

From Orthodoxy to Radical Critique: An Epistemological Reading of Abdullah Al-Qasimi's Religious Reason in Islamic Theology

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the transformation of Abdullah al-Qasimi's religious reason by comparing the epistemic structures of his early, transitional, and late writings and identifying the continuities and changes underlying his intellectual trajectory. While previous studies have largely interpreted his shift from defending Salafi-Wahhabi orthodoxy to criticizing religion, tradition, Arab society, and reason as a biographical or ideological rupture, this study approaches it as a transformation of religious reason. Employing qualitative library research, intellectual history, and philosophical-theological analysis, the study comparatively examines representative primary texts through nine analytical categories: the source of truth, epistemic authority, the function of reason, the status of revelation, the

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conception of tawhid, the object of critique, modes of argumentation, the treatment of doubt and certainty, and the relationship between reason and transcendence. Al-Ghazali provides the diagnostic framework, while Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's Islamic Worldview serves as the evaluative horizon. The findings reveal a three-stage transformation. In the early phase, reason operates within firm doctrinal boundaries established by revelation and tawhid. In the transitional phase, inherited and mediated forms of authority become objects of critical scrutiny. In the late phase, this critical orientation extends to language, collective belief, religious representation, and reason itself. Despite these changes, an oppositional organization of truth and error persists across the three phases. This pattern is conceptualized as dichotomous reversal, in which the direction and objects of negation change without overcoming the underlying binary epistemic structure. The study therefore proposes epistemic integration as a reconstructive model that brings 'aql, naql, ethical-spiritual formation, and tawhidic orientation into a mutually reinforcing relationship while preserving the critical function of reason.

Keywords: *Abdullah al-Qasimi, Religious Reason, Islamic Epistemology, Dichotomous Reversal, Islamic Worldview.*

Introduction

Abdullah al-Qasimi represents a distinctive case in modern Arab-Islamic intellectual history, when his intellectual trajectory evolved from an early commitment to Salafi-Wahhabi doctrinal purification toward a radical critique of inherited religious authority, religion, language, Arab historical consciousness, and the processes through which truth claims are established. Yusuf bin 'Adi characterizes this development as a transition from ideological defense to a mode of thinking marked by a “demolishing hammer,” underscoring the scale of the change in al-Qasimi’s intellectual project.¹ Rather than treating this development solely as an ideological rupture, however, it raises an epistemological question: how does religious reason change when sources of certainty, forms of authority, and objects of critique themselves become

¹ Yusuf Bin Adī, “‘Abdullah Al-Qasimi: Min al-Mudāfa'ah al-Idiyūlūjiyyah Ilā al-Taḥkīr Bi-l-Mi'wāl al-Haddām,” in *Al-Falsafah al-'Arabīyyah al-Mu'āṣirah: Taḥawwulāt al-Khiṭāb Min al-Jumūd al-Tārikhī Ilā Ma'ziq al-Thaqāfah Wa al-Idiyūlūjiyyā*, ed. Ismail Mahnanah (Dār al-Amān, 2014), 663–64.

transformed? This question belongs to the wider reconfiguration of religion, reason, authority, and modernity in the Arab world from the late nineteenth century onward.²

The early phase of al-Qasimi's corpus is characterized by a strong commitment to the purification of *tawhid*, the rejection of *shirk* and *bid'ah*, and the defense of religious norms associated with the Salafi-Wahhabi reform project. This orientation corresponds to a broader theological emphasis on divine unity and scriptural normativity.³ His *al-Burūq al-Najdiyyah fī Iktisāḥ al-Zulumāt al-Dajwīyyah*, *al-Faṣl al-Ḥāsim bayn al-Wahhābiyyīn wa Mukhālīfihim*, and *al-Ṣirā' bayn al-Islām wa al-Wathaniyyah* exemplify a strongly polemical mode of religious reasoning in which revelation and established doctrinal principles provide the boundaries for legitimate belief while reason clarifies and defends those boundaries.⁴ The transitional and late writings alter this configuration. *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl* redirects critique toward social and interpretive structures shaping human agency, knowledge, and civilizational capacity, whereas *al-'Arab Zāhirah Ṣawṭiyyah*, *Ayyubā al-'Aql Man Ra'āk*, and *Yakdẓibūn Kay Yaraw al-Ilāh Jamīlan* extend criticism to language, collective conformity, religious representation, historical consciousness, and reason itself.⁵

² Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 3–25.

³ David Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia* (I.B. Tauris, 2006), 11–36; Natana J. DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 7–32.

⁴ Abdullah Al-Qasimi, *Al-Burūq al-Najdiyyah Fī Iktisāḥ al-Zulumāt al-Dajwīyyah*, vol. 1 (Maṭba'at al-Manār, 1931); Abdullah Al-Qasimi, *Al-Faṣl al-Ḥāsim Bayn al-Wahhābiyyīn Wa Mukhālīfihim* (Maṭba'at al-Taḍāmūn al-Akhawī, 1934); Abdullah Al-Qasimi, *Al-Ṣirā' Bayn al-Islām Wa al-Wathaniyyah*, vol. 1 (al-Maṭba'ah al-Salafiyyah, 1937).

⁵ Abdullah Al-Qasimi, *Hādẓī Hiya Al-Aghlāl* (Maṭba'at Miṣr Sharikat Musāhamah Miṣriyyah, 1946); Abdullah Al-Qasimi, *Al-'Arab Zāhirah Ṣawṭiyyah* (Maṭābi' Montmartre, 1977); Abdullah Al-Qasimi, *Ayyubā Al-'Aql Man Ra'āk*, 2nd ed. (Dār al-Ghad, 1967); Abdullah Al-Qasimi, *Yakdẓibūn Kay Yaraw Al-Ilāh Jamīlan*, 2nd ed. (Dār al-Kātib al-'Arabī, 2001).

