



Open Access

Al-Irfan (Research Journal of Islamic Studies)

Published by: Faculty of Islamic Studies & Shariah
Minhaj University Lahore

ISSN: 2518-9794 (Print), 2788-4066 (Online)

Volume 11, Issue 21, Jan-June 2026,

Email: alirfan@mul.edu.pk

الحرفاء

The Concept of Prophethood in Islamic Creed: A Theological and Epistemological Analysis

Muhammad Hamza Yousaf

Independent Researcher Denmark

mhy@mqi.dk

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the concept of Prophethood (al-Nubuwwah) within the framework of classical Islamic creed (al-‘Aqīdah), focusing on the theological rationale for divine guidance being delivered through selected Prophets rather than through universal direct revelation. The study employs transmitted evidence from the Qur’ān and Sunnah (al-dalā’il al-naqliyyah), alongside rational analysis grounded in the principles of Uṣūl al-Fiqh (al-dalā’il al-‘aqliyyah). Within this framework, Prophethood is understood as a divinely instituted rank characterized by essential qualities such as trustworthiness (amānah), wisdom (ḥikmah), perseverance, and infallibility (‘iṣmah), which ensure the reliable transmission of revelation (waḥy). The paper further affirms the finality of Prophethood and emphasizes that it is not a humanly acquired station (kasb), but a purely divine bestowal (waḥb) grounded in divine wisdom and selection. In addition, the study engages selected Enlightenment critiques of revelation, particularly those advanced by David Hume and Immanuel Kant, and reconsiders them through the metaphysical framework of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. It argues that Islamic theology offers a coherent epistemological structure that preserves both the rational credibility and moral authority of Prophethood.

Keywords:

Prophethood (al-Nubuwwah), Islamic Theology, Revelation, Enlightenment Critique, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas.

Introduction

Prophethood (al-Nubuwwah) constitutes a foundational pillar of Islamic belief, representing the primary means through which divine guidance is communicated to humanity. It represents a point of connection between divine transcendence and human existence, raising important theological questions regarding the necessity, nature, and function of revelation. Initially, this study seeks to address three fundamental questions within Islamic creed: why divine communication is not granted directly to every individual, what wisdom underlies the selection of specific human beings as Prophets, and what essential qualities define those chosen for this role.

Since these questions belong to the domain of Islamic theology (al-‘Aqīdah), they require a methodologically grounded approach based on transmitted textual evidence and rational reflection. Accordingly, this study proceeds by engaging Qur’ānic discourse and Prophetic tradition. It then extends the discussion to modern philosophical critiques of revelation, particularly those associated with Enlightenment philosophers, such as David Hume and Immanuel Kant, before evaluating them through a traditional Islamic metaphysical lens as developed in contemporary thought.

Divine Communication and the Necessity of Prophetic Mediation

Based on the abovementioned introduction, we will first study the Quranic source to understand how Allah Almighty addresses the first question: why does Allah Almighty not communicate directly with every individual? A brief answer to this can be derived from verse 51 of Surah ash-Shura, in which Allah Almighty declares:

وَمَا كَانَ لِبَشَرٍ أَنْ يُكَلِّمَهُ اللَّهُ إِلَّا وَحْيًا أَوْ مِنْ وَرَاءِ حِجَابٍ أَوْ يُرْسِلَ رَسُولًا فَيُوحِيَ بِإِذْنِهِ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ

“It is not (possible) for any human that Allah should speak to him except through revelation, or from behind a veil, or by sending a messenger who reveals by His permission whatever He pleases. Indeed, He is All-Exalted, All-Wise.”⁽¹⁾

The first part of this Quranic verse elucidates a fundamental principle concerning the eminent speech of Allah Almighty. It clarifies the basic question of why Allah Almighty doesn’t speak with everyone. It states that not every individual possesses the inherent ability or aptitude to establish a direct line of communication with the divine, i.e., Allah Almighty. To briefly elaborate on this, it is important to note certain intricacies and nuances that appear in this verse. Firstly, the incapacity for direct communication between Allah Almighty and His creation lies within the latter, as they are inherently prone to imperfections, physically unable, and bound by inherent limitations, which make them incapable of communicating with the infallible and in all aspects perfect God. The wisdom and speech of Allah Almighty encompass the understanding of human nature and limitations.

Direct communication with the divine would overwhelm and be beyond the comprehension of humans, as the knowledge and wisdom of Allah Almighty are boundless. As derived from the verse, most humans are incapable of communicating with Allah ﷻ, and not vice versa.

