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THE EVOLUTION OF KALAM SCIENCE IN THE POSTMODERN ERAA NEW PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Ilmu Kalam which is a major branch of theological studies in Islam, has undergone significant transformation from its classical origins to the modern era. Throughout its development, Ilmu Kalam has sought to address philosophical and theological issues related to faith, rationality, and the relationship between revelation and reason. However, in the postmodern era, characterized by technological advances, cultural pluralism, and relativistic thought, Kalam Science faces significant challenges in maintaining its relevance. Postmodernism, which often emphasizes the relativity of truth and ontological uncertainty, requires a new approach to understanding religious doctrines. Therefore, this study aims to explore how Kalam science has evolved in the postmodern context. This journal will examine the shift in perspectives within Ilmu Kalam, both in terms of methodological approaches and the substance of its teachings, as well as present insights into a more adaptive application of Ilmu Kalam in response to the dynamics of the contemporary world. Through a review of contemporary literature, critical analysis of key figures in Ilmu Kalam, and reflection on the principles of postmodernism, this journal aims to contribute new insights into understanding the relationship between religion and rationality in the contemporary context. The study is expected to pave the way for a more open and inclusive discourse within Islamic theology, aligning traditional thought with the social and intellectual challenges present today.

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INTRODUCTION

Kalam, as a discipline that discusses the basics of faith and religious philosophy, has a long history that began in the early days of Islamic civilization. As a branch of knowledge that seeks to explain and defend the basic beliefs of Islam, Kalam has developed rapidly through various historical periods, both in the Eastern and Western Islamic worlds. Initially, Kalam emerged as a response to philosophical and theological challenges, such as debates about destiny, the nature of God, and the relationship between revelation and reason.

However, entering the modern and post-modern era, the Kalam Science faces new, more complex challenges. The postmodern world, characterized by pluralism, relativism, and deconstruction of thought, raises profound questions about truth, objectivity, and authority. In this context, the question that arises is whether the Kalam Science can continue to maintain its claims as a source of absolute truth, or whether it needs to adapt to the spirit of pluralism that is developing in contemporary society. This is where the importance of critical and reflective thinking about the role and relevance of the Kalam Science in this postmodern era lies.

As part of the effort to answer this challenge, this journal will discuss the evolution of the Kalam Science in facing the social and intellectual changes that occurred in the 20th and 21st centuries. The main focus of this research is to identify how the Kalam Science integrates new perspectives, both from contemporary scholars and intellectuals, in responding to the postmodern phenomenon.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with text analysis and critical thinking. The first step is to review the literature related to classical and modern Kalam to gain an in-depth understanding of the transformations that have occurred in this discipline. This study identifies the works of great thinkers in Kalam, both from the Sunni and Shia traditions, as well as contemporary intellectuals who have contributed to the development of Islamic theological thought in the postmodern era.

Next, an analysis is conducted on works that connect the Kalam Science with postmodernist theories. Deconstruction, relativism, and pluralism as the main principles in postmodernism will be examined to see whether these principles can be applied in a new understanding of the Kalam Science. This study also examines the contributions of contemporary Islamic thinkers who try to align the teachings of the Kalam Science with more inclusive social and political realities, while still maintaining its theological roots.

The text analysis method used focuses on the comparison between classical and modern thought in Ilmu Kalam, as well as reflection on the relationship between religion and rationality

in the postmodern era. Data were obtained through literature reviews from various primary and secondary sources, including books, journal articles, and other scientific works relevant to the topic of this research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

a. Understanding the Science of Kalam

Kalam Science is included in the classical scientific system in the Islamic tradition, known as the bayani approach, namely the dialectical rational method used in various fields of science such as fiqh, tafsir, and theology. Its main focus is to defend the faith through logical argumentation by combining revelation and reason (Setyaki, 2023: 36).

