




Ahl al-Hadith, Epistemology, *and* the Misreading of Ibn Taymiyyah



A STUDY 

BY ZUHAYR AL MALIKI



Table of contents:

Chapter One: What Is Knowledge?.....	6-14
1 - The Correspondence Theory:.....	9
2 - The Coherence Theory:.....	10
3 - The Pragmatic Theory:.....	11
1 - Propositional vs. Non-Propositional Knowledge:.....	12
2 - Knowledge by Acquaintance vs. Knowledge by Description:.....	12
3 - A Priori vs. A Posteriori Knowledge:.....	13-14
Chapter Two: What Is Aql Salafi Versus Ash'ari And Philosophers	
Definitions:.....	15-25
The Concept of Reason According to the Salaf:.....	15-18
The concept of reason amongst philosophers:.....	18-21
The Concept of 'Aql According to the Mutakallimūn:.....	21-25
Chapter three: History Of Epistemology:.....	26-30
Chapter Four: The Possibility Of Knowledge:.....	31-36
The Skeptical Position (al-ittijāh ash-shakkī):.....	32-34
Rejection of as-Sababiyyah (Causality):.....	35-36
Chapter Five: Editing Ibn Taymiyyah's Epistemology:.....	37-66
Ibn Taymiyyah's Positions And Responding To Misreadings:.....	37-55
A Priori And It's Problems, An In Depth Critique:.....	55-66
Chapter Six: The Hostility of Materialism and the Obstruction of Vision:.....	67-75
Chapter Seven: idealism And Materialism In Islam, It's Beginning:.....	76-85
Chapter Eight: Ibn Taymiyyah And Idealism:.....	85-97
Chapter Nine: Ibn Taymiyyah On Sensatory	
Knowledge:.....	98-101
Chapter Ten: The Authority Of Reason And Revelation, Salaf Vs The	
Ash'ariyyah:.....	102-128
Revelation's Authority In Matters Of Belief The Salaf:.....	102-109
The Authority Of Reason According To The Salaf:.....	109-120
The Authority Of Reason/Revelation According To Ahlu Kalam:.....	120-128
Chapter Eleventh: Qānūn al-Ta'wīl (Law Of Metaphorical Interpretation) And It's History, An	
Analysis:.....	129-148
Imām Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478 AH):.....	129-131
Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505 AH):.....	131-137

Abu Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 543 AH):.....	137-140
Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Rāzī (606 AH):.....	140-143
The Claim that Texts Do Not Yield Certainty in the Fundamental Issues of Religion, Including the Attributes and Actions of the Blessed Lord:.....	143-146
Opposition of Texts with Their Like, Dismissing Their Implications, or Preferring the Implication of the Opposing Text:.....	146-148
Chapter Twelve: The Methodologies of Ahl Al Sunnah in Resolving Apparent Contradictions:.....	149-165
Ibn Qutaybah:.....	149-158
Ibn Taymiyyah:.....	158-165
Chapter Thirteen: On The Issue Of Majazi (Metaphors) Between The Salaf, Ibn Taymiyyah, And Ahlu Kalam:.....	166-179
Ibn Taymiyyah On Majazi:.....	171-176
The Salaf On Majazi, Addressing Misunderstandings:.....	176-179
Chapter Fourteen: The Issue Of Ahad Al Hadith:.....	180-192
First View:.....	180-182
Second View:.....	182-186
Third View:.....	186-189
Investigating The Doctrine Of Imam Ahmad In Ahad Al Hadith:.....	189-191
Chapter Fifteen: The Sunni Approach And It’s General Principles:.....	193-202
Categories of Wording in the Qur’an and Sunnah:.....	193-197
The Apparent Meaning (ẓāhir) Between the Salaf and Their Opponents:.....	197-200
The Criterion for Muḥkam and Mutashābih Texts Is the Sharī‘ah:.....	200-202.
The Final:.....	203-203

Introduction To The Book:

The subject at hand is the issue of epistemology one of the most important and discussed topics within Islamic theology, also subject to many errors and mistakes, some tulab al ilm attributed horrific views to ibn taymiyyah and ahlu al hadith, some miss attributed to ibn taymiyyah the belief in kantinan a priori, which we will discuss in later chapters, first we will discuss an introduction to epistemology, the book will be split into two parts:

First part dealing with physicalism and idealism. Second part dealing with aql wa naql relationship and the issue between ash'ariyyah and ahlu al hadith.

This book will be fairly long compared to my other works such as: “The Issue of Ex-Materia vs. Ex-Nihilo: Clarifying Ibn Taymiyyah’s Position”, “Luma‘at al-I‘tiqād Sharḥ of Muḥammad Maḥmūd Āl Khidāyir”, “The Misunderstanding of Athari Doctrine on Universals and Common Measure by the Ash‘ariyyah”, this book will be a comprehensive book compared to the rest.



Chapter One: What is Knowledge?

One of the first problems we face in the field of epistemology (naẓariyyat al-maʿrifah) is the search for a sound definition of maʿrifah (knowledge). The earliest to explore this issue was the Greek philosopher Plato (d. 347 BCE), particularly in his dialogue *Theaetetus*, which revolves entirely around the search for a definition of knowledge through a discussion of several key questions: What is knowledge? What is the difference between knowledge and true opinion? What conditions must be fulfilled for something to be considered knowledge?

Plato explores these questions through a dialogue among three characters: Socrates, Theodorus, and Theaetetus. The dialogue begins when Socrates poses the question to Theaetetus: What is knowledge?

Theaetetus offers three definitions. The first is that knowledge is sensation (iḥsās). But Socrates objects to this, saying that it aligns with the view of the Sophists, who claimed that "man is the measure of all things," meaning that each person's sensation is different from another's. Therefore, there could be no universally agreed-upon truth. If knowledge were merely sensation, then truth would vary from person to person. Moreover, a person can have knowledge of something by remembering it—though memory is not sensation—suggesting that knowledge cannot simply be equated with sensation.

Next, Theaetetus offers a second definition: knowledge is true judgment (ḥukm ṣādiq). Socrates again rejects this definition, arguing that a person might believe a judgment to be true, yet still be mistaken.

Then Theaetetus adds a condition to the second definition and says: knowledge is true judgment supported by reasoning (al-ḥukm aṣ-ṣādiq al-muʿayyad bi'l-barāhīn). But Socrates remains unconvinced, arguing that the proofs used to support an opinion may also be faulty. Thus, the dialogue ends without reaching a definitive conclusion. This was intentional on Socrates' part—his goal in engaging

Theaetetus was to make him think critically and develop his intellectual capacity, rather than falsely claim to know what he does not.

In this regard, Socrates says: “*If, after all this, Theaetetus, you try once more to conceive a new idea, then you will be filled with better thoughts after having been purified by the current inquiry. But if, on the contrary, you remain empty of ideas, you will still be a lighter burden to your companions and more refined in manner, because you will, through a kind of wisdom, never suppose that you know what you do not know. In this alone lies all my strength—I do not think I know what these astonishingly clever minds of our day, and of the past, claim to know.*”¹

Most epistemologists (*ahlu al-ibtistimūlūjiyā*) later came to agree on defining *maʿrifah* (knowledge) as: “**justified true belief**”—a definition now commonly referred to as the *standard analysis* (*at-taḥlīl an-namūdhajī*). According to this view, a person only possesses knowledge of a proposition if three conditions are met: the proposition must be true, the person must believe it, and the belief must be justified from their perspective.

Thus, knowledge rests on three essential components:

1. **Belief** (*iʿtiqād*)
2. **Truth** (*ṣidq*)
3. **Justification** (*taswīgh* or *tajrīr*)

A person does not possess knowledge if they do not have a belief about a certain matter. This belief can either be that the proposition is true or that it is false—what matters is that some form of belief is present. Without any belief at all, there is no knowledge of the matter.

¹ *Theaetetus*, Plato, p. 134

In addition to belief, the proposition must also be **true**. One cannot have knowledge of something that is false. For example, saying “I know that Egypt is located in Europe” cannot be classified as knowledge because the belief is false.

However, not every true belief qualifies as knowledge either. Sometimes, true beliefs are formed merely by guessing or speculation. This is why a **third condition**—justification—is essential. There must be adequate reasoning or evidence supporting the belief in order for it to be considered *ma ‘rifah*.

However, this definition underwent deep scrutiny after the philosopher Edmund Gettier presented an objection in a short three-page paper titled “*Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?*” In summary, Gettier argued that justification (*taswīgh*) is not sufficient to establish *ma ‘rifah* (knowledge). A belief can be justified, yet still turn out to be false.

Gettier presented examples in which all three conditions of knowledge—belief, truth, and justification—were apparently fulfilled, yet knowledge was still absent. Here is one of the examples he used to illustrate his objection:

“Suppose I am looking out the window of my house and see what any reasonable person would take to be falling rain. I form the belief that it is indeed raining. But in fact, what I’m seeing is not real rain—it’s artificial rain created by a film crew using sprinklers installed above a temporary roof. Still, at the very same time, it actually is raining. If that temporary roof hadn’t been there, the real rain would have fallen in the same place as the fake rain I’m seeing. In this case, I believe that it’s raining, and I have justification for this belief. Yet it seems strange to say: ‘I know that it’s raining.’ The truth of my belief under these particular circumstances, as Gettier presents them, seems to be pure coincidence. My justification, in any case, appears to be flawed: I formed the belief that it’s raining based on the false assumption that the substance falling outside the window is genuine rain.”²

² *Introduction to Philosophy*, William James Earle, p. 73

After Gettier introduced what later came to be called the Gettier problem (mu‘ḍilat Jitīr), numerous articles and studies were published aiming to improve and refine the definition of knowledge (ma‘rifah). Epistemologists (al-ibtistimūlūjiyyūn) worked to revise the standard analysis (at-taḥlīl an-namūdḥajī) in ways that would address the issues Gettier raised. This led to the development of various theories related to truth (ṣidq), belief (i‘tiqād), and justification (taswīgh), and the debate continues between modification, critique, and further development.

Despite Gettier’s counterexamples, some philosophers still supported the traditional three-part definition of knowledge. Leading figures among them include the American philosopher Lewis (1964), the English philosopher Ayer (1989), and the American philosopher Roderick Chisholm (1999), among others.

Of the three conditions in the definition of knowledge, the most central is truth. So, what is truth? What is its essence? And under what conditions are propositions considered true? Philosophers have long debated these questions, resulting in multiple theories. Due to the importance of ṣidq, the major ones will be summarized briefly:

1 - The Correspondence Theory:

This is one of the earliest explanations of truth. It claims that a proposition is true if it reflects something that exists in reality and corresponds to it. A proposition is considered true if it matches a real-world fact, and false if it does not. The criterion that determines whether a proposition is true or false is captured in the following quote: *“What determines the truth value of the statement ‘The sky is raining’ is something that has no relation to the speaker’s psychology, motives, or evidence. What determines the truth value of the statement ‘The sky is raining’ is simply the local weather, which is something out there and entirely independent of the mind.”*

Philosophers have described the connection between a proposition and reality using terms like correspondence (*tanāẓur*), agreement (*mutābaqah*), or representation (*taṣwīr*), and have referred to external reality with words like facts (*waqā'i*), things (*ashyā'*), or events (*ḥawādith*).

This theory finds its early roots in Plato's *Theaetetus*, and later came to represent the position of the broader empiricist (*tajrībī*) tradition.

Nevertheless, the theory has faced several objections. One is that it applies well to propositions related to sensory perception but fails when it comes to areas like ethics, logic, or aesthetics. Another objection is that the requirement of matching a real-world fact becomes difficult when applied to certain types of statements—such as general ones like “All poisons are lethal,” negative ones like “The professor did not attend today,” or conditional ones like “If the sun is up, then daytime exists.”

Another objection to this theory is that it assumes the correspondence (*tanāẓur*) relation to be a perfect resemblance between the original (the fact) and the representation (the proposition). However, propositions themselves don't resemble facts—they only resemble other propositions. In that case, truth (*ṣidq*) is interpreted as coherence (*ittisāq*) between one proposition and another. Moreover, there are certain types of statements referred to as normative statements—for example, when someone says, “You should help and rescue a drowning person if you're able to do so, and if saving him doesn't endanger your own life.”

2 - The Coherence Theory:

In response to criticisms against the correspondence theory, some philosophers

³ *Introduction to Philosophy*, William James Earle, p. 59

looked for an alternative explanation of truth that doesn't rely on anything external. This led to the coherence theory, *which reflects the idealistic (madhhab al-mithālī) approach*. **Notable supporters include Thomas Hill Green (1882), Blanshard (1892), Bradley (1924), and later the American philosopher Nicholas Rescher, in his book The Coherence Theory of Truth.**

Proponents of this theory defined truth in terms of a particular relationship between propositions—namely, coherence. They argued that a proposition is true if it fits consistently with a broader set of propositions, and false if it contradicts them. Thus, unlike the correspondence theory which links truth to things external to the proposition—namely real-world facts—the coherence theory ties truth to the internal consistency among propositions.

Those who supported *the coherence theory (naẓariyyat al-ittisāq)* differed on how to define coherence itself. Some held that coherence refers to internal consistency among a set of propositions, while others defined it as logical entailment within a system—that is, the ability to derive one proposition from the rest of the system.

One of the major criticisms against this theory is the possibility that multiple systems could each be coherent internally, yet incompatible with one another. In such cases, what standard can be used to judge which system is true and which is false? The coherence theory doesn't provide a way to resolve this, *because appealing to correspondence with reality would effectively mean adopting the correspondence theory (naẓariyyat at-tanāẓur) instead.*

3 - The Pragmatic Theory:

Pragmatist philosophy offers both a theory of meaning and a theory of truth. In this view, the meaning of an idea lies in the practical consequences it leads to. A proposition is considered true if it yields useful and beneficial results in real life. Therefore, a true idea is one that leads to practical benefit, whereas a false one

leads to no benefit at all. ⁴

This theory has received various criticisms. One of the most significant is that some propositions may be false, yet still yield practical benefits—such as scientific theories that were eventually proven wrong but nonetheless contributed to the search for more accurate theories.

Philosophers have distinguished between *different types of knowledge (anwāʿ al-maʿrifah)*, including:

1 - Propositional vs. Non-Propositional Knowledge:

This distinction is attributed to the philosopher Gilbert Ryle (1976) in his book *The Concept of Mind*. Propositional knowledge is the knowledge that—like knowing that today is Friday. *This form of knowledge is called a proposition (qaḍiyyah), which is a declarative statement capable of being either true or false. In contrast, non-propositional knowledge refers to knowledge how—like knowing how to drive or how to write in thuluth or Kufic script.* This is often tied to direct perception and experience.

2 - Knowledge by Acquaintance vs. Knowledge by Description:

This division was introduced by Bertrand Russell (1970) in his book *The Problems of Philosophy*. Knowledge by acquaintance involves direct awareness without mediation—through sensory data like color, smell, shape, or texture. For example, if a table is in front of me, I am directly aware of its physical properties. On the other hand, knowledge by description involves understanding something through

⁴ See: *The Logic of Truth*, Chess & Warren, pp. 83–97. *Contemporary Epistemology*, Ṣalāḥ Ismāʿīl, pp. 103–129. *Epistemology in the Thought of Muslim Thinkers and Contemporary Western Philosophers*, Maḥmūd Zaydān, pp. 129–154

concepts—for instance, knowing the table as a material object. This form of knowledge arises through sensory input, but also assumes the existence of an external material reality that causes those sensations.

3 - A Priori vs. A Posteriori Knowledge:

Rationalists such as Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza believed in the existence of a *priori* knowledge (*maʿrifah qablīyah*), which is independent of experience.

Opposing them were empiricists like John Locke, Berkeley, and David Hume, who held that all knowledge comes after experience—that is, a *posteriori* (*maʿrifah baʿdīyah*). The term *epistemology* (*al-ʿilm bi-maʿnāhu al-falsafī*) refers to a branch of philosophical inquiry concerned with defining the nature, scope, sources, and value of knowledge. The term is derived from the Greek *epistēmē* (knowledge or science) and *logos* (theory). Its use is credited to the Scottish philosopher James Frederick Ferrier in his book *The Institutes of Metaphysics* (1854).

In Arabic linguistic usage, knowledge (*maʿrifah*) is defined as: “Perceiving something as it actually is.”⁵

That is, forming a mental conception that corresponds to reality. In this sense, *maʿrifah* is synonymous with *ʿilm* (knowledge), though some have noted distinctions:

1 - The verb *ʿarafa* (he knew) typically takes a single object—e.g., “I knew the house,” or “I knew Zayd.” As the Qurʾan says: “And the brothers of Joseph came and entered upon him, and he recognized them, while they did not recognize him.” [Surah Yūsuf: 58] Meanwhile, the verb *ʿalima* (he knew) often requires two objects, such as: “If you have known them...” [Surah al-Mumtaḥanah: 10] However, when *ʿalima* takes only one object, it carries the same meaning as *ʿarafa*,

⁵ Al-Taʿrīfāt, al-Jurjānī, p. 231.

as in: "...And others besides them, whom you do not know, Allah knows them."
[Surah al-Anfāl: 60]

2 - Maʿrifah is typically related to knowing the essence of a thing, while ʿilm concerns its qualities - e.g., "I knew your father," versus "I knew he was righteous and knowledgeable." This is why commands in the Qurʾan use ʿilm rather than maʿrifah, as in: "So know that there is no deity except Allah, and seek forgiveness for your sin and for the believing men and women..." [Surah Muḥammad: 19]

3 - Maʿrifah often refers to recalling something previously absent from the mind. For example: "And the brothers of Joseph came and entered upon him, and he recognized them, while they did not recognize him." [Surah Yūsuf: 58] Thus, maʿrifah resembles dhikr (remembrance), which is the return of something that was forgotten. Its opposite is inkār (denial), while the opposite of ʿilm is jahl (ignorance). As in: "They recognize the favor of Allah, then they deny it. Most of them are disbelievers." [Surah al-Naḥl: 83] One may say: "He recognized the truth and affirmed it," or "He recognized it but denied it."

4 - *Maʿrifah implies distinguishing one known object from others, whereas ʿilm implies distinguishing its attributes from those of other things.* This is a subtle difference from the previous point—while the first relates to knowing the self of a thing versus its attributes, this distinction refers to isolating one entity or quality from others.⁶



⁶ See: *Madarij al-Salikin bayna Manazil Iyyaka Naʿbudu wa Iyyaka Nastaʿin*, Ibn al-Qayyim, vol. 3, pp. 314–315.

Chapter Two: What Is Aql Salafi Versus Ash'ari And Philosophers Definitions:

Note: In the first chapter we provided an introduction to the issue of epistemology, in this chapter we will particularly focus on the issue of “aql” and how the ash'ariyyah and philosophers differed from ahlu al hadith, in the third chapter we will focus on the history of epistemology then we will focus on ash'ari understanding of contradictions between aql wa naql, this will be the subject of the book chapters will be split into two categories: the issue of epistemology and misunderstanding Ibn Taymiyyah, the issue of “aql wa naql”.

The Concept of Reason According to the Salaf:

The salaf — may Allah be pleased with them — were not known for excessive speech or delving into matters that had been veiled from human understanding and not explicitly clarified in *ṣaḥīḥ manqūl* (authentic transmitted texts). *Their approach to defining matters was always grounded in the Qur'an and the Sunnah.*

Reason (‘aql) is from the unseen realities (umūr ghaybiyyah) that Allah has granted to mankind. However, the Qur'an and Sunnah do not offer a detailed explanation of its true essence or nature (ḥaqīqah al-‘aql wa māhiyyatuhu). What they do emphasize is the status and importance of reason, the characteristics of rational people (ṣifāt al-‘uqalā’), and how they should engage in reflection and contemplation of Allah’s signs and dominion. This leads them to gratitude, sincere devotion, and upright conduct—traits that are recognized as virtuous by both sound intellect and uncorrupted human nature (fiṭrah salīmah).

The Salaf gave importance to highlighting the qualities of the rational, based entirely on what had been transmitted through revelation, without attempting to

define the metaphysical structure of reason itself. They viewed reason as akin to the soul (rūḥ), the reality of which is known only to Allah.⁷

In the early generations, before the emergence of ahl al-bid‘ah such as the speculative theologians (ahl al-kalām) and others, *the righteous predecessors (al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ) limited their discussion on reason (‘aql) to describing the characteristics of rational individuals. However, once the Muslim community was tested with the intrusion of philosophers (muta-falsifah) and theologians who introduced foreign notions — such as declaring reason to be a jawhar (substance or essence) and elaborating endlessly on its metaphysical nature — and when these views began to lead people into theological deviation, the salaf responded by clarifying the errors of such discourse and redirecting people to the correct understanding of reason.*

Among the most well-known statements from the salaf concerning the nature (ma‘nā) of reason are the following:

1 - Reason is an innate faculty (gharīzah). This definition is transmitted from Imām ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak and Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal. Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī reports with his chain of narration: “‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak was asked: ‘What is the best thing a man can be given?’ He replied: ‘An innate rational faculty (gharīzat ‘aql).’” He then went on to list other praiseworthy traits.⁸

Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā mentioned that *al-Imām Aḥmad* held the view that reason (‘aql) is an innate faculty (gharīzah). This was conveyed from him by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Tamīmī. Ibn al-Jawzī also referenced this opinion in his critique of desire (hawā), highlighting how the *salaf* approached reason through this essential and simple

⁷ An example of this approach is found in: *Rawḍat al-‘Uqalā’* by Imām Ibn Ḥibbān, where he dedicates a chapter titled: “Mention of the encouragement to adhere to reason and the traits of the rational person.” (pp. 39–50) Also in *al-‘Aql wa Faḍluhu* by al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Abī al-Dunyā, in which he gathers narrations from the Salaf highlighting the virtue of reason and the qualities of those who possess it.

⁸ Refer to: *Rawḍat al-‘Uqalā’* by Ibn Ḥibbān, p. 41.

lens, avoiding philosophical excess: “Imām Aḥmad said, as reported by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Tamīmī: ‘Reason is an innate faculty (al-‘aql gharīzah).’”⁹

Ibn Taymiyyah also included this view in his discussion on the various meanings that fall under the term ‘aql, *giving it consideration within his broader critique of philosophy and speculative theology (falsafah and kalām).*¹⁰

2 - Another explanation holds that reason is a tool for distinguishing between things — ‘aql as ālah at-tamyīz. This interpretation is attributed to Imām al-Shāfi‘ī and Abū Naṣr al-Sijzī. The latter stated that decisive evidence comes through revelation (sam‘), and reason functions as the instrument through which we discern: “*He [al-Sijzī] said: The definitive proof is that which is established through transmitted revelation, and reason is the instrument of discernment (al-‘aql ālah at-tamyīz).*”¹¹

3 - Among the explanations is that the term ‘aql carries multiple meanings — specifically four — a view clearly expressed by *Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah.* He outlines these meanings in a structured manner, presenting them as distinct yet interconnected facets of human understanding.

“There are a number of matters: **First: necessary knowledge (‘ulūm ḍarūriyyah) by which one can distinguish between the insane person (from whom legal responsibility is lifted) and the rational person upon whom taklīf applies — and this is the basis for moral accountability.**

Second: *acquired knowledge (‘ulūm muḥtasabah) that motivates a person to pursue benefit and avoid harm — there is no dispute over its existence, and it is part of what is praiseworthy before Allah when referred to as ‘reason’.*

⁹ *Al-‘Uddah fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* by Abū Ya‘lā (vol. 1, p. 76); also cited by Ibn al-Jawzī in *Dhamm al-Hawā* (p. 5).

¹⁰ *Bughyat al-Murtād* (pp. 257 and 273).

¹¹ *Al-Radd ‘alā Man Ankar al-Ḥarf wa-Ṣawt* by al-Sijzī, ed. Dr. Muḥammad Bākīrīm (p. 85).

Third and fourth: the innate faculty (gharīzah) by which one understands — some have debated its actual existence.

The salaf and a'immaḥ all affirm the existence of these faculties. The faculties by which one understands are like those by which one sees. Allah is the Creator of all of it, just as a servant acts through his capacity — yet without dispute, Allah is the Creator of both him and his capacity, for there is no power and no strength except by Allah.”¹²

These various descriptions from the salaf regarding the concept of ‘aql are not in contradiction. *They converge on the understanding that reason is both an innate quality (ṣifah) granted by Allah and a distinguishing faculty — an ālah at-tamyīz — through which a human being discerns between truth and falsehood. It is by means of this faculty that one understands divine revelation (waḥy) and reflects on the signs of Allah in the universe and within themselves, recognizing His greatness, oneness, and divinity. Through reason, a person also gains beneficial knowledge that aids him in both his worldly life and afterlife, acting upon the guidance he comprehends from the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger — thereby fulfilling the definition of an ‘āqil (rational person).*

The concept of reason amongst philosophers:

Before exploring the concept of ‘aql according to the *mutakallimūn* (theologians), it is appropriate to first briefly highlight how ‘aql was understood by the *falāsifah* (philosophers). This allows us to appreciate the extent to which the theologians were influenced by philosophical thought—even in their very definitions of reason.

The statements of the philosophers—those who placed excessive emphasis on

¹² *Bughyat al-Murtād* by Ibn Taymiyyah (pp. 260 and 263)

reason—are many and varied. But their perspectives on the meaning of ‘aql within the human being can be summarized as follows:

1 - ‘Aql is a simple, immaterial jawhar (substance) that perceives things in their true essence.¹³

2 - ‘Aql is the cognitive power of the nafs (soul), through which one forms conceptions of meanings, combines propositions, and constructs syllogisms (qiyās). It is a renewing faculty that abstracts forms from matter and perceives al-ma‘ānī al-kullīyyah (universal concepts). This cognitive faculty, according to them, operates in stages:

A - Stage of al-‘aql al-hayūlānī — This is the stage of pure potentiality to grasp intelligibles. It is associated with hayūlā (prime matter) because the soul at this level resembles undifferentiated matter—devoid of any form or impression. **This level is synonymous with ‘aql bi’l-quwwah (potential intellect), like a blank slate upon which nothing has yet been inscribed.**

B - Stage of ‘aql bi’l-malakah — This refers to the possession of necessary, self-evident knowledge (‘ulūm ḍarūriyyah) and the readiness of the soul, through this, to acquire inferential knowledge (naẓariyyāt).

C - The third stage is known as ‘aql bi’l-fi‘l—a level at which theoretical knowledge (naẓariyyāt) becomes stored within the quwwah ‘āqilah (rational faculty) through repeated acquisition, such that one can recall this knowledge at will without needing to acquire it anew.

D - Then comes the level of al-‘aql al-mustafād, where theoretical knowledge is constantly present to the mind and never absent.¹⁴

¹³ “Reason is a simple substance that perceives things by their realities.” Risālah fī Ḥudūd al-Ashyā’ by al-Kindī, in Rasā’il al-Kindī al-Falsafīyyah (p. 165)

¹⁴ See: Al-Mu‘jam al-Falsafī by Jamīl Ṣalībā (Vol. 2, p. 86), and Muqaddimat Bughyat al-Murtād by Dr. Mūsā ad-Duwaysh (pp. 97–98).

The point being made here is that these detailed definitions presented by the falāsifah (philosophers) pertain specifically to their conception of ‘aql within the human being. However, their general understanding of ‘aql goes far beyond that—and enters into realms of outright kufr (disbelief) and ilhād (heresy). For example, they describe God as ‘aql, ‘āqil, and ma‘qūl—exalted is Allah above what they claim. ¹⁵

They also assert that from the ‘aql al-awwal (First Intellect) emanated an intellect, a soul, and a celestial sphere; and from each subsequent intellect came another intellect, soul, and sphere—until they reached what they call the ‘aql al-fa‘āl (Active Intellect), from which all forms and matter beneath it proceeded. These they named al-arbāb aṣ-ṣuḡhrā (lesser lords) and al-āliha aṣ-ṣuḡhrā (lesser deities). ¹⁶ They even went so far as to describe Jibrīl (peace be upon him) as “al-‘aql al-fa‘āl.” ¹⁷

This view reflects the position of someone who does not believe in Allah, His Messenger, or the Last Day. Instead, they posit the existence of some other ilāh (deity) beyond this universe—one who has no real connection to it: He neither created it ibtidā’an (in the beginning), nor does He act within it, oversee it, or have any knowledge of what occurs in it from motion or events. The only “connection” they admit between this god and the universe is that He is the initial cause of its motion. Yet even this motion, according to them, is not a real act on His part, but merely a type of yearning or longing (ḥarakah shawqiyyah).

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (raḥimahullāh) said: “In the language of all Muslims, from the first to the last of them, ‘aql is not an angel, nor a self-subsisting essence (jawhar), but rather the ‘aql that exists in the human being. None of the

¹⁵ See: *Al-Milal wa’n-Niḥāl* by ash-Shahrastānī (Vol. 2, p. 184).

¹⁶ See: *Bughyat al-Murtād* (p. 241) and *Dar’ Ta‘āruḍ al-‘Aql wa’n-Naql* (Vol. 8, p. 203).

¹⁷ See: *As-Ṣafadiyyah* by Ibn Taymiyyah (Vol. 1, p. 201).

Muslims have ever referred to any angel as ‘intellect,’ nor have they called the rational soul (an-nafs an-nāṭiqah) the ‘intellect.’ These are terms borrowed from Greek language and philosophy.”¹⁸

Although the mutakallimūn do not affirm what the falāsifah (philosophers) claim regarding the metaphysical nature of ‘aql, they still shared their understanding of ‘aql as it pertains to the human being—a point that will be discussed in future chapters.

The Concept of ‘Aql According to the Mutakallimūn:

The mutakallimūn (scholastic theologians) offered differing and often conflicting views on the meaning of ‘aql, producing extensive debate and speculation on the subject. Many of them drifted away from the truth in proportion to how deeply they were influenced by the falāsifah (philosophers). Among the numerous definitions they proposed, the following are the most well-known:

1 - Some among them defined ‘aql as a jawhar (substance or essence), which is exactly what the philosophers held, as previously noted.¹⁹

2 - Others said that ‘aql is the essence or purest part of the rūḥ (soul), i.e., its refined core. They supported this view through linguistic reasoning, noting that lubb (core) in Arabic refers to the pure part of something; thus, ‘aql is called lubb for being the essence of the soul.²⁰

3 - A number of mutakallimūn adopted the approach of the falāsifah in

¹⁸ Bughyat al-Murtād (p. 251)

¹⁹ This was mentioned by al-Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā in his work *al-Uddah fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (vol. 1, p. 77), and also by Ibn al-Jawzī in *Dhamm al-Hawā* (p. 5). Al-Jurjānī also supported this opinion after listing various meanings and classifications of ‘aql. See: *at-Ta’rīfāt* by al-Jurjānī (p. 152).

²⁰ This definition is attributed to al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī in his book *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān* (p. 54).

categorizing 'aql, assigning to each category obscure philosophical terminology. Among them were al-Jurjānī ²¹ and al-Taftāzānī.

When examining al-Taftāzānī's divisions of 'aql and the meanings he attributes to each category, one finds that they align closely with the earlier classifications proposed by the philosophers. *Al-Taftāzānī divided 'aql into two main types: naẓarī (speculative) and 'amalī (practical). He defined the practical intellect as the quwwah (faculty) of the soul through which knowledge and action are attained for its perfection.*

As for the speculative intellect, he broke it down into four stages:

A - *Al-'Aql al-Hayūlānī – which he called the "weak stage" – named so due to its resemblance to hayūlā (prime matter), which is itself void of all forms yet capable of receiving them. He likened it to a child's latent potential to learn writing.*

B - *Al-'Aql bi al-Malakah – which he termed the "intermediate stage" – defined as the readiness of the soul to recall learned theories at will, without requiring fresh acquisition.*

C - *Al-'Aql bi al-Fi'l – which he labeled the "strong stage" – the soul's ability to retrieve theoretical knowledge at any time without needing new learning.*

D - *Al-'Aql al-Mustafād – which he referred to as the "complete stage" – when theoretical knowledge becomes vividly present to the intellect, similar to a skilled scribe in the act of writing. This level, he said, is acquired from an external source, namely the 'aql al-fa'āl (active intellect). ²²*

A large group among the mutakallimūn defined 'aql as a type of 'ilm ḍarūrī (self-

²¹ See: *at-Ta'rīfāt* by al-Jurjānī (p. 52).

²² See: *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid* by al-Taftāzānī (vol. 3, p. 339).

evident knowledge). Those who held this view **include al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, and al-Bājī.** ²³

Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Qurṭubī attributed this definition of ‘aql to Imām Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, Abū Ishāq al-Isfarā’īnī, and al-Qāḍī Abū Bakr ibn al-‘Arabī. ²⁴ Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah also noted that this was the view preferred by the majority of the mutakallimūn. ²⁵

The views mentioned above represent the most well-known positions among the mutakallimūn concerning the definition of reason (‘aql). Many other interpretations exist, but they were omitted here for brevity. ²⁶

From this, it becomes clear *how deeply influenced some of the mutakallimūn were by the falāsifah (philosophers) in their approach to defining ‘aql. Descriptions such as calling it a jawhar (substance), or dividing it into levels like ‘aql hayūlānī, ‘aql bi al-malakah, ‘aql bi al-fi‘l, and ‘aql mustafād all stem directly from philosophical traditions. However, the mutakallimūn did not adopt the more extreme doctrines of the falāsifah—such as naming Allah “‘Aql,” referring to Jibrīl (peace be upon him) as the “‘aql al-fa‘āl,” or their belief that all of existence originated from the “First Intellect” (al-‘aql al-awwal) through successive emanations involving an ‘aql, a nafs, and a celestial sphere. These are considered kufr (disbelief) and ilhād (heretical deviation).*

Reason (‘aql) is not an independent jawhar (substance) existing on its own, as claimed by both the falāsifah (philosophers) and some mutakallimūn (speculative theologians). Instead, it is an innate faculty—a gharīzah—that exists within the

²³ See: al-Mughnī fī Abwāb at-Tawḥīd wa al-‘Adl by al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār (vol. 11, p. 371), al-Irshād by al-Juwaynī (p. 36), al-Mawāqif fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām by al-Ījī (p. 146), and al-Minhāj.

²⁴ Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī (vol. 1, pp. 370–371).

²⁵ See: Bughyat al-Murtād (p. 256).

²⁶ For further detail, refer to: al-‘Uddah fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh by al-Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā (vol. 1, pp. 83–85), Bughyat al-Murtād by Ibn Taymiyyah (p. 252), and Dhamm al-Hawā by Imām Ibn al-Jawzī.

rational being (‘āqil), whether one describes it as a ‘araḍ (accidental attribute) or a ṣifah (quality). This, as Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah explained, is the concept that aligns with what is found in the Qur’an, the Sunnah of the Messenger, the speech of the Companions and their successors, and the teachings of the imams of the Muslims.²⁷

As for the claim by some theologians that reason is the “pure essence of the soul” (ṣafwat al-rūḥ), and their linguistic argument that “lubb” (core) implies the intellect—this argument is fundamentally flawed. If lubb means ‘aql, then defining ‘aql by ‘aql is circular and unhelpful. Furthermore, this definition has no basis in Arabic usage, where ‘aql means restraint and control, as previously discussed. Al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī refuted this view, saying: *“This statement has no evidence from any written text nor from any established ḥadīth, and therefore we do not accept it.”*²⁸

Regarding the majority view among the mutakallimūn that reason is a type of self-evident knowledge (‘ilm ḍarūrī), Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah critiqued this as well: *“The ṣifātī mutakallimūn who claimed that ‘aql is some form of necessary knowledge did not define it in any precise or consistent way... It is clear that what is included in the meaning of ‘aql is action specific to rational beings (‘uqalā’), so to restrict it to self-evident knowledge is no more justified than defining it as a faculty for necessary action.”*²⁹

Thus, their definition is vague and incomplete. Additionally, they overlooked the natural disparity in intellectual capacity among people. It is self-evident that one

²⁷ See: *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā* by Ibn Taymiyyah (vol. 9, p. 271). This will also be discussed in future chapters when mentioning the epistemology of Ibn Taymiyyah.

²⁸ See: *al-‘Aql wa Fahm al-Qur’ān* by al-Muḥāsibī (p. 204).

²⁹ See: *Bughyat al-Murtād* by Ibn Taymiyyah (p. 271).

person's reasoning is not equal to another's. Imām al-Shāṭibī observed: *"Even if a person believes he fully comprehended a matter, time will pass and he will realize he understands it more deeply than before and sees dimensions he had not previously grasped. Everyone experiences this personally, and it applies to all knowledge, not just one branch."*³⁰

The closing remark hints at a long-standing debate over where exactly in the human body the faculty of reason (‘aql) resides—is it in the heart (qalb) or the brain?³¹

The correct view, which reconciles both opinions, was expressed by Imām Ibn al-Qayyim: *"The correct position is that the origin and foundation of ‘aql lies in the qalb (heart), while its branches and fruits manifest in the head. The Qur’an affirms this in the verse: ‘Have they not traveled through the land so that their hearts may reason with?’ [al-Ḥajj: 46]. The heart mentioned here is not merely the piece of flesh shared with animals, but what it contains of intellect and inner core (lubb)."*³²



³⁰ See: *al-I‘tiṣām* by al-Shāṭibī (vol. 2, pp. 835–836).

³¹ For more on this, see: *Miftāḥ Dār al-Sa‘ādah* by Ibn al-Qayyim (vol. 1, pp. 194–195).

³² See the same reference (*Miftāḥ Dār al-Sa‘ādah*, vol. 1, p. 195).

Chapter three: History Of Epistemology

It is essential, when discussing *epistemology* (*naẓariyyat al-maʿrifah*), to explore its historical development, examine its roots, and trace the early emergence of its key questions. Mapping its evolution across various eras is crucial because understanding the origins of ideas offers a clearer perspective, while neglecting this background often leads to a deficient grasp of the topic.

Philosophy in its early days was *natural philosophy* (*al-falsafah aṭ-ṭabīʿiyyah*), primarily concerned with the natural world, the origin of the universe, and the *jawhar* (substance) underlying all things. This began with Thales (546 BCE), regarded as the first of the Greek philosophers, who proposed that the origin and fundamental substance of the cosmos was water. Anaximenes (525 BCE) followed, attributing the origin to air, arguing that even water, as Thales claimed, is condensed air. Then came Heraclitus (480 BCE), who declared fire as the fundamental principle of the universe.

This line of inquiry continued until the fifth century BCE, when the Sophists (*as-sūfistāʾiyyūn*) shifted the philosophical focus from the external, physical world to the human being. With this shift came the earliest discussions of epistemological issues, especially when the Sophists denied the existence of absolute truths. Socrates (399 BCE) and Plato (347 BCE) responded by refuting the Sophists' arguments and affirming the value of *ʿaql* (reason) as a source of knowledge. They differed, however, regarding the reliability of the senses—Plato cast doubt on sensory perception, whereas Aristotle would later affirm its value, as will be detailed.

The exploration of epistemology continued through the *Hellenistic* period (*al-ʿuṣūr al-hīlīnīstiyyah*), particularly among the Stoics (*ar-rūwāqiyyūn*) and the Epicureans (*al-abīqūriyyūn*), both of whom affirmed the certainty of sensory knowledge. However, Epicurus (270 BCE) centered his philosophy on ethics, treating moral

questions as its foundation and ultimate goal, with all other sciences serving that end. The same can be said of Stoic philosophy, in which ethics formed the core—indeed, it was essentially an ethical doctrine.

In the *Middle Ages* (*al-‘uṣūr al-wuṣṭā*), philosophers were influenced on one hand by Greek philosophy, and on the other by Christian doctrine. One of the key questions that emerged was the tension between *reason and revelation* (*‘aql wa naql*), which medieval thinkers sought to address. Among the most prominent Christian philosophers who examined this issue was Saint Augustine (430 CE), who argued that reason alone could not independently access truth; rather, only the sacred text had the authority to reveal it. He sought to align reason in defense of faith, asserting that faith must precede reason, which in turn justifies and protects faith from being naive. This idea is famously encapsulated in his phrase: **"Believe so that you may understand."**

Another notable treatment of the issue came from Thomas Aquinas (1274 CE), who held that reason has its own domain and boundaries, beyond which revelation (*naql*) assumes its role. According to him, each has its own realm of authority, and there can be no contradiction between the two when rightly understood.

Muslim philosophers, like their predecessors from earlier traditions, showed significant interest in the study of *epistemology* (*naẓariyyat al-ma‘rifah*). Among the most renowned of these thinkers are: Ya‘qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (d. 260 AH), Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī (d. 339 AH), and Abū ‘Alī Ibn Sīnā (d. 427 AH).

Just as medieval Christian thought was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy—particularly the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and *Neoplatonism* (*al-aflūṭīniyyah al-muḥdathah*)—so too was Islamic philosophical thought deeply tied to those traditions. One of the central concerns for Muslim philosophers was the *reconciliation* (*al-jam‘ wa at-taṭbīq*) between religion and philosophy, as well as the harmonization of differing philosophical views. Al-Fārābī took the lead in this endeavor, as is evident in his book *"The Harmonization of the Opinions of the Two*

Sages" (*al-Jamʿ bayna Raʾyay al-Ḥakīmayn*), in which he attempts to reconcile the thoughts of Plato and Aristotle. Ibn Rushd (Averroes) continued this approach and tackled the issue of harmony between religion and philosophy in his well-known work *"The Decisive Treatise on the Relationship between the Sharīʿah and Philosophy"* (*Faṣl al-Maqāl fīmā bayna ash-Sharīʿah wa al-Ḥikmah min al-Ittiṣāl*).

Their epistemology was closely tied to the notion of the *Active Intellect* (*al-ʿaql al-faʿāl*), to which they assigned a central role in the acquisition of knowledge. According to them, knowledge arises from the emanation (*faḍl*) of the Active Intellect. The senses merely serve as preparatory tools that enable the mind to receive this emanation. Thus, they regarded the Active Intellect as the source of all knowledge—whether natural or revealed—and claimed that connection with it was the only path to knowledge. In attempting to reconcile this with Islam, they argued that these intellects are in fact the angels, and that the Active Intellect is none other than Jibrīl (Gabriel), peace be upon him.

As for the scholars of Islam, across their various theological schools, they also addressed numerous issues related to *epistemology* within their works—though often in a scattered or incidental fashion, as dictated by the structure of their discussions. They emphasized the importance of *revelation* (*waḥy*) as a source of knowledge, alongside *reason* (*ʿaql*) and *sense perception* (*ḥiss*). They also examined the relationship between reason and revelation in dedicated works, such as Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH) in his *"Refutation of the Conflict between Reason and Revelation"* (*Darʿ Taʾarūḍ al-ʿAql wa an-Naql*). Similarly, Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415 AH) devoted the twelfth volume of *al-Mughnī* to the discussion of *nazar* (rational consideration) and epistemic matters.

