

# Kant the Unlikely Muhaddith? Basmalah and the Hidden Islam of Modern Philosophy

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**Abstract:** This paper uses an interdisciplinary approach—bridging intellectual history, philosophy, and religious studies—to explore overlooked intersections between Immanuel Kant’s philosophy and Islamic thought. It takes the intriguing appearance of the Basmalah (the Islamic invocation “In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate”) on Kant’s 1755 doctoral diploma as a point of departure for examining cross-cultural intellectual influences in the Enlightenment era. The analysis compares Kant’s ideas with those of prominent Islamic philosophers—especially the epistemological skepticism of al-Ghazālī and the metaphysical principles of Avicenna—to identify conceptual resonances and potential channels of influence on Kant’s critical philosophy. Through this comparative examination, the study illuminates previously unrecognized links between Enlightenment philosophy and medieval Islamic thought. The findings suggest that elements of Kant’s thought were shaped, directly or indirectly, by Islamic philosophical traditions. This exploratory yet assertive inquiry into Kant’s “hidden Islam” challenges the conventional narrative of modern philosophy as a purely Western enterprise and underscores the globally interconnected intellectual lineage of Enlightenment thought. Overall, the study’s conclusions invite a re-evaluation of the origins of modern philosophy and highlight the broader implications of acknowledging Islamic contributions within the foundations of Western philosophical discourse.

**Keywords:** Immanuel Kant, Basmalah, Islamic philosophy, al-Ghazālī, Avicenna, modern philosophy.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) stands as a towering figure of the Enlightenment and modern Western philosophy. His critical philosophy – epitomized in works like the Critique of Pure Reason – is often portrayed as a product of European intellectual developments, from rationalism to empiricism. Yet a curious historical detail hints at a deeper cross-cultural story: Kant’s 1755 doctoral diploma from the University of Königsberg bears at its top an Arabic phrase, the Basmalah – Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm (“In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful”). The presence of this quintessential Islamic invocation on Kant’s thesis certificate is puzzling and symbolically potent. (Naragon, 2006). It prompts the central question of this paper: To what extent might Kant have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by Islamic thought, and does the Basmalah in his academic milieu reflect a deeper metaphysical convergence between Kantian philosophy and Islamic intellectual tradition?

This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach – drawing on philosophy, religious studies, comparative theology, and intellectual history – to explore the “hidden Islam” in modern philosophy through the case of Kant. We will engage deeply with primary texts by Kant and key Islamic thinkers (especially Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) and al-Ghazālī), analyze the role of the Basmalah in Islamic tradition, examine the historical and philosophical implications of its appearance in Kant’s context,

and undertake comparative metaphysical analysis of Kantian and Islamic ideas. The aim is to argue, with supportive evidence, that Kant's thought was not created in isolation but was permeated by ideas that resonate with earlier Islamic philosophy – whether by speculative intellectual convergence (e.g. shared Neoplatonic sources and parallel arguments) or through more direct textual influence mediated by translations and the scholarly milieu. At points, the tone will shift from exploratory (raising possibilities and connections) to assertive, especially where defending the plausibility of specific influences or parallels.

By uncovering these connections, we gain not only a richer understanding of Kant but also insight into the broader narrative of modern philosophy. The Enlightenment's intellectual genealogy may be more globally entangled than traditionally assumed, with Islamic philosophy providing some of the scaffolding upon which European modernity was built. Kant's Basmalah, in this reading, becomes a symbol of a hidden heritage – a visible marker of an intellectual convergence that modern philosophy has largely overlooked.

### The Basmalah in Islamic Tradition

The Basmalah, in full *Bismillāh al-Raḥmān al-Raḥīm*, is one of the most important phrases in Islam, often translated as “In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate.” This sacred formula originates from the Qur'an itself, where it prefaces every chapter (sura) except one, and is traditionally recited by Muslims to inaugurate any significant action or text. By invoking God's name and two of His most benevolent attributes (*al-Raḥmān* and *al-Raḥīm*, often rendered “the Most Gracious” and “the Most Merciful”), the Basmalah is believed to invite divine blessing and guidance. It has deep theological and spiritual resonance: Islamic scholars often regard the phrase as encapsulating the essence of the Quran's message of monotheism and mercy.

In practice, the Basmalah is ubiquitous in Muslim life. It is recited at the start of daily prayers, before meals, at the outset of letters and books, and inscribed atop documents and contracts as a sanctifying invocation. For instance, a well-known hadith counsels that “every important matter not begun with Bismillah is cut off from blessings” (Islamic tradition). Thus, classical Islamic authors typically open their works with the Basmalah (often followed by praises of God and the Prophet). For example, each of the forty books of al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* begins with an invocation of God's name and glory. al-(Ghazālī, A, n.d.) This convention reminds the reader that even rigorous scholarship is undertaken in the presence of God. In Sufi mysticism, the Basmalah has been subject to esoteric interpretation; for example, the letter *Bā'* (the first letter of *bismillāh*) and even the dot below that letter have been ascribed cosmological significance as symbols of creation and the divine point that underlies existence. While such mystical exegeses vary, they underscore a shared intuition: the Basmalah is not a mere formula but a profound statement of metaphysics – affirming that all actions and knowledge properly begin by acknowledging the ultimate Reality, God.

In the context of Islamic intellectual history, major thinkers engaged with the Basmalah's meaning. For instance, al-Ghazālī (1058–1111) in his works on the foundations of Islamic teachings often emphasizes sincerity of intention via beginning in God's name. Philosophers like Avicenna (980–1037) might begin their treatises with the Basmalah, signifying that even rational inquiry is grounded in the divine source of intelligibility. The Basmalah thus bridges devotion and philosophy: it reminds the scholar that the pursuit of truth is, at its highest level, an act done in the presence of the divine.

Given this significance, the appearance of the Basmalah in any text – especially outside the traditional Islamic milieu – carries weight. It is to this day “frequently cited at daily prayers and other contexts by Muslims,” and regarded as containing “the true essence of the Quran” in a concise form. Its calligraphic representations adorn mosques and manuscripts. In short, the Basmalah is a microcosm of Islamic theology: invoking it is a statement that all knowledge and undertaking are under the sovereignty of the One God whose mercy sustains the world. It invites us to reconsider Kant's thought not as an island of pure European Enlightenment, but as partly built on a shared heritage with medieval Islamic philosophy and theology. (Naragon, 2006)

## Kant's Doctoral Diploma and the Curious Case of the Basmalah in Königsberg



\*Figure: Kant's 1755 doctoral diploma (Universitas Albertina, Königsberg), with the Arabic Basmalah inscribed at the top (center). This ornate Latin document, issued under the authority of King Frederick ("Friderici, Regis Prussiae..."), surprisingly opens with the words "Bismillāh al-Rahmān al-Rahīm" in Arabic script.

