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## EPISTEMOLOGICAL CONTINUITY AND INNOVATION: CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY MUSLIM RESPONSES TO ATHEISM

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### Abstract

*The question of how the Islamic intellectual tradition has understood and responded to atheism is one that spans more than a thousand years of continuous scholarly engagement. This article examines that tradition through a comparative lens, bringing together four classical Muslim scholars, Al-Maturidi, Al-Ghazali, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, and Ibn Taymiyyah, and four contemporary Muslim intellectuals, Hamza Tzortzis, Muhammad Hijab, Dr. Shoaib Ahmed Malik, and Dr. Nazir Khan, to identify the epistemological commitments that unite them across the centuries and the genuine innovations that distinguish the modern from the classical period. Drawing on a qualitative and comparative methodology, the article argues that despite the vast difference in historical context, all eight scholars share three foundational epistemological convictions: the rejection of pure empiricism as a sufficient basis for answering questions of ultimate meaning; the use of dialectical inversion to expose the internal incoherence of atheistic reasoning; and the conviction that reason and divine revelation are fully compatible. At the same time, the article identifies real and significant differences, most importantly the emergence of the philosophy of science as an indispensable arena of engagement, the transformation of audience and medium, and the cross-confessional intellectual openness of the contemporary period. The article concludes that the Islamic epistemological response to atheism is not a medieval relic but a living, adaptive intellectual tradition, one that has met every challenge it has faced with rigour and confidence and remains more than equal to the demands of the present age.*

**Keywords:** *Atheism, Islamic Epistemology, Kalam, New Atheism, Classical Scholarship, Comparative Theology, Fitrah, Philosophy of Science*

### 1. Introduction

Every age has its own instruments of doubt. In the present time, one of the most influential has been New Atheism, a movement that, armed with the language of science and the reach of the internet, has posed one of the most serious intellectual challenges to religious belief in living memory. Led by figures such as Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett, it did not merely revive old objections to religion. It weaponised them, speaking the language of evolutionary biology, neuroscience, and cosmology. It presented itself as the voice of reason and science against the darkness of superstition, and directed much of its sharpest hostility toward Islam in particular, portraying it as uniquely dangerous among the world's religions.

But this is not something new. The question of God's existence is as old as human intellect itself. In every century and in every civilisation, there have been people who looked at the world and concluded that no Creator governed its existence. And in every century, men and women of faith stepped forward and refused to leave those arguments unchallenged. Al-Ghazali challenged the philosophers of his time with profound and precise arguments, while Ibn Taymiyyah strongly refuted the rationalist sceptics of his era, answering their doubts point by point. The tradition of defending faith through reason is not a modern invention; it is one of the oldest and most honourable callings within the Islamic scholarly heritage.

This article asks a specific and largely underexplored question: across the fourteen centuries that separate the classical and contemporary periods, what epistemological



commitments have remained constant in the Islamic response to atheism, and what has genuinely changed? It proceeds through a structured comparison of eight scholars, four classical and four contemporary, examining their epistemological foundations, their argumentative strategies, their understanding of the atheist challenge, and their methodological tools. The aim is not merely historical documentation but analytical clarity: to identify what is structurally essential to the Islamic intellectual tradition's response to atheism and what is contextually adaptive.

The significance of this question extends beyond the academy. Muslim youth confronting atheist arguments in classrooms and online spaces need intellectual clarity. Scholars and da'wah workers need a deeper understanding of how classical and modern arguments complement each other. And the broader academic study of Islamic theology needs a systematic comparative framework that has, as this article demonstrates, been largely absent from the existing literature.

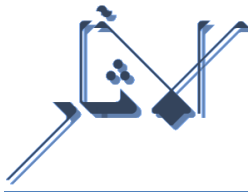
## 2. Background: The Landscape of the Atheist Challenge

Before comparing how Muslim scholars have responded to atheism, it is necessary to understand precisely what they have been responding to, not in a superficial sense, but with the kind of rigour that the tradition itself demands. The most striking feature of this background is that atheism across both the classical and modern eras is not a single, homogenous position. It is a family of related but distinct intellectual stances, each requiring a somewhat different response.