Various elements of epistemology also appear in the introductions of theological works such as *Uṣūl ad-Dīn* by al-Baghdādī (d. 429 AH), *Tabṣīrat al-Adillah* by al-Nasafī (d. 508 AH), and *al-Mawāqif* by al-Ājī (d. 756 AH).

Discussions related to epistemology (*naẓariyyat al-maʿrifah*) can also be found scattered throughout the classical works of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory), such as: *Al-Burhān* by al-Juwaynī (d. 478 AH), *Al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām* by Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 AH), *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munīr* by al-Fattūhī (d. 972 AH).

Discussions related to epistemology (*naẓariyyat al-maʿrifah*) can also be found scattered throughout the classical works of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (legal theory), such as: *Al-Burhān* by al-Juwaynī (d. 478 AH), *Al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām* by Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456 AH), *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munīr* by al-Fattūhī (d. 972 AH).

Thus, one observes that issues pertaining to knowledge and its nature were present throughout ancient and medieval philosophical traditions, though they were rarely treated as independent and comprehensive studies. This changed in the modern era, when *maṣāʾil al-maʿrifah* (epistemological issues) rose to central importance and became a focal point for many philosophers.

A defining feature of *ḥikmah ʿurūbiyyah ḥadīthah* (modern European philosophy) was its systematic treatment of knowledge, which reached a new level of development with the English empiricist philosopher John Locke (d. 1704 CE). His work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* is often considered a foundational text in the modern discussion of epistemology.

As Hunter Mead states: “It became customary to mark the beginning of modern thought on the problem of knowledge with the year Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was published—1690. This work, which ushered in a new era in the history of philosophical reflection on the question of knowledge, was the result of extensive contemplation dating back to the author’s youth.”³³

Despite the shifts in modern philosophical trends and the rise of *falsafat al-ʿaql* (philosophy of mind) to a position of prominence, *naẓariyyat al-maʿrifah* (epistemology) has continued to receive significant attention from many

³³ *Philosophy: Its Methods, Types, and Problems*, Hunter Mead, p. 175

philosophers. It remains a central and continually evolving field, with core themes such as understanding the *‘aql* (intellect) and perception (*idrāk*).

One sign of this ongoing interest is the critique offered by Gettier in the 20th century against the classical definition of knowledge as "justified true belief." His objection sparked widespread debate and numerous responses aimed at reevaluating what constitutes knowledge.

Several influential works on epistemology and its key issues were also published in the 20th century, including: *Theory of Knowledge* by the American epistemologist Roderick Chisholm (1999 CE). *Perception* by Howard Robinson. *Seeing Things as They Are: A Theory of Perception* by John Searle.



Chapter Four: The Possibility Of Knowledge

The inquiry into the question of whether knowledge is possible—*imkān al-maʿrifah*—centers around fundamental questions such as:

Are there absolute truths? And is the human being capable of perceiving these truths and trusting in the accuracy of such perception?

This issue wasn't a primary concern during the early stages of *falsafah* (philosophy), as early philosophers were mainly preoccupied with questions about the nature and origin of the universe. Their focus was on what is called *falsafah ṭabīʿiyyah* (natural philosophy), which revolved around the physical world and its underlying substance.

Later, however, the focus shifted to the human being himself. Philosophy “descended from the heavens to the earth,” as it's often said, through the efforts of the *sūfistāʾiyyūn* (Sophists) in the latter half of the 5th century BCE. These Sophists were educators who specialized in teaching the arts of rhetoric and debate. They prided themselves on their ability to argue for or against any position—truth was not their concern. With their rise, skepticism began to spread among the people.

This *shakk* (skepticism) later evolved into various schools and modes of doubt. Thus, the question of whether knowledge is possible became the *first* issue to be addressed in the framework of *naẓariyyat al-maʿrifah* (epistemology) when it began to be categorized systematically—because one must first affirm that knowledge is possible before one can explore its other dimensions.

Opinions about the possibility of knowledge generally divided into two primary positions:

- 1 - A skeptical position (*ittijāh shakkī*) that denies the human capacity to attain certain knowledge.
- 2 - A realist or affirming position (*ittijāh i 'tiqādī*) that asserts the existence of truth and the possibility of attaining it.

The Skeptical Position (al-ittijāh ash-shakkī):

The rise of skepticism dates back to the 5th century BCE, introduced by a group of Greek thinkers known as the *Sūfistā' iyyūn* (Sophists). Several factors contributed to the emergence of this *naz'ah shakkiyyah* (skeptical tendency). Among these:

Intellectual Factors: The stark disagreements among earlier philosophers about the origin and essence of existence. Some claimed the universe originated from water, others from fire, and others from air. These contradictions prompted a shift in attention away from the external world to the self (*adh-dhāt*), as a more reliable focus.

Political Factors: The emergence of democratic systems, which required eloquence and persuasive oratory skills. In this environment, the Sophists positioned themselves as experts in rhetoric, claiming mastery in defending any position and its opposite.

Social Factors: The Athenians' exposure to neighboring peoples with different customs, beliefs, and legal systems. This cultural interaction provoked questions like: *Who holds the truth? Which view is correct?*—leading many to conclude that truth is unattainable, and thus, skepticism began to spread in various forms.

1. Absolute Skepticism (ash-shakk al-muṭlaq):

This form of skepticism involves a complete denial of the possibility of knowledge and total distrust in the means by which it is supposedly attained. It is *shumūlī* (all-

encompassing), rejecting all claims to knowledge. Moreover, it is not a method but a conclusion—those who adopt it begin in doubt and end in doubt. For them, all human effort to arrive at certain knowledge is futile.

In the context of *fikr islāmī* (Islamic thought), proponents of absolute skepticism were classified into three main groups. The first of these are:

The ‘Indiyyah (Relativists): This group asserted the relativity of truth, claiming that all truth is dependent on personal beliefs. In their view, the human being is the measure of all things—*ma ‘rifah* (knowledge) is not based on the reality of the object known, but on the perspective of the knowing subject. Hence, truth is subjective: *What appears true to you is your truth, and what appears true to me is mine.*

This viewpoint is rooted in the ideas of **Protagoras (410 BCE)**, who famously stated: “Man is the measure of all things”³⁴

The ‘Inādiyyah (Contrarians): This group represents a more defiant form of skepticism. They don’t merely doubt the existence of truth—they outright deny it. They claim with certainty that nothing exists at all. This extreme stance is traced back to **Gorgias (376 BCE)**, who argued: Nothing exists. ”If anything does exist, it cannot be known by humans. And if it can be known, it cannot be communicated to others.”³⁵

The Lā-Adriyyah (Agnostics): These skeptics take a position of suspended judgment (*tawqīf*). They neither affirm nor deny any claims to truth, believing that arguments for and against are equally persuasive (*takāfu’ al-ḥujaj*). Therefore, they refrain from making any decisive assertions.

³⁴ Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Amīrah Ḥilmī Maṭar, p. 39.

³⁵ Yūsuf Karam, *Tārīkh al-Falsafah al-Yūnāniyyah*, p. 64.

The *Sūfistā'īyyūn* (Sophists) supported their skepticism with several arguments. Notably, **Aenesidemus (43 BCE)** played a key role in organizing and refining these arguments. Broadly, they can be grouped into five main categories—three of which challenge the reliability of *al-ḥawāss* (the senses), and two which cast doubt on the trustworthiness of *al-'aql* (reason).

Their Critique of *al-'Aql* (Reason):

In addition to rejecting the reliability of the senses, the *Sūfistā'īyyūn* (Sophists) also challenged the validity of reason itself (*al-'aql*) by presenting two central arguments, which they used to claim that attaining certain knowledge through reason is impossible:

1- The Argument of Infinite Regress (taṣalsul):

This argument states that: “Every argument (*burhān*) either relies on proven premises or unproven ones. If the premises are proven, then their proofs must also be proven, and so on infinitely—which renders any proof impossible. And if the premises are unproven, then nothing has been truly proven in the first place. Hence, the process of argumentation is invalid and incapable.”³⁶

2 - The Problem of Justifying Reason with Reason: This argument challenges the very basis of rational justification. If one tries to prove the validity of *al-'aql* (reason), they must use reason itself as the tool of justification. In doing so, one is attempting to prove a thing by means of itself—a clear case of *daur* (circular reasoning), which renders the justification logically flawed.

³⁶ *With the Philosopher Muḥammad Thābit al-Hindī*, pp. 146–147.

Rejection of as-Sababiyyah (Causality): ³⁷

The concept of *as-sababiyyah*—the necessity that every occurrence must have a cause—is known as *as-sababiyyah al-‘āmmah* (universal causality). This principle is considered a necessary one: it's inconceivable, from a rational standpoint, that an event could occur without some cause behind it. However, not all philosophers agreed on its necessity. Among the most famous to reject this notion was the Scottish empiricist David Hume.

Hume argued that there is no *logical necessity* within what we observe as causal relationships. Our sensory impressions, he claimed, do not give us access to such necessity. All we perceive is succession—event A followed by event B—but not a necessary link between them. Through repeated observation, we develop the habit of associating one with the other, mistaking this habitual connection for actual necessity. He states:

“Seeing any two things or actions, no matter their relationship, cannot give us any idea of force or connection between them. This idea arises from the repetition of their joint occurrence. Repetition itself reveals or produces nothing within the objects; rather, it affects the mind, producing a habitual transition. This habitual transition is what we call force and necessity. These are, then, qualities of perception—not of the objects themselves. They are felt by the mind, not perceived externally in things.” ³⁸

Hume also rejected the *necessity of constant conjunction*—that is, the idea that effects always follow causes in a fixed way.

³⁷ The issue of causality were covered by me in two different works one criticizing ash’ari denience of secondary causality two my book ”Ex Materia Vs Ex Nihilo”

³⁸ *A New Introduction to Philosophy*, ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Badawī, p. 109.

Interestingly, this rejection aligns, in part, with the view of the majority of the *Ash‘arīs*. They too denied the concept of inherent causal properties in created things (*khawāṣṣ al-ashyā’*), as affirming such properties would contradict one of the theological foundations of Islam: the absolute *tawḥīd* (oneness) and control of God over all affairs. However, unlike Hume, the *Ash‘arīs* did affirm *as-sababiyyah al-‘āmmah* in the sense that every occurrence must have a cause—but they insisted that *Allāh* is the *sole agent* behind all effects, even when they appear to result from natural causes.

As *as-Sukūnī* put it:

“Many people believe that the sword cuts, fire burns, and food satisfies hunger—this is attributing action to inanimate objects. Whoever ascribes action to inanimate matter is a worshipper of idols... Everything you see is created by God at the moment when one thing is adjacent to another, by a habit He has instituted.”

39

Among those in Western thought who also rejected *as-sababiyyah* (causality) was the French philosopher Nicolas Malebranche (d. 1715), a follower of Descartes. He held that the only true cause is God Himself, and that what we typically call “causes” in the world are merely *occasions* (*munāṣabāt*) for divine action. In this regard, Malebranche’s view bears a notable resemblance to the position of the majority of the *Ash‘arīs*.⁴⁰



³⁹ *Forty Questions on the Foundations of Religion*, as-Sukūnī, p. 69.

⁴⁰ And the *sufiyyah*, Ibn Taymiyyah commented upon a famous *sufī* poem and explained how they reject secondary causality, this is found in *minhaj sunnah* vol 5.

Chapter Five: Editing Ibn Taymiyyah's Epistemology:

We have given the tools and build up for one of the main topics of this book, the epistemology of Ibn Taymiyyah, all the prior chapters served as a backbone to understanding the context of Ibn Taymiyyah and whom he is dealing with, which is necessary to understand Ibn Taymiyyah.

Ibn Taymiyyah's Positions And Responding To Misreadings:

Ibn Taymiyyah says: *"Sophistry has types: the ignorant sufaṣṭā'īyah (sophists), the lā adrīyah (agnostics), who say: We do not know whether truths are fixed or negated, and whether knowledge is possible or not. This is the view of those who deny truths and knowledge of them. They make truths follow beliefs, so for one who believes in the existence of something, it is considered existent for him, and for one who denies it, it is considered non-existent for him. They do not regard truths as having an essence independent of belief. This is the view of those who affirm the existence of truths but deny the possibility of knowing them."*⁴¹

He rejects the *lā adrīyah* who suspend judgment on affirming truths, those who assert their denial, and he also rejects the view that makes truths follow beliefs. He also rejects affirming the existence of truths and entities while denying the ability to know their true nature. In other words, affirming something in itself without the ability to know its reality, with the objective reality existing apart from perception and knowledge. He says: *"External truths, independent of us, are not subject to our*

⁴¹ *As-Safadiyyah*, Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah, edited by Muhammad Rashad Salem, published by Dar al-Huda al-Nabawi, Mansoura, Egypt, and distributed by Dar al-Fadhila, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 1st edition: 1421H - 2000 CE, p. 98.

conceptions, but our conceptions follow them." ⁴²

"Knowledge corresponds to the known, which is independent of knowledge and follows it." ⁴³

He further states: "Lack of knowledge is not knowledge of nothingness, and lack of knowledge of truths does not negate their existence in themselves." ⁴⁴

There are external truths independent of humans. He agrees with the materialists in their view: "The objective reality given to humans in their sensory perceptions, which is reproduced by them, and whose image is reflected in their perceptions, exists independently of us." ⁴⁵

For those who do not acknowledge that objective reality exists independently of us, "they have nothing left but the *anā* (the bare self)." ⁴⁶

The connection between existence and knowledge was expressed by Walter Stace, who said: "The unity of knowledge and existence is the fundamental principle in all forms of idealism, which was absolutely relied upon by the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle." ⁴⁷

In *theory of knowledge*, idealism is presented as: "The thesis that the external world appearing to the human is not independent of the conceptions of the thinking self." ⁴⁸

⁴² *Radd 'alā al-Mantiqiyyīn*, Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah, Dar Tarjumān as-Sunnah, Pakistan, 1976, p. 71.

⁴³ *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 1, p. 88.

⁴⁴ *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 1, p. 87.

⁴⁵ *Al-Mādīyah wa al-Madhhab al-Naqdī al-Tajrībī*, p. 145.

⁴⁶ *Al-Mādīyah wa al-Madhhab al-Naqdī al-Tajrībī*, p. 40.

⁴⁷ *Al-Mantiq wa Falsafah at-Ṭabī'ah*, Vol. 1 of Hegel's Philosophy), Walter Stace, translated by Imam Abdul Fattah Imam, introduction by Zaki Naguib Mahmud, Dar al-Tanweer for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, Beirut, Lebanon, 3rd edition: 2007, p. 82.

⁴⁸ *l-Mithāliyah al-Almāniyyah*, edited by Hans Zindkoller, translated by Abu 'Arab al-Marzouqi, Arab Network for Research and Publishing, Beirut, Lebanon, Vol. 1, p. 37.

Al-Rāzī expressed the unity of knowledge and existence in alignment with the idealist tradition. He said: *"Everything we conceive has an existence that is independent of us, either existing by itself as Plato states, or by something else as the philosophers assert."*⁴⁹

Meanwhile, Ibn Taymiyyah states: *"The conception of the dhihnīyah (mental) is broader than external truths, for it encompasses the existent, the non-existent, the impossible, and the possibilities."*⁵⁰

*"Concepts in the adhhān (minds) and mutaṣawwirāt al-‘uqūl (conceptions of intellects) contain things that have no existence in the external world."*⁵¹

He clarified that awareness of those independent existents follows their existence, not the reverse. Our conceptions follow the existents, as he says: *"Knowledge corresponds to the known, which is independent of knowledge and follows it."*⁵²

But how does knowledge begin for him? Does it start from *qabliyyāt ‘aqliyyah* (a priori mental concepts) or from *al-ḥiss* (sensory perception) of particular existents? Ibn Taymiyyah says: *"Knowledge has paths, faculties, and internal and external powers in humans. First, they sense things and witness them, then they imagine and conceive them, and grasp them with their intellect, comparing the unseen with what they have witnessed."*⁵³

Knowledge begins with *al-ḥiss* (sensation), then the intellect abstracts and generalizes, and then compares the unseen with what has been witnessed. It's as if he's saying: *"There are two operations in knowledge: one is from the particular to*

⁴⁹ *Al-Mawāqif fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Ahmad al-Ijī, ‘Ālam al-Kutub, Beirut, Lebanon, p. 52.

⁵⁰ *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 2, p. 163.

⁵¹ *Dar’ Ta’āruḍ al-‘Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 5, p. 137.

⁵² *Dar’ Ta’āruḍ al-‘Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 1, p. 88.

⁵³ *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah fī Ta’sīs Bid’ihim al-Kalāmiyyah*, Majma‘ al-Malik Fahd, vol. 1, p. 434.

the general, and the other from the general to the particular." ⁵⁴

The particular begins with the transition from the sensory to the intellectual, then from the intellectual to knowing something else by analogy with what has already been known. Ibn Taymiyyah does not start from *kullīyyāt* (universals) or *ma 'ārif 'aqliyyah qabliyah* (a priori intellectual knowledge), but from *al-ḥiss* (sensation) first for the objective reality independent of sensory perception. He says: *"There is no doubt that al-ḥiss perceives particular things first, then it moves from them to general propositions."* ⁵⁵ *"When a person senses some external particulars, they abstract from it a wasf kullī (universal quality), especially when the particulars are numerous. Knowledge of the established common characteristic in the external world is knowledge of the universal proposition."* ⁵⁶

He also says: *"The intellect, especially qiyās (analogy), i 'tibār (consideration), and quḍāyā kullīyyah (universal propositions), must rely on the sensory perceptions, as they are the foundation for considering them."* ⁵⁷

This abstraction does not occur all at once but is achieved through the repetition of sensory inputs. Ibn Taymiyyah says: *"Through al-ḥiss (sensation), particular matters are known, and then when they are repeated over time, the intellect realizes that this is due to the shared universal quality, and thus it makes a universal judgment."* ⁵⁸

Despite these clear texts, when Abdullah al-Dajani wrote about Ibn Taymiyyah's epistemic theory, he claimed that Ibn Taymiyyah believed in the existence of *awwaliyyāt 'aqliyyah* (a priori mental concepts) that precede any experience. He described them as: *"The source of these awwaliyyāt is the intellect, as it is the*

⁵⁴ *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 31, p. 158.

⁵⁵ *Radd 'alā al-Mantiqīyyīn*, p. 363.

⁵⁶ *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 204.

⁵⁷ *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 13, p. 75-76.

⁵⁸ *Radd 'alā al-Mantiqīyyīn*, p. 431

origin from which they emerge, and they cannot be separated from its innate nature. Therefore, they are characterized by universality and necessity, and they are ingrained in human minds since Allah created them." ⁵⁹

This is a reworking of Kant's thesis on *al-ma'ārif al-qablīyah* (a priori knowledge), but he dressed it in a different name, claiming it to be "awwaliyyāt" in order to draw parallels between him and Ibn Taymiyyah, ultimately reaching the conclusion that Ibn Taymiyyah agrees with: *"The essence of Kant's philosophical view."* ⁶⁰

Kant's *al-ma'ārif al-qablīyah* is described as: *"Knowledge independent of experience, even of all sensory impressions."* ⁶¹

This knowledge unites with metaphysics, which he views as: "Reflective intellectual knowledge that occupies a completely unique position, rising entirely above learning from experience." ⁶²

Kant's conception of *al-qablīyyāt* and its unification with metaphysics has been criticized by many philosophers, including Schopenhauer, who said: "It presents the existence of the world and our existence as a paradox, and Kant assumes without discussion that the solution to this riddle cannot be derived from a deep understanding of this world. Instead, one must search for something entirely opposed to it, which he called 'outside the realm of any possible experience.'"

In his view, all direct knowledge must be excluded from the solution, meaning any

⁵⁹ *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ma'rif: Qirā'ah Tahlīlīyah lil-Nisq al-Ma'rif al-Tīmī*, Abdullah bin Nafi' al-Dajani, introduction by: Abdullah bin Muhammad al-Qarni, Takwīn for Studies and Research, Khobar - Saudi Arabia, first edition: 1435H - 2014, p. 339.

⁶⁰ *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ma'rif*, p. 341.

⁶¹ *Naqd al-'Aql al-Mahd*, Immanuel Kant, translated by: Ghanem Hana, Arab Organization for Translation, Beirut - Lebanon, first edition: 2013, p. 58), which he considers to have the essential qualities of: "necessity and strict generalization." (*Naqd al-'Aql al-Mahd*, translated by Ghanem Hana, p. 59.

⁶² *Naqd al-'Aql al-Mahd*, translated by Ghanem Hana, p. 35.

possible experience, whether internal or external, and it should be sought indirectly through the keys of general a priori theoretical principles. After closing off the primary source of knowledge in this way, and closing the direct path leading to the truth, one should not be surprised that the dogmatic attempt failed. Kant could not provide a necessary explanation for its failure because he treated metaphysics and *al-ma'ārif al-qablīyah* as one and the same. He should have demonstrated beforehand that the solution to the mystery of the world cannot begin from the world itself, but must be sought from outside the world by reaching, for example, the indicators of the *ashkāl qablīyah* (a priori forms) he referred to.

As long as one has not demonstrated this, there is no room for filling in the most important and difficult tasks, nor for considering the primary source of knowledge and internal and external experience as empty forms devoid of any content. For me, the solution to the riddle of the world must originate from the world itself. The responsibility of *al-mītāfīzīqā* (metaphysics) is not to abandon the experience in which the world exists, but rather to understand this experience from its very foundation, since experience—whether internal or external—is the primary source of all knowledge.⁶³

Returning to what al-Dajani said, he mentions an example of that a priori knowledge—which he calls *awwaliyyāt*—through the principle of non-contradiction. He did not mention any text from Ibn Taymiyyah that states this principle is *qablī* (a priori) or innate in the intellect before any experience. All he mentioned was a single text in which Ibn Taymiyyah said: "*The greatest attributes of the intellect are the knowledge of resemblance and difference.*"⁶⁴ So the question arises: Where does this relate to that? His description of the intellect this way can be accepted by both those who argue for *al-ma'ārif al-qablīyah* and those who deny it. Thus, using this text to support the position of a priori knowledge is

⁶³ *Naqd al-Falsafah al-Kāntīyah*, Arthur Schopenhauer, translated by: Hamid Lachehb, Jadawil Publishing and Distribution, Beirut, Lebanon, first edition: 2014, p. 65.

⁶⁴ *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ma'rifi*, p. 344.

ungrounded.

He also mentioned another principle that stems from the previous one, attributing the view of its a priori nature to Ibn Taymiyyah: the principle of the excluded middle, meaning there is no middle ground between two opposites, relying on a text from Ibn Taymiyyah where he says: *"The falsity of negating the opposites, and what is similar to opposites, is clearer to the intellect than acknowledging the prophethood of one of Allah's messengers."*⁶⁵ Again, this is an interpretation that completely diverges from Ibn Taymiyyah's approach. The fact that something is clearer than something else does not imply that it originates as *awwalī* (a priori) from the intellect. These two texts were simply employed, but they do not indicate anything of this sort. So what does Ibn Taymiyyah say about the principle of non-contradiction?

Ibn Taymiyyah says: *"It is well-known that when the intellect is certain of the impossibility of the coexistence of two things or their mutual removal—whether one of them is existence and the other is non-existence, which is the specific contradiction, or both are existences—we know this initially from what we observe in the entities we encounter."*⁶⁶ The matter is initially witnessed in the existing entities; there are entities independent of thought and sensation, and then there is perception: *"For al-ḥiss (sensation) is the cause of correct knowledge."*⁶⁷ After this, the intellect abstracts entirely from the sensory inputs, as it does with other *al-kullīyyāt* (universals).

"Even knowledge that one is half of two, and that opposites cannot coexist, is understood by al-ḥiss in some bodies, substances, and contrasting colors, and the intellect rationalizes what it has not perceived, just as it perceives in them, and the judgment does not differ between one and one, body and body, color and color,

⁶⁵ *Dar' Ta'ārūḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 6, p. 129.

⁶⁶ *Dar' Ta'ārūḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 6, p. 123.

⁶⁷ *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmīyah fī Ta'sīs Bid'ihim al-Kalāmīyah*, King Fahd Complex, vol. 1, p. 317.

*and opposite and opposite; it judges this in a general, kullī (universal) manner." ⁶⁸
"The knowledge that this one is half of these two is more innate than the knowledge
that each one is half of two, and thus everything that is assumed from
singularities." ⁶⁹*

*"Universal, intellectual knowledge is preceded by specific, existential knowledge;
for if there were nothing in bodies that is one, the judgment of the intellect that one
is half of two would be impossible." ⁷⁰*

The knowledge of the specific in reality never depends on knowledge of a
universal proposition. *"The specific thing required to be known through these
universal propositions is known before these propositions are known, and it is
known without them. The knowledge of it does not require the universal
proposition, but what the intellect knows through the universal proposition are
examples of things not found in the external world, whereas the external existents
are known without this reasoning." ⁷¹*

These are general *aḥkām kullīyyah* (universal judgments), and those who utilized
Ibn Taymiyyah's statement—"Among the greatest qualities of the intellect is the
recognition of similarity and difference"—in support of the view that *ma'rifah
kullīyyah* (universal knowledge) exists prior to any particular, overlooked a crucial
point about the nature of the 'aql (intellect) according to Ibn Taymiyyah. In the
very same book (*al-Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*), he clearly states: *"The particular
quality of the intellect is its ability to know universals through particulars." ⁷²*

Thus, these *kullīyyāt* (universals) are never *qabliyyah* (a priori); rather, they are
abstractions from *al-juz'īyyāt* (particulars) that have first been perceived through

⁶⁸ *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmīyah fī Ta'sīs Bid'ihim al-Kalāmīyah*, King Fahd Complex, vol. 4, p. 621.

⁶⁹ *Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, p. 316.

⁷⁰ *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmīyah fī Ta'sīs Bid'ihim al-Kalāmīyah*, King Fahd Complex, vol. 4, p. 136.

⁷¹ *Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, p. 316, 317.

⁷² Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, p. 368

the senses. Ibn Taymiyyah says: "*Universals in the soul occur after the knowledge of specific, determined particulars.*" ⁷³

He further explains: "*Pure intelligibles (ma 'qūlāt maḥḍah) are universal concepts. When a person senses, internally or externally, certain things—such as sensing hunger, thirst, contentment, anger, joy, sadness, pleasure, and pain, or what he sees and hears—those are specific, existent realities. The intellect then abstracts from these a general, universal notion, such as hunger in the absolute, joy in the absolute, smell in the absolute, pain in the absolute, and so on. These universals are pure intelligibles because there are no universals in the external world that could be sensed. Sensation only occurs in relation to what exists.*" ⁷⁴

And he reaffirms the temporal sequence: "*Universals only become universals in the mind after their particulars have become established in existence.*" ⁷⁵

Ibn Taymiyyah's stance on the impossibility of *ijtimā' an-naqīḍayn* (the conjunction of two contradictories) in external reality can be summed up by noting that humans have previously sensed this impossibility in what they directly observed—such as certain bodies, physical objects, or opposing colors. In other words, what is being addressed here is the nature of *al-wujūd* (existence) itself and the structure of the *'ālam khārijī* (external world). Thinking cannot autonomously generate these forms from within; rather, they are always derived from the world outside the mind. This reverses the traditional idealist framework: principles are not the starting point of inquiry but its *natījah khitāmiyyah* (final conclusion). These foundational principles do not inherently apply to nature and human history; rather, they are abstractions derived *minhā* (from them). Nature and humanity do not conform to these principles—instead, the validity of the principles rests in how

⁷³ Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, p. 368

⁷⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah fī Ta'sīs Bid'ihim al-Kalāmiyyah*, ed. Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Qāsim, Government Press – Mecca, 1st ed. 1391 AH, vol. 1, p. 18.

⁷⁵ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 1, p. 47.

much they conform to nature and history.

*"Here we are speaking about the forms of existence, the forms of the external world, and the fact is that thought can never draw out these forms from itself, but only from the external world. Thus, the relationship is reversed entirely: principles are not the starting point of investigation but its final result. These principles do not apply to nature and human history in advance; rather, they are abstracted from them. It is not nature and humanity that conform to the principles, but the other way around. Principles are only true insofar as they match nature and history. That is the only materialist perspective on the subject."*⁷⁶

In presenting the view of a sect known as the *Samaniyyah*, Ibn Taymiyyah says:

*"These people used to say: nothing exists unless it can be sensed. So, a person should not affirm the existence of something that cannot be known through any of the senses. They did not mean that a particular person only knows what he himself senses; rather, they denied what all of mankind affirms—things similar to what one has sensed—and they even rejected the existence of things like what they themselves had sensed, or were at least unwilling to acknowledge it."*⁷⁷

His statement about something needing to be *maḥsūs* (perceivable by sense) is clarified further by what he said earlier: that sensory perception by a specific person is not a requirement for affirming the existence of a specific thing: "They denied the existence of that which could not be sensed—not the existence of what they themselves could not sense."⁷⁸

So, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-ʿaql* (the intellect) is capable of grasping

⁷⁶ Friedrich Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, translated by Muḥammad al-Jundī and Khayrī aḍ-Ḍāmin, Dar al-Taḳaddum – Moscow, Arabic edition 1984, published in the USSR, p. 41.

⁷⁷ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah fī Taʿsīs Bidʿihim al-Kalāmiyyah*, King Fahd Complex edition, vol. 2, p. 332.

⁷⁸ Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Radd ʿalā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, p. 42.

things, but cognition begins with *al-ḥiss* (sense perception), after which the intellect abstracts. Thus, existing things are indeed perceivable, though their existence is not dependent on direct sensory contact. Rather, anything that exists can potentially be known through sensation, given the right *shurūṭ mawḍūʿiyyah* (objective conditions).

The external world is *mustaḡnī* (independent) of human sensation or consciousness. Therefore, knowledge, in Ibn Taymiyyah's view, is acquired first through sense perception, then through abstraction by the intellect, and also through transmitted reports (*khabar*)—whether those are based on sense, rational inference, or universals formed in the mind of the one reporting: "*The paths to knowledge are three: sense perception, reason, and a combination of the two, such as transmitted reports.*" ⁷⁹

Some have relied on a statement by Ibn Taymiyyah in which he says:

"As for axioms (badīhiyyāt), which are the 'ulūm awwaliyyah (first principles of knowledge) that Allah places in the soul from the outset without any intermediary—such as arithmetic—they are like the knowledge that one is half of two. These do not provide knowledge of any specific, existent thing in the external world, such as judgments concerning absolute number or absolute quantity." ⁸⁰

Based on a misunderstanding of this passage, some have concluded that Ibn Taymiyyah affirmed the existence of *ma'ārif qabliyyah* (a priori knowledge) that precedes the mediation of sense perception (*ḥiss*). This misunderstanding led Wael Hallaq to state: "*[Ibn Taymiyyah] explicitly says in one place that mathematical principles—such as the idea that one is half of two—are axiomatic, planted by God into our souls at birth.*" ⁸¹

⁷⁹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'Aql wa an-Naql*, vol. 1, p. 178.

⁸⁰ *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 71

⁸¹ Wael Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyyah against the Greek Logicians*, trans. Amr Bassiouni, Ibn al-Nadim Publishing – al-Jazīrah, First Edition: 2019, p. 105.

However, Ibn Taymiyyah never actually made such a claim. This assertion arises entirely from a misreading of his statement. Hallaq's misunderstanding leads him to conclude that Ibn Taymiyyah contradicts his own established view. To reconcile this perceived contradiction, Hallaq assumes that Ibn Taymiyyah had earlier affirmed such axioms as innate, but later changed his stance to align with a more consistent epistemology, in which:

"All universal propositions—including mathematical and geometrical universals—are produced through empirical observation of particulars" ⁸²

In truth, Ibn Taymiyyah's actual position remains consistent: *al-kullīyyāt* (universals) arise through the intellect's abstraction from *al-juz'īyyāt* (particulars) that are encountered through the senses. He does not hold that such concepts are *fitrīyah* (innate) in the unmediated sense that Hallaq attributes to him.

Ibn Taymiyyah's words do not support the interpretation made by Hallaq. The intermediary that Ibn Taymiyyah denies here is not what Hallaq assumes. In *al-Radd 'ala al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, in the chapter where Ibn Taymiyyah critiques the logicians' distinction between *awwaliyyāt* (first principles) and *mashhūrāt* (commonly accepted premises), he explains his position:

"Their distinction between first principles and other propositions—namely, that in first principles, the predication of the predicate to the subject (i.e., the affirmation of the attribute for the described, or the ruling for the ruled-upon, or the information for the informed-about) occurs without an intermediary, both in mental and external existence, whereas others require a middle term—is a faulty distinction built on a false foundation. This is the claim that among the necessary attributes of a subject, some are affirmed of it by themselves, without a middle in reality, and others are not, but rather are affirmed through something else which is

⁸² Wael Hallaq, *Ibn Taymiyyah against the Greek Logicians*, p. 105.

itself necessary to the subject. That middle term, in turn, necessitates the predicate. This distinction has been mentioned by more than one scholar, such as al-Rāzī and others, regarding necessary attributes. Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) also mentions it, but he clarifies that by ‘middle term’ he means the ḥadd awsaṭ (middle term in a syllogism)—that which appears with the ‘because’ (li’anna) in a statement. This is simply the dalīl (evidence), which acts as a middle term in the mind of the one making the inference. But it is not a middle term in the reality of the connection between the attribute and the subject. One may infer a cause from its effect, and vice versa; one may infer one of two contraries from the absence of the other, or one of two co-necessitating elements from the presence of the other.

There is no doubt that necessary attributes of a thing can be divided into those whose necessity is obvious to the human being, and those whose necessity is not obvious and requires evidence. Whether something is obvious or not is not a quality of the thing itself—it is merely a statement about the human knowledge of it. It reflects the state of mental, not external, existence.

So what is self-evident and known to someone, and exists in their mind, does not require proof. What is not self-evident to them requires proof. The distinction between what is evident and what is not is relational—it depends on the individual and their state of understanding. What may be clear to Zayd might not be clear to ‘Amr, because people differ in their access to knowledge, perceptiveness, and intellectual ability. Therefore, if something becomes evident to one person, it doesn’t follow that it should be evident to everyone. Likewise, if something is hidden from one person, it doesn’t mean it is hidden from all.

When logicians say a proposition is awwalī (a first principle) because it requires no middle term, this distinction is relative to the person’s state. It’s just like saying a proposition is known or unknown, apparent or hidden, clear or unclear, comprehensible or not. This is a valid way of distinguishing between propositions. Every proposition is either evident to a person or not. But this does not justify dividing all propositions into essential categories where one type is entirely self-

evident and the other is not. That kind of distinction does not arise from an essential quality of the proposition itself, contrary to the claim that a clearly necessary attribute exists without a middle term in reality, while an unclear one requires a middle term in reality.

In fact, all necessary attributes of a subject have no real intermediary between them and their subject in existence. Even if a person needs evidence to know their necessity, it doesn't mean their existence depends on a real intermediary. Not everything whose connection to the subject is known only through evidence must be connected through an intermediary in reality.”⁸³

This full passage was cited to clarify the mistake of those who misunderstood Ibn Taymiyyah's earlier statement as affirming *qabaliyyāt ma'rifiyyah* (a priori knowledge). His discussion revolves around the *awwalī al-badīhī* (self-evident first principle)—that is, a type of *ma'lūm* (known) or *bayyin* (evident) which requires no *wāsiṭah* (intermediary) in the form of a *dalīl* (proof). As he says: “*It does not require an intermediary to serve as evidence for what is being sought.*”⁸⁴ This type of knowledge, and its evident nature, is not rooted in the *ajnās al-qadāyā* (categories of propositions) nor in *al-wujūd al-khārijī* (external existence independent of us). Rather, the *qadiyyah kulliyyah* (universal proposition) persists *after* sensory experience—not prior to it. Thus, what is *badīhī* or *awwalī* cannot be made an exception based on the propositions themselves; rather, its classification depends on the mind of the one who grasps it, making such distinctions *nusbiyyah* (relative) among people.

Ibn Taymiyyah critiques those who anchor these distinctions in the nature of the propositions themselves or in the external world. According to him, there is no real *wāsiṭ* between an external attribute and the object it describes. This is clarified in his statement: “*As for self-evident truths, which are primary types of knowledge*

⁸³ *Al-Radd 'ala al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, pp. 398–400

⁸⁴ *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, King Fahd Edition, vol. 4, p. 566, with slight abridgment.

that Allah places in the soul from the outset without intermediary—such as arithmetic, like the knowledge that one is half of two...”⁸⁵ Here, he explains that the notion of one being half of two is *ma’lūmah badīhiyyah* (a self-evident known truth). The one who knows this does not need to carry out a calculation, as he might with larger numbers, due to its clarity in his mind. However, this does not strip it of its *kulliyyah* (universality), nor does it imply its origin lies outside of sense experience. This is confirmed in another passage: “*Even his knowledge that one is half of two, or that two opposites cannot coexist—he perceived these truths through his senses in particular objects, bodies, and colors that are in opposition, and then abstracted to what he did not sense based on what he did. He judged that the ruling does not differ between one and one, body and body, color and color, or opposite and opposite—and thus formed a general, universal judgment.*”

⁸⁶ “*Mental universal knowledge is preceded by specific experiential knowledge. If there were no such thing as a ‘one’ among bodies, the mind could not judge that one is half of two.*”⁸⁷

In summary, Ibn Taymiyyah affirms that all *kulliyyāt* (universals), regardless of whether they are *badīhiyyah* (self-evident) or *naẓariyyah* (theoretical), *yaqīniyyah* (certain) or *ẓanniyyah* (probable), ultimately trace back to sense perception. He states:

“There are three pathways to knowledge: First: internal and external sensation (*ḥiss bāṭin wa-ẓāhir*), through which individually existing things are known. Second: reasoning and analogy (*i’tibār bi-naẓar wa-qiyās*), which only yield knowledge after sense perception. What is known specifically through the senses becomes known universally and abstractly through the intellect and analogy. The intellect on its own does not provide knowledge of any particular thing, but generalizes the specific and abstracts the particular. For universals are known through the intellect,

⁸⁵ *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 9, p. 71.

⁸⁶ *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah fī Ta’sīs Bida’ihim al-Kalāmiyyah*, King Fahd Edition, vol. 4, p. 621.

⁸⁷ *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, King Fahd Edition, vol. 4, p. 126.

just as particulars are known through sensation. *Third: report (khabar), which encompasses universals and particulars, the seen and the unseen, making it broader and more inclusive—but sensation and direct perception are more complete and perfect.*”⁸⁸

So, whether something is *ḍarūrī* (necessary) or *naẓarī*, *yaqīnī* or *ẓannī*, it still belongs to the realm of mental universals, which are derived from particular, concrete realities accessed through sensory experience.

Ibrāhīm ‘Uqaylī also expressed this point effectively in denying that Ibn Taymiyyah affirmed any form of *qabaliyyāt* (innate a priori knowledge), stating:

*“In his view, the intellect only acquires its knowledge from reality—it does not carry any a priori information.”*⁸⁹

It’s important to distinguish between two separate stages:

1 - The stage Ibn Taymiyyah refers to as *asbāb al-idrāk* (means of cognition)⁹⁰, this refers to the process by which awareness begins to form. According to him, this process is fundamentally grounded in objective reality, conveyed through sensory perception (*ḥiss*), which then transmits data to the brain. Through repetition of sensory input, the brain develops general, abstract concepts.

2 - The second stage concerns what happens *within* cognition *after* it has already formed. At this level, Ibn Taymiyyah acknowledges the presence of *awwaliyyāt* (first principles), *ḍarūriyyāt* (necessary knowledge), and *naẓariyyāt* (theoretical knowledge). These are employed in constructing arguments and organizing reasoning—but crucially, not before sensation has occurred.

⁸⁸ *Dar’ Ta’ārūḍ al-‘Aql wa-al-Naql*, vol. 7, p. 324.

⁸⁹ *Takāmul al-Manhaj al-Ma’rifī ‘inda Ibn Taymiyyah*, Ibrāhīm ‘Uqaylī, introduction by Ṭāhā Jābir al-‘Alwānī, International Institute of Islamic Thought, Herndon, Virginia, USA, 1st ed., 1415 AH / 1994 CE, p. 367.

⁹⁰ *Al-Radd ‘ala al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, p. 26.

As Dr. Yūsuf Samrīn stated in his famous work called "*Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min al-Ma'rifah al-Qabliyya wa-Shay' min Āthārih al-Falsafiyah*" page 29:

*"Kant treats a priori knowledge as timeless and purely logical, whereas Ibn Taymiyyah does not affirm any kind of timeless a priori. For him, 'before' and 'after' imply temporal precedence and succession."*⁹¹

This key difference undermines any real comparison between Ibn Taymiyyah and Kant regarding *qabaliyyāt* (a priori knowledge). Ibn Taymiyyah explicitly maintains that knowledge through sensory experience comes *before* conceptual universals, and that objective reality precedes mental or sensory cognition.

Further, since the mind can conceive of things that do not exist in the external world—or speculate about possibilities that are actually impossible due to some missing condition or present obstacle—Ibn Taymiyyah makes a clear distinction between two types of *imkān* (possibility): *imkān dhihnī* (conceivability in the mind), and *imkān khārijī* (actual possibility in external reality). He states: "*The difference between them is that mental possibility (imkān dhihnī) means the absence of any awareness of impossibility—there's nothing in the mind to prevent it. But external possibility (imkān khārijī) means the knowledge that such a thing is possible in reality.*"⁹²

This aligns closely with materialist thinkers, albeit under different terminology. What they refer to as *formal possibility* corresponds to *mental possibility*, while *real possibility* corresponds to what Ibn Taymiyyah terms *external possibility*.⁹³

⁹¹ *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min al-Ma'rifah al-Qabliyya wa-Shay' min Āthārih al-Falsafiyah*, Yūsuf Samrīn, Al-Quds University, Palestine, 1439 AH / 2017 CE, p. 29.

⁹² *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa-al-Naql*, vol. 3, p. 358.

⁹³ Regarding materialism and Ibn Taymiyyah we will talk deeper when we will have interconnected talks on epistemology and ontology, in later sections of this chapter.