Therefore, for us as humans to receive guidance from Allah Almighty, we need someone who is physically and spiritually able to establish a link with Allah Almighty, who can bear the mighty revelation on his heart, and who can transmit the divine revelations in a manner comprehensible to humans. This concept is called Prophethood, and the one entrusted with the responsibility of Prophethood, i.e., the intermediary, is called a Prophet. A Prophet acts as a medium and mediator for communication between ordinary humans and Allah Almighty. It is only viable because Allah Almighty has exalted him in his traits and characteristics, thereby distinguishing him from other humans. What are the qualities that distinguish a Prophet from an ordinary man? Among all the blessed qualities, some of the most prominent and pertinent to the questions are the following:

1) Righteousness, mannerisms, and morals (khuluq)

The Prophets have unmatched levels of righteousness that drive them to strive for the proximity of Allah Almighty. They exemplify the highest standards of conduct and morality among human beings. Allah Almighty declared in the Holy Qur'an:

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

“And indeed, you are upon an exalted moral character.” (2)

This verse emphasizes that Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ possesses the highest standards of manners and morals. Imam al-Tirmidhī has recorded that the noble companion Anas ibn Mālīk said:

وَكَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ مِنْ أَحْسَنِ النَّاسِ خُلُقًا

“The Messenger of Allah had the best character of all people.” (3)

In fact, one of the earliest accounts of the Prophet's noble character occurred when Sayyidah Khadija ^{RA}, the mother of believers, described the noble character of the Prophet ﷺ to encourage and support him upon his return from the Cave of Ḥirā', after he had received the first revelation:

فَرَجَعَ بِهَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ يَرْجِفُ فَوَادُّهُ، فَدَخَلَ عَلَىٰ خَدِيجَةَ بِنْتِ خُوَيْلِدٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهَا فَقَالَتْ: «رَمَلُونِ، رَمَلُونِ» - فَرَمَلُوهُ حَتَّىٰ ذَهَبَ عَنْهُ الرَّؤْمُ - فَقَالَ لَخَدِيجَةَ وَأَخْبَرَهَا الْخَبْرَ: لَقَدْ خَشِيتُ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِي - فَقَالَتْ خَدِيجَةُ: كَلَّا! وَاللَّهِ مَا يُغْزِيكَ اللَّهُ أَبَدًا! إِنَّكَ لَتَصِلُ الرَّحِمَ، وَتَحْمِلُ الْكَلَّ، وَتَكْسِبُ الْمَعْدُومَ، وَتَقْرَى الصَّيْفَ، وَتُعِينُ عَلَىٰ نَوَائِبِ الْحَقِّ

the Messenger of Allah ﷺ then returned with the Inspiration and with his heart beating severely. Then he went to Khadijah b. Khuwaylid ^{RA} and said, "Cover me! Cover me!" They covered him till his fear was lifted, and after that, he told her what had happened and said, "I fear for myself." Khadijah said, "Never! By Allah, Allah will never disgrace you! In fact, you keep good relations with your kith and kin, you carry the weak, you provide for those deprived, you are hospitable to your guests, and you assist the deserving calamity-afflicted ones." ⁽⁴⁾

The narrations describing the noble character and exemplary qualities of the Prophet ﷺ are abundant and have been preserved across numerous classical sources of ḥadīth and sirah-works. Scholars also compiled dedicated works that systematically documented these traits. Among the most renowned of such works are al-Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah by Abū 'Īsā al-Tirmidhī (d. 279 AH), which focuses on the Prophet's ﷺ character, habits, and physical description⁽⁵⁾, and al-Khaṣā'is al-Kubrā by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911 AH), which likewise examines the unique virtues and exemplary morals of the Prophet ﷺ and further documents the praises and descriptions of the Noble Messenger preserved in earlier revealed scriptures.⁽⁶⁾

This aspect of their Prophethood is crucial, as it helps attract people to them. Had they been harsh and immoral, people would have distanced themselves and scattered away, refusing to accept the divine message they carried and conveyed. As Allah Almighty states about our Beloved ﷺ:

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ،

"It is out of Allah's mercy that you (O Prophet!) are lenient (and gentle) to them! Had you been harsh or hard-hearted, they would surely have dispersed from around you." ⁽⁷⁾

Prophets are regarded as morally impeccable in all dimensions of their character, whereas ordinary human beings, regardless of their level of virtue, retain an inherent susceptibility to moral shortcomings. Thus, Prophets serve as the golden standard of morality and a normative framework through which human beings may orient their conduct and aspire towards moral refinement.

This principle is further articulated in a well-known authentic ḥadīth narrated by Abū Hurayrah in which the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ states:

إِنَّمَا بُعِثْتُ لِأَتَمِّمَ مَكَارِمَ (وَفِي رَوَايَةٍ: صَالِحَ) الْأَخْلَاقِ

"I was most certainly sent to perfect good character!" ⁽⁸⁾

This ḥadīth succinctly encapsulates one of the fundamental purposes of the Prophethood of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. It indicates that his mission was not merely to communicate doctrinal teachings, but also to perfect, refine, and elevate the system of moral virtues

among humanity. Consequently, the Prophetic model embodies the most comprehensive and perfected expression of ethical conduct, providing a living example through which the ideals of moral excellence are both articulated and realized.

