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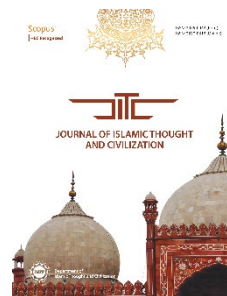
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Epistemology of *Tafsīr*, *Ta'wīl*, and Hermeneutics: Towards an Integrative Approach

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Abstract

The current research comparatively examines the three models *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and hermeneutics for understanding/interpreting the Qur'ānic text. It aims to explore the epistemological structure of *tafsīr* (interpretation), *ta'wīl* (explanation of inner meaning), and hermeneutics, dissect the strengths and weaknesses of each, and propose a creative synthesis between these three elements. By using the comparative method, this research found that *tafsīr* tends to have an objective ethic guided by a linguistic approach (*dalālah luġawiyah*). On the other hand, *ta'wīl* tends to prioritize subjective personalities based on an intuitive and rational approach. Meanwhile, hermeneutics prioritizes intersubjectivity using historical, sociological, and psychological approaches. The argument based on the source of knowledge of *tafsīr* is text, while according to *ta'wīl* it is the "inner experience". However, the source of knowledge for hermeneutics is the world of the text, author, and the reader. Due to their advantages and disadvantages, this research recommends using an integrated approach for understanding the text (al-Quran). *Tafsīr* is used to explore external aspects of the text (language). Hermeneutics helps to understand the reader's contemporary situation with all the prejudices, assessments, and traditions surrounding it. At the same time, *ta'wīl* is necessary to relate the results obtained to the methods of interpretation and hermeneutics. In this case, the task of *ta'wīl* is to find the "deepest meaning" that connects the objectivity of *tafsīr* and the subjectivity of hermeneutics. This "deepest meaning" can be a moral idea *'illat al-hukm* (ratio legit) or Sharia goals (*maqāshid al-sharī'ah*).

Keywords: epistemology, hermeneutics, integrative approach, objectivism, subjectivism, *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*

Introduction

The Qur'ān is the main source of Islamic teachings, apart from ḥadīth (prophetic tradition) and *ijtihād* (independent reasoning). Therefore, the Qur'ān has become the main reference in the study of traditional Islamic sciences. Along with the development of science and technology, which impacts societal changes, then the social sciences, and philosophy have recently emerged that try to respond to and criticize these changes. The changes in society require the traditional Islamic sciences to respond proportionally. The dialectics and struggle between traditional Islamic sciences, modern social sciences, and contemporary philosophy have given rise to the demands for a new way of understanding the Qur'ān.

In other words, the Qur'ān needs to be studied using methods of understanding the text relevant to contemporary situations. At least, until today, there are three dominant methods of understanding the Qur'ānic text which are *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and hermeneutics. *Tafsīr* and *ta'wīl* methods grew and developed in classical Islamic scholarship, while hermeneutics developed in the Western tradition,

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which is now adopted by Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988),¹ Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid (1943-2010),² Hassan Hanafi (1935-2021),³ Muhammad Sharur (1938-2019),⁴ Abdullah Saeed,⁵ Farid Esack,⁶ and other contemporary Muslim thinkers.

Studies of the Qur'ān using the methods of *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and hermeneutics have been widely carried out. Research in the field of *tafsīr* (exegesis) has even developed into two typologies of *tafsīr*, namely *tafsīr bi al-ma'tsūr* (Qur'ānic interpretation based on history) and *tafsīr bi al-ra'yi* (Qur'ānic interpretation based on rational thinking). Even further, *tafsīr* scholars have developed methods of interpreting the Qur'ān, which include the *tafsīr tahlīlī* (textual analysis of Qur'ānic verse), the *tafsīr ijmalī* (method to explore the meaning of the verse globally), the *tafsīr muqāran* (method to reveal the meaning of verses by comparing two or more *tafsīr* books), and the *tafsīr maudū'ī* (method to connect one verse with another verse that has a similar theme)⁷. Apart from that, some contemporary thinkers also offer *tafsīr maqāsid* models (interpretations based on the aim of transmitting the Qur'ān).⁸

Some researchers use these three interpretation methods independently and in isolation from other methods. However, each method has strengths and weaknesses in exploring the meaning of the Qur'ānic text. Therefore, this research attempts to dissect the characteristics of *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and hermeneutics epistemologically. After that, this research also examined the strengths and weaknesses of each. In the end, this research will offer a new perspective on understanding the text of the Qur'ān by combining the three methods of *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and hermeneutics into an integrative-dialectical model. With this integrative-dialectical model, the contextual interpretation model will emerge without abandoning the Al-Qur'ān text's roots.

¹Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1980).

²Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Maḥmūd Al-Nashsh: Dirāsah Fī 'Ulūm Al-Quran [The Concept of Text: Study of Quranic Sciences]* (Beirut: Markaz al-Tsaqafī al-'Arabi, 1994).

³Hassan Hanafi, *Qudāyā Mu'āshirah: Fī Fikrīnā Al-Mu'āshir [Contemporary Issues in Our Contemporary Thought]* (Beirut: Dār al-Tanwir, 1983).

⁴Andreas Christmann, "The Qur'ān, Morality and Critical Reason: The Essential Muhammad Shahrur," *Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia* 53, no. 9 (2013): 1689-99.

⁵Abdullah Saeed, "Islamic Thought: An Introduction," *Islamic Thought: An Introduction*, Routledge Taylor and Francis Group (2006): 1–204, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203015247>.