Imkān (possibility), no matter its form, is a rational judgment. If something's existence is to be proven in reality, it cannot be based purely on *imkān*. In this regard, Ibn Taymiyyah says: "Mental possibility (*imkān dhihnī*) may refer to the lack of knowledge about impossibility or to doubt in reality; both cases imply an absence of knowledge. External possibility (*imkān khārijī*) means that its existence in the external world is possible, not impossible, such as the birth of women or the growth of plants. As for certainty about occurrence or non-occurrence, it requires evidence." ⁹⁴

This clearly shows that Ibn Taymiyyah's position aligns with foundational epistemological elements of materialist philosophy regarding the solution to the basic problem of philosophy and the theory of *wujūd* (existence). More clarification on this will follow. However, a question arises: Why is this alignment not recognized by many scholars who have studied Ibn Taymiyyah's works or written about them? There are several possible answers, such as: insufficient familiarity with Ibn Taymiyyah's scattered writings and the connections between them, a lack of knowledge of other philosophies, or perhaps aversion to materialism due to its association with *ilhād* (atheism). Nevertheless, such aversion does not justify neglecting the study and comparison of materialism, because:

"If anatomists recoiled from the sight of a human corpse, turning their faces away and refusing to continue their dissection, we would still be in complete biological ignorance to this day" ⁹⁵

Ibn Taymiyyah himself acknowledged the correctness of the foundational principle of the *sammāniyyah* (materialist thinkers), regardless of how they framed it. He said:

⁹⁴ *Al-Nubuwwāt*, Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah, edited by Abd al-Aziz bin Saleh al-Tuwayan, Aḍwā' al-Salaf, Riyadh, 1st edition: 1420 AH / 2000 CE, vol. 2, p. 911-912.

⁹⁵ *Al-Madaniyyah*, Clive Bell, translated by Mahmoud Mahmoud, National Center for Translation, edited by Jābir Asfūr, 2009, p. 139.

“There is no doubt that the denial of the Creator entirely is the position of the sammāniyyah whom Jahm ibn Ṣafwān and others from the dahriyah (naturalists) debated” ⁹⁶

However, he corrected their epistemological foundation by stating: *“The principle they mentioned is held by those who affirm existence”* ⁹⁷

Finally, he asserts: *“What cannot be sensed by any of the five senses is nonexistent, and this method is clear from the Imams. Jahm said that Allah is nonexistent because he claimed He cannot be sensed by any of the senses, for existence must be something that can be sensed by one of them.”* ⁹⁸

A sound principle is not invalidated simply because it is misused. For instance, one cannot argue that the misuse of certain Qur’anic verses by deviant sects justifies rejecting the Qur’an as a source of *tashrī‘* (legislation), merely because those groups extracted incorrect rulings from it. However, in a similar fashion, the strong association of *māddiyyah* (materialism) with negative connotations and its reputation among critics has rendered any comparison with it automatically dismissed—so much so that the idea of making such a comparison rarely even enters academic discourse.

These prevailing intellectual customs have become so dominant that they are seen as synonymous with the standards of correctness. As a result, there's a pressing need to re-examine and critically highlight the blanket opposition to *māddiyyah*, not because it must be accepted, but because it deserves objective evaluation like any other school of thought.

A Priori And It’s Problems, An In Depth Critique:

⁹⁶ Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah, vol. 1, p. 440

⁹⁷ Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah fī Ta’sīs Bid’ahum al-Kalāmiyyah, and Majma‘ al-Malik Fahd, vol. 2, p. 341.

⁹⁸ Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah, vol. 4, p. 320.

Ma‘rifah qablīyah (pre-sensory knowledge) refers to knowledge that either arises alongside sensation but not from it, or is entirely independent of sensory experience—existing *prior* to any empirical input. It is a form of cognition disconnected from experience and all sensory impressions. As Kant puts it: A priori knowledge is that which exists independently of all experience and sensory impressions—it precedes both sensation and experience.⁹⁹

It’s crucial not to conflate *ma‘ārif qablīyah* (pre-sensory cognitions) with *ḍarūriyyāt* (self-evident truths) or *awwaliyyāt* (first principles of reason). A *‘ilm ḍarūrī* is one where the mind affirms a predicate's attachment to its subject without needing a middle term—meaning the mind doesn't require further reasoning due to the clarity of the connection. *Awwaliyyāt* are a subset of *ḍarūriyyāt*, being judgments that the mind accepts instantly without any external aid.

As clarified by Yūsuf Samrīn: Self-evident truths (*ḍarūriyyāt*) and first principles (*awwaliyyāt*) are also called *badīhiyyāt* (axioms). But *ma‘ārif qablīyah* are what the theory of pre-sensory knowledge affirms: that there exists necessary knowledge even before birth, or more precisely, prior to experience.¹⁰⁰

To illustrate the distinction between *naẓarī* (inferential), *ḍarūrī* (necessary), and *awwalī* (primary) knowledge:

1 - First, an example of *awwalī*: saying “two is the sum of one and one.” The mind grasps this instantly, without inference.

2 - Second, a case of *ḍarūrī*: saying “four is the sum of two and two.” This also

⁹⁹ *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 45, Immanuel Kant.

¹⁰⁰ *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min al-Ma‘rifah al-Qabliyah wa Shay’un min Āthārih al-Falsafīyah*, page 32.

doesn't require proof, though it builds on the primary concept that “each two is made up of one and one.”

Thirdly, what is classified as *nazarī* (theoretical knowledge) would be something like saying: “Fifty is the result of thirty and twenty.” This type of knowledge requires *kasb* (acquisition) and intellectual effort.

Still, in many discussions, both *ḍarūrī* (necessary knowledge) and *awwalī* (primary knowledge) are used interchangeably, since neither requires *naẓar* (discursive reasoning), *istidlāl* (inference), or intellectual exertion. For this reason, it's common to use the term *baḍḥiyyāt* (self-evident truths) for both, or to group them under *mabādi' ḍarūriyyah* (necessary first principles), among other expressions.

As for positions regarding *ma'rifah qabliyyah* (a priori knowledge), they fall into two main camps: those who affirm it and reject *ma'rifah ba'diyyah* (a posteriori knowledge), and those who deny the former while affirming the latter. Among those who affirm *ma'rifah qabliyyah*, some argue that it exists in the human soul *before* any sensory experience, while others claim it exists *potentially* (*bi'l-quwwah*) before birth, becoming actual (*bi'l-fi'l*) only through experience after birth.

To illustrate: if we have a large block of wood, it might be said, “this wood contains a chair *potentially*.” But in reality, the chair is not yet in existence. Once that wood is crafted into a chair, only then can it be said to exist *actually* or *bi'l-fi'l*.

This distinction between *wujūd bi'l-quwwah* (potential existence) and *wujūd bi'l-fi'l* (actual existence) is rooted in Aristotelian terminology derived from Greek philosophy.

The real challenge that arises from asserting *ma'rifah qabliyyah*—in the sense that reality depends on knowledge already stored in the mind—is philosophical. A critic might argue: “If such knowledge was implanted in us by the Creator *before*

birth, and external reality is structured according to that knowledge, then who's to say that in the *ākhirah* (afterlife), Allāh doesn't instill within us an entirely different set of cognitions?" In that case, such preloaded knowledge might apply only to this world (*dunyā*), leaving us unable to be certain that it applies in the *ākhirah*.

What is meant here is that an objector might argue: the equation " $1 + 1 = 2$ " only applies *within* this world because it's part of the knowledge pre-stored in humans before birth. Because that knowledge is embedded within us, we perceive in the external world that $1 + 1$ equals 2. However, it's possible that outside this world, things operate differently. For example, it could be that in the *ākhirah* (afterlife), Allāh — exalted is He — implants in our minds a different principle, such as $1 + 1 + 1 = 1$. Therefore, based on the idea of *ma'rifah qabliyyah* (a priori knowledge), the argument against the Christian claim that God can be "one and three at once" wouldn't necessarily hold in *every* context.

But this hypothetical objection contradicts a foundational principle established earlier — namely, that external realities (*al-mawjūdāt al-khārijīyyah*) do not depend on the perception of rational beings. The objector assumes the opposite: that what exists outside conforms to our internal cognition, making *external being* subordinate to the *idrāk* (apprehension) of the self, rather than the other way around.

Now, suppose someone responds by saying: "We don't accept that Allāh — exalted is He — would implant in us different sets of necessary knowledge in the *ākhirah* that are different from what was embedded pre-birth in this world." We would then ask: is such a change *mumtani* (impossible) for Allāh in terms of *imkān 'aqlī* (logical possibility), or is it ruled out due to *naṣṣ shar'ī* (textual evidence)?

From a purely rational standpoint, there is nothing logically impossible in the idea that the *fitrah* — the pre-instilled natural disposition — could be altered in the

afterlife. No Muslim would claim that such a thing lies beyond Allāh's power. Nor is there any revealed text that affirms Allāh has obligated Himself not to instill new forms of knowledge in us after death. Therefore, from both perspectives — reason and revelation — this possibility remains entirely open.

This approach — namely *ma'rifah qabliyyah* (a priori knowledge) as interpreted in that way — opens the door for every false man-made religion and deviant school of thought to use it as a basis for argumentation. Take Zoroastrianism for instance: it eventually developed the notion of two deities — even if they weren't necessarily equal in status — most likely as a result of grappling with the classic *ma'ḍilat ash-sharr* (problem of evil). They proposed one god for good and another for evil. Now, if a Muslim who affirms *ma'rifah qabliyyah* — in the sense that reality conforms to rational pre-knowledge — says to the Zoroastrian: “The argument of mutual exclusion (*dalīl at-tamānu*) proves without a doubt that the deity of the universe must be one and indivisible,” the Zoroastrian could easily respond: “That argument only holds because you assume theoretical and necessary knowledge applies beyond this world. But if you accept that *awwaliyyāt 'aqliyyah* (rational first principles) are not necessarily valid outside this universe, then the conclusion is undermined. After all, every *'ilm naẓarī* (theoretical knowledge) is ultimately based on *'ilm ḍarūrī* (self-evident knowledge). And if your view of a priori rational principles entails that such knowledge doesn't necessarily operate outside of this world — since external reality is thought to conform to that inner knowledge — then God could implant something else into us in another realm, and your argument collapses.”

Now, even though Zoroastrianism — according to the stronger opinion — is not originally a man-made religion but one that became distorted over time (as happened with Judaism and Christianity), its dualistic theology makes it comparable to other altered traditions that align with *al-mithāliyyah* (idealism) — the notion that consciousness precedes external reality. And as we've already discussed, consistency with *uṣūl al-mithāliyyah* (the foundations of idealism)

inevitably leads to *ilhād* (rejection of the truth). A historical example is Ibn ar-Rāwandī, a Mu‘tazilī who adopted idealism and took his line of reasoning to its logical conclusion — ultimately apostatizing.¹⁰¹

The fundamental flaw in the claim made by those who say there must be *ma‘rifah qabliyyah* that includes *awwaliyyāt ‘aqliyyah* before birth lies in reversing the natural order. They put *fīkr* (thought) before *ḥiss* (sense perception), placing consciousness ahead of the external world. So they assume we perceive, for example, that “the whole is greater than the part” because that concept already exists within us. But the truth is the opposite: we recognize that the whole is greater than the part precisely because that’s what we observe in the external world. The characteristics of things and their properties are entirely independent of whether or not we are aware of them.

This ties back to the *ṭarīqah* (method) of *Ahl as-Sunnah* which maintains that *al-mawjūdāt al-khārijīyyah* (external realities) are not dependent on the awareness or perception of *adh-dhawāt al-‘āqilah* (rational beings).

External realities (*al-ashyā’ al-khārijīyyah*) are completely independent of our knowledge or awareness of them. For instance, *an-naqīḍān* (two contradictories) can never coexist or be simultaneously absent in the real world—whether I personally know this or not. Likewise, the whole is always greater than the part, regardless of my awareness of that fact. One of the key problems in the view of those who insist on the necessity of *ma‘rifah qabliyyah* (a priori knowledge) is their failure to properly address the relationship between consciousness and external existence—what philosophers call *al-mas’alah al-jawhariyyah fī al-falsafah* (the fundamental problem in philosophy).

When a Muslim understands that things in the external world exist independently of our recognition or perception of them, it becomes clear that there is no rational

¹⁰¹ *Siyar A‘lām an-Nubalā’* (14/60).

need for pre-birth knowledge to already be stored in the soul. This is a mistake I had made myself before fully analyzing the matter. I used to say that *‘ulūm naẓariyyah* (theoretical knowledge) ultimately return to *‘ulūm ǧarūriyyah* (self-evident knowledge), and that the latter require no reasoning. For example, if someone were to ask, “Why is the whole greater than the part?” we would respond, “Because we observe that in the real world.” If they then ask, “But why do we see it that way?” I had once answered, “Because we *know* necessarily that the whole is greater than the part.”

The problem lies in the assumption behind the question: “Why do we see the whole as greater than the part?” That question assumes a false premise—namely, that external reality is *not* self-sufficient and depends on our cognition. But the truth is the opposite: *al-wāqi‘ al-khārijī* (external reality) exists independently of the perception of *adh-dhawāt al-‘āqilah* (rational selves). Based on that, even *al-ǧarūriyyāt* (self-evident truths) are supported by sensory observation of the external world.

Furthermore, this idealistic perspective naturally leads to *as-safṣaṭah* (radical skepticism). If the external world isn’t completely independent of our perception—and if that’s why humans supposedly need pre-birth knowledge already within them—then how can we ever be sure the world actually is as we see it? If reality is tied to perception, then any change in perception would imply a change in reality itself. But no sound mind would ever accept that. That kind of thinking is pure sophistry.

In contrast, the perspective that upholds *al-ma‘rifah al-ba‘diyyah* (posterior knowledge)—that is, the idea that reason relies on external reality—provides certainty in the possibility of knowledge itself. This is because *al-mawjūdāt al-khārijīyyah* (external existents) are fully independent of us. So, when we perceive them, that perception corresponds to their reality in a way that grants *yaqīn* (certainty). But this doesn’t mean we can fully grasp every aspect of all things, as

some opponents mistakenly assume. For example, we affirm that Allah *subḥānahu wa ta'ālā* rose over the Throne (*istiwā' 'alā al-'arsh*), yet we do not grasp *al-kayfiyyah* (the modality). We understand the meaning without knowing *how*. Hence, affirming certainty in knowledge doesn't imply absolute comprehension of every truth in its entirety.

On the other hand, when the mind is presumed to precede external reality—meaning external reality is shaped or interpreted through *ma'rifah qabliyyah* (a priori knowledge)—there is no guarantee that what we perceive through the senses in the real world corresponds to reality as it actually is. That's because what is perceived is thought to be influenced by the pre-birth knowledge embedded in the soul.

As for textual evidence, the clear implication of the noble verse is that we are born knowing nothing. Ibn Kathīr (May Allah have Mercy On Him) said in his *Tafsīr*:

*“Then Allah mentioned His favor upon His servants by stating that He brought them out from the bellies of their mothers not knowing anything. Then He provides them with hearing, through which they perceive sounds; and sight, by which they perceive what is seen; and hearts, which are the intellects—their place being the heart, according to the sound view, though some say it is the brain. Through the intellect, one distinguishes between harmful and beneficial things. These faculties and senses are given to humans gradually. As they grow older, their hearing, sight, and intellect increase until they reach maturity. Allah granted these to mankind so that they may worship their Lord, using each limb, faculty, and strength in the obedience of their Master.”*¹⁰²

Al-Ṭabarī (May Allah have mercy on Him) said in his *Tafsīr*:

“And He only gave them knowledge and intellect after He brought them out from

¹⁰² *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, 4/506.

*the bellies of their mothers.”*¹⁰³

Al-Baghawī (May Allah have mercy on him) also commented in his *Tafsīr*:

*“Allah, exalted is He, said: ‘And He gave you hearing, sight, and hearts,’ because Allah had created these faculties for them before they were born, but only granted them knowledge after they came out of their mothers’ wombs—‘so that you may give thanks’ for His blessings.”*¹⁰⁴

This interpretation was echoed by many of the *mufasssīrūn* (Qur’anic exegetes), and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī also presented a sound explanation of this topic.¹⁰⁵

This consistent understanding reinforces the position that knowledge (*‘ilm*) is not preloaded into the soul before birth—a rebuttal of the view that affirms *al-ma‘rifah al-qabliyyah* (a priori knowledge) in the metaphysical sense. It confirms that knowledge emerges in conjunction with experience in the world, not before it.

Now I will discuss a priori and Ibn Taymiyyah in more depths than the previous section:

Anyone who thoroughly examines the views and compares the texts found in the works of Shaykh al-Islām (May Allah have mercy on him) will inevitably realize that he does not support *al-ma‘rifah al-qabliyyah* in the sense that reality depends on the existence of certain information in the mind. However, many contemporary scholars wrongly attribute the view of *al-ma‘rifah al-qabliyyah* to Ibn Taymiyyah—based on texts that do not support their claim. These texts only affirm the existence of *ma‘ārif ḍarūriyyah* (necessary knowledge), and this is something we do not disagree with. Indeed, *al-awwalīyāt al-‘aqlīyyah* (rational primaries) are

¹⁰³ *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 17/266.

¹⁰⁴ *Tafsīr al-Baghawī*, 3/90.

¹⁰⁵ *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (20/250–251).

all ḍarūriyyah and are *fiṭrīyyah* (innate), meaning that *al-fiṭrah* requires them. But this does not necessarily mean they were stored in the soul before birth. There is no necessary connection between something being *fiṭrīyyah* and being stored in the soul prior to birth.

Many students of knowledge mistakenly equate the concept of *al-maʿrifah al-qabliyyah* with the idea of *fiṭrīyyah* (innateness), but this is not required. We affirm and uphold the *fiṭrah* from Allah, yet there is no evidence to suggest that the nature of the *fiṭrah* necessitates the pre-storage of information before birth. Therefore, those who argue for the connection between *al-fiṭrah* and *al-qabliyyah* must provide proof of the correlation, and this has not been demonstrated.

Al-fiṭrah is what does not go beyond what is required by *al-islām*, meaning the acceptance of the truth. For this reason, Shaykh al-Islām says: *"It does not follow from the fact that they are born upon al-fiṭrah that they are necessarily born with the belief in al-islām. Indeed, Allah brought us forth from the wombs of our mothers knowing nothing. However, the soundness of the heart, its acceptance, and its will to embrace the truth—al-islām—means that, if left unaltered, it would naturally be a Muslim. And this cognitive and practical capacity that naturally entails al-islām, unless hindered by an obstacle, is the fiṭrah of Allah with which He created humanity."*¹⁰⁶

He also says elsewhere: *"The Qurʾān and as-sunnah both indicate what has been agreed upon: that creation is born with the dīn of Allah, which is the knowledge of Allah and acknowledgment of Him. This is the natural consequence of their fiṭrah, and it should manifest in them unless something prevents it. Therefore, the occurrence of this knowledge in them is not dependent on the presence of a condition, but rather on the absence of a hindrance."*¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā, 4/247

¹⁰⁷ Darʿ Taʾarūḍ al-ʿAql wa an-Naql, 8/454

Ibn Taymiyyah (May Allah have mercy on him) explained in multiple places that the fact that some knowledge is *fiṭrīyyah* and that *al-fiṭrah* is the natural religion does not imply that this knowledge existed before the person's birth. He said:

"If it is established that *al-fiṭrah* requires knowledge and love of Allah, the objective is achieved, even if not everyone's *fiṭrah* is independent in acquiring this. Many need a specific cause for their *fiṭrah* to be actualized, such as teaching and guidance.

*For Allah sent the messengers, revealed the books, and called people to the demands of their fiṭrah—to know Allah and to believe in His Oneness. If there is no obstacle preventing al-fiṭrah, it responds to Allah and His messengers, because of what is inherent in it. And it is well known that when it is said 'every newborn is born upon al-fiṭrah,' it does not mean that they are born already knowing Allah and acknowledging His Oneness in a way they can fully understand. Allah says: 'And Allah brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing' (al-Nahl: 78). We know with certainty that a newborn does not have knowledge of this matter, but being born on al-fiṭrah means that al-fiṭrah requires this and demands it according to its nature."*¹⁰⁸

Ibn al-Qayyim (May Allah have mercy on him) says: *"It should be understood that when it is said, 'He was born upon al-fiṭrah or upon Islam or upon this millah, or was created ḥanīf,' it does not mean that when he came out of his mother's womb, he knew this religion and desired it. For Allah says: 'And Allah brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing' (al-Nahl: 78). However, his fiṭrah naturally inclines towards Islam due to its closeness and love. The very nature of al-fiṭrah necessitates acknowledging its Creator, loving Him, and dedicating the religion to Him. The demands and requirements of al-fiṭrah manifest gradually, depending on the completeness of the fiṭrah as long as there is no opposing obstacle."*¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql* (461/8).

¹⁰⁹ *Shifā' al-'Alīl fī Masā'il al-Qadā' wa al-Qadar wa al-Ḥikmah wa al-Ta'līl* (p. 289), Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah.

Some contemporary scholars have claimed that the primary *‘uqūlīyyāt* (intellectual principles) are present in the soul before birth, but some argued that these principles exist in a potential state rather than an actual one. They then contended that this knowledge comes into actualization with sensory experience, suggesting that it is "*like molds existing in the human being in a potential state, which become active through the influence of the external reality.*" ¹¹⁰ ‘Abd Allāh al-Dajānī. However, the essence of this argument is that knowledge is not truly *qablīyyah* (prior knowledge).

Some, however, have made a mistake in proposing a temporal precedence, and in claiming existence as potential and actual according to some philosophers' interpretation. This is entirely illogical and, I assert, that affirming such existence is a form of *mithāliyyah* (idealism) that holds no reality whatsoever if it refers to something that exists in the external world. Ibn Taymiyyah confirms that the *mumkin* (possible) has no attribute before its actual existence, and proving such existence is nothing but pure imagination. ¹¹¹



¹¹⁰ *Manhaj Ibn Taymiyyah al-Ma‘rifī* (p. 342).

¹¹¹ I had a lengthy explanation of this issue in my future work called "The Issue of Ex-Materia vs. Ex-Nihilo Clarifying Ibn Taymiyyah's Position".

Chapter Six: The Hostility of Materialism and the Obstruction of Vision:

George Berkeley (1685–1753), who was appointed as a tutor at Trinity College in Dublin in 1707 and then ordained as a deacon and later a priest in the Anglican Church in 1709, was primarily focused on defending religious *īmān* (faith) against its opponents. His philosophy revolved around the *mafhūm* (concept) of divinity, which served as the central pillar of his thought. This theological defense led him to confront one of the foundational *masā'il falsafiyyah* (philosophical problems) regarding reality and knowledge. “The idea of divinity is the central idea in the philosophy of George Berkeley.”¹¹²

Berkeley saw the belief in *māddah* (matter) as the cornerstone upon which the arguments of atheists were built. Because his orientation was toward the defense of religious belief, his intellectual confrontation with *al-māddiyyah* (materialism) became central to his project.

*“The existence of matter, as he says, was the main foundation for atheists. And since he had chosen from the start to defend religion, he began by combating materialism.” “He believes that affirming the existence of matter inevitably leads to materialism and atheism.”*¹¹³

Berkeley proposed a vision of reality rooted entirely in *la-māddiyyah* (immaterialism), framed by a theocentric orientation. For him, *wujūd* (existence) is nothing but *idrāk* (perception), and thus he denied the existence of matter

¹¹² *Oxford Guide to Philosophy*, edited by Ted Honderich, Vol. 1, p. 154 (summarized). *Fikrat al-Ulūhiyyah fī Falsafat Bārklī*, Firyāl Ḥasan Khalīfah, Maktabat al-Jundī, Egypt, 1st Edition, 1418 AH / 1997 CE, p. 2.

¹¹³ *Al-Naẓariyyah al-Māddiyyah fī al-Ma'rifah*, Roger Garaudy, p. 11, with slight adaptation. *Fikrat al-Ulūhiyyah fī Falsafat Bārklī*, p. 2.

altogether. Reality, in his view, consists solely of minds and ideas — with the ultimate locus being the divine intellect: “*A fully immaterial world, with a theological focus, in which existence is perception... he affirms the non-existence of matter, asserting that only mind and ideas exist. The world is composed of ideas that cannot exist independent of mind — particularly, the divine mind.*” ¹¹⁴

Berkeley argued that the ideas we perceive through sensation are the true reality — and that these ideas cannot exist independently of the perceiving mind. Based on this principle, he used radical *dhātīyyah* (subjectivity) as a path to reject the existence of matter. From his perspective, the logical consequence of asserting that "existence is perception" is the concept of *al-anā al-wuḥdāniyyah* (solipsism).

He sees that the ideas directly perceived by the senses are the real things — and that they do not exist independently of the mind. Based on this principle, and through radical subjectivity, he denies the existence of matter. The necessary outcome of this principle is nothing but solipsism, which is the inevitable result of asserting that existence is perception. ¹¹⁵

The doctrine of *al-anā al-wuḥdāniyyah* (solipsism) holds that nothing exists outside the self. Since existence is defined by one's own *idrāk* (perception), the very idea of an external world loses meaning. This extreme view is considered by many to be philosophically dangerous: “*The most damning accusation that can be leveled against any philosopher is the claim that his doctrine leads to solipsism.*”

¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ *Fikrat al-Ulūhiyyah fī Falsafat Bārklī*, pp. 30 and 7 (lightly adapted).

¹¹⁵ *Fikrat al-Ulūhiyyah fī Falsafat Bārklī*, p. 7 (lightly adapted).

¹¹⁶ *Tārīkh al-Falsafah al-Ḥadīthah*, William Kelley Wright, translated by Maḥmūd Sayyid Aḥmad, reviewed and introduced by Imām ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Imām, Dār al-Tanwīr li-l-Ṭibā‘ah wa-l-Nashr, Egypt – Lebanon – Tunisia, 3rd edition, 2016, p. 94 (summarized).

Philosopher Georgi Plekhanov was direct in his criticism of *al-mithāliyyah adh-dhātīyyah* (subjective idealism). He saw engaging in debate with someone who embraces such a worldview as fruitless, especially if it leads to denying even one's own birth — a logical consequence of solipsism, since nothing outside the “self” is acknowledged.

“As for subjective idealism, I find no reason to debate with one who finds intellectual sustenance in a philosophy that logically leads to solipsism. The only thing to do is to ask such a person to follow their idea to its end. But for someone like that, following it to its end would mean denying even the fact of their own birth. A solipsist, so long as he denies the existence of anything outside his ‘self,’ commits a gross logical fallacy if he accepts that his mother existed or had any existence independent of his mind. Moreover, no one is conscious of themselves during birth, so the solipsist has no reason whatsoever to claim he was born of a woman.”¹¹⁷

Yahyā Huwaydī's interpretation of Berkeley's thought was not entirely accurate in denying that *al-wāqi' al-mawḍū'ī* (objective reality) was dependent on the self in Berkeley's view. Though Berkeley consistently used the word “*idea*” to refer to sensed things, Dr. Huwaydī rendered it as “*image*”, which led to a reinterpretation suggesting that Berkeley did not deny the external world — a view Huwaydī endorses.

“Despite Berkeley's consistent use of the word ‘idea’ to refer to the perceived object, Dr. Huwaydī in his book Bārklī translates it as ‘image.’ This allows for an alternative interpretation of Berkeley's views, one which affirms that he did not, in fact, deny the existence of an external world — a position Dr. Huwaydī adopts.”

¹¹⁷ *Al-Mu'allafāt al-Falsafīyyah*, Georg Plekhanov, translated by Fu'ād Ayyūb, Dār Dimashq li-l-Ṭibā'ah wa-l-Nashr, Vol. 1, p. 415 (lightly adapted).

118

Berkeley labeled his school of thought *la-māddiyyah* (immaterialism), not *al-mithāliyyah* (idealism), to emphasize its opposition to *al-māddiyyah* (materialism). In this view, there is nothing in existence but spirits, and what people call matter has no existence apart from being perceived: “*He coined the term immaterialism to express his metaphysical doctrine, which he saw as the direct antithesis of materialism. In reality, there are only spirits, and what is commonly called ‘matter’ has no independent existence — it exists only insofar as it is perceived.*”

119

Berkeley argued that *al-maḥsūsāt* (sensible objects) have no *wujūd* (existence) apart from the *‘aql* (mind or soul). He rejected the notion that fire, for example, causes burning on its own. Instead, he attributed all causation in the universe to the direct *fi l ilāhī* (divine act): “*It is clear that sensible objects exist only in the mind or soul.*” ¹²⁰ “*Fire is not the cause of burning... the divine act alone is the true cause of motion in the universe.*” ¹²¹

His doctrine was called *la-māddiyyah* (immaterialism), or the denial of matter altogether. Philosophically, it was classified—alongside Fichte’s view—as a form of *mithāliyyah dhātiyyah* (subjective idealism), where existence is viewed as an extension of the self.

“*Berkeley’s doctrine is called immaterialism, the abolition of matter. It is also referred to, along with Fichte’s view, as subjective idealism—since existence here*

¹¹⁸ *Fikrat al-Ulūhiyyah fī Falsafat Bārklī*, p. 46 (lightly adapted).

¹¹⁹ *Mawsū‘at Laland al-Falsafīyyah*, Arabic translation by Khalīl Aḥmad Khalīl, 2nd edition, 2001, Vol. 2, p. 627 (lightly adapted). Also referenced in *Al-Mu‘jam al-Falsafī*, Jamīl Ṣalībā, Vol. 2, p. 338.

¹²⁰ *Al-Muḥāwarāt ath-Thalāth bayna Hīlās wa Faylūnūs*, George Berkeley, trans. Yaḥyā Huwaydī, National Center for Translation, 2015, p. 104 (abridged).

¹²¹ *Fikrat al-Ulūhiyyah fī Falsafat Bārklī*, p. 133.

*is nothing more than an extension of the self.”*¹²²

Such a stance, when consistently held, leads to predictable results. Even if one doesn't explicitly label his view as idealist—or even denies being such—this alignment with *al-mithāliyyah adh-dhātīyyah* will inevitably carry its philosophical consequences.

Berkeley's attitude presents a focused and condensed example of how some have opposed *al-māddīyyah* (materialism) in the name of defending religious doctrines. A similar situation unfolded in the Shi'ī religious establishment when *al-falsafah al-māddīyyah al-mārksiyyah* (Marxist materialist philosophy) began to spread: “*While the East was heedlessly satisfied with its achievements, Marxism sounded the alarm. It was a fierce danger, one that shook the religious establishment as it invaded homes. The institution woke up, relying on its human depth, defending its faith threatened by Marxist atheism, and its values challenged by the organized advance of materialist thought. But its defense was generally passive.*”¹²³

The criticisms of materialism continued from various intellectual circles. For instance, Ṭabāṭabā'ī noted: “*Philosophical inquiries, whether divine or materialist...*”¹²⁴ In this dichotomy, *al-falsafah al-ilāhiyyah* (theistic philosophy) is treated as fundamentally distinct from *al-falsafah al-māddīyyah* (materialist philosophy), based on the widespread assumption that religion is spiritual and idealistic, while materialism is inherently atheistic. Berkeley's immaterialist view, then, was essentially a religiously motivated reconstruction of these metaphysical

¹²² *Ad-Dafātir al-Falsafīyyah*, Lebanon, Vol. 1, p. 33.

¹²³ From the introduction to *Uṣūl al-Falsafah wa-l-Manhaj ar-Riyālī*, Muḥammad Ḥusayn aṭ-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, introduction and commentary by Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, trans. 'Ammār Abū Raghīf, Dār al-Ma'ārif li-l-Maṭbū'āt, Vol. 1, p. 15.

¹²⁴ *Uṣūl al-Falsafah wa-l-Manhaj ar-Riyālī*, Vol. 1, p. 76.

positions.

Describing the transition that Europe underwent from the medieval period to the ‘aṣr an-naḥḍah (Renaissance), Muḥammad Quṭb notes how the continent gradually turned away from religion and leaned more and more into *al-māddiyyah* (materialism), rather than leaping in a single bound: “*The trend that detached from religion and moved toward materialism did not jump all at once from religious spirituality to non-religious materialism... but with each step, it moved further into materialism and further away from God.*” ¹²⁵

In Quṭb's view, there is a fundamental divide between religious spirituality and the worldview of materialism. In his book *Al-Insān bayna al-Māddiyyah wa-l-Islām*, he critiques a perception of the human being that sees nothing beyond the physical: “*The materialistic and animalistic view of the human being—one that denies spiritual dimensions and higher ideals, and believes only in the body and the reality accessible to the senses.*” ¹²⁶

However, it would be inaccurate to say that *al-falsafah al-māddiyyah* (materialist philosophy) entirely dismisses ideals or *al-jawānib ar-rūḥiyyah* (spiritual aspects). In fact, materialism is a philosophy in itself and represents, from its proponents' perspective, a kind of spiritual distillation of the age. Within this worldview, *al-fikr* (thought) and matter are both treated as real, though thought is seen as secondary—arising from the *al-maḥsūs* (perceived substance), often referred to by the term “matter.” The confusion often arises when people conflate the morally pejorative sense of being “materialistic”—as someone devoid of ideals—with the technical, *falsafī* (philosophical) meaning of materialism as a position in *naẓariyyat*

¹²⁵ *Madāhib Fikriyyah Mu‘āṣirah*, Muḥammad Quṭb, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, Egypt, 9th ed., 1422 AH / 2001 CE, p. 262.

¹²⁶ *Al-Insān bayna al-Māddiyyah wa-l-Islām*, Muḥammad Quṭb, Dār al-Shurūq, Cairo, Egypt, 12th ed., 1418 AH / 1997 CE, p. 56.

al-maʿrifah (epistemology). But the two domains—ethics and theory of knowledge—must be kept distinct.¹²⁷

Associating every person indulging in worldly pleasures with *al-falsafah al-māddiyyah* (materialist philosophy) reflects a distorted understanding of the concept within its proper *falsafī* (philosophical) context. For instance, to label someone a follower of Plato or Berkeley as a materialist simply because they drink alcohol, steal, or commit violence is a categorical mistake. One’s behavior and the classification of their *madhhab falsafī* (philosophical school) are two distinct matters: “*There is no relation between ‘matter’—which in philosophy refers to the objective reality that exists independently of human consciousness—and drunkenness, debauchery, and similar behaviors, which materialism considers forms of escapism from reality.*”¹²⁸

Regarding the claim that materialism “does not rise above sensory perception”¹²⁹ if this means it rejects anything beyond the empirical and sensible, then it is a fair description—since, by this view, only what can be sensed has *wujūd* (existence), a stance once held by the *Samanīyyah* and affirmed by Ibn Taymiyyah. However, if the claim intends to portray materialism as restricted merely to raw sensory data without rational development, that would be inaccurate. For *al-māddiyyah* considers *idrāk ḥissī* (sensory perception) as the lowest form of knowledge—preceding the intellective—but ultimately gives priority to *al-maʿrifah al-ʿaqliyyah* (rational knowledge) which abstracts and universalizes from those sensory inputs. Thus, it sees rational cognition as more elevated than empirical knowledge, even if it follows it chronologically. But what is it exactly that Muḥammad Quṭb is trying to establish through his

¹²⁷ *Mabādiʾ Awallīyyah fī al-Falsafah*, Georges Politzer, p. 22.

¹²⁸ From the introduction by al-Mahdāwī to *Al-Māddiyyah wa-l-Mithālīyyah fī al-Falsafah*, Georges Politzer, trans. and annotated by Ismāʿīl al-Mahdāwī, 1957 CE, p. 6.

¹²⁹ *Al-Insān bayna al-Māddiyyah wa-l-Islām*, p. 56

criticism? He seems to charge materialism with both remaining at the level of the senses and denying the soul: “*It does not rise above sensory perception and does not believe in the soul.*”¹³⁰

But what is meant by *rūḥ* (soul) here, and in what sense is it being denied? What is the objective behind establishing belief in it? Quṭb continues: “*As for the soul—that great energy which the West does not believe in—its task may not be...*”¹³¹

In any case, conflating ethical evaluations with *mafhūm falsafī* (philosophical concepts) leads to misunderstandings. One must distinguish between the philosophical framework of materialism and the moral conduct of individuals, which are not inherently tied.

It becomes clear that much of the criticism directed at al-māddiyyah (materialism) aims to affirm the existence of something that, while not maḥsūs (empirically perceptible), is still claimed to exist—namely the *rūḥ* (soul), often described as a “great energy.” Yet after asserting this, critics often avoid delving into endless *jadāl mītāfīzīqī* (metaphysical debate).

Mustafa Maḥmūd writes: “Islam rejects both al-falsafah al-mithāliyyah (idealist philosophy) and al-falsafah al-māddiyyah (materialist philosophy) at the same time.”¹³²

He elaborates: “It rejects philosophical idealism because it denies the existence of other people and of an objective world as a truth independent of the mind.” “Islam

¹³⁰ *Al-Insān bayna al-Māddiyyah wa-l-Islām*, p. 56.

¹³¹ *Al-Insān bayna al-Māddiyyah wa-l-Islām*, p. 56.

¹³² *Dialogue with My Atheist Friend*, Mustafa Mahmoud, Dār al-‘Awda, 1986, p. 134.

also rejects materialist philosophy because, although it affirms the objective world, it denies anything beyond it.”¹³³



¹³³ *Dialogue with My Atheist Friend*, p. 135.

Chapter Seven: idealism And Materialism In Islam, It's Beginning:

Ibn Taymiyyah notes that the earliest emergence of kalām (theological dialectic) in Islam took place after the first century Hijri, initiated by figures like al-Ja'd ibn Dirham and al-Jahm ibn Ṣafwān. This discourse was later taken up by followers of 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, such as Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf and others. The central theme in the early days of this kalām was focused on infādh al-wa'īd (the execution of divine threat), with the belief that those who enter Hell will never exit it.

*“The first appearance of kalām in Islam came after the first century, through al-Ja'd ibn Dirham and al-Jahm ibn Ṣafwān. Then it passed on to the companions of 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, such as Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf and the like. 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd and Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' only made kalām public concerning the enforcement of the divine threat, believing that none will exit the Hellfire once they enter it.”*¹³⁴

Among the earliest prominent names in 'ilm al-kalām (dialectical theology) is undoubtedly Jahm ibn Ṣafwān, whose views led to the formation of the *Jahmiyyah* sect. *“It is reported from him that he used to say: ‘I do not say that Allah, Exalted be He, is a thing, because that would be likening Him to things.’”*¹³⁵

Although his ideas reached us through later transmission, the overall content paints a picture of what he believed. One of the most important early critiques of Jahm's ideas is found in *ar-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyyah* by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal: *“What we have received about Jahm... he was from Khurāsān, from the town of Termidh. He was a man of argumentation and disputation, and most of his discussions were about*

¹³⁴ *Minhāj as-Sunnah an-Nabawiyyah fī Naqḍ Kalām ash-Shī'ah wa al-Qadariyyah*, vol. 8, p. 5 (adapted).

¹³⁵ *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, vol. 1, p. 338; see also: *Kitāb at-Tawḥīd*, Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, ed. Bakr Ṭūbāl Ūglī & Muḥammad Ārūsh, Dār Ṣādir, Beirut, p. 168.

Allah, the Exalted. He met a group from among the polytheists called the Samaniyyah. They said to him: 'We will debate you. If you defeat us, we will follow your religion. If we defeat you, you follow ours.' One of their questions was: 'Do you claim to have a god?' He replied, 'Yes.' They asked, 'Have you seen Him?' He said, 'No.' They asked, 'Have you heard His speech?' He said, 'No.' 'Have you smelled His scent?' 'No.' 'Have you touched or sensed Him?' 'No.' They then said: 'How do you know He is a god?' Jahm became confused and for forty days did not know whom to worship. Eventually, he adopted a proof similar to that used by the heretical Christians, who claim that the spirit in Jesus is the spirit of God, and that God enters His creation and speaks through them. Jahm told the Samanī: 'Don't you claim that there is a spirit within you?' The man said: 'Yes.' Jahm asked: 'Have you seen it?' 'No.' 'Heard it?' 'No.' 'Touched it?' 'No.' Then Jahm said: 'Likewise is God—unseen, unheard, untouchable, and imperceptible—hidden from sight, and not in any place more than another.'”¹³⁶

This raises the question: who were the Samaniyyah, the group Jahm debated? Al-Bīrūnī refers to them under the variant name Shamaniyyah and writes: *"The group known as the Shamaniyyah, though strongly opposed to the Brahmins, were closer to India than others. In ancient times, Khurāsān, Persia, Iraq, Mosul, and the Levant were under their religion."*¹³⁷

*"I did not find a book by the Shamaniyyah nor anyone from whom I could deduce their doctrines. So, when I narrate about them, it is through the intermediary of the Iranian Shahrastānī, though I believe his reports are inaccurate or not sourced directly."*¹³⁸

¹³⁶ *Ar-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyyah wa az-Zanādiqah*, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, ed. Ṣabrī ibn Salāmah Shāhīn, Dār ath-Thabāt li an-Nashr wa at-Tawzī', 1st ed., 1424 AH / 2003 CE, pp. 93–97.

¹³⁷ *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind min Maqūlah Maqbūlah fī al-'Aql aw Mardhūlah*, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, Maṭba'at Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah, Ḥaydarābād ad-Dakkān, India, 1377 AH / 1958 CE, p. 15.

¹³⁸ *Tahqīq mā li-l-Hind*, p. 206.

This indicates that the available information on them is unreliable and should be compared with other sources. Still, it is clear that the Samaniyyah once had widespread influence, particularly in India, where they stood opposed to the Barāhima—the Brahmins, the top of the caste hierarchy.

When they debated Jahm, he didn't offer a fundamentally new argument, but merely echoed the views of their opponents, the Brahmins, who spoke of a God beyond all limits and imperceptible to the senses. This debate may be considered one of the earliest clearly recorded confrontations between al-mithāliyyah (idealism) and al-māddiyyah (materialism) in the Islamic tradition. It left a lasting imprint on intellectual history, forming the basis for Jahm's distinctive ideas, which would become: *"The beginning of the turning point that steered methods of thought toward the rational-philosophical methodology of the mutakallimūn, paving the way for the emergence of the philosophical stage."*¹³⁹

ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī also discusses the Samaniyyah, reporting: *"They denied rational reflection and inference, claiming that nothing can be known except through the five external senses."*¹⁴⁰

The common claim that the Samanīyah (or Shamanīyah) entirely denied the validity of nazar (rational consideration) and istidlāl (rational inference) is not entirely accurate. Their historical debate with Jahm ibn Ṣafwān itself indicates otherwise. While their reasoning may have been fundamentally rooted in ḥiss (sensory perception), it was still, nonetheless, a form of rational argumentation. Accusations of irrationality have traditionally been directed at adherents of materialist worldviews, and in this case, it seems to follow the same pattern.

¹³⁹ *Materialist Currents in Arab-Islamic Philosophy*, Ḥusayn Marwah, Dār al-Fārābī, Beirut, 1978, vol. 1, p. 610 (adapted).

¹⁴⁰ *Al-Farq bayna al-Firaq*, ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, ed. Muḥammad ʿUthmān Khisht, Maktabat Ibn Sīnā li-n-Nashr wa at-Tawzīʿ, Cairo, p. 235.