2) Trustworthiness (Amānah)

Prophets are required to possess the highest and most exceptional degree of trustworthiness, as their role demands unwavering integrity. Without a trustworthy character, they would lack the necessary moral authority essential to their mission, and their role as exemplars and conveyors of God's sacred message would be rendered ineffective and diminished in impact. The Holy Qur'an depicts multiple prophets as enhancing the credibility of their divine messages by identifying themselves to their nations with the epithet al Amīn, thereby signaling trustworthiness and moral integrity. ⁽⁹⁾ For example, we find Prophet Shu'aib (as) addressing his nation:

إِنِّي لَكُمْ رَسُولٌ أَمِينٌ

"Indeed, I am a trustworthy messenger to you."⁽¹⁰⁾

Similarly, the Beloved Prophet Muhammad ﷺ demonstrated his unparalleled trustworthiness through his noble and exemplary life, serving as a living testament before the pagans of Mecca. His character, actions, and conduct provided tangible evidence of his reliability, establishing him as an unequivocal model of integrity in fulfilling the divine mission. The Noble Prophet ﷺ referenced his own life as evidence of his trustworthiness. Allah Almighty declared in the Quran:

فَقَدْ لَبِثْتُ فِيكُمْ عُمُرًا مِّن قَبْلِهِ ؕ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

"Indeed, I have lived a lifetime among you before it. Do you not then understand?" ⁽¹¹⁾

Even long before the commencement of his Prophethood, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ was widely recognized among the people of Quraysh as al Amīn (the Trustworthy), a testament to his exceptional trustworthiness, integrity, and moral uprightness. ⁽¹²⁾

3) Wisdom (Hikmah)

Prophets are embodiments of wisdom. Wisdom aids them in conveying the message of Allah Almighty even in hostile environments and guides many people toward the truth. And as Allah Almighty declares in the Holy Book that those who are granted wisdom have indeed been given abundant good.

وَمَن يُؤْتَ الْحِكْمَةَ فَقَدْ أُوتِيَ خَيْرًا كَثِيرًا

"And whoever is granted wisdom is certainly given an abundant good."⁽¹³⁾

There is no doubt that the Prophets are the ones with the greatest good, i.e. with the greatest levels of wisdom, and thereby the wisest among all humans. Allah Almighty further declares in the Holy Qur'an:

كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِيكُمْ رَسُولًا مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِنَا وَيُزَكِّيكُمْ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُم مَّا لَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْلَمُونَ

“Thus, We have sent you a Messenger ﷺ from among yourselves, who recites Our revelations to you, purifies you, teaches you the Book and Wisdom, and instructs you in (other) matters you did not know.”⁽¹⁴⁾

As it appears from the verse, imparting wisdom is a divine task and a prophetic responsibility. It is understood that the Prophets can only teach wisdom because they themselves possess it in its fullest form. One cannot convey what one does not possess. Thus, the Prophets are endowed with profound insight and intellectual capacity, sound judgment, and perfect understanding, enabling them to guide humanity authentically and effectively. By granting wisdom to the Prophets, Allah Almighty ensures that they are uniquely qualified to resolve disputes justly, lead by example, and exemplify the highest standards of conduct for their followers. Thus, wisdom is inseparable from Prophethood and constitutes a cornerstone of their distinguished and unparalleled station among all people.

4) Patience and perseverance, and mental capacity

A core attribute of the Prophetic persona is that of patience and perseverance (ṣabr). Without this quality, the responsibility of Prophethood (an-Nubuwwah) would be difficult, or rather unattainable. Patience and perseverance are needed as the Prophets endure the most difficult and arduous trials in their earthly life. From people rejecting their message, facing hostility and ridicule from their own people to numerous tests and tribulations decreed by Allah Almighty, through which their rank and spiritual station were elevated. As narrated in Sunan al-Tirmidhī, Sa'd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ reported that he asked the Prophet ﷺ:

قُلْتُ: يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ، أَيُّ النَّاسِ أَشَدُّ بَلَاءً؟ قَالَ: الْأَنْبِيَاءُ ثُمَّ الْأَمْثَلُ فَالْأَمْثَلُ

I said: “O Messenger of Allah ﷺ, which people are tested most severely?” He said: “The Prophets, then those most like them, then those most like them.”⁽¹⁵⁾

Moreover, perseverance is needed when receiving the revelation of Allah Almighty, as it demands extraordinary capacity and strength beyond worldly measures. Even a robust and firmly established structure, such as a mountain, is incapable of bearing the weight of Allah Almighty's blessed speech, as it is stated in the Holy Qur'an:

لَوْ أَنزَلْنَاهَُا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْنَاهُ خَاشِعًا مُّصَدِّعًا مِّنْ خُشْيَةِ اللَّهِ،

“Had We sent this Qurān down upon a mountain, you would have seen it humbled (to pieces and) torn asunder by the fear of Allah.”⁽¹⁶⁾

So, if even a firm and rock-solid structure cannot bear the weight of Allah’s majestic speech, how then could an ordinary human being be expected to shoulder such a burden? This invites reflection upon the extraordinary spiritual capacity and fortitude required of the heart to withstand the immense gravity and divine intensity of revelation. Such, indeed, were the hearts of the noble Prophets.

