

Islamic Ilm-ul-Kalaam and Christian Rational Theology: A Comparative Study of Kant's Critical Philosophy, Enlightenment Thought, and Shaykh Sabri's Critique

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Abstract

This paper compares Islamic Ilm-ul-Kalaam and Christian Rational Theology, highlighting their approaches to reason and revelation. It contextualizes these traditions within Immanuel Kant's Critical Philosophy, a cornerstone of 18th-century Enlightenment thought, which redefined metaphysical inquiry to justify emerging secular and capitalist structures. Kant sought to resolve the Empiricist-Rationalist debate, but his epistemology, emphasizing the limits of reason and the noumenon/phenomenon divide, effectively marginalized revelation (as authority) and the traditional 'metaphysical' discussions. The paper also examines Shaykh Mustafa Sabri's critique of Kant (in the early 20th century), which goes beyond epistemology to challenge Enlightenment thought as a whole. Shaykh Sabri critiques the Enlightenment's secular underpinnings and its alignment with capitalist ideologies, presenting an Islamic defense of divine guidance as central to mankind's knowledge and social order. To enhance this discussion, examples from classical Islamic scholarship, modern Islamic critiques and contemporary thought have also been incorporated here.

Keywords: Ilm-ul-Kalaam, Rational Theology, Kant, Sabri, Enlightenment, Capitalism, Reason, Revelation

1. Introduction

The 18th-century Enlightenment marked a profound transformation in Western thought, characterized by a turn toward secular reason, empirical inquiry, and individual autonomy. Philosophers like Immanuel Kant (d. 1804) epitomized this intellectual movement, challenging traditional metaphysics and redefining the role of religion and theology in western society. Kant's *Critical Philosophy* not only intended to resolve the philosophical tension between Empiricism and Rationalism but also laid the groundwork for the Enlightenment's broader agenda: *to establish a rational basis for secular governance, scientific progress, and capitalist economics*.

Against this backdrop, Shaykh Mustafa Sabri Effendi (d. 1954), the second last Shaykh-ul-Islam (in office 1919-1920) of Usmani sultanate, critiqued Kant's epistemology as part of a broader critique of Enlightenment thought. Shaykh Sabri argued that Kant's denial of metaphysical knowledge and his relegation of faith to practical reason undermined the intellectual integrity of religion and facilitated the rise of secular ideologies. For Shaykh Sabri, Enlightenment philosophy, with its dismissal of divine guidance, was not merely an epistemological error but a complete social and moral failure that only served to criminally justify the capitalist and colonialist structures of

modernity.

This paper compares Ilm-ul-Kalaam and Christian Rational Theology, contextualizes them with reference to Kantian and Enlightenment thought, and evaluates Shaykh Sabri's critique, offering a nuanced understanding of the intellectual and sociopolitical dimensions of these debates. The relation between revelation and reason (to knowledge) is the thread that binds the various sections together.

2. Development of Ilm-ul-Kalaam & Rational Theology

Religious traditions have historically sought to reconcile faith and reason. In Islam, Ilm-ul-Kalaam developed as an intellectual (or 'aqli¹, عقلی) defense of Islamic theology, rooted in the Quran and Hadith. Conversely, Scholastic Rational Theology in Christianity sought to harmonize faith with philosophical reasoning, particularly influenced by Greek philosophy. This section compares the historical intellectual traditions of *Islamic Ilm-ul-Kalaam* and *Scholastic Rational Theology*, examining their origins, objectives, methodologies, and key themes. While both disciplines appear to utilize similar discursive

¹ To maintain distinction, I prefer to use the word 'aqli (عقلی) here as opposed to 'rational' as the words *reason*, *rational* & *rationality* in English usage are heavily tainted with overtones of Enlightenment Rationality. More on this ahead.

techniques to engage with theological questions, their epistemological foundations and theological concerns differ significantly. The main argument here is that Ilm-ul-Kalaam prioritizes divine revelation within the framework of Islamic monotheism, whereas Scholastic Theology emphasizes a synthesis of reason and revelation, often within the context of Trinitarian doctrines. Primary texts relied on, to support this point of view are *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* by Imam Al-Ghazali رحمه الله and *Summa Theologica* by Thomas Aquinas. Other secondary sources were also used to construct the tabular comparison at the end of this section (See Table 1).