Ibn Taymiyyah comments critically on those who accused the Samanīyah of denying the basic rational principles of reality, stating: “*They are said to reject the mutawātirāt (widely transmitted reports), mujarrabāt (empirical experiences), and badīhiyyāt (self-evident truths). But this—and Allah knows best—is likely a false accusation against them.*”¹⁴¹

Had the Samanīyah indeed denied all forms of *nazar* and *istidlāl*, they would have simply rejected Jahm’s attempt to draw analogical proof from the soul to affirm the existence of God. But they didn’t. Ibn Taymiyyah observes this point further: “*They say: ‘This [i.e., the soul] is known to exist as you have described—but why then must we affirm its counterpart (i.e., God)?’ For according to their own principles, the ruling of a thing cannot be known on the basis of its counterpart.*”

142

This line of reasoning was absent from their exchange with Jahm, and it seems clear that Jahm himself never understood their philosophy to be based on such a denial.

The term Samanīyah is itself ambiguous. It could refer to a geographical region, a historical figure, or even a religious symbol. Arabic sources vary widely on the matter. Some trace the name to Saman, said to be the name of an idol; others to Sūmanāt, a town in India; while others suggest a derivation from Sūmnān. The pronunciation also varies: some double the “mīm,” others do not; some use a “sīn,” others a “shīn.” In still other accounts, they are referred to as Sumnāyah.

This range of variation suggests the possibility that multiple groups or local traditions were conflated under this label in early Islamic texts.

Contrary to what some polemicists have claimed, the Samanīyah did not insist that

¹⁴¹ *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, King Fahd Complex edition, vol. 3, p. 450.

¹⁴² *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, King Fahd Complex edition, vol. 2, p. 332.

all knowledge must be directly derived from ḥiss (sense perception) experienced by every individual. Rather, their principle was that the origin of knowledge must be ḥiss—even if the immediate knower had not personally experienced the sensed reality. For example, when someone reports a fact that they have sensed, it is acceptable for another to acquire knowledge of that fact through their testimony, even without experiencing it firsthand. Ibn Taymiyyah captures this nuance when he states: *"The Samanīyah say: 'That which cannot be perceived by the senses has no reality.' Yet a person may come to know something through his senses or through the report of someone who has perceived it. This is supported by the fact that these people exist; one of them must acknowledge the existence of his parents, grandparents, his birth, past events in his land, and his need for the reports of others concerning people and lands. All of these things are only known to them through transmitted information."*¹⁴³

Such a view, far from being a rejection of all reasoning, reveals a framework that emphasizes a foundational connection to ḥiss while still allowing for derivative knowledge through report (khabar). This does not imply a dismissal of nazar (rational analysis) or istidlāl (rational inference). Ibn Taymiyyah explicitly clarifies: *"Whoever only affirms what is perceptible through the senses is disputing the reality of external existents—not the intelligibles of the mind (ma'qūlāt dhihniyyah)."*¹⁴⁴

What distinguished the Samanīyah's methodology was their clear distinction between rational proofs rooted in ḥiss and those detached from it. They considered the latter—those lacking a sensory basis—to be epistemically weak. It was this view that provoked accusations from their opponents who claimed they denied all forms of rationality. In truth, what the Samanīyah rejected were the kinds of

¹⁴³ *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, King Fahd Complex ed., vol. 3, p. 452.

¹⁴⁴ *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 5, p. 169.

istidlālāt (rational demonstrations) used to prove the existence of entities beyond sensory perception.

When Jahm ibn Ṣafwān debated them, he attempted to use an argument to affirm the existence of non-empirical entities, or mujarradāt khārijīyyah (external abstracts). This argumentative structure would later be echoed by other philosophers, such as al-Kindī, who said: *"To ask about the Creator—exalted is He—in this visible world and in the intelligible world (al-‘ālam al-‘aqlī), is like asking: if there is something in the body, then how do we know about it? The answer is: it is like the soul in the body. Nothing from its administration occurs except by the soul, and it can only be known through the body by observing the traces of the soul’s governance. Just as we know of the soul’s presence through the body, so too we know that the visible world cannot be governed except by a world that is not seen."*¹⁴⁵

The editor of al-Kindī’s Philosophical Epistles, Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Hādī Abū Rīdah, comments on this passage: *"It is remarkable that this argument resembles—according to reports—the very discussion that took place between Jahm and one of the Samanīyah. The Samanīyah asked Jahm how he came to know of God, and Jahm answered by drawing an analogy between the soul and the body. Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal also mentioned this episode."*¹⁴⁶

Jahm ibn Ṣafwān’s theological system was marked by a distinctly mithālī (idealistic) tendency. His reliance on abstract reasoning and detachment from ḥiss (sense perception) laid the groundwork for major doctrinal shifts that reverberated through later sects. Ibn Taymiyyah poignantly describes the extent of this influence: *"The resemblances promoted by the Jahmiyyah—those who negate the attributes—deeply affected people’s hearts, to the point that the truth brought by the Messenger, which accords with reason, no longer even crosses their minds, nor*

¹⁴⁵ *Rasā’il al-Kindī al-Falsafīyyah*, vol. 1, p. 174.

¹⁴⁶ *Rasā’il al-Kindī al-Falsafīyyah*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Hādī Abū Rīdah, vol. 1, p. 174.

can they conceive of it." ¹⁴⁷

Jahm's commitment to an idealistic framework compelled him to pursue the logical consequences of his premises without reservation. Since he denied that Allah could be known through ḥiss, he consequently held that anything perceptible must be other than Allah—thus, created. To affirm otherwise would collapse his foundational claim.

For example, had he accepted that Allah could be heard (as in the case of revelation), he would have had to concede that something of the divine enters the domain of perception. But he refused to accept this implication, which led him to assert that the Qur'an is created, in order to prevent any possibility of divine speech being perceptible through hearing. This extreme position left a profound imprint on later theologians—especially the Mu'tazilah—who adopted and expanded on Jahm's view. They stated: *"He, exalted is He, created the Qur'an and originated it for the benefit of His servants."*¹⁴⁸ *"He cannot be perceived by any of the senses."*¹⁴⁹

This alignment with Jahm's principles placed the Mu'tazilah in a difficult position. Theologically, it was deeply embarrassing for a sect that claimed to represent the authentic creed to be seen as borrowing its key doctrines from a figure whose views were regarded as deviant. Since Jahm's views clearly predated theirs, critics could—and often did—accuse them of simply repackaging his ideas with philosophical embellishments.

To counter this charge, some Mu'tazilī apologists attempted to reframe the historical narrative. They revived and circulated a late account of Jahm's debate

¹⁴⁷ *Dar' Ta'ārūḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 2, pp. 308–309.

¹⁴⁸ *Khalq al-Qur'ān*, from *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa al-'Adl* by al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Aybārī, supervised by Tāhā Ḥusayn, Committee for Authorship, Translation and Publication, Cairo, p. 224.

¹⁴⁹ *Al-Minhāj fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī, ed. Sabine Schmidtke, Dār al-'Ulūm al-'Arabiyyah, Beirut, 1st edition, 1428 AH / 2007 CE, p. 15.

with the Samanīyah, aiming to suggest that he, in fact, adopted his views from them—not that the Mu‘tazilah took them from him. This rhetorical maneuver served to distance their doctrine from his, at least in appearance.

The Jahmiyyah—the theological school named after Jahm ibn Ṣafwān—would eventually develop and refine his claim that it is impermissible to describe God as a "thing." Faced with scriptural evidence that contradicted a categorical denial of the word *shay’* (thing) being applied to Allah, they reformulated their stance using a seemingly more balanced expression: “He is a thing unlike other things”.¹⁵⁰

This formulation was a reaction to explicit textual evidence affirming the use of the word *shay’* for Allah, such as the verse: “*Say: What thing is the greatest in testimony? Say: Allah.*”¹⁵¹ Commenting on this, it is reported in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī that: “Allah called Himself a 'thing'.”¹⁵²

The phrase “a thing unlike other things” preserves the basic theological stance of Jahm—that Allah should not be compared to anything perceptible—while allowing for the scriptural usage of the term *shay’*. However, this phrasing contains an inherent tension: it affirms and then negates the same concept. To declare that Allah is a “thing” only to immediately strip Him of all resemblance to other things is, in effect, to return to the original denial—just in more guarded language.

Some attempted to resolve this tension by arguing that the word thing used in the beginning of the phrase refers to something completely distinct from what is being negated at the end. But such a maneuver falters upon closer inspection. If all forms of resemblance (*tashābuh*) are absolutely negated, then what remains cannot reasonably be called a thing at all—unless some level of resemblance or shared

¹⁵⁰ *Al-Radd ‘alā al-Jahmiyyah wa al-Zanādiqah*, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, pp. 93–99.

¹⁵¹ Qur’an 6:19: “*Say: What thing is the greatest in testimony? Say: Allah.*”

¹⁵² *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, Dār Ibn Kathīr, Damascus–Beirut, 1st edition, 1423 AH / 2002 CE, p. 1830.

meaning exists that makes the use of the term *shay'* meaningful.¹⁵³

This same foundational notion would later be expressed in various formulations across sects. The Mu'tazilah, for instance, stated: "*He is not a body (jism), nor an accident ('araḍ), nor is He like either in any conceivable way.*"¹⁵⁴ In other works, they summarized it even more succinctly: "*He has no likeness.*"¹⁵⁵

This intellectual atmosphere was fertile ground for the absorption of foreign philosophical traditions, particularly those introduced through translation movements. As Greek and Hellenistic philosophies made their way into Arabic through translation, they began to be incorporated, adapted, and restructured within competing theological frameworks.

The impact of this intellectual influx was not neutral. These imported *mithālī* (idealistic) systems didn't just inform theology—they began to reshape it. Theological factions gradually adopted and codified these frameworks into relatively stable systems, arming themselves with philosophical arsenals to defend their views and to engage in polemics against rivals.

In this climate, idealism did not merely influence the sects—it consumed them.



¹⁵³ See my article "*The Misunderstanding of Athari Doctrine on Universals and Common Measure by the Ash'ariyah*" <https://telegra.ph/The-Misunderstanding-of-Athari-Doctrine-on-Universals-and-Common-Measure-by-the-Ashariyah-03-10>

¹⁵⁴ *Al-Minhāj fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, al-Zamakhsharī, p. 16.

¹⁵⁵ *Risālat Iblīs ilā Ikhwānīh al-Manaḥīs*, p. 31.

Chapter Eight: Ibn Taymiyyah And Idealism:

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah firmly defended the creed and methodology of Ahl al-Ḥadīth—those who not only transmitted prophetic reports but made them the foundation for their beliefs, legal rulings, and theological disputes. Contrary to what some might assume, this group was never limited to mere narrators of prophetic sayings; rather, they were scholars who evaluated ḥadīth critically, reflected deeply on their meanings, and expressed those meanings in carefully reasoned theological positions. They opposed any innovation (bid‘ah) in religion and insisted that every statement attributed to the Prophet ﷺ or his Companions be supported by an authentic chain of transmission (isnād).

Ibn Taymiyyah writes: *“By Ahl al-Ḥadīth, we do not mean only those who merely listen to ḥadīth, write it down, and narrate it. Rather, we mean all those who are most entitled to preserve it, understand it—both outwardly and inwardly—and follow it, both outwardly and inwardly. The same applies to Ahl al-Qur’ān.”*¹⁵⁶

This clarification underscores that their engagement with revelation was not superficial. Their method included deep understanding (fiqh) and active implementation.

Importantly, the early scholars of Ahl al-Ḥadīth did not reject rational inquiry (nazar) or deductive reasoning (istidlāl) as such. What they rejected was the kalam—the speculative and often abstract reasoning style developed by the mutakallimūn (dialectical theologians). Their critics, however, accused them of rejecting reason altogether. This was a gross misrepresentation.

Ibn Taymiyyah explains: *“Allah has commanded reflection, inference, contemplation, and deliberation in many verses. Not a single person from the Salaf*

¹⁵⁶ *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 4, p. 95

*of the Ummah or from the scholars of the Sunnah is known to have rejected these practices. In fact, they are unanimously agreed upon regarding what the Sharī'ah calls for—namely, reflection, contemplation, and inference. However, the confusion arises from the ambiguity in the use of words like 'rational inquiry' and 'speculation.' What they rejected was the false reasoning and arguments innovated by the speculative theologians. So, when they rejected these methods, it was misunderstood as a rejection of all forms of rational inquiry."*¹⁵⁷

He further writes: *"The people of truth do not reject rational proofs in themselves, nor what the intellect confirms as valid. What they reject is the claim that certain rational arguments contradict the Qur'an and Sunnah. Praise be to Allah, there exists no sound proof that genuinely contradicts revelation. Nor is there any accepted proof among the majority of sound-minded people that has not been undermined by the intellect itself."*¹⁵⁸ This demonstrates that Ahl al-Ḥadīth operated with a balanced epistemology, one that affirmed the role of the intellect ('aql) within the bounds of revelation (naql), without falling into the extremes of rationalism or literalism.

Contrary to the assumptions of many mutakallimūn (dialectical theologians), the path of reasoning that opposes their methodological framework should not be dismissed as non-rational merely because it draws from revelation. In fact, the naṣṣ (text) of revelation itself contains what may properly be described as rational indicators (adilla 'aqliyyah).

Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes this point clearly when he states: *"The indication (dalālah) of revelation includes both reports and guidance—clarification and awakening toward rational evidence. Just as people benefit from the words of scholars and instructors to understand rational proofs that clarify the truth, their*

¹⁵⁷ *al-Intiṣār li-Ahl al-Athar* (printed under the title *Naqḍ al-Manṭiq*), Aḥmad ibn Taymiyyah, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ḥassān Qā'id, Dār 'Ālam al-Fawā'id, Makkah, 1st ed., 1435 AH, p. 81.

¹⁵⁸ *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 1, p. 194.

benefit from the speech of Allah is even more complete and superior. These proofs are rational in the sense that the intellect recognizes their truth when it is directed to them, and they are revelatory in the sense that revelation directs and guides toward them. From this perspective, such proofs are simultaneously rational and scriptural" ¹⁵⁹

This view rejects the dichotomy frequently advanced by the theologians of ‘ilm al-kalām, who often classified religious knowledge into two disconnected categories: the rational (‘aqliyyāt) and the scriptural (sam‘iyyāt), thereby marginalizing revelation as merely the transmission of divine truth by a reliable informant. Ibn Taymiyyah rebuts this restrictive framing: “*Many mutakallimūn assume that scriptural proofs are limited to the report of a truthful informant, and that the Qur’an and Sunnah only serve this function. For this reason, they divide the foundations of religion into two kinds: the rational and the transmitted. They then claim that the first type—rational knowledge—cannot be known through the Qur’an and Sunnah. This is a mistake. The Qur’an points to rational evidence, explains it, and draws attention to it.*” ¹⁶⁰

In this integrated framework, revelation is not positioned in opposition to reason. Nor is it treated merely as a sacred zone that prevents rational analysis. Revelation, for Ibn Taymiyyah, is itself a guide to reason—not a barrier against it.

This view starkly contrasts with modern secular critiques of religion, which often reduce the sacred to an authoritarian force that shuts down thinking. For instance, Bouazza criticizes this conception of sacredness as: “*The sacred is treated as something possessing awe that blocks thinking.*” ¹⁶¹

He critiques this perspective but notes that it is commonly found among those who,

¹⁵⁹ *Dar’ Ta’ārūḍ al-‘Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 8, pp. 36–37.

¹⁶⁰ *Dar’ Ta’ārūḍ al-‘Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 1, p. 199.

¹⁶¹ Tayyib Bouazza, *Naqd al-Libirāliyya* [Critique of Liberalism], Cairo: Tanwīr Publishing, 1st ed., 2013, p. 165.

in various religious traditions, believe that faith requires abandoning the intellect. This is a sentiment echoed by Ludwig Feuerbach, who wrote: “*In religion, man negates his reason and knows nothing of God except by renouncing his own intellect.*” ¹⁶²

Such views are not unique to one tradition. They are embedded in various theological positions that promote the delegation of meaning (tafwīḍ al-ma‘nā), discouraging any attempt to understand or rationalize divine attributes.

Against this trend, Ibn Taymiyyah advanced the tradition of Aḥl al-Ḥadīth, who rejected the speculative frameworks of the mutakallimūn, especially those inherited from the Jahmiyyah and their offshoots. His critiques were rooted in a profound understanding of the internal disagreements among these sects and their relationship with the peripatetic philosophers who upheld the legacy of Aristotle.

Despite these divisions, Ibn Taymiyyah recognized a deeper philosophical unity among the mutakallimūn and the falāsifah (philosophers): they were ultimately working from the same foundational assumption. He wrote: “*They were all drinking from the same spring.*” ¹⁶³

This shared source, in his view, was a type of idealism—or in his own words: “*A confusion between what exists in the mind (fī al-adhhān) and what exists in external reality (fī al-a‘yān).*” ¹⁶⁴

Thus, the epistemological error common to both theologians and philosophers, in his analysis, was a failure to distinguish between conceptual constructs and ontological realities—a confusion that corrupts their understanding of Allah and the world alike.

¹⁶² Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, p. 85.

¹⁶³ *Dar’ Ta’āruḍ al-‘Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 5, p. 175.

¹⁶⁴ *Dar’ Ta’āruḍ al-‘Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 5, p. 127.

Ibn Taymiyyah astutely observed the profound influence of *mabda' al-mithāliyya* (idealism) that had infiltrated the religious and intellectual psyche of many in his time. This influence, he argued, distorted not only theological concepts but also corrupted the capacity of people to recognize the truth brought by the Prophet ﷺ, a truth that was both rationally sound and textually revealed. He writes: “*The pseudo-rationalist notions of the Jahmiyyah—those who negated the attributes—deeply affected people’s hearts, to the point where the truth brought by the Messenger, which aligns with sound reason, no longer occurred to their minds, nor could they even conceive of it.*” ¹⁶⁵

This deviation was not merely a matter of faulty conclusions, but a deliberate manipulation of key theological terms. The Jahmiyyah, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, employed *tahrīf* (distortion) of fundamental expressions such as *tawḥīd* and *al-Wāḥid*, emptying them of their revealed meanings. He notes: “*They repeatedly invoked the terms tawḥīd and al-wāḥid (the One); yet in their usage, these terms meant something that possesses no attributes, from which nothing specific can be known, and which cannot be seen.*” ¹⁶⁶

Ibn Taymiyyah categorically rejects this reinterpretation, asserting that it has no grounding in revelation or in the intellectual legacy of the early Muslim generations. He declares: “*This version of 'oneness' that they call tawḥīd is neither revealed in any book nor sent through any messenger, nor was it held by any of the early scholars or imams of the ummah. In fact, it contradicts clear reason and authentic transmission.*” ¹⁶⁷

At the heart of their claim lies a negation of divine reality itself. Their discourse, when carried to its logical end, leads to an annihilation of divine existence in favor of a kind of pantheistic worldview. As Ibn Taymiyyah remarks: “*The ultimate*

¹⁶⁵ *Dar' Ta'ārūḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 2, pp. 308–309.

¹⁶⁶ *Dar' Ta'ārūḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 1, pp. 223–224

¹⁶⁷ *Dar' Ta'ārūḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 8, p. 247

conclusion of the Jahmiyyah's doctrine is that there is no existent but the created world (al-ʿālam)." ¹⁶⁸

This trajectory—the confusion between what is conceptualized in the mind (fī al-adhhān) and what exists in reality (fī al-aʿyān)—was central to what Ibn Taymiyyah perceived as the core philosophical flaw of their idealism. By doing so, they emptied the divine of all attributes and rendered Allah a mere abstract idea, unrecognizable by the intellect and unattainable by the heart.

Ibn Taymiyyah clearly articulated the deep philosophical divide between the Ahl al-Ḥadīth—those whose theological reasoning begins with observable reality (al-maḥsūs) and affirmed attributes—and the proponents of al-mabdaʾ al-mithālī (idealism), such as Jahm ibn Ṣafwān and his followers. These idealists began with abstract, non-empirical concepts—maʿqūlāt (intelligibles)—that were assumed to exist prior to and apart from the concrete world. Their approach stands in stark contrast to that of Ahl al-Ḥadīth, who emphasized knowledge drawn from real attributes, perceptible qualities, and realities whose truths are inseparable from their attributes in the objective world (al-wāqiʿ al-mawḍūʿī).

Despite numerous attempts to harmonize these opposing schools—especially by groups like the Ashʿarīs and Māturīdīs—such reconciliatory efforts proved unstable and inconsistent. Eventually, these intermediate positions were forced to favor one side over the other, particularly on pivotal issues like the ruʾyah (the beatific vision), the uncreated nature of divine speech, and the direct hearing of Allah's words. For this reason, Ibn Taymiyyah echoes the statement: *"There are only two schools: the school of Ahl al-Ḥadīth and the school of the philosophers."*

¹⁶⁹

This quotation, which he attributes to Ibn al-Nafīs, reinforces the idea that the

¹⁶⁸ *Darʾ Taʾāruḍ al-ʿAql wa al-Naql*, vol. 6, p. 194.

¹⁶⁹ *Darʾ Taʾāruḍ al-ʿAql wa al-Naql*, vol. 1, p. 203.

conflict revolves around a foundational issue in philosophy—one that concerns the nature of knowledge, existence, and perception.

Here, *al-falāsifah* (the philosophers) refers not to all philosophical schools, but specifically to those influenced by *mithāliyya* (idealism), particularly the legacies of Plato and Aristotle. These thinkers upheld the existence of *mujarradāt* (abstract universals) in the external world, claiming they had real being independent of particulars. Thus, Ibn Taymiyyah's opposition to idealism was not a mere repetition of old arguments—those had already been thoroughly discussed by earlier theologians. Instead, he elevated the epistemology of Aḥl al-Ḥadīth into a fully developed counter-philosophy, one capable of confronting *mithālī* philosophy at its roots.

He wasn't content with simply rebutting the Jahmiyyah. His intellectual project expanded to challenge the various shades of philosophical idealism, whether articulated by early, classical, or later thinkers. Idealists, he argued, repeatedly confused mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*) with external existence (*al-wujūd al-khārijī*), a confusion that had led to major errors in their doctrines.

As he explains: *"They confused mental existence with external existence. This mistake appears frequently in the statements of the philosophers. The early ones, like the followers of Pythagoras, believed in the existence of numbers abstracted from counted things in the external world. The followers of Plato affirmed the existence of Platonic forms—absolute realities that exist apart from specific, individual things in the world."*¹⁷⁰

Ibn Taymiyyah lays out a detailed critique of *al-mithāliyya* (idealism), not merely as a mistaken doctrine, but as a flawed foundation for understanding *al-wujūd* (existence) and *al-maʿrifah* (knowledge). He challenges the notion that so-called *maʿqūlāt*—abstract intelligibles—can have any true existence independent of the

¹⁷⁰ *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 5, p. 205.

mind, especially when they cannot be pointed to, perceived, or said to exist within the world, outside of it, apart from it, or even within it.

For Ibn Taymiyyah, it is self-evident that these "intelligibles" only exist as concepts grasped by the mind—hence their being intelligible to it. The clearest example of this is the case of abstract universals like “absolute humanity,” “absolute animality,” “absolute body,” and “absolute existence.” These concepts have no existence *fī al-khārij* (in external reality). What exists externally is always particular, concrete, and perceptible.

He explains: *“What they call ‘intelligibles’—and their claim that there are intelligible entities outside the mind that cannot be pointed to, perceived in any way, or said to be within or outside the world, nor distinct from it, nor residing in it—is false. It is known that intelligibles are those which the intellect grasps. The clearest examples are abstract universals, such as absolute humanity, absolute animality, absolute body, and absolute existence. These exist in the mind. There is nothing absolute and unspecified in the external world; what exists externally is always particular and specified, and is perceptible.”*¹⁷¹

Ibn Taymiyyah affirms that the only people who affirmed the real existence of these abstract intelligibles in the external world were certain misguided philosophers. For example, the *Fīthāghūriyyūn* (Pythagoreans) affirmed the real existence of abstract numbers, while the *Aflātūniyyūn* (Platonists) believed in the existence of Platonic forms—pure, absolute *māhiyyāt* (essences), or disembodied entities such as pure matter (*hayūlā*), pure duration (*mudda*), and pure void (*khalā*).

By contrast, philosophers like Aristotle and his followers—particularly al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā—rejected the existence of these forms as wholly separate entities. Instead, they claimed these *kulliyyāt* (universals) exist alongside particulars, as

¹⁷¹ *Dar’ Ta’arūḍ al-‘Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 5, pp. 173–174

concepts inseparable from actual things. They posited intelligible substances (*jawāhir ma 'qūlah*) such as *māddah* (matter) and *ṣūrah* (form), as companions to perceptible bodies. But upon close scrutiny, even their model collapses into the admission that what exists externally is nothing but physical bodies and their attributes.

Ibn Taymiyyah summarizes: As for Aristotle and his followers, like al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, they rejected their predecessors' claim that these things exist separately in reality. But they affirmed their existence as conjoined to actual particulars, asserting that alongside perceptible bodies there exist intelligible substances such as matter and form. Yet if their view is thoroughly analyzed, it becomes clear that nothing exists in the external world except physical bodies and their attributes. As for the universals, they only exist conjoined to particulars—and on investigation, one finds that nothing exists externally except particulars and the qualities that inhere in them.¹⁷²

A significant portion of philosophical debate—especially among the ahl al-kalām and al-falāsifah—has been consumed with endless verbal disputes. These polemics often revolved around linguistic choices, clinging to terms that subtly reinforced al-mithāliyyah (idealism), even when used against those who affirmed al-wujūd al-mawḍū'ī (objective reality), that is, the world as perceptible and external.

Interestingly, even al-mādīyūn (materialists)—despite their rejection of the idealized deity—generally abstained from indulging in these semantic entanglements. They chose instead to focus on the fundamental philosophical divide: the opposition between al-mithāliyyah (idealism) and al-mādīyah (materialism), without becoming mired in the abstract wordplay that often defined the former.

¹⁷² *Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 5, pp. 173–174

One of them aptly stated: *"What matters to us is not this or that formulation of materialism, but the opposition of materialism to idealism—this fundamental split in philosophy: do we begin with things, then arrive at sensation and thought? Or do we begin with thought and sensation, then arrive at things?"* ¹⁷³

Even the early figures like Jahm ibn Ṣafwān—who denied the reality of sensory-experienced existence—recognized the implications of certain terms. When he realized that the word *shay'* (thing) implied affirmation of something perceptible, he outright denied that Allah could be described as a thing.

By contrast, the more recent idealists latched onto the term *jism* (body) to frame the discussion in ways that suited their metaphysical agenda. Ibn Taymiyyah directly responded to these tactics, articulating a principle of discernment between linguistically grounded terms and philosophical speculation.

He writes: *"In general, it is known that terms are of two types: those that occur in the Qur'an, Sunnah, or by consensus—these must be affirmed in the way they were conveyed. The second type includes terms not found in any revealed text, such as those disputed by the theologians and philosophers: this one says 'He is a body' or 'a substance,' and that one says 'He is not a body nor a substance.' As for these terms, no one is required to affirm or deny them until the speaker is asked to clarify what he means by them. If he means by them something true, it is affirmed; and if he means something false, it is rejected."* ¹⁷⁴

There is nothing inherently impermissible about the use of certain terms—such as *jism* (body)—within philosophical or theological discourse. If such terms were absolutely banned from being uttered, they could not be spoken even when criticized or rejected. Nor should they be viewed as fundamentally different from other common *iṣṭilāḥāt* (technical terms) used throughout the traditions of *falsafah*

¹⁷³ *Al-Mādiyyah wa al-Madhhab al-Naqdī al-Tajribī*, Vladimir Lenin, p. 38, summarized.

¹⁷⁴ *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, vol. 5, pp. 298–299

(philosophy). To remove a term from usage merely because an *al-mithālī* (idealist) mindset finds its presence distasteful is not a matter of principle, but of mood. The issue always returns to *al-maʿnā* (meaning) and the *maqṣad* (intent) of the speaker.

Suppose, hypothetically, that someone used this term in another language—referring to something existent. Would one then prohibit its translation into Arabic merely because it contains the letters *jīm*, *sīn*, and *mīm*, and a purist's idealism has declared these sounds forbidden?

If what matters is *al-maʿnā* (meaning), then focusing merely on the *lafẓ* (expression)—when no binding affirmation or negation from revelation (*al-sharʿ*) exists—is nothing but a superficial verbal squabble. It merely shifts the discussion into populist rhetoric devoid of substance. Once the intent is clarified, the term itself becomes irrelevant. Any legitimate opposition must challenge *al-maʿnā* (the meaning), provide a reasoned refutation, and present evidence for the falsehood of the underlying concept—not just recoil at a word or act scandalized by its syllables.

Ibn Taymiyyah firmly rejects the notion that the *ʿaql* (intellect) can generate conceptual forms (*taṣawwūrāt*) independently—from nothing or from pure *maʿrifah qablīyah* (a priori knowledge). Rather, the intellect is constrained by what the senses convey to it from *al-wāqīʿ al-mawḍūʿ al-maḥsūs* (tangible objective reality). The intellect's function is to synthesize sensory inputs, not fabricate out of thin air. He gives the example: imagining a mountain of ruby or an ocean of mercury is not a creation *ex nihilo*, but a mental composition of elements the person has already experienced—mountains and oceans, rubies and mercury—fusing what is known into a new mental image.

"The intellect, according to him, does not produce conceptions from nothing, or from a priori knowledge. It is bound by what is reflected to it through sensation from the external objective reality. It merely synthesizes sensory inputs. For

example, it may imagine a mountain of ruby or a sea of mercury. This mental composition is formed from knowledge of mountains and seas on the one hand, and rubies and mercury on the other, then it combines them into the idea of a ruby mountain or a sea of mercury." ¹⁷⁵

"It may be broader than what exists in actual things, and it exists and is fixed in the mind, but not in actual reality." ¹⁷⁶

This emphasis on the particular leads Ibn Taymiyyah to assert that the knowledge of necessary connections between particular things is more immediate and self-evident than placing particular instances under general, abstract categories. That is, to know that a specific cause leads to a specific effect is more obvious than placing it under a universal law.

He concludes that when people reason, their certainty in *shakhṣiyyāt min al-maḥsūsāt* (individual perceptibles) is far stronger than their certainty in general concepts. Their confidence in general statements about types is stronger than that in statements about genera, and their knowledge of particulars is *asbaq ilā al-fīṭrah* (more primary in human nature). The more *al-ʿaql* (the intellect) grows, the broader its ability to engage in abstraction and grasp universals (*kulliyyāt*), but the foundation is always rooted in particulars.

"The certainty of rational people regarding perceptible individuals is stronger than their certainty about universals. Their certainty about the universality of types is stronger than about the universality of genera. Knowledge of particulars is prior to human instinct, and so certainty in them is stronger. As the intellect grows stronger, it becomes more expansive in universals." ¹⁷⁷

Ibn Taymiyyah's epistemology, grounded in *al-wāqiʿ al-mawḍūʿī* (objective

¹⁷⁵ *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min al-Maʿrifah al-Qabliyah*, p. 51

¹⁷⁶ *Al-Radd ʿalā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, p. 64.

¹⁷⁷ *Al-Radd ʿalā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, pp. 115–116

reality) and mediated by *al-ḥiss* (sense perception), leads him into persistent conflict with *al-mithāliyah* (idealism). His critique extends beyond isolated arguments to the fundamental problems of philosophy itself. At every turn, his dispute with idealist notions returns to the role of reason and its proper function. For him, the rift with the idealists lies at the very heart of the question of *al-‘aql* (the intellect) and its connection with reality.



Chapter Nine: Ibn Taymiyyah On Sensatory Knowledge:

Ibn Taymiyyah acknowledges that our *maʿrifah ḥissiyyah* (sensory knowledge) of things is primarily of their external, visible aspects, rather than their internal dimensions. However, he does not concede, as some idealists (*mithāliyyūn*) and rationalists claim, that this hidden, internal aspect of reality belongs to the realm of the purely intelligible (*maʿqūlāt*)—those which are either the *jawhar* (essence) perceived only through reason, or which must be accepted blindly, without the capacity for perception or verification.

Ibn Taymiyyah challenges this division and clarifies that the interior of a thing is still in principle *maḥsūs* (perceptible)—that is, capable of being sensed—even if it is not actually sensed in a particular moment. The lack of perception, he explains, is not due to an ontological inaccessibility, but due to practical limitations such as concealment or situational factors. Thus, he draws a clear line between what is *maḥsūs biʾl-fiʿl* (actually sensed) and what is *maḥsūs biʾl-imkān* (potentially sensible).

“The senses do not grasp the whole of it, even though the whole is perceptible in the sense that it is capable of being sensed and seen in general. But the interior of it is not sensed when we observe the exterior—not because it cannot be sensed, but because it is hidden, or due to some other factor. This is also a cause of their error: they fail to distinguish between what is actually sensed and what could be sensed, even if we cannot currently sense it. If by ‘sensed’ one means the former, then there is no doubt that some entities are sensed and others are not. But these people divide things into sensed and intelligible, even though the intelligible is simply what is present in the mind. As for external entities, they can be sensed, though our capacity to sense them may depend on certain [currently absent]

conditions.” 178

In doing so, Ibn Taymiyyah dismantles the *mithālī* (idealist) premise that reality is bifurcated into sensible and intelligible realms, asserting instead that even what is not currently accessible to the senses remains part of the realm of the potentially sensible. The error, then, lies in mistaking epistemic limitation for metaphysical division.

Ibn Taymiyyah’s dispute with the idealists goes even deeper when it comes to theology and *ithbāt al-ilāh* (affirmation of God’s existence). He holds that the philosophical foundation of *mithālīyah* not only fails to establish the reality of God but, in truth, undermines it. According to him, any claim that there exist real, self-subsisting entities that can *never* be known through any form of perception is inherently false. Such a view, he argues, aligns with the stance of the *Jahmiyyah*, who deny the *ru’yah* (vision) of Allah in the afterlife.

“Whoever claims that among existent, self-subsisting entities there are those that can never be known through perception under any condition—this is a false claim without evidence. This is the view of the Jahmiyyah, who deny the vision of Allah, the Exalted.” 179

Hence, Ibn Taymiyyah’s framework insists that sensory perception (*ḥiss*)—though limited in practice—is not ontologically limited. What lies beyond current perception is not unreachable due to its nature but due to circumstance. This radically grounds both knowledge of the world and theology in a unified realist framework, positioning *ḥiss* as the gateway to *ma’rifah* (knowledge), not as a veil from it.

Ibn Taymiyyah criticizes two extremes in the epistemological landscape. On one end, he identifies the materialist deniers—the *kuffār dahriyyah mu’atṭilah*—who

¹⁷⁸ *Dar’ Ta’āruḍ al-‘Aql wa’l-Naql*, vol. 1, p. 33.

¹⁷⁹ *Dar’ Ta’āruḍ al-‘Aql wa’l-Naql*, vol. 5, p. 132.

deny the existence of anything beyond what can be perceived in the present, physical world. On the other end, he places the *mutakallimūn mithāliyyūn* (idealist theologians), who—despite affirming Allah—reduce Him to nothing more than an abstract mental concept. These idealists, though they claim to support belief, end up constructing a worldview no less disconnected from the real than the outright deniers.

The denial of what is not perceived in this world—this is the way of the absolute materialist atheists. These are the same ones who mocked the theologians among the idealists, who supported views that render Allah as nothing but a mental idea.

180

In contrast to these extremes, Ibn Taymiyyah upholds a view rooted in what might be called *ḥissiyyah qiyāmiyyah*—the principle that reality is anchored in what is *maḥsūs* (perceptible), even if that perception is postponed to the afterlife. For him, all that the messengers have reported from the unseen—Paradise, Hell, the angels, and even Allah Himself—can be known through sensory perception (*ḥiss*), particularly in the *ākhirah* (hereafter). This includes the vision (*ru'yah*) of Allah, which believers will experience directly and bodily, just as they now perceive the sun and the moon.

What the messengers have informed of from the unseen—such as Paradise, Hell, the angels, and even their report about Allah, the Exalted—is among those things that can be known through sensory perception, like vision. This is the view of the vast majority of those who believe in the messengers, and the early generations of this ummah and its scholars. They unanimously agree that Allah will be seen in the hereafter directly, as the sun and moon are seen. The messengers did not differentiate between the unseen (*ghayb*) and the witnessed (*shahādah*) in terms of one being intelligible and the other sensible, as some philosophers and Jahmiyyah assumed. Rather, the distinction lies only in that one is present now and witnessed,

¹⁸⁰ *Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'Aql wa'l-Naql*, vol. 5, p. 131; vol. 2, p. 224; vol. 3, p. 416.

while the other is currently absent and thus called *ghayb*.¹⁸¹

From this perspective, Ibn Taymiyyah's critique of *mithāliyyah* (idealism) becomes clearer. He sees idealism as fundamentally incapable of accommodating or substantiating the truths of *īmān* (true belief). Even when it claims spiritual depth or metaphysical insight, idealism ultimately fails to affirm anything real. On the other hand, he acknowledges that materialist frameworks—despite their apparent rejection of the unseen—may offer a more viable foundation if extended to accommodate both this world and the next.

This is why Ibn Taymiyyah finds value in the *asās al-samniyyah* (the epistemological foundation of the Indian materialist Samkhya school): although often seen as irreligious, it operates within a framework of realism that could be broadened to support truths of *īmān*. By contrast, idealism's root assumptions prevent it from affirming such truths, no matter how much it drapes itself in the language of spiritual belief.



¹⁸¹ *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa'l-Naql*, vol. 5, pp. 131–132; vol. 9, p. 15.

Chapter Ten: The Authority Of Reason And Revelation, Salaf Vs The Ash'ariyyah:

Revelation's Authority In Matters Of Belief The Salaf:

If it were not for the tribulation that afflicted the Muslim ummah through the emergence of *'ilm al-kalām* (speculative theology)—which sectarians and innovators used as a tool to reject the *naṣṣ* (textual proofs) of the Qur'an and Sunnah—there would have been no need to even author treatises establishing the binding authority of revelation (*ḥujjiyyat an-naql*). For what reasonable person would reject the guidance that secures their success in both this life and the hereafter, without which they would be among the doomed?

By *naql* here, we refer to the transmitted texts of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, authentically narrated from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. As for their *iḥtijāj* (authoritativeness), it means that they serve as binding evidence upon all creation, universally and absolutely, in both matters of belief (*'aqīdah*) and law (*sharī'ah*).

One of the greatest divine favors bestowed upon the *salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ* (righteous predecessors) was their unwavering adherence to the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and their establishment of these sources as decisive proof in every matter of religion, whether in foundational principles (*uṣūl*) or derived rulings (*furū'*). Among the principles agreed upon by the Companions and those who followed them in righteousness is that no one is permitted to oppose the Qur'an and the Sunnah—not by personal opinion (*ra'y*), spiritual taste (*dhawq*), rational inference (*ma'qūl*), or analogy (*qiyās*).

Their conviction in this was not blind. It was grounded in *barāhīn qat'iyyah* (conclusive proofs) and *āyāt bayyināt* (clear verses) that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ came with true guidance and the religion of truth, and that the Qur'an directs to the

most upright path. Thus, the Qur'an remained for them the ultimate *imām* (guide) to follow.

Among the established principles with the Companions and the generation who followed them with excellence is that no one is permitted to oppose the Qur'an and the Sunnah—neither with his opinion, nor his spiritual taste, nor with rational inference, nor analogy—because it has been established for them through definitive proofs and manifest verses that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ came with guidance and the religion of truth, and that the Qur'an guides to that which is most upright. Thus, the Qur'an was their leader to be followed. For this reason, you will not find in the words of any of the *salaf* that they opposed sound transmitted texts with reason or opinion.¹⁸²

Their faith in what the Messenger brought was characterized by complete submission (*taslīm*) and acceptance, without distinction between statements related to knowledge or action. For them, the standard was always the *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) Sunnah. Whenever a sound ḥadīth was confirmed from the Prophet ﷺ it necessitated acceptance, belief in its implications, and acting upon it—regardless of whether it belonged to the category of *mutawātir* (mass-transmitted) or *āḥād* (solitary) reports.

Among the Companions themselves, there were no theological disputes over core beliefs. They were in complete agreement that the Qur'an and the Sunnah alone were to be used as decisive proof.

One of the most distinguishing features of the *salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ* (righteous predecessors) was their unity in matters of belief (‘*aqīdah*’), especially regarding Allah’s names, attributes, and actions. Although they differed in various rulings related to legal issues (*aḥkām*), they never disputed theological matters tied to *asmā’*, *ṣiḡāt*, or *aḥkām*. Their consensus on affirming what is clearly stated in the

¹⁸² *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah, vol. 13, p. 28.

Qur'an and Sunnah was unwavering—from the first generation to the last. They never sought to *ta'wīl* (reinterpret) these texts, nor did they distort them from their intended meanings (*tahrīf*), nor did they deny or nullify their implications.

Their approach was not to impose metaphors where there was no justification, nor to speculate analogies where none were revealed. They did not oppose any portion of these texts—neither their openings nor conclusions. Not one among them argued that such texts must be stripped of their real meanings and carried upon figurative interpretations. Rather, they received them with complete *qabūl* (acceptance) and *taslīm* (submission), and held them in reverence and awe.

Ibn al qayyim said: *"The Companions, may Allah be pleased with them, disputed over many legal rulings, and they were the leaders of the believers and the most complete in faith among the Ummah. Yet, by the grace of Allah, they never differed on a single matter related to the names, attributes, or actions [of Allah]. They unanimously affirmed everything clearly stated in the Qur'an and Sunnah, with one voice—from the first to the last of them. They never resorted to figurative interpretation, never altered the words from their rightful meanings, never invalidated any part of it, never struck analogies for it, never opposed its beginnings or ends, and no one among them said that these texts should be diverted from their realities and interpreted metaphorically. Rather, they received them with acceptance and submission, met them with faith and veneration, treated all such texts the same, and applied a consistent methodology to them all."* ¹⁸³

The *salaf* firmly believed that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ conveyed all that was revealed to him with complete clarity. This was especially true in matters concerning the *uṣūl ad-dīn* (foundational principles of religion)—both in their content and their proofs—for this represented the very heart of the Prophet's mission of *tablīgh* (conveying revelation). His clarification to humanity was the

¹⁸³ *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn*, Imām Ibn al-Qayyim, vol. 1, p. 49.

most comprehensive and decisive, and this message was transmitted through the noble Qur'an and the *ḥikmah* (wisdom), which is the Sunnah of the Messenger ﷺ.

These two sources—Qur'an and Sunnah—contained the most complete expression of obligatory truths and impossible falsehoods. The assumption that they lack detailed explanation in matters of belief stems from the flawed reasoning of those whose intellects are deficient.

The *salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ* made no distinction between the use of authentic Sunnah in matters of belief (*'aqīdah*) versus legal rulings (*aḥkām*). They did not know of such a division between *'ilmiyyah* (theoretical beliefs) and *'amaliyyah* (practical actions), nor did they recognize the later theologians' rule of accepting *khbar al-āḥād* (solitary reports) in legal rulings but not in foundational beliefs. For them, the sole standard for *iḥtijāj* (legal and theological authority) was *ṣiḥḥah* (authenticity), and nothing else.

