

THE IMPORTANCE OF REASON, RATIONALITY, AND KNOWLEDGE IN RELIGIOUS LIFE: A CRITICAL STUDY OF ‘ABD AL-ŞAMAD PALIMBANI

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Abstract: *This article elucidates the thoughts of ‘Abd al-Şamad al-Palimbānī (1116 H / 1704 M-1203 H / 1789 AD) regarding the role of reason and the importance of rationality in religion and society. This article refers to ‘Abd al-Şamad’s works as primary data and the writings of Muslim scholars as secondary data. After describing ‘Abd al-Şamad’s main views on reason, knowledge, and thinking, this article concludes that religious life based on rational thinking, contemplation, and critical logic will give rise to knowledge, wisdom, and moderation, support the development of human potential, and develop civilization. Conversely, a religion that is dominated by hatred and avoids critical rational thinking will give birth to ignorance, religious extremism and terrorism, and other destructive actions. This study is qualitative literature using the hermeneutic method and philosophical analysis.*

Keywords: *‘Abd al-Şamad al-Palimbani; Logic; Rationality; Religious extremism; Moderation.*

Abstrak: Artikel ini akan menganalisa pemikiran ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī (1116 H/1704 M-1203 H/1789 M) mengenai peran akal dan pentingnya rasionalitas dalam beragama dan dalam bermasyarakat. Artikel ini merujuk pada karya-karya ‘Abd al-Ṣamad sebagai data primer dan tulisan-tulisan ulama Muslim sebagai data sekunder. Setelah menjelaskan pandangan pokok ‘Abd al-Ṣamad tentang akal, ilmu dan berpikir, artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa kehidupan beragama yang dilandasi oleh pemikiran rasional, perenungan dan logika kritis akan melahirkan ilmu pengetahuan, kebijaksanaan, moderasi, mendukung pengembangan potensi manusia, dan mengembangkan peradaban. Sebaliknya, agama yang didominasi oleh kebencian dan menjauhi pemikiran kritis rasional akan melahirkan kebodohan, ekstremisme dan terorisme agama serta tindakan destruktif lainnya. Studi ini adalah riset kualitatif-kepuustakaan dengan menggunakan metode hermeneutik dan analisa filsafat.

Kata Kunci: Logika; Rasionalitas; Praktek Beragama; Moderasi; Toleransi.

Introduction

The term religion in Islam is equal to the word *al-dīn*. According to Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, this word has many meanings, some of them being, debt (*dayn*), submission, wise strength, and inclination. The word *dīn* is also closely related to the terms *maddana*, *madīnah*, and *tamaddun*, which mean “building cities”, “being civilized”, and “making humans to be humans”.¹ Religion or *dīn* then is related to the values of goodness, humanity, peace, and civilization. These values are inherent in the religion (Islam) itself. However, religious meaning is not always positively correlated with the attitudes and deeds of its adherents. Jonathan Fox (2000) marks questions, *Is Islam More Conflict Prone than Other Religions?*² The question arises not only because of the stereotype or the view that Islam is a religion of terror, violence, and extremism, but in reality, its adherents often do things that are contrary to the meaning of the religion itself. Therefore, to answer his question, Fox conducted a study of 105 correspondences; 40 minority Muslims, 29 minority Christians, and 36 other minority groups such as Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs, Bahais, and other groups. His conclusion shows that Islam and other religions are more likely to conflict, especially in minority groups. The issue of conflict tends to be a significant issue among minority groups, including in Islam.²

Fox’s research is one among other studies related to the relationship between religion and violence. Religion, especially Islam, contains values of violence, conflict, and radicalism has been confirmed by many scholars such as Martin Van Bruinessen,³ Abd Ala,⁴ and Muhammad Shirazi.⁵ They are proving that violence, conflict, and terrorism have their roots in religion. According to them, radicalism and terrorism in Indonesia

historically can be traced to Islamic groups who want the establishment of an Islamic state such as *Darul Islam*.⁶ The emergence of radicalism is also related to the Khawarij sect in Islam⁷ and according to A'la, the link between the past and the present is tied by Wahhabism.⁸ According to Hinnells, in Islam God, is most often referred to as "Compassionate and Merciful", *al-Rahmān* and *al-Rahīm*, but at the same time is very harsh on people who are considered different in faith and belief.⁹

