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BETWEEN DOUBT AND BELIEF: A HUMAN-CENTERED DA'WAH FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGING ATHEISTS BASED ON *RISALAH AL-ADAB FI 'ILM AL-BAHTH WA AL-MUNAZARAH*

ANTARA RAGU DAN IMAN: KERANGKA DAKWAH BERTERASKAN KEMANUSIAAN DALAM MENDEPANI ATEIS BERDASARKAN *RISALAH AL-ADAB FI AL-'ILM AL-BAHTH WA AL-MUNAZARAH*

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ABSTRACT

Based on methodological and ethical principles of dialogue and debate from Muḥammad Muhyi al-Din 'Abd al-Hamid's *Risalah al-Adab fi 'Ilm al-Bahth wa al-Munazarah*, this article suggests a human-centered daʿwah paradigm for interacting with atheists. This study promotes a paradigm shift towards dialogue that prioritises mutual respect, epistemic humility, and ethical reasoning as strategic instruments for daʿwah efficacy, in contrast to contemporary daʿwah methodologies that frequently concentrate on apologetic arguments or polemical refutation. The framework prepares Muslim callers to have academically demanding, emotionally sensitive, and spiritually transforming discussions with atheists by resurrecting the Islamic tradition of principled and disciplined argument. A pragmatic and moral approach to daʿwah is provided by this fusion of traditional dialectical ethics with contemporary issues; it actively works to lead interlocutors towards introspection, receptivity to faith, and, eventually, spiritual development in line with Islamic goals.

Keywords: Islamic Da'wah, Atheism, Dialogue, Human-Centered Engagement, Fitrah

ABSTRAK

Berasaskan prinsip metodologi dan etika daripada karya *Risalah al-Adab fi 'Ilm al-Bahth wa al-Munazarah* oleh Muḥammad Muhyi al-Din 'Abd al-Hamid, artikel ini mencadangkan suatu paradigma dakwah berteraskan kemanusiaan untuk berinteraksi dengan golongan ateis. Kajian ini mengusulkan satu anjakan paradigma ke arah dialog yang mengutamakan rasa hormat bersama, kerendahan epistemik, dan penaakulan etika sebagai instrumen strategik untuk keberkesanan dakwah, berbeza daripada pendekatan dakwah kontemporari yang sering menumpukan kepada hujah apologetik atau penolakan bersifat polemik. Kerangka ini mempersiapkan para pendakwah Muslim untuk mengadakan perbincangan yang mencabar secara intelektual, sensitif secara emosi, dan transformatif secara spiritual bersama golongan ateis dengan menghidupkan kembali tradisi Islam dalam berhujah secara berprinsip dan berdisiplin. Pendekatan dakwah yang bersifat pragmatik dan bermoral ini, hasil gabungan etika dialektik tradisional dengan isu kontemporari, berusaha secara aktif untuk membawa pihak lawan berfikir secara mendalam, terbuka kepada keimanan, dan akhirnya menuju kepada pembangunan spiritual selaras dengan matlamat Islam.

Keywords: Da'wah Islam, Ateisme, Dialog, Pendekatan Berteraskan Kemanusiaan, Fitrah

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the landscape of religious belief and identity has experienced substantial alterations, particularly with the advent and popularisation of what has been known as "New Atheism." New Atheism, led by authors such as Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens, offers a strong critique of religion, questioning its moral, epistemological, and metaphysical claims (Razif, 2024). These theorists contend that ethics and morality are not only distinct from religion, but may be hampered by it. They argue that religious frameworks block human flourishing, limit autonomy, increase societal differences, and lack the clarity required for competent moral reasoning (McAnulla, 2019). Furthermore, New Atheists believe that scientific empiricism provides a more plausible and rational foundation for comprehending the universe, arguing that believing in God is unsupported, if not contradicted, by current evidence (Razif, 2024).

Although these concepts have always had an impact on secular civilisations, their increasing accessibility through digital platforms like social media, podcasts, and video streaming has greatly expanded their reach, even within environments with a majority of