⁶Farid Esack, "Qur'ān Hermeneutics: Problem and Prospects," *The Muslim World* 83, no. 2 (1993): 118-141; Hamid Dabashi, "Being a Muslim," *Being a Muslim in the World* (2013), 83-109, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137301291_5.

⁷Haziyah Hussin et al., "The Trend of Malay Qur'ānic Commentary Writing in Malaysia in the 20th Century," *Journal of Applied Sciences Research* 8, no. 8 (2012): 4343-49; Abdul Hayii Al-Farmawi, *Al-Bidāyah Fī At-Tafsīr Al-Maudhū'ī [Introduction to Thematic Interpretation]* (Beirut: Maktabah Al-Hadharah Al-Arabiyyah, 1977).

⁸Ruslan Sangaji et al., "Tafsir Al-Ahkām's Analysis of Demoralization in Cases of Sexual Harassment in Educational Institutions in Indonesia," *Samarah* 7, no. 2 (2023): 713-33, <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i2.17028>; Egi Tanadi Taufik, "New Face of Religious Affair Minister and the Epistemology of Qur'ānic Ethics: A Synchronicdiachronic Reading on Qs. Al-Hujurat (49): 11-13," *Jurnal Ilmiah Islam Futura* 21, no. 1 (2021): 1-22, <https://doi.org/10.22373/jiif.v0i0.5942>; Aksin Wijaya and Shofiyyullah Muzammil, "MAQĀ (Formula Presented) IDI TAFSIR Uncovering and Presenting Maqā (Formula Presented) Id Ilāhī-Qur'ānī into Contemporary Context," *Al-Jami'ah* 59, no. 2 (2021): 449-78, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2021.592.449-478>.

2. Definition of *Tafsīr*, *Ta'wīl*, and Hermeneutics

According to some scholars, the word *tafsīr* is a *maṣdar* form of the words *fassara-yufassiru-tafsīran*, which is equivalent to the meaning of *al-bayān* or *al-īdah* (which means explanation and interpretation).⁹ Conceptually, *tafsīr* is often understood as an attempt to explain the meaning of a difficult sentence.¹⁰ Therefore, *tafsīr* contains methodical steps to understand the text of the Qur'ān along with explaining the meaning and legal implications.¹¹

Subsequently, the term *ta'wīl* is a derivation of the word *a-w-l* which means "to return" or "to revert." This implies the need of returning to the original meaning of a word for its connotation and meaning.¹² Conceptually, *ta'wīl* is often understood in various ways. Manna' al-Qathān, for example, defines *ta'wīl* as an effort to return from an explicit meaning (*rājiḥ*) to an implicit meaning (*marjūh*) because there is evidence that can be used as an indicator (*qarīnah*),¹³ while al-Zarkasyi defines *ta'wīl* as an effort to return a verse to the meaning it contains.¹⁴ Meanwhile, Nasr Abu Zaid said that *ta'wīl* means returning to actions or words to capture the meaning intended by the source (*al-aṣl*) and the meaning of the context.¹⁵ Even though they define *ta'wīl* in various ways, they argue that *ta'wīl* is rooted in the central postulate that everything (text) always has an exoteric-external and spiritual-esoteric dimension.¹⁶ This postulate shows that *ta'wīl* tries to find a text's second meaning (esoteric spiritual aspect). The second meaning is also called the inner meaning as opposed to the literal or exoteric (*ẓāhir*) meaning.¹⁷ Therefore, *ta'wīl* is understood as an explanation of the inner and hidden meanings of the Qur'ān.

Because of this, the work of *ta'wīl* is very different from *tafsīr*. If *tafsīr* is related to the exoteric or outer dimension of the text, *ta'wīl* is related to the esoteric or inner dimension. To differentiate between *tafsīr* and *ta'wīl*, Syed Farid al-Attas gave an example of its application by referring to the verse, "He brings life from death."¹⁸ If this verse is understood to mean that God gives life to birds

⁹Abdul Azim Al-Zarqani, *Manāhil Al-'Irfān Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān [Manahil Al-Irfan in the Sciences of the Qur'ān]* (Kairo: Mathba'ah Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, n.d.); Farid Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997).

¹⁰Muhammad Abdullah Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhān Fī Ulūm Al-Qurān [The Proof in the Sciences of the Qur'ān]* (Cairo: Maktab Atsabi, n.d.); Ibnu Manzhūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab [Arabic Spoken]* (Cairo: Muassasah Mishriyyah, n.d.).

¹¹Muhammad Ali Al-Shabuni, *Al-Tibyān Fī 'Ulūmul Qurān [The Explanation of Quranic Sciences]* (Beirut: Alamul Kutub, 1985); M. Quraish Shihab, *Membumikan Al-Quran: Fungsi dan Peran Wahyu dalam Masyarakat [Grounding the Qur'ān: The Function and Role of Revelation in Society]* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994); Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhān Fī Ulūm Al-Qurān [The Proof in the Sciences of the Qur'ān]*; Muhammad Husayn Al-Dhahabi, *Al-Tafsīr Wa Al-Mufasssīrūn [Interpretation and The Interpreters]* (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Haditsah, 1961).

¹²Yusuf Rahman, "Spiritual Hermeneutik (Ta'wil): A Study of Henry Corbin's Phenomenological Approach," *Al-Jami'ah* 62, no. 12 (1998): 1-16.

¹³Manna Al-Qathān, *Mabāhith Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān [Discourses in the Quranic Sciences]* (Beirut: Darul Fikri, n.d.).

¹⁴Al-Zarkasyi, *Al-Burhān Fī Ulūm Al-Qur'ān [The Proof in the Sciences of the Qur'ān]*.