In the classical period, the forms of atheism or near-atheism that Muslim scholars encountered clustered around three Arabic terms. The *dahriyya*, the 'eternalists' argued that the universe was uncreated and self-subsisting, that time was eternal, and that there was no divine creation, prophethood, or resurrection. Their views drew on pre-Islamic Arabian materialism, on Greek atomist philosophy as transmitted through Arabic translations, and on the naturalistic traditions of certain Indian philosophical schools. Al-Shahrastani's encyclopaedic *Al-Milal wa al-Nihal* identifies the *dahriyya* as those who combined materialism with the doctrine of the eternity of the universe, the closest classical Islamic equivalent to modern scientific atheism. The term *zandaqa* referred to those whose outward Islamic observance concealed heretical or atheistic beliefs, while *ilhād* denoted a broader deviation from the revealed path, covering a spectrum of theological corruption rather than simply the denial of God's existence.

New Atheism, as the contemporary challenge is known, is qualitatively different from these classical forms, not primarily in its philosophical arguments, which largely recycle positions from Hume, Voltaire, and Russell, but in its rhetorical tone, its popular reach, its media presence, and its explicit hostility toward religion as a social phenomenon. What is genuinely new is its claim to speak in the name of science, its mass cultural visibility, and its fundamentalist certainty, a tone that scholars across the ideological spectrum have noted mirrors the religious fundamentalism it claims to oppose. Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion*, Sam Harris's *The End of Faith*, and Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell* combined sold tens of millions of copies worldwide; their debates attracted millions of online viewers. For young Muslims in particular, exposed to these arguments through social media, classrooms, and digital communities, New Atheism represents an intellectual challenge of unprecedented scale and speed.

What unites both the classical and the modern forms of atheism, in the eyes of the scholars examined in this article, is an epistemological failure: a mistaken understanding of what knowledge is, where it comes from, and what it can legitimately establish. This diagnosis, atheism as fundamentally an error of epistemology, not merely of theology, is the single most



persistent commitment across all eight scholars examined. It shapes their argumentative strategies, their methodological choices, and their understanding of what a successful response to atheism looks like.

### 3. The Classical Epistemological Landscape

The classical Muslim scholars did not share a single, uniform epistemological position. What they shared was a set of commitments that, despite considerable internal disagreement about their precise content and weighting, converged on a common diagnosis of the atheist error and a common framework for responding to it.

#### 3.1 Al-Maturidi: Reason as a Co-Equal Foundation

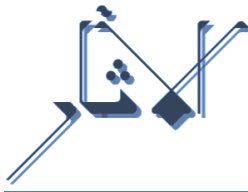
Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. 944 CE) occupies a unique place in classical Islamic epistemology because of his unusually strong confidence in the capacity of unaided human reason to reach theological truth. In his pioneering work *Kitab al-Tawhid*, he makes the case that rational argument involving reflection on the created world is, in principle, sufficient to prove the existence of God, and that this ability is shared by all people, regardless of whether they have access to prophetic revelation. His epistemological framework rests on the conviction that *aql* (reason) and *wahy* (revelation) are harmonious and mutually reinforcing, but that reason has its own independent authority.

His arguments against the materialist *dahriyyun* deploy rational demonstration as their primary instrument. The argument from origination (*Burhan al-Huduth*) runs as follows: things that exist contingently require a cause; chains of contingent causes cannot be infinite; therefore there must be a Necessary Being. The argument from design (*Dalil al-Tarkib*) reasons from the observable complexity and order of the created world to an ordering intelligence. These arguments are conclusive in themselves, al-Maturidi makes them accessible to all who reason with integrity from the facts of experience. The implication for his anti-atheist strategy is significant: because reason is universally available, atheism is not simply an error of faith. It is an error of reason. The atheist, on al-Maturidi's account, has failed to think correctly about the world he inhabits.