2A. Ilm-ul-Kalaam: Revelation Anchored in ‘aqli (عقلی) Discourse

Islamic Ilm-ul-Kalaam, or “the science of discourse,” emerged in the early centuries of Islam as a response to certain theological disputes and external philosophical influences. It operates on the premise that revelation is the ultimate source of truth, with ‘aql (or more popularly used ‘reason’) serving as a tool to defend and elucidate divine teachings. Knowledge stems primarily from revelation, though reason is valued for interpreting it within acceptable limits (Nasr, 2006a). Therefore, for many, it was an ‘aqli (عقلی) or ‘rational’ defense of Islamic theology against both internal and external challenges. Central concerns

for Ilm-ul-Kalaam included discussions on divine attributes, predestination versus free will, and the nature of the Quran. These debates were grounded in the Quranic principle of tawhid (the oneness of God) (Fakhry, 2004).

Ilm-ul-Kalaam debated whether divine attributes (e.g., mercy, power) were distinct from or identical to God's essence. The Ash'arite school emphasized that God's attributes are neither entirely distinct from nor identical to His essence (Fakhry, 2004). The Mu'tazilites championed free will, while the Ash'arites leaned toward divine predestination, highlighting God's omnipotence (Rahman, 1982).

Engagement with philosophy

The Mu'tazilites emphasized rationalism, advocated for divine justice and free will, while the Ash'arites, led by scholars like Imam Al-Ash'ari (d. 936 AD) and later refined by Imam Al-Ghazali (d. 1111 AD), (رحمهم الله سبحانه وتعالى), restrained rationalism with textual fidelity to the Quran and Sunnah (Nasr, 2006b). This Ilm-ul-Kalaam sees reason as subordinate to revelation. It aligns with the Quranic view of man's intellect as a limited yet valuable tool for understanding divine signs (Quran 3:190). For example, in *Tahafut al-Falasifa*, Imam Al-Ghazali critiqued the philosophers' excessive reliance on Aristotelian metaphysics and rejected the Aristotelian

idea of an eternal universe because it conflicts with the Quranic teaching of creation *ex nihilo* (Frank, 1999).

Ibn Taymiyyah's *Dar' Ta'arud al-'Aql wa al-Naql* extends this critique, arguing that intellect/reason, when purified of philosophical presuppositions, inherently affirms the truths of revelation. For Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 AD), divine guidance is the ultimate epistemic authority, and man's intellect reaches its zenith only when aligned with revelation (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1982).

Social and Political Dimensions

Ilm-ul-Kalaam played a critical role in shaping the moral and social fabric of Islamic societies by addressing the intersection of divine law and societal organization. It posited that man's intellect, when harmonized with divine revelation, forms the basis for a just and cohesive social order. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210 AD), a pivotal figure in Islamic theology and philosophy, provides a profound exploration of these ideas in *Al-Mabahith al-Mashriqiyyah*. He argues that societal stability and harmony arise from adherence to divine authority, which offers an objective and universal moral framework, transcending the limitations and inconsistencies of purely subjective or man-centered rationalizations (Al-Razi, 1985).

Al-Razi's perspective underscores that intellect/reason alone, while essential, is insufficient to fully

grasp moral truths or ensure societal order; it requires the guiding light of revelation to anchor it in absolute principles. This peculiar arrangement of reason and revelation in *Ilm-ul-Kalaam* not only shaped individual ethical behavior but also justified political authority and the implementation of Sharia as the foundation of governance. By rooting social justice and political legitimacy in divine law, *Ilm-ul-Kalaam* reinforced a model of governance that sought to balance intellectual inquiry with unwavering adherence to spiritual truths, ensuring both moral integrity and societal cohesion (Fakhry, 1994).

