

Hermeneutics and New Theology (Ilm Al-Kalam Al-Jadid)

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Abstract: This article examines the renewal of ‘Ilm al-Kalām (Islamic theology) within the framework of contemporary intellectual and cultural shifts. It explores how modern challenges have prompted a revitalization of theological discourse, particularly through the integration of hermeneutics as a key interpretive method. While the incorporation of hermeneutics introduces complexities—such as balancing pre-understanding with objective truth—it provides a means for advancing Islamic theological thought. The study advocates for a renewal that honors traditional Islamic principles while engaging with contemporary knowledge systems. It emphasizes interdisciplinary collaboration, educational reform, and a balanced hermeneutical approach to address current ethical and social issues. Ultimately, the article calls for renewing theological discourse to ensure that Islamic theology ‘Ilm al-Kalām’ remains a dynamic and transformative force in modern religious discourse.

Keywords: religious discourse, Islamic theology, new theology, hermeneutics, reform.

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Résumé : Cet article examine le renouveau de l’Ilm al-Kalām (théologie islamique) dans le cadre des changements intellectuels et culturels contemporains. Il explore la manière dont les défis modernes ont suscité une revitalisation du discours théologique, notamment par l’intégration de l’herméneutique comme méthode d’interprétation clé. Bien que l’incorporation de l’herméneutique introduit des complexités – comme l’équilibre entre la précompréhension et la vérité objective – elle fournit un moyen de faire progresser la pensée théologique islamique. L’étude prône un renouveau qui honore les principes islamiques traditionnels tout en s’engageant dans les systèmes de connaissances contemporains. Elle met l’accent sur la collaboration interdisciplinaire, la réforme de l’éducation et une approche herméneutique équilibrée pour aborder les questions éthiques et sociales actuelles. En fin de compte, l’article appelle à renouveler le discours théologique pour garantir que la théologie islamique « Ilm al-Kalām » reste une force dynamique et transformatrice dans le discours religieux moderne.

Mots-clés : discours religieux, théologie islamique, nouvelle théologie, herméneutique, réforme.

Introduction

The renewal of Islamic theological discourse has become a significant topic within contemporary Islamic thought, prompted by evolving intellectual, cultural, and political circumstances. This study aims to explore the issue of revitalizing Islamic theology, or 'Ilm al-Kalām, as a facet of the broader movement to reform Islamic religious discourse. The inquiry begins by examining the factors that have led to the emergence of what is now referred to as "New Theology" ('Ilm al-Kalām al-Jadīd), followed by an analysis of the role of hermeneutics in shaping and modernizing its foundational principles.

The idea of revival in Islamic thought gained traction during the 1930s and 1940s when Amin al-Khuli (1895–1966), famously known as “The Imam of Renewers,” wrote his influential article on “renewal in religion” in 1933. Around the same period, Indian philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938) published his landmark book *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. These early efforts marked the beginning of a theological shift that sought to address the challenges of modernity within an Islamic framework. These endeavors were followed by further studies in the Arab intellectual tradition, yielding significant works such as Malek Bennabi’s *The Qur’anic Phenomenon*, Hassan Hanafi’s *Heritage and Renewal*, Mohammed Arkoun’s *Islamic Thought: A Scientific Reading*, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri’s *We and Our Heritage: Contemporary Readings of Our Philosophical Heritage*, and Taha Abderrahmane’s *The Principles of Dialogue and the Renewal of Theology*. Collectively, these works exemplify the renewal characteristic in religious discourse, with their authors striving to open new horizons in religious, doctrinal, and jurisprudential matters.

The research problem at the heart of this study stems from the dynamic nature of theological challenges in the Islamic world, which necessitates a continual re-evaluation of traditional approaches. As *‘Ilm al-Kalām* originally served to respond to theological doubts and questions, the field must evolve alongside modern intellectual developments. Specifically, this study seeks to determine how hermeneutics, as a method of interpretation, has been incorporated into contemporary theological discourse and how effective it is in addressing modern-day issues. The primary objective of this research is to highlight the necessity for innovation within Islamic theological thought, particularly through the integration of hermeneutical approaches. By doing so, the study aims to provide a framework for understanding how classical theological concepts can be adapted to contemporary contexts, fostering a discourse that is both rooted in tradition and responsive to modern intellectual currents.

The scope of this research is focused on the conceptual foundations of *‘Ilm al-Kalām al-Jadīd*, its methodologies, and the integration of hermeneutics as a tool for theological reform. It encompasses an exploration of both the necessity for renewal in *‘Ilm al-Kalām* and the theoretical underpinnings of the hermeneutical approach, considering its potential and limitations. The study sets forth the following research objectives :

1. To define the concept of *‘Ilm al-Kalām al-Jadīd*.
2. To explore the reasons and forms of renewal in Islamic theology.
3. To examine the role of hermeneutics in shaping modern theological discourse.