The fact that Kant's doctoral Thesis Diploma (issued in 1755 when he attained the title of Magister and the right to teach) is headed with the Arabic Basmalah has fascinated and perplexed historians. The diploma, largely in Latin celebrating the authority of King Frederick the Great of Prussia and listing Kant (here "Emanuel Kant") among the scholars, includes at its very top the inscription "بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ" in clear Arabic characters. There is no accompanying translation on the diploma – the phrase stands alone as a kind of ornamental invocation above the Latin text (Bobzin, 1993).

Scholars have debated why this Islamic phrase appears on Kant's diploma. One line of speculation, proposed by the Iranian-German scholar Abdoljavad Falaturi, posited that its inclusion was not merely a coincidence or decorative flourish. Falaturi suggested that the use of the Basmalah reflected the broad-mindedness and erudition of 18th-century intellectuals – an indication of the "intellectual superiority" or advanced cosmopolitan outlook of scholars in Kant's era (Falaturi, as cited in Bobzin, 1993, p. 7). In this view, Kant or the academic authorities might have deliberately invoked an Islamic phrase to signify the universality of knowledge or as a gesture of respect towards Eastern wisdom, thus hinting at a convergence between Western and Islamic intellectual traditions.

However, a comprehensive study by orientalist Hartmut Bobzin provides a more cautious, historically grounded interpretation. In his 1993 article *Immanuel Kant und die 'Basmala': Eine Studie zu orientalischer Philologie und Typographie in Deutschland im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Bobzin examines Kant's diploma in the context of early-modern scholarly practices. He finds that Kant's use of the Basmalah on the title page was not an isolated incident born of personal interest in Islam, but rather an example of a broader trend in European academia of the 17th–18th centuries. During that period, it was common for academic dissertations and invitations to public defenses to carry mottos, epigraphs, or invocations in various languages (often Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or others) on their front pages (Bobzin, 1993, pp. 5–8).

Bobzin's archival research uncovered that among approximately 1,000 dissertations from German universities in the 1600s–1700s, many included Hebrew and Greek phrases on their title pages, and a smaller number featured Arabic text. Within that subset, the Basmalah itself appears occasionally – with the earliest instance Bobzin found dating back to a 1640 doctoral thesis at a Protestant university (likely Wittenberg). He shows an example of a 1735 thesis by Johann Bernhard Hahn similarly adorned with Arabic on its cover, indicating Kant's case was “not a unique occurrence” but part of an academic fashion of Oriental mottos (Bobzin, 1993, pp. 9–11). In these instances, the presence of the Basmalah (or other non-Latin invocations) did not necessarily imply that the author or thesis had Islamic content; rather, it was often a way to lend an exotic prestige or universal gravitas to the work. It functioned as an *invocatio*, invoking God in a learned manner, since Latin Christendom's scholarly culture sometimes used the Arabic Basmalah just as it used the Latin “*In nomine Dei*” or the Hebrew “*B'Sheme Elohim*” – as a token invocation of the divine (Bobzin, 1993, pp. 12–13).

Crucially, Bobzin argues that Kant's use of the Basmalah was likely stylistic and conventional, not personal or theological. Kant himself, as Bobzin notes, made scant mention of Islam in his extensive writings, and there is no evidence Kant himself insisted on the Basmalah; it could have been suggested by a faculty mentor or even the university printer familiar with this typographical practice. Moreover, the University of Königsberg (Albertina) in Kant's time had a Protestant orientation, and similar uses of Basmalah are found across Protestant, Catholic, and even Orthodox-affiliated universities, suggesting it was not tied to an affinity for Islam but to a broader Enlightenment-era tradition of scholarly cosmopolitanism (Bobzin, 1993, pp. 14–15). Bobzin cautions against viewing the Basmalah on Kant's diploma as proof of “Islamophilia” or a hidden Muslim identity; instead, he sees it as an “exceptional but not unheard-of” example of oriental typography reflecting the era's academic culture (Bobzin, 1993, p. 18).

At the same time, Bobzin does acknowledge the symbolic intrigue of the case. The Basmalah as *invocatio* had a recognized meaning: it explicitly invokes Allah, which means its use, even decoratively, signaled a certain comfort with Islamic terms for God in the educated circles of Europe. Some theses of the period even placed such invocations at the start of the main text as well, not just the title page. The practice might reflect a spirit of intellectual openness or at least a fascination with the “Orient” that was growing in the 18th century (Bobzin, 1993, pp. 18–19). This was also the era in which Sir William Jones studied Persian literature, and Goethe would soon famously engage with Islamic poetry.

Bobzin points out that if a dissertation's subject matter related to the Middle East or to languages, authors often included a quote in the relevant language on the cover to indicate the connection. Could Kant's 1755 work have had any such linkage? Kant's doctoral thesis, *Concise Outline of Some Reflections on Fire (Meditationes de igne)*, was a work in natural philosophy and not directly about the Orient (Kant, 1755). However, Kant's broader early work also included cosmopolitan themes (e.g., his *Universal Natural History*, 1755). There is no clear Islamic angle in those texts, so the Basmalah on his diploma likely served a generalized good omen and scholarly adornment rather than referencing the thesis content (Naragon, 2006).

It is worth noting one more speculative angle: some commentators have mused whether Kant's Basmalah might have been influenced by contemporaries or acquaintances with interest in Islam. A popular suggestion (reflected in an annotation on Wikimedia Commons) is that Kant might have drawn inspiration from his contemporary Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who in later decades became an open admirer of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Goethe (b. 1749), though 25 years younger than Kant, lived contemporaneously and gained renown during Kant's lifetime; he famously wrote a poem in praise of the Prophet Muhammad (*Mahomet's Gesang*) and later composed the *West-östlicher Divan* (1819) celebrating Persian Sufi poetry (Goethe, 1819/1994). While Kant and Goethe did not have a documented friendship, Goethe's interest in Islam reflects that Enlightenment Germany had prominent voices engaging positively with Islamic culture. Another example is Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781), who portrayed Islam sympathetically in *Nathan the Wise* (Lessing, 1779/2004). Kant would have been aware of such currents.

Indeed, some enthusiasts have even speculated, based on philosophical parallels, that Kant was influenced by al-Ghazālī, though Kant never mentions him directly (Nasr, 2006). This perception suggests that Kant's milieu or education may have exposed him indirectly to Islamic ideas, even if not the Basmalah specifically.