2B. Christian Rational Theology: Faith and Reason in Synthesis

Scholasticism flourished in medieval Christian Europe, particularly within monastic and university settings. Its goal was to reconcile Christian doctrines with classical philosophy, especially the works of Aristotle. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274 AD), in his seminal work *Summa Theologica*, exemplified this synthesis, arguing that reason and revelation are complementary (Aquinas, 2006). He developed rational arguments for God's existence and the coherence of Christian doctrines (Copleston, 1993). Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* argued that while reason can demonstrate certain truths, mysteries like the Trinity are accessible only through faith. Centuries earlier Saint Augustine

(d. 430 AD), in his *Confessions*, had asserted that faith is a prerequisite for understanding, emphasizing that divine *illumination* precedes rational inquiry. Later, this was crystallized as *credo ut intelligam*, ('I believe so that I may understand') by St Anselm (d. 1109 AD) of Canterbury. This framework highlights the *complementary roles of faith and reason* in Christian theology, clearly contrasted with Islamic thinkers like Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, who emphasized systematic 'aqli defenses of Islamic tenets.

Scholastic Rational Theology was characterized by its rigorous logical structure and systematic approach to resolving theological issues. It employed philosophical reasoning as a primary tool, often building on the Aristotelian tradition (Copleston, 1993). It focused heavily on the doctrine of the Trinity, exploring the relational nature of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Aquinas, 2006). Building on Augustine's thought, Scholastics sought to reconcile the existence of evil with divine omnipotence and goodness (Copleston, 1993). Another major discussion was the nature of Christ² as both divine and earthly, as articulated in key doctrinal debates during the early councils (Pelikan, 1971). Other discussions included that of original sin and grace. Anselm of Canterbury's

² 'Christ' is a distortion of the concept of Messiah (مسیح)

ontological argument for God's existence, framed theology within the Rationalist tradition (Pelikan, 1971).

Scholasticism holds that reason and revelation are mutually enriching. Aquinas famously argued that truths discovered by reason (e.g., the existence of God) and those revealed through scripture (e.g., the Trinity) do not contradict but complement one another (Aquinas, 2006).

Alignment with Feudal Society

Scholastic theology supported the social order of medieval Europe, emphasizing divine authority and hierarchical structures. It was deeply intertwined with the socio-political structures of feudal society, reflecting and reinforcing its hierarchical nature. The *great chain of being*, central to Scholastic thought, mirrored feudal hierarchies, portraying the cosmos and society as divinely ordered. Thinkers like Aquinas emphasized that rulers derived authority from God, legitimizing feudal obligations and the divine right of kings (*Summa Theologica*, Ia-IIae, Q. 105). The Church, a key feudal landholder, used Scholasticism to maintain its authority and influence over political structures (Duby, 1980; Le Goff, 1993).

Educational institutions rooted in Scholasticism trained clerics and administrators, vital for feudal governance. Aquinas's discussions of natural law

upheld social stratification as part of divine will, while his notions of justice supported the feudal economy without challenging its inequalities (*Summa Theologica*, II-IIae, Q. 57). Scholastics also adapted Aristotelian political thought to justify the state's role in achieving the common good, reinforcing the alliance between Church and monarchy (Tierney, 1988).

Scholastic theology provided a moral framework for feudal obligations, portraying the duties of lords and vassals as aligned with Christian virtues like justice and charity (Southern, 2001). Rituals sanctified by clergy further embedded these obligations in the divine order. By unifying intellectual, spiritual, and political dimensions, Scholasticism helped sustain and legitimize the feudal system.

In summary, Ilm-ul-Kalaam and Scholastic Rational Theology exemplify how religious traditions engage with reason to address theological questions. While both share an emphasis on rational discourse, their epistemological foundations and thematic concerns reflect their respective religious frameworks. Ilm-ul-Kalaam prioritizes divine revelation, emphasizing Islamic monotheism and eschewing speculative philosophy when it conflicts with Quranic principles. Scholastic Theology, on the other hand, seeks to synthesize reason and revelation, grappling with the complexities of Trinitarian doctrine. Together, these

traditions highlight the diverse ways in which faith and reason intersect across religious contexts. With this introductory background we now move on to Kant's critical philosophy and then Shaykh Sabri's critique of Kant. It is of utmost importance to keep in mind that Kant was writing in the 18-century Protestant Christian & European Enlightenment framework, while Shaykh Sabri, was Shaykh ul Islam of the Usmani Saltanat (in early 20th century), trained in traditional Islam but writing in a rapidly modernizing and soon to be the nationalist Turkey.