To achieve these objectives, the research addresses several key questions:

1. What is the conceptual framework of *‘Ilm al-Kalām al-Jadīd*?
2. What are the driving factors behind the renewal of Islamic theology?
3. What is the role of hermeneutics in constructing the modern theological narrative?

In terms of methodology, this study relies on textual analysis of classical and contemporary works in Islamic theology and hermeneutics. By engaging in analysis, the research seeks to uncover the ways in which hermeneutical methodologies have been employed in theological debates, as well as the implications of these methods for the future of Islamic thought. While this study presents valuable insights into the intersection of hermeneutics and Islamic theology, it is important to note its limitations. Given the broad scope of *‘Ilm al-Kalām* and its evolution over centuries, this research focuses specifically on the hermeneutical aspects of modern theological reform, leaving other dimensions of *‘Ilm al-Kalām* for future exploration. Additionally, the study is limited by the availability of contemporary sources that directly address the application of hermeneutics in Islamic theology, reflecting an emerging but still developing field of inquiry

1. The Concept of New Theology

Traditional theology is widely associated with defending doctrinal contents and structures against external doubts and heretical interpretations. As described by him, theology is “a science that involves argumentation on behalf of faith-based doctrines using rational evidence, and responding to the heretics who deviate in their beliefs from the ways of the Salaf (righteous predecessors) and Ahl al-Sunnah” (Ibn Khaldun, 2015, p. 458). Consequently, this traditional theology was replaced by kalam-jadid (new theology), first used in 1869 by the Indian scholar Syed Ahmed Khan (1817–1898). It was further developed by Shibli Nomani, an Indian intellectual, who named one of his works, *Ilm al-Kalam al-Jadid* (New Theology), to tackle present-day doubts about Islamic law. He wrote: “The old theology was mainly concerned with Islamic doctrines because the objections to Islam at that time were related to doctrines. Today, however, it addresses itself more to religious history, civilization problems and ethical concerns” (Nomani, 2012, pp. 181–182). Europeans think that legal and ethical issues in any religion, like polygamy, divorce, slavery, and jihad, are significant points against that religion. So, the novel theology will discuss such issues. Also, Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938), an Indian-Pakistani thinker and another advocate of a renaissance, wrote “The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam”. In this book, he proposed that philosophy should be used to build a new theology based on reasoning and ideas relating to fundamental questions of religion and faith rather than abandoning tradition.

Amin al-Khuli (1896–1966) was the first one in the Arab world to try to reform traditional theology and urged *ijtihad*, independent thinking in doctrine. The new tawhid question or kalam-jadid, as referred to by Fahmi Jadan in his book “The Foundations of Progress among Muslim Thinkers in the Modern Arab World (1979),” is described as a liberation of monotheism through which some modern Muslim intellectuals have now “discovered how to perceive ‘theology’ and begun searching for a “new theology” of sorts. This new paradigm allows for tawhid with different functions, emancipating human life and pure knowledge without impurities or confusion” (Jadan, 1988, p. 195).

Thus, these thinkers came to believe that theology must be reformed. It is not just about recognizing the existence of Allah but about the personal journey of Faith. Theology is about fostering a closer relationship with Allah, rebuilding such a relationship through an inner drive that renovates the heart of a believer. This process endows the believer with the ability to overcome a state of passivity, stagnation, and indolence. As Malek Bennabi puts it, “our task is not to prove the existence of Allah but to make one feel His presence and fill the soul with it, considering it as a source of energy” (Jadan, 1988, p. 195). This does not happen in traditional theology, which praises debate and the swapping of opinions. Classically speaking, it substitutes the "psychological problem" of revival with a theological one; that is to say, instructing the believer in the existence of Allah without helping him to realize this existence

in life, as the "ancestors" themselves did (Ben Nabi, 1959, p. 55). It simply teaches a creed that the Muslim already possesses but does not try to restore the efficacy, the positive power, and the social impact of that creed. From this perspective, as it is necessary to go beyond in theology the trivially doctrinal dimension, the Iranian thinker Mohammad Mojtabeh Shabestari defines new theology as:

the science which discusses such issues as the meaning and essence of religion, the substance and accidents of religion, the commonalities among different religions, religious pluralism, the religious function with respect to the life of persons and communities, the concept of religious society, the interaction between religious and human knowledge and its borderlines, the place of subjectivity and objectivity in religious exegesis, whether there exist permanent projections on the religious text, constancy and transformation in religion, the relation between religion and myth, and the defects of religion, that is to say, its negative aspects: extremism, fanaticism, religious superiority, individualism, wars, sexual and intellectual repression, terrorism in all its forms-violence and brutality- and others that preoccupy modern theologians. (Shabestari, 1998, pp. 51–52)

Similarly, Abd al-Jabbar al-Rifai describes *kalam-jadid* as the science that moves the burning questions beyond the limits of traditional *kalam* from the concerns of general and specific prophethood, the existence of Allah, His attributes, the unseen, and the resurrection to a scope that includes all the issues concerning the sacred texts, whether these issues pertain to reality or ethics. The redefinition of *kalam-jadid*, however, implies not only the induction of new issues within the inherited system of theology but also a renewal of issues, aims, methods, subject matter, language, and epistemic bases of theology (al-Rifai, 2021, p. 76). We will return to those dimensions and their relationship with the epistemic architecture of theology in the latter part of the book.