Ibn al qayyim said: *"Indeed, the division of religion into theoretical and practical matters, the labeling of these as 'foundations' and 'branches', and the idea that solitary reports establish only secondary rulings but not core beliefs—none of this was ever said by the salaf. Rather, it is one of the foundational errors of the mutakallimūn (speculative theologians). They are the ones who made this distinction between what they labeled 'uṣūl' and what they called 'furū'."*¹⁸⁴

Across generations and regions, the scholars of Islam have stood united in their affirmation of what the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah report concerning the attributes of Allah. This unity, grounded in *īmān* (faith) and commitment to the *naql* (transmitted revelation), was devoid of the speculative trends of *ta'wīl* (figurative interpretation), *tashbīḥ* (likening Allah to creation), or philosophical speculation.

¹⁸⁴ *Mukhtaṣar aṣ-Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalah*, Imām Ibn al-Qayyim, vol. 2, pp. 613–614.

One clear expression of this consensus comes from the renowned Ḥanafī scholar **Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ash-Shaybānī** (d. 189 AH), who stated: *"The jurists—every one of them from the East to the West—are in agreement on having faith in the Qur'an and in the aḥādīth that have been reliably transmitted from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ concerning the attributes of the Lord, the Mighty and Majestic, without explanation, description, or likening."*¹⁸⁵

This statement emphasizes a foundational *uṣūl* (principle) of *Ahl al-Sunnah*—affirmation without delving into *kaiḥiyyah* (modality) or likening the Divine to the created world.

Similarly, **Imām al-Ṭaḥāwī** (d. 321 AH), while articulating the creed inherited from the founders of the Ḥanafī school—Abū Ḥanīfah, Abū Yūsuf, and Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan—addressed the topic of Allah's *ru'yah* (being seen in the Hereafter), affirming the reports without reinterpretation: *"Everything that has come in this regard from authentic ḥadīth of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is exactly as he said it. Its meaning is what Allah intended, and we do not delve into it with our opinions, nor do we imagine interpretations based on our desires."*¹⁸⁶

This statement embodies the methodology of *taslīm* (submission) and *tawqīf* (suspending judgment) in issues related to *ghayb* (the unseen) and Divine reality. For the *salaf*, the transmitted texts held ultimate authority—whether or not the human intellect grasped their full implications.

In both statements, we see the intellectual humility and theological discipline of the early scholars. Their approach resisted the temptation to subject the Divine to human categories or speculative metaphysics. Instead, they adopted a consistent

¹⁸⁵ Reported by Imām al-Lālikā'ī in *Sharḥ Uṣūl I'tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah*, vol. 2, pp. 432–433. Also cited by Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah in *Naqḍ al-Manṭiq*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁶ *Al-Aqīdah al-Ṭaḥāwiyyah*, with the commentary of Ibn Abī al-'Izz al-Ḥanafī, pp. 203–204.

methodology: *ithbāt* (affirmation) without *tamthīl* (analogy), *ta'wīl*, or *ta'fīl* (negation).

One of the enduring principles upheld by the scholars of Ahl al-Sunnah is the ḥujjiyyah (authoritativeness) of khabar al-āḥād—reports transmitted by a single narrator—in both uṣūl ad-dīn (creedal foundations) and furū' (practical rulings). This view reflects their unwavering confidence in the truthfulness of what is reliably attributed to the Prophet ﷺ provided that the chain of transmission is sound and the narrators are trustworthy.

Imām Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d. 463 AH), a foremost scholar of ḥadīth and fiqh, explicitly stated the consensus on this matter. He wrote: *"There is a consensus (ijmā') on accepting solitary reports (khabar al-āḥād) in matters of creed."*¹⁸⁷

This consensus illustrates that the early generations did not restrict khabar al-āḥād to legal rulings alone, but extended its authority to affirming truths related to 'aqidah (creed), including knowledge of the ghayb (unseen) and attributes of Allah.

Similarly, the great theologian and defender of Ahl al-Ḥadīth, Abū al-Muẓaffar al-Sam'ānī (d. 489 AH), affirmed: *"If a report is authentically established from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ narrated by trustworthy narrators and reliable imāms, transmitted from one generation to the next all the way back to the Prophet ﷺ and accepted by the Ummah, then it is obligatory to accept it as conveying knowledge in matters whose nature is to be known. This is the position of the majority of the people of ḥadīth and the experts of the Sunnah. The claim that a solitary report never yields certainty unless transmitted through tawātur is something invented by the Qadariyyah and Mu'tazilah, whose intent was to reject the prophetic reports."*

¹⁸⁸

Here, al-Sam'ānī not only affirms the legitimacy of solitary reports in matters of

¹⁸⁷ *Al-Tamhīd*, Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, vol. 7, pp. 145, 158.

¹⁸⁸ *Ṣawn al-Manṭiq*, al-Suyūṭī, p. 160.

belief, but he also identifies the origins of their rejection as rooted in sectarian innovation. The Mu‘tazilah and Qadariyyah, driven by rationalist agendas, attempted to undermine the naql (transmitted revelation) through philosophical skepticism.

Finally, Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH), reflecting the position of the Ḥanbalī school, reinforced this stance, stating: *“It is the position of our Ḥanbalī scholars that solitary reports (āḥād) which are accepted by the Ummah are valid for establishing the fundamentals of the religion (uṣūl ad-diyānāt).”*¹⁸⁹

This indicates that *qabūl* (acceptance) by the Ummah plays a central role in determining the epistemic value of such reports—once accepted and acted upon by the community, they hold the weight of definitive proof in creed and law alike.

Through these authoritative statements, we see a consistent methodology among the *salaf*: affirming what is proven through reliable *isnād* (chains of transmission) without requiring *tawātur* (mass transmission) in every theological matter. This principled approach preserves the integrity of the Sunnah while guarding against speculative intrusions from *ahl al-kalām* (proponents of speculative theology).

Among the foundational beliefs of *Ahl al-Sunnah* is that the texts of the Qur’an and authentic Sunnah carry not just guidance, but definitive *‘ilm* (knowledge) and *yaqīn* (certainty), especially in matters of *‘aqīdah* (creed). This contrasts sharply with the position of the *mutakallimūn* (speculative theologians), who often argued that the *dalālah* (indication) of revelatory texts in such matters is merely speculative (*ẓanniyyah*), not definitive (*qaṭ‘iyyah*).

Imām **Ibn al-Qayyim** (d. 751 AH) sharply criticized this view, pointing out its contradiction with the entire basis of divine responsibility and accountability. He wrote: *“Indeed, Allah has established the proof (ḥujjah) upon His creation through His Book and His Messenger. So if the speech of Allah and His Messenger does*

¹⁸⁹ *Al-Musawwada fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, by the Āl Taymiyyah, p. 245.

*not provide certainty and knowledge, and if reason is always in opposition to revelation, then what proof has truly been established upon those morally responsible (mukallaḥīn) through the Book and the Messenger? Is this view not in total contradiction to the very notion of Allah’s proof being established upon His creation through His Book? This is clearly evident to anyone who understands it—and to Allah belongs all praise.”*¹⁹⁰

The Authority Of Reason According To The Salaf:

The *salaf al-ṣāliḥ* (righteous predecessors), may Allah be pleased with them, upheld a unified and balanced approach to deriving knowledge in matters of ‘*aqīdah* (creed). Just as they affirmed the authority of *ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl* (authentic transmitted texts), they also recognized the validity of *ṣarīḥ al-ma‘qūl* (clear rational proofs)—provided it was in agreement with revelation. Both revelation and sound reason are, in their view, part of Allah’s *ḥujjah* (proof) against His creation.

Imām **Ibn al-Qayyim** (d. 751 AH) eloquently described this harmony between sound transmission and reason. He wrote: “*Indeed, hearing (al-sam‘) is Allah’s proof upon His creation, and so is reason (al-‘aql). For He, exalted be He, has established His proof upon them by what He has instilled in them of reason, and what He has revealed to them of revelation. Sound reason does not contradict itself, just as authentic transmission does not contradict itself. Likewise, reason and revelation do not contradict one another. Rather, the evidences and clear signs of Allah support and strengthen each other.*”¹⁹¹

This reveals a critical principle: contradictions only appear when one misinterprets either revelation or reason. But when both are correctly understood, they are never

¹⁹⁰ *Al-Ṣawā‘iq al-Mursalah*, Ibn al-Qayyim, vol. 2, pp. 735–737.

¹⁹¹ *Al-Ṣawā‘iq al-Mursalah*, Ibn al-Qayyim, vol. 3, p. 1187.

in opposition. The *‘aql ṣarīḥ* (sound intellect) and the *sam‘ ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic revelation) work in tandem, not in conflict.

For the *salaf*, the valid *dalīl* (proof) is that which is recognized by the *Shar‘* (revealed law), used by the *Shar‘*, and encouraged by the *Shar‘* to be used. This includes both *dalīl sam‘ī khabarī* (textual evidence from revelation) and *dalīl sam‘ī ‘aqlī* (rational evidence in harmony with revelation), the soundness of which can be confirmed by reason itself.

Among the *salaf* (early generations), the method of reasoning in *‘aqīdah* (creed) did not involve setting *‘aql* (intellect) against *naql* (transmitted revelation). Rather, both were employed together as integral sources of *dalīl shar‘ī* (legal-probative evidence), so long as they were authentic and properly understood. This comprehensive outlook is seen in their engagement with the rational evidences found within revelation itself, particularly in the Qur’an.

Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allah have mercy on him, clarified a foundational distinction between correct and corrupt evidence: *“The fact that a dalīl (proof) is shar‘ī (legal/revealed) is not opposed by the claim that it is ‘aqlī (rational); rather, it is only opposed by it being bid‘ī (innovated). An innovated proof contradicts the revealed one... The dalīl shar‘ī can either be based on transmitted revelation (sam‘ī) or reason (‘aqlī). If by ‘shar‘ī’ we mean what the Shar‘ (revealed law) affirms, then it might also be something that can be known through reason, but which the Shar‘ points out and confirms. In this case, it is both shar‘ī and ‘aqlī. This applies to the rational proofs which Allah, exalted is He, has drawn attention to in His noble Book, including the parables and other signs that establish His oneness, the truthfulness of His Messenger, the affirmation of His attributes, and the reality of the afterlife. All these are rational proofs whose soundness is known through reason, and they are barāhīn (demonstrations) and maqāyīs (analogical arguments) which are, at the same time, shar‘ī.”*¹⁹²

¹⁹² *Dar’ Ta’arūḍ al-‘Aql wa al-Naql*, Ibn Taymiyyah, vol. 1, p. 196.

The early generations did not create an artificial divide between *dalā'il khabariyah* (narrative evidences) and *dalā'il 'aqliyah* (rational evidences) when it came to *masā'il al-i'tiqād* (creedal matters). Rather, they regarded the rational evidences within the Qur'an as among the most powerful means of guiding the intellect to the truth in the clearest and most direct manner.

As such, the *dalīl* used by the *salaf* could either be *khabarī maḥḍ* (purely transmitted) or *'aqlī*, and both are *shar'ī*—having been affirmed by the Qur'an itself.¹⁹³

Ibn Taymiyyah further affirmed that the foundations of religion (*uṣūl ad-dīn*) consist either of *masā'il* (doctrines) that must be affirmed, or the *dalā'il* (proofs) for these doctrines. In both cases, Allah and His Messenger have provided a complete and decisive clarification that leaves no room for excuse. This clarification is one of the greatest ways through which Allah has established His *ḥujjah* (proof) over His creation. Regarding the *dalā'il* specifically, he stated: As for the evidences for the doctrines of *uṣūl ad-dīn*, the position of the *salaf* of this *ummah* and its scholars and believers is that Allah has clarified, through *dalā'il 'aqliyah* (rational evidences), everything people need in order to know and affirm these truths—clarifications whose extent the *mutakallimūn* (speculative theologians) cannot even estimate.¹⁹⁴

The Qur'an repeatedly affirms the harmony between *ḥujjat al-kitāb wa as-sunnah* (the proof of the Book and the Sunnah) and *al-mīzān* (the balance or standard of justice), a term which classical scholars understood to include the principles of sound reason and equitable judgment.

¹⁹³ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 198–199.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 28.

Allah, exalted is He, says: “We certainly sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and sent down with them the Scripture and the Balance, so that people may uphold justice.”¹⁹⁵

This verse combines three essential elements of divine guidance: *al-bayyināt* (clear evidences, i.e. miracles and demonstrative signs), *al-kitāb* (the revealed Scripture), and *al-mīzān* (the standard or criterion for justice).

Imām al-Ṭabarī, may Allah have mercy on him, explained that the word *mīzān* refers to ‘*adl* (justice). He narrates with his chain from **Qatādah**, who said, “The *mīzān* is justice.”¹⁹⁶

Ibn Kathīr, may Allah have mercy on him, in his commentary on the verse, expands on this by saying: “*Allah says: ‘Indeed, We sent Our messengers with clear evidences’—meaning miracles, proofs, and decisive signs. ‘And sent down with them the Scripture’—that is, true and honest revelation. ‘And the Balance’—which is justice. This was said by Mujāhid, Qatādah, and others. It refers to the truth that upright, sound minds recognize—minds that oppose corrupt opinions.*”¹⁹⁷

Here, justice is not confined to social ethics or personal morality. Rather, it includes epistemic justice—the commitment to truth and sound reason as ordained by revelation. The *salaf* did not divorce rational insight from divine guidance; they saw them as converging paths leading to the same reality.

Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allah have mercy on him, further clarifies the concept of *al-mīzān* as found in the verse. He interprets it to refer not only to justice in general, but to *al-qiyās aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ* (sound analogy), which is the true standard (*mīzān ḥaqq*)

¹⁹⁵ Al-Ḥadīd (57:25).

¹⁹⁶ *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 11, p. 688.

¹⁹⁷ *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, vol. 4, p. 337.

by which justice is recognized—by equating what is similar and distinguishing what differs. He states: *“Indeed, Allah sent His messengers with justice and revealed the Balance with the Book. The Balance includes justice and that by which justice is known. They explained that the sending down of the Balance means that Allah inspired His servants with knowledge of it. Allah and His Messenger equate between things that are similar and distinguish between those that are different—and this is sound analogy.”*¹⁹⁸

A question may arise in the minds of some individuals: *If certain truths are knowable by reason alone, then why did Allah send messengers to teach them?* This concern touches on the relationship between *al-‘aql* (reason) and *ar-risālah* (prophetic revelation), and whether the former negates the necessity of the latter.

Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allah have mercy on him, addresses this very objection in a comprehensive manner. He explains that while some truths may be accessible through the intellect, the role of the messengers is not limited to transmitting information (*khavar*). Rather, they play a pivotal role in directing people to correct reasoning and restoring the natural disposition (*fiṭrah*) that may have been obscured by false ideologies.

In response to the question, 'If this is something that can be known through reason, then why did Allah make it part of what the messengers were sent with?': the answer is that the messengers presented to people rational parables through which they could understand similarities and differences. They guided them to that by which justice is recognized and clarified the sound rational analogies used to establish religious truths.

Thus, prophetic knowledge is not limited to mere transmitted reports, as some of the *ahl al-kalām* (speculative theologians) mistakenly assume when they claim that what is known by reason is separate from prophetic knowledge. In truth, the

¹⁹⁸ *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, Ibn Taymiyyah, vol. 19, p. 176.

messengers—peace and blessings be upon them—explained rational knowledge by which Allah's religion is completed in both knowledge and action.

They set forth analogies, completed the natural disposition by alerting it to what it had ignored, and corrected it from the corruption brought by false ideologies. In doing so, they clarified what the *fiṭrah* had been heedless of, until the disposition came to recognize the *mīzān* (balance, i.e., criterion of justice) that Allah sent down and that His messengers explained.¹⁹⁹

Within the framework of *‘ilm al-uṣūl* (principles of Islamic reasoning) and theological inquiry, one of the foundational assertions upheld by *Ahl al-Sunnah* is the harmony between *an-naql aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic transmission) and *al-‘aql aṣ-ṣarīḥ* (sound reason). This is particularly evident in the acceptance of *al-qiyās aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ* (valid analogy) as a form of *‘adl* (justice) that Allah has revealed as part of His guidance.

Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allah have mercy on him, eloquently affirms this principle, stating that contradiction between an authentic textual proof and a correct rational argument is impossible.

Sound analogy is part of the justice that Allah has revealed, and it is never permissible for the Book and the Balance (i.e., the standard of justice) to be in contradiction. There can be no contradiction between a sound text transmitted from the Messengers and a correct analogy.

It is never allowed that authentic naqlī (transmitted) evidences oppose sound ‘aqlī (rational) proofs. Nor is it permissible for a valid analogy—whose soundness has been verified—to contradict a divine text. There is nothing in the sharī‘ah that truly opposes sound analogy.

¹⁹⁹ *Ar-Radd ‘alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, Ibn Taymiyyah, p. 382.

Whenever someone assumes a contradiction between the Book and the Balance, then one of two things must be true:

- 1 - Either the text being cited is not actually established from the infallible one (i.e., the Prophet ﷺ) or it does not indicate what the person assumes.
- 2 - Or, the analogy being used is invalid due to the corruption of some—or all—of its premises, as often happens when analogies are built upon ambiguous or equivocal terms.²⁰⁰

The methodology of the *salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ*—the righteous predecessors—regarding matters of knowledge, religious practice, and conflict resolution, is grounded in well-established principles. These principles serve as the primary references to which they return when disputes arise and upon which they rely in both belief and action. Their core sources of evidence and judgment can be summarized in four fundamental foundations:

- 1 - The first and highest source is the *Kitāb Allāh*—the Qur'an. It is the speech of Allah, the truest of speech, and there is nothing more truthful than it.
- 2 - The second source is the *sunnah* of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, the best of all guidance. It does not contradict the Qur'an but rather explains and clarifies it. The *sunnah* carries the same weight of authority and stands as a decisive proof in matters of religion.
- 3 - The third source is the *ijmā'* of the Muslim ummah, specifically the consensus of *Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā'ah*, those united upon the truth who, as a collective, do not agree upon misguidance. The most reliable form of *ijmā'* is that of the *ṣaḥābah* (may Allah be pleased with them), as their understanding is considered the most sound.

²⁰⁰ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Ar-Radd 'alā al-Mantiqiyyīn*, p. 373.

The fourth source is *qiyās*, or analogical reasoning, which is built upon the preceding three sources. It involves applying shared principles of justice and logic to derive rulings in new or unclear matters.

These are the three (primary) scales by which Ahl al-Sunnah wa-l-Jamā‘ah weigh all matters. They do not weigh these principles against anything else. This is the essence of analogy: applying uniform judgment to similar things (*taṭrīd*) and distinguishing between things that are unlike (‘*aks*). Using these principles, they assess all human behavior—both inward and outward—related to knowledge and religion.²⁰¹

There is nothing in the Sharī‘ah that contradicts sound analogical reasoning (*qiyās ṣaḥīḥ*). And whenever one assumes a contradiction between revelation and reasoning, then one of two errors must have occurred: either the text is not authentically established or not properly understood, or the reasoning is flawed due to false premises or ambiguous language.²⁰²

The early generations of Islam—*as-salaf aṣ-ṣāliḥ*—recognized the authority of both sound reason (‘*aql ṣarīḥ*) and authentic transmission (*naql ṣaḥīḥ*), and did not view them as contradictory. Instead, they considered correct reasoning to be in full agreement with the guidance of revelation. This coherence is clearly demonstrated in their refutations of speculative theologians (*ahl al-kalām*) who pitted their rational assumptions against divine texts. In contrast, the *salaf* confronted such objections using a combination of the Qur'an, Sunnah, scholarly consensus (*ijmā‘*), and sound reasoning (*naẓar ṣaḥīḥ*).

A prominent example of this method is found in the famous debate between Imam ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Kinānī (d. 240 AH) and the Mu‘tazilī theologian Bishr al-Murīsī,

²⁰¹ Dr. Ṣāliḥ al-‘Ubūd, *‘Aqīdat ash-Shaykh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb as-Salāfiyyah*, p. 183.

²⁰² Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 3, p. 157; see also: Dr. Ṣāliḥ al-‘Ubūd, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

held before the caliph al-Ma'mūn. The debate centered around the Mu'tazilah's innovation—the claim that the Qur'an was created.

In his arguments, al-Kinānī relied on both authentic transmitted evidence and pure reason. Among his rational arguments was an instance of inverse analogy (*qiyās al-'aks*)—a rational tool that distinguishes between fundamentally different things. This analogy reflects a central quality of sound reason: it separates what differs and equates what is truly alike.

During the debate, Bishr al-Murīsī attempted to dismiss al-Kinānī's reliance on verses of the Qur'an by arguing: "You and I are the same in this matter. You extract verses from the Qur'an whose interpretation and explanation you do not know, while I reject and dismiss them until you bring me something I can comprehend and understand!"

In response, al-Kinānī turned to the caliph and said: "*O Commander of the Faithful, you have heard Bishr's words and his claim of equality between us. But Allah has indeed made a distinction between us and informed us that we are not the same.*"

Al-Ma'mūn asked, "Where in the Book of Allah is that for you?"

Al-Kinānī replied: "By Allah, O Commander of the Faithful, I truly know that what was revealed to the Prophet is the truth, and I believe in it. As for Bishr, he testifies against himself that he neither knows it, nor understands it, nor accepts it—nor can he use it as any proof against me." ²⁰³

Through this response, al-Kinānī highlighted the core point of divergence: belief and submission to revelation versus arrogant dismissal due to speculative rationalism. His reasoning combined a sound understanding of transmitted knowledge with clear logical inference based on *qiyās al-'aks*.

²⁰³ 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Kinānī, *al-Ḥida wa-l-I'tidhār fī ar-Radd 'alā man Qāla bi-Khalq al-Qur'ān*, pp. 32, 42.

In essence, al-Kinānī's method demonstrates the very balance that the *salaf* upheld: weighing arguments by the scales of both revelation and reason. He used the Qur'an and *sunnah* as his ultimate reference and clarified that any rational analogy must conform to the divinely revealed standard. This proper use of *qiyās*—both in drawing similarity (*ṭard*) and making distinctions (*'aks*)—is the domain of a sound mind. It is only the corrupted intellect that misuses or reverses these analogies.

Another clear demonstration of the harmony between revelation and sound reason (*naẓar ṣaḥīḥ*) in the approach of the *salaf* can be seen in the position of Imām Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224 AH). He firmly refuted the *Murji'ah*—those who claimed that actions are not part of the definition (*musammā*) of faith (*īmān*), and that faith is a single, indivisible entity that neither increases nor decreases.

Imām Abū 'Ubayd based his response on both authentic transmitted evidence (*ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl*) and sound intellectual argumentation. He began by affirming a fundamental principle (*aṣl*) that guides any theological dispute: “*When we examine the disagreement between these two groups, we find that the Book and the Sunnah affirm the group that defines faith as both intention and speech together, and they reject what the other group says.*

The foundation which serves as our proof in this matter is what is clearly stated in the Qur'an, for Allah—exalted and glorified—says in His definitive Book: 'And if you disagree over anything, refer it to Allah and the Messenger if you believe in Allah and the Last Day. That is the best [way] and best in result.'”²⁰⁴

Having anchored his position in revelation, Imām Abū 'Ubayd proceeded to cite a series of Qur'anic verses, Prophetic traditions, and statements from the early generations, all confirming that deeds are essential components of *īmān*—and that

²⁰⁴ Abū 'Ubayd al-Qāsim ibn Sallām, *Kitāb al-Īmān*, pp. 25–26.

īmān increases and decreases depending on the presence or absence of these actions.

But he did not stop there. He also supported his argument with rational evidence, demonstrating that even sound reason affirms that actions must necessarily be included within the reality of *īmān*. Among his logical arguments is the following analogy: *“If a group of people were ordered to enter a house, and one person stepped just past the threshold and stood there, another took a few more steps, and a third proceeded to its center, it would be said of all of them that they have entered, but some of them have entered more deeply than others.*

This is the type of speech that is well-understood among the Arabs and is common in their language. And likewise is the case of īmān.” ²⁰⁵

With this simple but profound analogy, Imām Abū ‘Ubayd clarified that faith is not static. Just as physical entrance can be partial or complete, so too can *īmān* vary in degree and depth. This logical demonstration supports the view that faith is composed of components that fluctuate and develop, and not a fixed inner conviction alone.

Thus, in both transmitted and rational evidences, the methodology of Imām Abū ‘Ubayd stands as a shining example of the balanced path of Ahl al-Sunnah—one that neither isolates revelation from reason nor subjects revelation to the whims of speculation.

The early generations of this *ummah*—the *salaf al-ummah*—along with their *a’immah* (leaders) among the people of knowledge and faith, adopted a balanced and moderate approach to the use of reason (*‘aql*). They neither granted it unrestricted authority over revelation (*wahy*), as the speculative theologians (*ahl al-kalām*) did, nor abandoned it altogether, as the *ṣūfiyyah* were prone to do.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 27.

Instead, the *salaf* employed reason, but only under a specific condition: that it aligns with authentic transmitted texts (*ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl*). When reason supports the clear guidance found in revelation, it is accepted and used alongside it. This balanced and truthful methodology arises from their recognition of the unique harmony between the *fitrah*, the human intellect, and divine legislation.

Allah granted human beings an innate disposition (*fitrah*)—naturally inclined toward truth—which, if left undisturbed, does not prefer anything over it. He further supported this *fitrah* with a faculty of reasoning (‘*aql*’) capable of distinguishing truth from falsehood. This was then perfected by revelation (*shar‘*) that elucidated and clarified what was already intuitively known through nature and generally grasped by reason.

The Authority Of Reason/Revelation According To Ahlu Kalam:

In the early centuries of Islam, Muslims lived in a state of clarity and harmony regarding their *dīn*. They held fast to the *Kitāb Allāh* and the *Sunnah* of His Messenger ,ﷺ never placing anything in opposition to these two foundational sources. Whenever disputes arose among them in matters of religion, they would return to these divine texts for judgment, upholding their authority as the ultimate proof (*ḥujjah*).

However, as time passed, people of *bid‘ah* emerged—innovators who began to cast doubt on the authority of the Qur'an and Sunnah, particularly in matters concerning the divine *ṣifāt* (attributes). The first group known to have clearly opposed transmitted texts (*naql*) using reason (‘*aql*’), and rejected the use of *ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl* unless it conformed to their intellectual frameworks, were the *Jahmiyyah*. Their views were passed on to the *Mu‘tazilah*, who carried this methodology forward,

relying solely on what matched their speculative intellect and dismissing everything else.

Later theological schools such as the *Māturīdiyyah* and the *Ash‘ariyyah*—especially among their later adherents—also followed this path. These groups, influenced by *‘ilm al-kalām* (speculative theology), departed from the methodology of the early *salaf*.

Before the rise of the *Jahmiyyah*, no known group had openly opposed the transmitted texts based on personal reasoning or required that texts conform to the intellect to be accepted. Even the *Khawārij* and *Shī‘ah*—though deeply misguided—would still attempt to use the texts themselves, albeit through misinterpretation.

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allah have mercy on him, explained this historical shift clearly. He said: *"It is well known that during the time of the ṣaḥābah and the senior tābi‘īn, there was no one who opposed the transmitted texts with intellect. The Khawārij and Shī‘ah emerged during the final period of ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib’s caliphate, and the Murji‘ah and Qadariyyah appeared in the closing days of the ṣaḥābah. These groups would adopt the texts and use them as proof for their views, not claiming to possess rational proofs that contradicted revelation. However, when the Jahmiyyah arose at the end of the tābi‘īn era, they became the ones who opposed revelation with their personal opinions. Even then, they remained a minority, subdued within the ummah."*²⁰⁶

Nonetheless, it could be said that these earlier groups unintentionally paved the way for the emergence of the *Jahmiyyah* and those who followed their methodology. This happened through the various heresies they introduced—heresies that ultimately fractured the unity of the Muslim community. Among the

²⁰⁶ *Dar’ Ta‘āruḍ al-‘Aql wa al-Naql*, vol. 5, p. 244; *al-Istiḳāmah*, vol. 1, p. 23.

most dangerous of their errors was their boldness in declaring righteous *ṣaḥābah* to be disbelievers, due to their misreading of the Qur'ān.

For example, 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him and his father) said regarding the *Khawārij*: *"They took verses revealed about the disbelievers and applied them to the believers."* ²⁰⁷

The issue at hand is the denial of the *ḥujjah* (authority) of the *Kitāb* (Qur'ān) and *Sunnah*, and the claim that their meanings are uncertain. Additionally, the rejection of *ḥabar al-wāḥid* (reports from a single narrator) in matters of *'aqīdah* (creed), while elevating the intellectual *ḥujjah* (proof) in opposition to *ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl* (authentic transmitted texts), reflects a deviant position. These innovations in thought were first introduced by the *Jahmiyyah* and *Mu'tazilah*, and later adopted by some *Ash'ariyyah* and *Māturīdiyyah*, particularly in their later phases. Here are a few of their deviant statements on this issue, summarized for brevity:

Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā', the head of the *Mu'tazilah*, once said: *"Every report that cannot be corroborated, communicated, and agreed upon other than by consensus is invalid. What cannot be agreed upon is to be discarded."* ²⁰⁸

Upon reflecting on this statement, it becomes clear that Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' granted *'aql* (reason) the power to judge the validity of *akhbār* (reports). He considered the *ḥujjah* (proof) of a report conditional upon the possibility of consensus or corroboration, thereby elevating intellectual validation above traditional textual transmission (*naql*). According to this view, reports that are not subject to unanimous agreement would be discarded, leaving only those that pass the scrutiny of reason.

The broader implications of this view are as follows:

²⁰⁷ *Ma'ālim Ṭarīq al-Salaf fi Uṣūl al-Fiqh* by Dr. 'Abid al-Sufyānī, p. 181.

²⁰⁸ *Fadl al-I'tizāl wa Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazilah* by al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār al-Mu'tazilī and others, p. 234.

1 - The Intellectual Approach to Texts: This early statement marks the beginning of the dominance of *‘aql* (reason) in evaluating *akhbār* (reports) within the *Mu‘tazilah* school. It indicates a shift towards rationalizing religious texts, prioritizing intellectual reasoning over traditional acceptance.

2 - The Rejection of *ḥabar al-wāḥid* (Single Narrator Reports): As a consequence of this intellectual stance, *akhbār* (reports) that do not meet the criteria of consensus are rejected, whether these are single reports (*ḥabar al-wāḥid*) or multiple reports. The rejection of such reports implies that they do not convey any substantial knowledge or actionable evidence.

3 - Foundations of *Mu‘tazilah* Thought: The underlying premise of *Mu‘tazilah* thought is rooted in this very concept—the acceptance of *‘aql* (reason) as the final arbiter in matters of religious truth, leading to the rejection of many traditionally accepted reports that do not conform to rational scrutiny.²⁰⁹

Due to the *Mu‘tazilah*'s reliance on *‘aql* (reason) and their view that *‘aql* holds absolute authority, they began to reject any texts from *al-Wāḥy* (revelation) that did not align with their rational understanding. This led some of them to speak arrogantly against Allah and His Messenger, even making statements that were dangerously close to disbelief. One such example is *‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd*, a prominent figure of the *Mu‘tazilah*, who, in reference to a *ḥadīth* (narration) of the *ṣādiq al-maṣdūq* (truthful and trustworthy Prophet), said: "If I heard *al-A‘mash* say this, I would discredit him. If I heard *Zayd ibn Wahb* say this, I would not respond. If I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say this, I would reject it. And if I heard Allah say this, I would say: 'This is not how You made the covenant with us.'" ²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ *Ma‘ālim Ṭarīq al-Salaf fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* by Dr. ‘Ābid al-Sufyānī, p. 185.

²¹⁰ *Tārīkh Baghdād*, by al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (vol. 2, p. 172) and *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, by al-Dhahabī (vol. 6, p. 104).

Allah is exalted far beyond such words!

Furthermore, *Abū al-Hudhail al-ʿAllāf* went beyond his teacher *Wāṣil ibn ʿAṭā* in rejecting reports and elevating intellectual proofs over textual ones. He imposed additional conditions for accepting the authority of transmitted texts, including that they must be *mutawātir* (continuously reported by multiple chains of narrators) and that at least one of the narrators must be from the people of Jannah (Paradise).

Abū al-Hudhail's position, according to *ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī*, was as follows: "*What Abū al-Hudhail intended with his condition that one of the narrators must be from the people of Jannah was to essentially invalidate reports. He meant that those who followed his ʿAṭāʾī ideology could only accept narrations from within their own sect.*" ²¹¹

Abū al-Hudhail al-ʿAllāf further advanced this position by claiming that the *ḥujjah* (proof) should be derived from *mīzān al-ʿaql* (rational standards) rather than from the *naql* (textual transmission) itself. He explicitly stated: "*The narration is subjective, and the ḥujjah lies in the mīzān (rational measures).*" ²¹²

This declaration highlights how the *Muʿtazilah* sought to replace the authority of traditional texts with rationalist criteria, marking a significant shift in theological thinking.

Al-Nizām, another notable figure in the *Muʿtazilah* school, further escalated the challenge to *naql* by asserting that some *aḥādīth* were contradictory, claiming that rational proofs (*ḥujjah al-ʿaql*) could potentially abrogate (naskh) these reports. *Ibn Qutaybah* mentions that *al-Nizām* held views on certain narrations that he considered contradictory to the *Kitāb* (Qurʾān), and he argued that the authority of

²¹¹ *Al-Farq Bayn al-Firāq*, by *ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī* (p. 100).

²¹² *Fadl al-Iʿtizāl wa Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazilah*, by al-Qāḍī *ʿAbd al-Jabbār* and others (p. 259).

reason could override the *aḥādīth*: The *ḥujjah al-‘aql* could abrogate the narrations, and certain reports contradict one another.²¹³

Dr. ‘*Ābid al-Sufyānī* states: "The *Mu‘tazilah* grew increasingly attached to their rationalist methodology, gradually distancing themselves from *adillāh naqlīyah* (textual proofs). This trend reached its peak under the leadership of *al-Nizām*. As they drew closer to *al-falsafah* (philosophy), they moved further away from *adillāh naqlīyah*. When *Mu‘tazilah* thought merged with philosophical ideas through the influence of *al-Nizām*, *Wāṣil ibn ‘Aṭā*’s views gained prominence, especially after they were further reinforced by *Abū al-Hudhail al-‘Allāf... al-Jāḥiẓ* acknowledges that the definitive judgment lies with the intellect, saying: 'The definitive judgment is for the intellect, and true understanding belongs only to ‘*aql*.'" In discussing the disdain philosophers held for mere memorization, *al-Jāḥiẓ* states: "The philosophers disliked reliance on *ḥifẓ* (memorization) because they believed it hindered true intellectual discernment. They argued that those who depend on memorization are not capable of true *istimbāt* (deductive reasoning) and *tafakkur* (contemplation), and that those who excel in memorization are only imitators."²¹⁴

Among the destructive notions that took root through the rise of ‘*aqlānīyah* (rationalism) in theological discourse was the disdain for *ḥifẓ*—the act of memorization. Some thinkers, under the influence of philosophical trends, began to minimize the significance of memorization in the transmission and preservation of the *Qur’ān* and *sunnah*. Unfortunately, this flawed view continues to be echoed by those ignorant of the status and value of *ḥifẓ* in preserving the core teachings of Islam and the legacy of the *salaf al-ummah* (righteous predecessors).

One of the most vocal in this regard was *al-Jāḥiẓ*, who was deeply enamored by the ideas of the philosophers and openly adopted their corrupt premises. His admiration of them came at the cost of his hostility toward *ahl al-ḥadīth* (the

²¹³ *Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth*, by *Ibn Qutaybah* (p. 47 and 64).

²¹⁴ *Kitāb al-Mu‘allimīn* (vol. 3, p. 29) and *al-Jāḥiẓ* by *al-Ḥājirī* (p. 48).

people of hadith), whom he accused of ignorance, while extolling the *Mu'tazilah* as the intellectual elite. He even stated: "*If it were not for the Mu'tazilah, the common people would have perished.*" ²¹⁵

Such a statement reflects a deep misguidance, for how could those who followed the Prophet ﷺ and preserved his teachings be deemed ignorant—while those who borrowed from Greek philosophers and opposed *ṣaḥīḥ al-manqūl* (authentic transmitted texts) are painted as saviors of the *'awāmm* (masses)? In reality, the reverse is true. Many people were led astray and spiritually ruined by the *shubuhāt* (doubts) spread by the *Mu'tazilah* and their rational opposition to authentic revelation.

Further illustrating the extent of this rationalist deviation, *Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī*, a leading figure in *uṣūl al-fiqh*, asserted that establishing *tawḥīd* (divine oneness) must rest entirely on *adilla al-'aql* (rational evidences), not on *akhbār* (reports). He states: "*The method of argumentation in tawḥīd relies on rational proofs, not on transmitted reports.*" ²¹⁶

Such a statement reveals how far the "rationalist school" had shifted from the prophetic method, favoring philosophy over revelation.

A significant deviation among the later *mutakallimūn* (speculative theologians) was their insistence on subjecting *al-manqūl aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic transmitted reports) to the authority of *al-'aql* (reason). For these theologians, the *ḥujjiyyah* (authoritativeness) of revelation was not intrinsic but conditional—dependent upon whether it aligned with what they deemed to be *qaṭ'iyyāt 'aqliyyah* (definitive rational conclusions).

Imām *Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī* (d. 478 AH) explicitly set forth two criteria for

²¹⁵ *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, al-Jāḥiz, vol. 4, p. 289.

²¹⁶ *Mu'tamad fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, *Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī*, vol. 2, p. 60.

accepting transmitted reports as authoritative: That the report be *qaṭʿī* (definitive in its transmission), and that it conform to rational arguments considered definitive. Only when these two conditions are met, he argues, can a report be used as proof—and even then, its authoritativeness is merely *tābiʿah* (subordinate) to that of the rational evidences.²¹⁷

Following the same trend, Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505 AH) maintained that reports related to divine *ṣifāt* (attributes) must meet two criteria: they must be definitive in transmission, and rationally acceptable. Failing either of these conditions, the texts must be subject to *taʾwīl* (figurative reinterpretation) in order to align with rational evidence.²¹⁸

The position of Fakhr al-Dīn ar-Rāzī (d. 606 AH) was even more stringent. He posited no fewer than ten conditions that must be satisfied for a report from the Qur'an or *sunnah* to yield certainty. These include: Infallibility of all transmitters of individual words. Clear and unambiguous grammatical structure. Absence of polysemy (*ishtirāk*). No figurative language (*majāz*). No terminological shifts (*naql*). Absence of specification by person or time. No ellipsis (*iḍmār*). No rearrangement (*taqdīm wa-ta'khīr*). No abrogation (*naskh*). No contradiction with reason.²¹⁹

By laying down these stringent conditions, ar-Rāzī effectively invalidated the use of revelation as definitive proof in theological matters.

When asked whether these ten conditions could ever truly be satisfied, ar-Rāzī himself answered: “*The absence of these obstacles is speculative, not definitive. And that which depends on speculation remains speculative. Therefore, transmitted proofs are ḡanniyyah (speculative), and rational proofs are qaṭʿiyyah (definitive).*”

²¹⁷ *Irshād*, al-Juwaynī, pp. 301–302.

²¹⁸ *Iqtisād fī al-ʿItiqād*, al-Ghazālī, pp. 132–133.

²¹⁹ *Muḥaṣṣal Afkār al-Mutaqaddimīn wa al-Mutaʾakhkhirīn*, ar-Rāzī, p. 170.

Speculation cannot stand in opposition to certainty.”²²⁰

Thus, ar-Rāzī arrived at the deeply problematic conclusion of dismissing *al-manqūl aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ* in matters of creed in favor of what he termed *qaṭʿiyyāt ʿaqliyyah*—which in truth were mere speculative constructs cloaked in the garb of certainty.²²¹



²²⁰ *Maʿālim Uṣūl ad-Dīn*, ar-Rāzī, p. 24.

²²¹ In future sections we will have a study of the words of these people, Ar razi, juwayni, Ghazali, we will examine their works on these topics and then provide their evidences for such positions.

Chapter Eleventh: Qānūn al-Ta'wīl (Law Of Metaphorical Interpretation) And It's History, An Analysis:

In the prior chapter we shown that the mutazaliah and the jahmiyyah were the ones who originally were backbone for the future ash'ariyyah then brefiely went over the ash'ari doctrines, in this chapter we will throughly analyze their works and text.

Imām Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī (d. 478 AH):

Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī laid down foundational *qawā'id* (principles) which were followed by those who came after him. These principles became a base for further development of that *qānūn* (legal methodology), most prominently expanded by al-Ghazālī. ²²²

Among the foundational positions established by al-Juwaynī was his division of the fundamentals of *'aqā'id* (beliefs) into categories based on how they are known. The first category includes those matters that are accessible through *'aql* (reason). He exemplified this with what he called a “*foundational principle in the religion that precedes knowledge of the speech of Allah and the obligation of attributing truthfulness to it.*” ²²³

²²² *Al-Iqtisād fī al-I'tiqād*, al-Ghazālī, p. 132. *Qānūn at-Ta'wīl*, Ibn al-ʿArabī, ed. Muḥammad al-Sulaymānī, Dār al-Qiblah, Jeddah, 1st ed., 1406 AH, p. 246.

²²³ *Al-Irshād*, al-Juwaynī, p. 301.

According to al-Juwaynī, such matters are impossible to be known through *samʿ* (transmission/revelation) alone.

The second category consists of those beliefs which, although theoretically permissible in *ʿaql*, are only known through *samʿ*. However, al-Juwaynī's restriction by saying it is "rationally possible" suggests that these are not purely *samʿ* in the full sense.

The third category includes those that can be known through both *ʿaql* and *samʿ*. He defines this as: *"That which is indicated by rational proofs, and it is possible to conceptualize that the knowledge of the speech of Allah would come after it."* ²²⁴

He gives as examples the issue of the *ruʾyah* (vision of Allah), and Allah's uniqueness in creation and origination.

After laying down this framework, he asserts: *"It is necessary for every person committed to the religion and confident in his intellect to examine the matters supported by transmitted proofs. If one finds that the matter is not rationally impossible, and the transmitted proofs are definitive in their transmission, with no room for doubt in their establishment or interpretation, then there is no position except to affirm it definitively. But if the transmitted evidences are not definitive in their transmission, although not rationally impossible, and their bases are established definitively, yet there remains possibility for interpretation, then it is not valid to affirm them definitively. And if what has reached us from the sharʿ (revealed law) contradicts the conclusions of ʿaql, then it is certainly rejected—for the sharʿ does not contradict ʿaql, and it is not conceivable that such a contradiction could come from a definitive samʿ, nor could such a thing be hidden."* ²²⁵

Al-Juwaynī does not conceal his prioritization of *ʿaql* (reason) when it comes to

²²⁴ *Al-Irshād*, al-Juwaynī, pp. 301–302.