#### 3.2 Al-Ghazali: The Limits of Reason and the Demolition from Within

Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) offers perhaps the most complex epistemological framework of all the classical scholars. His position is not anti-rational, he was himself trained in Aristotelian logic and deployed it with extraordinary skill, but he is deeply sceptical of reason's capacity to generate certainty on its own. His autobiographical work *Deliverance from Error (Al-Munqidh min al-Dalal)* opens with a searing account of his own epistemological crisis: a moment in which he could no longer trust the deliverances of either the senses or unaided reason. What rescued him was not a new rational argument but a divinely granted certainty, a light that God cast into his heart.

Al-Ghazali's structural approach to refuting atheism is correspondingly distinctive. In the *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, he does not construct a positive case for theism from the outset but instead takes the central tenets of the philosophical tradition for granted and shows that they cannot be sustained by the philosophical framework on which they rely. His twenty refutations, directed at the eternity of the world, the nature of divine knowledge, and the denial of bodily resurrection are all aimed at showing that these positions are not only false, but also internally incoherent within the very philosophical tradition that leads to them. This is the strategy that later scholarship has come to call dialectical inversion: entering the opponent's framework and demonstrating its collapse from within. Al-Ghazali used Aristotelian logic to demolish Aristotelian philosophy. The content is specific to his time; the structure is timeless.



### 3.3 Al-Razi: Systematic Rational Theology

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d. 1210 CE) represents the classical kalam epistemological project in its most systematic and ambitious form. His *Al-Arba'in fi Usul al-Din* contains forty carefully laid-out rational proofs for the existence of God — arguments from the contingency of substances, the origination of accidents, the dependence of attributes, and the structure of existence itself. His use of Aristotelian logic is fully accepted, but employed to arrive at Islamic theological conclusions. The epistemological wager of al-Razi is significant: he asserts that rational demonstration not only can bear the weight of theological proof, but should. If philosophy is played correctly, God wins. This renders his method the most directly comparable to that of contemporary analytic philosophers of religion who work within a rational philosophical framework while holding Islamic theological commitments.

### 3.4 Ibn Taymiyyah: Revelation Supreme, Fitrah Central

Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328 CE) represents the most radical epistemological departure from the kalam tradition. His fundamental conviction, worked out across hundreds of pages in *Dar' Ta'arud al-Aql wa al-Naql* (The Refutation of the Conflict Between Reason and Revelation), is that any apparent contradiction between reason and revelation is always the result of a defective form of reasoning, never of genuine incompatibility.

But Ibn Taymiyyah's epistemology is not a blind retreat to authority. He introduces the concept of *fitrah*, the innate disposition of the human being, which he argues naturally recognises God. Atheism, on this account, is not simply a logical mistake. It is a disordering of the human soul's natural orientation. The *dahriyyun* and the philosophical sceptics have not reasoned their way to atheism; they have reasoned away from a knowledge which the *fitrah* a secondary capacity, to undermine a capacity that is more fundamental and more reliable: the direct knowledge of God inscribed in human nature. This move, locating the knowledge of God in *fitrah* rather than solely in rational demonstration, is a remarkable anticipation of the contemporary scholars who bring *fitrah* to the forefront as a response to New Atheism's claim that faith is irrational.

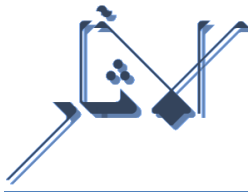
## 4. The Contemporary Epistemological Landscape

Contemporary Muslim scholars engage a fundamentally different version of the atheist challenge. The atheism they face does not come primarily in the form of Aristotelian metaphysics or Neoplatonic cosmology. It comes packaged as science. New Atheism claims the authority of evolutionary biology, cosmology, and neuroscience for its rejection of God. This means that contemporary Muslim scholars must do something their classical predecessors were never required to do: engage with the epistemology of natural science directly, and disentangle what science actually establishes from what atheism claims it establishes.