Al-Rifai himself, however, prefers to use the term *kalam-jadid*, or new theology, rather than *kalam hadith*, or modern theology, since some researchers, out of attachments, have been using this term with lurking fear in their hearts that they might stand accused of having severed the links with tradition. He further argues that while both terms may relate to some common issues, *kalam-jadid* does not introduce new themes unknown to classical theology. Its approach, objective, and methodology differ. Each had its epistemic premises, research methodology, interpretive tools, key concepts, and worldview. Although al-Rifai prefers to use the term "new theology," he feels that, for him, it brings forth Christian Western connotations and is not expressive enough for the topics dealt with by *kalam-jadid*; therefore, Hassan Yousefian prefers to use the term "philosophy of religion." Today, however, the term *kalam-jadid* is prominent. Through its new conceptualization of theology renewal, the distinction between the terms "philosophy of religion" and modern Christian theology has blurred. (Al-Rifai, 2016, pp. 43-44).

2. Forms and Reasons for the Renewal in Theology

The term *kalam-jadid* has sparked debate among scholars, with some opposing and others supporting it. The opponents argue that theology, like any other science, naturally evolves, so why limit the description of renewal to theology alone? Why not apply the "new" attribute to all Islamic sciences being documented today? Moreover, if we describe a particular phase of theological development as "new," what should we call subsequent stages? On the other hand, proponents believe that *kalam-jadid* represents a new construction with a unique architecture that shares only a few characteristics with traditional theology. One of the questions raised about this concept is whether it is synonymous with the "philosophy of religion" or whether they are distinct. However, the term *kalam-Jadid* has gained legitimacy through its widespread use, if not for other justifications. Despite the efforts of theologians in the past to establish religious thought and respond to doubts, more is needed today, given the

advancements in human thought in science, methodology, language, and philosophy. The scope of traditional theology only extended beyond doctrines and fundamentals, necessitating a new spirit and vitality in theology.

This renewal can enable theology to perform its tasks more effectively, keep pace with the intellectual development of the modern world, and open up new methodologies for understanding reality and uncovering its truths. This may also justify the call to renew Islamic theology by introducing essential changes to all its epistemological framework elements, including subject matter, purpose, methodology, language, principles, and issues in light of the modern era's cultural, intellectual, philosophical, and scientific developments (Badawi, 2009, pp. 8-9).

The deficiencies and weaknesses of any given domain of knowledge are not diagnosed and identified, nor will the points that need renovation or change be indicated, except through a broad and deep understanding of all its aspects, particularly its concept and subject matter, purpose, issues, methods, and principles. These latter constitute epistemic foundations of any given branch of knowledge. A change in one or all of these pillars does not necessarily affect the field since it will remain intact. However, once the transition can occur in all the above pillars, we have a different field of knowledge that has branched out from the earlier one. Logicians have argued that sciences are distinguished by their aims and what they claim to accomplish. If a field of knowledge has kept its purpose despite changes in its other bases, it will also keep its identity. It was precisely so with 'new theology' 'Ilm al-Kalam al-Jadid, whose bases-issues, subject matter, language, and methods all have been changed while keeping its purpose and objective unchanged, contrary to what many have argued on this topic (Al-Rifai, 2002, pp. 21-60). This adaptability of 'new theology' is evidence that the goal of this discipline has always been to defend Islam from an intellectual and doctrinal perspective the same objective present in the definition of classical theology ('Ilm al-Kalam). For this reason, the discipline has kept the name 'theology' ('Ilm al-Kalam) and has not taken up an entirely new name for itself, even if the word 'new' has been added to its name given all that is new about it.

These changes come in epistemic pillars that are the mainstay of theology, namely:

2.1. Subject Matter

The subject matter of theological research has differed between the past and the present, necessitating a distinction between old and new theology. At the very least, there has been an increase in the subject matter of theology to include many issues not previously harnessed within, such as ethical issues, human rights issues, and humanitarian issues.

Traditional theologians dealt with specific religious issues that bordered on reality, and those that had to do with ethics and morals were not considered to be within their radar, unlike theology in the West. What in Western culture falls under theology or divinity incorporates many issues in religious texts, whether with reality or ethics (Badawi, 2009, p. 55). Are we to follow the West in this? If the purpose of theology is to defend Islam from an intellectual point of view, then it has to address doubts wherever they are. If they pertain to moral issues, for example, we find ourselves obliged to answer; thus, these issues become part of the subject matter of theology—not merely an act of aping the West. Issues like women's rights, human rights, children's rights, and social justice are high on this list.