The connection between religion and violence is also viewed by modern scientists and philosophers such as Richard Dawkins, Harris, and Bertrand Russell.¹⁰ They say that religion is a virus, that is, a mental illness that spreads irrationalism. Religion is not able to explain the origin and meaning of life and also attracts people to commit violence and cruelty. Religion justifies committing suicide. It is also found in Hinduism, which, according to Hinnells, contradicts the spiritualist image of Hinduism itself, violence is an integral aspect of the Hindu tradition.¹¹ In many cases, religion has caused wars in the world that is driven by religion.¹² The problems of violence, terrorism, and extremism usually are the result of the loss of rationality, blind *taqlīd*, and ignorance (*jahl*). According to 'Abd al-Ṣamad's view, these problems and phenomena are caused by the malfunctioning of human logic. In fact, according to him, as stated in the hadith of the Prophet that thinking for an hour is more important than worshipping for seventy years.¹³ With no logic, the heart will be dark, and with no logic, humans will have unknowledge. Therefore, the problem of terrorism and extremism in Islam is none other than the reason for the absence of logic in religion during interpreting the holy book, and in seeing reality. In This study, we use religion interchangeably with belief and faith.

'Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī (1704-1789) as a Sufis

'Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī is one of the Indonesian Muslim scholars who expert in Islamic studies such as the Quran, hadith, kalam, and Sufism. Michael Feener notes that al-Palimbānī was highly educated, had a deep understanding of the field of religion, was an expert in sciences in various fields, and was a productive scholar.¹⁴ Azyumardi Azra has written a biography of his life and mentions that 'Abd al-Ṣamad was born in Palembang in 1116 H/1704 AD and died in 1203 H/1789 AD at the age of 85 years. He is a scholar of Sufis as Azra noted:

"Al-Palembani had a strong disposition towards mysticism, and it is evident that he studied Sufism mostly with al-Sammani, from whom he also took both tariqahs of Khalwatiyyah and Sammaniyyah."¹⁵ Al-

Palimbānī was very concerned and responsible for spreading Sufism in the archipelago.¹⁶

Logic and rationality are still important in ‘Abd al-Ṣamad’s system of Sufism. For centuries, Sufism has always been viewed negatively because it ignores reason and logic. Harun Nasution for example, once stated that one of the causes of the Islamic decline was due to the negative influence of the tarekat (tariqah), namely Sufism organizations that often cult Sufi master figures.¹⁷ However, Harun notes that Sufism which harms the decline of Muslims is Sufism that developed in the Middle Ages, not the one that developed in the classical century.¹⁸

‘Abd al-Ṣamad, according to Azra, was a Sufi who linked Sufism and tarekat.¹⁹ This connection is not only in the context of the organization but also in his thoughts and works. Among his teachers were Ibrahim al-Ra’īs, ‘Aṭā’ al-Miṣrī, Muhammad Jawharī, and Muhammad b. Sulaymān al-Kurdī.²⁰

‘Abd al-Ṣamad works on Sufism are among others, *Hidāyat al-Sālikīn* and *Sayr al-Sālikīn* or *Siyār al-Sālikīn*. The two works are written in Javanese Arabic, printed in Jawi script, known as Arabic *Pegon*, and can be accessed through online and offline bookstores. According to Drewes (1977), these two works of ‘Abd al-Ṣamad were also published in Mecca, Bombay, Cairo, and Singapore. The *Hidāyat al-Sālikīn* is intended for beginners who want to follow the path of Sufism. This book is an introduction to the teachings of Sufism. While the *Hidāyat al-Sālikīn* is the Indonesian version of *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* of Ghazali. According to Azra, these two works contain the principles of the Islamic faith and religious tasks that must be carried out by everyone concerned with the Sufism method.²¹ These two works are also evidence that ‘Abd al-Ṣamad is a Sufi and a practitioner of the tarekat.