¹⁵Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Naqd Khithāb Al-Dīni [Criticism of Religious Discourse]* (Cairo: Sinā ī al-Nasyr, 1992).

¹⁶Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid, *Al-Khithab Wa at- Ta'wīl [Discourse and Ta'wil]* (Beirut: al-Markaz ats-Tsaqafi al-'Arabi, 2000).

¹⁷Rahman, "Spiritual Hermeneutik (Ta'wil): A Study of Henry Corbin's Phenomenological Approach."

¹⁸Al-An'ām 6:95.

from eggs, for example, this is *tafsīr*. However, if it is understood that "God prioritizes believers over polytheists or prioritizes the knowledgeable over the ignorant, then this is *ta'wīl*" because it contains a deep meaning.¹⁹

Meanwhile, hermeneutics is a derivation of the word *hermeneuein* (Greek) which means to interpret.²⁰ Card Breiten then defined hermeneutics as a science that attempts to understand words or events in the past that are still abstract in order to make them meaningful in the present situation.²¹ In the hermeneutic view, a text always has a structure of ideas and language that represents these ideas. These two components of ideas and language must be considered crucial in understanding a text.²² Therefore, hermeneutics develops a hermeneutical circle model between text, author, and reader integrally. Implicitly, this triadic structure contains hermeneutic conceptual problems regarding the nature of the text, the methods used to understand the text, and how the presuppositions, beliefs, or horizons of the text's target audience determine understanding and interpretation.²³

3. Construction of the Epistemology of *Tafsīr*, *Ta'wīl*, and Hermeneutics

Epistemology is a philosophical study that discusses the knowledge's nature and scope, basic assumptions, and validity.²⁴ In addition, epistemology is also defined as the philosophical study of knowledge regarding its nature, requirements, and limitations.²⁵ In other words, epistemology is a theory of knowledge that discusses in depth the issues of the nature, source, and validity of the knowledge.

3.1. The Nature of Knowledge

The first issue that arises in epistemological discourse is the nature of knowledge. Two views explain the nature of knowledge, namely realism and idealism.²⁶ Realism has several forms but empirical realism is the most basic form as stated by Immanuel Kant in *the Critique of Pure Reason*. Meanwhile, the basic form of idealism is transcendental idealism.²⁷

In the view of realism, the existence of a being lies within itself (being is being).²⁸ Realism argues that reality is mind-independent or that metaphysics is about the objective world as it is.

¹⁹Syed Farid Al-Attas, "Agama dan Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial [Religion and Social Sciences]," *Ulumul Qurān* 5, no. 2 (1994): 40-47.

²⁰Richard E. Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer* (Philadelphia: From Press, 1966).

²¹Card Breiten, *History of Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: From Press, 1966).

²²Josef Bleicher, *Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).

²³Van A Harvey, "Hermeneutics," in *Encyclopedia of Religions*, ed. Mircea Eliade (Macmillan: Simon & Schuster, 1995).

²⁴D.W. Hamlyn, "History of Epistemology," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edward (New York: Mac Millan, 1972).

²⁵Laurence Bonjour, *Classic Problems and Contemporary Responses* (New York: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010).

²⁶Kevin Schilbrack, "A Metaphysics for the Study of Religion: A Critical Reading of Russell McCutcheon," *Critical Research on Religion* 8, no. 1 (2020): 87-100, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2050303219900229>.

²⁷Dietmar Heidemann, "Kant and the Forms of Realism," *Synthese* 198, no. s13 (2021): 3231-52, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-019-02502-4>.

²⁸Jesse M. Mulder, "Absolute Idealist Powers," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 100, no. 3 (2022): 471-84, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2021.1933556>; Peter Kügler, "Meaning Autonomy and Objective Meaning in Life," *Journal of Human Values* (2023): 1-10,

Realism means that "being" (*ousia*) only belongs to concrete objects. Therefore, the essence of knowledge is a representation or copy of the real world. Consequently, realism adopts an objectivist view. Objectivism believes that there are objects whose existential nature does not depend on the subject.²⁹

Meanwhile, idealism believes that the essence of everything lies in the soul or idea. For adherents of idealism, soul, reason, or ideas occupy an important position. As a consequence, idealism adopts a subjectivist view. Subjectivism believes that knowledge is a subjective mental process. Knowledge is a description according to the subject's point of view. Consequently, searching for knowledge will end in a purely subjective idea or event.³⁰

If examined from these two points of view, *tafsīr* tends to develop an objectivist character in interpreting the Qur'ān which is supported by a linguistic approach (*dalālah luġawiyah*). Armed with the linguistic rules of the *anic* text, interpreters try to understand the Qur'ān within the boundaries of external language.³¹ This objectivist character is based on the theological belief that the Qur'ān is *Qadīm* (eternal) as found in Ash'ariyah doctrine.³² For *Ash'ariyah*, the doctrine of the eternity of the Qur'ān has implications for the eternity of the commands and prohibitions of the Qur'ān which transcend history and are free from human interference in its formation.

This concept of the eternity of the Qur'ān then gave rise to the ways for interpreters who tended to exaggerate in cultivating the text, thus giving birth to a shift from a factual historical language to an ahistorical-spiritual text. This assumption is based on the Asyariah doctrine which differentiates the word of Allah into *kalām naḥsī* (ahistorical *kalām*) and *kalām ḥissī* (historical *kalām*). Apart from that, the concept of the eternity of the Qur'ān has given rise to the belief that there is a unity between meaning (*al-ma'na*) and text (*al-laḥẓ*). As a result, the meaning of a text (*kalām ḥissī*) must follow the ahistorical *kalām* (*kalām naḥsī*) so that the meaning of the text becomes closed and no one can penetrate the essence of the *kalām naḥsī*. This concept of the unity of material *kalām ḥissī* and immaterial *kalām naḥsī* has become dominant in the tradition of *tafsīr* epistemology.³³

<https://doi.org/10.1177/09716858231185619>; Paul Thomson, "Evolutionary Epistemology and Scientific Realism," *Journal of Social and Evolutionary Systems* 18, no. 2 (1995): 165-91, [https://doi.org/10.1016/1061-7361\(95\)90035-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/1061-7361(95)90035-7).