Numerous narrations describe the intensity (شدّة) experienced by the Prophet ﷺ during the reception of revelation.⁽¹⁷⁾ Furthermore, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī, in his seminal work *Khaṣā’iṣ al-Kubrā*, records several narrations describing not only the state the Prophet ﷺ experienced while receiving revelation, but also the effects perceived by those present around him during these moments.⁽¹⁸⁾ Allah Almighty has set forth the patience and perseverance of the prophets as an example to follow:

فَاصْبِرْ كَمَا صَبَرَأُولُو الْعِزِّ مِنَ الرُّسُلِ

“So be patient just as the Messengers of Firm Resolve were patient”⁽¹⁹⁾

5) Infallibility (‘Iṣmah)

A defining attribute of Prophets in Islamic theology is ‘iṣmah (infallibility). Since Prophets are entrusted with the reception and transmission of divine revelation, they must be protected from error in conveying the message of God. Any possibility of forgetfulness, moral lapse, or distortion in transmission would undermine the epistemic certainty of revelation and weaken trust in the prophetic office. For this reason, the majority of classical Muslim theologians maintain that Prophets are safeguarded from both major and minor sins in matters related to their mission.⁽²⁰⁾ This protection is not merely an ethical distinction but a necessary condition for the preservation of revelation (waḥy) as a reliable source of divine guidance.

Now, one may question why Allah Almighty did not create these attributes inherently within every human being if they are the very conditions required for Allah to communicate with them. The explanation lies in the theological understanding of human existence as a moral test. The Qur’anic worldview presents life as a domain of trial in which moral responsibility depends upon human freedom. If all individuals were created with prophetic infallibility, the structure of moral accountability, such as reward, punishment, and spiritual testing, would lose its meaning. For if everyone were inherently upon the right path, there would be no need for trial and moral responsibility in this worldly life, nor for reckoning in the Hereafter. This contradicts the declaration of the Quran, wherein Allah Almighty states that this life is a test to distinguish those who adhere to the divine guidance and follow it from those who turn away from it.⁽²¹⁾

Prophets, therefore, represent a divinely selected group prepared for a unique epistemic role, while the rest of humanity remains responsible for responding to their guidance through faith and action.

While the Prophets may appear to be humans like us, they are elevated in all aspects of life, allowing them to communicate with the All-Praiseworthy Allah. This is precisely what defines them as Prophets, as stated in the Quran:

قُلْ إِنَّمَا أَنَا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ أَنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ إِلَهُ وَاحِدٌ

“Say: ‘I am only a human being like you. It has been **revealed** to me that your God is (only) One God” (22)

The moment Allah Almighty confers revelation upon an individual and communicates with him through divine address, that individual is thereby officially appointed to Prophethood and may openly proclaim his prophetic mission.

The primary function of Prophets is the communication of divine guidance. They serve as conveyors of revelation as well as practical models of its application. Through them, humanity receives moral instruction, spiritual refinement, warnings against deviation, and direction toward ultimate accountability. Within this framework, Prophets also preserve the principle of divine oneness (tawhīd), correct doctrinal deviation, and provide an authoritative standard by which belief and action are evaluated. Acceptance of their message becomes, therefore, a measure of submission to divine authority.

Islamic theology further emphasizes that Prophethood is not an acquired rank achieved through spiritual discipline or intellectual effort. Rather, it is a purely divine gift (wahb), granted according to divine wisdom and selection. The Qur’an states: “Allah knows best where to place His message”,⁽²³⁾ and “Allah chooses messengers from among angels and humans”,⁽²⁴⁾ indicating that Prophethood is exclusively determined by divine choice.

Human acquisition or Divine bestowal?

To elaborate further on this concept, it is useful to distinguish between two key terms: “al-Kasb” and “al-Wahb”. His Eminence, Shaykh-ul-Islam Prof. Dr. Muḥammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, frequently employs these terms in his lectures to clarify the distinction between human efforts and divine endowment.

“Al-Kasb” refers to earning or acquiring something through one’s own effort. It denotes that the object or outcome is achieved as a result of personal exertion and active striving.⁽²⁵⁾ In contrast, “al-Wahb” denotes a gift or blessing that is (divinely) bestowed, without any effort on the part of the recipient. Prophethood is a quintessential example of “al-Wahb”, as it is a divine endowment granted by Allah alone.⁽²⁶⁾

In this regard, a salient illustration may be found in the concept of the friendship of Allah (al-Wilāyah). In the majority of cases, this spiritual station is attained through “al-Kasb”

whereby the individual actively strives to seek the pleasure and satisfaction of Allah the Most High. Through consistent effort, disciplined devotion, and righteous action, the seeker (سالک) is gradually elevated to the distinguished rank of al-Wilāyah.