Scholarship on al-Qasimi has developed primarily along several related lines. Wasella reconstructs his movement from fundamentalist commitment toward unbelief and treats *Hādẓī Hija al-Aghlāl* as an important turning point. Bin 'Adi emphasizes the movement from ideological defense toward demolition. More recent studies continue this emphasis from different perspectives: Arahal interprets al-Qasimi's trajectory as a transition from Wahhabism to radical atheism. Yahya and Mahmudah situate his writings within a wider discussion of atheism and religious policy in Saudi Arabia. Elsässer places contemporary *ilhād* within socially situated patterns of doubt and unbelief in Arab Muslim settings.⁶ These studies substantially clarify the historical, biographical, ideological, and sociological dimensions of al-Qasimi's transformation.

Their explanatory focus, however, remains primarily on the positions from which al-Qasimi moved and the positions toward which he moved. Consequently, less attention has been given to the epistemic structures operating within and across those positions. Existing accounts explain the transition from doctrinal defense to religious criticism, but they do not systematically compare how the source of truth, epistemic authority, function of reason, position of revelation, conception of *tawhid*, objects and modes of critique, treatment of doubt and certainty, and relation between reason and transcendence are reorganized across his writings. Contemporary discussions of Islamic epistemology have meanwhile renewed attention to religious authority, reason and revelation, metaphysics, and the integrative role of worldview.⁷

⁶ Jürgen Wasella, *Min Uṣūlī Ilā Mulhid: Qiṣṣat Inṣhiqāq 'Abd Allāh al-Qasīmī* (Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyah, 2001), 23–46, 55–80.; Bin 'Adi, "Abdullah Al-Qasimi: Min al-Mudāfa'ah al-Īdiyūlijīyah Ilā al-Taḥkīr Bi-l-Mi'wal al-Haddām," 48–52; Yuangga Kurnia Yahya and Umi Mahmudah, "State Religious Policies and the Emergence of Atheism in Saudi Arabia, 2000–2022," *Center of Middle Eastern Studies (CMES)* 19, no. 1 (2026): 1–14, <https://doi.org/10.20961/cmcs.19.1.115151>; Sebastian Elsässer, "A Wave of Unbelief? Conservative Muslims and the Challenge of Ilhād in the Post-2013 Arab World," *Religions* 16, no. 6 (2025): 670, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16060670>.

⁷ Mohammed Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*

The research gap therefore lies not in the absence of studies documenting al-Qasimi's ideological transformation, but in the absence of a systematic account of how his religious reason itself was reconfigured and which epistemic structures, if any, persisted beneath that transformation.

Addressing this gap is important because ideological rupture and epistemic rupture are not necessarily identical. A thinker may abandon earlier doctrinal conclusions while retaining deeper argumentative habits through which truth and error, authority and deviation, or certainty and doubt are organized. The present study therefore asks two related questions: (1) how do the principal elements of religious reason change across al-Qasimi's orthodox-apologetic, transitional, and radical-critical phases, and (2) what epistemic structures remain continuous across those changes? The article argues that al-Qasimi's trajectory is better described as a *dichotomous reversal* than as a complete epistemological leap. The concept identifies a transformation in which the direction and objects of criticism change substantially while an oppositional organization of truth and error remains comparatively persistent. It further distinguishes *epistemic transformation* from *epistemic reconstruction*.

Methodologically, the study employs qualitative library research combined with intellectual-historical and philosophical-theological analysis. The primary corpus is purposively organized into three analytical phases: the orthodox-apologetic phase draws principally on *al-Burūq al-Najdiyyah*, *al-Faṣl al-Ḥāsim*, and *al-Ṣirā' bayn al-Islām wa al-Wathaniyyah*, while the transitional phase centers on *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl*. The radical-critical phase draws on *al-'Arab*

(Westview Press, 1994), 17–31; Adi Abdullah Muslim et al., “Religious Authority in Islam: Between Classical Fiqh and Hadīth Traditions in Contemporary Epistemological Discourse,” *Tasfīyah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 10, no. 1 (2026): 211–251, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tasfīyah.v10i1.32>; Hammis Syafaq et al., “Reconstructing Islamic Epistemology: Bridging Metaphysics, Reason, and Revelation,” *Teosofi: Jurnal Tasawuf Dan Pemikiran Islam* 14, no. 2 (2024): 240–269, <https://doi.org/10.15642/teosofi.2024.14.2.240-269>.

Zābirah Ṣawtiyyah, *Ayyubā al-'Aql Man Ra'āk*, and *Yakdẓibūn Kay Yaram al-Ilāh Jamīlan*. Selection follows publication chronology, the visibility of changes in epistemic orientation, and the presence of sustained arguments concerning truth, authority, reason, revelation, religion, and knowledge. The three phases function as analytical categories rather than rigid historical compartments. Intellectual history contextualizes the arguments while close reading keeps the analysis tied to their textual organization.⁸

The analysis proceeds through a structured cross-textual matrix comprising nine categories: source of truth, epistemic authority, function of reason, position of revelation, conception of *tawhid*, object of critique, mode of argumentation, treatment of doubt and certainty, and the relation between reason and transcendence. Each phase is first reconstructed on its own textual terms before cross-phase comparison is undertaken. Coding organizes recurrent propositions and argumentative patterns rather than measuring frequency.⁹ Al-Ghazali's discussions of 'aql, doubt, certainty, and the knowing subject are then used diagnostically, especially through *al-Munqidẓ min al-Dalāl* and *Miẓān al-'Amal*, while Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas's account of the worldview of Islam provides an evaluative and reconstructive horizon. These frameworks are assigned distinct tasks and are applied only after textual reconstruction.¹⁰ Interpretive credibility is strengthened through cross-text comparison, historical contextualization, differentiation between al-Qasimi's explicit statements and the

⁸ Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics*, Regarding Method (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1:57–89; Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Cornell University Press, 1983).