2.2. Principles

Like its discipline, each science has principles and foundations; this is the case with theology. Principles of theology make up its epistemic system and can be supplied by various sciences, such as logic, philosophy, natural sciences, language, and the humanities. There can

be two principles in this regard: conceptual and propositional. In the former, theological evidence is based on a conceptual principle, for example, how we conceive of a body.

In the latter, theological evidence is based on acquired premises taken from other sciences like physics, chemistry, mathematics, and astronomy, and the result changes with changes in these principles. For example, to prove the unity of Allah based on the order prevailing in the cosmic system, as established by science. In this context, Hassan Hanafi says: "I cannot enter into a new theology without living in the world as an expert in international relations and political, social, and behavioural sciences. Thus, I must get to know human experiences through literature, novels, proverbs, and poetry through everything which expresses experiences" (Hanfi, 2002, p. 73). Thus, the ground of theology has changed with the development of the principles on whose basis it was built in agreement with the evolution of old sciences and the birth of new ones. This does not mean that all the old principles have changed.

2.3. Issues

Some new problems today were never addressed in the past. One can point out some matters related to the philosophy of religion, problems related to prophet hood, like finality, and problems regarding Imamate, like the authority of jurisprudence, governance, economy, and political issues. Others have gone to the extreme of including all affairs related to the nation under theology, whereby it was said that the objective of new theology is no longer defending the creed but the nation (Hanfi, 2020, p. 73). Traditional theologians focused on pure theology, centered on doctrinal issues. In contrast, new theology can be categorized into three main axes: Allah and religion, Humanity and Religion, and Nature and Religion.

-Allah and religion axis: This includes issues such as the argument for the existence of the Creator after new theories casting doubt on such evidence had emerged, the problem of finality in prophet hood, the problem of Imamate, and related concepts like the authority of the jurisprudence, shura, and elections, and the problem of good and evil and resurrection.

-Axis of Humanity and Religion: This relates to the relationship between reason and revelation, the humanity of religion, which religion serves, ethical and human rights issues and Islam's attitude over them, women's and children's rights, freedom of expression, social issues related to family and its attitude in Islam, and freedom in its different forms.

-Axis of nature and religion: This touches on issues like the relation of the soul to the body, the relation of religion to the world, the relationship of religion with science, and new scientific issues on genetic engineering and cloning and whether they are compatible or in conflict with religious teachings. Kalam-jadid has departed from traditional theological concerns, rejecting issues such as Allah's attributes and the nature of Allah's speech. Instead, it has embarked on a new field of inquiry, exploring general concepts of Islam as a comprehensive system encompassing all life affairs, including human rights, scientific issues, and social and political matters (Badawi, 2009, pp. 60-66).

2.4 Methodology

In the modern age, several methodologies have been developed. Therefore, theology does not depend on traditional methodologies like dialectical, narrative, and rational ways. Modern hermeneutic, semiotic, and phenomenological methodologies have given much power to bring various truths. Hassan Hanafi (2002) says,

The way of argumentation is a way which the ancients followed in theology, and according to logicians it is a way of defense and not one that seeks the truth; it is a way based on silencing or convincing the opponent. In my opinion, this is not a scientific way. The scientific way examines the validity of the premises for ensuring the validity of the conclusions. (p. 73)

2.5. Language

Since the relation of theology is so intimately associated with language analysis, clarification, and expression the renewal of theology calls for the use of current language, borrowing expressions from the new achievements of knowledge, sciences, arts, and literature. For example, in the old theology, the phrase "the creation of actions " expressed human freedom in acts." This no longer catches the attention of new generations as the word "freedom" does. It would enable monotheism to be presented anew by theologians who could use the language that has now infiltrated our civilization: freedom, democracy, socialism, liberalism, etc.

The progress in the study of linguistics also paves the way for me to read afresh religious thought that helps me understand and interpret religion in a new context. It has paved the way for contemporary scholars to produce deeper critical analyses of religious texts, religious thought, and religious discourse in light of recent developments within linguistics. Suppose the renewal question involves the above distinctions: subject, problems, principles, methodology, and language.

In that case, theology's epistemic architecture, the epistemic architecture of theology is the complex structure in which the different dimensions form in their interaction. Insofar as renewal takes place within these dimensions, understood in its problems, subject matter, methods, principles, and the epistemic architecture of theology itself will be renewed. Any change in one dimension necessarily translates to changes along the other dimensions. This necessitates the destruction of the old system as another is being born. In this new-born system, each dimension occupies a proper place in a reshaped manner, and the issues are reshaped in a way compatible with the new transformations. This renewal would imply a re-creation of the epistemic structure of theology, will also be renewed (Al-Rifai, 2002, p. 77).