However, the Basmalah on Kant's diploma, while likely a formal convention, serves as a tantalizing historical symbol. It literally and figuratively places Islamic discourse at the gateway of Kant's career, inviting us to ask whether this was merely typographical ornamentation or the tip of an iceberg of deeper intellectual convergence.

### **Kant on Islam and the Presence of Islamic Thought in Kant's Era**

Kant's own writings contain relatively few direct references to Islam or Islamic philosophers by name. Unlike some of his contemporaries (e.g., Voltaire or Gibbon), he did not write extensively about the Prophet Muhammad or Islamic theology in his published works. In fact, where Islam is mentioned, Kant's remarks can be mixed. On one hand, he made some harsh or stereotypical statements typical of 18th-century attitudes; on the other hand, he also offered a notable commendation of Islam's spirit in his work *Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (Kant, 1793). In that work Kant contrasts different religions' methods of spreading faith, and according to one analysis, "Kant praised Islam" for distinguishing itself by "pride and courage, for it propagates faith not by miracles but by conquests, and it is founded on courageous asceticism" (Kant, 1793, as cited in Almond, 2010). This striking quote shows Kant's admiration for what he perceived as Islam's refusal to rely on miraculous claims, instead appealing to reason and bravery – albeit spread by the sword ("conquests"). The actual context is Kant's discussion of religions that demand belief; he viewed Islam as avoiding superstition by not grounding itself in miracles, but rather in a kind of militant rational zeal (Kant, 1793).

It is significant that Kant even commented on Islam in such terms, as it indicates he had some knowledge of Islamic history and practices (e.g., that Islam de-emphasized miracles of the prophet and valued ascetic discipline and courage). This knowledge might have come from Kant's reading of travel literature or historical works. By the late 18th century, European intellectuals had access to various sources on Islam: for example, a French translation of the Qur'an by Savary (1783), George Sale's English translation (Sale, 1734) with its comprehensive commentary, as well as discussions in works by historians like Gibbon (Okkley, 1708; Gibbon, as cited in Almond, 2010). It's plausible Kant read or heard about Islam's tenets through such sources. In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (Kant, 1798), Kant references different cultures and might indirectly allude to Islamic societies when discussing Orientals, though often stereotypically. Clearly, Islam was not completely outside the ken of Königsberg's learned circles.

More pertinent to our inquiry than Kant's overt remarks on Islam is the question of whether Islamic thought influenced Kant's philosophy. Here we must widen the lens to consider the intellectual climate and sources feeding into Kant's education and the Enlightenment generally. Kant was educated in a milieu heavily shaped by the German Pietist tradition (stressing inner religious experience and ethics) and the legacy of Christian Wolff and Leibniz in rationalist philosophy. The University of Königsberg did not have an Islamic studies department per se, but it did teach classical languages and likely some "Oriental languages" as was common (Bobzin, 1993). Kant himself tutored in various subjects and was aware of debates in theology and metaphysics that had medieval antecedents. Many of those medieval debates (on existence, causality, cosmology) had involved Islamic philosophers whose works were transmitted in Latin (Avicenna, 1020; al-Ghazālī, 1100).

Indeed, by Kant's time, Islamic philosophy had been subtly woven into European scholarship for centuries. Thinkers like Avicenna (Ibn Sina) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd) were household names in medieval scholasticism – Avicenna's *Metaphysics* and *Canon of Medicine* were used in universities, and Averroes was known as "The Commentator" on Aristotle, deeply influencing Thomas Aquinas and the Latin Aristotelian tradition (Sharif, 1963; Pasnau, 2011). While the direct influence waned after the Renaissance, their ideas did not vanish. The Enlightenment-era philosophers often read the works of their scholastic predecessors (e.g., Leibniz and Wolff engaged with Scholastic concepts), thereby indirectly inheriting some of the conceptual toolkit forged by Islamic thinkers (Sharif, 1963). For example, the distinction between essence and existence central to Avicenna, or his arguments for a Necessary Being, were transmitted through Aquinas and Suárez into early modern metaphysics (Avicenna, 1020; Sharif, 1963).

Kant's own teacher, Martin Knutzen, and the textbooks Kant used (such as Baumgarten's *Metaphysica*) contained many scholastic notions that originated with Avicenna or Averroes – though these were by then naturalized into "European" philosophy (Sharif, 1963).

An illustration of this hidden legacy is found in the realm of logic and epistemology: The idea that categories of thought are not objective features of reality but subjective contrivances of the mind was discussed by some late Scholastics under Avicennian influence. Notably, one historical analysis states: “For Ibn Sīnā as for al-Ghazālī after him and for Kant in the modern age, the categories are subjective. Indeed, the Kantian position that the categories are subjective and knowledge of objects is due to a synthesis of sense perception and logical intelligence, was a commonplace of Muslim philosophy...” (Sharif, 1963, p. 1378). This is a remarkable claim – effectively suggesting that the cornerstone of Kant’s epistemology (that space, time, and categories like causality, substance, etc., are forms imposed by the mind) had antecedents in medieval Islamic thought. We will examine this claim further in the comparative analysis section, but historically it is known that al-Ghazālī and other Ash‘arite theologians considered universals and causation as constructs of the mind or habits, not as intrinsic necessities in external things – a viewpoint that converges intriguingly with Kant’s transcendental idealism (Griffel, 2016).

By Kant’s era, there was also a burgeoning field of “Oriental studies” in Europe. In 1700, the University of Halle (in Prussia) had established a chair in Oriental languages; by mid-18th century, interest in Arabic and Persian texts (poetry, the Arabian Nights, etc.) was increasing among literati (Falaturi, 1990). Königsberg, being somewhat provincial, was not a center of Orientalism, but Prussia under Frederick the Great had a noted ethos of religious tolerance and international exchange. Frederick himself corresponded with the Ottoman Sultan and famously welcomed a Muslim envoy; he even built a mosque for Muslim soldiers in Potsdam in 1732 (Almond, 2010). This atmosphere of relative openness could have indirectly encouraged intellectual curiosity about Islamic culture among Prussian scholars.

It is within this context that Kant’s “hidden Islam” must be understood. We do not contend that Kant secretly read Arabic or studied the Qur’an in depth (there’s no evidence of that) (Naragon, 2006). Rather, we posit that Islamic ideas reached Kant through philosophical discourse and that Kant’s own solutions to metaphysical problems show striking parallels with those earlier ideas. In the next sections, we will draw detailed comparisons between Kant’s philosophy and the works of key Islamic thinkers – chiefly Avicenna and al-Ghazālī – to support this view. These comparisons will reveal that many issues Kant grappled with (the limits of reason, the nature of causality, the distinction between phenomenal appearance and true reality, the role of morality and faith) had been explored by Muslim philosophers centuries prior, sometimes in astonishingly similar terms (Pasnau, 2011). Whether this is due to direct influence or independent development, the convergence is too strong to ignore. It suggests that modern philosophy’s narrative, usually told as a purely European story, actually has deep roots that extend into the Islamic Golden Age.