Table 1: Differentiating Ilm-ul-Kalaam and Christian Rational Theology

	Ilm-ul-Kalaam	(Scholastic) Rational Theology
Primary Source	Quran and Hadith	Bible and Church Fathers
Role of Reason	Subordinate to revelation	Complementary to revelation
Philosophical Influence	Engages critically with Hellenistic thought	Heavy reliance on Greek philosophy
Core Doctrines	Tawhid, divine attributes, free will	Trinity, Incarnation, original sin
Key Thinkers	Imam Al-Ghazali (RA), Fakhr al-Razi	Thomas Aquinas, Anselm of Canterbury

3. Kant's Critical Philosophy & Enlightenment Thought

Immanuel Kant's (d. 1804) critical philosophy is

regarded as a revolutionary departure from traditional metaphysical systems, but continues to bear significant traces of scholastic rational theology and marked influences from Christianity. This section elaborates further upon this claim.

Kant and the Legacy of Scholastic Rational Theology

Scholasticism, particularly as developed by Thomas Aquinas (and discussed in section earlier), sought to synthesize reason and faith, grounding theological truths in Aristotelian logic and metaphysical frameworks (Aquinas, 2006). While Kant rejected traditional metaphysics in favour of a critical approach that focused on the limits of human cognition, his systematic exploration of reason and moral philosophy parallels the Scholastic method of rigorous & structured inquiry (Kant, 1998). Both approaches share an emphasis on reason as a tool for understanding, albeit with divergent conclusions regarding the role of metaphysics and divine revelation. Kant's division between phenomena (the-world-as-experienced) and noumena (things-in-themselves) can be seen as an echo of the Scholastic distinction between natural reason and divine mystery. For Scholastic theologians, while human reason was capable of apprehending certain truths about God through natural theology, divine revelation was necessary for understanding transcendent truths

beyond human comprehension (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.12.1). Similarly, Kant acknowledged the existence of a reality beyond empirical knowledge, even if he confined such knowledge to the realm of practical reason and moral necessity rather than metaphysical inquiry (Kant, 1998).

Implications of the Phenomenal/Noumenal Divide

Kant distinguished between phenomena (the-world-as-experienced) and noumena (things-in-themselves). This meant that while phenomena are accessible to human cognition, noumena, including God and ultimate reality, are beyond the limits of reason (Kant, 1998). This division marginalized traditional metaphysical and theological claims, confining them to the realm of subjective faith rather than objective knowledge.

Kant and the Enlightenment Project

Kant epitomized the Enlightenment ideals, calling for the liberation of human reason from traditional authorities. His motto, “Sapere aude” (Dare to know), encapsulated the Enlightenment’s emphasis on autonomy³, reason, and secular progress (Kant, 1784).

³ The meaning of autonomous here is that man is dependent only upon himself (قائم بذات). This is Man’s claim to be Ahad (احد) and Samad (صمد). He is not to depend upon any external authority - but only upon the activity of his own mind. Only then can he be truly autonomous.

Furthermore, Kant's Critical Philosophy sought to resolve conflicts between Empiricism and Rationalism while justifying a new, secular framework for morality and governance.

Christian Moral Framework in Kantian Ethics

Kant's moral philosophy, particularly his concept of the "categorical imperative," reflects significant influence from Christian ethical ideals. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant posited that belief in God, the immortality of the soul, and moral accountability are necessary postulates of practical reason, i.e. moral necessities (but not rational conclusions) (Kant, 1996). This framework aligns with Christian theological concepts of divine justice and the moral law inscribed in human nature. For instance, Augustine and Aquinas emphasized that human morality reflects the eternal law of God (Aquinas, 2006), a principle echoed in Kant's assertion that moral obligations possess universal validity. However, Kant departed from Christian theology by grounding his moral law in autonomous *human reason* rather than *divine revelation*. This effectively reduced theology to merely a moral function, aligning it with Enlightenment goals of secular ethics and governance.