²²⁵ *Al-Irshād*, al-Juwaynī, p. 302.

interpreting the *adilla sam‘iyyah* (revealed proofs), their meanings, and implications. Even when discussing issues that he classifies as purely *sam‘ī*, he introduces limitations—most notably the condition that the transmission must not contradict *‘aql*. Otherwise, the revealed evidence is to be dismissed.

In fact, in some foundational issues of *i‘tiqād* (belief), he considers *‘aql* to be the sole valid means of knowledge, outright rejecting the possibility of *sam‘ī* proofs applying to such matters.

He even criticized the Ash‘arīs for refusing to interpret certain divine attributes, such as their rejection of interpreting the *ṣifah* (attribute) of “hand” as meaning “power.” He responds to them by saying: *“This is incorrect. The intellect has determined that creation only occurs through power, or through the existence of the one possessing power being powerful. So, there is no justification to believe that the creation of Adam occurred through knowledge rather than power.”*²²⁶

What led him to interpret texts affirming the attribute of the “hand” was his claim that the apparent meaning conflicts with *dalīl ‘aqlī* (rational proof). This is the consequence of the principle by which al-Juwaynī judged the texts of the *shar‘*.²²⁷ Through these methodological rules, al-Juwaynī laid the groundwork for later scholars. He diminished the authority of *adilla sam‘iyyah*, and increased the restrictions and conditions for their acceptance—placing priority instead on *adilla ‘aqliyyah* (rational proofs), which the *mutakallimūn* (theologians) considered the foundational source.

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505 AH):

When al-Ghazālī discussed the various groups and their positions regarding *‘aql* (reason) and *naql* (transmission), he favored what he identified as the fifth group.

²²⁶ *Al-Irshād*, al-Juwaynī, p. 146.

²²⁷ *Manhaj Imām al-Ḥaramayn fī Dirāsāt al-‘Aqīdah*, Dr. Aḥmad Āl ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, p. 268.

According to his classification, this group occupied a middle position by combining both the *ma'qūl* (rational) and *manqūl* (revealed), considering each to be an independent source that cannot be in contradiction. He justified this by referring to a fundamental *kalāmī* (theological) principle in establishing *nubuwwah* (prophethood): if *shar'* (revelation) is the word of a truthful source, it is *'aql* that testifies to that truthfulness. Thus, it is impossible to deny the revealed text without denying *'aql*, because it is by *'aql* that one comes to know *shar'*. Without the soundness of *'aql*, one could not distinguish between a true prophet and a false claimant. As he put it: If the revelation is the speech of the truthful, then reason is what has testified to its truthfulness. So it cannot be accused of falsehood, because whoever accuses reason of lying has accused revelation of lying—for it is by reason that revelation was known. Were it not for the truthfulness of reason, one would not know a prophet from a false prophet. How can reason be contradicted by revelation, when revelation itself is only established through reason? ²²⁸

Despite this seemingly balanced position—advocating the combination of *manqūl* and *ma'qūl*—al-Ghazālī later contradicted it. When addressing the issue of *ishtibāh* (ambiguity) or contradiction between the two sources, he ultimately prioritized *'aql* alone. He prescribed the way to resolve such conflict as follows: “*The proof of reason must never be denied at all, for reason does not lie. If reason were to lie, perhaps it also lied in affirming revelation. So how can the witness be confirmed through the commendation of a false recommender? Revelation is a witness to details, but reason is what confirmed revelation.*” ²²⁹

Upon close examination of al-Ghazālī’s argument, it becomes evident that his assertion of the impossibility of contradiction between *shar'* (revelation) and *'aql* (reason) is not grounded in any essential quality of the *dalīl shar'ī* (revealed proof)—such as it being inherently truthful or never conflicting with sound reason. Instead, al-Ghazālī’s claim rests solely on the testimony of *'aql*, without due

²²⁸ Qānūn at-Ta'wīl pp. 582–583.

²²⁹ Qānūn at-Ta'wīl p. 583.

consideration of the origin, transmission, and content of *sharʿ*, which—by its very nature—is protected from falsehood, “neither falsehood comes to it from before it nor from behind it.” What he affirmed for reason should more rightly be affirmed for revelation.

Thus, the principle formulated by al-Ghazālī—indeed, he is regarded as the first among the *ashʿarī* scholars to present it in such an organized manner—was taken up and expanded by those who came after him. However, this principle, which was intended to reconcile *adilla ʿaqliyya* (rational proofs) and *adilla naqliyya* (textual proofs), ultimately lost its balance. It leaned heavily toward one side, giving priority to reason at the expense of revelation. Rather than achieving reconciliation, it entrenched the notion of conflict between *maʿqūl* and *manqūl*, and elevated reason over revelation.²³⁰

Thus, the essence of al-Ghazālī’s framework for reconciling rational and textual proofs can be summarized as follows: *ʿaql* is the foundation by which *sharʿ* is affirmed. So, if there is a *ẓāhir naqlī* (apparent text) that conflicts with reason, it must be reinterpreted in a way that conforms to the requirements of reason. The proof of reason, he argues, can never be rejected.²³¹

Thus, the principle formulated by al-Ghazālī for those examining the *adilla* (proofs) is in reality a *qānūn at-taʿwīl* (law of interpretation), not a method of reconciliation, despite his claim that it represents the sound path. A clear indication of this is the fact that he authored a treatise explicitly titled *Qānūn at-Taʿwīl* (The Law of Interpretation).²³²

²³⁰ *Ibn Taymiyyah wa Mawqifuhu min Qadiyyat at-Taʿwīl*, Dr. Muḥammad al-Jalīnd, p. 251; *Qānūn at-Taʿwīl*, Ibn al-ʿArabī, p. 247; *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min al-Ashʿariyyah*, vol. 2, p. 643.

²³¹ *Ibn Taymiyyah wa Mawqifuhu min Qadiyyat at-Taʿwīl*, p. 253.

²³² This treatise was structured as a series of responses to questions posed by his student Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī, some of which are preserved in the encyclopedic work *al-Miʿyār al-Muʿrib fī al-Fiqh al-Mālikī* (vol. 11, pp. 23–24). See also: *Darʿ Taʾarūḍ al-ʿAql wa an-Naql* (p. 51), *Qānūn at-Taʿwīl* by Ibn al-ʿArabī (p. 244). The editor, Muḥammad al-Sulaymānī, notes that some of these responses exist in manuscript form in certain libraries.

This general principle served as the foundation of al-Ghazālī's approach—both in methodology and application—especially in matters of *'aqīdah* (creed). He consistently placed *dalīl sam'ī* (textual evidence) at a lower rank than *dalīl 'aqlī* (rational evidence), treating the former as valid only if permitted or not negated by the latter.

Al-Ghazālī explicitly articulates this approach, stating: *"Whenever something is reported by revelation (sam'), one must examine it: if reason ('aql) deems it possible, then belief in it becomes obligatory—certainly, if the transmitted evidence is decisive in both content and transmission, or presumptively, if the evidence is probable... But if reason deems it impossible, then the revealed report must be interpreted. It is inconceivable that decisive revelation would contradict reason. Most of the apparent meanings of ḥadīths involving tashbīh (anthropomorphism) are not authentic, and those that are authentic are not decisive; they are open to interpretation... If reason is undecided—judging neither impossibility nor possibility—then belief is still required by the revealed evidence. In this case, it is sufficient that reason does not rule out the possibility."*²³³

There is no *ṣaḥīḥ* (authentic) text whatsoever regarding *tashbīh* (anthropomorphism), neither from the Qur'an nor the Sunnah. Any text that appears to indicate *tashbīh* is fabricated and false, and needs no interpretation.

However, al-Ghazālī refers to things by other than their proper names. Like others among those who engage in corrupt *ta'wīl* (interpretation), he refers to texts affirming the divine attributes as *nuṣūṣ tashbīh* (texts of anthropomorphism).

Furthermore, how can he presume to judge whether a prophetic *ḥadīth* is *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḍa'īf*, when he himself is not from among the specialists in this field? He himself admitted this, saying: *"My knowledge of ḥadīth is deficient"*²³⁴

²³³ *Iqtīṣād fī al-I'tiqād*, al-Ghazālī, pp. 132–133.

²³⁴ *Qānūn at-Ta'wīl* (p. 585).

Thus, his grading of *aḥādīth* as weak, and his imposition of interpretation even on those deemed authentic, is something he himself warned against—since it entails, or even necessitates, the rejection of *aḥādīth*, whether by denying their meanings or weakening them without valid reason. He criticized the third group among the five categories he mentioned regarding their stance on reason and revelation, saying: *"They are the ones who made the rational the foundation, so their investigation into it became extensive, and their concern for the transmitted evidence weakened. When they encountered apparent texts contrary to reason, they rejected and denied them, and accused their narrators of falsehood—except for what reached them via tawātur (mass transmission) like the Qur'an. The danger of this opinion in rejecting authentic aḥādīth is not hidden."* ²³⁵

Yet this very opinion is the same as that of al-Ghazālī himself—no more, no less. Therefore: *"As long as reason holds precedence in his view, then the classification of the fifth group reverts to that of the third, which made the rational primary and interpreted the apparent meaning of the revealed texts accordingly."* ²³⁶

Thus, in al-Ghazālī's view, the criterion (*madār*) for affirming the validity of *al-shar'* (the revealed law) is *al-dalīl al-'aqlī* (the rational proof)—either by it affirming the *jawāz* (possibility) of what the revelation indicates, or by it not affirming its *iḥālah* (impossibility). These are two distinct levels (*martabatān mutaghāyiratān*) according to al-Ghazālī.

Based on this *qānūn* (universal rule), al-Ghazālī structured his method of *ta'wīl* (interpretation), categorizing it into five levels—all in harmony with the foundational principle he adopted, namely, the necessity of preferring reason (*'aql*) over revelation (*naql*). These levels are:

²³⁵ *Qānūn at-Ta'wīl* (p. 581)

²³⁶ *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min Qadīyat at-Ta'wīl* (p. 253)

- 1 - **Al-wujūd adh-dhātī** (essential or real existence): This is true existence, established outside the senses and the intellect—such as the existence of the heavens and the earth.
- 2 - **Al-wujūd al-ḥissī** (sensory existence): This exists only in the *ḥāssah* (sense faculty), such as sight. It has no external reality, like what is seen by someone dreaming or a sick person imagining things not present outside their senses.
- 3 - **Al-wujūd al-khayālī** (imaginal existence): This refers to the internal image of something sensed previously, which remains in the mind after it has departed from the senses—such as visualizing something that is no longer present, though it appears as though still perceived externally.
- 4 - **Al-wujūd al-‘aqlī** (intellectual existence): This is when something has a *rūḥ*, *ḥaqīqah*, and *ma‘nā* (spirit, essence, and meaning), and the mind receives only its meaning, without its image being present in the senses, imagination, or externally. For example, the word “hand” is interpreted here only as its ‘*aqlī*’ meaning—i.e., *qudrah ‘alā al-baṭsh* (power to seize).
- 5 - **Al-wujūd ash-shibhī** (analogical or resembling existence): This is when the actual thing does not exist—neither in form nor essence—in the external world, senses, imagination, or mind, but something else exists which resembles it in one of its qualities.²³⁷

Al-Ghazālī provided examples for each level. Excluding the first level—*al-wujūd adh-dhātī*, in which *ta’wīl* has no place—he applied rational interpretation to all revealed texts that, in his view, contradict reason, judging them with *al-burhān* (decisive rational proof) that deems their outward meanings impossible.

²³⁷ *Fayṣal at-Tafrīqah* by al-Ghazālī, in *Majmū‘at Rasā’il al-Ghazālī* (pp. 240–243)

What is more concerning in al-Ghazālī's method is the scope of his qānūn expanding to accommodate all philosophical and theological views—justifying them and declaring that their proponents are not disbelievers, so long as their statements fall within what the qānūn kullī (universal rule) can accommodate. He said: "Indeed, whoever interprets any statement of the Lawgiver according to one of these levels is among the affirmers (muṣaddiqīn)... and one cannot accuse the interpreters of disbelief so long as they remain within the bounds of the law of interpretation (qānūn at-ta'wīl)... And how can disbelief be warranted due to interpretation, when every group within Islam finds themselves compelled to it?"

238

Abu Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 543 AH):

Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī followed the same path as his teacher al-Ghazālī in affirming the universal law (*qānūn kullī*) for adjudicating the relationship between *al-naql* (the transmitted texts) and *al-‘aql* (reason). Whatever aligned with this law, he accepted; whatever contradicted it, he either *ta’awwalah* (interpreted it) or did not follow it. This is evident in his discussion of the different positions people take regarding the conflict between reason (*‘aql*) and revelation (*naql*), where he said: *"If reason and revelation conflict, it is due to the deficiency of the observer. The deficient observer might assume that revelation should be the primary source and thus return to reason, or they might consider reason as the primary source and subordinate revelation to it. Another might take a middle path, treating each as an independent source."*

The observer who prioritizes the transmitted texts will find that the apparent meanings of the revelation might distort its true essence, which cannot be the case. The one who makes reason primary and treats revelation as secondary, if doing so in an absolute sense and rejecting what is evidently contradictory to reason in the

²³⁸ *Fayṣal at-Tafriqah* (p. 243)

texts, is a denier. If they assert what the texts say, they are contradictory, as revelation contains things that are impossible according to reason. The just observer is the one who takes a balanced approach, treating both reason and revelation as independent sources and organizing the path to knowledge using both." ²³⁹

Ibn al-ʿArabī's words indicate a tendency to favor reason (ʿaql) over revelation (naql), much like his teacher al-Ghazālī. He sometimes describes those who prioritize naql over ʿaql as deficient (taqsīr), and he speaks of the apparent meanings of the texts as potentially distorting the true essence of the revelation, arguing that one who accepts the implications of revelation, even if they align with reason, would be contradictory when revelation includes things that reason deems impossible.

Despite this, Ibn al-ʿArabī claims that justice (al-ʿadl) lies in balancing the two, giving each its independent status. Therefore, in practice, he contradicts himself, as he ultimately prioritized ʿaql over naql, interpreting the latter in a way that aligns with his rational conclusions, building upon the qānūn established by his teacher and further expanding it.

Ibn al-ʿArabī's remarks on the important issue of the proof of Allah's attributes are very significant. When he criticized al-Juwaynī for using the *dilāl as-samʿ* (proof of hearing) to affirm Allah's attributes and the impossibility of ascribing defects that contradict His hearing and sight, he said: "*Al-Juwaynī relied on the consensus of the Ummah regarding the negation of defects from the Lord, and there is no foundation for this except the samʿ (hearing). What the theologians have said is unacceptable. We mention this to you so that you adopt it as a principle. It is astonishing that the head of the scholars relies on samʿ to negate defects. Samʿ cannot be the way to know the Lord or any of His attributes, because samʿ itself is from Him; you cannot know samʿ except by Him, and you cannot know Him except*

²³⁹ *Qānūn at-Taʿwīl* (p. 647).

through samʿ, and thus there is a contradiction and inconsistency." ²⁴⁰

If Ibn al-ʿArabī had taken a more balanced approach and combined both the proof of revelation (*naql*) and the proof of reason (*ʿaql*), which is possible in many ways, as both the revealed texts and rational proofs support the affirmation of God's attributes and His oneness, he would not have criticized al-Juwaynī's position. The issue here is not that reason was ignored, but that Ibn al-ʿArabī rejected what the theologians (*mutakallimūn*) had established.

What illustrates Ibn al-ʿArabī's approach to establishing his novel *qānūn kullī* (universal law) is found in some of his other writings, where he states: *"The intellect is the validator of the sharʿī (legal) text, and it does not invalidate the validating witness, nor does it deny it; doing so would nullify it... So when something appears to contradict reason, it must also be interpreted, because taking it literally is impossible, and thus it becomes incomprehensible. The sharʿ would never present such an interpretation, so it must be interpreted."* ²⁴¹

"Take the meaning of the word in Arabic and examine it with rational evidence if it is a matter of monotheism. What appears reasonable to it is valid, and what is impossible should be interpreted in a way that brings it closer to its true meaning."

²⁴²

This universal law (*qānūn kullī*) was embraced by Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī, and he based his book *Qānūn at-Taʾwīl* on it, making it obligatory to follow this law when considering the conflicting rational and transmitted proofs (*dalāʾil al-ʿaql wa al-naql*). He specifically affirmed that this law should be applied when examining the transmitted texts regarding the attributes and actions of the Lord, and the impossibility of rationally denying these attributes if they cannot be interpreted. ²⁴³

²⁴⁰ *Qānūn at-Taʾwīl* of Ibn al-ʿArabī (p. 461-462)

²⁴¹ *Al-ʿAwāsim min al-Qawāsim* of Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī, edited by Dr. ʿAmmār Ṭālibī, Dār at-Thaqāfah, Doha (Qatar), 1st edition, 1413 AH (p. 231). Also see (p. 112).

²⁴² *ʿAridhat al-Aḥwadhī* of Ibn al-ʿArabī, Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, Beirut (p. 49/11).

²⁴³ *Qānūn at-Taʾwīl* (p. 575-576).

Thus, Ibn al-ʿArabī plays a role in formulating and applying this law, reinforcing the idea that reason (ʿaql) contradicts transmitted texts (naql). In this, he follows the approach of his teacher, al-Ghazālī, who organized the discussion around the universal law (qānūn kullī) and whose imitation stems from a belief in the correctness of this methodology, which he thought could not be surpassed. Ibn al-ʿArabī states: *"Do not deviate in this matter (the law) from the methodology of the scholars; those who followed have found guidance, and no one will ever bring anything better than what those before have brought."* ²⁴⁴

There is no doubt that those who preceded him in establishing this law were not among the Imams of the Salaf (the early generations). Therefore, to claim that what those predecessors established by their own reasoning is final and unchallengeable is blind imitation (taqlīd) and baseless assertion (qawl jazaf).

Abū ʿAbd Allāh al-Rāzī (606 AH):

While al-Ghazālī was the first to speak systematically about the universal law (qānūn kullī), albeit in a relatively vague manner, al-Rāzī is the one who took on detailing and clarifying this law, offering further explanation. This indicates the alignment between the two men, as their methodology stems from shared foundations, including those discussed by Ibn Taymiyyah in his stance on the issue of taʿwīl (interpretation).

A. Both of them considered reason (ʿaql) as the primary tool in establishing religious rulings, to the extent that they did not accept any challenge to it from the Prophets, as reason is the standard in their view. Hence, if reason is contradicted by a transmitted text (naql), they argue that the text must be interpreted (taʿwīl) to align with reason. To deny the authority of reason would lead to a rejection of both reason and the transmitted texts.

²⁴⁴ *Qānūn at-Taʿwīl* of Ibn al-ʿArabī (p. 576).

B. Both of them based their laws on the assumption that there is a conflict between reason and the apparent meanings of the transmitted texts, but this is incorrect. The sound intellect (*‘aql ṣarīḥ*) never contradicts established religious texts (*shar‘*).

However, al-Rāzī goes further than al-Ghazālī in his stance on the transmitted proofs (*dalā‘il al-naql*), as he explicitly states that they do not provide certainty (*yaqīn*).

As for the law that al-Rāzī formulated, it is expressed in many of his works, including his question: "What should we do when rational proofs contradict the apparent meanings of the transmitted texts?"

He states: *"Know that when decisive rational proofs (dalā‘il ‘aqlīyah qaṭ‘īyah) establish something, and we find transmitted texts (dalā‘il naqlīyah) whose apparent meanings suggest the opposite, the situation cannot be without one of four possibilities:*

1 - Either the rational and transmitted proofs are both true, which leads to the contradiction of opposites, which is impossible.

2 - Or they both are false, which results in the denial of opposites, which is also impossible.

3 - Or we accept the transmitted proofs and reject the rational proofs, which is invalid because we cannot verify the truth of the transmitted proofs except through rational proofs, such as establishing the existence and attributes of the Creator, how miracles show the truth of the Prophet, and how miracles appear through Muhammad's hand.

4 - Or we reject the rational proofs completely, which would discredit reason and invalidate the acceptance of any rational argument.

*Therefore, the only remaining option is to conclude, based on the decisive rational proofs, that the transmitted texts either: Are incorrect, or are correct, but their intended meaning is different from their apparent meaning. If we allow ta'wīl, we then provide interpretations, but if we do not allow it, we leave the knowledge of this to Allah alone. This is the universal law to be referred to when dealing with ambiguous matters."*²⁴⁵

Given the seriousness of this universal law (*qānūn kullī*)—especially in the version formulated by al-Rāzī—Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah responded to it in detail. He dedicated an entire book to refuting it, titled *Naqd Ta'sīs al-Jahmīyah* (Refutation of the Founding of the Jahmīyah). In addition, Ibn Taymiyyah also addressed the issue extensively in his other work *Dar' Ta'ārud al-'Aql wa al-Naql* (The Refutation of the Conflict Between Reason and Transmission). Furthermore, the renowned scholar Ibn al-Qayyim dedicated a significant portion of his book *Al-Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalah* to this issue, considering this law as the second *ṭāghūt* among the four *ṭawāghūt* (tyrants) that the enemies of the texts (*naṣṣ*) have set up to destroy the strongholds of the religion.²⁴⁶

It is likely that what has been mentioned earlier in this research, and what will follow—inshā'Allāh—serves as a refutation of this universal law (*qānūn kullī*), both in its premises and its consequences, in light of what has been established by the Imams of the Salaf. The aim here is to clarify the concept of the so-called universal law (*qānūn kullī*), its origins, and the major figures who formulated and applied it among the philosophers and theologians (*'ulamā' al-kalām*).

It remains to be pointed out that most of those who came after al-Rāzī from the Ash'arī school (*al-ash'arīyah*) relied on al-Rāzī's law, especially al-Ijī and those after him. Therefore, al-Rāzī is undoubtedly the leader of the later Ash'arī sect (*ṭā'ifah*), and this may explain the intense deviation and

²⁴⁵ *Asās at-Taqdīs* by al-Rāzī (p. 220-221).

²⁴⁶ *Al-Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalah* (3/796 and onwards).

extremism in their denial (*ta'fīl*) and interpretation (*ta'wīl*).²⁴⁷

The Claim that Texts Do Not Yield Certainty in the Fundamental Issues of Religion, Including the Attributes and Actions of the Blessed Lord:

As we have briefly discussed earlier in this research, this **claim** was first articulated by **al-Rāzī**, and some of his statements were mentioned there that indicate this position.

I would like to begin by reminding that this view has been **refuted** by the **Imams** of Islam, including **Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah** and his student, the scholar **Ibn al-Qayyim**, from various angles.²⁴⁸

The most famous figure to have excessively criticized the **texts** of revelation, describing them as not yielding **certainty**, after al-Rāzī, is **Sīf al-Dīn al-Āmidī** (631 AH).

In his extensive discussions, **Sīf al-Dīn al-Āmidī** makes the following key statements regarding the nature of textual evidence in the field of **ʿIlm al-Kalām** and its limitations when it comes to establishing certainty in matters of **Aqīdah**:

He says, *"When some of the scholars envisioned the falseness within these paths, and saw the injustice contained within them, they relied upon a set of **ahādīth** reported from the **Sunnah** and the statements of the **Ummah**. However, these are far from reaching the highest level of certainty. Their authenticity is weakened, both in terms of the content (*matn*) and the chain of narration (*sanad*); therefore,*

²⁴⁷ *Al-Mawāqif* by al-Ijī (p. 40).

²⁴⁸ *Naqd Ta'sīs al-Jahmīyah* (2/314-334). Ibn al-Qayyim refuted it with seventy-three arguments, see: *al-Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalah* (2/642-794).

*to use them as evidence is essentially a branch of establishing the **kalam**.*" ²⁴⁹

In other words, since the proof for **kalam** is based on 'aql, it becomes the primary source for establishing the **ahādīth**. How, then, can they be used as evidence to prove the **attributes** of Allah without relying on the proof of 'aql? This assumes the **ahādīth** are used at all; otherwise, they remain **ẓannī** (presumptive) and do not establish **yaqīn** (certainty) or serve as a valid proof.

He also adopts the philosophical approach to the reports regarding the **vision** of Allah, stating:

*"We do not rely on anything other than the rational approach we have explained regarding the issue of **ru'yah** (vision). Everything else falls within the realm of sensory perceptions and mental insights, neither of which provide **qat'** (certainty) or **yaqīn**. They are only mentioned to aid in conceptual understanding, guiding individuals towards genuine belief. For there may be a person who is more inclined towards the apparent meanings in the **Kitāb** and **Sunnah**, and the consensus of the **Ummah**, than to the rational paths and certain ways of knowledge, due to the roughness of their battle and their inability to grasp it fully.*"

²⁵⁰

The words of **Sīf al-Dīn al-Āmidī** in his **kalām** work, *Ghayat al-Marām*, reflect a deeper philosophical stance against the reliance on **nass** (texts) for establishing certainty in matters of **Aqīdah**. He states:

*"Know that these apparent meanings, even though they may be misleading to some, with their seeming implications based on the linguistic context or the technical usage in the '**urf** (customary understanding), will inevitably lead one into the realm of **tajsīm** (anthropomorphism) and enter the circle of **tashbīh***

²⁴⁹ *Ghayat al-Marām*, p. 90-91.

²⁵⁰ *Ghayat al-Marām*, p. 174.

(resemblance).”²⁵¹

He further elaborates that this view is a form of deviation and impossibility, as he says:

*“Some scholars might cling to the apparent meanings of the **Kitāb** and **Sunnah**, as well as the statements of certain **a’immah** (leaders), but they have no bearing on matters of **qat’iyyāt** (decisive truths) or **yaqīniyyāt** (certain realities). Therefore, we chose to disregard them and did not waste time presenting them.”*²⁵²

Following the same line of thought, **al-Āmidī**’s position was taken up by **al-Ījī**, who, in discussing the **sam’ī** (auditory) evidences, remarks: *“There is doubt about their ability to provide **yaqīn** (certainty) in matters of ‘**aqlīyyāt** (rational matters); because it depends on whether **sam’ī** evidences alone can decisively rule out any rational opposition.”*²⁵³

Before moving on to future topics regarding naql wa aql relationship and the ash’ari thesis, it is important to provide a general commentary on the statements of **al-Āmidī** and those who followed his lead, to prevent the misconception that their views represent unchallenged truth.²⁵⁴

It is well-established in much of **kalām** (theological discourse) that one can achieve **qaṭ’** (certainty) regarding the meaning intended in a statement, and denying this is an act of contradiction. If **qaṭ’** is achieved in the speech of someone

²⁵¹ *Ghayat al-Marām*, p. 138

²⁵² *Ghayat al-Marām*, p. 218

²⁵³ *Mawāqif fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām*, p. 40.

²⁵⁴ This perspective is further clarified in the work of the esteemed scholar ‘**Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ma’lamī**, in his book *al-Qā’idah ilā Taṣḥīḥ al-‘Aqā’id*, particularly in the final chapter of his book, *al-Tankīl bā Mā Fī Ta’nīb al-Kawtharī min al-Abā’īl*, where he addresses the falsehoods and misinterpretations propagated by some contemporary figures. (Source: *al-Qā’idah ilā Taṣḥīḥ al-‘Aqā’id*, p. 329-331, published by the General Directorate of Fatwa, Riyadh, 2nd edition, 1403 AH).

who is absolutely incapable of error, it follows that the meaning intended is understood clearly: that is, the correct meaning must be inferred from the speech.

Once this premise is established—that it is impossible for such a speaker to lie, whether by mistake or intentionally, and this is inherently true—**qaṭʿ** in the correctness of the intended meaning is achieved.

Thus, it is impossible for there to be a rational proof (**dalīl ʿaqlī**) that contradicts that meaning.

Therefore, anyone who claims that **nass** (texts) do not lead to **qaṭʿ**—either because they do not impart **yaqīn** (certainty) or because they are susceptible to **muʿāraḍa** (opposition) from rational arguments—must be one of two types:

- 1 - Someone ignorant of the principles of **kalām**, especially with the available context and clues that assist in understanding the speech.
- 2 - Someone who is a **mukadhdhib** (denier) of the speaker of these texts, particularly if they reject or distort the meanings of these texts from their true intended interpretations.

In the case of **al-Āmidī** and others like him, it cannot be doubted that they are well-versed in the principles of **kalām**, so it is difficult to categorize them as being in the first category—those who are unaware of these principles.

Opposition of Texts with Their Like, Dismissing Their Implications, or Preferring the Implication of the Opposing Text:

One example of this is their opposition to the verse of Allah where He established Himself above the throne and similar verses, which affirm the attribute of **istiwāʾ** (settling) upon the Throne of Allah. This is contradicted by their reference to

another verse: "There is Nothing Like Him" ²⁵⁵

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) responded, saying: *"They confuse the common people by suggesting that anyone who affirms that He is above the heavens on His Throne has made a comparison."* ²⁵⁶

This was the method used by **al-Rāzī** when interpreting the verse of **istiwā'**. He argued that the apparent meaning of the verse is invalid because of the verse: There Is Nothing Like Him, which negates any similarity in all aspects, implying that **istiwā'** could not mean that He is physically seated in the way creatures are. He concluded that, if this interpretation were true, it would contradict the verse. ²⁵⁷

Al-Rāzī extensively included such oppositions in his tafsīr, which he understood from the opposing texts, and used them to challenge the method of the **salaf** in affirming the divine attributes. ²⁵⁸

They also opposed the **mutawātir** (mass-transmitted) narrations of **ru'yah** (vision) by citing Allah's statement: "Vision cannot encompass Him." ²⁵⁹

Ibn al-Qayyim responded: *"Oh the minds! We received these narrations from the one to whom the verse was revealed, and He brought both this and that. How can a Muslim oppose his words by a corrupted understanding of the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān? If they understood it properly, they would know that the Qur'ān is in agreement with the Sunnah, not contradictory to it."* ²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ Ash-Shūra: 11

²⁵⁶ *Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalāh* 4/1533.

²⁵⁷ *Tafsīr al-Kabīr* 5/22

²⁵⁸ For further discussion, see *Tashīḥ al-Mafāhīm al-'Aqdīyah fī al-Ṣifāt al-Ilāhīyah*, by 'Isā ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Ḥamīrī, Dār al-Salām, 1st edition, 1419H, p. 156 and beyond.

²⁵⁹ Al-An'ām: 103

²⁶⁰ *Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalāh* 4/1534.

Another example of opposition involves texts affirming the **‘ulūw** (ascendancy) of Allah, such as *"To Him ascends the good word, and the righteous deed lifts it"* (Fater: 10), and *"And He is the Most High, the Most Great"* (Al-Baqarah: 255); which they oppose with texts about His **ma‘iyyah** (companionship), such as *"And He is with you wherever you may be"* (Al-Ḥadīd: 4). They argue that what is in the Qur’ān and Sunnah, stating that Allah is above the Throne, conflicts with what affirms His **ma‘iyyah** with His creation.²⁶¹

Similarly, **al-Āmidī** also followed this path when discussing the issue of "Is the nonexistent a thing?" He cited texts such as *"And never say of anything, 'Indeed, I will do that tomorrow,'"* (Al-Kahf: 23), and *"Indeed, the earthquake of the Hour is a terrible thing"* (Al-Ḥajj: 1), arguing that these apparent meanings could be opposed by other similar ones, such as *"And [He] created you from before when you were nothing"* (Maryam: 67).²⁶²

These oppositions, along with many others, are all based on erroneous understandings of the texts of the Qur’ān and Sunnah.

The evidences which they use will be explained and responded in future chapters when clarifying the manhaj (methodology) of ahlu sunnah in "conflict between reason and revelation".



²⁶¹ For further clarification, see *Al-Fatwā al-Ḥamawīyah al-Kubrā* by **Ibn Taymiyyah**, p. 518.

²⁶² *Ghāyah al-Marām* p. 281-282.

Chapter Twelve: The Methodologies of Ahl al-Sunnah in Resolving Apparent Contradictions:

In this chapter we will shortly see the methodologies of major imams when it comes to the issue of conflict between texts, and reason and revelation.

Imam Ibn Qutaybah:

Imām Ibn Qutaybah, whose full name was ‘Abd Allāh ibn Muslim ibn Qutaybah al-Dīnawarī—some reports say al-Marwazī—was a distinguished scholar and author, known as Abū Muḥammad. He earned renown for his extensive knowledge and prolific contributions to Islamic sciences.

He was born in Baghdad in the year 213 AH. Among his notable teachers were Ishāq ibn Rāhwayh, Muḥammad ibn Ziyād ibn ‘Ubayd, and Ziyād ibn Yaḥyā. He, in turn, taught many students including his son, the judge Aḥmad, as well as ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Sukkarī and ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ja‘far ibn Rustawayh, among others.

Among his many works are:

Gharīb al-Ḥadīth (The Obscurities of Hadith). *Kitāb al-Ma‘ārif* (The Book of Knowledge). *Uyūn al-Akḥbār* (Selections of Reports). *Ṭabaqāt al-Shu‘arā’* (Classes of Poets). *Ta’wīl Mushkil al-Qur’ān* (Interpretation of Difficult Verses in the Qur’ān). *Ta’wīl Mukhtalif al-Ḥadīth* (Interpretation of Conflicting Ḥadīth). *Al-Ikhtilāf fī al-Lafẓ fī al-Radd ‘alā al-Qā’ilīn bi-Khalq al-Qur’ān* (Differences in Wording in Response to Those Who Claim the Qur’ān is Created).

Ibn Qutaybah was deeply disturbed by the rising wave of *shubuhāt* (doubts and specious arguments) that had begun to circulate about the Qur’ān in his time. The

relentless stream of objections and criticisms launched at the divine revelation compelled him to take action. As Dr. al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr remarked in the introduction to *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*: “He feared that the end result of these doubts might be ruinous for the inexperienced and the youth, so he dedicated himself to refuting them, straightening their distortions, and turning their deceit back upon its originators.”²⁶³

In his introduction to *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, Ibn Qutaybah outlines both the motivations of those who attacked the Qur'ān and the flawed reasoning behind their arguments. He states:

“The Book of Allah has been met with defiance by heretics who revile it, treat it disrespectfully, and follow that which is ambiguous from it, ‘seeking discord and seeking its interpretation’ (Āl ‘Imrān: 7), relying on feeble intellects, impaired insight, and faulty reasoning. They have distorted the words from their proper places and diverted them from their intended meanings.

They then accused it of contradiction, absurdity, grammatical error, disjointed structure, and inconsistency.

They put forth arguments that might sway the naive and the unseasoned, planting shubuhāt in hearts and igniting shakk (skepticism) in the breasts.”

He continues by highlighting the irrationality of these claims, explaining that had their interpretations been valid, the Qur'ān's original opponents—those eloquent masters of language and debate from among the Quraysh—would have certainly exploited them:

“Had the criticisms of these later deniers been valid based on their interpretations, those who never ceased opposing the Messenger of Allah would have beaten them

²⁶³ Introduction to *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, Dr. al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr, p. 76.

to it. These were the very people to whom he presented the Qur'ān as the clearest sign of his prophethood, as proof of his truthfulness, and as a direct challenge to produce something like it. They were the masters of eloquence, rhetoric, poetry, and argument, distinguished among mankind for their sharp tongues and sound reasoning. Allah described them as such in various passages of the Qur'ān.

Yet they never claimed what these modern-day critics claim. They alternated in their accusations—calling it sorcery at times, poetry at others, or merely tales of the ancients.

But neither Allah nor any reliable report has ever narrated that they accused it from the angle claimed by these detractors.”

In response, Ibn Qutaybah took it upon himself to write a comprehensive defense of the Qur'ān, focusing on clarifying what appears problematic in its verses without overreaching through speculative reasoning or arbitrary interpretation (*ta'wīl*). He explains:

“So I desired to defend the Book of Allah, to shield it with luminous evidences and clear proofs, and to uncover for people what others seek to obscure.

I composed this book, combining therein explanations for the problematic portions of the Qur'ān, drawing from established tafsīr while expanding upon it with added clarification and detail. For passages whose interpretation I could not attribute to a knowledgeable imām versed in Arabic language, I indicated the place of majāz (figurative meaning) and the route of conceptual possibility (imkān), without asserting an opinion or final interpretation.

I refrained from citing chains of transmission to those who authored the tafsīr, for I did not merely transmit their words—I explained them, clarified their meaning, added and removed expressions, rearranged points, and illustrated them with examples and analogies so that all listeners might comprehend.

*I ask Allah for pardon over any error due to my intentions, and for success in what I have attempted, and the reward of what is right.”*²⁶⁴

In *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, Imām Ibn Qutaybah offers an expansive and detailed critique of the objections raised by critics of the Qur'ān. His engagement is not superficial—rather, he thoroughly presents the claims made by skeptics, then systematically dismantles them with reasoned responses and precise analysis. The work itself spans nearly six hundred pages, a testament to the depth and care with which he approached the task.

What enabled this comprehensive refutation was his mastery of language and thought, as well as the strength of his *manhaj* (methodology): “*He possessed a powerful, eloquent command of language, and was capable of rigorous, scholarly critique. His knowledge was vast, his intellect sharp, and his reasoning broad. He drew upon two rich traditions of learning—Arabic and Persian—which sharpened both his literary taste and his analytical insight.*”²⁶⁵

Ibn Qutaybah opens the book with a *muqaddimah* (introduction) that outlines some of the remarkable features of the Qur'ān's eloquence (*balāghah*) and the intricacy of its structure (*naẓm*). These features, he argues, are what decisively silenced its detractors and exposed the artificiality of those who sought to fabricate similar speech. As he states in the introduction.²⁶⁶

Ibn Qutaybah then explains that recognizing this literary and rhetorical excellence is not something accessible to all—it requires deep familiarity with Arabic language and culture. In his words: “*Only one who studies the Qur'ān extensively, possesses wide-ranging knowledge, and understands the diverse styles and methods of the Arabs will truly grasp its excellence.*”²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, ed. al-Sayyid Ṣaqr, Cairo: Dār al-Turāth, 2nd ed., 1393 AH, pp. 22–23.

²⁶⁵ Dr. al-Sayyid Aḥmad Ṣaqr, Introduction to *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, pp. 76–77.

²⁶⁶ Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, p. 113.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 12.

In his seminal work *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, Imām Ibn Qutaybah dedicates a section to clarifying the linguistic principles (*uslūb*) and expressive methods (*asālīb*) employed by the Arabs in their speech. These linguistic norms, he argues, are vital for grasping the subtleties of Qur'ānic language and resolving what may appear to be contradictions or ambiguities. This approach exemplifies a core aspect of *manhaj Ahl al-Sunnah*—namely, returning to the linguistic and cultural usage of the Arabs in interpreting revelation.

He begins by illustrating the Arabs' use of *ḥarakāt al-binā'* (grammatical vowel endings) to distinguish between meanings in otherwise identical words.

1 - The Arabs distinguish between two meanings by the vocalization of a single consonant. For example, they say *rajulun la'na* (a man who is cursed by others), with the letter ‘‘ayn having a *ḍammah*. But if he is the one who curses others, they say *rajulun la'anah*, with a *fatḥah* on the ‘‘ayn.²⁶⁸

2 - He then explains another stylistic method in which the Arabs differentiate between closely related meanings by altering a single letter in the word: They say of a fire that has completely gone out: *hāmidah*. But if the flame has settled yet embers still remain, they say: *khāmidah*.²⁶⁹

3 - Ibn Qutaybah further expands on the central role of poetry in Arab intellectual tradition. He observes that for the Arabs, poetry functioned as a repository of knowledge (*maḥfazh li-'ulūmihā*), a preserver of cultural values, genealogies, and historical events. Its structured rhythm and rhyme served to protect it from distortion or tampering: “*For the Arabs, poetry was like scripture for other nations. It preserved their sciences, upheld their virtues, documented their lineages, and chronicled their history. Allah protected it with meter, rhyme,*

²⁶⁸ Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, pp. 15–16.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., pp. 16–17.

eloquence of structure, and artistic clarity—making it resistant to forgery and alteration. Whoever attempted to tamper with it would struggle to do so.” ²⁷⁰

4 - Among the key observations made by Imām Ibn Qutaybah is his emphasis on the diverse *asālīb* (styles) and *ṭuruq* (paths) through which the Arabs expressed meaning in their speech. These methods form the foundation of Arabic rhetoric, and they appear consistently throughout the Qur’ān. Without familiarity with these conventions, one risks misunderstanding the divine text and falling into *ta’wīl fāsīd* (false interpretation): The Arabs utilized rhetorical tools such as metaphor (*isti’ārah*) ²⁷¹, analogy (*tamthīl*), inversion (*qalb*), forwardness and delay (*taqdīm wa-ta’khīr*), omission (*ḥadhf*), repetition (*takrār*), concealment (*ikhfā’*) and expression (*iẓhār*), insinuation (*ta’rīd*), clarity (*iṣṣāḥ*), allusion (*kināyah*), elaboration (*īdāḥ*), addressing the singular as if plural, the plural as if singular, and addressing one or many as if they were two; also, using expressions of particularity to convey generality, and generality to imply particularity. ²⁷²

5 - Such tools reflect not only the depth of the Arabic language but also its flexibility in expressing layered meaning. In this light, the Qur’ān, when revealed, followed the same linguistic patterns familiar to its first audience. As Ibn Qutaybah affirms: “*By all these methods, the Qur’ān was revealed.*” ²⁷³

This declaration underscores a crucial point in *‘ilm al-tafsīr*: proper comprehension of the Qur’ān hinges upon mastery of the Arabic language and its rhetorical customs. Ibn Qutaybah seems to aim—*wa-Allahu a’lam*—at warning against the presumptuousness of those lacking in this linguistic competency, particularly the *mutakallimūn* (theologians engaged in *‘ilm al-kalām*), who often attempt to pass judgment on the Qur’ān's style and structure without adequate grounding in the

²⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 17–18.

²⁷¹ On the issue of metaphors, we will have a separate chapter where we discuss the different approaches on metaphors and clarify the salaf belief and the arguments for and against metaphors.

²⁷² Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta’wīl Mushkil al-Qur’ān*, pp. 20–21, 103–298.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 21.

very language it was revealed in.