Finally, apart from these aspects of renewal, there are also more reasons for renewing theology: a direction to rid oneself of the negative aspects lying in the past of old theology, some of those illogical ideas and propositions. The impetus for renewal hails from the negative aspect of the old and its flaws, not just the infusion of new ideas. Further, the developed and influential sciences and philosophies relating to religion (like the philosophy of religion, modern philosophies, and evolution philosophies) increasingly raised new doubts based on arguments against the tenability of several religious ideas and relevance to human life that the new doubts raised, against the development of new theology to answer them.

3. Hermeneutics and New Theology

Hermeneutics is concerned with the process of understanding; the science focuses on understanding (the understanding of understanding). The primary concern of hermeneutic inquiry is: How do we understand the text? Who understands the text? These questions have led to other questions that take on an ontological dimension in the event of understanding, in addition to its epistemic dimension. This has resulted in the emergence of philosophical hermeneutics, through which the focus shifted from understanding texts to understanding life and then to understanding existence, from the question of how we understand to the very essence of understanding itself.

Suppose Islamic theology is essentially a historical interpretative vision (an attempt to understand) of the revelations. In that case, it undoubtedly allows for a direct relationship with hermeneutic philosophy as a theory of interpretation and explanation. Furthermore, if the renewal of theology, as we have shown earlier, is not limited to one dimension but includes the renewal of the epistemic architecture of this discipline, then the renewal and change of methodology in line with contemporary developments will inevitably push theology toward adopting a hermeneutic approach. What epistemic breakthroughs does hermeneutics promise

for general religious texts and theological texts? What are the hermeneutic foundations for the discourse of renewal in Islamic theology? One of the essential concepts forming the theoretical foundations for the discourse of renewal in Islamic theology, which reflects its connection to the modernist interpretative project, is the concept of the pre-structuring of understanding and the relativity of religious truth.

3.1. Pre-Structuring of Understanding

In his ontological approach, Heidegger considered understanding “not something we possess but something we create” (Mustafa, 2007, p. 222). In understanding the text, the interpreter reveals aspects of their being and its possibilities. Understanding is inherent in human beings, accompanying their existence and present in every interpretive act. Since understanding is ontological, it is naturally connected to the individual's horizon and influenced by their existential self-view. Understanding cannot be imagined without a “world” or “meaning”, the pivotal point here is that understanding, according to Heidegger, becomes an ontology (Mustafa, 2007, p. 224). Consequently, the features of the hermeneutic circle begin to form existentially so that with every interpretation, we encounter some signs of the ontological presence of the interpreter in what is interpreted, justifying the discussion of preconceptions in the process of understanding as foundational elements for understanding the text and as essential components that shape the horizon of expectation and the anticipation of meaning.

What Heidegger offers us here is the shift from the epistemic to the ontological level in the process of understanding, which justifies the presence of the self in what is understood—a presence ensured and supported by the pre-structuring of understanding, embodied in the interpreter's pre-awareness of the overall meaning of the text and the various questions framing it, starting from the concerns of the present and its challenges. This framework is what Heidegger calls the pre-structuring of understanding. It goes beyond the traditional interpretive view that separates the subject from the object to achieve an objective interpretation free from preconceptions. However, acknowledging the role of preconceptions in the interpretive process does not endorse subjectivity over objectivity or obscure the text's identity. Instead, it affirms the factuality and historicity of understanding. Every preconception forms a pre-structuring of meaning, representing the collective historical experience of individual consciousness through lived experience and the collective consciousness through tradition.

This theoretical background has provided the foundation for renewing theology, which aims to reinterpret tradition and develop a contemporary doctrinal vision. Theologians have believed that interaction with the text and renewing the relationship with it do not emerge from a vacuum. Every reading is driven by specific stakes and built upon preconceptions about meaning (Al-Mukhayni, 2017). This principle is evident in the Iranian thinkers Mohammad Mojtaba Shabestari and Abdolkarim Soroush's views on contemporary religious reading, emphasizing the role of pre-knowledge in preparing for the interpretive experience. Soroush states, “The science of religion, in the position of understanding the Sharia, is always guided by the mind to understand the Sharia in a way that does not conflict with preconceptions. If human knowledge, whether scientific or philosophical, aligns with religious knowledge or contradicts it only in certain areas, then these assumptions are always present in understanding religion” (Soroush, 2010, p. 42). All readers of the sacred text “do not approach religion ... without a lens and a foundation”.

The reader comes to the text with some understanding, guided by a representation shaped by their pre-existing knowledge. This does not mean that this preconception in extracting meaning from the Quranic text would lead the understanding astray or deviate from its divine purpose. Instead, it is a pre-existing readiness to receive meaning, engaging in dialogue with the text to confirm or modify it. Shabestari confirms this by saying, “There is no

doubt that anyone who lives a faith experience holds philosophical and anthropological conceptions and has a particular worldview. A mind devoid of conceptions and hypotheses cannot acquire the faith experience” (Shabestari, 2009, p. 172). This means a close relationship exists between the faith experience and pre-existing knowledge; it is not built from nothing. Thus, pre-understanding is not merely a condition for religious knowledge but a prerequisite for faith.