²⁹Eric Johannesson, "Realism and Empirical Equivalence," *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 49, no. 3 (2020): 475-95, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10992-019-09526-8>; Elisabeth Schellekens, "Towards a Reasonable Objectivism for Aesthetic Judgements," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 46, no. 2 (2006): 163-77, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ajj020>.

³⁰David Rose and Dora Brown, "Idealism and Materialism in Perception," *Perception* 44, no. 4 (2015): 423-35, <https://doi.org/10.1068/p7927>; James S. Spiegel, "Berkeleyan Idealism and Christian Philosophy," *Philosophy Compass* 12, no. 2 (2017): 1-9, <https://doi.org/10.1111/phc3.12400>.

³¹Bilal Gökkir, "The Application of Western Comparative Religious and Linguistic Approaches to the Qur'ān in Turkey," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 14, no. 3 (2003): 249-63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410305265>; Wijaya and Muzammil, "MAQĀ(Formula Presented)IDI TAFSIR Uncovering and Presenting Maqā (Formula Presented) Id Ilāhī-Qur'ānī into Contemporary Context,"; Abdul Mustaqim, "The Epistemology of Javanese Qur'ānic Exegesis: A Study of Sālih Darat's Fayd Al-Rahmān," *Al-Jami'ah* 55, no. 2 (2017): 357-90, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2017.552.357-390>.

³²Mohammad Yunus Masrukhin, "The Will and The Presence of Human Being in Abu Al-Hasan Al-Ash'ari's Thought: Explaining the Relation between Human and God in Kalam Discourse," *Al-Jami'ah* 59, no. 1 (2021): 221-54, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2021.591.221-254>.

³³Zaid, *Maḥmūd Al-Nashsh: Dirāsah Fī 'Ulūm Al-Quran [The Concept of Text: Study of Qur'anic Sciences]*; Ramli Awang and Roslan Abdul-Rahim, "Antropomorfisme dalam Teologi Islam

The debate on the theory of the eternity of the Qur'ān can be explained using the terminology of the theory Structuralism by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). Saussure distinguished between *parole* and *langue*. *Parole* (conversation) is individual language (speech/language use), while *langue* is language that is transformed into a language system. If *parole* is a thought, then *langue* is an instrument for presenting that thought.³⁴

If applied to the Qur'ān, the Qur'ān has the dimension of both *parole* (*kalām*) that is the word of God, and *langue* (*luġat*) that is the Arabic language medium used as an instrument to communicate His words. In addressing the relationship between *parole* and *langue*, the epistemology of *tafsīr* places *parole* and *langue* as a unity. As a result, textual understanding tends to be more dominant when compared to the attempts to leave out the textual meaning of the verse. In other words, the true meaning of a verse is contained in the internal of that verse itself.³⁵

In contrast to *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl* tends to develop a character of subjectivism in interpreting the Qur'ān which is supported by an intuitive approach. This subjectivist character is based on al-Ghazali's view which greatly emphasizes on the text's inner aspect. Starting from the project of revitalizing religious sciences (*ihyā' 'ulūmuddin*), al-Ghazali has developed the concept of text dualism and differentiated it into the outer and inner aspects of the text (*ẓāhir-bāḥin*).³⁶ The inner aspect is the core and substance contained in the text, while the outer aspect is the outer packaging that encloses the text and through which the text appears communicative to human thought. If the episteme of *bayānī* (*tafsīr*) makes a difference between *al-lafẓ* (the text) and *al-ma'na* (the meaning), the episteme of *'irfānī* (*ta'wīl*) makes a difference between *zhāhir* and *bāḥin*. The difference is in the *bayānī* episteme where one departs from *al-lafẓ* (the text) towards *al-ma'na* (the meaning), whereas in the *'irfānī* episteme one departs from *al-ma'na* (the meaning) towards *al-lafẓ* (the text) or in al-Ghazali's view, meaning as core (*aṣl*) while text follows meaning (*furū'*).³⁷

If we use Saussurean terminology, *ta'wīl* tends to arbitrarily place the relationship between *parole* and *langue*. It means that the Qur'ān as *parole* (*kalām*) is eternal, while the Qur'ān as *langue* (*luġat*) is historical. Therefore, *ta'wīl* opens up the possibility of a different understanding between the dimensions of *parole* (*kalām*) and *langue* (*luġat*). Even from a *ta'wīl* point of view, understanding *parole* (*kalām*) is much more important than *langue* (*luġat*) because *ta'wīl* seeks to go beyond symbols (*mītsāl*) to penetrate into the inner secrets of the text in order to regain its original meaning. Therefore, *ta'wīl* can only be carried out by those with intellectual and spiritual authority. As a result, *ta'wīl* epistemology accommodates subjective understanding.

[Antropomorfism in Islamic Theology],” *Global Journal Al-Thaqafah* 7, no. 2 (2017): 129-36, <https://doi.org/10.7187/gjat122017-7>.