### 4.1 Hamza Tzortzis: Reviving Fitrah and Rational Cosmology

Hamza Tzortzis builds his epistemological foundation on two pillars rooted in the classical tradition. The first is the cosmological argument, specifically, a reformulation of the Kalam contingency argument in Islamic philosophical vocabulary: everything which begins to exist has a cause; the universe began to exist; therefore the universe has a cause that itself did not begin to exist. This argument, which in the classical tradition finds its most developed form in al-Maturidi and al-Razi, is supplemented with contemporary cosmological physics, the Big Bang, the second law of thermodynamics, and the Borde-Guth-Vilenkin theorem, all of which point, Tzortzis argues, to a universe that genuinely had a beginning.

The second pillar is the *fitrah* argument, drawn directly from Ibn Taymiyyah: the claim that belief in God is not primarily an inference from evidence but an expression of humanity's innate cognitive and spiritual architecture. In his major work *The Divine Reality: God, Islam*



and the Mirage of Atheism, Tzortzis argues that the epistemological principles of New Atheism that only empirically verifiable propositions are meaningful, are self-contradictory, since the verificationist principle cannot itself be empirically verified. This is a continuation of the classical kalam's own procedure, the same move al-Ghazali applied to the philosophers in the Tahafut: undermine the epistemological pretensions of the opponent using the opponent's own standards.

#### 4.2 Muhammad Hijab: Linguistic Epistemology

Muhammad Hijab's epistemological perspective is distinguished by its grounding in linguistic and literary analysis. His central argument is that the unmatched linguistic style of the Quran constitutes a first-order epistemological argument, not merely a secondary apologetic point. The Quran is not only a source of arguments for God; it is itself the chief evidence for the divine origin of Islam. This position is close to the approach upheld by other contemporary scholars, but approached from a different discipline, Arabic language, literature, and rhetoric rather than philosophy of science.

Hijab also argues for the epistemological poverty of New Atheism: that it takes materialism on faith without establishing it, and that it cannot coherently account for the reliability of human thought within a purely physical framework. His use of speech act theory, drawing on Austin and Searle, to analyse the linguistic and propositional claims of New Atheism represents a genuinely novel methodological contribution, one that has no direct classical parallel but is rooted in the broader Islamic tradition's engagement with the philosophy of language.

#### 4.3 Shoaib Ahmed Malik: Philosophy of Science as Epistemological Weapon

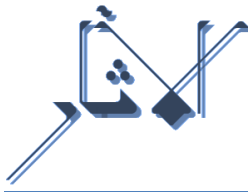
The epistemological contribution of Shoaib Ahmed Malik is the most technically advanced among the contemporary scholars studied. His central argument — which distinguishes Methodological Naturalism (the operational assumption that science investigates natural causes) from Ontological Naturalism (the philosophical claim that only material things exist) — is not merely a semantic distinction. It is a precise epistemological dismantling of the foundational claim of New Atheism: that science provides grounds for denying God's existence.

In his 2018 article in *Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press), Malik further demonstrates that contemporary atheism has distorted its own epistemological foundations through what he calls definitional manipulation, redefining atheism as 'mere lack of belief' in a way that no classical Islamic scholar would have recognised as a coherent philosophical position, and which allows atheists to make substantive metaphysical claims while escaping their epistemic burden of proof. This is rigorous analytic philosophy in the tradition of al-Razi: meeting the opponent on the terrain of rational demonstration and showing that, on those terms, the atheist position cannot be sustained.

#### 4.4 Nazir Khan: Empirical Science and Qur'anic Epistemology

Nazir Khan's epistemological approach is distinguished by its dual anchoring in empirical science and Qur'anic theology. As a trained neuroscientist writing for the Yaqeen Institute, Khan engages directly with the scientific literature, not merely citing it strategically, but reading it as a specialist and showing where its epistemological implications diverge sharply from what New Atheist popularisers claim. His papers on human origins, epigenetics, and embryology demonstrate that the biological evidence, carefully examined, does not support the reductive materialist account of human nature that New Atheism presupposes.