Muslims (Razif, 2024). In the Muslim world, atheism is becoming more well-known. Survey results and anecdotal information point to an increasing tendency, although exact statistics are still hard because of societal sensitivities and legal constraints. Between 2021 and 2025, atheism and non-religious identification have remained relatively limited across Muslim-majority countries, although regional variations are significant. In Saudi Arabia, less than 1% of the population openly identifies as irreligious due to legal and cultural constraints (U.S. Department of State, 2021). Türkiye shows stronger secular trends, with 3–5% identifying as atheists or unaffiliated, and up to 34% describing themselves as "not religious" (KONDA, 2018). Tunisia and Lebanon report the highest levels of non-religiosity in the Arab world at 27% and 19% respectively, according to recent Arab Barometer surveys (Arab Barometer, 2022). In Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, and Yemen, the proportion of those identifying as "not religious" ranges from 5% to 10%, while those openly identifying as atheists typically remain under 1% (Arab Barometer, 2022). Pakistan and Iraq show some of the highest religiosity levels globally, with over 90% of respondents describing themselves as religious (Gallup International, 2024). In Iran, while official statistics show over 96% identifying as Muslim, an online 2020 survey suggests up to 9% identify as atheist and 22% as non-religious (GAMAAN, 2020). In Southeast Asia, Malaysia shows about 0.7% religious unaffiliation, though up to 23% consider themselves "not religious," while Indonesia maintains very low levels of declared atheism (<0.1%) but with possible silent secularisation among 10–30% of the population (Pew Research Center, 2019). Overall, while atheism remains a minority identity in these societies, quiet secularisation particularly among younger and urban populations, is a discernible trend.

Recent scholarship has increasingly drawn attention to the limitations of the New Atheist movement represented by figures such as Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens in cultivating meaningful engagement with religious communities. Marked by polemical rhetoric, ideological rigidity, and internal fragmentation, the movement has largely failed to foster constructive dialogue within an increasingly pluralistic public sphere. In response, scholars are now advocating for more nuanced forms of atheist-theist engagement, grounded in intellectual humility, shared ethical concerns, and perspectives informed by post-identity politics. (Kettle, 2025; McGrath 2024)

In light of these developments, interaction with atheists must transcend superficial conversation, passive cohabitation, or adversarial debate. Rather, it ought to be recontextualised within the traditional ethical and linguistic framework of *ʿIlm Adab al-Baḥth wa al-Munāẓarah* the Islamic discipline concerned with the ethics and methodology of disputation. This classical model envisions *daʿwah* not simply as an act of religious outreach, but as a deliberate and principled endeavour aimed at cultivating self-reflection, cognitive reorientation, and moral transformation in accordance with Islamic epistemology and ethics.

This study employs a qualitative, textually grounded methodology that combines classical textual analysis with critical discourse evaluation. It begins with a close reading of key New Atheist works, focusing on their epistemological assumptions, ethical critiques, and modes of rhetorical engagement. In parallel, the study engages with Islamic scholarly tradition through an in-depth analysis of *ʿIlm Adab al-Baḥth wa al-Munāẓarah*, with particular emphasis on Muḥammad Muhyi al-Din ‘Abd al-Hamid*’s Risalah al-Adab fi ‘Ilm al-Bahth wa al-Munazarah*. The selection of this text is both methodological and normative, as it exemplifies an ethical grammar for disagreement grounded in sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), justice (*ʿadl*), and the pursuit of truth (*ḥaqq*). To contextualise the religious and sociopolitical relevance of this framework, the study incorporates statistical data on atheism in Muslim societies from recent international surveys. This triangulated approach combining theological tradition, contemporary critique, and demographic context allows for a holistic exploration of how Muslims might ethically and intellectually respond to atheistic discourses today.

Four main research questions serve as the inquiry’s compass. First, what effects has the spread of New Atheist rhetoric had on religious identification and doubt patterns in cultures with a majority of Muslims? Second, what are the ideological and rhetorical constraints of New Atheism that prevent fruitful interaction with Islamic philosophy? Third, how wouldMuḥammad Muhyi al-Din ‘Abd al-Hamid*’s Risālah*, an example of the traditional Islamic discipline of *ʿIlm Adab al-Baḥth wa al-Munāẓarah,* be a useful model for interacting with atheists in the pluralistic world of today? Lastly, how may this methodological and ethical heritage improve modern daʿwah by preparing Muslim scholars and preachers to handle secular criticisms with dialogical integrity, moral clarity, and intellectual rigour?

Rooted in Muḥammad Muhyi al-Din ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd's *Risālah al-Adab fī ʿIlm al-Baḥth wa al-Munāẓarah*, the researcher offers a disciplined model of engagement that emphasises procedural clarity, epistemic integrity, and moral responsibility. It is designed to guide structured discourse between belief and doubt, particularly in contexts shaped by New Atheist critiques. This framework places a higher priority on intellectual humility, ethical discourse, and psychological sensitivity than it does on confrontational or solely apologetic approaches. By shifting the focus from rhetorical victory to sincere inquiry, it fosters an environment where sceptics and believers alike can pursue truth collaboratively. Rather than treating doubt as antagonism, it recognises it as a necessary stage in intellectual exploration, to be met with clarity, patience, and principled reasoning. In doing so, it affirms that meaningful conviction arises not from coercion, but from understanding grounded in respect and rational coherence.