### Comparative Metaphysical Analysis: Kant and Islamic Philosophers

#### Knowledge, Perception, and Categories: Kant’s Epistemology and Its Parallels in Avicenna and al-Ghazālī

In the *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant, 1781/1787), Kant famously argues that human knowledge is a synthesis of sensory intuitions and a priori concepts (the categories of the understanding). Space and time are forms of sensibility that shape all our intuitions, and categories like causality, substance, unity, plurality, etc., are not derived from experience but imposed by our mind to organize experience. Hence the world of phenomena (things-as-they-appear) is partly a product of the mind’s structuring activity, while the noumenal reality (things-in-themselves) remains unknowable through theoretical reason. This “Copernican revolution” in philosophy – putting the subjective conditions of knowing at the center – is often considered a radical departure from earlier philosophy (Allison, 2004).

Yet, if we look to Islamic philosophy, we find comparable insights. Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), in his epistemology, taught that the human intellect at birth is like a blank slate (*tabula rasa*), but it has innate potential and receives intelligible forms from the Active Intellect (Gutas, 2001). He distinguished between the empirical faculties (sensation, imagination) and the rational faculties, and asserted that universals (categories, genera, species) exist in the mind as abstractions – they are not objectively existing things but mental concepts. In other words, Avicenna recognized that much of how we understand the world – through general categories – is a function of the intellect’s operation on sensory data.

One modern comparative study even notes that “for both Avicenna and Kant, the imagination serves to connect the phenomenal and the noumenal,” highlighting that Avicenna saw the imagination as translating between the world of sense images and the realm of intellectual forms, much as Kant saw the productive imagination synthesizing intuitions and concepts (Black, 2008, p. 123). The similarity in roles assigned to “imagination” in bridging sense and intellect is a telling parallel, though Kant and Avicenna couched it in different frameworks (Avicenna in Neoplatonic-Aristotelian terms, Kant in transcendental terms).

Moving to al-Ghazālī, we see an even more striking convergence with Kant’s critical philosophy. Al-Ghazālī, in works like *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (“Incoherence of the Philosophers”, 11th century), launched a vigorous critique of the Islamic Peripatetic philosophers (Avicenna and al-Fārābī chiefly) on several metaphysical points – the eternity of the world, causality, and the limits of human knowledge of God (al-Ghazālī, 2000). Al-Ghazālī argued that human reason has severe limits: it can analyze the natural world as experienced (phenomena), but it fails when it tries to penetrate divine mysteries or ultimate metaphysical truths (noumena). For instance, neither God’s existence and attributes nor the soul’s immortality can be demonstrated by reason alone, in Ghazālī’s view; these belong to the realm of faith and mystical experience (al-Ghazālī, 2000).

Compare this with Kant: in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant similarly concludes that theoretical reason cannot know the answers to “God, the soul, and the cosmos” – the traditional metaphysical questions of existence of God, immortality of soul, and the ultimate nature of the universe (Kant, 1781/1787). Kant calls these the “transcendental ideas” and shows that pure reason falls into antinomies and contradictions when it attempts to resolve them (Kant, 1781/1787, A407/B433). Thus, both Ghazālī and Kant distinguished between the world of phenomena knowable by disciplined experience and logic, and the ultimate realities which elude rational knowledge.

Indeed, an author in *A History of Muslim Philosophy* asks pointedly: given these similarities, “*who is the real Copernicus of philosophy – al-Ghazālī or Kant?*” (M. M. Sharif, 1966, p. 593). The rhetorical question is provocative: al-Ghazālī, writing in 1100, turned classical Islamic philosophy on its head by denying it access to ultimate truths and vindicating faith, much as Kant upended classical Western metaphysics in 1781.

The parallels run deep in structure:

- **Phenomena vs. Noumena:** Al-Ghazālī didn’t use these Latin terms, but he effectively said the observable world (*‘alam al-shahāda*) is where empirical study applies, whereas the unseen world (*‘alam al-ghayb* – God, afterlife) is known only to God or through revelation (al-Ghazālī, 2000). Kant’s phenomena/noumena distinction echoes this: phenomena are what science knows; noumena (“things in themselves”) include God and the soul, which are real but inaccessible to ordinary cognition (Kant, 1781/1787).
- **Subjectivity of Categories:** Al-Ghazālī, aligned with the Ash‘arite school, insisted that concepts like causality, substance, etc., are not inherent powers in things but our mind’s way of describing observed regularities (Marmura, 2000). The text we cited earlier claims “the Kantian position that the categories are subjective... was a commonplace of Muslim philosophy” – meaning thinkers like Al-Ghazālī (and to some extent Avicenna in logic) long held that these categories do not exist outside the mind (Sharif, 1966, p. 592). Kant made the categories subjective forms of understanding – remarkably consonant with that tradition (Kant, 1781/1787).
- **Limits of Theoretical Reason:** Both argue that theoretical reason cannot give ultimate answers. Kant concluded that questions like the existence of God or the immortality of the soul cannot be settled by empirical or logical proof (Kant, 1781/1787). Al-Ghazālī similarly concluded that philosophers failed to prove or disprove those, and one must turn to faith or mystical intuition for such truths (al-Ghazālī, 2000).
- **Alternative Route to Truth:** Kant “found the key” to moral/metaphysical truth in the practical reason – the moral law within us that justifies belief in God, freedom, and immortality as postulates (Kant, 1788). Al-Ghazālī “discovered it in the religious experience of the Prophet and the mystic,” which is then validated by the moral and spiritual transformation it produces (Frank, 1992). In other words, each relocated the assurance of those truths from the domain of discursive reason to the domain of either moral conscience (Kant) or spiritual illumination (Ghazālī), and each insisted that such answers must ultimately be tested by their impact on the soul (Kant’s emphasis on moral certitude parallels Ghazālī’s emphasis on the transformative certainty of mystical experience).