While Kant secularized morality, his emphasis on duty, human dignity, and the intrinsic worth of individuals resonates with Christian teachings.

Christian thought, particularly in its Scholastic tradition, underscores the inherent value of human beings as creatures made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Kant's categorical imperative, which demands treating individuals as ends in themselves, mirrors this theological emphasis on the sanctity of human life, albeit framed in a rational, secular context (Kant, 1996). This suggests that Kantian ethics, while (enlightened and) secular, may owe its foundational ideals to the Christian intellectual tradition.

Kant's Critical Philosophy and Protestant Individualism

The Enlightenment's emphasis on individual autonomy and secular progress was deeply intertwined with the Protestant Reformation's focus on personal faith and scriptural interpretation. Kant, raised in a Pietist Lutheran environment, was likely influenced by Protestant ideals of individual moral responsibility and the primacy of conscience (Wood, 1999). His assertion that enlightenment involves the courage to use one's reason without reliance on external authority reflects the Protestant rejection of hierarchical ecclesiastical control in favour of direct engagement with scripture and faith (Kant, 1784). Furthermore, the Pietist focus on ethical living over doctrinal orthodoxy parallels Kant's prioritization of morality over metaphysical speculation.

Protestant theology also shaped Kant's approach to the relationship between reason and faith. While he restricted theological claims to the realm of subjective belief, his acknowledgment of God as a postulate of practical reason echoes the Protestant emphasis on faith as a personal and moral commitment rather than a purely intellectual assent (McGrath, 2013). This aspect of Kant's philosophy highlights a continuity with Christian ideals, even as he sought to establish a secular framework for ethics and knowledge.

Tensions Between Kant and Scholastic Christianity

Despite these points of convergence, Kant's philosophy represents a fundamental challenge to Scholastic and Christian rational theology. By limiting metaphysical knowledge to the phenomenal realm and denying the possibility of rational proofs for God's existence, Kant undermined the intellectual foundations of traditional Christian theology. Aquinas's *Five Ways*, for example, relied on Aristotelian causality to demonstrate God's existence, a methodology Kant critiqued as falling outside the bounds of pure reason (Aquinas, 2006; Kant, 1998). Similarly, Kant's moral theology, which grounded belief in God in subjective necessity rather than objective truth, marked a departure from the Scholastic integration of reason and revelation.

Kant's epistemological framework also challenged Christian doctrines that affirm the intelligibility of divine action in the world. The Scholastic tradition, influenced by the principle of *analogia entis* (analogy of being), held that human reason could apprehend divine attributes through creation (Aquinas, 2006). Kant's restriction of knowledge to phenomena effectively precluded such analogical reasoning, confining theological claims to the domain of faith without rational verification.

Justifying Secular and Capitalist Order

Kant's epistemology justified the Enlightenment's emphasis on individual autonomy, rationality, and empirical progress, which underpinned emerging capitalist structures. By confining religion to the private sphere, Kantian philosophy aligned with Enlightenment ideals of separating church and state, enabling the rise of secular governance and market-driven economies.

In summary, we can say that Kant's critical philosophy reflects both continuity with and divergence from Christian and Scholastic traditions. While his systematic approach to reason and morality bears similarities to scholastic rational theology, and his ethical framework aligns with Christian ideals of human dignity and moral law, his secularization of these concepts represents a profound departure from

their theological roots. Kant's philosophy, shaped by the Protestant emphasis on individual autonomy and moral responsibility, thus occupies a unique position as both a product of and a challenge to the Christian intellectual heritage.

4. Shaykh Sabri's Critique of Kant & Enlightenment Thought

Shaykh Mustafa Sabri's critique of Kantian epistemology, informed by the principles of *Ilm-ul-Kalaam*, underscores the limitations of Kant's dismissal of metaphysical knowledge and his reduction of God to a moral postulate. Through the methodologies of *Ilm-ul Kalam*, Islamic scholars have long demonstrated that man's intellect is capable of apprehending divine truths, both in the natural world and beyond. Kant's epistemological framework, by contrast, fragments knowledge and severs it from its divine source, creating a duality that is alien to the Islamic worldview. Shaykh Sabri's insights, as explained further in the following section, will remind us of the enduring relevance of Islamic *Ilm-ul-Kalaam* in addressing contemporary philosophical challenges and reaffirming the unity of knowledge under the sovereignty of God.