⁹ Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, 4th ed. (SAGE, 2021); Matthew B. Miles et al., *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 4th ed. (SAGE, 2020).

¹⁰ Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqidẓ Min al-Dalāl*, 7th ed. (Dār al-Andalus, 1967), 64–68; Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Miẓān Al-'Amal* (Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1964), 193–198; Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1995), 2–5, 118–121.

article's theoretical interpretations, and restraint regarding claims about personal motives or spiritual states.¹¹

Abdullah Al-Qasimi in The Context of Modern Islamic Thought

Al-Qasimi's writings belong to a modern Arab-Islamic debate shaped by inherited religious authority, reform, colonial modernity, nationalism, and competing programs of civilizational renewal. Modern Arab thought developed through rival attempts to redefine religion, reason, political authority, progress, and collective identity.¹² Al-Qasimi's corpus condenses several of these tensions within a single intellectual career, making it particularly useful for examining not only changes of position but also changes in the organization of knowledge.

In the early writings, al-Qasimi appears as an apologetic defender of Salafi-Wahhabi orthodoxy. The principal tasks are doctrinal purification, defense of *tawhid*, and refutation of practices or claims identified as *shirk*, *bid'ah*, or theological deviation.¹³ The transitional *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl* redirects criticism toward the social and interpretive mechanisms through which inherited religious ideas shape agency and knowledge. The later writings extend the field of critique toward language, conformity, historical self-understanding, religious representation, and reason itself.¹⁴

Therefore, a linear narrative of tradition versus modernity, or faith versus unbelief, misses the central analytical problem. Such labels register biographical and theological difference but do not explain changes in the epistemic structure through which

¹¹ Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (SAGE, 1985); Sarah J. Tracy, "Qualitative Quality: Eight 'Big-Tent' Criteria for Excellent Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 16, no. 10 (2010): 837–851, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800410383121>.

¹² Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939*, 3–25.

¹³ Al-Qasimi, *Al-Burūq al-Najdiyyah Fī Iktisāb al-Zulumāt al-Dajniyyah*, vol. 1.

¹⁴ Al-Qasimi, *Yakdẓībūn Kay Yaraw Al-Ilāh Jamīlan*.

claims gain authority. Bin 'Adi's image of a shift from ideological defense to a "demolishing hammer", together with Wasella's historical reconstruction, captures the magnitude of change. The epistemological question concerns how truth, authority, doubt, and criticism are reorganized across the three phases.¹⁵ Arkoun's attention to the historical production of meaning and authority helps clarify why these mechanisms deserve analysis in their own right.¹⁶

The Orthodox-Apologetic Phase: Reason of Purification and The Limits of Epistemic Integration

Al-Qasimi's early writings exhibit a religious reason structured primarily by doctrinal demarcation. In *al-Burūq al-Najdiyyah*, *al-Faṣl al-Hāsim*, and especially *al-Ṣirā' bayn al-Islām wa al-Wathaniyyah*, religious claims are evaluated within a theological horizon defined by the purification of *tanbīd*, the normative authority of revelation, and the rejection of practices classified as *shirk*, *bid'ah*, or doctrinal deviation. This pattern corresponds to the broader Salafi-Wahhabi emphasis on divine unity and scriptural normativity.¹⁷ In al-Qasimi, however, *tanbīd* also functions epistemically: it supplies a criterion through which competing religious claims are classified and judged. In his discussion of the imamate, intercession, and saintly mediation, he distinguishes legitimate human agency from claims that, in his view, assign divine prerogatives to created beings.¹⁸ Truth is consequently organized through relatively stable oppositions such as *tanbīd/shirk*, *Sunnah/bid'ah*, and authentic religion/deviation.

This structure should not be interpreted as the absence of rational argument. Al-Qasimi's discussions of *ta'wīl*, *ru'yah*, divine

¹⁵ Bin Adi, "Abdullah Al-Qasimi: Min al-Mudāfa'ah al-Īdiyūlūjiyyah Ilā al-Taḥkīr Bi-l-Mi'wal al-Haddām," 663–64; Wasella, *Min Uṣūlī Ilā Mulḥid: Qiṣṣat Inṣbiqāq 'Abd Allāh al-Qasīmī*, 23–46, 55–80.

¹⁶ Arkoun, *Rethinking Islam: Common Questions, Uncommon Answers*, 17–31.

¹⁷ Commins, *The Wahhabi Mission and Saudi Arabia*, 11–36; DeLong-Bas, *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*, 7–32.

¹⁸ Al-Qasimi, *Al-Ṣirā' Bayn al-Islām Wa al-Wathaniyyah*, 1:4–6, 102–103.

attributes, and the relation between rational judgment and revealed norms demonstrate sustained argumentative reasoning.¹⁹ The epistemological issue is therefore not whether 'aql is present, but how it functions and within what horizon it operates. In the early writings, reason primarily clarifies, defends, and extends conclusions whose fundamental theological coordinates have already been secured by revelation and purified doctrine. Reason is active, but predominantly justificatory and demarcative.

This configuration can be described as *boundary-based certainty*. Certainty is maintained by the relative stability of the authority structure from which judgments are made: revelation provides the normative horizon, *tawhid* supplies a principal criterion of doctrinal intelligibility, and rational argument works within these coordinates. The limitation of this configuration becomes visible when the authority that establishes those criteria itself becomes an object of questioning. A structure effective in distinguishing authorized truth from perceived deviation does not necessarily contain an equally explicit account of how certainty should be reconstructed once inherited interpretation and mediation are destabilized.