³⁴Yanfei Zhang and Shaojie Zhang, “How Saussure Is Misinterpreted in Cognitive Grammar,” *Semiotica* 2021, no. 239 (2021): 243-64, <https://doi.org/10.1515/sem-2018-0102>; John E. Joseph, “Saussure’s Dichotomies and the Shapes of Structuralist Semiotics,” *Sign Systems Studies* 50, no. 1 (2022): 11-37, <https://doi.org/10.12697/SSS.2022.50.1.02>.

³⁵Huda Suleiman Al-quanyeer, Arif Ahmed, and Mohammed H Al-ahdal, “Saussure’s *Langue* /*Parole* Binary in the Qur’ān,” *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change* 12, no. 2 (2020): 406-17.

³⁶Zaid, *Maḥmūd Al-Nashsh: Dirāsah Fī ‘Ulūm Al-Qur’ān [The Concept of Text: Study of Qur’ānic Sciences]*.

³⁷Muhammad Abid Al-Jabiri, *Bunyah Al ‘Aql Al ‘Arabī: Dirāsah Tahlīliyyah Naqdiyyah Li Nudzūm Al Ma’rifah Al-‘Arabiyyah [The Composition of Arabic Reason: Analytical and Critical Study for Arabic Epistemology]* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasah al-Wahdah al-‘Arabiyyah, 1992); Muhammad Al-Ghazali, *Misykat Al-Anwār [The Niche of Lights]* (Cairo: Dar Al-Qaumiyyah, 1964).

The subjectivist character of ta'wīl is based on the theological arguments that originated from the word of Allah, *wamā ya'lamu ta'wīlahu illā Allah wa al-rāsikhūna fī al-'ilmi*.³⁸ Thus, ta'wīl is the inner interpretation (esoteric exegesis), while *tafsīr* is related to the outer interpretation (exoteric exegesis).³⁹ According to Muhammad Shahrur, what is meant by *al-rāsikhūna fī al-'ilmi* are the scientists in philosophy, science, astronomy, and historians in their capacity as experts in the field of objective-empirical sciences. These collective scientists can then work together according to their scientific specifications in interpreting the Qur'ān.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, hermeneutics further develops the dialectical character of knowledge between objectivity and subjectivity. Suppose *tafsīr* assumes the eternity of the Qur'ān (*Qadīm*). In that case, ta'wīl assumes the dualism of the Qur'ān into the outer and inner dimensions (*zāhir-bāṭin*) and views the inner aspect as more important than the outer aspect of the text. Then, hermeneutics develops the idea of the text's historicity to get the moral idea of the Qur'ān. Further on, this moral idea must be brought into the contemporary social world (subjectivity).

The idea of the historicity of the Qur'ān comes from the Mu'tazilah doctrine, which believed in the historicity of the Qur'ān and wanted to answer the problems of the reading community.⁴¹ Therefore, the interpreter's task is to make a conceptual analogy between "the world of the human being" and "the world of God," as well as make an analogy between the Arabic social world of the Prophet Muhammad and the contemporary social world of Muslims. Therefore, the interpretation of holy books must be dynamic and contextual to provide solutions to society's problems.⁴²

4. The Source of Knowledge

The second epistemological problem is the source of knowledge. Based on the definition of *tafsīr*, implementing the *tafsīr* always requires a medium (*tafsīrah*), namely the text or more specifically, the external dimension of the text. Apart from texts, *tafsīr* also relies on knowledge that has been previously obtained (a priori) in the form of narrations and other authentic sources in the Islamic tradition.⁴³ However, the main source of knowledge for *tafsīr* remains the text, especially the Qur'ān and the hadīth.

In *tafsīr* methods, linguistics occupies a primary position. These linguistic sciences include the science of morphological and semantic forms, the relationship between signifiers and signifieds, and the science of deviation and change processes (conjugation). Apart from that, other linguistic knowledge that is very important is the *nahwu* and *i'rāb*, as well as the knowledge of *balāghah* (eloquence or clarity of speech).⁴⁴

³⁸Al-i-Imran 3:07.

³⁹Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*.

⁴⁰Christmann, "The Qur'ān, Morality and Critical Reason: The Essential Muhammad Shahrur."

⁴¹Esack, *Qur'ān Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*; Esack, "Qur'ān Hermeneutics: Problem and Prospects,"; Fazlur Rahman, "Approach to Islam in Religious Studies," in *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies*, ed. Richard C. Martin (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1985).

⁴² Komaruddin Hidayat, *Memahami Bahasa Agama: Sebuah Kajian Hermeneutik [Understanding Religious Language: A Hermeneutical Study]* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1996).

⁴³M. Amin Abdullah, "Al-Ta'wīl Al-'ilmi: Ke Arah Perubahan Penafsiran Kitab Suci [Al-Ta'wīl Al-'ilmi: Towards Transformation in the Interpretation of Scripture]," *Al-Jamiah* 39, no. 2 (2001): 360-80.

⁴⁴Zaid, *Maḥmūd Al-Nashsh: Dirāsah Fī 'Ulūm Al-Quran [The Concept of Text: Study of Qurānic Sciences]*.

Even though *tafsīr* has tried to develop aspects related to the chronology of the text. Therefore, there is no place for *ijtihād* to correct or compromise the text narrations. These aspects are not semantic-*ijtihādiyyah* aspects where the interpreter has a role in determining them. Besides that, *tafsīr* has also positioned *asbāb al-nuzūl* (history of the text) as a source of supporting knowledge. Nevertheless, what is meant by *asbāb al-nuzūl* in the method of *tafsīr* is *asbāb al-nuzūl* which relates to the text. Therefore, *asbāb al-nuzūl* here is often defined as an event or question asked by the companions of the Prophet which was the cause of the revelation of a verse.⁴⁵

The hegemony of texts in this *tafsīr* tradition gives rise to the methodical implications for *tafsīr*. It always attempts to trace the relationship between the signified (*al-m'na*) and the signifier (*al-lafẓ*). Therefore, reasoning is the method related to processes and procedures in obtaining knowledge which leads to *Qiyās* (analogy) and prioritizes a deductive thinking framework (*qiyās bayānī*). This analogical reasoning can be *qiyās 'illah* (based on text similarities) in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) or *qiyās al-dalālah* (based on similarities in some indicators) in *kalām* (Islamic theology).