These similarities led the author of the Muslim philosophy history to remark that the minds of Kant and Ghazālī “worked on the same lines,” and to hypothesize a historical influence chain: “Kant was only a corrected and developed form of Leibniz, whereas Leibniz was an incorrect and undeveloped form of al-Ghazālī combined with Ash‘arite atomism.” (Sharif, 1966, p. 594). This bold thesis suggests that Leibniz (1646–1716), a key precursor to Kant, was significantly influenced by Islamic occasionalist ideas (Ash‘arite atomism and Ghazālī’s critiques) – an influence that could have come via the Scholastics or by direct reading of translations. In fact, Leibniz was learned in many languages and read widely; he certainly was familiar with concepts from “Algazel” (the Latinized Ghazālī) because Latin excerpts of Ghazālī’s philosophy were

available (Sharif, 1966). Leibniz's own metaphysics (e.g., the doctrine of monads and pre-established harmony) is arguably a creative response to the same issues that Ghazālī raised: how to reconcile causation with divine providence, how to conceive substance. Leibniz explicitly fought the materialist notion of causality by proposing every "substance" mirrors the universe and God coordinates changes – a solution reminiscent of occasionalism (where God directly causes all interactions) (Leibniz, 1714; Malebranche, 1678). The historical record shows, for example, that Malebranche's Cartesian occasionalism was very similar to the Ash'arite occasionalism that Ghazālī championed; whether by coincidence or via influence through interlocutors like Henry More or Jacob Golius, these ideas were "in the air" (Frank, 1992). It is plausible that Leibniz, interacting with French and Dutch thinkers, absorbed some of these notions. By the time Kant came, the Leibniz–Wolff school taught a rationalist metaphysics that included many refined versions of those concepts (Wolff, 1728).

Thus, from categories to the limits of reason, Kant's critical philosophy can be seen as converging with a path blazed by Islamic thinkers. However, convergence does not necessarily mean intentional borrowing. It could be that Kant arrived at similar conclusions independently due to tackling similar problems (like how Hume's skepticism inadvertently echoed Ghazālī's, as we explore next). Yet the chain of transmission via Leibniz and Scholastics suggests that at least some indirect influence is plausible. Kant's "permanent atmosphere" was Leibnizianism, and if Leibnizian thought was in part an "undeveloped Ghazālī," then Kant, by developing Leibniz, was unknowingly carrying forward a torch lit by Ghazālī (Sharif, 1966).

### Causality and Induction: From al-Ghazālī to Hume to Kant

No discussion of Islamic influence on modern philosophy is complete without the famous question of causality. David Hume (1711–1776) is often credited as the first Western philosopher to openly challenge the necessity of causal connection – asserting that our belief that A causes B is not grounded in reason, only in the habit of seeing A followed by B (Hume, 1748). This skepticism "awoke Kant from his dogmatic slumber," leading Kant to devise his theory of a priori causal structure of understanding to rebut Hume (Kant, 1781/1787, Preface). However, six centuries before Hume, al-Ghazālī had articulated a very similar critique of causation. In *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, Ghazālī famously argued that what we call causes and effects (e.g., fire burning cotton) are not logically or metaphysically bound; the connection is made by God's will each time. There is no necessity that fire must burn cotton – God could intervene or could have set up the world differently (al-Ghazālī, 2000). Ghazālī even used the example of fire and cotton, stating if a miraculous suspension of the usual course happened, the cotton might not burn, demonstrating that the purported necessary connection was not absolute, only habitual. He concluded that all we empirically observe is "one thing following another," not "one thing producing another" (al-Ghazālī, 2000).

This is almost exactly Hume's point in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Hume, 1748, Section IV): that we never perceive the necessary connection, only the constant conjunction of events and the mind's expectation. The historical question arises: did Hume know of Ghazālī's ideas? Some scholars have speculated on possible influence (e.g., via medieval scholastics or via later writers like Bayle referencing Muslim occasionalists), though there is no direct evidence Hume read Ghazālī (Frank, 1992). Still, the symmetry is striking enough that one scholar remarked Hume's treatise is "fundamentally not more than what Ghazālī wrote" (Sharif, 1966, p. 600). Whether by influence or independent discovery, the alignment of their thought is clear: both reject necessary natural causality and restrict us to observed sequences.

Kant's role in this story is as the synthesizer who responded to Hume. Kant agreed with Hume (and Ghazālī) that if causality were purely an empirical idea, we could never justify its necessity – since experience only shows instances, never a must (Kant, 1781/1787, A189/B233). However, Kant refused to accept radical skepticism or theological occasionalism as the answer. Instead, he proposed that causality is a necessary truth because it is not derived from experience at all; it is a built-in category of the mind that structures experience (Kant, 1781/1787, A92/B124). In Kant's framework, every appearance we can experience must follow the rule of cause and effect because our mind wouldn't cognize it as an event otherwise. This saved causality's necessity but at the price of relocating it to the subject (our mind) rather than in the objective world – interestingly echoing the Ash'arite move of saying only God ensures regularity, except Kant secularized it by saying the mind's constitution ensures it.

We see here a triadic interplay: Ghazālī – Hume – Kant. Al-Ghazālī and Hume both assert the empirical unknowability of necessary causation; Kant provides a transcendental solution that still limits causation's scope to phenomena (not to things-in-themselves or to God's will). Importantly, Kant's resolution mediates between Hume and Ghazālī: Ghazālī says only God's will provides real causes; Hume says we have no rational basis for necessity; Kant says necessity is real in experience

but is contributed by our rational mind – creating a closed system of natural causation for the phenomenal world, while leaving God’s freedom intact in the noumenal realm (Kant, 1781/1787, A547/B575). That is why in Kant’s philosophy, it is consistent to believe in miracles or divine free will beyond phenomena, since causality as a necessary law applies only within the structure of appearances.

To highlight Ghazālī’s anticipation of later ideas: Al-Ghazālī also gave an analysis of inductive reasoning that prefigures later empiricist thought. He argued that we assume the future will be like the past (e.g., fire will burn tomorrow as it did before) because of experience, but this is not logically certain – it’s an expectation of the uniformity of nature that could be broken by God’s power (al-Ghazālī, 2000). This is essentially the problem of induction that Hume made famous (that we cannot rationally justify induction without circular reasoning) (Hume, 2007). As one historical analysis notes, “His (al-Ghazālī’s) description of induction is the same as Mill’s,” and he even addresses the justification, suggesting that only a divine guarantee (or some rational insight) could justify expecting continued regularity (Hourani, 1975). Kant, in turn, doesn’t directly solve the problem of induction, but by making causality a necessary precondition for experience, he implies a solution: as long as the conditions of experience hold, nature will continue uniformly (because our mind will impose causal order) (Kant, 1998). Thus all three (Ghazālī, Hume, Kant) wrestled with the problem of induction and causal necessity – a clear through-line of thought, whether continuous or rediscovered.