This conclusion reveals the importance and role of personal experience in shaping faith belief, which opens up to the collective dimension. The pre-structuring of understanding reveals the role of individual and collective historical experience in forming the faith belief. Consequently, we can consider the contexts of meaning production in theological, exegetical, jurisprudential, mystical, and ethical literature as being connected to the researcher's preconceptions, upbringing, the nature of their era, environment, society, culture, and diverse life experiences. All these factors influence the formation of their understanding. Abdolkarim Soroush expressed this by saying, “Allah Almighty revealed the Sharia so that people may dwell on it in the recesses of their minds and make room for it in the space of their culture, and then they will understand it in a way that suits their culture and circumstances” (Soroush, 2010, p. 32). We can discern the pre-structuring of understanding in Soroush and Shabestari's thought through:

3.2-Previous Knowledge and its Role in Guiding Understanding

In understanding the religious, or more precisely, the Quranic text, every interpreter is trying to achieve the meanings that the Quran implies. Soroush mentions that they opt for a confident, scientific attitude towards realizing the Quranic meanings. Therefore, this preliminary background of the interpreter's knowledge becomes a pre-understanding basis for constructing meaning. He says, “What harm is there in approaching Sharia with an empty mind? What can an empty mind, devoid of everything, even questions, teach? To create questions, one must have a mind full of knowledge” (Soroush, 2010, p. 175). “An empty mind cannot uncover the truth” (Soroush, 2010, p. 35)

This idea is also found in Gadamer, who believed that understanding starts from inherited views and expectations from one's past and present, which one cannot be distanced from since the ideal of eliminating preconceptions does not respond to the historicity of the understanding (Gadamer, 2007, p. 368). In this respect, one interpretation would differ according to the epistemic speciality the interpreter belongs to and from which he approaches the religious text. Given the question, a linguist would associate it with the linguistic perspective, a theologian with the doctrinal perspective, and a specialist in the humanities with the human-related issues perspective. Shabestari reinforces this hermeneutic principle in his argument that any understanding and interpretation must have some direction from a particular perspective, preconceptions, or hypotheses. Their different preconceptions among individuals when understanding the text make them give different views on its meaning.

The person willing to understand the text has a hypothesis consistent with their perspective and preconceptions, as given, to select the meaning intended from among those ready in the structure of the language of the text by the author. Another person does so based on his preconception, and so on. A person who puts forward better evidence and arguments has a higher chance that his theory will be widely accepted (Shabestari, 2009, pp. 74-76).

Thus, the renewalists of Islamic theology found it necessary to adopt preconceptions in reading the Qur'anic text despite claims of objective reading, which falsely presupposes neutrality in reading and objectivity in interpretation. This position thus renders the renewal of Islamic theological discourse independent of the renewal of preconceptions impossible. Our notion regarding legislative intentions and doctrinal significations can remain the same,

independent of modification in the reader's knowledge and hypotheses. Al-Mukhayni (2017, p. 10) states that for this reason, there is a need for the new theological project to take as its basis new hypotheses to open the interpretive horizons different from those of traditional theology and its doctrinal perspective (Al-Mukhayni, 2017, p. 10). According to Shabestari, this means relying on more consistent philosophical hermeneutic foundations, which would permit laying the basis of a new Islamic theology and renewing the perception of the theological heritage of Islam.

3.3-The Historicity of Pre-understanding

In this new theological approach, religious knowledge is a part of human knowledge, which is changeable and variable. Thus, movement becomes an imperative element within the preconceptions that prepare the ground for building religious knowledge and reading the Quranic text. The assertion of religious knowledge's historicity dismantles the belief in the sanctity of religious tradition. Shabestari believes that:

the vision of the proponents of the new religious hermeneutics holds that dogmas and definitive judgments, which are found in religious tradition in general, are historical and temporal by nature, and they represent a thick veil that covers the 'face of religious discourse.' It is necessary to remove this veil so that believers can live in the light of its radiance and movement. In reality, this truth must always be 'renewed' and 'restored' to keep it alive and active in the life of human beings and society. These mechanisms and tools should be used to sift through the elements of tradition and purify the process of 'new revelation.' (Shabestari, 2009, p. 35)

Today, movement in Islamic discourse has turned out to be a hermeneutic necessity, and transformation in the quality of religious knowledge can only take place if the pre-structuring of understanding remains in constant motion. In other words, such renewal presupposes that the reader's expectations must be adjusted to new knowledge, and interpretive insights must be developed to create a new understanding of the text. It is this renewal that provides religious knowledge with its interactive historicity.