This principle is firmly grounded in the Qur’anic paradigm of striving, as articulated in the verse:

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَكَبِيرُ الْبُعْثِينَ

” As for those who strive hard for Us, we shall surely guide them in Our ways. And Allah is indeed with the virtuously excellent.” (27)

This verse establishes a causal relationship between spiritual striving and divine guidance, indicating that the pathways leading to proximity are unveiled only to those who engage in sincere and sustained effort in the ways of Allah.

It is reported from Sayyidna Abu Ad-Darda ra that when a servant exerts himself in the paths of Allah, he is granted access to knowledge and gnosis previously unknown to him.(28) This nearness to and awareness of the Almighty is called al-Wilāyah. Fudayl ibn Iyad ra underscores that this process entails not only the opening of the doors of inspired knowledge, but also the facilitation of acting according to the learned realities and the divine will of Allah ﷻ. (29)

This graduated ascent toward divine proximity is further articulated in a well-known ḥadīth qudsī transmitted in Sahih al-Bukhari, which delineates a structured hierarchy of spiritual development. (30) The narration indicates that the servant’s nearness to Allah is primarily realised through the fulfilment of obligatory acts, which constitute the most beloved means of drawing close to Him. This proximity is subsequently intensified through the consistent performance of supererogatory (nawāfil) deeds, culminating in the attainment of divine love. At this stage, the servant becomes the recipient of divine aid, such that his faculties are guided and preserved in accordance with the divine will, and his supplications are granted. (31)

The ḥadīth thus portrays wilāyah not as an abstract or instantaneous state, but as the outcome of a gradual process rooted in devotion, discipline, and sustained spiritual striving.

As opposed to this, Prophethood (an-Nubuwwah) is attained solely through al-Wahb, a divine bestowal that cannot be earned through human effort. It is a sacred gift granted exclusively to those whom Allah chooses. And with the arrival of the final Messenger, our Beloved Prophet ﷺ, the door to this extraordinary station has been permanently closed and sealed. (32)

Within the Islamic creed, the notion that Prophethood could be acquired through personal effort is considered kufr. It constitutes a grave distortion of the principles of Monotheism (Tawḥīd) and the divine selection of Messengers.

This is exemplified by Mirza Ghulam Qādiyānī, leader of the Qadiyani-sect, when he falsely proclaimed Prophethood. The erroneous assertions began with his claim of being a Mujaddid (Reviver) and ultimately culminated in a claim to Prophethood. He believed in the notion that Prophethood could be attained through a gradual progression, which is contrary to the established textual evidence (al-Nuṣūṣ al-Qaṭʿiyyah).

Epistemological Interlude: Revelation in the Crucible of Western Enlightenment and the Metaphysical Response

While classical Islamic theology regards revelation (waḥy) as a definitive and objective source of knowledge (ʿilm yaqīnī), post-Enlightenment philosophy has introduced systematic skepticism regarding the epistemic legitimacy of divine communication. In order to appreciate the intellectual coherence of the Islamic position, it is necessary to engage with the critiques developed by David Hume and Immanuel Kant, both of whom challenged the epistemological status of revelation from within a post-Enlightenment framework.

David Hume: Miracles and the Limits of Historical Knowledge

David Hume's critique of revelation is grounded in a strict empiricist epistemology, as articulated in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, particularly in his discussion "Of Miracles." For Hume, all meaningful knowledge of matters of fact must ultimately be derived from sensory experience and uniform patterns of observation.⁽³³⁾

Within this framework, the concept of miracle (muʿjizah), which traditionally functions as a sign of Prophethood, becomes epistemically problematic. Hume defines a miracle as a violation of the laws of nature established by consistent human experience, and he argues that historical testimony can never be sufficient to establish such an event unless the falsehood of that testimony would itself be more improbable than the miracle it reports.⁽³⁴⁾ His argument does not directly deny metaphysical possibility but instead questions the rational justification for accepting miracle reports based on historical transmission.⁽³⁵⁾ In his view, such reports are vulnerable to human tendencies toward imagination, emotional excess, and cultural distortion, particularly in pre-modern societies where critical inquiry is limited.⁽³⁶⁾

However, this critique presupposes a purely probabilistic model of knowledge that treats all testimony as inherently fragile. It also assumes a uniform naturalistic framework in which the possibility of divine intervention is methodologically excluded rather than evaluated.

In contrast, Within the Traditional Islamic theological paradigm, the historical validity of revelation is not left to solitary reports (*āḥād*). Rather, *Kalām* theology resolves the problem of historical transmission through the rational certainty of mass-transmitted, uninterrupted reports (*tawātur*), a cognitive category that renders collusion or systemic falsehood mathematically and rationally impossible. In contrast, Hume assumes that

historical testimony regarding the supernatural degrades over time due to the baseline probability of natural law. He views it as an epistemological impossibility for later generations to accept rationally.