The broader implication is that modern empiricism and skepticism have roots in earlier Islamic critiques of Aristotelianism. *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* of Ghazālī in the 11th century attacked many ideas of Avicennian Aristotelian philosophy, weakening its hold (al-Ghazālī, 2000). In the West, a similar break from Aristotelian-Scholastic dogmatism was needed to allow modern philosophy to progress – and thinkers like Descartes, Bayle, and Hume provided that (Hume, 2007). It is fascinating that Ghazālī is sometimes dubbed the “Algazelus destroyer of philosophers” in medieval Latin; Hume might be seen as an 18th-century Algazel in the eyes of some Christian critics (Davidson, 1987). Indeed, some in Kant’s time referred to Hume’s skepticism as a nihilism that “destroys” metaphysics (Kuehn, 2001). Kant’s proud claim to have enacted a Copernican revolution might actually have had a precursor in what Ghazālī did to Islamic philosophy: dethroning human reason from the center and asserting its limitations – a revolution that, in their respective cultures, forced a new course for philosophy (Frank, 1992).

### **God, the Necessary Being, and the Critique of Proofs: Kant and Avicenna**

Kant’s philosophy of religion and his critique of traditional proofs of God’s existence is another area to explore for hidden Islamic influences. Kant famously critiqued the ontological argument (that from the mere idea of a most perfect being, one can conclude its existence), the cosmological argument (that a necessary first cause can be inferred from contingent beings), and the physico-theological argument (design argument) (Kant, 1998). In doing so, he was responding to a long tradition that includes Anselm, Aquinas, and Leibniz. But note that Aquinas and Leibniz in formulating their arguments were themselves inheriting ideas from Avicenna and other Muslim philosophers (Avicenna, 2005; McGinnis, 2010).

Consider Avicenna’s proof of the Necessary Existent. Avicenna formulated a sophisticated version of the cosmological argument based on the distinction between necessary existence and contingent existence. Every contingent being (one that can either exist or not exist) must have a cause, and tracing the chain of causes must either go on infinitely (which Avicenna rejects) or terminate in a being that must exist by its own nature – a Necessary Existent, which has no cause and is one, unique, and the source of all others (Avicenna, 2005). This argument was transmitted to the West; Thomas Aquinas’ *Third Way* (contingency and necessity) is basically Avicennian, and Leibniz’s argument from “why is there something rather than nothing?” is a variant of it (Craig, 1979). Kant, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, specifically targets the cosmological proof which asserts a necessary being as the ground of contingent beings. His refutation is that the cosmological proof secretly relies on the ontological proof: it leaps from “a necessary being exists” to identifying it as the All-Perfect God, which presumes we know that a supremely perfect being is necessary – something Kant denies we can know by reason (Kant, 1998).

The interesting point is that Kant’s critiques indirectly engage with ideas that came through Avicenna. For example, when Kant dissects the concept of “necessary being,” he might have unconsciously been grappling with the logical legacy left by Avicenna (McGinnis, 2010). Avicenna also discussed existence as a predicate in some sense (he wouldn’t phrase it that way, but he distinguished existence from essence in creatures and said only God’s essence includes existence) (Avicenna, 2005). Kant’s famous claim that “existence is not a predicate” essentially destroyed the ontological proof (which came via Descartes and Leibniz) (Kant, 1998). Could Kant have known of Avicenna’s essence-existence distinction? Perhaps not

directly, but that distinction was embedded in scholastic metaphysics (Aquinas, 1947). So by the time Kant was learning metaphysics, the notion that existence is something other than essence – a contingent addendum for creatures – was standard. Kant took the next step to say, in conceptual terms, adding “existence” adds nothing to the concept of a thing. While this was a fresh insight of Kant’s, it resonated with centuries of debate started by Avicenna’s metaphysics (Nasr, 2006).

Furthermore, recall from the earlier excerpt that “*Al-Fārābī’s proof of the existence of God from the concepts of necessity and contingency came down to [Leibniz] through Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Maimonides, and St. Thomas*” (Sharif, 1963, p. 469). Leibniz was well-versed in Scholastic thought; he admired Aquinas and the Scholastics (he once said the peripatetic philosophy contained great treasures) (Leibniz, 1989). It is not far-fetched that Leibniz, who formulated his own version of the cosmological proof (Principle of Sufficient Reason: there must be a reason for the world, which leads to a necessary substance, which he called God), was conceptually indebted to Avicennian ideas (Leibniz, 1989; Avicenna, 2005). *The History of Muslim Philosophy* text even notes “*Ibn Sīnā’s influence on [Leibniz] can hardly be doubted for there is a curious parallelism in al-Shifā’ and the Monadology of Leibniz... The similarity is remarkable... including the example of the dog and the stick with which they illustrate their theory*” (Sharif, 1963, p. 470). Apparently, both Avicenna in *al-Shifā’* and Leibniz in his *Monadology* discuss association of ideas with an example of a dog and a stick – a very specific parallel, suggesting Leibniz (knowingly or via secondary sources) drew from Avicenna’s work (Avicenna, 2005).

If Leibniz was “inspired” by Avicenna’s ideas of necessary being and of psychology, and Kant in turn was heavily influenced by Leibniz’s philosophy (even if critically), then a chain of influence is evident: Avicenna → Leibniz/Wolff → Kant (Kant, 1998; McGinnis, 2010). Kant’s immediate targets were often Leibnizian ideas. For instance, Kant’s critique of the ontological argument could be seen as targeting Leibniz’s form of it, and his antinomies about the universe (whether it had a beginning or is infinite, etc.) recall debates that happened among Muslim theologians and philosophers (e.g., Ghazālī vs. Ibn Rushd on the eternity of the world) (Averroes, 2001). Aquinas had taken a stance (no proof of eternity or beginning by reason alone) which is essentially what Kant also says – these cosmological questions (finite vs infinite past, etc.) are insoluble by reason, aligning with what Ghazālī argued (he argued forcefully that philosophers who claimed to prove the world’s past eternity were wrong, and in fact reason cannot decide it – only revelation tells us there was a beginning) (al-Ghazālī, 2000).

Thus, in the realm of philosophical theology:

- Kant’s insistence that God’s existence cannot be proven by pure reason and that we must rely on moral faith has a precursor in al-Ghazālī’s insistence that God is known by faith and experience, not by Aristotelian proofs. Ghazālī outright called the philosophers’ arguments for God (like the Necessary Existent proof) into question (though note: Ghazālī himself believed in God’s existence, just not via Avicenna’s logical method; similarly, Kant believed in God as a postulate, just not via rationalist proof) (al-Ghazālī, 2000; Kant, 1998).
- Kant’s notion of a Necessary Being as something reason seeks but can’t fully comprehend parallels Avicenna’s concept of God as Necessary Existent which is beyond full human comprehension (Avicenna said we can only say what God is not, a kind of negative theology) (Avicenna, 2005).
- Kant’s moral argument that we must postulate God to ensure the highest good (happiness proportional to virtue) has an interesting analog in Islamic thought: many Islamic philosophers and theologians argued that without God, there is no ultimate justice or meaning – though they typically grounded this in revealed teachings rather than pure reason. Still, figures like Mulla Sadra (17th c. Iranian philosopher) or earlier Ibn Miskawayh talked about the alignment of virtue with divine order, conceptually similar to Kant’s highest good (Miskawayh, 1964; Sadra, 1981).

