

Operationalising *Kalām*: Towards a Framework of Applied *Kalām* (*al-Kalām al-Taṭbīqī*) with Special Focus on the Problem of Evil

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Abstract

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, *ʿilm al-kalām*—as formalised by the Ashʿarite school—has historically succeeded in the rational articulation and defence of Islamic creedal principles. However, the emergence of a Western worldview that reduces religion to dogmatic belief devoid of empirical or rational proof has created a significant dilemma for contemporary Muslim theologians. Adherents of Ashʿarism, in particular, face the challenge of engaging with modern ideologies that are often more nuanced than the polemics of the past. This article contends that the solution lies not in abandoning this robust tradition, but in its operationalisation through a proposed framework of “Applied *Kalām*” (*al-kalām al-taṭbīqī*). This systematic methodology transforms theological principles into practical tools for addressing both classical and contemporary problems. By defining Applied *Kalām* and demonstrating its efficacy through a case study on theodicy, this study asserts the tradition’s enduring relevance.

Keywords:

Applied *Kalām* (*al-kalām al-taṭbīqī*), *ʿilm al-kalām*, Islamic theology, Islamic Philosophy, the Problem of Evil.

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Introduction

Ilm al-kalām is one of the rational sciences that exemplifies the high level of intellectual discourse within the Islamic tradition. Its root can be traced back to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 936 CE) who is regarded as the pioneer of Sunnī *kalām*, and from whose epithet the school of Ash‘arism was eponymously named. Throughout the centuries, his intellectual successors, the Ash‘arites (Ar: *al-Ash‘arīyah*), have successfully defended the Islamic faith against the challenges they encountered in earlier periods by employing the methodology of the Ash‘arite school.¹ Among the most formidable challenges they faced was the widely spread Peripatetic philosophy as articulated and promulgated by the likes of al-Farābī (d. 951 CE) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037 CE).

Consequently, as observed by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406 CE), later *kalām* theologians (*mutakallimūn*), also known as the *muta‘akhhirūn*, led by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210 CE) launched a series of reprisals but in a distinctively novel approach.² Al-Rāzī revolutionised the methodology of writing *kalām* by integrating Peripatetic terminologies into his works and restructuring their contents to mirror philosophical texts much more closely: beginning with logic and epistemology (*al-nazar*), moving through ontology (*al-umūr al-‘ammah*) and natural philosophy (*al-tabī‘īyyāt*), and finally concluding with theology (*ilāhiyyāt*, *nubuwwāt*, and *samī‘īyyāt*).³ Some of the most well-known *kalām* works to have adopted this methodological arrangement include *Tawālī‘ al-Anwār* by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1316 CE), *Al-Mawāqif* by ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 1356 CE), and *Al-Maqāsid* by Sa‘ad al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390 CE). Ibn Khaldūn further notes that this rearrangement enabled the later *mutakallimūn* to engage with the Peripatetic philosophers much more efficiently and rigorously as well as elevated the technical sophistication of *kalām* works such that, for better or for worse, these works are considered works of philosophy since the two corpora are almost indistinguishable.⁴ For the sake of the discussion that is to unfold in this present article, this entire Ash‘arite *kalām* tradition—including both the earlier and later developments—shall be known as classical *kalām*.

1. Muḥammad bin ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid Kaylānī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1970.), 1:32.
2. The term earlier *mutakallimūn*, also known as the *mutaqaddimūn*, refers to pre-Ghazālī scholars such as al-Ash‘arī and al-Juwaynī, whereas the term later *mutakallimūn* refers to post-Ghazālī scholars such as al-Rāzī and al-Taftāzānī. See Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah Ibn Khaldūn*. ed. ‘Abd-Allāh Muḥammad, 2 vols. (Damascus: Dār Ya‘rab, 2004.), 2:213.
3. For a brief comparative analysis between al-Rāzī’s approach and pre-Rāzī’s approach, see Mohd Saiful Aqil Naim Saiful Amin, *Hujah Ilmu Kalam dalam al-Quran: Pembelajaran Imam Fakhr al-Din al-Razi Terhadap Ilmu Kalam Berdasarkan Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghayb* (Kuala Lumpur: Rawdah al-Hikmah, 2025), 72.
4. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, 2:214.

This development in classical *kalām* proves to be an important historical precedence and thereby establishes a crucial principle: that the *kalām* tradition allows a remarkable room for creative dynamism that enables it to respond effectively to the dominant paradigms of its time. Today the challenges come from the modern West with its introduction of a new set of dominant paradigms in the form of positivism, scientific materialism, and what might be appropriately termed “neo-sophism” which radically deconstructs the very concepts of reality, truth, and existence. Furthermore, its offspring, i.e., modern science, is often weaponised against religion, as seen in the rise of New Atheism in the late twentieth century. Herein lies the dilemma for contemporary *mutakallimūn*: how to engage with these challenges rigorously and systematically as classical *kalām* texts do not directly address some of these problems, especially in their current form. That said, it could be argued that works of classical *kalām* may indeed contain the answers to these problems, but considering the stark contextual differences between that of classical *kalām* and that of today, these answers would require some recontextualisation so as to make them suitably potent today. This recontextualisation, it is here argued, is possible with the integration of a practical framework of *kalām*.