In a chapter that Imām Ibn Qutaybah titled "**Bāb at-Tanāquḍ wa-al-Ikhtilāf**" (*the Chapter of Contradiction and Disagreement*), he compiles a list of passages from the Qur'ān that detractors have accused of inconsistency. With the same methodological clarity he outlined in his introduction—drawing from the statements of the leading exegetes (*mufasssirūn*) and his extensive linguistic insight—he proceeds to refute these claims systematically.²⁷⁴

Among the verses which critics cited as supposedly contradictory are the following:

"Do not dispute before Me. I had already sent you the warning." (Qāf: 28) *"This is the Day they will not speak, nor will it be permitted for them to offer excuses."* (al-Mursalāt: 35–36). *"Then, on the Day of Resurrection, you will dispute before your Lord."* (az-Zumar: 31). *"Bring your proof if you are truthful."* (al-Baqarah: 111)

At first glance, these verses seem to conflict—some asserting that there will be no speech or dispute, while others explicitly describe disputation and dialogue. Ibn Qutaybah responds with careful *tafsir* (*explanation*), bringing together context and narration to show that there is no contradiction at all. He writes: *"The answer to all of this is that they will indeed dispute—when the wronged bring claims against the wrongdoers. In that moment, disputation takes place. But once retribution is enacted and judgment passed, it is said to them: 'Do not dispute, do not speak, and do not offer excuses,' for none of this will avail you or benefit you in any way. At that point, they are silenced."*²⁷⁵

He further supports this explanation with a narration: *"Abd ar-Razzāq reported*

²⁷⁴ Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān*, p. 65.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

from Ma‘mar, from Qatādah, that a man came to ‘Ikrimah and asked: “What do you make of Allah’s statement: This is the Day they will not speak, and His statement: Then, on the Day of Resurrection, you will dispute before your Lord?” ‘Ikrimah replied: “These refer to different stations. In one station, they speak and dispute. Then Allah seals their mouths, and their hands and feet begin to speak. At that point, they no longer speak.” ²⁷⁶

Allah says: “Indeed, We are sending the she-camel as a trial for them, so watch them and be patient. And inform them that the water is shared between them, each drinking turn attended. But they called to their companion, so he dared and hamstrung her. Then how was My punishment and My warnings?”
al-Nāzi‘āt: 27–30

From this, certain detractors claimed that the verse implies the heavens were created before the earth, which they argued contradicts other verses. Imām Ibn Qutaybah addresses this claim directly and clarifies the misunderstanding with precise linguistic and exegetical reasoning. He states: *“The Book of Allah is not to be twisted by the ignorance of the foolish nor by the mistakes of those who misinterpret. A critic might have some ground to stand on if the verse had said, and after that, He created the earth, or began it, or originated it. But what the verse actually says is: dahāhā (He spread it). Creation of the earth had already begun, as stated in earlier verses—in two days. Then the heavens were created while they were smoke, also in two days. Then the earth was dahw—spread out and extended. It had been a compact mass. Mountains were fixed upon it, plants grew upon it, all of that over the course of two days. That makes six days in total, as stated for those who ask. This is also the interpretation reported from Ibn ‘Abbās. Mujāhid said that the phrase after that (ba‘da dhālik) here means ‘alongside that’—and in the usage of the Arabs, ba‘da (after) and ma‘a*

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

*(alongside) can mean the same.”*²⁷⁷

Among the common pitfalls of certain interpretative schools—especially those influenced by speculative theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*)—is the overuse of *majāz* (figurative language). Those who lean heavily on *ta’wīl* (interpretive reinterpretation) often invoke *majāz* to bend the meanings of Qur’ānic verses according to preconceived theological frameworks, without being bound to the linguistic norms of the Arabs.

One prominent example of this tendency is found in the commentary on *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān* by the Mu’tazilī scholar Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār. His editor proudly describes his method: “(B) *Language and structure: Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār relies on language for his interpretation—whether in individual words, grammatical rules, or attention to the Qur’ānic composition. He maintains the necessity of preserving both linguistic and semantic connections between verses. In this regard, he is like other Mu’tazilah in their care for language in tafsīr and ta’wīl.*”²⁷⁸

But Imām Ibn Qutaybah critiques this reliance on *majāz* as one of the primary sources of deviation in interpretation: “*Indeed, it is from majāz that many people erred in their interpretations. The paths split because of it, and sects diverged.*”²⁷⁹

Imām Ibn Qutaybah Allah continues his critical examination of interpretative distortions by highlighting instances where groups falsely claimed the use of *majāz* (figurative language) in the Qur’ān, thereby altering its intended meanings. He writes: “*A group held that the speech and words of Allah are not qawl (speech) nor kalām (words) in reality, but rather the mere origination of meanings (ījād al-ma’ānī). They reinterpreted much of the Qur’ān through majāz, as in the example*

²⁷⁷ Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta’wīl Mushkil al-Qur’ān*, pp. 47–48.

²⁷⁸ Dr. ‘Adnān Zarzūr, Introduction to *Mutashābih al-Qur’ān* by Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, p. 44.

²⁷⁹ Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta’wīl Mushkil al-Qur’ān*, p. 103.

*of someone saying: ‘The wall spoke and leaned’ or ‘Say with your head’—by which one only means it leaned, not that it actually spoke. In this view, qawl is merely something extra.”*²⁸⁰

His methodology reminds us that the integrity of *naql* (transmission) and *fahm* (understanding) rests not merely on philosophical reasoning but on a firm grasp of Arabic usage and an adherence to the inherited meanings of key terms. When foundational terms like *kalām*, *qawl*, or *‘ilm* are reinterpreted away from their clear linguistic and theological realities, entire doctrinal frameworks are jeopardized.

Ibn Taymiyyah:

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah, in his renowned work *Dar’ Ta’āruḍ al-‘Aql wa-an-Naql*, approaches the claim of contradiction between reason (‘*aql*) and revelation (*naql*) through a dual strategy: one *ijmālī* (general) and one *tafsīlī* (detailed).

The general response is built upon exposing the invalidity of the three foundational premises upon which the theologians (*ahl al-kalām*)—notably Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī and his predecessors—constructed their approach to the supposed conflict between reason and revelation. These three premises are:

- 1 - The presumption of an actual contradiction between reason (‘*aql*) and revelation (*naql*).
- 2 - The limitation of possibilities to only four logical divisions (as suggested by theologians).

²⁸⁰ Ibn Qutaybah, *Ta’wīl Mushkil al-Qur’ān*, p. 106.

3 - The invalidity of three of these divisions and the presumed truth of only one.

To dismantle this structure, Ibn Taymiyyah offers a foundational principle that becomes the basis for any discussion concerning *ta'āruḍ* (conflict). This principle holds that if two *dalīls* (evidences)—whether both rational, both revelatory, or one of each—are alleged to contradict, then the situation must necessarily fall into one of three categories:

1 - Both evidences are *qaṭ'ī* (definitive): In this case, a contradiction is impossible, whether they are both rational, both revelatory, or one of each.

2 - One is *qaṭ'ī* and the other is *ẓannī* (speculative): The definitive evidence is to be preferred without exception—regardless of whether it is rational or revelatory.

3- Both are *ẓannī*: In this case, the appropriate course is to weigh the evidences and give preference to the stronger of the two, again, regardless of whether it is rational or revelatory.

This structured principle serves as a preface to Ibn Taymiyyah's detailed refutation and offers several critical *ta'sīlāt* (foundational clarifications) in epistemology and theology:

1 - Revelation vs. Innovation, Not Reason: The evidence from revelation (*ad-dalīl ash-shar'ī*) should not be seen as opposed to reason (*'aql*), because the two are not equivalent categories. Rather, *'aql* is to be compared with *naql* (transmitted evidence), while *dalīl shar'ī* encompasses both *naql* and *'aql*. Therefore, what truly stands opposed to *dalīl shar'ī* is *dalīl bid'ī* (innovated, unsanctioned reasoning).²⁸¹

2 - Criterion Is Certainty, Not Category: The proper criterion for weighing evidences is not their classification as rational or revelatory, but whether they are *qaṭ'ī* or *ẓannī*. In any case of conflict, the definitive (*qaṭ'ī*) must be given

²⁸¹ *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa-an-Naql*, 1/198–199; see also *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 6/71–72.

precedence, whether it comes from reason or revelation.

3 - Only Sound Reason Is Authoritative: the type of reason that qualifies as *qaṭʿ* is *al-ʿaql aṣ-ṣarīḥ* (clear, sound reason). This excludes the speculative constructs of the theologians, which are fraught with disagreement, conjecture, and analogical excesses. True reason, when sound and properly applied, never contradicts authentic revelation.

4 - Certainty Exists in Both Revelation and Reason: Just as rational evidence can be *qaṭʿ*, so too can transmitted evidence. Ibn Taymiyyah explicitly rejects the notion that definitive evidence cannot exist in revelation, saying: “*The claim that revelation cannot be definitive is like cutting through thorns with bare hands.*”²⁸²

5 - A key epistemological point emphasized by Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah is the necessity of distinguishing between **sound, definitive reason** (*al-ʿaql aṣ-ṣarīḥ ad-daʿlalah*) and what people commonly refer to as *maʿqūlāt* (rational ideas) or *dalālah ʿaqliyyah* (rational inferences). Not everything that people deem rational necessarily qualifies as definitively rational in its implications. Just as not everything people consider part of the Sharīʿah is necessarily valid—whether in terms of its chain of transmission (*isnād*), textual integrity (*matn*), or its inferred meaning (*dalālah wa-istinbāṭ*)—so too, not all that is assumed to be rational is actually sound or binding. One researcher has articulated this methodological principle, foundational to Ibn Taymiyyah’s defense of the creed of the *salaf*, in a more precise and profound formulation: “*This methodological foundation laid by Shaykh al-Islām in defense of the creed of the Salaf is sometimes more accurately and deeply expressed in the phrase: muwāfaqat ṣarīḥ al-maʿqūl aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ lil-manqūl aṣ-ṣaḥīḥ (the agreement of clear and sound reason with authentic transmission). Its merit lies in the fact that it qualifies ʿaql as clear and sound, and naql as authentic—thus, the two can never*

²⁸² *Darʿ Taʾarūḍ al-ʿAql wa-an-Naql*, 1/80.

be in contradiction under any circumstances.” ²⁸³

These are **foundational principles and universal methodologies** that, by their inherent clarity, almost impose themselves on the human intellect due to their powerful reasoning and coherent method of demonstration. As one scholar put it: *"These are methodological foundations and overarching principles that impose themselves upon the intellect by their power of persuasion and structured reasoning."* ²⁸⁴

Ibn Taymiyyah begins his detailed refutation of the *universal principle* (al-qānūn al-kullī) proposed by the *innovators* (ahl al-bid‘ah) by laying down several *methodological premises* (muqaddimāt manhajīyyah). These premises are drawn from a careful study of the revealed texts and a comprehensive examination of the foundational assumptions of the *theologians* (ahl al-kalām) and their *rational constructions* (ma‘qūlāt) which they used to oppose those texts. His approach is based on an in-depth, analytical reading and survey of the majority of their principles. This is evident in his presentation of the primary arguments made by the objectors, especially since he had studied the most important works across their various sects and time periods.

Among the most prominent works that Ibn Taymiyyah examined and critiqued in his *Dar’ Ta‘ārūḍ al-‘Aql wa-al-Naql* are:

1 - **Asās al-Taqdīs** by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. ²⁸⁵

2 - **Nihāyat al-‘Uqūl** by al-Rāzī. ²⁸⁶

²⁸³ *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min al-Ashā‘irah*, Dr. ‘Abd ar-Rahmān al-Mahmūd, 2/818.

²⁸⁴ *Taqrīb at-Turāth: Dar’ Ta‘ārūḍ al-‘Aql wa-an-Naql li Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah*, prepared by Dr. Muḥammad as-Sayyid al-Jalīnd, al-Ahrām Center for Translation and Publishing, Cairo, p. 11.

²⁸⁵ Which he refuted in a lengthy work entitled *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah fī Ta’sīs Bidā‘ihim al-Kalāmiyyah*.

²⁸⁶ *Dar’ al-Ta‘ārūḍ* (1/21), (2/244), (3/87), (4/290), (5/328), (6/295)

3 - **Al-Muḥaṣṣal** by al-Rāzī. ²⁸⁷

4 - **Al-Ishārāt** by Ibn Sīnā ²⁸⁸

5 - **Al-Risālah al-Aḍḥawīyyah** by Ibn Sīnā. ²⁸⁹

6 - **Tahāfut al-Falāsifah** by al-Ghazālī. ²⁹⁰

7 - **Abkār al-Afkār** by al-Āmidī. ²⁹¹

8 - **Ghāyat al-Marām** by al-Āmidī. ²⁹²

9 - **Manāhij al-Adillah** by Ibn Rushd. ²⁹³

For this reason, Ibn Taymiyyah stated: “*I examined most of the issues in which people have disagreed, and I found that anything which contradicts the sound, explicit texts is based on corrupt speculations, whose falsehood is known through reason. Rather, through reason, the opposite of such speculations—what agrees with the revealed law—is known to be true. I observed this in the major foundational issues such as those concerning tawḥīd, the attributes (ṣifāt), divine decree (qadar), prophethood (nubuwwāt), the afterlife (ma‘ād), and other such topics. I found that what is known by sound reason never contradicts the revealed texts (sam‘) at all. As for the so-called scriptural evidence that supposedly contradicts reason, it is either a fabricated ḥadīth or based on a weak indication that would not count as valid proof even if there were no rational opposition—so*

²⁸⁷ *Dar’ al-Ta‘ārūḍ* (1/22), (4/290), (8/179)

²⁸⁸ *Dar’ al-Ta‘ārūḍ* (5/87), (9/254), (10/13).

²⁸⁹ *Dar’ al-Ta‘ārūḍ* (1/9), (5/10).

²⁹⁰ *Dar’ al-Ta‘ārūḍ* (1/162), (2/213), (3/389), (4/281), (5/142).

²⁹¹ *Dar’ al-Ta‘ārūḍ* (3/61), (3/182), (4/18), (5/110), (7/356), (9/249)

²⁹² *Dar’ al-Ta‘ārūḍ* (3/385).

²⁹³ *Dar’ Ta‘ārūḍ al-‘Aql wa-al-Naql* (6/212).

*how could it be valid if it contradicts sound reason (ṣarīḥ al-ma‘qūl)?”*²⁹⁴

Among the *methodological premises* (muqaddimāt manhajiyyah) laid down are:

1 - Complete trust in the content of the Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Messenger, with the certainty that they are free of contradiction and cannot be genuinely opposed by any *clear rational proof* (ma‘qūl ṣarīḥ).²⁹⁵

*“The established texts found in the Qur’an and Sunnah are not, and have never been, opposed by any clear rational evidence. Rather, what appears to oppose them is filled with ambiguity and inconsistency. What is known to be true cannot be contradicted by something ambiguous and confused, whose truth has not been established. On the contrary, we say—categorically and universally—that the authentic reports from the Messenger of Allah have never been opposed by sound rational argument. Let alone one that would override them. What does seem to oppose them consists of specious arguments and imaginative illusions built on ambiguous meanings and vague terminology.”*²⁹⁶

2 - The confusion claimed by those who object to the revealed texts—particularly those dealing with Allah’s attributes—is nothing more than baseless allegations without any proof. Likewise, their claims of contradiction between different texts, or between the texts and rational thought, are merely speculative doubts and imagined conflicts arising from ignorance of both revelation and sound reasoning. For this reason, engaging with such individuals and exposing the corruption of their so-called rational principles—through which they oppose revelation—is done only as a form of *argumentative concession* (tanaẓẓul).²⁹⁷

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 1/147.

²⁹⁵ Abd al-Raḥmān al-Maḥmūd, *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min al-Ashā‘irah*, 2/821.

²⁹⁶ *Dar’ Ta‘āruḍ al-‘Aql wa-al-Naql*, 1/155–156.

²⁹⁷ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Maḥmūd, *Mawqif Ibn Taymiyyah min al-Ashā‘irah*, 2/821.

3 - Outlining the essential general principles required to refute the invented rules established by those who object to the revealed texts. Among these invented rules are their claims that: (a) inference based on transmitted (*sam'ī*) evidence is founded on speculative premises, and (b) solitary reports (*akhbār al-āḥād*) are not valid in matters of creed. Hence, they concluded that reason must always be preferred over revelation.

The general principles highlighted by Shaykh al-Islām in his refutation of these rules include the following:

- a. Demonstrating that the transmitted texts (*al-adillah as-sam'īyyah*) are independently authoritative and serve a clarifying function.
- b. Affirming that the Messenger ﷺ conveyed the message in a clear and complete manner, and that he clarified his intended meaning. Ibn Taymiyyah said: *"Every expression in the Qur'an and ḥadīth that they claim requires interpretation (ta'wīl) in its technical sense—meaning a redirection from its apparent meaning—must have been explained by the Messenger through another statement. It is impermissible for him to utter speech whose apparent meaning is false without clarifying the correct intent. Nor is it allowed for him to expect the people to understand something he did not explicitly clarify or point them toward—on the assumption that they might discern it through their intellects. This is a slander against the Messenger who conveyed the clear message."* ²⁹⁸
- c. Demonstrating the absence of a valid rational counter-argument by exposing the invalidity of the rational claims they allege to be in opposition to the Messenger.
- d. Showing that sound rationality (*al-ma'qūl aṣ-ṣarīḥ*) agrees with what the Messenger ﷺ brought and does not contradict it. Ibn Taymiyyah said: *"As for the way to refute them, we have several paths: First: To show the falsity of what they*

²⁹⁸ *Dar' Ta'arūḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, 1/22–23; see also 1/25–78, and *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 19/155–202.

claimed to be in opposition to the Messenger ﷺ from among their rational arguments. Second: To establish that what the Messenger ﷺ brought is either known by necessity from his religion, or known through definitive evidence. In such a case, it becomes impossible, while affirming the truthfulness of the Messenger, to contradict it—and this benefits everyone who believes in the Messenger. Third: To clarify that sound reason aligns with what the Messengers brought and does not contradict it—either because it is known necessarily by the intellect, or by reflection and reasoning. This is an even stronger proof against the objector in every case—whether he harbors doubt about the truth of the Messenger's mission, or whether he doubts whether the Messenger reported this matter—since among these objectors are many whose hearts are filled with doubt regarding the very truth of the message, or whether the Messenger truly said what is being attributed to him." ²⁹⁹

These are the most important elements that *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql* was written to establish—principles that are foundational in addressing the supposed conflict between revelation (*shar'*) and reason (*'aql*). This alleged conflict led to the rejection of numerous revealed texts and the distortion of their meanings based on this weak pretense—a pretense that Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah masterfully refuted in this work. And Allah knows best.



²⁹⁹ *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, 4/6–5.

Chapter Thirteen: On The Issue Of Majazi (Metaphors) Between The Salaf, Ibn Taymiyyah, And Ahlu Kalam:

It was the Mu‘tazilah who invented the theory of metaphor (majāz). What were their purposes in creating and inventing it? Some of them are presented here. The areas in which they relied on metaphor.

An illustration of much of what al-Zamakhsharī wrote, and presenting another topic that was a substitute for metaphor among the proponents of metaphor, and we follow them in this regard. Instead of that, we import al-Zamakhsharī’s influence in this example; his impact on the rhetoricians and the exegetes.

After this, metaphor between negation and affirmation, and presenting the issue in the fundamentals of jurisprudence: how is this issue presented? How do these issues relate to the methodology of Ahl al-Sunnah? When you look at how they are presented in the books of fundamentals and theology, you find that the issue is settled from the outset: both in terms of the strength of the opponents' position and the number of those who uphold their view versus the few who follow the stance of Ahl al-Sunnah. Thus, presenting these issues in the books of fundamentals is a deeply distorted presentation. This is not only specific to the issue of metaphor but is generally the case with most issues where the people of innovation oppose Ahl al-Sunnah wa’l-Jamā‘ah. It is they who write in theology, in rhetoric, in tafsīr, and in the fundamentals; what they invent here, they subtly infiltrate into these other areas. One might think that they are confronted with purely academic phenomena, when in fact they are dealing with theories created by this innovator or that.

I believe these topics are more important than the core issue. Because if we delve into the core issue and present the opinions, the arguments of those who hold them,

and weigh what we believe to be stronger and supported by evidence, it may obscure some very important matters that initially led to this conflict. Therefore, I thought it best to start from here, from scratch, so we can recognize that we are faced with a purely heretical theory that has no relation to the subject at hand. Of course, what I am saying will be met with much astonishment from Ahl al-Sunnah and others. However, I – by the grace of Allah – say all of this based on the evidence and clues, some of which will be presented before you, insha'Allah. This theory, in essence, has nothing to do with the Arabic language.

In order to prevent anyone from thinking that those who reject *majāz* (metaphor) are opposing the language itself, it is essential to clarify the dispute. If someone says, "I saw a lion giving a speech," does the person who denies *majāz* deny that the "lion" here refers to a courageous man? No, they do not deny this. If they did, the solution would be different. The conversation with them would then be treated from a different perspective. No one denies this; why does everyone agree on this point? Because there is indeed a clear indication that the term "lion" refers to a courageous man, not an actual lion, and the clue to this meaning is the phrase "giving a speech," right?

Here, the disagreement lies. There is no conflict between those who accept *majāz* and those who do not about the fact that "lion" refers to a courageous man in this example. The disagreement, however, arises over what to call this linguistic usage. Those who accept *majāz* refer to it as metaphor, while we consider it to be a literal meaning. We say that as long as the most apparent meaning of "lion" is a courageous man, then the usage of the word in this context is literal. Of course, this might seem strange to us — why is that? Because this particular cultural perspective has dominated us; we have been taught that there is such a thing as *majāz* with specific rules and definitions. As a result, it becomes difficult to adjust to a different perspective. However, we present the truth and believe that this is indeed the correct view.

There is no objection to calling this expression by any name you like, whether *majāz* or *tawassuʿ* (expansion), but the term *majāz* has come to represent a particular concept with a set of rules. Therefore, if you call it *majāz*, you must accept the full set of implications and rules associated with that term.

Miftāḥ al-ʿUlūm by al-Sakkākī, who was a Muʿtazilī, Talkhīṣ al-Miftāḥ by al-Qazwīnī, who was an Ashʿarī, and Asrār al-Balāghah by al-Jurjānī, who was also an Ashʿarī. We will read his words on *majāz* (metaphor). These individuals—who are from these schools of thought—we do not blame them. This is their belief, their view. However, why do we, as Ahl al-Sunnah, agree with them? Why should we agree with them, especially when we differ from them in the foundational principles (uṣūl)? If a theory is based on sharʿī (legal) grounds, it must be established and proven to be sharʿī for me to agree with it. If the matter is intellectual (ʿaqlī), then the differences between the two must be proven logically for me to agree. If it is a linguistic matter (lughawī), then it must be proven by the experts of the language (ahl al-lughah) for me to agree. If it is not in accordance with sharʿī principles and actually contradicts them, or if it does not have intellectual or linguistic proof, then I cannot agree.

“Based on these points, one scholar asserts—focus on this text, as well as other similar texts—that rhetoric (balāghah) was born within the environment of the mutakallimīn (theologians), particularly the Muʿtazilī school, and that it flourished and developed within this environment. He goes on to state that it matured and progressed through the efforts of scholars from this active group of Arabic thinkers. In its early stages, the Muʿtazilī scholars such as ʿAmr ibn ʿUbayd, Bishr ibn al-Muʿtamar, and Abū ʿUthmān al-Jāḥiẓ nurtured it. During its period of growth and development, figures such as al-Rumānī and al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, among others, contributed to its progress.”³⁰⁰

³⁰⁰ This text is from Dr. Walīd Ibrāhīm Qasāb's thesis titled *The Influence of the Muʿtazilah on Rhetorical and Critical Heritage until the End of the 6th Century Hijrī*.

Another researcher, under the title *The Role of the Mu'tazilī School in the Emergence and Development of Rhetorical Sciences*, states: "Due to the significant role played by the Mu'tazilah in general and their literary figures in particular in the establishment and development of rhetorical studies in Arabic literature, we have decided to dedicate a specific section to explore their contributions in this important area of Arabic literature." He further elaborates: "Regarding the role of the Mu'tazilah in the emergence and evolution of rhetorical sciences, we can confidently state that the foundational core of these sciences was established among the mutakallimīn, particularly the Mu'tazilah. In fact, we can say that a broad and active rhetorical and linguistic renaissance took place due to the mutakallimīn, with the Mu'tazilah at the forefront, starting from the 2nd century Hijrī. Therefore, figures like Wāṣil ibn 'Atā, al-Niẓām, Thamāmah, Bishr, 'Amr ibn 'Ubayd, and others are regarded as the pioneers in the establishment of the sciences of rhetoric and eloquence." 301

One scholar, claiming to be neutral, asserts: "Metaphor (majāz) has played a crucial role in the 'Itilālī school of thought, as all their interpretations (ta'wīlāt) in denying the divine attributes (ṣifāt) were based on it." 302

Dr. Muḥammad al-'Amrī states that the mutakallimīn (theologians) who focused on the tanzīh of the Qur'anic text from conflicting with reason ('aql) and language (lughā)—as he describes it—utilized the linguistic and rhetorical resources to interpret the concept of the Qur'anic miracle (i'jāz). This is because, as he mentions, linguists raised a series of intellectual questions regarding the coherence (insijāmi) of the Qur'anic text's miraculous nature, and the linguistic answer alone was no longer sufficient, as al-Jāḥiẓ said. It became essential to rely on mantiq

³⁰¹ This is found in *Tārīkh al-Mu'tazilah: Their Thoughts and Beliefs* by Dr. Fāliḥ al-Rubay'ī. He discusses these details in greater depth, and I recommend reviewing it, particularly from page 50.

³⁰² This statement is from Dr. Aḥmad 'Abd al-Ghaffār's work titled *The Phenomenon of Ta'wīl and Its Connection to Language*.

(logic). In this context, the concept of majāz (metaphor) evolved from the general linguistic level (al-mustawā al-lughawī al-‘ām)—which refers to anything that deviates from the usual linguistic norms and established meanings—to the specific kalāmī level (al-mustawā al-kalāmī al-khāṣ) where the meaning is transformed, with majāz in contrast to ḥaqīqa (reality). 303

Dr. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ Lāshīn, who has written extensively on this subject, says: "The third century witnessed the mutakallimīn of the Mu‘tazila trying to purify the ‘aqīda (creed) from any misunderstandings. Their fundamental principle of tawḥīd (oneness of Allah) became the basis for their discourse on majāz, defending the divinity (ulūhiyya) from any interpretation that might imply anthropomorphism (tajassum) or resemblance (tashbīh). They confronted every Qur’anic text and ḥadīth that contradicted their beliefs. They confronted them without exception.” 304

One researcher discusses the direct motivations of the Mu‘tazilah (the Mu‘tazite scholars) in studying majāz (metaphor), stating that the Mu‘tazilah found some verses in the Qur’an and ḥadīth that seemingly contradicted their uṣūl (fundamentals) and ‘aqā’id (beliefs). They exerted effort to ta’wīl (interpret) these texts in a way that aligned with their school of thought. In doing so, they sought to divert the words from their apparent meanings and assign them other meanings beyond their surface interpretations. From this perspective, some of the fundamental principles of I‘tizāl (the Mu‘tazilite school) can be considered direct motivations for studying majāz in the Qur’an, ḥadīth, and in Arabic in general. 305

Dr. ‘Abd al-Qādir Ḥasan, who has written extensively on balāgha (rhetoric), states: "Despite all of this—meaning, the dominance of the rational theory over their thinking—the mutakallimīn (theologians) are credited with the development of

³⁰³ Dr. Muḥammad al-‘Amrī discusses this in his book *Al-Balāgha al-‘Arabiyya: Uṣūluhā wa-Intiṣārātuhā*

³⁰⁴ This is found in his book *Al-Bayān fī daw’ Asālīb al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*.

³⁰⁵ This is discussed in *Al-Manhā al-I‘tizālī fī al-Bayān wa-I‘jāz al-Qur’ān* by Aḥmad Abī Zayd.

many muṣṭalahāt (terminologies) of balāgha that were later adopted by later scholars. These include the division of speech into ḥaqīqa (reality) and majāz (metaphor), or the division of ‘ulūm al-balāgha (rhetorical sciences) into ma‘ānī (meanings), bayān (clarity), and badī‘ (stylistic embellishments)." 306

A researcher specializing in al-Zamakhsharī's approach to tafsīr (exegesis) asserts that al-Zamakhsharī focused on majāz because his theological views, driven by ‘aqīda (creed), motivated him to shape the meaning of the texts according to the Mu‘tazilite viewpoint, and that he was not concerned with studying majāz from an aesthetic or rhetorical perspective. 307

After this brief introduction we will analyze Ibn Taymiyyah’s position through the lens of Dr. Yusuf Ghafees where he discussed Ibn Taymiyyah’s view on majaz in his sharh (explanation) of tadmurriyyah and hamawiyyah, and Dr. Ahmad Issam Al Najjar, whom had an article on this issue which has been translated.

Ibn Taymiyyah On Majaz:

Dr. Yusuf Ghafees says: "Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah did not discuss those linguistic terms, such as when someone says: "I saw a lion giving a speech," *this is a majāz (metaphor) according to Ibn Taymiyyah, and he accepts it. Similarly, when someone says: "I saw a man giving a speech," this is ḥaqīqa (literal) according to Ibn Taymiyyah, and he also accepts it.*

However, Shaykh al-Islam says: "The issue of majāz, when viewed as an attribute of words, is a muṣṭalah (terminology), and the terminology has a wide scope. But

³⁰⁶ This is not a statement from the Mu‘tazilah themselves, but from an expert in the development of balāgha. Dr. ‘Abd al-Qādir Ḥasan mentions this in his book *Al-Mukhtaṣar fī Tārīkh al-Balāgha*.

³⁰⁷ This point is discussed by Dr. Muṣṭafā Ṣādiq al-Juwaynī in his book *Manhaj al-Zamakhsharī fī Tafsīr al-Qur’ān wa-Bayān I’jāzih*.

when viewed as an attribute of meanings, this is what we have already mentioned." Therefore, Ibn Taymiyyah does not deny majāz as a muṣṭalaḥ. The grammarians (naḥwiyyīn) have labeled certain constructions as ḥāl (state), fā'il (subject), tamīyiz (specifier), etc., and these are all terminologies. There is no objection in terminology. Ibn Taymiyyah and others have permitted religious muṣṭalaḥāt, let alone linguistic muṣṭalaḥāt. In fact, we find that Ibn Taymiyyah sometimes says: "This is from the majāz of the language," and similar statements are found in the words of Ibn al-Qayyim. Some researchers have claimed that they contradicted themselves, but this is not true. This is because what Ibn Taymiyyah meant by the word majāz was as an attribute of words, while what he rejected and opposed was the idea that majāz is an attribute of meanings. By this, he meant that a verse in the Qur'an has one meaning called ḥaqīqa (literal meaning), and another meaning, which contradicts the first one, is called majāz (metaphorical meaning). This is what Ibn Taymiyyah opposed, and this opposition is a clear legal (shar'ī) stance.

For example, regarding the verse: {The Most Merciful rose above the Throne} [Tāhā: 5], Ibn Taymiyyah opposed the view that the verse has two meanings: one we call ḥaqīqa (literal meaning), and another different one, which we call majāz (metaphorical meaning), thus making the verse have two meanings that contradict each other. This is what Ibn Taymiyyah wanted to oppose.

This is a correct stance, because how can it be said that the verse has a literal meaning that is not intended, and another intended meaning? From here, Ibn Taymiyyah said that what they call ta'wīl (interpretation) is a form of qarmaṭa (distortion) in matters of hearing. He grouped all the sects of the three groups into the category of qarmaṭa, because either they explicitly declared qarmaṭa like the Bāṭinīyah (esotericists), or they said – like Ibn Sīnā – that it is a speech for the masses, or they said – like the mutakallimīn (theologians) – that it is a form of ta'wīl (interpretation).”³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ Dr. Yusuf Ghafes, explanation of tadmuriyah, lecture 8.

Dr. Yusuf Ghafees further stated in his hamawiyyah: "It is well known that Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, may Allah have mercy on him, was one of the most outspoken critics of the issue of *majāz* (metaphor), and he said that the Qur'an does not contain any *majāz*.

Some contemporary scholars have spoken about this issue and claimed that Shaykh al-Islam is inconsistent. They argue that at times he uses the term majāz in his books, saying: "This is from the linguistic majāz," and "This is from the majāz of the language."

However, he also has writings and parts of his statements where he explicitly rejects *majāz*. *Some even assumed this applied to Ibn al-Qayyim as well, despite the fact that Ibn al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy on him, generally followed the methodology of Shaykh al-Islam. (...) What Shaykh al-Islam opposed and strongly rejected was majāz as an attribute of meanings. However, if it is considered an attribute of words, then it is merely a muṣṭalaḥ (terminology), and this is what led Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah to sometimes use the term majāz, saying: "This is from the majāz of the language." Ibn al-Qayyim also frequently used such expressions.*

For example, the statement "I saw a lion giving a speech" is a linguistic *majāz*.

This is a terminology, and it is no different from saying: "Zayd came," where "came" is a past verb and "Zayd" is the subject. No one would ask for proof that "Zayd" is the subject, or that this is a *ḥāl* (state), *tamīyiz* (specifier), or *maf'ūl bih* (direct object), because these are terms, and there is no dispute over terminology. Shaykh al-Islam would not oppose linguistic terminology because we also have *muṣṭalaḥāt* (terms) in *fiqh* (jurisprudence) that he did not oppose. (...) Thus, *Shaykh al-Islam did not deny majāz as a muṣṭalaḥ of words, but his critique and objection were directed at majāz as an attribute of meanings.*

Some might say: "We see that Shaykh al-Islam, in his rejection of the theory of majāz, sometimes denies it even from the perspective of pure linguistic muṣṭalah." He says, for instance: "This division was not mentioned by the great linguists like Khalīl ibn Aḥmad, al-Asma'ī, or others," and "This division of Arabic words into ḥaqīqa (literal) and majāz (metaphorical) was not spoken of by any of the early generations, nor by any of the early linguists," and "The proponents of this division have not provided a correct definition for it." They claim that ḥaqīqa is the word used in its original meaning, and majāz is the word used in a meaning other than the original. This necessitates knowledge of both the origin (wada') and usage (istimāl).

Shaykh al-Islam's critique is strong here because they say that ḥaqīqa is the word used in its designated meaning, and majāz is the word used in a different meaning. So, we must know the wada' (origin) and istimāl (usage)." ³⁰⁹

Dr. Ahmad Issam Al Najjar says: *"So then—what is the concept of majāz according to Ibn Taymiyyah?"*

His understanding of majāz is based on the unity of meaning (waḥdat al-ma'nā) and the multiplicity of referents (ta'addud al-maṣādiq). (...) Therefore, one may say: "I saw a lion on the pulpit" is majāz, or one may call it ṣāḥir siyaqī (contextual apparent meaning), or ṣāḥir tarkībī (compositional apparent meaning), or a kināyah (metonymy), or whatever term one prefers—these are merely terminologies indicating a difference in referent, not a difference in meaning.

From this angle—where majāz is just a term for differing referents—Ibn Taymiyyah has no issue with it. But the idea that the word "lion" in one sentence has a completely different meaning in the other sentence is something Ibn Taymiyyah does not accept." ³¹⁰

³⁰⁹ Dr. Yusuf sharh al hamawiyyah lecture 4.

³¹⁰ Did Ibn Taymiyyah deny majāz? Translation of Shaykh Ahmad Issam al-Najjar's article, <https://telegra.ph/Did-Ibn-Taymiyyah-deny-maj%C4%81z-Translation-of-Shaykh-Ahmad-Issam-al-Najjars-article-04-08>.

From now onwards I will provide my view:

An important question remains: is the disagreement regarding *majāz* (metaphor) a matter of terminology (*lafẓī*) or of meaning (*ma' nawī*)?

Some researchers argued there is a inconsistency in the writings of ibn taymiyyah saying "he has passages saying the dispute is real not semantical" however what they miss is that there is a passage in his writings where he briefly mentions that the dispute over *majāz* might be a *lafẓī* (terminological) matter ³¹¹, some claimed this is an inconsistency in the words of Ibn Taymiyyah, however this is wrong.

What seems apparent to me – and Allah knows best – is that the dispute contains both *lafẓī* (terminological) and *ma' nawī* (meaning-based) elements.

Terminological Dispute: The *lafẓī* aspect of the disagreement is illustrated when the word "lion" (*asad*) is used to refer to a courageous man. Everyone agrees that the listener does not understand this term as referring to the wild animal, nor is the man literally being compared to a lion in form and appearance. Instead, the listener understands that the courageous man is being likened to a prominent trait of the lion, namely bravery. This meaning is almost universally understood when the term is used in such a context.

However, those who support *majāz* argue that the term "lion" here is being used metaphorically. The opponents of *majāz*, on the other hand, claim that the term "lion," when used in reference to a brave man, is used literally in that context. They assert that it would be impossible to attribute to the Arabs the use of this expression in a way that deviates from its intended meaning. No one would misunderstand this usage as referring to the actual animal.

³¹¹ *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* 12/277.

A similar case can be seen with the term "head" (*ra's*) when referring to wealth, as in the phrase "capital" (*ra's al-māl*). No one would think the term "head" here refers to the head of a person. This is agreed upon by all.

Yet, those who support *majāz* claim that the term "head" is used here in a non-literal sense, since its literal meaning refers specifically to the human head. Conversely, those who deny *majāz* argue that the term "head" is being used literally in this context, as the word *ra's* can be used literally for the head of a human, the head of capital, the head of a road, the head of a mountain, the head of a matter, and so on.

Meaning-Based Dispute: The supporters of *majāz* claim that the word is being used in a non-literal sense, outside its original usage, and that the contextual clue indicates the shift from the literal to the metaphorical meaning. Regardless, all parties agree that the intended meaning is clear from the context and the structure of the language used.

At times, the dispute may be more substantial than merely a terminological one, particularly in the case of the *āyāt as-sifāt* (verses of attributes). Many of those who affirm *majāz* in the Qur'an tend to deny the apparent meanings of many of Allah's attributes.

This is not my own independent research, rather this was taken by numerous researchers: Dr. Yusuf Ghafees, as I quoted, Dr. Ahmad Issam Al Najjar, Dr. Sultan Al Umayri in his lectures on *majāz* ³¹² Dr. Sulaymān ibn Ṣāliḥ al-Ghuṣn ³¹³, Dr. Razzāq ibn Ṭāhir Ma'āsh. ³¹⁴

The Salaf On Majazi, Addressing Misunderstandings:

³¹² <https://soundcloud.com/mishref-alshehri/il3lfl2axhmm?in=mishref-alshehri%2Fsets%2F6as4hryrwpuv>

³¹³ In his research called "Mawqif al-Mutakallimīn min al-Istidlāl bi-Nuṣūṣ al-Kitāb wa-l-Sunnah" had a chapter on the issue of *majāz* on page 474-475.

³¹⁴ *Masālik Ahl al-Sunnah fīmā Ashkala min Nuṣūṣ al-'Aqīdah*, Volume 2, page 419.

Some of the Ḥanābilah (followers of the Ḥanbali school of thought) have mentioned that Imam Aḥmad explicitly stated that there is *majāz* (metaphor) in the Qur'an.³¹⁵

Shaykh al-Islam and his student Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned that some people reported two narrations from Imam Aḥmad regarding this issue.³¹⁶

They inferred this from Imam Aḥmad's commentary on the verse: "*Indeed, We are with you*" (Surah Ash-Shu'arā', 26:15), where he said: "*This is a majāz of language. A man says to another man: 'We will provide you with your sustenance,' or 'We will do this for you.' And as for His statement: 'Indeed, I am with the two of you. I hear and I see' (Surah Tāhā, 20:46), it is permissible in language. A person might say to another: 'I will provide for you,' or 'I will do good for you.'"*"³¹⁷

The correct understanding is that Imam Aḥmad did not intend *majāz* here in the sense of something that is not literal or that can be negated. He did not mean *majāz* in its technical sense, but rather that it is something permissible in language. He meant that it is permissible for a powerful person with helpers to say: "We did this, and we will do this," and similar expressions. Imam Aḥmad did not intend to suggest that the word was used in a way other than its established meaning.

Evidence that Imam Aḥmad's concept of *majāz* refers to what is permissible in language and not the technical term of metaphor is found in his words: "*It is permissible in language.*" For him, *majāz* was a matter of permissibility and

³¹⁵ This can be found in various sources, such as *Al-'Uddah* by Al-Qādī Abū Ya'lā (2/695), *Al-Īmān* by Shaykh al-Islam (7/89), in *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, *Mukhtaṣar al-Ṣawā'iq* (2/4), *Al-Mukhtaṣar* by Ibn al-Laḥḥām (p. 45), *Al-Maswādah* (p. 164–165), and *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munīr* (1/192).

³¹⁶ This can also be seen in *Al-Īmān* by Shaykh al-Islam (7/89) and in *Mukhtaṣar al-Ṣawā'iq* (2/5).

³¹⁷ *Al-Radd 'ala al-Jahmīyyah* by Imam Aḥmad, p. 64, as found in *'Aqā'id al-Salaf*.

extension in language, not the technical definition that contrasts with *ḥaqīqa* (literal meaning).

Just as Imam Aḥmad used the term *majāz* to refer to what is permissible in language, this usage is also found in the words of Imam Al-Dārimī, where he responded to Al-Marisi by saying: *“It cannot be said that something is sami‘ (hearing) and baṣīr (seeing) except for one who possesses hearing and sight. However, it may be said figuratively, for example, that mountains and palaces ‘appear’ and ‘hear,’ meaning that they face each other and sounds reach them, but they do not comprehend. It is impossible to say that a mountain is sami‘ and baṣīr because hearing is impossible for it except for those who have ears, and sight is impossible except for those who have eyes. If the followers of Al-Murīsī deny what we have said, they should provide an example of something that is not from the possessors of hearing and sight, but for which the Arabs would allow it to be said: ‘He is hearing and seeing.’ They will not find such an example.”*³¹⁸

Imam Al-Dārimī also mentioned in another place: *“It may be permissible for a person to say: ‘I built a house,’ or ‘I killed a man,’ or ‘I struck a boy,’ or ‘I weighed money for so-and-so,’ or ‘I wrote him a letter,’ even though he did not directly perform any of these actions himself. Instead, the builder built, the writer wrote, the killer killed, and the striker struck. Such statements are permissible as a majāz that people understand with their hearts, following the figurative language of the Arabs.”*³¹⁹

This statement clarifies that when the early Salaf used the term *majāz*, they referred to what is permissible in language, and not the technical *majāz* that contrasts with *ḥaqīqa*.

Imam Ibn Qutaybah used the term *majāzāt al-kalām* (metaphors of speech) to

³¹⁸ *Radd al-Dārimī ‘ala al-Marisi*, p. 408,

³¹⁹ *Same source*, p. 387

describe the various ways in which the Arabs expressed themselves, particularly in their interpretation of difficult Qur'anic verses. These forms of expression, unique to them, include metaphors, similes, the use of precedence and postponement, omission, repetition, addressing one person as if speaking to many, and vice versa, as well as using terms that are specifically intended to express general meanings or using general terms to convey specific meanings. The Qur'an was revealed in such styles, and the Sunnah also came in this manner.³²⁰

In earlier usages of the term, as seen with figures like Abū 'Ubaydah 'Amr ibn al-Muthannā (the grammarian, who passed away in 209 or 210 AH), the meaning of *majāz* was different. He was one of the first to use the term *majāz* and authored a book titled *Majāz al-Qur'ān* (The Metaphor of the Qur'an).³²¹

The term *majāz* in their usage referred to the explanation and interpretation of words, rather than their abstraction into purely metaphorical meanings. For this reason, Abū 'Ubaydah's book is also known by other names, such as *Gharīb al-Qur'ān* (The Strange Words of the Qur'an), *Ma'ānī al-Qur'ān* (The Meanings of the Qur'an), and *I'rāb al-Qur'ān* (The Grammar of the Qur'an).³²²

Thus when the salaf used majaz they did not mean the later definition but merely an explanation or something the arabs said, in contrast to the later ash'ariyyah who meant it as an opposition to the apparent meaning.