### **Ethics and Mysticism: Autonomy and Surrender**

Kant’s moral philosophy, based on the categorical imperative and autonomy of rational will, seems at first glance far removed from Islamic ethics, which emphasize obedience to God’s law (Sharī‘a) and the emulation of the Prophet (Qur’an, 33:21). However, there are thought-provoking intersections. Kant held that true religion is essentially ethical: in *Religion within the Bounds of Mere Reason*, he asserted that all that matters is leading a moral life and that particular rituals or creeds are secondary (Kant, 2009). He even praised Islam’s lack of priesthood and miracles (as noted) and its emphasis on justice and courage as aligning with a more rational faith (Kant, 2009, p. 158).

In Islam, especially in Sufi thought, there is the concept of *fitra* – an innate human disposition towards goodness and recognizing God. Some have likened *fitra* to a natural moral law in the heart (Nasr, 2006). One might draw a parallel between Kant's concept of practical reason (an inbuilt rational moral compass) and the Islamic notion of a God-given inner light or conscience (for example, the Qur'an speaks of God inspiring the soul with knowledge of right and wrong. Both concepts uphold that morality is not arbitrary but rooted in human nature as intended by the Creator or by rational structure (Al-Attas, 1990).

Moreover, al-Ghazālī's latter-life embrace of Sufism brought forward the idea that ethical and spiritual realization (through practices like *dhikr* [remembrance of God], ascetic discipline, etc.) is the true path to knowing God, beyond jurisprudence and theology (al-Ghazālī, 2001). He argued that following the spirit of God's law purifies the heart, making it receptive to divine knowledge (al-Ghazālī, 2001). While Kant obviously did not advocate mysticism, his placing of faith in the moral realm rather than in speculative theology resonates with Ghazālī's move to ground religion in lived practice and spiritual insight rather than abstract philosophy. Both reduce the gap between religion and ethics: Kant effectively equated the two (saying "religion is the recognition of all our duties as divine commands") (Kant, 2009, p. 142), and Islamic thinkers like Ghazālī or the earlier Mu'tazilites held that ethical truth is accessible to reason and that God commands good because it is good (Watt, 1948), though Ash'arites like Ghazālī formally said things are good because God commands them, Ghazālī often appeals to moral reasoning in practice (Frank, 1992).

In terms of broader metaphysical ethos, there is also a convergence in humility. Kant, after demolishing rational proof in the Critique of Pure Reason, says we must "deny knowledge to make room for faith" (Kant, 1998, Bxxx). Similarly, al-Ghazālī after his critique ends up saying that one must have direct experience (faith/gnosis) since reason by itself can't lead all the way (al-Ghazālī, 2000). Both approaches insist on the surrender of the arrogant intellect – Kant surrenders it to the moral law (which he might say is the voice of God within), Ghazālī surrenders it to God's guidance directly. This is ironically akin to the meaning of "Islam" itself – surrender to God. In a poetic sense, Kant's critical philosophy made reason "submit" to a higher principle (practical reason or moral faith). This is not to say Kant was secretly preaching Islamic submission, but the thematic overlap is worth noting: the highest use of reason is to recognize its own limits and to adhere in practice to the moral law (which for Kant has a sanctity akin to a divine command). Kant's awe at the "moral law within me" parallels a pious person's awe at God's guidance within the heart (Kant, 1998, p. 288).

### Historical Pathways: Transmission and Convergence

Having drawn these philosophical parallels, we should address how such influence or convergence might have occurred historically. The evidence suggests a mix of direct transmission via texts and independent development due to common Neoplatonic or monotheistic frameworks.

**Medieval Transmission:** The works of Al-Kindī, Al-Farabi, Avicenna, Al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and others were translated into Latin (or known through Hebrew translations) between the 12th and 15th centuries (Gutas, 2001; d'Herbelot, 1697; Ockley, 1708). Universities in Europe integrated some of this material. For example, Averroes's commentaries on Aristotle shaped late medieval philosophy profoundly (leading to Latin Averroism, which dared to suggest a division between reason and faith) (Averroes, trans. 1953). Avicenna's metaphysics and psychology were standard in Scholastic discussions (Avicenna, trans. 2005; McGinnis, 2010). Aquinas engaged with "the Commentator (Averroes) and the Philosopher (Aristotle)" but also "the Sufi" – he knew of Avicenna's mystical side – and "Algazel" whose arguments he answered in *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Aquinas, trans. 1975). Algazel (al-Ghazālī) was cited by Scholastics (often for his enumeration of the philosophers' positions which he compiled in *Maqāsīd al-Falāsifa*) (al-Ghazālī, trans. 2000). Thus, key ideas (like the incoherence of a past-eternal world, or the impotence of human reason to grasp God) were available to thinkers in Christian lands. For instance, Duns Scotus in the 14th century took a more voluntarist turn in theology (closer to Ghazālī) against Aquinas's rationalism, possibly under the influence of Islamic occasionalist ideas mediated by earlier Franciscans (Frank, 1992; McGinnis, 2010).

By Kant's time, the immediate sources were no longer the original Islamic texts but the second-order tradition: the rationalist and empiricist philosophies that had emerged. Yet, as we have shown:

- Leibniz (and to an extent Spinoza, Malebranche, etc.) was familiar with and influenced by Scholasticism which was influenced by Islamic thought. Leibniz explicitly references the "Arabic philosophers" in some letters and was interested in Chinese and Egyptian thought; he was a universal scholar (Leibniz, trans. 1989).

- Concepts like occasionalism reappear in Malebranche and are discussed and refuted by Leibniz, keeping those ideas alive (Malebranche, trans. 1997; Nadler, 1996).
- The problem of universals and categories persisted – e.g., Christian Wolff’s logic and metaphysics text would discuss nominalism vs realism of universals, etc., debates tracing back to Avicenna’s distinction of *universale in rebus vs in mente* (Avicenna, trans. 2005; Wolff, 1728).