Islamic epistemology treats a *mutawātīr* account of a miracle as a source of definitive knowledge (*‘ilm yaqīnī*) that acts as an intellectual proof (*al-dalā’il al-‘aqliyyah*) of a Prophet's authenticity.⁽³⁷⁾ As contemporary scholars such as Wael Hallaq have noted, *tawātūr* functions as a structured form of inductive corroboration in which the convergence of independent reports eliminates the rational possibility of coordinated falsehood.⁽³⁸⁾

Immanuel Kant: The Limits of Reason and the Internalization of Religion

Immanuel Kant approaches revelation from a different angle. Rather than focusing on historical reliability, he questions the structural capacity of human reason to access or verify metaphysical realities.⁽³⁹⁾ In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, Kant argues that human cognition is limited to phenomena, i.e. objects as they appear within space and time, while God, as a noumenal reality, remains beyond theoretical knowledge.⁽⁴⁰⁾ As a result, any claim to direct divine communication cannot be objectively validated within human cognitive limits.⁽⁴¹⁾ Even if such an experience occurs, it cannot be distinguished with certainty from subjective illusion or psychological projection.⁽⁴²⁾

Kant therefore redefines religion in moral terms, describing it as the cognition of all our duties as divine commandments”.⁽⁴³⁾ On this view, the authority of religion is grounded not in external revelation but in the autonomy of practical reason and the universal moral law (the categorical imperative).⁽⁴⁴⁾ Consequently, “statutory religion” i.e. religion based on historical revelation and scripture, is subordinated to rational morality. Revelation is considered valid only insofar as it aligns with moral reason; otherwise, it is either symbolic or dispensable.

The Islamic Response: Revelation as Necessary Epistemic Anchor

From the perspective of classical Islamic theology, both Hume and Kant operate within frameworks that restrict knowledge to either empirical probability or autonomous moral reasoning. In contrast, Islamic thought maintains that human reason (*‘aql*), while valuable, is limited in its access to metaphysical and unseen realities (*al-ghayb*).

Revelation is therefore not an external supplement to reason but a necessary epistemic foundation that completes and guides it. Prophethood, supported by *‘ishmah* and validated through *tawātūr*, functions as the bridge between divine knowledge and human cognition. In this sense, the Islamic model reverses the Kantian hierarchy by positioning revelation as the condition for the proper orientation of moral and metaphysical reasoning, rather than its subordinate expression.

The Core Synthesis of Creedal Mechanisms

To resolve these modern cognitive complexities, the analysis must return to the foundational concepts established in the first half of this study. The apparent deadlock presented by Enlightenment skepticism is disarmed when evaluated through the classical hierarchy of evidence (al-dalā'il al-naqliyyah wa al-'aqliyyah).

Where Kant diagnoses an insurmountable barrier between the phenomenal world and the noumenal realm of the unseen (al-ghayb), traditional Islamic creed offers a structural solution through the very definition of Prophethood as a purely divine bestowal (al-wahb). Within Islamic theology, Prophethood is understood as a purely divine bestowal rather than a form of human acquisition. Revelation, therefore, represents knowledge granted by God rather than knowledge independently attained through human reason. From this perspective, revelation functions as a source of knowledge that complements the limitations of unaided human intellect, as an ontologically unique bridge. The concept of revelation (waḥy) breaks through Kant's epistemological boundary from the outside, delivering objective knowledge of reality that human intellect ('aql) recognizes as necessary but cannot independently attain.

Similarly, Hume's empirical rejection of prophetic testimony is structurally countered by the classical framework of mass-transmission (tawātur) and the internal necessity of infallibility ('Ismah). When the transmission of knowledge meets the mathematical and logical threshold of tawātur, and the source is anchored in absolute trustworthiness (amānah), the historical skepticism of the Enlightenment loses its foundational grip.

The Metaphysical Resolution: Al-Attas on the Integrity of Waḥy

This synthesis of classical creedal mechanisms finds a modern articulation in the metaphysical framework of contemporary philosopher Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas. In *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, he critiques the Western philosophical tradition as developing within a progressively secularized worldview. A view in which knowledge is shaped by an ongoing process of revision and reorientation between competing intellectual paradigms, increasingly detached from a theocentric foundation. ⁽⁴⁵⁾

Al-Attas argues that this historical trajectory has culminated in the "secularization of reason," whereby human intellect is no longer oriented toward transcendence but is instead confined to the domain of sensory and empirical reality (kawn). ⁽⁴⁶⁾

This critique is further developed in Wael Hallaq's analysis of Enlightenment modernity. Hallaq notes that the post-Enlightenment Western tradition gradually separated epistemology from metaphysical foundations and from stable moral frameworks embedded in pre-modern intellectual traditions. As a result, reason becomes increasingly autonomous and self-referential, claiming epistemic authority independent of transcendent or ethical grounding. ⁽⁴⁷⁾

Consequently, just as Al-Attas identifies the modern cognitive issue as a byproduct of a secularized intellect, Hallaq illustrates how the modern marginalization of metaphysical authority leaves human reason structurally incapable of recognizing transcendent realities. This contributes to what he describes as a broader transformation of the modern intellectual condition, in which transcendence becomes epistemically inaccessible within the modern Western mind.