Kalam Science is a branch of Islamic Theology that discusses God and everything related to Him rationally and argumentatively. In the Islamic tradition, Kalam Science is identical with names such as Tauhid Science, Aqidah, Ushuluddin, and Fiqh al-Akbar. Its main focus is not only on metaphysical concepts such as the Essence and nature of God, but also reaches practical issues in religious life. (Qomaruzzaman, 2020: 1–10).

b. The Development of Kalam Science from Classical to Modern

The development of the Kalam science from the classical era to the modern era shows significant intellectual dynamics in the history of Islamic thought. Initially, the discussion in the Kalam science was very limited and simple, only focusing on
recognition of the absolute existence of God, namely between "what exists" (wujud) and "what is made" (maujud). During the time of the Prophet Muhammad SAW. and the generation of companions, Muslims tended to avoid in-depth discussions about the substance and nature of God. This is because such discussions are considered speculative and risk deviating from pure faith, and are even prohibited from being discussed in detail in order to maintain the purity of monotheism. However, along with the emergence of political and ideological conflicts such as the tahkim incident and the emergence of various sects (Khawarij, Shia, Murji'ah), Muslims began to develop an intellectual approach in defending their beliefs. This is where the Science of Kalam developed into a more dialectical and systematic one.

This transformation was further strengthened after interaction with Greek philosophy and the influence of rational thought began to enter the Islamic world. Groups such as the Mu'tazilah pioneered the progressive use of reason in explaining religious teachings, even in the context of interpreting the attributes of God and human actions. For example, they emphasized the concept of God's justice and human freedom to choose their actions, something that broadened the horizon of Islamic theology from what was previously

textual and rigid. Although at the same time there was resistance from traditionalists, this transformation paved the way for a Kalam methodology that was more open to differences, inclusive of other disciplines, and responsive to developments in the era. In other words, from an approach that was initially dogmatic and textual, the Science of Kalam shifted to a rational-dialectical approach that was able to interact with various branches of science and broader social realities (Muhtarom, 2017, 5–9).

The development of Kalam Science can be understood within the framework of the evolution of the general Islamic scientific approach. In classical times, the approach used was philological, namely emphasizing the study of language in classical Islamic texts. Muslim scholars and intellectuals at that time understood Islam through the language of Arabic texts, with a focus on grammatical and etymological aspects. This approach positions the text as a direct reflection of the reality of Muslim society at that time. However, this approach has weaknesses because it tends to ignore the social and historical context behind the text, so that understanding becomes rigid and less relevant to the reality of society (Ismail, 2019: 243–244).

Entering the modern era, the approach to Islamic sciences began to shift towards positivity, following the paradigm of modern science. In this phase, society is seen as a social system that can be engineered rationally and empirically. This approach is considered more objective and scientific, but it also has weaknesses because it often ignores cultural elements, local values, and the uniqueness of Muslim society. All societies are considered to be able to be developed in the same way through Western-style modernization programs. Then there was a reaction to this approach because it was considered too generalizing and ignoring the spiritual and social dimensions typical of Muslims (Ismail, 2019: 244–245).

Recent developments then entered the next phase: a more interpretive and contextual post-positivistic approach. This approach not only emphasizes rationality alone, but also appreciates the process of interpretation, social imagination, and the historical reality of the people. He invited Islamic thinkers to understand society from within to understand how people build meaning, values, and beliefs in everyday life. This is where the Kalam Science has new space to develop, namely by opening itself to contemporary social methods in order to remain relevant amidst changing times (Ismail, 2019: 245–246).

The journey of Kalam Science from the classical period to the modern era shows a transformation in the scope and approach of science. At the beginning of its emergence, Kalam Science was developed through a traditional approach that was apologetic and

defended the doctrine of faith against external challenges, such as Greek philosophy and other ideologies. This classical model focused on defending the faith and often relied on formal logic and rhetorical systematics.

However, along with the development of the social, political, and intellectual context in the Islamic world, especially in Indonesia, since the 1970s, the study of Kalam and Islamic philosophy began to expand. This transformation can be seen from the expansion of themes, approaches, and reading models used. If previously the Science of Kalam was limited to history and classical figures such as Al-Asy'ari and Al-Maturidi, now its studies have expanded to contemporary issues such as ethics, education, and politics.