For this purpose, this article proposes that the framework of “Applied *Kalām*” (*al-kalām al-tatbīqī*) be developed. To clearly illustrate the nature of this project and its significance, this article begins with a brief historical account of how *kalām* was applied in history, followed by a historical account of the shift in Western worldview that would later become the dominant global worldview. These two accounts are necessary to highlight the need for Applied *Kalām*. The discussion then continues with the definition of Applied *Kalām*, subsequently accompanied by its application in a chosen problem, i.e., theodicy or the problem of evil, to demonstrate its intellectual potency.

A Brief History of *Kalām* Writing Methodology

During its emergence in the second century of the Islamic era, both the substance and methodology of *ʿilm al-kalām* were significantly influenced by the Muʿtazilite school. According to al-Taftāzānī, the science of *kalām* was originally considered to be a condemned innovation (*bidʿah madhmūmah*) because it was seen as unnecessary philosophical discussions that only resulted in creedal confusions among Muslims. Due to its harm being more prevalent than its benefits, it received a backlash from the earliest generation of scholars, the Salaf, the formative clashes between whom would later culminate in the unfortunate event of the Inquisition or the *Mihnah*.⁵ Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Shāfiʿī argues along the same line when he states

5. Masʿūd bin ʿUmar al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-ʿAqāʾid al-Nasafīyyah*, ed. Anas ʿAdnān al-Sharfāwī (Damascus: Dār al-Taḳwā, 2020), 102–105.

that the reason behind the condemnation of *ʿilm al-kalām* was its attribution to the Muʿtazilites, who were considered by the Sunnīs as innovators (*ahl al-bidʿah*).⁶ Thus, due to its notorious early reputation, al-Ashʿarī himself, for instance, once wrote *Risālat Istiḥsān al-Khawḍ fī ʿIlm al-Kalām* to clarify the misunderstandings surrounding *ʿilm al-kalām* and even to exhort students to master it.⁷ Due to this origin, it is crucial to stress that the *mutaqaddimūn* of *ʿilm al-kalām* include scholars from both the Ashʿarite and the Muʿtazilite schools. As such, the application of the term is not limited to the Ashʿarites to the exclusion of the Muʿtazilites.

The term *mutaqaddimūn* refers not only to a group of scholars, but also a period in the development of *ʿilm al-kalām*. And this period can be divided, as done by al-Shahrastānī, into two main phases of development: (1) the non-philosophical period and (2) the philosophical period.⁸ The pre-philosophical phase is characterised by theological discourse confined strictly to scriptural sources (the Qurʾān and the Sunnah), without recourse to philosophical terminology such as *jawhar* (substance) or *ʿarad* (accident). In contrast, the philosophical phase marks an expansion of both the conceptual scope and technical lexicon of *kalām*, wherein certain problems addressed were not explicitly derived from scriptural texts. Harry Wolfson, on the other hand, understands this distinction as not only of periods but also of methods. For Wolfson, the *mutakallimūn* of the first period utilised the method of analogy as conceived in *fiqh*, i.e., *qiyās usūlī*, instead of syllogism as understood in the science of logic. In reality, however, the *mutaqaddimūn* made use of both logical syllogism and *fiqhī* analogy; in their vocabulary, *qiyās usūlī* of *fiqh* is termed *tamthīl*, while the method of syllogism is termed *qiyās*.⁹ These they utilised respectively in various circumstances depending on whichever was needed for said circumstances.

One of the most prominent examples of this can be seen in the work *Al-Iqtisād fī al-Iʿiqād* of Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE). There he outlines three main logical methods of the work, which are: (1) *al-sabr wa al-taqṣīm* (connective syllogism with hypothetical disjunctive premises or *qiyās shartī munfasil*), (2) *al-qiyās al-iqtirānī* (connective syllogism), and (3) *burhān al-khulf* (*reductio ad absurdum*).¹⁰ Aside from these three, there are also other logical methods that could be used in *kalām* as mentioned also by al-Ghazālī

6. Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Laṭīf al-Shāfiʿī, *Al-Madkhal ilā Dirāsāt ʿIlm al-Kalām* (Cairo: Idārat al-Qurʾān wa al-ʿUlūm al-Islāmiyyah, 2001), 36.

7. Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Risālat Istiḥsān al-Khawḍ fī ʿIlm al-Kalām* (Hyderabad: Dāʿirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyyah, 1979), 2.

8. Al-Shahrastānī, *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*, 1:85.

9. Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 20–21.

10. Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iqtisād fī al-Iʿiqād*, ed. Anas ʿAdnān al-Sharfāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2019), 115–117.

in another work, *Miʿyār al-ʿIlm*, which was penned as a methodological complementary to his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*.¹¹ For al-Ghazālī, since the primary intellectual and methodological tool of the Peripatetics was Aristotelian logic, it was necessary to refute them using their own tool. Thus was how Aristotelian logic got introduced into *kalām* works of the *mutaqaddimūn*.

As for the *mutaʾakhhirūn*, they continued with the preoccupation with Aristotelian logic laid down by their predecessors, utilising it in their works, for they believed that only syllogisms that fulfil their conditions can yield conclusion that are decisive (*bi al-qatʿ*).¹² To be sure, for them perfect induction (*al-istiqrāʾ al-tāmm*) can also yield certainty; however, it is inefficient for theological arguments, which are often based on metaphysical premises that are nearly impossible to generalise through induction. As such, syllogisms, whether connective or hypothetical, were their main tools in constructing their theological arguments.¹³ In addition, Khaled El-Rouayheb noted that their attention was primarily dedicated to definition and its preliminaries (the five predicables), formal syllogisms and their preliminaries (the immediate implications of propositions), as well as a dominant interest in investigating the technicalities of modal and conditional logic.¹⁴ The fact that the *mutaʾakhhirūn* maintained a primarily academic rather than religious interest in Aristotelian logic demonstrates that they viewed it as a functional tool instead of a metaphysical doctrine to be accepted as an article of faith. This distinction challenges the assertion that the theological framework of later *kalām* was shaped by the ontological assumptions of Greek philosophy.

The *mutaqaddimūn-mutaʾakhhirūn* distinction was drawn precisely based on this development, in the forms of novel philosophical discussions in post-Ghazālī *kalām* works and the restructuring of the methodology of writing *kalām*. Regarding the restructuring of the methodology of writing *kalām*, al-Rāzī was the first to include a discussion of *al-umūr al-ʿāmmah*, a discussion on ontology that had not previously been given a specific chapter in earlier *kalām* works.¹⁵ In his *Al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah*, al-Rāzī divides the book

11. Al-Ghazālī, *Miʿyār al-ʿIlm fī Fann al-Mantiq* (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2016), 50–51.

12. ʿAbduLlāh Yazdī, *Sharḥ Tahdhib al-Mantiq*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd al-Turkīmānī (Amman: Dār al-Nūr, 2018), 279.

13. Additionally, the post-Ghazālī period is also marked by the increase in number of *summas* in Arabic logic written by a great number of *mutakallimūn* such as al-Rāzī's own compendium of logic and philosophy, *al-Mulakḥhas fī al-Mantiq wa al-Hikmah*; Sirāj al-Dīn al-Urmawī (d. 1283 CE) with his *Matalīʿ al-Anwār*; Afḍal al-Dīn al-Khūnajī (d. 1248 CE) with his *Kashf al-Aswār*; Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī (d. 1264 CE) with his *Isagoge*; and Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī (d. 1276 CE) with his *al-Risālah al-Shamsiyyah*. This proves clearly how Aristotelian logic, which was by the time already purified from non-Islamic elements, was utilised by the later *mutakallimūn*. For further discussion, see Khaled El-Rouayheb, *The Development of Arabic Logic* (1200–1800) (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2019), 37–72.

14. Idem, *Relational Syllogisms and the History of Arabic Logic* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 48.

15. Muḥammad Shawqī, *Al-Umūr al-ʿĀmmah: Bayn al-Imām al-Rāzī wa Naṣīr al-Ṭūsī* (Cairo: Dār al-Khazānah, 2020), 47.

into three main chapters: (1) *al-umūr al-‘āmmah*, (2) *al-tabī‘yyāt*, and (3) *al-ilahiyāt*.¹⁶ Meanwhile in his *Muḥaṣṣal Afkār al-Mutaqaddimīn wa al-Muta‘akḥkhirīn min al-Hukamā’ wa al-Mutakallimīn*, there are roughly six main chapters: (1) on logic (*al-mantiq*), (2) on general matters (*al-umūr al-‘āmmah*), (3) on natural philosophy (*al-tabī‘yyāt*), (4) on Divine attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-ilāhiyyah*), (5) on prophethood (*al-nubuwwāt*), and (6) on unseen things (*al-sam‘iyyāt*).¹⁷ Similar writing structures found in numerous later *kalām* works—such as *Tawāli‘ al-Anwār* by al-Bayḍāwī, *Al-Mawāqif* by al-Ijī, and *Al-Maqāṣid* by al-Taftāzānī—are evidence of al-Rāzī’s far-reaching influence. For this reason, it is arguable that al-Rāzī had facilitated a profound paradigm shift in the *kalām* tradition.