In contrast to *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl* does not always require a medium (*tafsīrah*). In *tafsīr*, the medium is text and *asbāb al-nuzūl*, while for *ta'wīl* the source of knowledge is the "inner "experience," which in the *Isyrāqī* tradition will give birth to *'ilm al-hudlūrī* (direct experience). Therefore, the method of acquiring knowledge of *ta'wīl* is *qiyās 'irfānī* (analogical reasoning based on similarities in the deepest meaning).

This model of *qiyās 'irfānī* is different from *qiyās bayānī* as developed by *tafsīr*. If *qiyās bayānī* requires element ratio *legis* (*'illat*) to build the relationship between the signified (*al-ma'na*) and the signifier (*al-lafẓ*) then *qiyās 'irfānī* does not require any conditions.⁴⁶ Apart from that, in *qiyās bayānī* an interpreter departs from the signifier (*al-lafẓ*) to the signified (*al-ma'na*), so in *qiyās 'irfānī* someone departs from the signified (*al-ma'na*) to the signifier (*al-lafẓ*) or from *bāṭin* to *ẓāhir*. In the relationship built by *qiyās 'irfānī*, the signified (*al-ma'na*) is *aṣl*, while the signifier (*al-lafẓ*) is *furū*.⁴⁷

Therefore, *qiyās 'irfānī* is not conquered to any particular formal rules. It starts from similarities in the relationships between structures then draws a common pattern that unifies the two.⁴⁸ *Qiyās 'irfānī* attempts to adapt the knowledge obtained through the *kasyf* (*al-aṣl*) within the text (*al-furū*). In other words, *qiyās 'irfānī* follow the principle *qiyās al-ghaib 'ala al-syāhid* (analogizing ideality with reality) or the written text is adjusted to the ideas of the mind based on *isyārāt* (inner guidance).

If the origin of knowledge (source of knowledge) in the *tafsīr* is text and in the *ta'wīl* is "inner "experience" then the origin of knowledge in hermeneutics is more broadly not only the world of the text and the world of the author, but also the world of the reader. These three sources of knowledge are then put into dialogue in a "hermeneutical circle" logic as stated by Schleiermacher and further developed by Wilhelm Dilthey in a *part-whole-part* movement.⁴⁹ Consequently, hermeneutics does not understand the Qur'ānic text in isolation and atomism but relates to other parts of the text.

⁴⁵Al-Zarqani, *Manāhil Al-'Irfān Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān* [Manahil Al-Irfan in the Sciences of the Qur'ān].

⁴⁶Al-Jabiri, *Bunyah Al 'Aql Al 'Arabī: Dirāsah Tahlīliyyah Naqdiyyah Li Nudzūm Al Ma'rifah Al-'Arabīyyah* [The Composition of Arabic Reason; Analytical and Critical Study for Arabic Epistemology].

⁴⁷Al-Ghazali, *Mishkat Al-Anwār* [The Niche of Lights].

⁴⁸Muhammad Abid Al-Jabiri, *Takwīn Al-'Aql Al-'Araby* [The Structure of Arabic Episteme] (Beirut: Markaz Dirasah al-Wahdah al-'Arabīyyah, 1989).

⁴⁹Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer*.

The hermeneutic circle can also be used to understand the social world of authors and readers as historical beings for the individual's internalization takes place in the social system. At the same time, the social system is also influenced by individuals. Therefore, the Qur'ān must be understood in the historical-sociological context of the Arab society when the Qur'ān was revealed. Apart from that, the social world of the reader of the text must be understood in its entirety because the reader's social world is very different from that of Arab society at the time of the Prophet. This understanding of the reader's social world will be the basis for the proper formulation and application of general principles, values, and objectives of the Qur'ān in actual situations.

5. The Validity of Truth

The third issue related to epistemological problems is the validity of truth. As explained above, the source of knowledge in tafsīr is language (text) and *asbāb al-nuzūl*, so the validity of truth in tafsīr is the closeness of the signifier (*al-laḥẓ*) to the signified (*al-ma'na*). In other words, the closer the interpretation results are to the text's literal meaning, the more valid they will be. As a result, *tafsīr* is less accommodating to liberal interpretations that try to abandon the text's literal meaning.⁵⁰

Different from *tafsīr*, the source of knowledge in *ta'wīl* is inner experience. As a result, the validity of the truth in *ta'wīl* lies in direct appreciation by intuition (*ḡauq*) so that the resulting understanding is subjective.⁵¹ A quite popular Sufi quote says, "a person cannot possibly taste the sweetness of honey if he has never tasted it himself."⁵²

Meanwhile, the source of knowledge in hermeneutics is the relationship between the world of the text, the world of the author, and the world of the reader. As a result, the validity of the truth in hermeneutics is more dialogical and dialectical between the three. As a consequence, the truth produced by hermeneutics is pluralistic and flexible. Therefore, the message of the Qur'ān that is relevant in a certain context is not necessarily relevant in another context. One of the results of hermeneutic interpretation is the equality of men and women and the accommodation of Islam to the democratic system. This interpretation is the product of a dialectic between the text of the Qur'ān, the Arabic social situation at the time the Qur'ān was revealed, and the contemporary social situation.