In contrast to Kant's strict separation between the phenomenal and noumenal realms, al-Attas emphasizes that the Islamic worldview (*ru'yat al-Islām li al-wujūd*) does not split reality into a binary of sacred and profane, nor does it limit reality (*ḥaqīqah*) to mere material occurrences (*wāqī'iyah*).⁽⁴⁸⁾ In Islamic metaphysics, true knowledge (*‘ilm*) is not an isolated product of unaided human reason or physical sensation; rather, it is a divine bestowal received by the soul through validated, traditional channels.⁽⁴⁹⁾

Furthermore, al-Attas challenges what he views as underlying assumptions in Hume's skepticism regarding testimony and human nature. In the Islamic framework, the human soul is understood to possess an innate disposition (*fiṭrah*) oriented toward its Creator via the primordial covenant.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Prophethood (*al-Nubuwwah*) functions as an objective, divinely protected medium through which absolute truth enters human reality. The Prophet, endowed with infallibility (*‘Iṣmah*), ensures that the transmission of the message remains uncorrupted by the psychological fluctuations or historical degeneration that Hume feared.⁽⁵¹⁾

Where Kant asserts that human moral reason must judge revelation, al-Attas counters that human freedom and moral action are only true when they align perfectly with human nature as illuminated by divine law (*al-Sharī'ah*). Choosing to act against a divine command is not an expression of autonomous rational freedom, but a form of misalignment with one's own nature (*ẓulm*).⁽⁵²⁾

These positions reflect a divergence between Enlightenment epistemologies, which tend to treat revelation as a problem to be assessed within the limits of human cognition, and the classical Islamic framework, in which Prophethood functions as an absolute, necessary framework that validates, protects, and completes human reason.

Concluding Note

The institution of Prophethood (*al-Nubuwwah*) stands as a unique, divinely ordained pillar of Islamic belief, bridging the infinite wisdom of the Divine, Allah Almighty, with the temporal limitations of humans. Prophethood is neither a humanly attainable station nor a symbolic construct, but a real epistemic institution grounded in divine selection, protection, and revelation. Prophets act as an ontologically unique medium through which absolute truth enters the human realm. Recognizing and affirming the unique, divinely bestowed nature of Prophethood is essential to understanding the architecture of Islamic creed, the role of revelation (*wahy*), and the broader divine wisdom in shaping human history.

The Islamic framework remains inherently resilient when it is contrasted with post-Enlightenment critiques. It demonstrates a distinctive coherence when it is examined in relation to the modern epistemological critical thought. It neither reduces knowledge to empirical probability nor confines it to internal moral reasoning but instead situates revelation as the necessary foundation of both. In this way, Prophethood remains not only a theological doctrine but also an enduring epistemological necessity within the structure of Islamic thought.

* * * * *

(¹) Muḥammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, M. (Trans.). (2024). The Manifest Qur'ān: A contemporary English translation. Minhaj-ul-Quran Publications. (Original work published as the Qur'ān). Cited verse: Qur'ān 42:51.

(²)The Manifest Qur'ān, 68:4.

(³) Al-Mubārakpūrī, 'A. al-R. ibn 'A. al-R. (1353 AH). Tuḥfat al-Aḥwadhī bi Sharḥ Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī. Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah. (Chapter 6, p. 132, Hadith No. 2015).

(⁴) Al-Bukhārī, M. ibn Ismā'īl. (1997). Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (M. M. Khan, Trans.). Darussalam Publishers. (Original work compiled c. 846 CE). Kitāb Bad' al-Waḥy (Book of Revelation), Kitāb al-Riqāq (Book to Make the Heart Tender), Hadith No. 3.

(⁵)Al-Tirmidhī, M. ibn 'Īsā. (2003). Al-Shamā'il al-Muḥammadiyyah (The noble qualities and characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad) (A. Khaliyl, Trans.). Darussalam Publishers. (Original work compiled 9th century CE). Chapter 48, pp. 185–191.

(⁶)Al-Suyūṭī, J. al-D. (2004). Al-Khaṣā'is al-Kubrā (M. Na'eimī, Trans., Vol. 1). Maktaba Ashrafiyyah. (Original work published in the 15th century). pp. 42–45.

(⁷)The Manifest Qur'ān, 3:159.

(⁸)Al-Bayhaqī, A. B. A. (2007). Shu'ab al-Īmān. Dār al-Ishā'at. (Original work published in the 11th century CE). Hadith No. 7978.

(⁹)The Manifest Qur'ān, 26:107, 125, 143, 162

(¹⁰)The Manifest Qur'ān, 26:178

(¹¹)The Manifest Qur'ān, 10:16.