Through this lens, Muslim preachers are better equipped to address intellectual doubts, rectify misconceptions, and extend an invitation to faith through a process that balances respectful dialogue with rational coherence. Consequently, *ʿIlm al-Munāẓarah* functions as a strategic and ethical instrument of *daʿwah* one that aspires to deepen conviction, revive spiritual awareness, and engage secular audiences with integrity and purpose.

DEFINITION AND HISTORY OF ATHEISM AND NEW ATHEISM

Atheism, despite its seemingly straightforward nature, is a complex and contested concept. Scholars have yet to reach a unified definition, largely due to the varying historical, linguistic, and philosophical contexts in which it is used (Bullivant, 2013; Quillen, 2015). It is very important to discuss how atheism is defined, especially as the term has been used in conversation and philosophical form (Oppy, 2021; Wróbel & Skonieczny, 2020). Many people might have different definitions of atheism, and those need to be accounted for to fully flesh out the concept (Oppy, 2021).

Definition

Atheism is derived from the Greek term "without God," yet its definitions differ widely. (Stein, 1980; Edwards, 1967). While it generally refers to the lack of belief in any deity, it can also refer to an active conviction that no gods exist or merely a rejection of theistic assertions without proclaiming unbelief. The ambiguity originates from varied perspectives

on what constitutes belief, as well as the various interpretations of the name "God" among theological and philosophical traditions. Scholars like as Bullivant (2013) say that the definition of atheism is complex by different ideas of god, but others, such as Harris (2006), contend that the phrase is redundant similar to not believing in astrology. However, for intellectuals such as McGrath (2004), atheism is a deliberate and logically motivated rejection of theism.

In Islamic thought, the concept closest to atheism is *al-ilḥād*, a term rooted in the idea of deviation or turning away from truth, derived from the Arabic triliteral root L-H-D (Al-Firuzabadi, 2005; Ibn Faris). Classical scholars, including Ibn Taymiyyah (1995), understood *ilḥād* as a moral, metaphysical, or theological deviation from the divine path. The Qur'an also refers to *al-dahriyyah*, a group who deny the afterlife and attribute existence solely to the passage of time, exemplified in Al-Jāthiyah (45:24). Allah says:

وَقَالُوا مَا هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا وَمَا يُهْلِكُنَا إِلَّا الدَّهْرُ ۚ وَمَا لَهُم بِذَٰلِكَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ ۖ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ

Al-Jathiyah: 24
And they say: "What is there but our life in this world? We shall die and we live, and nothing but time can destroy us." But of that they have no knowledge: they merely conjecture

The Qur'anic term highlights not only theological disbelief but a broader existential outlook that denies accountability and metaphysical purpose, underscoring Islam's holistic framing of atheism as both intellectual and moral deviation.

A Brief History on the Atheism in Classical Arab-Islamic World

In early Islamic history, atheism was often categorised under the broader term *zandaqah*, referring to individuals whose beliefs or actions deviated from orthodox Islamic creed (Lewis, 1993). Originally used in the Sassanid Empire to describe Manichaeans, the term *zindīq* later expanded under the Abbasids to include Gnostic dualists, agnostics, atheists, and libertines (Iraqi, 1982). Classical Islamic theological discourse did not treat atheism as a strictly defined category but as a spectrum encompassing heresy (*zandaqah*), apostasy (*riddah*), and

metaphysical deviation (*ilḥād*). Scholars such as Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn al-Rāwandī, and al-Ashʿarī contributed to the evolving understanding of these terms (Iraqi, 1982; Al-Jawaliqi, 1990; Basha, 1991), while figures like Badawi (1993) identified various early atheistic tendencies among theologians, poets, and sceptics. During the Umayyad period, the terms *mulḥid* (atheist) and *ilḥād* (atheism) also denoted desertion from the community of believers and rebellion against the caliphs (Repp, 1993)