Al-Ghazali's epistemological writings provide a diagnostic point of comparison. In *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, the search for 'ilm *yaqīnī* proceeds through the testing of inherited belief, sense perception, and rational necessities. Doubt is not presented as an end in itself but as part of a search for warranted certainty. Al-Ghazali's account of the restoration of confidence in rational necessities through a divine *nūr* also places discursive reasoning within a broader epistemic horizon.²⁰ *Mīzān al-'Amal* further links knowledge to action and explicitly discusses the purification and ordering of the faculties of the soul. *Mishkāt al-Anwār* provides complementary reflections on light, perception, and the limits of reason.²¹ When

¹⁹ Al-Qasimi, *Al-Ṣirā' Bayn al-Islām Wa al-Wathāniyyah*, 1:74, 91, 93.

²⁰ Al-Qasimi, *Al-Ṣirā' Bayn al-Islām Wa al-Wathāniyyah*, 1:1, 74, 91, 93.

²¹ Al-Ghazali, *Mīzān Al-'Amal*, 193–198; Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, *Mishkāt Al-Anwār* (al-Dār al-Qawmīyah lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-l-Nashr, 1964), 45–50.

read comparatively, these texts permit the present study to identify several interrelated dimensions relevant to epistemic inquiry: rational examination, revealed guidance, doubt and certainty, and the ethical-spiritual formation of the knowing subject. The article uses these dimensions as diagnostic categories. It does not claim that al-Ghazali himself formulates them as one schematic model.

Applied to early al-Qasimi, the Ghazalian comparison reveals a specific limit of epistemic integration. Al-Qasimi does not exclude reason, nor can the early phase accurately be described as irrational traditionalism. Rather, the selected texts develop the defense of doctrinal boundaries more extensively than the reconstruction of certainty after epistemic disturbance. This is a structural observation about the textual configuration, not a judgment concerning al-Qasimi's personal spirituality.

Al-Attas's account of the worldview of Islam provides a different but complementary point of comparison. He defines the Islamic worldview not as a view limited to the empirical world or human social experience but as *ru'yat al-Islām li al-wujūd*, a vision of reality and truth encompassing existence in its totality. Its fundamental elements include God, Revelation, creation, the human person and soul, knowledge, religion, freedom, values and virtues, and happiness. Al-Attas describes these elements as integrating principles within a coherent order of meaning and value. He also affirms multiple channels of knowledge, including sound senses, true report based on authority, sound reason, and intuition.²² Viewed through this framework, the question is not whether *tawhid* is clearly present in al-Qasimi's early writings,

²² Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, 2–5, 118–121; Abdullah Haq Al Haidary et al., “Islamic Worldview as a Basis for Islamization of Science Concept According to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas,” *KALAM* 18, no. 1 (2024): 19–36, <https://doi.org/10.24042/002024181145700>; Elit Ave Hidayatullah and Syamsuddin Arif, “Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas’ Exposition on the Concept of Ethics,” *Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 24, no. 1 (2022): 409–446, 431, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol24no1.12>.

but how broadly its epistemic implications are articulated. In the selected polemical texts, *tawhid* functions most visibly as a criterion of doctrinal demarcation. The wider ordering of reality, knowledge, the human person, value, and ultimate purpose is less explicitly developed as an epistemological architecture. This is a contrast in textual emphasis, not evidence that al-Qasimi lacked the broader Islamic worldview.

The early phase is therefore crucial for understanding the later transformation without making that transformation inevitable. The orthodox-apologetic configuration provides strong resources for doctrinal defense but less explicit resources for reconstructing epistemic authority once inherited mediation becomes questionable. This structural vulnerability becomes visible only when the status of authority changes, preparing the transition represented by *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl*.

The Transitional Phase: *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl* and the Destabilization of Epistemic Authority

Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl marks a significant reorientation in al-Qasimi's religious reasoning, but the transition requires careful qualification. The text should not be read simply as the point at which an earlier religious commitment is replaced by an already formed secular or atheistic epistemology. Its significance lies in a change in the location of epistemic scrutiny. In the apologetic writings, established doctrinal criteria provide the standpoint from which error is identified. In *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl*, inherited interpretations, social conventions, and mediated forms of religious authority increasingly become themselves objects of examination.

The shift is visible in al-Qasimi's discussion of human capacity, causal order, knowledge, responsibility, and the intellectual conditions he associates with Muslim decline. The "shackles" (*aghlāl*) designate interconnected doctrinal, intellectual, and

social constraints that restrict agency and inquiry.²³ Religious vocabulary has not disappeared, nor does the text yet articulate a systematic rejection of revelation. What changes is the immunity previously accorded to inherited and mediated certainty. Reason increasingly assumes an interrogative function: it asks how received interpretations acquire authority, whether inherited religious representations restrict human agency, and whether prevailing religious ideas adequately account for causality, responsibility, and intellectual development.

For this reason, the transition is better described as *epistemic destabilization* rather than as the straightforward substitution of autonomous reason for revelation. Wasella's historical reconstruction treats *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl* as a decisive stage in al-Qasimi's movement away from his earlier apologetic orientation.²⁴ An epistemological reading adds that the criteria by which error had previously been identified are themselves becoming contestable. The earlier relation among revelation, doctrine, and reason is unsettled before an alternative epistemic architecture has been fully articulated.

Al-Ghazali's *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* offers an illuminating comparison, provided that it is not converted into a claim of historical influence or psychological equivalence. Al-Ghazali describes his departure from *taqlid* as a search for the conditions of certain knowledge and tests the reliability of inherited belief, sense perception, and rational necessities. His account ultimately situates doubt within a movement toward certainty, and his description of a divine light restoring confidence in rational necessities shows that certainty is not reduced to discursive demonstration alone.²⁵ Recent scholarship likewise cautions against reducing al-Ghazali's doubt to a merely methodological procedure and emphasizes the

²³ Al-Qasimi, *Hādẓī Hiya Al-Aghlāl*, 41–47.