In Indonesia, this development is supported by the increasing number of published literature, both translated works and original works from local scholars. Studies are no longer focused on the thoughts of certain figures, but are more thematic and reflective of the needs of the times. New approaches such as historical, thematic, and critical are beginning to be applied to understand the Islamic context in a more comprehensive way. Thus, the Science of Kalam is no longer a science that only defends doctrine, but has developed into a discourse of Islamic thought that is open to the dynamics of the times (Setyaki, 2023: 38–39)

c. The Entry of the Post Modern Era

The postmodern era was born as a response to the limitations of modernism which overemphasized a single structure, certainty, and objective truth. In the world of philosophy and culture, postmodernism emerged as an approach that rejects claims of the universality of truth. It emphasizes more on the plurality of perspectives, languages, and the rejection of the dominance of a single interpretation in religion and science (Ismail, 2019: 237–238).

The main characteristic of postmodernism is fundamental pluralism. This means that in the postmodern world there is no one way of thinking that is considered the most correct and binding for everyone. In a religious context, this can be seen from the many styles and schools of contemporary Islamic thought that emerged from diverse social, historical, and scientific backgrounds. Liberal Islam, traditional Islam, and postmodern Islam are examples of how people try to understand their religion in the context of their respective times (Ismail, 2019: 241–242).

The challenge of postmodernism is how Muslims respond to these differences. Will they see it as a source of internal conflict or as a form of grace as the Prophet said, “the differences of my people are a grace”? Postmodernism challenges us to abandon a single

claim to truth and open up a space for dialogue between ideas. It rejects Western-style modernization that standardizes all social and cultural systems. Instead, it recognizes that each society has its own value system, beliefs, and perspectives that must be respected. This is a major challenge for the Kalam Science: to be able to remain based on revelation, but not deny the complexity and diversity of people's understanding (Ismail, 2019: 241–242).

The postmodern era brings about major changes in the way of thinking and the approach to knowledge, including in Islamic studies. In the postmodern paradigm, reality is seen as something that is not singular and cannot be known objectively, because it is always constructed by language, culture, and social context. In this context, Amin Abdullah offers a postmodern approach to theology and Islamic philosophy by emphasizing three main perspectives:

1. Deconstruction: dismantling old, established Islamic theories so that they do not become rigid dogmas, then reformulating new theories that are more appropriate to the social context and realities of the times.
2. Relativism: criticizing views that claim absolute truth. Truth in this perspective is dynamic and cannot be monopolized by certain individuals or groups.
3. Pluralism: rejecting the imposition of a single paradigm in understanding religion or science, and opening space for different approaches to dialogue with each other.

The main challenge of this approach is how Muslims maintain their theological foundations amidst the currents of relativity and plurality. Postmodernism teaches that truth is not something static, but is always in the process of being sought. Therefore, the Science of Kalam in this era is required to become a science that is more dialogical, open, and reflective of the increasingly complex socio-cultural diversity (Setyaki, 2023: 37–38).

d. Perspectives on the Renewal of Kalam Science

Kalam Science is one of the important fields in Islam that discusses fundamental issues related to faith and divinity. As time goes by, kalam thought has undergone a transformation from classical methodology to contemporary methodology. In its classical form, kalam thought emerged as a response to political conflicts, such as the murder of Utsman bin Affan and Ali bin Abi Thalib, which then gave rise to debates about the status of faith and disbelief of those who commit major sins. The classical kalam methodology is theocentric and deductive-speculative, oriented towards metaphysical and normative discussions based on revelation and reason, but has not yet adequately touched on the social realm (Ahmad, 2014: 147–149).

The three main schools of classical kalam, Mu'tazilah, Salafiyah, and Ash'ariyah, have different methodological characters. Mu'tazilah emphasizes the dominance of reason over text, Salafiyah emphasizes a literal textual approach, while Ash'ariyah tries to align reason and revelation in a moderate manner. Although different in methodology, all three adhere to the Qur'an and hadith as the main sources of teachings, with different roles of reason in interpreting them (Ahmad, 2014: 149–150).