³²⁰ These aspects are detailed in works such as *Ta'wīl Mushkil al-Qur'ān* (pp. 20-21), *Al-Risālah* by Al-Shāfi'ī (pp. 51-53), and *Jāmi' al-Bayān* by Al-Ṭabarī (12/1, 75).

³²¹ This book is referenced in sources like *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* (7/88) and *Mukhtaṣar al-Ṣawā'iq* (2/3).

³²² His approach can be found discussed in *Al-Tafsīr al-Lughawī li-l-Qur'ān* by Dr. Muṣā'id al-Ṭayyār (p. 335).

Chapter Fourteen: The Issue Of Ahad Al Hadith

We discussed this issue in previous chapters slightly when discussing the authority of naql in ahlu kalam:

The question of whether *khavar al-āḥād* (a solitary report) yields certainty (‘*ilm*) has long occupied the attention of scholars, both past and present. This issue has been discussed in relation to whether such reports necessitate action, their epistemological weight (*ḥujjiyyah*), and whether they are valid in matters of ‘*aqīdah* (creed). Because of its importance, some scholars—both classical and contemporary—have authored independent treatises dedicated to this specific issue.³²³

Imām al-Nawawī (rahimahū Allāh) stated: “Groups from among the scholars of *ḥadīth* and others have authored numerous independent works specifically on *khavar al-wāḥid* (solitary reports) and the obligation to act upon it.”³²⁴

Scholars have differed regarding whether a *khavar al-wāḥid* yields certainty (‘*ilm*), and their views can be generally divided into three positions:

First View: *Khavar al-Wāḥid* Yields ‘*Ilm* Unconditionally: This opinion holds that a solitary report can impart ‘*ilm* without requiring any supporting indication

³²³ Among the earlier scholars who wrote on this were al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr. Al-Khaṭīb discusses it in *al-Kifāyah fī ‘Ilm al-Riwāyah*, and Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr in *al-Tamhīd*.

Among contemporary scholars, Shaykh al-Albānī addressed this topic in his treatise *al-Ḥadīth Ḥujjah bi-Nafsih fī al-‘Aqā’id wa al-Aḥkām* (The Ḥadīth is a Proof in and of Itself in Beliefs and Rulings). Shaykh ‘Abd Allāh ibn Jibrīn also addressed it in his work *Akḥbār al-Āḥād fī al-Ḥadīth al-Nabawī*, and Shaykh Salīm al-Hilālī in his treatise *al-Adillah al-Shawāhid*—alongside others who have followed the same path.

³²⁴ *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* by al-Nawawī (1/62).

(*qarīnah*). It has been attributed to certain figures from the Zāhirī school and, according to one narration, to Imām Aḥmad.³²⁵

However, this attribution is questionable. It is difficult to affirm that *every* individual solitary report—regardless of its context—necessarily provides certainty, either by rational or legal standards. Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah clarified: “*No rational person has ever claimed that every solitary report yields knowledge (‘ilm). Much of the scholarly debate has actually been directed at rejecting this specific claim.*”³²⁶

This statement makes it clear that the view of *absolute* certainty from all solitary reports is not sustainable.

The attribution of the view—that *khavar al-wāḥid* (solitary report) yields ‘ilm (certainty) unconditionally—to Imām Aḥmad is, in truth, highly doubtful. His known positions on criticizing narrators (*jarḥ*) and validating them (*ta’dīl*), as well as his rejection of weak reports, are numerous and well-documented. A detailed discussion of Imām Aḥmad’s actual stance on *khavar al-wāḥid* will be addressed later, in shā’ Allāh.

Moreover, it is not reasonable—nor has any intelligent person ever claimed—that every solitary report from any individual automatically produces certainty, without any regard to the character of the narrator or the presence of supporting *qarā’in* (indications) confirming its truthfulness. Ibn al-Qayyim (May Allah have mercy on him) expresses this nuanced view by saying: “*The solitary report is judged in light of the evidence accompanying it. At times, one is certain of its falsehood due to clear proof contradicting it. Sometimes its falsehood is suspected based on indirect indicators. Other times, one remains undecided, with no evidence tipping the scale*

³²⁵ See: *al-Mu’tamad* by Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (2/566); *al-Tabsirah* by al-Shīrāzī (p. 298); *al-Iḥkām* by al-Āmidī (2/32); *Taysīr al-Taḥrīr* (3/76); *Fatāḥ al-Raḥmūt* (2/121); *Sharḥ Nukhbat al-Fikar* by al-Qārī (p. 39).

³²⁶ *Musawwada* (p. 244).

*toward either truth or falsehood. There are cases where its truth is more likely, but not definitive, and there are also times when its truth is affirmed with complete certainty, removing any doubt. Thus, not every solitary report leads to ‘ilm or even to ḡann (probable assumption).”*³²⁷

It seems that the origin of attributing the view of *unconditional* certainty to certain scholars—such as Imām Aḥmad—stems from an imprecise understanding of their statements. When some early scholars stated that a solitary report “yields ‘ilm,” they clearly did not intend that *any* report from *anyone* does so. Rather, they meant the report of a trustworthy (‘*adl*) narrator, supported by strong contextual indicators (*qarā’in*) affirming its authenticity. In reality, then, this position aligns more accurately with the third view to be discussed later.

The Second Opinion: *Khabar al-Wāḥid* Does Not Yield ‘*Ilm* Unconditionally:

The second view asserts that *khabar al-wāḥid*—a solitary report—does not produce ‘ilm (certain knowledge) under any circumstance. Instead, it only leads to ḡann (probability or assumption), regardless of whether there are accompanying contextual indicators (*qarā’in*) supporting it or not. This position was held by several scholars including al-Bāqillānī,³²⁸ al-Baghdādī, Ibn Fūrak, al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī, ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. It has also been attributed to the majority of *uṣūliyyūn* (legal theorists). According to Ibn Ḥazm, this view represents the stance of the Ḥanafīs, Shāfi‘īs, most Mālikīs, as well as all of the Mu‘tazilah and Khawārij.³²⁹

³²⁷ *Mukhtaṣar al-Ṣawā’iq al-Mursalāh* (2/359–360).

³²⁸ *Tamhīd al-Dalā’il* by al-Bāqillānī, p. 441.

³²⁹ See *al-Mu‘tamad fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* by Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (2/566); *Fatāḥ al-Raḥamūt* (2/121); *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munīr* (2/348); *Dhākira fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, p. 103. Ibn Ḥazm also confirms this attribution in *al-Iḥkām* (1/119).

One representative statement of this view comes from the Mu‘tazilī scholar Ibn Khayyāt, who said: “Our position regarding the solitary report of a trustworthy narrator is that it does not yield knowledge that what was reported is actually as he said.” *al-Intiṣār* by Ibn Khayyāt, p. 120.

Those who deny that *khavar al-wāḥid* (solitary report) yields ‘*ilm* (certain knowledge) have offered a number of arguments which they believe serve as rational *ḥujaj* (proofs). However, upon closer inspection, these arguments often reduce to intellectual assumptions and weak analogies that do not hold up under scrutiny.

One of their primary objections is the possibility of error or falsehood in a solitary report. They argue that since a single narrator may lie or make mistakes—even if unintentionally—we cannot be certain of the truthfulness of such reports. Therefore, the report can only lead to *ẓann* (probable assumption), not ‘*ilm*.³³⁰

This objection misunderstands the actual position held by proponents of *khavar al-wāḥid*. They do not claim that all narrators are infallible or immune to lying. Rather, the claim is that certain narrators, when supported by signs or contextual indicators (*qarā’in*), may reach a level of reliability such that certainty (‘*ilm*) about their report becomes justified.³³¹

Furthermore, taking this objection to its logical conclusion would render all efforts to distinguish between truth and falsehood invalid. As Ibn Ḥazm explains: “*This would lead to a position where no one would ever be able to distinguish between truth and falsehood. It would be a denial of Allah’s statement regarding the preservation of His revealed dhikr (reminder), and a rejection of His completion of the religion. It would also result in the corruption of the religion and its mixture with what Allah never legislated. Ultimately, it would mean that no person could know with certainty what Allah has commanded and what He has not.*”³³²

Among the arguments posed by those who reject the epistemic weight of *khavar*

³³⁰ See *al-Iḥkām* by Ibn Ḥazm (1/119); *at-Tabsirah* by ash-Shīrāzī, p. 299.

³³¹ See *al-Iḥkām* (1/119); *Akhbār al-Āḥād* by Shaykh ‘Abdullāh ibn Jibrīn, p. 85.

³³² *Al-Iḥkām* by Ibn Ḥazm (1/135).

al-wāḥid (solitary report) is the claim: “If solitary reports (*āḥād*) truly produced ‘ilm (certain knowledge), then this would apply to every individual report. There would be no need to require the narrator’s justice (*‘adālah*) or even their Islam—just as those conditions are not required for *mutawātir* (mass-transmitted) reports. This would also mean that we would be obliged to accept the claim of any person who alleges prophethood or makes a claim over another’s wealth. Since no one affirms this, it proves that solitary reports do not yield ‘ilm.”³³³

This argument fails to account for the nuanced differentiation between types of reports. It is true that not every report can be accepted blindly. However, it also does not follow that all solitary reports must be rejected or doubted. Our stance, instead, is more comprehensive and grounded in the reality of how knowledge is acquired through transmission (*naql*):

- Some reports are affirmed with certainty.
- Some are rejected as false.
- Some carry likelihood without reaching certainty.
- Some remain in suspension (*tawaqquf*), with no decisive judgment.

This variance is based on external signs (*qarā’in*), the character of the narrator, and contextual integrity. As for *mutawātir* reports yielding ‘ilm, this is due to the sheer number of narrators and the impossibility of coordinated fabrication, which is not the case with solitary reports. The requirement of *‘adālah* and Islam for narrators in solitary reports is precisely because the number is not sufficient on its own to secure certainty, unlike in *mutawātir*.³³⁴

As for the comparison to someone claiming prophethood without a miracle, this analogy is misplaced. A claim to prophethood is an extraordinary claim that lies outside the normative *sunnah* of Allah in how He has dealt with creation. Such a

³³³ See *at-Tabsirah* by ash-Shīrāzī, p. 299; *al-Iḥkām* by al-Āmidī (2/32–34); *al-Mu‘tamad* (2/566).

³³⁴ See *Akhbār al-Āḥād* by Shaykh Ibn Jibrīn, pp. 87–88; *Mukhtaṣar aṣ-Ṣawā‘iq* (2/359–360).

claim cannot be accepted without evidence—namely, a miracle confirming divine appointment. This is fundamentally different from a trustworthy Muslim narrating an ordinary event from another trustworthy source.³³⁵

Among the objections raised by those who reject the *ḥujjiyyah* (authoritativeness) of *khavar al-wāḥid* (solitary report) in yielding *‘ilm* (certain knowledge) is the claim: “*We do not find within ourselves, even when hearing a solitary report transmitted by one whose integrity is beyond question, anything more than a stronger assumption of its truth over falsehood—without certainty. And such assumption does not amount to knowledge.*”³³⁶

This is nothing more than an unproven assertion made precisely in a place of disagreement, and thus carries no evidentiary weight. As al-Āmidī himself reports in rebuttal: “*The opponent may just as well say: I find within myself certainty from such reports.*”³³⁷

In truth, such a statement often reflects the perspective of someone disengaged from the study of prophetic traditions (*aḥādīth*) and disconnected from examining their chains of transmission (*asānīd*) and the biographical details of their narrators. Were those who hold this view to invest time and effort in immersing themselves in the reports of the Messenger ﷺ, their collection, and the biographies of their transmitters, they would find themselves arriving at *qat‘* (certainty) concerning what the trustworthy, precise narrators have transmitted with connected chains back to the Prophet ﷺ.³³⁸

If solitary reports (*āḥād*) were to yield *‘ilm*, then there would never be any contradiction between reports. Yet, we observe apparent contradictions in many

³³⁵ See Shaykh ‘Abd ar-Razzāq ‘Afīf’s commentary on *al-Iḥkām* by al-Āmidī (2/34–35).

³³⁶ *Iḥkām* by al-Āmidī, 1/33.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ See *Mukhtaṣar aṣ-Ṣawā‘iq al-Mursalāh*, 2/432–433.

aḥādīth. If we claim that all such reports yield knowledge, we are left with a logical contradiction. If we say only one yields knowledge while the other does not, this becomes *tarjīḥ bi-lā murajjih* (preference without evidence), which is invalid. Thus, the correct position is to suspend judgment and not affirm certainty in solitary reports.³³⁹

This objection is based on a hypothetical scenario, not on actual occurrences. True contradictions do not exist among authentic prophetic reports unless within the legitimate context of *naskh* (abrogation). When no abrogation is involved, any contradiction is usually only *ẓāhirī* (apparent) and exists only from the perspective of the reader. This is why scholars have authored numerous works aimed at reconciling reports that appear contradictory on the surface.

Alternatively, a report might be considered *shādh* (anomalous), in which a trustworthy narrator opposes those more reliable than him, either due to forgetfulness or error. These matters have been exhaustively addressed by the scholars. Therefore, it is invalid to suspend judgment on trustworthy reports solely because of the potential for such rare occurrences.³⁴⁰

The previously mentioned arguments are among the main objections relied upon by those who argue that *khābar al-wāḥid* (solitary report) yields only *ẓann* (speculative probability), regardless of any accompanying *qarā'in* (supporting contextual indicators). However, as was demonstrated, these objections lack the strength to withstand critical examination and counterargument.

The Third View: *Khābar al-Wāḥid* Can Yield 'Ilm with *Qarā'in*: A third and more balanced view holds that a solitary report can indeed lead to 'ilm (certain knowledge) when supported by sufficient *qarā'in* (indications). This is the position

³³⁹ *Iḥkām* by al-Āmidī, 2/33.

³⁴⁰ See commentary of Shaykh 'Abd ar-Razzāq 'Afīfī on *al-Iḥkām*, 2/33–34; *Akhbār al-Āḥād* by Shaykh Ibn Jibrīn, pp. 88–89.

held by the majority of the *fuqahā'* (jurists) and a large number of *mutakallimūn* (theologians).³⁴¹

This view was also adopted by prominent scholars such as al-Āmidī, Ibn Ḥazm, al-Qāḍī Abū Ya' lā, al-Muwaffaq, Ibn Ḥamdān, aṭ-Ṭūfī, and Ibn az-Zāghūnī.³⁴²

Shaykh al-Islām also defended this position rigorously.³⁴³

The dominant position among the scholars of all Islamic schools and traditions is that a *khbar al-wāḥid* (solitary report), when it is received with acceptance by the *ummah*—either through affirmation of its truth or acting upon it—can yield *ilm* (certain knowledge). This is a foundational principle recorded by scholars of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) from among the followers of Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik, ash-Shāfi'ī, and Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal

Although a minority of later scholars departed from this consensus, following a faction of the *mutakallimūn* (theologians) who denied it, most of the *mutakallimūn* themselves—if not the majority—agreed with the *fuqahā'* (jurists), *muḥaddithūn* (hadith scholars), and the *salaf* (early generations).

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah summarized this consensus in his *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl at-Taḥqīq*, saying: “The majority of the scholars from all groups agree that if a solitary report is accepted by the *ummah* through either belief or practice, then it necessitates knowledge. This is what has been stated in the books of legal theory authored by the scholars of Abū Ḥanīfah, Mālik, ash-Shāfi'ī, and Aḥmad—except for a small group of latecomers who followed a faction among the theologians that

³⁴¹ See *Raf' al-Malām 'an al-A'imma al-A'lām* by Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah, in *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 20/257.

³⁴² See: al-Āmidī, *al-Iḥkām*, 2/32; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Iḥkām*, 1/108; al-Qāḍī Abū Ya' lā, *al-'Uddah*, 3/900–901; *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munīr*, 2/348–349.

³⁴³ See: Ibn Taymiyyah, *ar-Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, p. 38; *Mukhtaṣar aṣ-Ṣawā'iq al-Mursalāh*, 2/372–375.

*denied this. Yet even many, if not most, of the theologians agree with the jurists, hadith scholars, and early generations. This is the view of most of the Ashʿarīs... As for al-Bāqillānī, he was the one who denied this position, and he was followed by people like Abū al-Maʿālī, Abū Ḥāmid, Ibn ʿAqīl, and others. The first view, however, is the one affirmed by Abū Ḥāmid, Abū Ṭayyib, Abū Ishāq, and similar authorities among the Shāfiʿīs. It is also the position of Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Wahhāb and others among the Mālikīs, and of Abū Yaʿlā, Abū al-Khaṭṭāb, Ibn az-Zāghūnī, and others from the Ḥanbalīs. It is likewise the view of Shams ad-Dīn as-Sarakhsī and his peers among the Ḥanafīs.”*³⁴⁴

This affirmation—that a solitary report accompanied by *qarāʿin* (contextual indicators) can convey *ʿilm*—is the mainstream stance of the *salaf* and those firmly grounded in *ʿilm* (knowledge). Imām Abū al-Muẓaffar as-Samʿānī stated: “*If a report is authentic from the Messenger of Allah , ﷺ narrated by trustworthy and authoritative transmitters, passed down from one generation to the next until it reaches the Prophet , ﷺ and is accepted by the ummah, then it yields knowledge in matters where knowledge is required. This is the view of the majority of the people of hadith and of those well-versed in the Sunnah.*

As for the claim that a solitary report can never lead to knowledge and that knowledge can only come through *tawātur* (mass transmission), this is something the Qadariyyah and Muʿtazilah invented. Their real intention was to undermine the reports (of the Prophet). (ﷺ Some jurists who lacked firm grounding in *ʿilm* adopted this from them, without understanding their real aim.”³⁴⁵

Ibn al-Qayyim strongly supported the position that *khavar al-wāḥid* (solitary report) accompanied by *qarāʿin* (contextual indicators) can indeed result in *ʿilm* (certain knowledge). He elaborated extensively on this view and responded to

³⁴⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Muqaddimah fī Uṣūl at-Taḥṣīl*, in *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, 13/351–352.

³⁴⁵ Quoted by as-Suyūṭī in *Ṣawn al-Manṭiq*, pp. 160–161.

those who opposed it in his work *Mukhtaṣar aṣ-Ṣawā'iq*. 346

This view was also supported by various groups of scholars, both early and later, as seen in several works. 347

One of the most significant *qarā'in* that provide 'ilm about the authenticity of a report is the ummah's acceptance of it. When the ummah collectively accepts a report, this provides conclusive evidence of its authenticity because the ummah cannot agree on falsehood. Their consensus on the acceptance of the report indicates their knowledge of its truth. 348

It will be too long to mention all the arguments regarding *ahad al hadith* and I have written a treaty on this issue. 349

Investigating The Doctrine Of Imam Ahmad In Ahad Al Hadith:

Some scholars in the field of *uṣūl al-fiqh* have attributed to Imām Aḥmad views regarding *khavar al-wāḥid* (solitary report) that cannot rightfully be his. It is likely they misunderstood certain phrases of his, leading to inaccurate conclusions.

³⁴⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Mukhtaṣar aṣ-Ṣawā'iq*, 2/359–360.

³⁴⁷ For example, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* by al-Jaṣṣāṣ (1/386), *Fawātiḥ al-Rahmūt* (2/121), *Taysīr al-Tahrīr* (3/76), *Sharḥ Nukhbah al-Fikr* by al-Qārī (p. 39), *Minjād al-Muqri'in* by Ibn al-Jazarī (p. 20), *al-Nukāt 'alā Kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ* (1/377-379), *Sharḥ Nukhbah al-Fikr* by Ibn Ḥajar (p. 49), and *Irshād al-Fuḥūl* (p. 50) all mention this position.

³⁴⁸ This concept is discussed in *al-'Iddah fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh* (3/900), *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* (16/18), *Sharḥ al-Kawkab al-Munīr* (2/349), and *al-Nukāt 'alā Kitāb Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ* (1/378).

In this context, the term *ummah* refers specifically to the scholars of *ḥadīth*. When these scholars receive a report and affirm its authenticity, the rest of the *ummah* follows their judgment. This is supported by *Majmū' al-Fatāwā* (17/18).

³⁴⁹ <https://t.me/Fawaid101/91> Albeit this research was a bit incomplete and the needed refinement was provided here.

For instance, some of the *uṣūliyyūn* claimed that Imām Aḥmad held the position that *khavar al-wāḥid* produces *‘ilm* (certain knowledge) absolutely, even in the absence of supporting *qarā’in* (corroborating indicators). This was explicitly stated by al-Āmidī and others.³⁵⁰

However, it is unquestionably incorrect to attribute such a view to him. It is inconceivable that Imām Aḥmad would accept the report of *any* individual uncritically, regardless of whether the person was truthful or deceitful, righteous or corrupt. In fact, Imām Aḥmad was known for his detailed criticism of many narrators and his rejection of those proven to lie. These criticisms are too numerous to list.

Imām Ibn al-Qayyim harshly condemned al-Āmidī’s attribution of this view to Imām Aḥmad, stating: *"Some scholars of uṣūl have blatantly lied—a clear lie that no one else has said. They claimed: 'One of the two positions of Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal is that khavar al-wāḥid yields ‘ilm even without a supporting indicator (qarīnah), and that this applies consistently to every individual’s solitary report.' Amazing indeed! How can a rational person shamelessly lie against the imams of Islam?"*³⁵¹

Qāḍī Abū Ya‘lā discusses a phrase often quoted from Imām Aḥmad—“*lā nunaṣṣ aṣ-shahādah*” (we do not explicitly testify)—and interprets it to mean that one does not categorically affirm a judgment. However, Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah offers a more precise analysis of the term *nunaṣṣ*. He clarifies that the statement refers to a specific individual being testified for, i.e., not testifying about a particular person unless there is textual evidence.

Ibn Taymiyyah explains that Imām Aḥmad’s affirmation, *"na ‘lam annahu kamā jā’a"* (we know it is as it has come), indicates that he believed the report conveys

³⁵⁰ *Al-Iḥkām fī Uṣūl al-Aḥkām*, al-Āmidī, 2/32; *Musallam al-Thubūt*, 2/121.

³⁵¹ *Mukhtaṣar aṣ-Ṣawā‘iq al-Mursalah*, 2/370–371.

‘ilm (certain knowledge). He supports this by pointing to Imām Aḥmad's testimony regarding the ten Companions promised Paradise—based solely on solitary reports (*khābar al-wāḥid*). In these cases, Imām Aḥmad states: "*ashhadu wa a‘lamu wāḥid*" (I testify and I know—it is the same), clearly demonstrating that he based his testimony on a *khābar al-wāḥid*.³⁵²

This demonstrates that Imām Aḥmad's position was that a solitary report transmitted by a trustworthy narrator can indeed yield knowledge. His earlier statement, "*na‘lam annahu kamā jā’a*" (we know it is as it has come), makes this evident.

The phrase "*lā nunaṣṣ aṣ-shahādah*" (we do not explicitly testify) means that he refrains from making a judgment about a specific individual unless there is a report directly concerning that person. Thus, if a ḥadīth exists regarding someone, Imām Aḥmad acts upon it. As he says: "*illā an yakūna fī dhālika ḥadīth, kamā jā’a ‘alā mā ruwīya*" (except that there is a ḥadīth on the matter, as it has been reported). Therefore, his negation of *nass* (explicit textual testimony) is directed at affirming something for someone without textual proof—not a denial of the knowledge derived from the ḥadīth itself.

From what has been established, it becomes evident that both extremes are mistaken—those who attributed to Imām Aḥmad the view that *khābar al-wāḥid* (solitary report) yields *‘ilm* (certain knowledge) in all cases without qualification, as well as those who claimed he denied the ability of *khābar al-wāḥid* to produce knowledge altogether.

The correct understanding, as supported by Imām Aḥmad's statements and methodology, is that a solitary report transmitted by a *thiqqah* (trustworthy) narrator does indeed yield both *‘ilm* (knowledge) and necessitates *‘amal* (action).

³⁵² *Al-Musawwada fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, p. 242; *Mukhtaṣar aṣ-Ṣawā‘iq al-Mursalāh*, 2/371.

And Allah knows best.



Chapter Fifteen: The Sunni Approach And It's General Principles:

This may be one of the most important chapters in the book alongside the study on qanun al tawil, the issue of metaphors and ahad al hadith, this is a very important chapter in differentiating between ahlu al hadith and ahlu kalam.

Categories of Wording in the Qur'an and Sunnah:

The First Category: Wording That Allows Only One Meaning: This includes texts whose phrasing is so explicit and unambiguous that they cannot logically support any alternative interpretation. These are linguistically *qaṭ'ī*—that is, they offer absolute certainty in what they convey.

An example of this is the usage of numerical terms in the Qur'an. Allah says: “*And We appointed for Mūsā thirty nights, and completed them with ten more, so the appointed time of his Lord was forty nights.*” ³⁵³

Terms such as *thalāthīn* (thirty), *‘ashr* (ten), and *arba‘īn* (forty), as well as proper names like *Mūsā*, are not linguistically capable of signifying anything other than what they directly name. Their meanings are clear and unequivocal. Thus, these are examples of *naṣṣ*—explicit textual wording—and their evident meanings indicate certainty (*yaqīn*) in their referents. Ibn al-Qayyim commented on this clarity, stating: “*Most of the Qur’anic wording is of this type; such is the case with its individual terms. As for its composition, it is constructed in the most precise and unambiguous manner, and it corresponds most perfectly to the intended meaning. Its individual words are explicit, or nearly so, in their denotations, while its*

³⁵³ Al-A‘rāf (7:142).

*phrasing communicates the intended meanings with full clarity. The people addressed by it were native to that language by nature and habit, without artificiality, and thus they knew by necessity what was intended.”*³⁵⁴

Also included in this category are expressions whose structure leaves no room for alternative readings, such as duality (*tathniyah*) or plurality (*jam*). For instance, when someone interprets the verse: “That which I created with My two hands”³⁵⁵ as referring to Allah’s power (*qudrah*), they are violating the text’s explicit dual grammatical form, which cannot naturally be taken as metaphorical.

Similarly, texts that are reinforced by strong contextual *qarā’in* (indicators), repetition, or emphatic structures that affirm a specific meaning with certainty also fall under this category. An example is the statement: “And Allah spoke to Mūsā directly.”³⁵⁶

To interpret such wording away from its apparent meaning is among the most far-fetched forms of speculative reinterpretation (*taḥammul*) and unjustified tampering with revealed language.

Ibn al-Qayyim describes the first category of scriptural expressions—the texts whose meanings are clear, supported by *qarā’in* (contextual indicators) and affirmations that remove ambiguity. He states: “*This is the nature of most texts related to the [divine] attributes—when one whose heart Allah has opened to accept them reflects upon them and rejoices in what was revealed to the Messenger, he will find that they are surrounded by contextual indicators and affirmations that eliminate any room for reinterpretation.*”³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Ṣawā’iq al-Mursalāh*, 2/671.

³⁵⁵ Ṣād (38:75).

³⁵⁶ Al-Nisā’ (4:164).

³⁵⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Ṣawā’iq al-Mursalāh*, 1/197.

The Second Category: Texts With Weak Secondary Possibilities

This category refers to those texts that might, in theory, carry alternative meanings. However, such alternatives are *marjūh* (weak and unlikely), as the term in question consistently occurs with one specific meaning in all its usages. Because of this regularity (*iṭṭirād*), the text effectively attains the level of the first category in conveying certainty (*yaqīn*) and definitiveness (*qaṭʿ*) concerning the speaker's intent.³⁵⁸

Ibn al-Qayyim elaborates on how a wording qualifies as *naṣṣ* (an explicit, unequivocal expression). He explains: “*A word qualifies as naṣṣ in one of two ways: first, that it does not permit another meaning based on linguistic convention—as with the word ‘ten’. Second, that it is used consistently in all of its occurrences with one meaning. Such a word becomes naṣṣ in that meaning, and does not admit metaphor (majāz) or reinterpretation (taʿwīl), even if that were theoretically possible in one of its individual usages. This is like the case of khabar mutawātir (consecutively transmitted reports), which cannot be reasonably suspected of falsehood even if each individual narrator, in isolation, could be doubted. This consistency is a valuable safeguard that helps identify errors in many speculative reinterpretations of texts whose wording is consistently used according to its apparent meaning—reinterpreting them in that case is a mistake.*”³⁵⁹

Texts in the second category, whose wording is consistently used with a specific meaning across different contexts (*iṭṭirād*), cannot be reinterpreted (*taʿwīl*) based on rare or obscure usages. Departing from the dominant, established meaning without strong contextual indicators (*qarāʾin*) that clarify the shift would mislead the listener, causing them to default to the familiar usage. In cases where a rare

³⁵⁸ *Al-Ṣawāʾiq al-Mursalāh*, 2/671; 1/196.

³⁵⁹ Ibn al-Qayyim, *Badāʾiʿ al-Fawāʾid*, 1/15.

meaning is intended, the text would naturally include explicit contextual signs to redirect understanding away from the common interpretation. If such indicators are absent, then any rare reading must be rejected or interpreted in light of similar, exceptional cases.

One of the great obstacles faced by speculative theologians (*al-mutakallimūn*) was the precision and complexity of the Arabic language. They were unable to justify their interpretive distortions within its framework because Arabic is governed by robust and coherent linguistic rules. In contrast, their reinterpretations were built on subjective whims and arbitrary assumptions.

The Third Category: Texts That Are Conditionally Ambiguous: This third category includes *nusus mujmalah* (ambiguous or summarized texts) that require clarification. This clarification (*bayān*) is often provided in other scriptural texts or within the same verse via explanatory phrases or parenthetical expressions. Without such clarification, the passage remains open to legitimate interpretive possibilities.

For example, Allah says: “For whoever among you wills to be upright.” [al-Takwīr: 28]

This might appear to affirm complete independence of human will, suggesting that if people simply *will* to be upright, they can be. Such a misunderstanding is corrected by the immediately following verse: “And you do not will except that Allah wills.” [al-Takwīr: 29]

This establishes that human will is subordinate to Allah’s will, which acts in perfect harmony with His wisdom and knowledge.³⁶⁰

This precise structure—using contrastive phrasing and segmentation—makes the

³⁶⁰ Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Ṣawā‘iq al-Mursalah*, 1/389; 2/670–671. *Al-Ṣawā‘iq al-Mursalah*, 1/393–394.

meaning clear and leaves no room for reinterpretation (*ta'wīl*) or alternative explanation. It is, as Ibn al-Qayyim puts it, a definitive statement that “*does not admit any other interpretation.*” ³⁶¹

Certain *aḥādīth* include explicit indications intended to prevent any misunderstanding about the nature of Allah’s attributes—particularly *al-sam‘* (hearing) and *al-baṣar* (sight)—as being anything other than real attributes. Al-Bayhaqī comments on such a narration: “*The intended meaning of the gesture mentioned in this narration is to affirm the attributes of hearing and sight for Allah. The Prophet pointed to the locations of hearing and sight on the human body to establish that Allah is indeed described with these attributes. It is similar to how one might say, ‘So-and-so seized the wealth of another,’ while pointing with the hand—not to affirm that the hand is involved in the acquisition, but simply to indicate possession. This narration affirms that Allah is All-Hearing and All-Seeing (samī‘ baṣīr)—that He possesses hearing and sight as real attributes, not merely that He is knowledgeable (‘alīm). For if the meaning had been knowledge, the Prophet would have gestured to the heart, since it is the seat of knowledge in humans.*” ³⁶²

Accordingly, texts of this kind—when understood through this methodology—join the first two categories of scriptural expressions in terms of establishing their intended meanings. They fall into the realm of what cannot justifiably be distorted (*tahrīf*) from their apparent sense. The deliberate structure and contextual indicators (*qarā’in*) within these texts serve to remove ambiguity and protect the listener from false interpretations.

The Apparent Meaning (ẓāhir) Between the Salaf and Their Opponents:

³⁶¹ Ibid., 1/395.

³⁶² Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Asmā’ wa al-Ṣifāt*, 1/362–363.

The term *ẓāhir* (apparent meaning) can sometimes become equivocal (*mushtarak*) between two distinct interpretations, which necessitates clarification and removal of confusion. Some proponents of *tahrīf* (distortion) claim that the apparent meaning of the texts regarding the divine attributes (*ṣifāt*) implies *tamthīl* (likening Allah to creation). However, this is certainly not the meaning intended by the *āyāt* and *aḥādīth*, and describing such an interpretation as the “apparent meaning” is a clear mistake.

The *ẓāhir* of speech refers to what is immediately understood by a sound intellect—one fluent in the language in which the text was revealed. This clarity may arise purely from linguistic usage (*waḍʿ*), or from the context and structure of the discourse (*siyāq al-kalām*). The notions of *tamthīl*, invented meanings, and false, impossible concepts are not what would come to the mind of a believing person grounded in the Arabic language and the framework of divine revelation.³⁶³

Shaykh al-Shinqīṭī commented: “*The people of taʿwīl claim that the apparent and immediate meaning conveyed by terms such as istiwāʾ (rising over) and yad (hand), as mentioned in the Qurʾān, is resemblance to the attributes of created beings. They then assert that we are obligated to reject the ẓāhir meaning by consensus, because believing in it would constitute disbelief (kufr), since likening the Creator to the creation is disbelief.*”³⁶⁴

Allah clarified the *ẓāhir* (apparent) meaning that naturally arises in the minds of believers when He described Himself and His attributes. Al-Shinqīṭī said: “*The indisputable truth—denied only by those with hardened hearts—is that every description by which Allah described Himself, or by which His Messenger described Him, has an apparent meaning (ẓāhir) that immediately comes to the mind of anyone who possesses even the slightest degree of faith (īmān): that is,*

³⁶³ See: Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Risālah al-Madaniyyah*, ed. Walīd al-Firyān, 1st ed., 1408 AH, p. 30.

³⁶⁴ Al-Shinqīṭī, *Aḍwāʾ al-Bayān*, 2/319.

complete tanzīh (absoluteness and transcendence) from any resemblance (mushābahah) to the attributes of created beings.

Simply by attributing the quality to Allah, the mind understands with certainty that there is no correlation between the divine attribute and the attributes of creation. Can any sound intellect deny that what naturally comes to the understanding of every rational person is the absolute dissimilarity of the Creator in His essence (dhāt) and all His attributes (ṣifāt)? By Allah, no one denies this except a stubborn denier.” ³⁶⁵

At times, a person might intend something sound by denying the *ẓāhir* of a text, but to make an unqualified statement such as "the apparent meaning is not intended" (*ẓāhir ghayr murād*) opens the door to innovation (*bid'ah*), as it may imply rejection of meanings affirmed by revelation.

Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymiyyah said: “Whoever says, ‘The *ẓāhir* is not intended,’ and by that means the *ẓāhir* of the attributes of created beings is not intended—then we say: You are correct in this meaning, but you erred in your phrasing and gave the impression of innovation. You also paved the way for the Jahmiyyah to reach their goals.

It would have been better for you to say: We affirm them as they came, according to their apparent meaning, with the understanding that Allah’s attributes are not like those of created beings, and that He is exalted and free from anything that would imply origination or imperfection.

But whoever says that ‘the apparent meaning is not intended’ as an interpretation—as the Jahmiyyah and those who follow them among the Mu‘tazilah, Ash‘arīs, and others do—then he has certainly erred.” ³⁶⁶

³⁶⁵ *Aḍwā’ al-Bayān*, 2/320

³⁶⁶ *Risālah al-Madaniyyah*, p. 36

For according to them, to negate the *tafsīr* (interpretation) of these texts is to negate their actual meanings and realities—meanings which the *Jahmiyyah* only rejected due to falsely assuming they imply *takyīf* (modal explanation) and *tamthīl* (likening). This is the essence of the doctrine of *tafwīd* (consigning meaning) held by many in later theological sects.³⁶⁷

The Criterion for Muḥkam and Mutashābih Texts Is the Sharī‘ah:

It is clear that the criterion for determining whether a text is *muḥkam* (decisive) or *mutashābih* (ambiguous) is based on *shar‘* (divine revelation), not on the human intellect. The people of deviation (*ahl al-zaygh*) declare texts to be *mutashābih* purely based on their own reasoning.

As previously discussed, the method of the leaders of the *Mu‘tazilah* in conceptualizing *mutashābih* is rooted in their rationalistic methodology. They explicitly stated: “*It is necessary that both the muḥkam and mutashābih be ordered according to rational proofs. The most reliable way to distinguish between them is through rational evidence. The nature of language itself implies that every word, in its usage, can denote something other than what it was originally coined for. If we do not return to something that is not open to multiple meanings, then distinguishing between the muḥkam and mutashābih would be invalid.*”³⁶⁸

This position was also upheld by the leading *Ash‘arīs*, particularly Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who summarized the criterion—according to his methodology—for distinguishing between *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* as follows: The *muḥkam* is that which is not opposed by a definitive rational proof (*dalīl ‘aqlī qāṭi‘*), and the

³⁶⁷ *Madhhab Ahl al-Tafwīd fī Nuṣūṣ al-Ṣifāt*, pp. 370–384.

³⁶⁸ *Mutashābih al-Qur‘ān* by Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, pp. 7–8, see also p. 25

mutashābih is that which is opposed by such a proof. ³⁶⁹

The *Salaf* of this *ummah* did not define *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* based on philosophical reasonings or speculative logic, but rather based on what Allah and His Messenger clarified.

According to the sound position, the negation of knowledge about the *mutashābih* does **not** refer to knowledge of its meaning (*maʿnā*), but rather to knowledge of its ultimate *taʿwīl* (interpretation in terms of reality and final outcome). That *taʿwīl*—which is known only to Allah—is not conveyed through *samʿ* (revelation), nor can it be uncovered by the intellect. Thus, the intellect is not the basis for distinguishing between *muḥkam* and *mutashābih*.

The *iḥkām* (decisiveness) referred to in the Qurʾan—not through the lens of errant rationalism—comes in three meanings:

Iḥkām of Revelation (iḥkām al-tanzīl): This is the foundational meaning, where the *muḥkam* refers to revelation sent down in a clear, unambiguous manner. Ibn Taymiyyah said: “*The muḥkam that is revealed from Allah is that which He has made decisive, meaning: He has distinguished it from what resembles it, and separated what does not belong to it.*” ³⁷⁰

Iḥkām Through Abrogation (naskh): This refers to the *iḥkām* that occurs when a ruling or apparent meaning of a text is removed or altered, but the text itself remains. This is known in technical terms as *naskh*: “*Allah perfects His verses through abrogation, by which the previous ruling is lifted and the intended meaning becomes clarified.*” ³⁷¹

In such cases, the *shayṭān* may lead some people to persist in acting upon what has

³⁶⁹ *Asās al-Taqdīs*, pp. 234–235

³⁷⁰ *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, 13/274

³⁷¹ *Majmūʿ al-Fatāwā*, 13/274

been abrogated, especially if what has been abrogated remains in recitation. The *muḥkam*, then, is the abrogating text, while the *mutashābih* is the abrogated one.

Iḥkām in Interpretation and Meaning (iḥkām al-ta’wīl wa-l-ma’nā): This kind of *iḥkām* refers to distinguishing a concept or truth clearly from others so it does not become confused or conflated. The *mutashābih*, by contrast, is that which resembles other things and may bear multiple meanings, such as homonyms or shared expressions.

This is why Imām Aḥmad said: “*The muḥkam is that which has no contradiction in it; the mutashābih is that which appears in one place like this, and in another place like that.*”³⁷²

When refuting the *Zanādiqah* who claimed that certain verses in the Qur’an were contradictory or not decisively clear, he interpreted each verse according to its context, and said: “*That is because the Qur’an includes what is specific and general, multiple facets and perspectives, and insights that only scholars can grasp.*”³⁷³

Thus the difference between ahlu al hadith and ahlu kalam became very clear.



³⁷² *Uddah* by Abū Ya‘lā, 2/685.

³⁷³ *Radd ‘alā al-Zanādiqah wa-l-Jahmiyyah*, in ‘*Aqā’id al-Salaf*, p. 54.

The Final:

At the heart of this book was a simple conviction: that the tradition of Aḥl al-Ḥadīth — as defended by scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah — offers not only a theology, but a complete and coherent theory of knowledge.

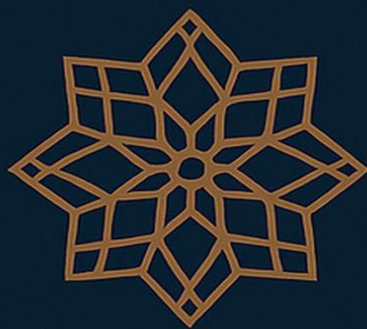
The aim was never just to win an argument or defend a historical figure. It was to clear away the noise and return to a way of thinking that trusts revelation without falling into blind imitation, and respects reason without allowing it to dominate what was meant to be submitted to.

Along the way, we encountered the challenges raised by materialism, idealism, Greek metaphysics, and speculative kalām. We traced how later thinkers, sometimes with good intentions, introduced distortions — claiming to defend Islam, but ultimately weakening the certainty of knowledge that the Qur'an and Sunnah demanded.

Through all of this, Ibn Taymiyyah and the scholars of Aḥl al-Ḥadīth remained consistent: revelation comes first, reason follows it, not the other way around. Where reason shines, it does so because it reflects the truth already given by Allah.

This book is, in many ways, only a beginning. Much work remains to be done to recover the integrity of Islamic epistemology and to rebuild it on foundations untouched by foreign philosophical assumptions. But if anything in these pages has helped clear the path — even a little — then the effort was worthwhile.

May Allah forgive the shortcomings, accept the intention, and make it a benefit for those who seek truth, not mere argument. And may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon our Prophet Muḥammad, his family, and his companions, abundantly until the Day of Judgment.



Ahl al-Hadīth, Epistemology, and the Misreading of Ibn Taymiyyah

BY ZUHAYR AL MALIKI

Ibn Taymiyyah's epistemology has been misunderstood for centuries. This study restores his authentic methodology: grounded in the senses, the fitrah, and the definitive authority of revelation. Bridging traditional Sunni thought with critical analysis of philosophical rationalism, *Ahl al-Hadith, Epistemology, and the Misreading of Ibn Taymiyyah* is a call to return to foundations of certainty.

Return to revelation. Return to clarity.