This strategic initiative served a clear objective. Al-Rāzī and his contemporaries undertook this methodological shift as a direct response to the intellectual challenges of their era, primarily those posed by the Peripatetic philosophers. As Ma‘ālim Sālim Yūnus observes, this is evident in the ubiquitous inclusion of philosophical views in later *kalām* works for the purpose of rigorous scrutiny.¹⁸ For instance, al-Rāzī authored the *Muḥaṣṣal* at the request of Qiwām al-Dīn al-Mustawfī (d. 1239 CE), a high-ranking official in the court of the Khwārazmshāh Tekish. Al-Mustawfī commissioned the work as a representative for a circle of distinguished scholars and prominent philosophers of that period.¹⁹ The fact that al-Rāzī was asked to summarise the discourses of both groups carries two major implications. First, it signifies the high esteem in which both the *mutakallimūn* and philosophers were held, as well as the pervasive tension between them. Second, it underscores al-Rāzī’s pre-eminent intellectual standing relative to his peers. His reputation was such that he became the primary authority to whom the *mutakallimūn* turned to effectively counter their philosophical adversaries.

The Shift in Worldview and *Kalām* Contemporary Challenges

As discussed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, the rise of rationalism and empiricism during the European Enlightenment led to a profound existential crisis in the Western world. This crisis is commonly described as secularisation.²⁰ In his depiction of life in a secular age, Charles Taylor

16. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah fī ‘Ilm al-Ilāhiyyāt*, ed. Muḥammad Mu‘taṣim, 2 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Arabī, 1990).

17. Idem, *Muḥaṣṣal Afkār al-Mutaqaddimīn wa al-Muta‘akḥkhirīn min al-Hukamā’ wa al-Mutakallimīn*, ed. Ṭahā ‘Abd al-Ra‘ūf (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyyah, n.d.).

18. Ma‘ālim Sālim Yūnus, *Al-Madrasah al-Kalāmiyyah al-Ash‘ariyyah: Bayn al-Naz‘ah al-‘Aqliyyah wa al-Marji‘iyyah al-Naṣṣiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Rayyāḥīn, 2017), 241.

19. Frank Griffel, *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 308.

20. Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1993), 1–2.

identifies three defining characteristics: (1) the absence of religion from public spaces, (2) the decline of religious belief and practice, and (3) the emergence of new conditions of belief.²¹ Taylor's purpose in outlining these features is to elucidate the core dynamics of secularisation in the West, which arose from several interrelated factors. One of the principal factors was the rise of modern science and technology, which precipitated an epistemic shift whereby empirical facts came to be regarded as absolute truth, while theological and metaphysical claims were dismissed as dogmatic assertions lacking empirical verification. This development later contributed to the emergence of positivism, a philosophical movement grounded in the theory that only statements verifiable through direct observation or logical proof are meaningful as claims to truth. As noted by Herbert Feigl, positivists were radically opposed to metaphysical speculation, particularly of an *a priori* and transcendent nature.²² Consequently, religious doctrines grounded in metaphysical claims came to be viewed as meaningless and unverifiable.

Apart from this, another crisis rooted in the rise of modern science is the crisis of dehumanisation. According to Gianni Vattimo, Martin Heidegger understood the crisis of humanism to be closely linked to modern technology. Technology, in this regard, appears as the driving force behind a broader process of dehumanisation, one that entails the displacement of humanistic cultural ideals in favour of a conception of the human subject modelled upon the natural sciences and rationally controlled productive capacities.²³ For an existentialist thinker such as Heidegger himself, however, dehumanisation is not merely a catastrophe; rather, it presents an opportunity to grasp the essence of humanity apart from metaphysical presuppositions, a stance that subsequently underpins his existentialist doctrines. This perspective is precisely what is encapsulated by al-Attas when he states:

The disenchantment of nature and terrestrialization of man has resulted, in the former case, in the reduction of nature to a mere object of utility having only a functional significance and value for scientific and technical management and for man; and in the latter case, in the reduction of man of his transcendent nature as spirit emphasizing his humanity and physical being, his secular knowledge and power and freedom, which led to his deification, and so to his reliance upon his own rational efforts of enquiry

21. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 1–3.

22. Herbert Feigl, "The Origin and Spirit of Logical Positivism," in *The Legacy of Logical Positivism*, ed. Peter Achinstein and Stephen F. Barker (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), 3.

23. Gianni Vattimo, *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Culture*, trans. Jon R. Snyder (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 33–34.

into his origins and final destiny, and upon his own knowledge thus acquired which he now sets up as the criterion for judging the truth or falsehood of his own assertions.²⁴

It is therefore evident that the rise of modern science has generated a range of challenges, and these problems were not explicitly addressed in *kalām* literature. To confront these challenges, one cannot simply consult a *kalām* text in the expectation of finding a ready-made solution. Rather, responses must be articulated with precision so as to correspond to the specific contours of contemporary problems.