However, in the contemporary context, the challenges faced by Muslims have shifted. The development of science, technology, and global socio-political dynamics demand a new approach that is more responsive to humanitarian issues. In this case, the idea of a contemporary kalam methodology emerged that is more open to philosophical and social science approaches, as proposed by modern thinkers such as Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Arkoun, Hasan Hanafi, and others. They encourage a systematic reconstruction of the framework of kalam science, by aligning theological values and the social reality of the community (Ahmad, 2014: 147–148).

Contemporary kalam thought no longer merely functions as a means of defending the existence of God (apologetics), but is more directed to answering the actual problems of the people. For example, the concept of "infidel" is not merely understood as a label for non-Muslims, but also includes behavior that does not care about social justice, such as letting the poor starve. Rewards and sins are not only understood in the context of the afterlife, but are also measured by their impact on social harmony in the world (Ahmad, 2014: 151–152).

In addition, the renewal of kalam demands involvement in a broader social discourse. When religious concepts such as faith and piety are not internalized in public life, especially in dealing with problems of corruption, collusion, and nepotism, a kalam approach is needed that is able to touch public morality, not just personal piety. In this context, the science of kalam should work together with critical social sciences to be more down to earth and provide real contributions to community development (Ahmad, 2014: 153).

Finally, contemporary kalam methodology is expected to be able to bridge the normative teachings of Islam with the practical needs of humanity today. It remains rooted in the Qur'an and hadith as primary sources, but does not close itself off to rational and social approaches in order to actualize the teachings of faith into everyday life (Ahmad, 2014: 154).

e. How Kalam Science Responds to Modernism

In facing the era of postmodernism, Kalam Science can no longer simply repeat the old scholastic, normative, and defensive mindset. Postmodernism has brought about a massive paradigm shift, starting from the relativism of truth, the deconstruction of grand narratives (including religion), to the collapse of single authority in the fields of science and religion. This condition demands that Kalam Science leave the "formal fortress" of faith doctrine and begin to dialogue openly with a more complex and plural reality.

Kalam science as a reflection of faith is not sufficient to stop at a logical-formal formulation of the nature of God or the relationship between human will and divine will. In a world increasingly dominated by hedonism, materialism, and the spirit of anti-authority, Kalam needs to expand the scope of its discussion to the realm of life's practices. This means that reflection of faith in Kalam must answer the concrete problems of the people: moral crisis, social rift, value disorientation, and spiritual alienation that emerge as symptoms of postmodernism.

The response of Kalam Science to postmodernism should ideally be critical and creative, not merely rejecting or accepting the new paradigm. On the contrary, Kalam should be a bridge between the transcendental values of Islam and contemporary socio-cultural dynamics. In this position, Kalam Science can play an important role in reviving awareness of the meaning of life that comes from God, in the midst of a society that is starting to lose its way due to the onslaught of postmodern relativism and nihilism.

Thus, today's Kalam Science is not enough to be a static doctrinal system, but must be a living theology that lives, responds, and guides modern humans towards the ultimate truth without losing their roots in revelation. The challenge is how to maintain the integrity of Islamic values while remaining flexible and relevant in facing an era that is changing very rapidly (Qomaruzzaman, 2020: 166–180).

CONCLUSION

The evolution of Kalam in the postmodern era shows that despite the challenges faced, this discipline is still able to adapt to the dynamics of the times. Postmodernism, with its pluralistic and relativistic nature, offers space for Kalam to be more flexible in understanding various religious and intellectual perspectives. One of the important contributions of postmodern Kalam thought is its ability to integrate the principles of rationality with broader

spiritual experiences, and to accommodate diversity of views without sacrificing the basic truth of Islamic teachings.

Contemporary thinking in theology of Kalam, influenced by postmodern theories, provides an opportunity to develop a theology that is more inclusive and responsive to the challenges of the times, especially in terms of the plurality of religions and thoughts. Thus, theology of Kalam does not only serve as a tool to maintain religious beliefs, but also as a means to create a more constructive and harmonious dialogue among various groups in global society.

This study also confirms that the Kalam Science in the postmodern era has great potential to continue to develop and provide positive contributions in understanding the relationship between religion, rationality, and diversity. Therefore, it is important for Islamic scientists and intellectuals to continue to update their approach to the Kalam Science, in order to remain relevant and useful in facing increasingly complex global challenges.

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