6. Integrative-Dialectical Understanding Method: An Offer

Based on the description of the nature of knowledge, sources of knowledge, and the validity of knowledge developed by the epistemology of *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and hermeneutics, all three have several advantages and disadvantages. The advantage that stands out from the *tafsīr* method is its emphasis on the character of objectivism in interpreting the Qur'ān. This objectivism will give birth to the interpretive products that are free from the ideological intervention and the interpreter's interests (*al-talwīn*).⁵³

The tradition of *tafsīr* contains weaknesses from the perspective of modern hermeneutics because *tafsīr* does not accommodate the dialectical relationship between the text, interpreter, and contemporary reality which cannot be ignored while finding the meaning of a text.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the dialogical relationship in *tafsīr* only goes in two directions, namely between the Qur'ān as the object being interpreted and the interpreter himself. Understanding of the text is limited to aspects of the

⁵⁰Abdullah, "Al-Ta'wīl Al-'ilmi: Ke Arah Perubahan Penafsiran Kitab Suci [Al-Ta'wīl Al-'ilmi: Towards Transformation in the Interpretation of Scripture]."

⁵¹Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Living Sufism* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1980).

⁵²Nurcholish Madjid, *Islam Doktrin dan Peradaban; Sebuah Telaah Kritis tentang Masalah Keimanan, Kemanusiaan, dan Kemodernan [Islamic Doctrine and Civilization: A Critical Study of Issues of Faith, Humanity, and Modernity]* (Jakarta: Paramadina, 2000).

⁵³Zaid, *Naqd Khithāb Al-Dīni [Criticism of Religious Discourse]*.

⁵⁴Harvey, "Hermeneutics."

language and historicity of the text (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), while the social world of the reader is ignored.⁵⁵ Therefore, *tafsīr* methodologies always fail to make the explicit performative function for the reader. In addition, interpretive objectivism will narrow the interpretation of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān very likely contains a very deep and rich meaning that cannot simply be reduced to just the meaning of the "skin and surface" of the language of the text.

The epistemology of *tafsīr* also often treats verses from the Qur'ān in isolation. As a result, the interpretation of the Qur'ān is often atomistic and partial and separated from other verses. Even though in the *maudlū'ī tafsīr* method (thematic interpretation), the *mufasssir* (interpreter) tries to relate one verse to another and the choice of verses is done in an isolated and atomistic manner, therefore it is difficult to find a "world-view (*weltanschauung*) of the Qur'ān." The world-view of the Qur'ān itself is the ethics of the Qur'ān...which is the philosophical basis for interpreting the Qur'ān.⁵⁶

As a consequence, the concept of the eternity of the Qur'ān (*qadīm*) which is the background to the assumptions developed by the epistemology of *tafsīr* has given birth to the view of eternal and single meaning in interpreting the verses of the Qur'ān. This view will then cause the loss of some understanding of time and evolution or historical perspective. In the *mufasssir's* view, every present connects with the past and almost all past, present, and future periods are flat and unmoving. Consequently, the products of *tafsīr* in the past must be applied constantly in the present and future.

In contrast to *tafsīr*, the advantage of *ta'wīl* lies in its success in freeing oneself from the entanglement of the text, so that a freer model of interpretation will emerge for understanding the text in accordance with the intuitive function of the interpreter. However, *ta'wīl* also contains several weaknesses as *Ta'wīl* only relies on the inner dimensions of the text. Hence, the priority is not the text or the text's historicity but rather the transcendental reality that confirms the factual reality. This transcendental reality is a reality that has an idealistic, metalinguistic, and metatheoretical character. This view is influenced by Sufism, which divides existence into *al-zāhir* and *al-bāṭin*. In the view of Sufism, the visible form (*al-zāhir*) is seen as an imaginary reality (*ḥayāl*). If it is connected to the text of the Qur'ān, then it is seen as an imaginary reality behind which there is an ultimate reality (*al-bāṭin*). Therefore, every interpretation must go beyond the textual meaning to the inner meaning of the text.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, hermeneutics has the advantage of building interpretations that are more open, tolerant, flexible, and of pluralistic character, so that its interpretation will avoid the phenomenon of sacralization of religious thought (*taqdīs al-afkār al-dīnī*).⁵⁸ However, hermeneutics also contains several weaknesses. Hermeneutics develops a relativistic interpretation model due to which there is no final interpretation from a hermeneutic point of view. Every religious follower always needs certainty in carrying out the religious activities based on certainty regarding their understanding of the teachings of the religion. Apart from that, hermeneutical assumptions regarding the historicity of the Qur'ān have given rise to lawsuits against the sacredness of the text of the Qur'ān. In turn, hermeneutical interpretation may lead to the erosion of a religious believer's faith.

A creative synthesis is needed as an integrative understanding method based on the strengths and weaknesses of the three models for understanding the Qur'ānic text. The first stage uses the *tafsīr*

⁵⁵ Hanafi, *Qudāyā Mu'āshirah: Fī Fikrinā Al-Mu'āshir [Contemporary Issues in Our Contemporary Thought]*.

⁵⁶ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'ān* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980).

⁵⁷ Zaid, *Maḥmūm Al-Nashsh: Dirāsah Fī 'Ulūm Al-Qur'ān [The Concept of Text: Study of Quranic Sciences]*.

