

## **THOUGHTS OF K.H. ABDUL MALIK KALAM FREE WILL AND FREE ACT ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF NADHARAT AL-AFKAR**

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### **Abstract**

*K.H. Abdul Malik's thoughts on free will and free act in the Book of Nadharat al-Afkar offer a moderate theological approach in explaining the relationship between divine will and human freedom. This study aims to analyze the concepts of free will and free act formulated by K.H. Abdul Malik and their relevance to Islamic theological discourse and the lives of Muslims today. K.H. Abdul Malik adopted a synthesis approach, combining the view between Jabariyah determinism and Qadariyah's absolute freedom. He emphasized that humans have efforts as a form of free will, but human actions remain within the scope of God's will and permission. Through the concept of kasb, he shows human responsibility for his actions while placing it within the framework of God's will. The results of the analysis show that this view reflects an effort to bring harmony between the aspects of classical theology and the challenges of modern life. K.H. Abdul Malik's thinking is relevant in providing a theological foundation for Muslims to understand individual freedom without neglecting responsibility to God. This study reinforces the importance of kalam thinking in responding to contemporary problems and offers a balanced perspective between human effort and submission to the divine will.*

**Keywords:** Abdul Malik, *free will, free act, Nadharat al-Afkar.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the Islamic tradition, the debate between the Jabariyah school that emphasizes divine determinism, and the Qadariyah that glorifies human freedom, has given birth to a long discourse on the question of human will and deeds (Nasution, 2019: 31–45). The Ash'ariyah school tries to be a middle ground with the concept *of kasb* (human effort under the will of God), which affirms that man has a role in his actions without negating the absolute power of Allah (al-Ash'ari, 2018: 52–60; Fathurrahman, 2021: 155–170). K.H. Abdul Malik emerges as a figure who reconstructs this discussion in *Nadharat al-Afkar* to offer a view that is contextual and relevant to the challenges of Muslims.

K.H. Abdul Malik's thinking developed in the Muslim community that faced challenges in integrating the Islamic faith with the dynamics of modern life. Issues such as moral responsibility, individual freedom, and submission to divine destiny are often fundamental questions in contemporary theological discourse (Wijaya, 2021: 1–18). This prompted him to re-explore the values of classical kalam in answering contemporary problems with an adaptive approach but still rooted in Sunni orthodoxy.

*Nadharat al-Afkar* is an important work that reflects K.H. Abdul Malik's desire to review the concepts of Islamic theology in depth. In this book, it not only elaborates on the views of previous scholars, but also offers a synthesis that is relevant to the lives of Muslims

today (Abdul Malik, 2015: 10–25). His approach shows continuity with the classical kalam tradition as well as openness to modern social realities.

In the context of modernity, many Muslims face a dilemma between the value of individual freedom offered by global civilization and submission to divine principles in Islam (Ahmad, 2022: 233–248). K.H. Abdul Malik's thinking is relevant because it offers a conceptual framework that not only affirms the importance of the human will, but also reminds us of its responsibility to God as the source of morality and law.

K.H. Abdul Malik's thinking is important to be studied further because it can be a guide for Muslims in understanding their position as free beings but still in the corridor of the divine will. By studying *Nadharat al-Afkar*, Muslims can find a balance between effort and tawakal, between freedom and submission as affirmed in the theological tradition of Ahl al-Sunnah (Rahmat, 2020: 75–92).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach to explore K.H. Abdul Malik's thoughts on *free will* and *free act* in *Nadharat al-Afkar*. The qualitative method was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the meaning, construction of thought, and theological argumentation in depth (Moleong, 2021: 6; Creswell, 2018: 183). The descriptive-analytical approach is used to explain and analyze ideas systematically and critically (Sugiyono, 2022: 13).

The research began with the collection of primary data through the analysis of the text directly from the book, which is considered the main representation of his thoughts. Text analysis as the main source is a characteristic of library *research* in the study of figures' thoughts (Zed, 2018: 3). Secondary data were collected from related literature that includes the study of classical Islamic theology (*kalam*), especially the debate on *free will*, *free act*, and the concept of *kasb* in the Jabariyah, Qadariyah, and Ash'ariyah schools (Nasution, 2019: 31–45).

Data analysis techniques involve several stages. First, the study of the text (content analysis), which is to analyze the content of the book to identify K.H. Abdul Malik's view of the relationship between human will and God's will. Content analysis is used to interpret the meaning of texts systematically and objectively (Krippendorff, 2018: 24). Second, conceptual interpretation, which is understanding the theological and philosophical arguments used by K.H. Abdul Malik in explaining the concepts of *free will* and *free act*, with a conceptual analysis approach in the study of philosophy and theology (Bagus, 2019: 115). Third, contextualization, which is to connect his thoughts with the dynamics of contemporary Muslim life in order to evaluate their relevance (Azra, 2020: 89).