The Definition and Application of Applied *Kalām*

As defined by al-Ījī, *ʿilm al-kalām* is a science which, when mastered, enables one to assert the Islamic faith through the construction of arguments and the refutation of opposing views.²⁵ Al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 1414 CE) explains that al-Ījī employs the term “asserts” (*ithbāt*) to indicate that the purpose of mastering *kalām* is to demonstrate the truth of the faith to others (*ithbātuhā ‘alā al-ghayr*).²⁶ For this reason, the prominent Persian *kalām* scholar Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn As‘ad al-Dawwānī (d. 1502 CE) expounds in his treatise—written exclusively as a commentary on al-Jurjānī’s commentary on al-Ījī’s definition of *kalām*—that *kalām* is not a rational science pursued for its own sake. Rather, it belongs to the instrumental sciences (*ʿulūm al-ālah*), which serve to aid in the comprehensive assertion of faith.²⁷ Likewise, al-Taftāzānī states that the purpose of *kalām* is to secure certainty in the affirmation of Islamic beliefs to such an extent that they become impervious to doubt.²⁸ Based on this understanding of *kalām*, it is undeniable that *kalām* constitutes a set of methodologies intended to function as instruments for asserting the Islamic faith, regardless of the historical period in which a Muslim lives. In light of this, Applied *Kalām* is not a new science distinct from classical *kalām* in its essence; rather, it is a branch of it. Applied *Kalām* denotes the domain in which *kalām* is applied—a systematic framework that enables Muslims to respond to contemporary as well as classical challenges through *kalāmī* methods, rather than merely reiterating the views of the *mutakallimūn* as preserved in old texts.

24. Al-Attas, *Islām and Secularism*, 38.

25. ‘Alī bin Muḥammad al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Dimiyāṭī, 8 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1998), 1:40.

26. *Ibid.*, 1:42.

27. Muḥammad bin As‘ad al-Dawwānī, *Taʿrīf ʿIlm al-Kalām*, ed. Nizār Ḥammādī (Tunis: Dār al-Imām Ibn ‘Arafah, 2018), 57–58.

28. Maṣ‘ūd bin ‘Umar al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ‘Umayrah, 5 vols. (Beirut: ‘Ālam al-Kutub, 1998), 1:175.

Accordingly, Applied *Kalām* may be understood as a systematic framework comprising a series of methodological steps required to operationalise this classical science within modern contexts. This article proposes a structured methodological framework for Applied *Kalām*, represented by the acronym “IDAAF”: Issue, Domain, Axiom, Apply, and Formulate. The foundational first step, “Issue,” involves the precise definition of the problem under consideration. This step is essential, as many intellectual errors arise from a misunderstanding of the problem itself—a concern deeply embedded within the Islamic intellectual tradition. As al-Ghazālī aptly observed, a significant source of error originates from the misunderstanding of terms and definitions.²⁹ Consequently, the *mutakallimūn* consistently emphasised the primacy of clear definition, incorporating discussions of definition (*taʿrīf*) in their manuals on the art of disputation (*ādāb al-baḥṭh wa al-munāẓarah*). Such definition was established as a necessary preliminary to any substantive argumentation, ensuring a concrete and shared understanding of the subject matter before a debate begins.³⁰

The second step involves domain mapping, a process of categorising the identified problem in order to locate the most relevant conceptual “tools” within the *kalām* tradition. This is accomplished by situating the issue within one or more of the science’s core theological categories, which are traditionally: (1) logic and epistemology, (2) ontology and metaphysics, (3) divine attributes, (4) prophethood, and (5) eschatology and revelation. The objective is to identify the specific sub-branches from which the problem arises. For example, the Problem of Evil is not merely a general question regarding divinity but falls precisely within the domain of Divine Actions (*afʿāl Allāh*) and the related sub-discourse on Divine Wisdom (*al-Hikmah*). Such precise domain mapping is crucial, as it ensures that the problem is situated within the appropriate macro-level theological framework, thereby enabling the systematic and accurate extraction of the specific *kalām* principles, axioms, and arguments necessary to address it.

The third step involves the extraction of specific *kalām* principles and axioms (*al-mabādiʾ al-kalāmiyyah*) necessary for constructing a theological response. These axioms serve as the foundational premises for all subsequent argumentation. Al-Ghazālī listed six axioms, though others are also available, which may be employed as premises in theological reasonings.³¹ These are: (1) sensory data (*al-ḥisyyāt*), (2) logical axioms

29. Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iʿtiqād*, 106–107.

30. Mohd Saiful Aqil Naim Saful Amin and Syed Mohammad Hilmi Syed Abdul Rahman, “Aplikasi Ilmu *Ādāb al-Baḥṭh wa al-Munāẓarah* dalam Isu *Ruʿyah Allāh*,” *Jurnal Usuluddin* 50, no. 2 (2022): 36.

31. It is termed by al-Ghazālī as *al-uṣūl al-musallamah al-wājibah al-taslīm*, or shortly as *al-musallamāt*. See al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iʿtiqād*, 120.