Religious knowledge is historical, and religious understanding is the product of the interaction between the text and human knowledge. It is a function of the interpreter's awareness of being conditioned by the circumstances of the reading act that shows the historicity of religious understanding. This pre-anticipation of meaning must be informed by preliminary knowledge that the reader brings with them, and this has to be dynamic lest such a reading become static, fixed, and one which lays claims to absolute truth or an absolute understanding.

In light of this, Soroush develops his argument by claiming that preconceptions are always subject to affirmation and negation; principles, opinions, and previously attained knowledge must be continually revised and corrected according to the developments of contemporary knowledge. Shabestari espouses this with a belief in natural interactive motion within the interaction between preconceptions in religion and parallel human knowledge. He says, "The refinement we mean can only be effected through constant research, analysis, and criticism of these accepted and pre-existent mental moulds in the light of the latest philosophical, scientific, and aesthetic Constructions of humanity" (Shabestari, 1998, pp. 102–103).

3.2. Religious Truth

The principle of the historicity of religious understanding is directly correlated with the concept of religious truth in the hermeneutic view. Since all understanding is historical and subject to circumstances in time and space, it implies that maybe there is no total meaning in any text. So, in the meaning of a hermeneutic question and this scope, truth poses the problem for the project of the new Islamic theology as conceived by Abdolkarim Soroush and Mohammad Mojtabeh Shabestari.

3.2.1 The Relativity of Truth and the Demolition of the Myth of Absoluteness

The new theologians develop a concept of truth emanating from the historicity of understanding. Religious understanding, to the extent that its conditions are historical, can thus have no absolute truth. So long as the movement of existence is one in a series of continuous flux, it is unreasonable to claim that the reader of the text of religion is to gain a single, fixed truth, or else their understanding will be invalid. Hermeneutics teaches that the religious text is a living organism whose life and renewal depend on its reinterpretation at every instant. It unshackles the text from the weight of historical interpretations, which obscure its communication with the new era, removing the encumbrance of cultural, social, political, and economic contexts that have weighed it down with their interpretations. So, we are facing a new understanding of truth, which does not simply repeat what has been involved but opens up the plurality of the truth. Therein lies but one of its appearance to every individual, as though truth were a multifaceted mirror that looks at but one face to every onlooker yet traps something of their reflection (Al-Rifai, 2002, p. 08).

From this perspective, Soroush rejects the argument that Islamic theological discourse has been based on refuting the opponent's doubts since its inception. In this, he sees that this discourse has been based on the assumption that the theologian holds the truth and regards the other as lacking it and needing the theologian to disclose it. There must, therefore, be a distinction between the truth of the Sharia and the understanding of the Sharia, between religion and religious knowledge. The absolute truth of Sharia and its purposes are known only to the Allah who legislated it. Hence, it is incorrect to speak of the relativity of truth; instead, we must speak of the relativity of religious knowledge in its quest for religious truth. Truth remains the goal of aspiration; however, understanding can neither attain nor possess the truth in full measure. Therefore, relativity is not related to the truth but to understanding religion, that is, the relativity of understanding religion and not the relativity of truth. This signifies a new concept of truth in the new theological approach.

3.2.2 Truth as openness

The hermeneutical view of truth is openness, in contrast to the dogmatic thought that thinks to possess absolute truth. Heidegger alludes to the relation of truth and freedom, an openness as phenomenological to the meaning of being; namely, to let the being be, and we find it authentically, and ourselves in that manner. In this regard, new theologians consider that the basic fact related to reading the Quranic text is not in claiming the attainment of truth concerning the divine intention but living the event of understanding itself while divesting any chance of alienation from the religious text and coming nearer to what one interprets. Thus, the renewal of theology is bound with openness on three levels: the text, the self, and the other. The conversation with the text occurs in the process of being open to the text. The interpreting self inquires, and the reply is the anticipated meaning that issues from the text. Through this dialectical process, question-answer, it would be possible to reach an opening saturation with the text beyond the mere claim of possession of its fixed truth. Openness to self means that engagement in dialogue with the text opens the self to the meaning given by the text as much as the self discovers the self. In other words, the individual's idea about religiosity will be shaped through the knowledge-creation process borrowed from the religious text. Openness to the other is associated with the text, tradition, and opposite thought, which is the hermeneutic approach.

The text exists in its own right, and the self must recognize its otherness with a symmetrical discussion in which the meaning transformed is constituted. The otherness of the text manifests for us the countenance of tradition in which the interpreter and text are participants. This means that the dichotomy between tradition and modernity should be

transcended within the interpretive theological process, designed to construct a theological interpretative experience in which the traditional and modern dimensions are integrated. Direct dealing with tradition is also necessary in the hermeneutic approach of new theology; it opens to tradition as the other that parallels the presence of the contemporary theologian in the interpretation of the religious text in the search for meaning and significance.