Khan also makes extensive use of Ibn Taymiyyah's epistemological framework, in particular the critique of radical scepticism (safsatah), to argue that atheism ultimately



undermines the very rational faculties on which it depends. His paper *Atheism and Radical Skepticism: Ibn Taymiyyah's Epistemic Critique* (2020) is the most direct scholarly bridge between classical Islamic epistemology and contemporary anti-atheist argument in the entire secondary literature. It demonstrates that Ibn Taymiyyah's critique of philosophical scepticism, developed in the fourteenth century, maps directly onto the self-refuting tendencies of New Atheist epistemology, a continuity that is as philosophically significant as it is historically striking.

### **5. Comparative Analysis: Similarities and Differences**

When the epistemological frameworks of all eight scholars are placed side by side, several patterns emerge with clarity. These patterns are not superficial similarities of vocabulary or genre; they are deep structural commitments that persist across the transformation of the intellectual landscape.

#### **5.1 Structural Similarity One: The Rejection of Pure Empiricism**

Every scholar examined rejects the claim that empirical observation alone is a sufficient foundation for knowledge of the deepest questions. Al-Maturidi grounds his rational theology in the universal capacity of reason, not sense-perception alone. Al-Ghazali exposes the limits of both the senses and unaided reason in *Deliverance from Error*. Ibn Taymiyyah insists that *fitrah* provides a more reliable cognitive access to divine reality than empirical inference. Al-Razi's forty rational proofs operate above the level of empirical observation, they work on the structure of being itself.

In the contemporary period, Malik's central argument is precisely that New Atheism's empiricist epistemology its claim that only scientifically verifiable propositions are meaningful is self-undermining: the verificationist principle cannot itself be empirically verified. Tzortzis makes the same argument in accessible form. Nazir Khan demonstrates that even within neuroscience and evolutionary biology, the evidence does not support the reductive materialist conclusions that New Atheism draws from it. The anti-empiricist conviction is not a weakness of the tradition but a philosophical strength: it correctly identifies the limits of empirical methodology and refuses to accept the conflation of scientific method with philosophical naturalism.

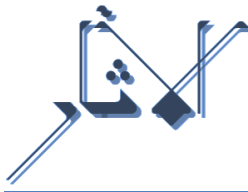
#### **5.2 Structural Similarity Two: The Dialectical Inversion**

All eight scholars employ what can be called the dialectical inversion — the strategy of entering the opponent's framework and showing that it is self-undermining. Al-Ghazali used Aristotelian logic to demolish Aristotelian philosophy. Malik uses the philosophy of science to demolish scientism. Ibn Taymiyyah used reason to show that radical scepticism destroys the reliability of reason. Nazir Khan uses biological science to challenge the reductive materialism that New Atheism derives from biology.

The technique is structurally identical across the centuries: enter the opponent's framework, demonstrate its internal incoherence, and exit with theism intact. This is not merely a rhetorical tactic; it is an epistemological conviction: that if you seek truth sincerely in any legitimate intellectual framework, you will find it, and it will lead to God. The atheist version of the world is not wrong because it is alien to Islam, but because it is internally incoherent it fails to uphold its own most fundamental assertions.

#### **5.3 Structural Similarity Three: The Harmony of Reason and Revelation**

The single most persistent commitment across all eight scholars , over fourteen centuries, is that well-directed reason and true divine revelation never genuinely clash. Ibn Taymiyyah wrote an entire major work, *Dar' Ta'arud*, to establish this. Malik's entire epistemological project, including his distinction between Methodological and Ontological



Naturalism and his reinterpretation of the Islam-and-evolution debate, rests on this premise. Al-Maturidi's confidence in universal reason presupposes it. Al-Razi demonstrates it constructively through forty rational proofs.

The apparent conflicts between reason and revelation are, on this shared view, always the result of a misconception, either about what science actually establishes or about what revelation actually claims. This is not an apologetic evasion; it is a considered epistemological position that has, in the hands of scholars like Malik and Nazir Khan, been defended at the highest levels of academic philosophy.