(*al-ʿaqlī al-mahd*), (3) mass-transmitted events (*al-mutawātirāt*), (4) premises established through prior demonstrated proof, (5) scripturally revealed facts (*al-samʿiyyāt*), and (6) the opposition’s own axioms, if the problem originates from a contrasting worldview.³²

While this taxonomy provides the general categories of valid premises, it remains non-specific. Accordingly, the theologian must extrapolate the precise, substantive doctrines pertinent to the problem’s mapped domain. For instance, within the domain of Divine Actions in relation to the Problem of Evil, one must extract doctrines such as: (1) the Divine Act is unconstrained by external purpose (*fi ʿl Allāh lā yataqayyad bi al-gharad*), and (2) the essence of good and evil is determined by divine decree (*al-tahsīn wa al-taqbīh al-sharʿiyyān*). This process of moving from general axiomatic categories to specific doctrinal principles enables the formulation of a targeted and robust theological argument. It represents, in essence, the operationalisation of rational thought. As logicians define it, rationality is precisely this: “the arrangement of known premises to arrive at unknown conclusions (*tartīb umūr maʿlūmah li al-taʿaddī ilā majhūl*).”³³ The extraction of *kalāmī* axioms constitutes the fundamental act of gathering those “known” and certain premises.

The fourth and most integral step is application, which involves a comprehensive evaluation to ascertain the logical correspondence between the extracted axioms (principles) and the defined problem. This process is most clearly understood through the formal structure of a categorical syllogism (*qiyās*), as employed by classical logicians. In this framework, the relevant *kalāmī* principle functions as the major premise (*al-muqaddimah al-kubrā*), while the specific problem is formulated as the minor premise (*al-muqaddimah al-ṣuḡhrā*). The logical subsumption of the minor under the major (*indirāj al-ṣuḡhrā taht al-kubrā*) necessarily yields a theological conclusion (*natījah*).³⁴ A full illustration of this syllogistic application will be provided in the following section through a dedicated case study on the Problem of Evil.

The fifth and final step is synthesis and formulation. This stage involves consolidating the conclusions derived from the applied syllogisms into a coherent and accessible framework or model tailored to a specific thematic area. The primary aim of this synthesis is to produce a pragmatic output that functions as a definitive guideline or toolkit. Such an output provides a structured theological response for anyone encountering a similar problem or any issue within the same thematic domain, as its foundational principles have already been rigorously established.

32. Ibid., 120–124.

33. Maṣʿūd bin ʿUmar al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Risālah al-Shamsiyyah*, ed. Jād-Allāh Bassām (Amman: Dār al-Nūr, 2011), 106.

34. Ibid., 316.

When executed meticulously, this five-step process achieves two overarching objectives: (1) it resolves the specific theological problem at hand through rigorous, principle-based reasoning; and (2) it produces a versatile, ready-to-use intellectual toolkit, equipping scholars, educators, and professionals to address a wide range of related contemporary challenges efficiently, thereby extending the usefulness of the *kalām* tradition well beyond a single application. In summary, the IDAAF framework provides a systematic and replicable framework for the practice of Applied *Kalām*, ensuring its continued relevance and efficacy within the modern intellectual landscape.

A Case Study of Applied *Kalām* on The Problem of Evil

To demonstrate the practicality of the Applied *Kalām* framework, it will be applied to a test case: the classical yet enduring Problem of Evil. The central question posed is: does the existence of perceived evil in the world logically necessitate the absence of an All-Merciful (*al-Rahmān*) and All-Wise (*al-Hakīm*) God?

Step 1: Defining the Problem (Issue)

The integral keywords of the problem are: the existence of perceived evil; logical necessity; and the absence of a Most Merciful and All-Wise God. Accurate definition of these constituent terms constitutes the essential conceptual phase (*al-marḥalah al-taṣawwuriyyah*), a prerequisite for the judgment phase (*al-marḥalah al-tasdiqiyyah*), as established in classical logical discourse.³⁵ Here, “perceived evil” denotes subjectively experienced harm or suffering (e.g., illness). “Logical necessity” implies a relationship of strict logical entailment, in which the conclusion is inescapable. The “absence of an All-Merciful and All-Wise God” signifies the non-existence of a God who creates the world both mercifully and wisely. Consequently, the problem is refined into a question of rational coherence: does the empirical fact of suffering logically contradict the existential proposition of a merciful and wise God?

Step 2: Domain-Mapping the Problem (Domain)

The next step involves pinpointing the precise theological domains to which the Problem of Evil belongs. This article posits that the problem resides at the intersection of three primary domains within the *kalām* tradition, necessitating a multi-faceted analytical approach. The first domain is ontology

35. ‘Ubayd Allāh bin Faḍl-Allāh al-Khabīṣī, “Al-Tadhīb bi Sharḥ al-Tahdhīb,” in *al-Majmū‘ah al-Manṭiqiyyah*, ed. Khālid Khalīl al-Zāhidī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 2022), 106.

and metaphysics; specifically, the discourse on necessity and contingency (*al-wujūb wa al-imkān*). This domain is relevant as it provides the logical framework for analysing “necessity” and “possibility,” which is central to the claim that evil logically necessitates (*luzūm ‘aqli*) God’s non-existence. The inquiry hinges on whether the coexistence of God and evil is logically impossible (*muḥāl*) or merely contingent (*mumkin*).