In another ‘Abd al-Ṣamad’s work, *Anīs al-Muttaqīn*, it seems that the theme of logic is in the first chapter of five chapters. He also explains the importance of rational thinking as contained in the same book in the fourth chapter.²² ‘Abd al-Ṣamad categorizes three levels of Sufi practitioners; beginner, intermediate, and high level. He also suggested to the three groups some readings and references such as 56 for beginners, 13 for intermediate, and 26 for advanced levels. According to Azra, the 26 references suggested by ‘Abd al-Ṣamad are all philosophical and rational.²³ Based on that, for us, the types and characteristics of ‘Abd al-Ṣamad’s thoughts are mystical-metaphysical-rational.²⁴

Academically, some previous studies of ‘Abd al-Ṣamad have already been conducted. firstly, analytical studies related to the influence of the book of *Hidāyat al-Sālikīn* on the Malay Culture of Palembang.²⁵ Secondly,

the philological study of *Zahrat al-Murīd fī Bayān Kalimat al-Tawhīd*.²⁶ Thirdly, philological studies of *Anīs al-Muttaqīn*,²⁷ which we use for this article. Fourthly, an analytical study of *Kitāb Hidāyat al-Sālikīn fī Sulūk Li-l-Muttaqīn* in the fields of education,²⁸ manuscript studies,²⁹ as well as hadith studies.³⁰ Fifthly, an analytical study of *Kitāb al-Dur al-Nāfis* and *Siyār al-Sālikīn*.³¹ Other studies related to the role and contribution of ‘Abd al-Ṣamad such as *The Discourse of Islamic Knowledge in Malay Word* (2018);³² *The Yemeni Years of a Shaykh from Sumatra* (2015);³³ *Interpretasi Jihad ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī* (2016);³⁴ *Faham Waḥdat al-Wujud dan Martabat Tujuh* (2015);³⁵ and *Etika Interaksi Edukatif Guru dan Murid Menurut Perspektif Syaikh ‘Abd Al-Ṣamad Al-Falimbānī* (2019).³⁶ Our concern is about the importance of reason and rationality in religion as well as in social life which has not been studied before.

Meaning and The Urgency of Logic

In *Siyar al-Salikin*, ‘Abd al-Ṣamad mentions that ‘*aql* (reason) has many meanings, including “knowing the reality of things” (*al-‘ilm bi-haqā‘iq al-ashyā’*) such as knowing the obligatory, impossibility, and ability (*jā’iz*). Accordingly, the mind can know the existence of Allah and whether His attributes are mandatory or necessary and vice versa. The *jā’iz*, perhaps, that everything can exist by the will of Allah.³⁷ According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, the word ‘*aql* in Arabic or “intellect” in English is related to the word “binding” or “to bind”. Etymologically, “reason” in the sense of “binding” can be related to the meaning of “religion” because religion is to bind humans to God.³⁸

In *Anīs al-Muttaqīn*, ‘Abd al-Ṣamad stated that reason (‘*aql*) and knowledge (‘*ilm*) are the same. If a man has not ‘*aql*, then he does not have the knowledge, *man lā ‘aqla lā ‘ilma labu*.³⁹ Knowledge is a *renaissance* for humans that erased stupidity and ignorance. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad then contrasted ‘*aql* with ignorance and darkness (stupidity) in a chapter, *al-‘aql wa al-humqa*. According to ‘Abd al-Ṣamad, ‘*aql* and knowledge are united and cannot be separated. In *Siyār al-Sālikīn*, ‘Abd al-Ṣamad said that knowledge is like the basis of logic,⁴⁰ so logic will appear visible if someone has knowledge.

Which one is more important between ‘*aql* and knowledge? ‘Abd al-Ṣamad then replied that ‘*aql* is more important than knowledge. However, the unity between ‘*aql* and knowledge is the most important. Knowledge is necessary for intelligent people. ‘*Aql* is the factor of knowledge, and knowledge is a friend of worshipers, and worshipers are inhabitants of heaven. For people who do not have both ‘*aql* and knowledge, then

heaven is forbidden for them.⁴¹ This means that people who do not have 'aql are the same as those who do not have knowledge. Likewise, 'aql will be meaningless if there is no knowledge, while knowledge and 'aql will have no meaning if they do not fulfill the laws of Allah.