⁵⁸ Al-Jabiri, *Bunyah Al 'Aql Al 'Arabī: Dirāsah Tahlīliyyah Naqdiyyah Li Nudzūm Al Ma 'rifah Al-'Arabīyyah [The Composition of Arabic Reason; Analytical and Critical Study for Arabic Epistemology]*.

method. The methods of *Tafsīr* are required to explain the external dimensions of the text (langue). On the other hand, grammatical text analysis is required to obtain an objective understanding. At the same time, micro and macro social setting analysis (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) is also required to look at the historicity aspect of the Qur'ān and see the manner used by the Qur'ān to solve problems at that time. This first step can be called the objective historical reproduction step and it must be supported by linguistics (grammatical) and historical knowledge.

The second stage uses hermeneutics which is used to understand the contemporary situation of the readers and society. Based on the Gadamerian paradigm, the reader's or society's subjectivity must be studied with all the prejudices, preconceptions, and traditions surrounding it. Social dynamics and changes are also required to study for seeing the relevance of the messages of the Qur'ān in terms of contemporary situations. This step may produce the subjectivity of the reader's factual ideas. This further requires the help of social sciences, especially sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, and political science. These sciences are to explore the external and internal aspects experienced by the society in present times .

The third stage is about using *ta'wīl*. *Ta'wīl* is required to bridge the findings obtained by the methods of *tafsīr* and hermeneutics. The gap between findings obtained through reproductive methods (objectivism) and productive methods must be reintegrated through the *ta'wīl* method. In this case, the task of *ta'wīl* is to find the "deepest meaning" that connects the objectivity of interpretation and the subjectivity of hermeneutics. This "deepest meaning" can be moral ideas '*illat hukm* (ratio legis) or *maqāshid al-sharī'ah* (moral principal of the Qur'ān).

In addition, because *ta'wīl* ignores the text's dimensions and the text's historicity, the interpreter is seen as the only autonomous subject and has the authority to choose meaning even in forms of symbolic expressions that are difficult to understand. However, the emergence of truth claims cannot be avoided because interpreters have reached the level of transcendental tradition (*maqām al-ma'rifah*) which is very subjective. In addition, *ta'wīl* also recognizes the importance of reality but this reality is a metaphysical reality that is ahistorical and ignores the reality of empirical society. As a result, the problematic realities of empirical society receive less attention.

This integrative approach will give rise to several consequences in future studies of the Qur'ān. First, integrating the epistemology of *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and hermeneutics will result in a paradigm shift in studying the Qur'ān. A linguistic approach has so far dominated the study of the Qur'ān and is monodisciplinary. With this integrative approach, the study of the Qur'ān will use a linguistic approach for understanding the text of the Qur'ān intra-linguistically and extra-linguistically, as well as being interdisciplinary. Understanding the Qur'ān intra-linguistically means understanding the Qur'ān based on the language rules that apply to the text (Qur'ān).

Meanwhile, understanding the Qur'ān extra-linguistically means understanding the text of the Qur'ān by paying attention to the aspects that surround the language and influence directly or indirectly the interpretation of the Qur'ān. These aspects can be the social and political situations behind the production of a text. These social and political situations occurred in the past when text production occurred. At the same time, that text also interacts with the reader's contemporary social and political situations. Even this extra-linguistic study can touch the inner dimension of the text or the hidden meaning behind the text. Therefore, the Qur'ān is no longer suitable to be approached in a monodisciplinary manner but rather in a multidisciplinary manner by utilizing various social and philosophical sciences that emerged in the post-positivism era.

Second, studies of the Qur'ān always face polemics between the choice of objectivism or subjectivism. This integrative approach offers a concept of harmonization between objectivism and subjectivism. In other words, the contextualization that attempts to be built by hermeneutics which is based on the contemporary situation and *ta'wīl* which is based on the inner meaning of the text, will bring consequences to the subjective understanding of the Qur'ān. However, on the other hand,

the linguistic approach that is relatively dominant in the *tafsīr* tradition will ensure that the subjectivity brought by hermeneutics and *ta'wīl* remains based on the text. This integration will ultimately give birth to an objective-subjectivism or subjective-objectivism approach for interpretation.

7. Conclusion

Tafsīr, *ta'wīl*, and hermeneutics have strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, a creative synthesis is required in the form of an integrative understanding method. In this synthesis, the *tafsīr* method is required to explain the external dimensions of the text (langue). Grammatical text and social setting analyses are required to obtain an objective understanding. Hermeneutics is used to understand the reader's contemporary situation with all the prejudices, preconceptions, and traditions surrounding it. Social dynamics and changes are also required to study to see the relevance of the messages of the Qur'ān to contemporary situations.

Meanwhile, *ta'wīl* is required to bridge the findings obtained by the methods of *tafsīr* and hermeneutics. The gap between findings obtained through reproductive methods (objectivism) and productive methods must be reintegrated through the *ta'wīl* method. In this case, the task of *ta'wīl* is to find the "deepest meaning" that connects *tafsīr's* objectivity and hermeneutics's subjectivity. This "deepest meaning" can be moral ideas *'illat hukm* (ratio legis) or *maqāshid al-syarī'ah*.

This integration of *tafsīr*, *ta'wīl*, and hermeneutics gives rise to three important ideas in understanding texts: intra-linguistic and extra-linguistic understanding, inter-disciplinary understanding, and objectively subjective understanding. Intra-linguistic and extra-linguistic understanding indicates understanding the text based on the linguistic and socio-political aspects surrounding it. Then, this intra-linguistic and extra-linguistic study requires an interdisciplinary approach involving social sciences and philosophy to explore actual empirical data related to the text. Therefore, the reader's subjectivity will remain controlled by empirical data obtained objectively

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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