The second domain is theology and divinity proper. More precisely, the sub-domain concerning Divine Actions and the attendant discussion on the determination of good and evil (*al-tahsīn wa al-taqbīḥ al-shar‘iyyān*). This is the core domain addressing the attributes of Divine Wisdom and Mercy, and whether perceived evil constitutes a contradiction to these attributes or operates within a framework of divine wisdom unknowable in its entirety to humans.

The third domain is revelation and eschatology. This domain is essential for integrating the scriptural perspective on the nature of worldly life. It provides the revealed evidence (*al-adillah al-naqliyyah*) that frames earthly existence as a test (*ibtilā’*) and a temporary realm of trial, with ultimate justice, recompense, and the unveiling of divine wisdom deferred to the hereafter (*al-ākhirah*). This perspective fundamentally recontextualises the materialistic observation of suffering. By mapping the problem to this intersection, the Applied *Kalām* framework ensures a comprehensive response that addresses its logical, theological, and phenomenological dimensions.

Step 3: Extracting the Kalām Principles Related to the Problem (Axiom)

The third step involves the extraction of specific *kalāmī* principles (*al-mabādi’ al-kalāmīyyah*) requisite for constructing a theological response. While an exhaustive enumeration of all axioms lies beyond the scope of this preliminary demonstration, the following core axioms have been identified from the mapped domains as being directly relevant to the problem:

1. The axiom of Divine Omnipotence and Wisdom: “Every contingent being or event is subject to God’s absolute power and wisdom (*kull mumkin taht qudrat Allāh wa hikmatih*).” Drawn from the domain of Divine Actions, this principle affirms that no perceived evil occurs outside the sphere of God’s sovereign will.
2. The axiom of Divine Determination of Value: “The essence of goodness and evil is not intrinsic but is defined by divine injunction and determination (*al-tahsīn wa al-taqbīḥ shar‘iyyān*).” Central to the Ash‘arī school, this principle asserts that ethical value is not independently discerned by human reason but is established by God’s command. Consequently, human perception of “evil” may not correspond to its ultimate, divinely decreed value.

3. The epistemic axiom of the limitation of human knowledge: “An absence of human knowledge does not necessitate the absence or non-existence of the object of knowledge (*‘adam al-‘ilm lā yastalzīm ‘adam al-ma lūm*).” This logical principle counters the claim that, because we cannot perceive a reason for suffering, no reason exists.
4. The cosmological axiom of worldly existence: “The intrinsic nature of the temporal world (*dunyā*) is that of a probationary abode (*dār al-ibtilā’*), not a permanent realm of reward or pure pleasure.” Derived from Revelation, this principle provides the essential teleological context: the purpose of life is test and trial, a framework in which hardship and suffering are inherently meaningful rather than evidence of divine neglect.

These extracted axioms constitute the necessary and sufficient premises that will be employed in addressing this problem.

Step 4: Applying the Principles (Apply)

The extracted axioms now serve as major premises for a formal *kalāmī* response. The application proceeds through a series of logical deductions:

1. From Axiom 1, it follows that no instance of perceived evil occurs as an autonomous event outside divine control or ultimate purpose. Its existence, according to this axiom, falls within a framework of a higher, omnibenevolent design, even if incomprehensible to human intellect.
2. From Axiom 2, it follows that the human subjective label “evil” applied to an event does not constitute a definitive judgement on its ultimate, God-decreed value. An event that appears negative in its immediate, worldly context may in fact serve as the very cause of a greater good known only to God.
3. From Axiom 3, it implies that human ignorance regarding the wisdom behind a specific instance of suffering does not logically necessitate the actual absence of that wisdom. To claim otherwise is a logical fallacy.
4. From Axiom 4, it follows that any event within it, including those perceived as evil, is not a final state of reward or punishment but is inherently a test. A test, by definition, must contain challenges and adversity to be meaningful. What is perceived as “evil” is thus recontextualised as a necessary condition for a greater, ultimate good (i.e., the fulfilment of the test and its subsequent reward in the Hereafter).