Between the 2nd and 5th centuries AH, significant refutations of atheism emerged from Muʿtazilite, Murjiʾite, Ibāḍī, and Zaydī scholars, many of whose works are now known only by title (Ibn al-Nadim, 2009). Razif (2023) identified eleven early works on atheism by classical Muslim scholars, primarily recorded in Ibn al-Nadīm's *al-Fihrist*. Thinkers such as Dirar b. ʿAmr, al-Nazzam, al-ʿAṣamm, and Abu al-Hudhayl produced dedicated treatises countering atheistic claims, while debates with the *dahriyyūn* (eternists) were recorded from scholars like Abu Ḥanīfah (Ibn Abi al-'Izz, 2000). Classical kalām texts by al-Ashʿarī, al-Māturīdī, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Hazm, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī advanced rational arguments for God's existence using cosmological and metaphysical reasoning (Repp, 1993; Ibn ʿAsākir 1984; Ibn Hazm, n.d.; Al-Ghazali, 2013; Al-Maturidi, 1970; Al-Razi, 1986). These included proofs from contingency, order, causality, and creation, often aligning with Qur'anic themes. Philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā (1973) and Ibn Rushd (1998) offered metaphysical arguments for a Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*) and affirmed divine providence and creation (Najjar, 2001; Adamson, 2013)

Throughout classical discourse, the charge of *ilḥād* could reflect both theological disbelief and broader socio-political dissent. Figures like Ibn al-Rāwandī and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī questioned prophethood, revelation, and the uniqueness of Islamic rituals, earning them accusations of atheism or heresy (Inati, 2000; Al-A'sam, n.d.; 'Amru Sharif, 2013, Badawi, 1963). Al-Shahrastānī (2009) later documented how *mulḥid* evolved to include materialists and sceptics, reflecting shifts in the Islamic worldview. Thus, atheism in the Islamic tradition was not a static concept but a dynamic category shaped by theological, philosophical, and political contexts, often reflecting more than simple disbelief in God, and extending into broader critiques of religious authority and doctrine (Razif, 2024).

A Brief History on the Atheism in Classical Western World

In contrast to the Islamic understanding of atheism as a deviation from truth (*ilḥād*), the Western conceptualisation of atheism evolved along a distinct trajectory, shaped primarily by its engagement with Greco-Roman philosophy and later, Christianity (Razif, 2024). While early expressions of atheism appeared in ancient Greece through philosophical sceptics like Protagoras and Diagoras, it was the dominance of Christianity that intensified the tension between belief and unbelief (Razif, 2024). The Enlightenment marked a major turning point, fostering a climate of rational inquiry and secularism through figures such as Voltaire, Diderot, and Hume. Atheism often gained momentum in times of challenge to religious authority, while Christianity responded by refining its theological positions and engaging in philosophical defence, reflecting a cyclical relationship of opposition and mutual influence. (Popkin, 1999; Kent, 2022; Gilley, 1981; Allen, 1999)

In classical antiquity, atheism was largely viewed as a criminal rejection of state-sanctioned deities, as illustrated by the cases of Anaxagoras and Socrates in Athens (Sedley, 2015; Whitmarsh, 2015). Although religious critique existed, it rarely evolved into a coherent atheist movement. Scholars typically divide ancient atheism into three periods: classical, Hellenistic, and Christian (Razif, 2024). In the classical period, the Sophists and pre-Socratic philosophers challenged anthropomorphic notions of divinity. The Hellenistic period, despite greater caution, continued this critical tradition, most notably with Epicurus, who articulated the problem of evil (Hume, 2007). During the Christian period, the label of "atheist" shifted targets—from Christians accused by pagans to heretics condemned by the Church, becoming a rhetorical tool in theological polemics. (Bremmer, 2007)

The eventual rise of atheism in the West was fuelled by broader philosophical and cultural shifts. The transition from a teleological to a mechanical worldview weakened traditional metaphysical arguments for God's existence, while divisions within Christianity, particularly the erosion of papal authority, undermined the credibility of religious institutions. These changes reflected a larger transformation in Western thought, where atheism gradually emerged as a serious intellectual position. Rather than a linear decline of faith, the history of atheism reveals a complex and evolving interplay between religious doctrine, philosophical inquiry, and socio-political change. (DeWitt, 2010; Thrower, 2000).

New Atheism

Atheism, while often perceived as a modern phenomenon, has deeper historical roots. It has typically remained marginal, largely due to its failure to gather a critical mass of adherents (Ree, 2017; Eagleton 2014) . Its more recent prominence, particularly in the Western world, is closely tied to the complex historical relationship between Christianity and Western thought. Two major factors contributed to the rise of atheism: the transition from a teleological to a mechanical worldview, marking the decline of Aristotelian metaphysics central to Christian theology; and the diminished authority of revelation, accelerated by internal conflicts among Christian factions (Razif, 2024).