#### **5.4 Key Difference One: The Emergence of Philosophy of Science**

The most dramatic methodological difference between the classical and contemporary periods is the emergence of the philosophy of science as an independent and indispensable argumentative domain. Classical scholars had no need to engage with the specific epistemological claims of modern empirical science, its methodology, its scope, its relationship to metaphysical conclusions. The sciences of their era did not pose the specific challenge of claiming to explain away God through evolutionary or cosmological mechanisms.

Contemporary scholars, especially Malik and Nazir Khan, have had to develop entirely new argumentative tools for this domain. Malik's distinction between Methodological and Ontological Naturalism, his concept of Adamic Exceptionalism, his application of Ash'arite occasionalism to quantum indeterminacy, and his analysis of what evolutionary biology can and cannot establish, these are genuinely novel contributions that the classical tradition could not have produced because the challenge did not yet exist. They represent the tradition's capacity for genuine intellectual innovation in response to new challenges, not merely the repetition of established formulas.

#### **5.5 Key Difference Two: Transformation of Audience and Medium**

Classical scholars addressed a culture in which theism was the overwhelming intellectual consensus. Their audience was primarily other scholars, trained in the same classical disciplines, capable of following complex philosophical argumentation across hundreds of pages. Al-Razi's forty arguments, al-Ghazali's twenty refutations, Ibn Taymiyyah's multi-volume *Dar' Ta'arud*, these are works written for an audience of scholars rather than a general public.

Contemporary scholars address a dramatically different audience: educated Muslims simultaneously embedded in a secular Western intellectual culture that treats religious belief with suspicion, who have access to New Atheist arguments through popular media, and who may themselves be experiencing doubt. Hamza Tzortzis and Muhammad Hijab have found their way to this audience through live debates, YouTube lectures, and social media content. The Sapience Institute and the Yaqeen Institute have developed models that combine academic rigour with digital accessibility, a genuinely new institutional form that has no direct classical parallel but draws on the classical tradition's commitment to reasoned argumentation.

#### **5.6 Key Difference Three: Cross-Confessional Engagement**

Contemporary scholars are more openly engaged with non-Muslim philosophical resources as constructive allies. Elements of Tzortzis's argument are drawn from Alvin Plantinga's Reformed Epistemology and William Lane Craig's reformulated Kalam argument. Malik's work on the philosophy of science is cited in mainstream philosophy of science literature. Nazir Khan refers throughout his work to the findings of non-Muslim scientists, biologists, and neuroscientists.

Classical scholars were deeply engaged with Greek philosophy, al-Maturidi, al-Ghazali, and al-Razi all operated with extensive knowledge of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic



philosophy. But today's engagement is of a different character: it is not only critical engagement with a foreign tradition, but an intellectual partnership — the use of non-Muslim philosophical resources as constructive tools within an Islamic argumentative framework. This cross-confessional openness is a mark of the contemporary period.

#### **6. Contemporary Relevance: Which Classical Insights Still Cut**

The comparison conducted in this article is not merely of historical interest. It points directly to the question of what resources the Islamic intellectual tradition can bring to bear on the atheist challenge of the present day, and which of those resources require updating for new circumstances.

Ibn Taymiyyah's fitrah argument has perhaps the most immediate contemporary relevance of all the classical arguments examined. Its central claim, that the human being's deepest cognitive and spiritual constitution already knows God, and that atheism is a suppression or corruption of this knowledge rather than an absence of it, resonates with the present day in several ways. It provides an understanding of the phenomenon, well-documented in the cognitive science of religion, that basic religious beliefs emerge spontaneously in children across different cultures, even without intentional instruction. It provides an alternative to New Atheism's claim that religious belief is irrational, forcing the atheist to defend the override of basic human faculties that the argument for atheism requires. Tzortzis has transmitted this argument directly from Ibn Taymiyyah into the contemporary public debate. Nazir Khan has extended it to the specific threat of radical scepticism.