Our tradition does not exist outside of us; it is part of our consciousness, which we conventionally think is only living in the present and utterly cut off from the past. This hermeneutic theological understanding looks at the other as part of one amongst several mirrors reflecting in one way or another the meaning of the Quranic text; thus, this signification also represents a reading meaningful to that produced by the self, however much this may differ with the self's. The other becomes an implicit part of the self, for the self implicitly includes the other. The new theologians depended on this premise to open contemporary theological discourse to natural reciprocal horizons between the interpreting self and the opposing other in its interpretation. These are the theoretical bases of the new theological reading project, not an end in itself but related to the practical purpose for which the said project sets out to realize itself.

Application is necessary for the hermeneutic approach to linking the idea to the backdrop of reality and the possibility of its realization. Indeed, as Gadamer said: "Understanding always involves the application of the understood meaning" (Gadamer, 2007, p. 448). The new theologian conceives his Quranic text based on this tenet, and constructing this will impose on him the task of getting involved in the interpretive experience applied to the current situation and, hence, of working to update the meaning of the Quranic text. The preceding has stirred them to activate the practical dimension in this reading and renew it by addressing contemporary issues that beset the modern Muslim by conferring attention on matters of practical significance, unlike the issues of old theology (ElMukhainini, 2017, p. 22). Discussions on topics like human rights-relations of Islamic societies towards them, women's rights in the wake of the current modernist context, and issues of Islam and politics, among others, have been debated to place in the hands of the modern religious vision of the experience of modern Muslim subjects both theoretically and practically.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the modernization of Islamic theological discourse, specifically through the renewal of *'ilm al-kalām* (Islamic theology), is a vital and inevitable process driven by the evolving intellectual, cultural, and existential needs of contemporary society. The discourse surrounding the renewal of *'ilm al-kalām*, also referred to as "new *'ilm al-kalām*," is reflective of the broader effort to harmonize Islamic thought with modernity's rational, scientific, and pluralistic frameworks. This movement is not merely an academic exercise but a necessity for ensuring that religious thought remains relevant, dynamic, and equipped to address contemporary philosophical, social, and theological challenges.

One of the most significant contributions of this renewal is the incorporation of hermeneutics as a methodological tool. By adopting the hermeneutic approach, which emphasizes the interpretative nature of human understanding and acknowledges the historical and cultural conditions of interpretation, the *'ilm al-kalām* is provided with a mechanism to engage with modern knowledge systems and intellectual developments. However, this integration is not without its challenges. As highlighted, the issues of *pre-understanding* (or *prejudgments*) and the relativization of truth in the hermeneutic framework raise concerns about subjective interpretations that may depart from the traditional and universal understandings of the sacred text. These critiques, while significant, should not be seen as insurmountable

obstacles but rather as opportunities to refine and clarify the goals and methodologies of contemporary theological discourse.

Recommendations

1. **Balanced Hermeneutics:** To address the issue of subjective interpretation, it is essential to develop a balanced hermeneutical framework that respects both the historical context of the text and the modern reader's context. This can be achieved by creating interpretive methodologies that integrate traditional exegesis with contemporary insights, ensuring that the core theological principles are maintained while allowing for flexibility in responding to new challenges.
2. **Inclusive and Interdisciplinary Approach:** The renewal of *'ilm al-kalām* should be inclusive of insights from various fields, including philosophy, sociology, and cognitive sciences. By fostering interdisciplinary dialogue, scholars can enrich theological discourse, making it more responsive to contemporary human concerns. The inclusion of modern scientific knowledge should be carefully calibrated, ensuring that it enhances rather than undermines the foundational truths of the faith.
3. **Educational Reform:** The modern discourse on *'ilm al-kalām* should not remain confined to academic circles but should be integrated into educational curricula at various levels, particularly in institutions where Islamic studies are taught. By introducing students to the rich tradition of *'ilm al-kalām* and its contemporary renewal, future generations can develop a more profound and nuanced understanding of their faith, empowering them to engage critically with modern intellectual challenges.
4. **Ethical and Social Application:** Theological renewal must be accompanied by practical applications that address the ethical, social, and political realities of the contemporary world. The new *'ilm al-kalām* should not only offer theoretical solutions to philosophical questions but also provide ethical guidance in areas such as human rights, social justice, and environmental stewardship.
5. **Global Discourse:** Islamic theological renewal should not be seen as an isolated intellectual exercise but as part of a global discourse. Engaging with non-Muslim theologians and scholars from other faith traditions can help Islamic scholars broaden their perspectives and contribute to a more inclusive, global conversation on theology and ethics.

In sum, the renewal of *'ilm al-kalām* is not merely a theoretical pursuit but a critical and ongoing process that must evolve in tandem with the intellectual and existential realities of the modern world. By embracing both tradition and innovation, Islamic theology can continue to offer meaningful insights and guidance to contemporary believers. Through a balanced, interdisciplinary, and ethically driven approach, the renewed *'ilm al-kalām* can serve as a dynamic and transformative force in both Islamic thought and broader philosophical discourses.

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