The emergence of “New Atheism” around 2006 initiated a significant public debate that extended beyond the United States to several other countries. The term was widely adopted and translated across multiple languages, including French, Italian, Spanish, German, and Arabic (Zenk, 2015). New Atheism represents a cultural shift that brought religion back into the centre of public discourse. Its proponents launched an aggressive critique of religion, portraying it as irrational and harmful, and gained substantial social and political influence through bestselling books, public debates, and media appearances.

The movement’s most prominent figures, often referred to as the "Four Horsemen"—Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Daniel Dennett—were later joined by Victor Stenger. Although Stenger’s *God: The Failed Hypothesis* (2007) was less commercially successful, it was lauded by Hitchens as a major contribution to the movement. Stenger's later work, *The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason* (2009), systematically analysed the movement and responded to critiques by theologians and scientists such as Alister McGrath, Francis Collins, and others. Through subsequent works like *The Fallacy of Fine Tuning* and *God and the Folly of Faith*, Stenger continued to engage critically with religious arguments (Zenk, 2015).

New Atheism, while declining in momentum since its peak (2007–2009), has nonetheless had a lasting impact by reigniting discussions on the role of religion in contemporary society and offering a platform for secular humanist visions of a religion-free world.

ON DEBATE, ARGUMENTATION IN ISLAM AND *RISALAH AL-ADAB FI 'ILM AL-BAHTH WA AL-MUNAZARAH*

Humans are driven by their social nature to live in societies marked not merely by cooperation but also by conflict, divergence, and disagreement. Disagreement, in its different manifestations, is an unavoidable part of human contact, particularly in areas of belief, politics, and scholarly study. Divergence (*ikhtilāf*) is not considered negative in the Islamic faith. Rather, it has frequently been identified as a catalyst for contemplation, clarification, and knowledge improvement.

The legacy of debate and dialectic in Islamic thought is based on both revelation and reason. The Qur'an has provided patterns of logical participation and debate since the beginning of Islamic intellectual history. Prophet Ibrāhīm's contacts with his people and the tyrant Namrūd serve as a powerful example. In these stories, Ibrāhīm uses rational questioning and moral clarity to oppose idolatry and tyranny. He demonstrates that reasoned reasoning, when anchored in tawḥīd (monotheism), is a viable and potent means of imparting truth. Such Qur'anic experiences established the pattern for a reasoned, dialogical approach to truth-seeking, which would later be codified in the burgeoning Islamic sciences.

During the early centuries of Islam, particularly in the Abbasid period marked by the flourishing translation movement, Muslim theologians and philosophers began to actively engage with the intellectual legacy of Greek thinkers most notably Aristotle and his commentators through Syriac-to-Arabic translations (Gutas, 1998). Early *mutakallimūn* such as al-Balkhī, alongside philosophers like al-Kindī and al-Fārābī, integrated Aristotelian logic especially the syllogism (*qiyās*) into Islamic theology and philosophy. This incorporation not only enriched *kalām* and philosophical sciences (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music, physics, biology, medicine, etc.) but also provided a new impetus for the development of related disciplines, including the principles of jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). As a result, three interrelated fields emerged: *ʿilm al-jadal* (dialectical theology), *ʿilm al-khilāf* (juridical disagreement), and *ʿilm al-munāẓarah* (the science of debate). These disciplines served to sharpen internal theological and legal discourse while also equipping Muslim scholars for rigorous intellectual engagement beyond the Islamic tradition. Crucially, they were grounded in the ethic of *adab* the cultivation of moral conduct in disagreement—underscoring the

Islamic conviction that the pursuit of truth must be guided by both rational clarity and virtuous character.

It was not until the 3rd/9th century that Muslim scholars began to build new disciplines to meet the growing difference of thought in religion, philosophy, and law. These included *ʿilm al-jadal* (the science of dialectic), ʿilm al-khilāf (the science of legal controversy), and ʿilm al-munāẓarah (the science of argument), also known as adab al-baḥth wa al-munāẓarah (the art of discussion and debate). These disciplines, which emerged alongside conventional Islamic sciences, quickly gained recognition as key subjects of intellectual investigation and were studied for centuries across the Muslim world. However, when modern educational reforms gained traction, they were gradually phased out of most school and university curricula. It is therefore encouraging to witness a resurgent interest in these disciplines in recent years, even the scholarly study in the topic is still in its early stages (Belhaj, 2016; Syamsuddin Arif, 2020 & 2025; Asham, 2023).