²⁴ Wasella, *Min Usjūlī Ilā Mulh}id: Qis}s}at Inshiqāq 'Abd Allāh al-Qasīmī*, 55–80.

²⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqidh Min al-Dalāl*, 64–68.

distinctive role of divine intuition in his account.²⁶

This Ghazalian account should be applied to al-Qasimi with restraint. The textual evidence does not permit the conclusion that al-Qasimi's transition occurred because he personally lacked *tazkiyah* or divine illumination. Such a claim would move from textual analysis to an unverifiable judgment about spiritual condition. What the comparison permits is a narrower epistemological observation: whereas al-Ghazali narrates doubt within a movement toward the reconstruction of certainty, *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl* increasingly renders inherited and mediated authority questionable without yet articulating an equally explicit procedure by which the newly destabilized structure of authority is reconstructed.

Seen from the perspective of al-Attas's account of the worldview of Islam, the same transition raises a distinct question. The issue is not whether *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl* is simply "religious" or "secular," but whether the emerging critical function of reason remains articulated within an equally explicit account of the relations among reality, truth, Revelation, the knowing subject, and human purpose. At the transitional stage, these relations become less settled while no alternative ordering of them is yet fully visible.

The transitional phase therefore has a double character. It represents an expansion of critical rationality and simultaneously a weakening of the earlier mechanism through which certainty had been secured. These developments should not be collapsed into a causal narrative in which the first necessarily produces the second. Rather, they identify a textual configuration in which reason acquires greater critical autonomy while the relation among reason, revelation, authority, and transcendence becomes increasingly unsettled. This explains why *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl* deserves treatment as a distinct analytical phase.

²⁶ Taşkın, "Skepticism in Al-Ghazālī and Descartes: A Reply to Sami M. Najm," 583–597; Nabil Yasien Mohamed, *Ghazālī's Epistemology: A Critical Study of Doubt and Certainty* (Routledge, 2024).

The Radical-Critical Phase: From Critique of Authority to Reflexive Critique of Reason

Al-Qasimi's later writings mark a further expansion of the critical movement visible in *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl*. The decisive change is not simply that the range of criticized objects becomes wider, but that the mechanisms through which truth-claims acquire authority increasingly become objects of suspicion. Language, collective conformity, inherited belief, religious representation, historical consciousness, and eventually reason itself are subjected to critical examination. The radical-critical phase is therefore better understood as deconstructive and reflexive critical reason than as the straightforward replacement of revelation by autonomous rationalism.

The development appears clearly in *al-'Arab Zābirah Ṣawtiyyah*. Al-Qasimi describes language as “barriers and boundaries” that human beings impose upon themselves.²⁷ The epistemological significance of this claim extends beyond criticism of linguistic convention: language becomes one of the structures through which inherited categories, collective memory, cultural self-representation, and claims to truth are stabilized. Critique therefore moves from evaluating individual propositions to interrogating some of the conditions that make propositions appear self-evident or authoritative.

Yakdżibūn Kay Yaraw al-Ilāh Jamīlan extends this critical orientation toward collective belief and religious representation. Al-Qasimi associates behavioral conformity with intellectual, doctrinal, and sectarian conformity, suggesting that individuals often come to think and believe in forms demanded by their communities.²⁸ He also separates communal agreement in religion, deity, doctrine, teaching, or inherited tradition from the establishment of

²⁷ Al-Qasimi, *Al-'Arab Zābirah Ṣawtiyyah*, 24.

²⁸ Al-Qasimi, *Yakdżibūn Kay Yaraw al-Ilāh Jamīlan*, 127.

intellectual truth.²⁹ Collective agreement consequently ceases to function as a transparent epistemic guarantee and instead becomes a phenomenon requiring explanation.

The same work directs criticism toward human representations of transcendence. Al-Qasimi questions images of God shaped by human weakness, expectation, and need.³⁰ This passage does not by itself establish a systematic philosophical denial of transcendence. What it clearly shows is that human representations of God and the social-psychological processes through which such representations are formed have entered the field of critique.

The reflexive dimension becomes most explicit in *Ayyuhā al-'Aql Man Ra'āk*. Al-Qasimi portrays thinking as an activity capable of turning ideas into “weapons” directed toward things and other human beings and confronts reason with its own contradictions, absurdities, and defeats.³¹ Reason is therefore no longer simply the emancipatory faculty that exposes inherited error. It becomes an object of its own critique. The radical-critical phase cannot adequately be characterized as simple rationalism because the authority of reason itself is problematized.

This reflexivity transforms the structure of doubt and certainty, where in the orthodox-apologetic phase, certainty is maintained within stable doctrinal boundaries. While, in the transitional phase, mediated authority and inherited interpretations become contestable. In the radical-critical writings, suspicion extends to several mechanisms through which certainty is socially and intellectually produced: language, communal agreement, inherited representation, religious authority, and reason. The resulting configuration is best described as *generalized epistemic suspicion*. The term is intentionally narrower than “total skepticism”: the texts question multiple guarantees of truth, but the evidence

²⁹ Al-Qasimi, *Yakdžibūn Kay Yaraw Al-Ilāh Jamīlan*, 129.

³⁰ Al-Qasimi, *Yakdžibūn Kay Yaraw Al-Ilāh Jamīlan*, 14.

³¹ Al-Qasimi, *Ayyuhā Al-'Aql Man Ra'āk*, 5, 18.

does not demonstrate that al-Qasimi systematically denies the possibility of knowledge as such.