Murtadha Mutahhari, a Shi'ite prominent scholar, stated that every human being was born with logic and all its potential. One of the potentials possessed by logic is knowing.⁴² Therefore, epistemologically, logic is a source and at the same time a means to acquire knowledge. If humans do not have the knowledge, then their potential is not actualized. When the potential is not actual, the human dimension will also not be visible. Therefore, if his rational mind is not actualized, then he will not be happy.⁴³

In another part, 'Abd al-Şamad discusses heart, spirit, and nafs; it is a body that has divine and spiritual aspects, *huwa latīfa rabbāniyya rūḥāniyya*. This meaning is an affirmation of the difference between the meanings of mind, heart, spirit, and *nafs* which is defined as a clot of blood found on the left side of the human chest. The meaning of reason as a subtle spiritual form of Godhead is also different from the understanding in modern psychology which calls the mind the same as the brain. Humans acquire knowledge, according to this view, solely because of the stimulus of the five senses where the knowledge is located in the human brain. As James Mill said that the mind is the same machine as clockwork and can be predicted, *"the mind was a machine -it functioned in the same predictable, mechanical way as a clock. It was set in operation by external physical forces and run by internal physical forces."*⁴⁴

The statement of 'Abd al-Şamad above is strengthened by the hadith of the prophet Muhammad which stated that the first creature was *aql*, *awwalu mā khalaqallāh al-'aql*. Therefore, 'aql has a specific existence compared to the other three dimensions.⁴⁵ The hadith as quoted by Ibn Sina is as follows:

*awwalu mā khalaqallāh ta'alā al-'aql. Thumma qāla lahu: aqbil! Fa-aqbal. Thumma qāla lahu, adbir! Fa-adbara. Thumma qāla, fa-bi-'izzatī wa jalālī mā khalaqtu khalqan a'azza minka, fa-bi-ka a'ṭi wa-bi-ka akhuda wa-bi-ka uthiba wa-bi-ka a'qaba.*⁴⁶

According to the theory of emanation, this realm originates from the First Being. From the First Being, the One comes forth the first intellect called the First Cause. From this first intellect, thinking of the First Being flows forth a second intellect and a sphere. From the second intellect proceeds a third intellect and a sphere. The process goes on in a succession down to the lowest sphere, that of the Moon. From the Moon flows forth the active intellect. Here, we have the lower end of the suprasensible world,

where there are the ideas of Plato. Together with the nine spheres, these ten intellects constitute the second principle of Being. The third principle is the active intellect, which is a bridge between heaven and earth. Finally, matter and form appear, and, with these, is closed the series of spiritual existences.⁴⁷

Furthermore, in the theory of emanation, intellect or reason, ontologically, is different from human reason in general. Intellect, from the first to the tenth sense, is actual in itself, while the human mind is still potential. But both are spiritual, in a non-physical sense. From the first intellect to the tenth is called an angel, then the human intellect is called “the soul”, soul in the sense *nafs*, the *nafs*. When the soul has become actual, it is called human rational (‘*aql*). This difference (between the intellect that exists in humans and the intellect above) is explained by Ibn Sina in his book, *al-Ishārat wa-al-Tanbihāt*. According to him, both the soul and the intellect can think, *tafakkur* or *ta‘aqqul*. However, the thinking of the soul is still related to the sense of objects that are also owned by animals, while the thinking of reason, *ta‘aqqul*, is related to non-sensory objects. The human ability to think is what distinguishes him/them from all of God’s creatures, including animals.⁴⁸

Rationality Creates Knowledge

Rationality, in ‘Abd al-Šamad’s thought, is translated from Arabic, *al-tafakkur*, both in his *Anīs al-Muttaqīn* and *Siyār al-Sālikīn*. This word comes from the verbs *tafakkara*, *yatafakkaru*, and *tafakkuran*, which means “to think” and “reflect”. Thinking or contemplating is the activity of a person about an object of himself and outside of himself. According to al-Ghazali, what does the thinking process is essentially logic, *wa al-mufakkira fī haqīqat al-‘aql*.⁴⁹

The reason is both for thinking and also a source of knowledge. ‘Abd al-Šamad emphasized that ‘*aql* (reason) and knowledge (‘*ilm*) are the same. Whoever does not have a reason, does not carry out the thought process, then he will not have the knowledge, *Anna al-‘aql wa al-‘ilm sawā‘un, fa-man lā ‘aqla labu lā ‘ilma labu*.⁵⁰ Again, for ‘Abd al-Šamad, ‘*aql* is more important than knowledge. However, the unity between ‘*aql* and knowledge is the most important because knowledge is a necessity for people who have logic.