4A. Critique of Kantian Epistemology

Shaykh Sabri's critique of Kantian epistemology, as articulated in *Ma'wqif al-'Aql wa al-'Ilm wa al-'Alam*,

represents a robust challenge to Kant's relegation of metaphysical realities to the realm of the unknowable. Shaykh Sabri argues that Kant's restriction of man's knowledge to phenomena unjustifiably limits the divinely bestowed capacity of man's intellect to grasp metaphysical truths. In *Ilm-ul-Kalaam*, 'aql (commonly and incorrectly translated as Enlightenment tainted 'human reason') is seen as a tool for understanding not only the material world but also higher metaphysical realities, as evidenced by the Quranic injunction:

"Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and the day are signs for those of understanding" (Quran 3:190).

This verse affirms that man's intellect is capable of perceiving divine signs (*ayat*) in both natural and metaphysical realms, a capability Kant's phenomenal-noumenal divide appears to deny. Shaykh Sabri's critique aligns with the methodology of Islamic theologians such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Ibn Taymiyyah, who argued that divine realities are accessible through both naqli (scriptural) and 'aqli proofs. (Fadlou, 1987). Kant's epistemology, by severing metaphysical inquiry from empirical knowledge, thus stands in stark opposition to the Islamic worldview, which integrates 'aql, naql (revelation) and sensory perception into a unified epistemological framework.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr expands on this critique, asserting that modern epistemology's dismissal of metaphysical realities fragments man's understanding and disconnects knowledge from its divine source (Nasr, 2006a). In contrast, *Ilm-ul-Kalaam* insists on the harmony between sensory and rational knowledge, maintaining that man's cognition (عقل) — when guided by revelation — has the potential to ascend to truths about God, the soul, and the hereafter (Nasr, 1981). Shaykh Sabri's critique, therefore, underscores the Islamic perspective that reducing knowledge to only the 'phenomenal' undermines the integrative nature of divine epistemology.

Reduction of Revelation to Morality

Kant's portrayal of God as a moral postulate, rather than an objective reality, represents another point of contention for Shaykh Sabri. In Kantian thought, belief in God is posited as a necessity for moral coherence rather than as a rationally demonstrable or existential truth (Kant, 1996). Shaykh Sabri critiques this reduction as fundamentally incompatible with the Islamic doctrine of *tawhid* (the oneness of God), which affirms that God's existence is both self-evident to intellect and objectively real. The Quranic verse, "Say, He is Allah, the One" (Quran 112:1), encapsulates this foundational belief, emphasizing that God is not merely a functional construct for morality but the

ultimate, absolute reality.

Islamic theologians, particularly those in the Ash'ari tradition, have extensively engaged with 'aqli arguments for God's existence, such as the *dalil al-huduth* (proof from contingency) and the *dalil al-wujud* (proof from existence). These arguments demonstrate that the universe's contingent nature points to the existence of a necessary being—God—whose attributes and actions are appreciable to the righteous intellect, *aql-saleem* (Al-Juwayni, 2000). Kant's relegation of God to a subjective necessity disregards these rigorous theological proofs, effectively dismissing centuries of Islamic intellectual tradition. Obviously, this is completely unacceptable for Shaykh Sabri.

Furthermore, Shaykh Sabri's critique resonates with earlier critiques in *Ilm-ul-Kalaam* regarding the instrumentalization of religion. Al-Ghazali, for instance, warned against reducing divine realities to utilitarian ends, asserting that knowledge of God (*ma'rifat Allah*) is an end in itself, not merely a means to ethical or societal order (Al-Ghazali, 2000). By reducing God to a moral construct, Kantian thought undermines the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of belief, which are central to the Islamic understanding of divine knowledge.