Within the broader Islamic contemporary intellectual tradition, *Risālah al-Adab fī ʻIlm al-Baḥth wa al-Munāẓarah* by Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʻAbd al-Ḥamīd, a 20th-century Egyptian scholar stands as a concise yet impactful contribution to the study of formal argumentation. The treatise frames debate not as a contest for dominance but as a collaborative search for truth. It outlines the essential elements of rational discourse claim (*daʿwā*), evidence (*dalīl*), and objection (*iʿtirāḍ*) emphasising clarity, relevance, and fairness as the basis of meaningful dialogue.

A defining feature of the treatise is its insistence on the moral discipline that must accompany logical rigour. The author strongly discourages fallacious tactics such as mockery, evasion, or arbitrary assertions, presenting these not only as errors of reasoning but as breaches of ethical conduct. He underscores that a sound argument must be both intellectually coherent and ethically responsible, reinforcing the Islamic principle that moral character is inseparable from the pursuit of knowledge. In this light, the role of a teacher extends beyond technical instruction to nurturing intellectual humility and a sense of responsibility.

By identifying and classifying logical fallacies, the treatise also functions as a tool for cultivating critical thinking and self-restraint. Terms such as *mughālaṭah* (sophistry), *iltafāt* (topic shifting), and *taḥakkum* (baseless assertion) form a lexicon for diagnosing flawed reasoning and maintaining integrity in discussion.

The selection of *Risālah al-Adab fī ʻIlm al-Baḥth wa al-Munāẓarah* as a framework for da'wah to New Atheists is grounded in its dual commitment to rational precision and ethical discipline—two dimensions central to contemporary engagements with atheistic thought. Unlike classical atheism, New Atheism thrives in adversarial, public-facing modes of discourse, characterised by evidentialist critiques, sharp moral accusations, and rhetorical confrontation. The treatise of Muḥyī al-Dīn ʻAbd al-Ḥamīd offers a structured model of argumentation claim, proof, and objection that corresponds closely to the analytical demands of such discourse. Its systematic identification of fallacies, including *mughālaṭah*(sophistry) and *taḥakkum* (baseless assertion), equips Muslim scholars to respond to New Atheist arguments with analytical clarity rather than reactive apologetics.

Equally important, the treatise provides an ethical vocabulary for disagreement rooted in the Islamic tradition. New Atheist rhetoric often portrays religion as intellectually dishonest or morally corrosive; yet *Risālah al-Adab* reframes debate as a moral practice governed by humility, fairness, and intellectual responsibility. By rejecting mockery, evasion, and argumentative manipulation, it aligns closely with the Qur'anic imperative to argue "in the best manner" and positions dakwah as a truth-seeking endeavour rather than a contest for dominance. This moral orientation is essential for engaging an audience that frequently approaches religion with ideological suspicion or scepticism.

Finally, the treatise serves as a bridge between classical Islamic sciences and modern critical thinking. Its logical taxonomy parallels contemporary frameworks in informal logic, allowing Islamic scholars to engage atheistic critiques on shared intellectual ground without abandoning their own epistemic heritage. For these reasons, *Risālah al-Adab* offers not only a historical insight into Islamic argumentation but a living methodology for principled, rigorous, and ethically grounded engagement with New Atheism in the contemporary public sphere.

Though grounded in a specific historical and religious context, the work remains relevant in today's academic, legal, and interfaith arenas. Ultimately, *Risālah al-Adab* is both a preservation of Islamic argumentative heritage and a timeless guide to principled intellectual engagement.

ON THE METHODOLOGY, GENERAL PRINCIPLES, AND RHETORICAL STRATEGIES

It is crucial to start with a precise and methodical analytical framework in order to effectively engage interlocutors who are positioned between scepticism and faith. Based on Muhyi al-Din ‘Abd al-Hamid’s *Risalah al-Adab*, this section describes the fundamental requirements that guarantee intellectual rigour and uphold the human-centered ethos of discourse. By moving beyond simple polemics and following procedural and evaluative standards, the theist can offer their claims as objective propositions within this framework, while the atheist critically examines those statements.

The following is a concise yet cohesive explanation of five connected ideas, each intended to help interlocutors navigate the several phases of structured discussion. These five guidelines provide a methodical and moral way to deal with the doubt-belief dialectic at the heart of New Atheist criticisms. This paradigm encourages sceptics to engage in genuine conversation rather than combative discussion by defining words, creating common objectives, and requiring cogent, evidence-based reasoning. It guides doubt through courteous discourse based on intellectual virtue, treating it as a legitimate step in inquiry rather than as animosity. This approach promotes comprehension, logical clarity, and the potential for belief without force, in contrast to the confrontational attitude of New Atheism.