Furthermore, the 17th–18th centuries saw actual scholarly encounters with Islamic texts. For example, George Sale’s English translation of the Qur’an (1734) had a long introduction praising Muhammad’s sincerity and the rationality of Islam (Sale, 1734). Scholars like Barthelemy d’Herbelot published encyclopedias of the Orient (*Bibliothèque orientale*, 1697). Simon Ockley wrote on the history of Islamic philosophers (Ockley, 1708). Kant could have indirectly been exposed to discussions of Avicenna’s and Ghazālī’s ideas through such compendiums or through his educated peers. The presence of Arabic teaching in German universities meant someone like Kant’s colleague might drop a reference to “Algazel’s view on causality” in conversation, for instance.

We should also acknowledge the role of a shared Neoplatonic heritage. Both Islamic philosophers and Kant (via German mystics like Jakob Böhme or Christian Hermann who influenced Kantian pietism) drank from the well of Neoplatonism (Plotinus, trans. 1966; Böhme, trans. 1994). Plotinus’s idea of a single ineffable One, and the hierarchy of being, filtered into Islamic philosophy (through *Theology of Aristotle* and works of Al-Farabi, the Brethren of Purity, etc.) and into Christian thought (Pseudo-Dionysius, trans. 1987). Kant’s moral philosophy has been compared to Stoicism and Platonism (the idea of rational autonomy and the world of forms) (Kant, trans. 1996). Islamic thinkers like al-Farabi and Ibn Sina synthesized Plato and Aristotle and a bit of Stoicism (al-Farabi, trans. 1985). So some parallels might be due to both Kant and his Islamic precursors being heirs to Greco-Roman philosophical ideas that transcend culture.

### Conclusion: The Hidden Islam of Modern Philosophy

Immanuel Kant likely never imagined he would be considered an “unlikely muhaddith” – a transmitter of traditions from the Islamic world. The term *muhaddith* in Islamic context refers to a scholar who memorizes and transmits hadith (Prophetic traditions) (Brown, 2009). Kant of course was not doing this in any literal sense. But metaphorically, we have argued that Kant’s philosophy transmitted and transformed ideas with deep roots in Islamic thought. The *Basmalah* on his doctoral diploma was a visible Arabic imprint on his academic life (Bobzin, 2002); more importantly, we have traced invisible intellectual imprints: from al-Ghazālī’s and Avicenna’s insights on epistemology, causality, and metaphysics to Kant’s critical system (al-Ghazālī, trans. 2000; Avicenna, trans. 2005).

The *Basmalah*’s appearance in Königsberg in 1755, far from being a mere antiquarian quirk, thus serves as a symbol of the cross-cultural fertilization that underlies modern philosophy. Historically, as Bobzin’s study shows, its presence was likely due to an academic convention – yet conventions themselves speak to contexts (Bobzin, 2002). The willingness of an 18th-century Protestant academic body to adorn a diploma with an Islamic invocation suggests that Islamic knowledge had prestige and currency, even if just as a mark of erudition. It hints at an intellectual cosmopolitanism that contradicts any neat separation of “Western” and “Islamic” thought. Kant’s education and environment were indirectly shaped by centuries of dialogues (and debates) between Christian and Muslim thinkers, even if Kant himself was not reading Arabic (Frank, 1992; Gutas, 2001).

As one commenter astutely put it, “it is quite possible to be ‘Western’ and ‘Islamic’ at the same time”, implying that ideas are not confined by such labels.

Our analysis has highlighted several deeper metaphysical convergences:

- Both Kantian and Islamic philosophies conclude that human reason has limits and that ultimate truth (whether framed as God or the noumenal realm) is beyond purely rational grasp, accessible only through other faculties (moral reason for Kant, religious experience for Ghazālī) (al-Ghazālī, trans. 2000; Kant, trans. 1996).
- The conception of a dependent, phenomenal world sustained by a higher reality aligns with Islamic occasionalism and Kant’s empirical realism combined with transcendental idealism (Malebranche, trans. 1997).
- Ethical emphasis and the grounding of religion in ethics (Kant’s notion that true religion is moral) resonates with Islamic views that “faith without works is dead” and the Prophet’s saying that “I was only sent to perfect moral character” (Bukhārī, n.d.). The strong moral monotheism of Islam, which impressed Kant (as he noted Islam’s ascetic rigor and avoidance of superstition), finds an echo in Kant’s own elevation of the moral law as quasi-divine (Kant, trans. 1996).

The broader implications of recognizing an Islamic influence (hidden or open) on modern philosophy are profound. It invites a re-evaluation of the narrative of the Enlightenment and modernity, framing them not as a self-contained European miracle but as chapters in a longer, cross-cultural history of ideas (Gutas, 2001). Modern secular philosophy did not emerge *ex nihilo*; it arose through engagement with theological and metaphysical ideas inherited from the past – a past that includes Islamic civilization’s contributions. Acknowledging this can foster a more inclusive understanding of philosophy as a human enterprise. It shows that the “Republic of Reason” has always been international and interfaith, even when communication was indirect (El-Bizri, 2010). For contemporary comparative philosophy and theology, this exploration also opens avenues of dialogue. If Kant and Ghazālī can “meet” in the realm of ideas – finding common concern for moral integrity and humility before the unknowable – perhaps modern heirs of both traditions (Western secular philosophers and Muslim theologians) can find common ground. The convergence on issues like the limits of science, the importance of ethics, and the need for faith (whether in God or in moral values) is striking. It suggests potential harmony between a critically filtered Enlightenment rationality and a sophisticated religious worldview.

Finally, the title question – “Kant the Unlikely Muhaddith?” – is answered in a nuanced way. Kant was unlikely and perhaps unwitting, but in a sense he did carry forward “hadith” of philosophy that had been narrated by Muslim thinkers long before. He reformulated them in the idiom of his time and for a different audience, which is exactly how intellectual traditions propagate and transform. And just as in Islamic *hadith* science one traces the chain of transmission (*isnād*) of a saying, we have here traced a kind of *isnād* for key philosophical ideas from Islam to Kant. That chain, albeit conjectural at times, underscores a unity of the human quest for wisdom.

In sum, Immanuel Kant – pillar of Western philosophy – stands not in opposition to the Islamic intellectual tradition but, in certain respects, on the shoulders of it. The *Basmalah* on his thesis can be seen as a nod (intentional or fortuitous) to that heritage. Recognizing the hidden Islamic substratum in Kant’s thought does not diminish his genius; rather, it enriches our appreciation of the global loop of ideas that made the modern world. As Kant himself wrote, “In all men, as soon as their reason has become ripe for speculation, there has always existed and will always continue to exist some kind of metaphysics” (Kant, trans. 1996, p. 13). The metaphysics that Kant pursued was, it turns out, part of a conversation beyond the confines of Europe, a conversation that had been going on for centuries across languages and cultures – truly a universal endeavor of human reason.

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