In the Quran, according to the analysis of Jamal Ahmed Badi, the word *tafakkur* is found 18 times in the form of a verb. Badi emphasized that *tafakkur* is a thought process. The word is more than a noun that refers to an abstract concept. In addition, the 18 *tafakkur* words are used for the

past, the rest are used for the future. Therefore, the word *tafakkur* in the Quran is a continuous, holistic, and integral thought process.⁵¹ According to Ghazali, in his *Mukāshafat al-Qulūb*, as quoted by Akila Mamat, *tafakkur* is a method and process of deep thinking that one can gain rationality and wisdom. By thinking, one can gain knowledge and be able to avoid *taqlid*.⁵² Rational thinking is necessary for every human being. The Prophet said, as quoted by ‘Abd al-Şamad as well as Sheikh Nawawi al-Bantani in his work, *Salālim al-Fuḍalā* that “thinking for one hour is more important than worshipping for one year”.⁵³ In Islamic philosophical tradition, besides using the term *tafakkur*, the word “*ta’ aqqul*” is also used in rational thought processes, which in English is translated into “thinking” and “reasoning”.

In Anis al-Muttaqin, *tafakkur* is alongside with “forgetting”, *al-Bāb al-awwal fi bayāni al-ghaflah wa al-tafakkur*. By placing it in the first chapter, it shows that rationality is an important element for humans in religion and faith. ‘Abd al-Şamad explained that one of the problems of humans is being neglectful and careless. According to him, neglectful is against *tafakkur* in the sense of rationality. Negligence can be a barrier to the presence of goodness, *al-ghaflah tamna ‘ al-khair*.⁵⁴ In addition, neglectful also prevents someone from obtaining the truth, *al-ghaflah tamna ‘ al-haq*.⁵⁵

Logic and rationality can also be a cure for heart disease, *wa anna dā‘a al-qalb al-ghaflah wa-dawā’uha al-tafakkur*. Because it works as a medicine, rationalization is a light for the heart. It is the key to the opening of truth and knowledge, *annahu huwa miḥṭāb al-anwār wa-mabda‘ al-istibṣār wa-sabab al-‘ulūm*.⁵⁶ By light, the heart can see and distinguish between good and bad, between what is beneficial and what is harmful.⁵⁷ According to al-Ghazali, the process of distinguishing between good and bad, choosing something good, and rejecting what is bad is called the “thinking process”.⁵⁸

If the heart doesn’t think, means don’t *tafakkur*, then basically it has become a house for Satan, a house for evil. Conversely, if he thinks, he will receive an abundance of light in the form of knowledge and goodness. The more rational a person is, the more he will get light, goodness, perfection, and virtue. On the other hand, the more irrational a person is, the closer he is to ugliness and darkness. Therefore, ‘Abd al-Şamad insisted asserts that thinking is necessary for every believer because without thinking there is no faith, and without rationalization, there is no religion.

According to ‘Abd al-Şamad, someone who is well trained in the process of thinking, contemplating, and being rational, will get a high degree in an honorable place, together with the prophets and saints. A rational person

becomes the friend of the saints, loved by the prophets, and the brother of Ulema because rationality is the provision of the saints, the “food” of the prophets, and the “drink” of Ulema. According to al-Ghazali, *tafakkur* can produce new forms of knowledge. This new knowledge then produces another form of knowledge as a result of the thought process.⁵⁹ That is why according to ‘Abd al-Šamad, *tafakkur* (reasoning) is the same as knowledge. The more one thinks the more knowledge he acquires.