1. Determining the “Rules of Engagement” and the “Ranging of Conversation”

An established framework that regulates the exchange’s purpose, procedures, and subject boundaries is necessary for meaningful discourse to start. Interlocutors clarify the precise topics to be discussed, whether they be moral, epistemological, or metaphysical, which improves understanding between parties and reduces deviation. This proactive clarity promotes targeted, fruitful conversation and deters the employment of distracting rhetorical devices.

Muhyi al-Din (2009) emphasised that disagreement should be conducted within the bounds of religious obligation and intellectual virtue (*farḍ kifayah*). To preserve the relevance and integrity of such debates, he stipulated that only complete propositional statements (*tamm*

khabarī) are admissible, thereby excluding fragmentary expressions and performative utterances.

Additionally, Muhyi al-Din (2009) addresses procedural closure with ideas like *ifham* (silencing by reasoned refutation) and *ilzam* (required capitulation). These systems stop unending regress and maintain structure. Interpersonal ethics are codified in the last chapter on *Adab al-Mutanazirin* (the etiquette of disputants), which forbids interruption and ridicule and prioritises the truth over victory. This focus promotes mutual respect and psychological safety, which allows for a truly inquisitive spirit that is necessary for meaningful conversation, especially in the context of interfaith or theist-atheist interactions.

2. Terminology and Goals Clarification

Avoiding semantic confusion and misaligned aims requires precise terminology and clear intention. To prevent ambiguity or changing meanings, terms like "faith," "reason," or "doubt" need to be clearly defined and accepted by both parties. Clarifying the purpose of the conversation whether it is to learn, convince, reinforce personal beliefs, or discover shared values also helps participants.

Using criteria like *jami'* (inclusive), *mani'* (exclusive), and clarity of form, it offers a strict typology of definitions: *lafzi* (lexical), *tanbihi* (indicative), *ismi* (nominal), and *haqiqi* (actual). Asking for clarification (*istifsar*) is presented as a legitimate procedural step to guarantee mutual comprehension rather than as an indication of ignorance (Muhyi al-Din, 2009)

This lexicographical accuracy promotes argumentation's mutual intelligibility, and the expression of epistemic goals heightens sincerity. It promotes an environment of trustworthiness and cooperative reasoning by enabling the tracking of discursive progress and guaranteeing that interlocutors stay true to their stated goals.

3. Argumentation Structured Hierarchically

A cogent argument must follow a hierarchical structure, starting with definitions and underlying premises before progressing to complex implications and derivative claims. Interlocutors create a logical framework for the development of more complex concepts by

first addressing fundamental issues like the existence of objective moral ideals or the standards of argumentation.

According to Muhyi al-Din (2009), this concept is methodologically expressed in *Bab al-Taqsim* (on division), *Bab al-Tasdiq* (on consent), and *Bab al-Da'wa* (on claims). By breaking down wholes into parts and universals into particulars (*haqiqi/i'tibari, 'aqli/istiqra'i*), as well as categorising propositions into *badihi* (self-evident) and *nazari* (requiring evidence), the treatise encourages systematic reasoning.

This kind of stratification guarantees that the conversation develops naturally and rationally. Both spectators and interlocutors can follow the argumentation thread from its axioms to its conclusions with clarity and consistency because it avoids misunderstandings between fundamental premises and subordinate inferences.

4. Respect for the Principles of the Speech Act

Language is performative as well as descriptive; it can be used to make demands, make promises, make assertions, issue warnings, or provide information, and every action has moral implications. Sincerity, clarity, and relevance are essential for meaningful discussion, according to Grice's Cooperative Principle and its maxims: quantity, quality, relation, and method (Grice, 1975).

Every discursive action in *Bab al-Mu'aradah* (counterargument), *Bab al-Naqd* (refutation), *Bab al-Farq* (distinction), and *Bab al-Tardid* (forced alternatives) must adhere to ethical responsibility and logical consistency. Deliberate ambiguity, rhetorical manipulation, and misrepresentation are prohibited since they erode not only logic but also the confidence required for intellectual collaboration (Muhyi al-Din, 2009).

By adhering to the speech act's tenets, it creates an atmosphere in which every statement has moral significance. It prevents the conversation from turning into aggressive theatrics and instead encourages epistemic humility and understanding amongst people.

5. Evidential primacy and rhetorical integrity

An argument's strength is determined by the calibre of its supporting data and the soundness of its rhetorical structure. Before turning to illustrative or anecdotal evidence, interlocutors should offer their strongest, most authoritative evidence, such as scientific data, canonical texts, or reasoned philosophical proofs. By doing this, one can appropriately weigh the argument's gravity and demonstrate intellectual seriousness. Muhyi al-Din (2009) places a strong emphasis on *burhan* (demonstration) and *dalil* (evidence). Both parties must agree on premises to support assertions. In *Bab al-Man'* (rebuttal), a claim cannot be disproved by simply voicing disagreement; rather, it must be rejected by contesting the reliability of the supporting evidence.