Al-Ghazali's methodological principle, enter the opponent's context and demonstrate its collapse from within, holds equal force. Malik applies it to the philosophy of science: entering the epistemological framework of New Atheism and showing that scientism cannot sustain itself by its own standards. Nazir Khan applies it to evolutionary biology: entering the biological literature and showing that the evidence, carefully read, does not support the reductive materialist conclusions that New Atheism draws from it. The Ghazalian principle is not merely historically interesting; it is methodologically essential for any future Islamic engagement with atheism.

Al-Maturidi's rational universalism, the insistence that anyone can reason from the created world to God, even without access to revelation, retains special force in a pluralist public space populated by people of different cultures and faiths. It makes the case against atheism accessible to those who do not already accept the authority of the Quran, by grounding it in shared human reason rather than the authority of any particular scripture. This is why the cosmological and design arguments, which al-Maturidi was the first to articulate most systematically in the Islamic tradition, are also the first employed by Tzortzis and Khan in contemporary public engagement.

The most important classical insight that requires contemporary updating is the science-religion interface. Classical scholars were well-versed in the natural philosophies of their day, but did not need to engage with evolutionary biology, quantum mechanics, neuroscience, or Big Bang cosmology. Their metaphysics, in particular Ash'arite occasionalism, proves surprisingly apt for this engagement, but the application must be developed anew. Malik's application of Ash'arite occasionalism to evolutionary biology and quantum indeterminacy showing that the framework al-Ghazali and al-Razi used to think about natural causation maps coherently onto the findings of modern physics and biology, is the most significant example of classical insight being updated for contemporary purposes.



## 7. Conclusion: A Living Tradition

The comparison proposed in this article does not tell a story of rupture between the classical and the contemporary. It tells a story of continuity, deep, structural, epistemological continuity, alongside genuine adaptation to new challenges and new contexts. Contemporary Islamic anti-atheist scholarship, at its best, as represented by the work of scholars such as Shoaib Ahmed Malik, Nazir Khan, Hamza Tzortzis, and Muhammad Hijab, is the continuation of a project that al-Maturidi, al-Ghazali, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, and Ibn Taymiyyah inaugurated. The vocabulary has evolved. The medium is different. The specific form of the atheist challenge has changed profoundly. But the same basic conviction endures: that a thinking person, if honest about the world and about themselves, cannot remain an atheist. They can only come to God.

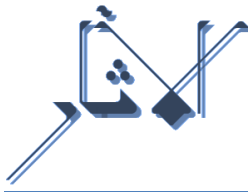
Three structural similarities run across all eight scholars examined. First, all of them reject pure empiricism, the idea that science alone can answer the deepest questions about existence. Second, all of them practise what this article calls the dialectical inversion: entering the opponent's framework and showing that it collapses from within. Third, all eight share the conviction that reason and revelation, properly understood, are not enemies but allies, and that the apparent conflicts between them are always the result of a misconception, not a genuine incompatibility.

At the same time, the differences between the eras are real and significant. The most important is the emergence of the philosophy of science as a central arena of debate, a challenge the classical scholars simply did not face. The shift in audience also matters: today's scholars must make rigorous arguments accessible to people shaped by digital media and popular culture, a demand that has no classical equivalent and one that has not yet been fully resolved.

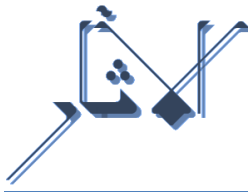
What this comparison ultimately demonstrates is that this tradition is alive, not merely preserved. The classical insights of Ibn Taymiyyah, al-Ghazali, and al-Maturidi are not museum pieces; they are active instruments, being picked up and carried forward by contemporary scholars who know how to use them. The Islamic response to atheism has endured for over a thousand years. It has not only survived every intellectual challenge it has faced; it has grown stronger in meeting them. As long as Muslim scholars continue this work with rigour, seriousness, and intellectual humility, the tradition remains strong, relevant, and fully capable of meeting the challenges of the present age.

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