

A Quest for Methodology - First Kalam Transdisciplinary Research Workshop

On August 3, 2016 about thirty participants consisting of lecturers and researchers from the Department of Usul al-Din, Islamic Studies, Bioethics, Psychology, as well as Science and Technology in local universities and the Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia (IKIM) convened at the office of the Islamic and Strategic Studies Institute (ISSI) and Kalam Research & Media in Chancery Place, Putrajaya. The day-long event began shortly after breakfast at 9 am with a complete introduction of the institute's mission and objectives.

Dr. Amran Muhammad, Chief Executive of ISSI South-East Asia Director of KRM, received various comments, questions and suggestions on the implementation of ISSI's Reviving Kalam Tradition (ihya' 'ilm al-kalām), a joint-effort by scholars of the Islamic analytical philosophy (Kalam) and those scholars who are experts in various intellectual sciences including those from the field of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), the Social Sciences as well as the representatives of multidisciplinary areas. The participants agreed that in the beginning, the specialists of Kalam or referred to as mutakallimān, would continue their research in pure Kalam, delving into questions of causality, ontology and various aspects of theology following the terminology set out by our illustrious Kalam predecessors such as al-Ghazālī, al-Bāqillānī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and others. The South-East Asian region boasts a strong cadre of scholars who pursue the field of Kalam such as Dr. Amran Muhammad, Dr. Wan Suhaimi Wan Abdullah, Dr. Aldilla Dato Isahak, Dr. Megawati Moris, Dr. Hamid Zarkasyi (Indonesia) and many more. [Read their works here.](#)



The participants believe that scholars in the intellectual sciences should be encouraged to share their expertise in their own jargon, following the typical research framework of their field of research, be it modern research method or the scientific method. In this way, the scholars from the intellectual sciences, referring to that of contemporary knowledge, is lending their support to scholars from the Islamic sciences in their efforts to expand their understanding about topics that are beyond their current scope of study – and vice versa. Given time and the interaction between these two groups of scholars, the scholars of the intellectual sciences such as psychology, mathematics and education, to name a few, would feel encouraged to integrate

their acquired knowledge of Kalam into their works. Over time, such scholars would gain the core doctrines of Kalam, as represented by the Ash'ari-Mat'r'd? school of Islamic analytic philosophy, and they would then be empowered to probe their research question using the comprehensive method of our past illuminaries. As discussed during this workshop on methodology, the modern research method is severely limiting, in its insistence on a selected instrument of research; whereas the Islamic framework for research allows for simultaneous application of the inductive and deductive method. In addition, the Islamic framework of research as developed by the mutakallim?n from the 8th century onwards is based on a metaphysical understanding of knowledge.



Any field of knowledge is a bestowal from the Creator, thus revelation – both the Qur'an and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad is considered a valid channel of knowledge, if not the highest channel of all. Our sensory perceptions are clearly important source of knowledge as well, a cognitive instrument that is held in the highest regard by the logical positivists, as mentioned in the discussion regarding the challenges facing us today. Other sources of knowledge are our reasoning ability and intuition, which is closely tied to our metaphysical understanding. Perhaps this is why, several participants echoed the need to introduce the metaphysical framework of Islam before embarking on other aspects of research training. All in all, despite minor disagreements, participants are eager to begin their collaborative writing, following the transdisciplinary hubs that each of them holds an expertise in, namely Epistemology and education, Ethics and human rights, Ecology and sustainability, Economics and well-being, Psychology and spirituality, Politics and governance, and Comparative religion and interfaith dialogue. Currently, Comparative Religion and Interfaith Dialogue is considered to be the priority hub due to the pressing social needs in Malaysia. All papers written by ISSI scholars will be published in a selected journal that currently circulates in local universities. It is hoped that with increased funding and support by interested segments of society, ISSI would be able to publish these scholars' works in its own journal publication. Their work will soon be available at the ISSI website at issimalaysia.org.my.