This strategy guarantees that the search for the truth takes precedence above rhetorical triumph. In order to achieve persuasive power without compromising intellectual rigour, it requires a disciplined application of reasoning whether deductive, inductive, analogical, or exegetical that appeals to common epistemic standards.

The dialectic of doubt and belief is a central concern in engaging with New Atheist thought, which often frames religious conviction as intellectually untenable and morally suspect. *Risālah al-Adab fī ʿIlm al-Baḥth wa al-Munāẓarah* by Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd offers a more principled and ethically attuned methodology for daʿwah. Grounded in classical Islamic epistemology and ethics, the treatise outlines a disciplined framework for disputation that foregrounds sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), justice (*ʿadl*), intellectual rigour, and procedural integrity. It encourages Muslim interlocutors to meet scepticism with structured reasoning, clarity of intention, and a deep respect for the human capacity to seek truth. Rather than treating doubt as a deficiency to be eradicated, the method treats it as a legitimate stage of inquiry deserving careful, respectful engagement. This approach allows daʿwah to move beyond polemics and toward a dialogical model that nurtures mutual understanding and fosters moral and cognitive transformation. Applied in contemporary settings particularly where young Muslims are exposed to secular critiques via digital platforms this framework could recalibrate common *daʿwah* practice by promoting a more patient, dialogical, and ethically grounded approach. It holds the potential to revive the spirit

of Islamic intellectual tradition while addressing the challenges of modern disbelief with both compassion and confidence.

Muḥammad Muḥyi al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd's *Risālah al-Adab* provides a structured and ethical framework for engaging with sceptics, particularly in response to New Atheist critiques. It outlines five key principles clear rules of engagement, precise terminology, hierarchical argumentation, ethical speech, and evidential rigour which transform debate into sincere, reasoned dialogue. By emphasising intellectual clarity, mutual respect, and the primacy of sound evidence, the framework offers a refined approach to daʿwah that moves beyond polemics and equips Muslims to address doubt with integrity and intellectual confidence.

This framework prioritises intellectual humility, ethical discourse, and psychological sensitivity over confrontational or purely apologetic modes of engagement. Rather than approaching dialogue as a contest to be won, it encourages a disposition rooted in sincerity, fairness, and respect for the interlocutor's intellectual and emotional position—particularly important when engaging individuals grappling with doubt. Grounded in the classical tradition of *ʿIlm al-Baḥth wa al-Munāẓarah*, it shifts the aim of discourse from defensive argumentation to mutual understanding and truth-seeking. By emphasising clarity, compassion, and principled reasoning, this method fosters an environment in which belief can emerge not through coercion or rhetorical pressure, but through thoughtful, respectful exchange.

CONCLUSION

This study offers a sophisticated, human-centered da'wah paradigm based on the traditional Islamic discipline of *Adab al-Bahth wa al-Munāẓarah* that helps navigate the difficult terrain between doubt and belief. This framework places a higher priority on intellectual humility, ethical discourse, and psychological sensitivity than it does on confrontational or solely "apologetic approaches". It is a method that emphasises the defence and logical justification of Islamic beliefs through organised argumentation, evidential reasoning, and polemical interaction. By using philosophical proofs, scientific arguments, and logical rebuttals from *kalām*, natural theology, or modern philosophy of religion, these approaches usually concentrate on disproving atheist objections to the presence of God, revelation, and religious

morality. While apologetic approaches seeks to refute scepticism and establish the intellectual legitimacy of Islām, it frequently takes an adversarial stance that frames interaction as a debate to be won rather than a relational or educational process, occasionally ignoring the existential, psychological, and ethical aspects of doubt that atheists encounter.

The concept presented in this study, which is based on the methodological insights of Muḥammad Muhyi al-Din ‘Abd al-Ḥamid’s *Risalah al-Adab*, puts argumentation back where it belongs: as a cooperative search for truth rather than a winning battle. Reviving the adabic tradition of principled conversation gives Muslim preachers the ability to interact with atheists in a way that is clear, polite, and rigorously thought out. This method turns da'wah into a meaningful interaction that creates room for reflection and spiritual rejuvenation while also upholding the dignity of the interlocutor and being consistent with Islam’s larger ethical framework. Such a methodical, ethically based approach is not only pertinent, but also necessary in a time of ideological polarisation and online echo chambers.

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