Fragmentation of Epistemology

Another critique rooted in *Ilm-ul-Kalaam* is the fragmentation of epistemology inherent in Kant's philosophy. By severing noumenal knowledge from phenomenal experience, Kant creates an artificial duality that isolates metaphysical realities from empirical inquiry. In contrast, Islamic epistemology, as articulated by scholars like Ibn Taymiyyah, emphasizes the integration of '*aql* (intellect/reason), *naql* (revelation), and *hiss* (sensory experience) in the pursuit of truth (Ibn Taymiyyah, 1991). This holistic approach is grounded in the belief that all knowledge ultimately derives from God and is unified under His sovereignty.

Shaykh Sabri's critique highlights that Kantian epistemology's denial of metaphysical inquiry reflects a broader secularization of knowledge, where divine truths are marginalized in favour of purely material understanding. This secular framework is antithetical to the Islamic intellectual tradition, which views knowledge as a means of attaining proximity to God (*taqarrub ilallah*). As Nasr (2006a) observes, the fragmentation of knowledge in modern thought leads to a loss of meaning and purpose, which Islamic epistemology seeks to restore by reuniting reason, revelation, and spiritual insight.

4B. Critique of Enlightenment and Secularism

Shaykh Sabri critiqued Kantian philosophy and Enlightenment for severing the connection between 'aql (popularly equated with reason) and revelation (*wahy*), which is central to the epistemology of *Ilm-ul-Kalaam*. In Kant's framework, reason operates independently of metaphysical truths, relegating God and divine guidance to subjective belief (Kant, 1998). Shaykh Sabri viewed this divorce as fragmenting knowledge and morality, resulting in a worldview that prioritizes materialism, individualism, and moral relativism—concepts fundamentally opposed to the integrative epistemology of Islam. The Quran, emphasizing the interconnectedness of intellect/reason and revelation, states:

"Indeed, this is a reminder for whoever has a heart or who listens while he is present in mind" (Quran 50:37).

This verse underscores the Islamic principle that true knowledge arises from the harmony of intellectual and spiritual faculties, a harmony disrupted by secularism. Islamic theologians such as Imam Al-Ghazali (2000) argued that 'aql, when properly guided by revelation, leads to certainty (*yaqeen*) and moral clarity, preventing the descent into the relativism characteristic of postmodern societies.

Scholars, such as Maulana Mawdudi (d. 1979 AD),

have similarly critiqued the Enlightenment's reductionist approach to ethics, arguing that the secular framework fails to establish objective moral principles, instead succumbing to ever-shifting societal norms (Mawdudi, 1985). Modern secular frameworks often result in moral relativism, as evident in the shifting ethical paradigms of postmodern societies (Zaman, 2018). Shaykh Sabri's insights resonate with these critiques, highlighting how Enlightenment secularism disrupts the integrative moral order upheld by Islamic teachings.

Justifying Capitalist Exploitation

Shaykh Sabri linked Kantian and Enlightenment ideals to the emergence of exploitative capitalist systems. These systems not just prioritize individual autonomy and profit over collective welfare but organize society in a way that concern for worldly affairs completely dominates any preparations for the hereafter. Enlightenment morality, grounded in secular individualism, lacks the transcendent ethical foundations necessary to restrain economic greed and to ensure any form of social justice. Kant's ethical framework, which centers on the autonomy of reason and the categorical imperative, fails to address systemic injustices embedded in capitalist structures (Kant, 1996). Shaykh Sabri critiqued this ethical void, contrasting it with the Islamic model, where divine

law (*Shari'ah*) provides a comprehensive framework governing both individual and societal conduct.

Islamic economic principles, as elaborated in *Ilm-ul-Kalaam*, aim to balance between material prosperity and moral responsibility. Concepts such as *zakat* (mandatory almsgiving) and the prohibition of *riba* (usury) reflect the Quranic injunction to prevent economic oppression and promote distributive justice (Quran 2:275). Maulana Mawdudi (RA) argued that capitalism, rooted in Enlightenment secularism, disregards these principles, fostering inequality and exploitation under the guise of progress (Mawdudi, 1985).