Al-Ghazali's *al-Munqidh* sharpens this distinction. His doubt reaches inherited belief, sense perception, and rational necessities, yet the narrative does not terminate in the universalization of suspicion. It remains ordered toward certain knowledge.³² From this perspective, the late al-Qasimi texts display a strong capacity for negative epistemic work: they expose dependence on communal authority, interrogate inherited representation, reveal the formative power of language, and subject reason to reflexive criticism. What remains less explicitly articulated is a corresponding positive account of how certainty is reconstructed once these sources of authorization become contestable.

The role of 'aql, revelation, and ethical-spiritual formation in this comparison requires conceptual precision. The present article does not claim that al-Ghazali formulates these dimensions as a single schematic formula, nor does it use them as biographical criteria for judging al-Qasimi. Rather, the Ghazalian texts provide distinct points of comparison for rational examination, revealed guidance, the movement between doubt and certainty, and the condition of the knowing subject.³³ Reflexivity is epistemically significant because it prevents the later al-Qasimi from being reduced to naïve confidence in the autonomous reason. Yet, self-critique alone does not establish a criterion of truth beyond critique.

Al-Attas's account of the worldview of Islam illuminates the issue at a different level. The relevant question is not whether al-Qasimi's late writings remain inside or outside an externally imposed theological category, but whether their critical reorganization of

³² Al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqidh Min al-Djālāl*, 64–68; Taşkın, “Skepticism in Al-Ghazālī and Descartes: A Reply to Sami M. Najm,” 583–97.

³³ Al-Ghazali, *Mizān Al-'Amal*, 193–98; Ahmad Farid Fanani et al., “Tazkiyah Al-Nafs in Al-Ghazali's Thought: A Sufi Framework for Enhancing Mental Resilience among Generation-Z,” *Tasfiyah: Jurnal Pemikiran Islam* 10, no. 1 (2026): 77–116, <https://doi.org/10.21111/tasfiyah.v10i1.4>.

authority is accompanied by an equally articulated reordering of the fundamental relations among God, Revelation, reality, truth, knowledge, the human person, value, and ultimate purpose.³⁴ Read in this way, the later al-Qasimi does not simply “lose” *tawhid* in a manner that can be inferred from isolated passages. What can be said more cautiously is that the late works no longer employ *tawhid* as the visibly organizing epistemic criterion that characterized the early corpus, while they do not present an equally explicit alternative framework integrating reality, truth, knowledge, human purpose, ethics, and transcendence.

The radical-critical phase consequently combines genuine epistemic achievement with an unresolved reconstructive problem. Its achievement lies in widening critique beyond doctrinal disagreement to the processes through which authority, language, conformity, representation, and reason acquire legitimacy. Its unresolved problem lies in the absence, within the selected late writings, of an equally explicit architecture for reconstructing certainty after these guarantees have been subjected to criticism. The deeper continuity with the early phase can now be stated more precisely: the content and direction of negation change radically, but an oppositional mode of organizing truth and error remains discernible.

Islamic Epistemological Reconstruction: From Critique toward an Ordered Relation of Knowledge

The central epistemological issue in al-Qasimi's trajectory cannot be reduced to a simple opposition between faith and reason. Rational argument is already active in the orthodox-apologetic phase. It becomes increasingly interrogative in the transitional phase and deconstructive as well as reflexive in the radical-critical writings. The reconstructive question is therefore not whether

³⁴ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, 2–5, 118–21.

critique should be suspended, but how critique may be situated within an epistemic order capable of accounting positively for truth and certainty after inherited authority has itself become an object of examination.

Al-Ghazali provides one diagnostic resource for this question. *Al-Munqidh* presents doubt within a search for certain knowledge rather than as an end in itself, while *Mizān al-'Amal* relates knowledge to action and to the ordering of the faculties of the self.³⁵ The present article uses these dimensions diagnostically. It does not claim that al-Ghazali formulates them as one unified schematic epistemology. When brought back to al-Qasimi, the comparison highlights a difference in the epistemic destination of critique: the selected late writings elaborate the work of criticism more fully than the positive reconstruction of certainty after criticism.

Al-Attas provides a complementary reconstructive horizon at another level of analysis. His account of the worldview of Islam concerns an ordered vision of reality and truth rather than an isolated theory of one faculty of knowing. In *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam*, the worldview of Islam is presented as *ru'yat al-Islām li al-wujūd* and its fundamental elements function as integrating principles within a coherent order of meaning. Knowledge is likewise discussed through multiple channels, including sound senses, true report based on authority, sound reason, and intuition.³⁶ The analytical relevance to al-Qasimi should therefore be stated cautiously: the question is not whether *tawhid* is present or absent, but how extensively the relations among God, Revelation, knowledge, the human subject, reality, value, and ultimate purpose are epistemically articulated in each phase.

This comparison allows an important distinction between critique and reconstruction. Critique tests authority, exposes

³⁵ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqidh Min al-Ḍalāl*, 64–68; Al-Ghazali, *Mizān Al-'Amal*, 193–98.

³⁶ Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, 2–5, 118–121.

contradiction, interrogates inherited assumptions, and reveals the processes through which claims acquire legitimacy. Reconstruction addresses a different question: once such claims have been subjected to criticism, within what account of reality, truth, knowledge, human purpose, and normativity can warranted judgment again be situated? Contemporary scholarship on Islamic epistemology similarly emphasizes the need to relate metaphysics, reason, revelation, ethics, and worldview rather than treating them as isolated domains.³⁷

The concept of *epistemic integration* proposed in this article should be understood in this specific sense. It is an analytical-reconstructive formulation developed from the cross-phase findings. It is not presented as a technical term coined by either al-Ghazali or al-Attas. Epistemic integration refers here to an ordered relation in which rational inquiry retains its critical and reflexive functions, revelation is not reduced to defensive citation, the ethical-spiritual formation of the knower remains epistemically relevant, and questions of truth are related to a coherent account of reality and human purpose.