(¹²) Ibn Kathīr, I. (1998). Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah (T. L. Gassick, Trans., Vol. 1). Garnet Publishing. (Original work published in the 14th century). pp. 180, 198, 202.

(¹³)The Manifest Qur'ān, 2:269

(¹⁴)The Manifest Qur'ān, 2:151

(¹⁵) Al-Tirmidhī, M. ibn 'Īsā. (2007). Jāmi' al-Tirmidhī (A. Khaliyl, Trans., Vol. 4). Darussalam Publishers. (Original work compiled in the 9th century). Book 10, Hadith No. 2398.

(¹⁶)The Manifest Qur'ān, 59:21

(¹⁷) Al-Bukhārī, M. ibn Ismā'īl. (1997). Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Darussalam Publishers. (Original work compiled c. 846 CE). Book 1, Hadith Nos. 2, 5.

(¹⁸) Al-Suyūṭī, J. al-D. (2004). Al-Khaṣā'is al-Kubrā (M. Na'eimī, Trans., Vol. 1). Maktaba Ashrafiyyah. (Original work published in the 15th century). pp. 234–235.

(¹⁹) The Manifest Qur'ān, 46:35

(²⁰) Ad-Dardir, Ahmed ibn Ahmed ibn abi-Hamid al'Adawi al-Maliki al-Azhari al-Khalwati, al-Kharida al-Bahiyya - an abridged English commentary, Trans. Keys to the Unseen: Sep. 2018, pp. 56

(²¹) The Manifest Qur'ān, 67:2

(²²) The Manifest Qur'ān, 18:110

(²³) The Manifest Qur'ān, 6:124

(²⁴) The Manifest Qur'ān, 22:75

(²⁵) Al-Isfahani, Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥusayn ibn Mufaḍḍal ibn Muḥammad – better known as Raghīb al-Isfahani (d.502 AH / 1108 CE), Mufradāt fī Gharīb al-Qur'ān, trans. Muḥammad Abdou Firuzpuri, Pakistan: 1390 AH, vol. 2, p. 352

(²⁶) Al-Isfahānī, R. al-I. (n.d.). Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur'ān (M. A. Firuzpuri, Trans., Vol. 2). Pakistan. p. 582.

(²⁷) The Manifest Qur'an, 29:69

(²⁸) Shaft', M. (2008). Ma'ārif al-Qur'ān (Vol. 6). Idārat al-Ma'ārif. p. 713.

(²⁹) Ibid

³⁰ Al-Bukhārī, M. ibn Ismā'īl. (1997). Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Darussalam Publishers. (Original work compiled c. 846 CE). Kitāb al-Riqāq ,Hadith No. 91.

(³¹) Ibid

(³²) The Manifest Qur'an, 33:40

(³³) Hume, D. (2008). An enquiry concerning human understanding (P. Millican, Ed.). Oxford University Press. p. 109.

(³⁴) Hume, D. (2008). An enquiry concerning human understanding (P. Millican, Ed.). Oxford University Press. p. 83.

(³⁵) Schmitt, Y. (2012). Hume on miracles: The issue of question-begging. Forum Philosophicum, 17(1), 66.

(³⁶) Hume, D. (2008). An enquiry concerning human understanding (P. Millican, Ed.). Oxford University Press. p. 1

(³⁷) Al-A'zamī, M. M. (1977). Studies in hadith methodology and literature. King Saud University Press. p. 43.

(³⁸) Hallaq, W. B. (2013). The impossible state: Islam, politics, and modernity's moral predicament. Columbia University Press. p. 139.

(³⁹) Kant, I. (1998). Religion within the boundaries of mere reason and other writings (A. Wood & G. di Giovanni, Trans. & Eds.). Cambridge University Press. p. 43.

(⁴⁰) Kant, I. (1998). Critique of pure reason (P. Guyer & A. W. Wood, Trans. & Eds.). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1781/1787). A235/B294, p. 338.

(⁴¹) Kant, 1998, p. 39

(⁴²) Kant, 1998, p. 41

(⁴³) Kant, I. (1998). Religion within the boundaries of mere reason and other writings (A. Wood & G. di Giovanni, Trans. & Eds.). Cambridge University Press. p. 84.

(⁴⁴) Kant, I. (1998). Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals (M. Gregor, Trans. & Ed.). Cambridge University Press. pp. 102–103.

(⁴⁵) Al-Attas, S. M. N. (1995). Prolegomena to the metaphysics of Islam: An exposition of the fundamental elements of the worldview of Islam. International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC). pp. 1–2.

(⁴⁶) Al-Attas, 1995, pp. 2–4

(⁴⁷) Hallaq, 2013, p. 43

(⁴⁸) Al-Attas, 1995, p. 1

(⁴⁹) Al-Attas, 1995, pp. 1–2

(⁵⁰) Al-Attas, 1995, p. 14

(⁵¹) Al-Attas, 1995, pp. 13–14

(⁵²) Al-Attas, 1995, p. 33