Malcolm X's observations on Western colonialism add a historical dimension to this critique. He identified Enlightenment ideals as instrumental in perpetuating racial and economic hierarchies, highlighting how secular frameworks justified the subjugation of non-Western peoples under the pretext of progress and civilization (Malcolm X, 1965). Shaykh Sabri's critique echoes this analysis, emphasizing that secular morality lacks the ethical foundations to resist such exploitation, unlike the Islamic system, which upholds justice as a divine imperative.

Colonial and Imperialist Implications

Shaykh Sabri also critiqued the Enlightenment's universalist claims, arguing that its ideals were co-

opted to justify European colonialism and the imposition of Western values on non-European societies. While Enlightenment thinkers advocated for universal reason and autonomy, these principles were often applied selectively, reinforcing Eurocentric superiority. Kant's emphasis on universal reason, for instance, became a tool for rationalizing colonial domination, portraying non-European cultures as irrational and backward (Kant, 1784). Shaykh Sabri identified this as a contradiction, exposing the narrow-mindedness underlying Enlightenment universalism. Islam, by contrast, offers a genuinely universal framework grounded in divine revelation, which transcends cultural and racial boundaries. The Quran declares:

"O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another" (Quran 49:13).

This verse highlights Islam's recognition of mankind's diversity as a sign of divine wisdom, rejecting the ethnocentrist characteristic of Enlightenment thought. Maulana Mawdudi emphasized that Islam's universal message challenges the imperialist tendencies of Western secularism by advocating for justice, equality, and mutual respect among nations (Mawdudi, 1985).

Shaykh Sabri's critique also aligns with the tradition

of *Ilm-ul-Kalaam*, which has historically defended Islam's universal truth against the narrow and ethnocentric ideologies. Islamic theologians such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Ibn Khaldun emphasized that divine revelation provides a framework for addressing global challenges, transcending the limitations of human-centric ideologies (Nasr, 2006b). Shaykh Sabri's insights affirm this perspective, positioning Islam as a counter-narrative to the secular universalism of Enlightenment thought.

Table 2: Summarizing positions of Ilm-ul-Kalaam, Rational Theology, Kant & Shaykh Sabri

	Islamic Ilm-ul- Kalaam	Christian Rational Theology	Kant's Philosophy	Shaykh Sabri's Critique
Epistemo logical Basis	Revelation as supreme, aql/reason as a tool	Synthesis of reason and revelation	Limits reason to phenomena	Affirms 'aql's capacity for metaphysical knowledge
Role of Revelation	Central and objective	Complement ary to reason	Reduced to moral necessity	Universal and transcendent
Social Order	Divine law governs society	Hierarchical, church- aligned	Justifies secular, capitalist structures	Critiques secularism and capitalism
Ethics	Grounded in divine command	Rational and revealed	Based on practical reason	Based on revelation

Through the lens of *Ilm-ul-Kalaam*, Shaykh Sabri's critique of Enlightenment secularism exposes its epistemological, moral, and sociopolitical limitations. By separating revelation from aql/reason, secular frameworks undermine the holistic integration of knowledge and ethics, leading to materialism, exploitation, and imperialism. In contrast, Islamic thought, as articulated by Shaykh Sabri and Maulana Mawdudi, offers a comprehensive system grounded in divine guidance, capable of addressing the moral and social failures of secular modernity. Shaykh Sabri's critique reaffirms the enduring relevance of Islamic rational theology in providing ethical and epistemological alternatives to the crises of contemporary society. Table 2 (above) summarizes the positions of Ilm-ul-Kalam, Rational theology, Kant's philosophy and Sabri.

5. Conclusion

It may be concluded that Kant's *Critical Philosophy* reflects the 18th-century Enlightenment's project to secularize knowledge and justify emerging capitalist and colonial systems. While his epistemology redefined metaphysics and theology, it attempted to marginalize the role of revelation and communal ethics. Shaykh Mustafa Sabri's critique of Kant challenges both his epistemological framework and the broader Enlightenment ideology, defending the

traditional Islamic hierarchy of 'aql being subservient to and guided by Revelation (وحي). Shaykh Sabri's work not only reaffirms the centrality of divine guidance but also critiques the sociopolitical implications of Enlightenment thought, offering a powerful alternative to the secular and materialist paradigms of capitalist modernity.

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