Such a reconstruction should not be understood as a return to closed apologetics. The later al-Qasimi identifies serious epistemological problems: communal agreement does not by itself establish truth. Inherited authority may require examination. Language and representation shape the apparent plausibility of claims. Reason itself must remain capable of reflexive criticism. The issue is whether criticism can be preserved without allowing critique itself to become the only remaining epistemic operation. Epistemic integration therefore names the article's reconstructive response to limitations visible at both ends of the trajectory:

³⁷ Al Haidary et al., "Islamic Worldview as a Basis for Islamization of Science Concept According to Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas," 19–36; Hidayatullah and Arif, "Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas' Exposition on the Concept of Ethics," 409–46; Syafaq et al., "Reconstructing Islamic Epistemology: Bridging Metaphysics, Reason, and Revelation," 240–69.

boundary-based certainty can restrict reflexive criticism, whereas unrestricted negation can leave the grounds of reconstructed certainty insufficiently articulated.

Cross-Phase Synthesis: Epistemic Transformation and Dichotomous Reversal

The cross-phase comparison demonstrates that al-Qasimi's intellectual trajectory cannot be adequately represented by a single linear opposition such as orthodoxy versus rationalism, faith versus unbelief, or tradition versus modernity. The nine analytical categories reveal a differentiated pattern. Several components of religious reason undergo substantial transformation, but they do not change simultaneously or to the same degree. At the same time, a deeper continuity remains visible in the oppositional manner through which competing claims to truth and error are organized. Al-Qasimi's trajectory therefore combines epistemic transformation at the level of authority, critique, and the function of reason with structural persistence at the level of argumentative organization.

The first finding concerns the uneven temporality of epistemic change. The object and mode of critique change earlier and more visibly than the status of revelation, *tawhid*, and transcendence. In the orthodox-apologetic phase, doctrinal authority provides relatively stable criteria from which error is identified. In *Hādẓī Hiya al-Aghlāl*, the social and interpretive mediation of authority increasingly becomes an object of criticism while the text does not demonstrate an explicit abandonment of revelation or *tawhid*. In the later writings, critique expands toward language, collective conformity, inherited representation, and reason itself. The transformation is therefore neither instantaneous nor uniform.

The second finding concerns epistemic authority. In the early writings, Scripture and purified doctrine provide the dominant

normative horizon for religious judgment.³⁸ In the transitional phase, mediated and inherited authority loses its previous immunity from criticism.³⁹ In the radical-critical corpus, collective agreement, inherited legitimacy, and communal conformity no longer function as self-evident guarantees of truth.⁴⁰ The guiding question changes from which authority correctly represents truth toward how claims to authority acquire epistemic and social legitimacy.

The third finding concerns the function of reason. Reason is present throughout all three phases. The trajectory is not a movement from non-rational religion to rationality. In the apologetic corpus, rational argument is primarily justificatory and demarcative. In the transitional phase, reason becomes increasingly interrogative. In the later writings, it becomes deconstructive and reflexive, eventually subjecting its own operations to criticism.⁴¹ The transformation thus concerns the function and scope of reason rather than its mere presence or absence.

The fourth finding concerns doubt and certainty. The early phase is characterized by *boundary-based certainty*. The transitional phase produces *epistemic destabilization* because mediators of inherited certainty themselves become criticizable. The radical-critical phase extends suspicion toward language, collective agreement, religious representation, and reason. The term *generalized epistemic suspicion* is deliberately preferred to total skepticism because the primary texts demonstrate the widening of critique without establishing a systematic denial of the possibility of knowledge itself. Revelation, *tawhid*, and transcendence change more slowly and therefore require more cautious language than the categories of critique and authority.

³⁸ Al-Qasimi, *Al-Širā' Bayn al-Islām Wa al-Wathaniyyah*, 1:102–3.

³⁹ Al-Qasimi, *Hādẓī Hiya Al-Aḡhlāl*, 41–47.

⁴⁰ Al-Qasimi, *Yakdẓibūn Kay Yaraw Al-Ilāh Jamīlan*, 127, 129.

⁴¹ Al-Qasimi, *Ayyuhā Al-'Aql Man Ra'āk*, 5, 18.

Table 1. Cross-Phase Comparison of Al-Qasimi’s Religious Reason Across Nine Analytical Categories

Analytical category	Orthodox-apologetic	Transitional	Radical-critical
Source of truth	Revelation within a purified doctrinal horizon	Inherited criteria increasingly subjected to examination	No inherited criterion functions as an unquestioned guarantee
Epistemic authority	Scripture and purified doctrine	Mediated authority becomes criticizable	Inherited authority and collective agreement lose self-evident privilege
Function of reason	Justificatory and demarcative	Interrogative	Deconstructive and reflexive
Position of revelation	Normative horizon of religious reasoning	Not shown to be explicitly abandoned, with the relation increasingly unsettled	No longer visibly privileged in the same manner as in the early corpus
Conception/function of tawhid	Prominent doctrinal and epistemic criterion	Still religiously articulated, but relation to authority becomes less settled	Human representations of God become objects of critique, while no equally explicit organizing function is articulated
Object of critique	Perceived deviation, sectarian claims, devotional practices	Inherited interpretation and social-intellectual constraints	Language, conformity, inherited representation, historical consciousness, and reason
Mode of argumentation	Demarcative and polemical	Interrogative and destabilizing	Deconstructive and reflexive
Doubt and certainty	Boundary-based certainty	Epistemic destabilization	Generalized epistemic suspicion
Reason and transcendence	Reason operates within a revelatory horizon	Relation becomes increasingly unsettled	Critique expands while a reconstructive relation to transcendence remains less explicitly articulated

Taken together, these patterns demonstrate genuine epistemic transformation. Sources of authority changencom, objects of critique expand, the function of reason is reconfigured, and certainty becomes progressively less dependent on inherited guarantees. Yet transformation at these levels does not mean that every deeper feature of reasoning is replaced. The cross-phase comparison reveals one significant continuity: a persistent tendency to organize truth and error through strong oppositional relations.