Consequently, the existence of perceived evil does not logically entail the absence of a Most Merciful and All-Wise God. On the contrary, it is rationally compatible with His existence when understood through the *kalāmī* axioms that: (1) life is

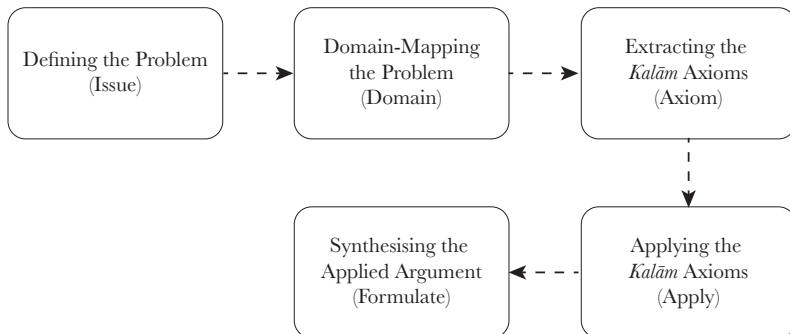
a test, (2) divine wisdom defines ultimate good, and (3) human knowledge is limited. Perceived evil is therefore not evidence against God’s mercy; rather, it functions as a potential vehicle for its manifestation in the form of trial, patient perseverance (*sabr*), and ultimate reward—a wisdom that may remain hidden to us in the temporal realm.

Step 5: Synthesis and Formulation (Formulate)

The fifth and final step transcends the resolution of the immediate problem. It involves the synthesis of the applied arguments into a reusable theological framework. This stage transforms the specific conclusions derived from the syllogisms into a versatile, pragmatic output—a structured guideline or model for the mapped domain. In the case of the Problem of Evil, this formulation does not merely assert that “evil does not contradict God’s mercy.” Rather, it synthesises the four axioms into a coherent Ash‘arī theodicy model, which provides: firstly, a structured flowchart or decision tree to guide teachers and students of *kalām* through the logical response, based on the nature of the doubt or challenge presented; secondly, a concise apologetic script built upon the sequential logic of the axioms, suitable for educational settings or public discourse; and, thirdly, an ethical framework that reorients the perception of suffering from a meaningless tragedy to a potential locus of divine trial and eventual reward, with implications for fields such as Islamic psychology and bioethics.

Thus, this step ensures that the rigorous intellectual labour of application yields maximum usefulness. It produces a ready-to-use intellectual toolkit that empowers scholars, educators, and professionals to address not only this specific problem but also a wide range of related challenges concerning divine justice and human suffering, thereby extending the relevance of *kalām* into contemporary practical theology. Below is a flowchart summarising the steps of the IDAAF framework in Applied *Kalām*:

Diagram 1: Steps of the IDAAF framework in Applied *Kalām*.



Conclusion

In conclusion, this article has demonstrated the significance and practicality of the Applied *Kalām* framework as a methodology for engaging with theological problems, both classical and contemporary. This preliminary study highlights the framework's considerable potential to transform *kalām* from a primarily historical discipline into a vital intellectual toolkit for addressing modern intellectual and ethical challenges. It is contended that the scope of Applied *Kalām* is far more diverse and expansive than traditionally perceived. If properly developed, this project could catalyse the creation of specialised modules—such as Applied *Kalām* in Scientific Atheism or Applied *Kalām* in Gender Ethics—each designed to address specific ideological or philosophical arenas. Just as theoretical physics finds applied expression in engineering and architecture, eventually giving rise to independent disciplines, so too can theoretical *kalām* be systematically applied to domains such as secularism and bioethics. This application would enable such specialisations to mature into distinct sub-fields yet natural extensions of *kalāmī* mastery.

It is essential to emphasise, however, that this study represents only a preliminary exploration. The progression from conceptual framework to a robust, practical discipline will require sustained scholarly effort, critical refinement, and the development of concrete pedagogical and analytical tools. The path ahead necessitates rigorous validation, interdisciplinary dialogue, and careful implementation. Consequently, while the novelty and potential of the Applied *Kalām* project are considerable, its ultimate success depends upon this foundational work. By undertaking it, a dynamic pathway is charted to ensure the continued vitality, relevance, and impact of Islamic theological discourse in an evolving world.

To reiterate, this article argues that such a framework is essential for several reasons. First, articulating classical *kalām* discussions within a modern context is a complex undertaking. It demands considerable skill to accurately comprehend a novel issue and to formulate a response grounded in sophisticated classical discourse. Without a systematic approach, the risk of misapplication or error is significantly increased; therefore, a structured methodology for operationalising classical *kalām* is imperative. Second, theological problems (*al-masā'il al-kalāmiyyah*) are not static, as one might assume. On the contrary, they are inherently progressive, continually evolving as humanity encounters new theological and scientific questions. Consequently, a universal framework is required to serve as a comprehensive guideline for engaging with this ever-expanding discourse.

Finally, this framework equips teachers (*asātidhah*), students, and intellectually curious laypeople with a robust toolkit to address complex theological questions with confidence. It facilitates a move beyond simple

apologetics towards deep, substantive engagement. While the classical *kalām* tradition provides a wealth of concrete arguments, this framework seeks to demystify the process itself, outlining the necessary steps to meticulously construct a sound argument, in the manner of the distinguished *mutakallimūn* of the past.

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