Rationality Creates Moderation

In general, ‘Abd al-Šamad makes two senses of *al-‘āqil* (the man who is thinking): vertical and horizontal. *Al-‘āqil* vertically is someone who lives in this world and expects nothing but Allah, and cannot see the world except with the eye of Allah.⁶⁰ This means that the orientation and process of human thought must be focused on God Himself, not others. This also explains the relationship between thinking and its source and origin, namely God. By thinking about God, one will gain knowledge or revelation.⁶¹

The problem of modern man, according to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, is the separation between the human mind (as a tool and source of knowledge) and its origin, namely the Sacred. This problem has caused very complex crises, such as existential, spiritual, ethical, ecological, and environmental crises. Humans lose their footing and orientation in life. Concerning the universe, humans are considered the determinant of everything, while nature is a physical object that can be used according to its will, without any respect and care for nature.⁶²

Meanwhile, *al-‘āqil* horizontally is the person who unites the heart, knowledge, deeds, and ethics as one entity together.⁶³ By mentioning the four aspects as a whole, then someone couldn’t be *al-‘āqil*. According to al-Farabi, if the four elements are not actualized then someone will not achieve happiness, virtue, and glory. This matter is related to its social implications. When a person gets closer to Allah, he will be wiser in his thoughts, words, and deeds. Likewise, rationality will give rise to nine characteristics: fear, repentance, the spirit of worship, pleasure, generosity, humility, civility, and *‘uzlah* (seclusion) from the negative things.⁶⁴ According to al-Ghazali, in his *al-Arba‘in fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, *khawf*, *tawba*, and *riḍā* are part of the forty basics of religion.⁶⁵ Without these aspects, religion will not appear in human life. Accordingly, these qualities will not be present in every human being if they do not have *‘aql*, in other words, if they do not think rationally.

Tafakkur in the sense of how to think comprehensively means the

balance between thought and deeds, the balance in fulfilling the needs of life. Ibn Khaldun, for example, stated that by thinking humans are able to fulfill their needs. By thinking rationally, for Ibn Khaldun, humans can understand what must be done and accomplish their duties such as helping and cooperating. Such rational deeds cannot be done by animals who have no minds.⁶⁶ In the words of the Quran, *tafakkur* or rational thinking must be accompanied by piety and good deeds. In turn, good deeds will bring wisdom, justice, openness, inclusiveness, patience, courage, and other good qualities. In the context of religious moderation, the more rational a person is, the more moderate he is.

Conclusion

‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī is known as a Sufi in the archipelago. Sufism usually emphasizes intuition (*dhawq*) and metaphysics rather than reason and logic. But all the explanations above show that ‘Abd al-Ṣamad is an exception. Apart from teaching the doctrine of Sunni Sufism, ‘Abd al-Ṣamad also intensively discussed reason, knowledge, and *tafakkur* which are usually discussed by philosophers. This is an interesting fact from the other side of ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī.

In the context of the relationship between ‘Abd al-Ṣamad’s logic and rationality and religious extremism, several important things must be noted. First, the reason and knowledge of an extremist and terrorists do not support human development. They support the loss of human life. Religious violence, indeed, is more dominated by emotion, or it can also be called the “psychology of hatred”. It is a kind of feeling of dissatisfaction with other different views or with all government regulations. Extremists think that the religious doctrines they embrace are the best. They may also take any action for their purposes, even if it is to destroy another different group.⁶⁷

Religious radicalism and extremism usually occur due to (1) blind *taqlid* towards religious leaders, (2) being too literal in understanding religious texts, (3) ignoring context, and (4) losing critical power. A blind *taqlid* has prevented a person from understanding the essential values of Islam. He only understands Islam formally, textually, and symbolically.⁶⁸ However, *taqlid* as one of the religious practices is a common thing that is done by adherents of religions, for example, NU members.⁶⁹ However, this tradition does not lead to destructive attitudes that destroy social order and humanity. Finally, religious life based on rational thinking, contemplation, and critical logic will give rise to knowledge, wisdom, and moderation, support the development of human potential, and develop

civilization. Conversely, a religion that is dominated by hatred and avoids critical rational thinking will give birth to ignorance, religious extremism and terrorism, and other destructive actions.[]

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