In the early phase, this oppositional structure is visible in distinctions such as *tawhid/shirk*, *Sunnah/bid'ah*, and authentic religion/deviation. Negation operates outwardly: claims judged compatible with purified doctrine are identified and rejected. In the later phase, the direction of negation changes. Suspicion is redirected toward inherited authority, communal agreement, language, religious representation, and eventually reason itself.⁴² The objects of negation change dramatically, but negation remains a major organizing operation.

This pattern is what the present study terms *dichotomous reversal*. The concept does not claim that the orthodox-apologetic and radical-critical phases are substantively equivalent, nor does it reduce the later critique to a disguised continuation of earlier theology. It identifies a more limited structural continuity: the direction and objects of opposition are reversed while an oppositional organization of truth and error remains comparatively persistent. The concept therefore distinguishes epistemic content from epistemic organization. At the level of content and authority, al-Qasimi's later position changes profoundly. At the level of argumentative organization, a strong logic of opposition remains detectable.

This distinction also clarifies why al-Qasimi's trajectory should not be described as a complete epistemological leap. Such

⁴² Al-Qasimi, *Al-'Arab Zābirah Şawtiyyah*, 24; Al-Qasimi, *Yakdżibūn Kay Yaran Al-Ilāh Jamilan*, 14, 127–29; Al-Qasimi, *Ayyuhā Al-'Aql Man Ra'āk*, 2–5, 118–21.

a leap, in the analytical sense used here, would imply not only the dismantling of an earlier authority structure but also the emergence of a comparably explicit alternative architecture of knowledge. The late writings accomplish substantial deconstructive work, but the selected corpus is less explicit in positively ordering truth, certainty, normativity, transcendence, the knowing subject, and human purpose after critique.

The distinction between *epistemic transformation* and *epistemic reconstruction* is therefore central. Epistemic transformation refers to the observable reconfiguration of authority, reason, objects of critique, and structures of certainty across al-Qasimi's writings. Epistemic reconstruction refers to the further task of articulating a coherent order within which criticism, truth, certainty, and the formation of the knower can again be related after inherited guarantees have been destabilized. Al-Ghazali and al-Attas illuminate different dimensions of this distinction: the Ghazalian comparison highlights the epistemic destination of doubt, while the Attasian horizon raises the broader question of epistemic order within a worldview of reality and truth.⁴³

The contribution of *dichotomous reversal* consequently lies neither in proposing another label for al-Qasimi's conversion nor in denying the depth of his intellectual change. It offers a conceptual distinction between change in epistemic position and change in the deeper organization of reasoning. Previous biographical and ideological accounts have illuminated where al-Qasimi began and where his later writings positioned him. The present analysis adds a different question: what changed in the architecture of knowing, what changed only gradually, and what remained structurally persistent beneath those changes? The answer is mixed: authority, the function of reason, and the objects of critique are substantially transformed, while an oppositional logic remains comparatively

⁴³ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqidh Min al-Dalāl*, 64–68; Al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, 2–5, 118–21.

durable. Dichotomous reversal thus names the coexistence of epistemic rupture and structural continuity.

Conclusion

This study has argued that Abdullah al-Qasimi's intellectual transformation is better understood as a reconfiguration of religious reason than as a linear movement from faith to unbelief. Cross-phase analysis of his selected writings reveals three distinct but related epistemic configurations. In the orthodox-apologetic phase, reason operates within a relatively stable revelatory and doctrinal horizon, producing what this study terms boundary-based certainty. In the transitional phase, inherited and mediated religious authority increasingly becomes an object of scrutiny, generating epistemic destabilization without demonstrating an immediate abandonment of revelation or *tawhid*. In the radical-critical phase, critique expands toward language, collective conformity, religious representation, and reason itself, producing a condition more accurately described as generalized epistemic suspicion than as total skepticism.

The principal conceptual contribution of the study is the notion of *dichotomous reversal*. The term identifies a pattern in which the objects and direction of critique change substantially while an oppositional organization of truth and error remains comparatively persistent. Al-Qasimi's trajectory therefore involves genuine epistemic transformation in authority, the function of reason, the objects of critique, and the structure of certainty, but not a complete replacement of the deeper argumentative organization through which opposition is structured. This distinction also clarifies the difference between epistemic transformation and epistemic reconstruction.

Al-Ghazali and al-Attas illuminate different dimensions of this finding. The Ghazalian comparison helps diagnose the epistemic destination of doubt and the relation between critical

inquiry, certainty, and the knowing subject. Al-Attas's account of the worldview of Islam provides a reconstructive horizon for considering how knowledge remains ordered within relations among reality, truth, Revelation, the human person, value, and ultimate purpose. On this basis, the article proposes epistemic integration as its own reconstructive formulation: a relation in which critical reason is preserved without being detached from revelation, ethical-spiritual formation, and an ordered account of reality and human purpose.

The study has three limitations. First, the corpus is purposively selected and does not include every work by al-Qasimi. Second, the transitional phase is textually less extensive than the early and late phases, requiring caution in cross-phase comparison. Third, the conclusions concern textual epistemic structures and do not establish al-Qasimi's motives, faith, or spiritual condition. Future research should expand the transitional corpus, examine the aphoristic and polemical form of the later writings as an epistemic practice in its own right, and investigate the reception of al-Qasimi across different Arab and Muslim intellectual contexts.[]

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