا	i	o or ö
	ا	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. چ jh گ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

AL-SHAJARAH

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