The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources, which is comparing various literature and the views of other relevant scholars to ensure accurate interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 195). The researcher also uses hermeneutic methods to capture the deep meanings in the text, including the historical and sociocultural contexts that influenced the thought of K.H. Abdul Malik. The hermeneutic approach allows for a dialogical understanding of texts between the author, the text, and the reader (Palmer, 2019: 43).

The final results of this research are expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the contribution of K.H. Abdul Malik's thought in bridging classical

theological concepts with modern challenges, as well as enriching the study of contemporary Islamic theology

## **RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION**

In Islamic theology, the concept of *free will* refers to the ability of humans to choose between a variety of possible actions consciously and responsibly. This free will is closely related to the concept of *taklif* (the imposition of law), reward and sin, as well as God's justice. Meanwhile, *free act* refers to the concrete actualization of the will in the form of real deeds. In other words, *free will* is in the realm of intention and mental choice, while *free act* is in the realm of action realization in the empirical world (Rahman, 2018).

In classical discourse, this issue arises as part of the debate about the relationship between the will of man (*iradah al-insan*) and the will of Allah (*iradah Allah*). The Qur'an contains verses that affirm freedom of choice, such as commandments and prohibitions that presuppose man's ability to obey or immorality, as well as verses that affirm that everything happens by the will of Allah. This textual tension has given birth to theological debates since the first century of the Hijri (Watt, 2017).

Historically, the early debate on free will was pioneered by the Qadariyah group who asserted that human beings have complete freedom in determining their actions. They argue that without this freedom, God's justice will be questioned because humans do not deserve to be rewarded or punished for something they did not choose themselves (Nasution, 2019). In this view, *free will* and *free act* are entirely within the authority of man.

In reaction to Qadariyah, the Jabariyah group emerged that emphasized divine determinism. They argue that all human actions are essentially created and determined by God, while humans are only the "place" of those actions. Within this framework, the concepts of *free will* and *free act* are effectively eliminated because humans do not have an independent causal role (Watt, 2017).

The debate then found a more systematic formulation in classical Sunni theology, especially through the thought of Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari. He introduced the concept of *kasb* (acquisition), which is that Allah creates deeds, but humans "acquire" or "acquire" deeds through their will and efforts (Al-Ash'ari, 2018). Thus, *free will* is recognized as the capacity to choose, while *free act* is an action created by God but attributed to man as a form of moral responsibility. This formulation seeks to maintain a balance between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.

In addition to Ash'ariyah, the rational approach was also developed by Abu Mansur al-Maturidi. In Maturidiyah theology, reason has an important role in understanding good and bad values, so human freedom is seen as a gift that allows the implementation of moral responsibility (Fakhry, 2016). While still acknowledging that Allah's power is absolute, Maturidiyah gives more space to the role of rationality in explaining the relationship between human will and action.

Thus, historically the concepts of *free will* and *free act* in Islamic theology developed through a dialectic between determinism and freedom. This discourse is not only metaphysical, but also ethical and juridical, because it concerns the basis of the legitimacy of God's merit, sin, and justice. The debate then became an important foundation for later theological thought, including in modern reconstruction efforts that sought to bridge the gap between human freedom and submission to the divine will.

### **a. Free Will in Traditional Theology**

*Free will* in traditional theology refers to the ability of humans to choose between a variety of choices, both in spiritual and temporal actions. In this view, man is given the will by God to choose good or bad deeds, albeit within the bounds of divine provision (Rahman, 2018: 97–102).

In the Ash'ariyah tradition, *free will* is defined as the ability of humans to choose, but with the recognition that everything happens with the permission and will of Allah. Man has the will to choose, but God created the act anyway. The concept of *kasb* (human acquisition/effort) is the key in this theory (al-Ash'ari, 2018: 52–60; Fakhry, 2016: 210–215).

Maturidiyah emphasized that human intellect has an important role in determining actions that are in accordance with the will of Allah. In this view, *free will* is recognized, but it must be used with consideration of reason and revelation (Maturidi, 2019: 134–140; Rudolph, 2015: 298–305). The final result remains in God's power, but man has an active role in exercising his will.

Qadariyah emphasizes human freedom more broadly. They argue that man has free will and is fully responsible for his actions without direct intervention from God in those actions (Nasution, 2019: 33–35). On the contrary, Jabariyah argues that humans do not have free will. All human actions have been determined by God, so that man has no choice but to carry out what has been decreed (Watt, 2017: 80–82).

### **b. Free Act in Traditional Theology**

*Free act* refers to human actions that are carried out based on their will. In Ash'ariyah, although man has the will to choose an action, it is in essence created by Allah. Thus, man is responsible for his *kasb*, while the creation of deeds remains the property of Allah (al-Ash'ari, 2018: 58–60; Fakhry, 2016: 212).

According to Maturidiyah's view, *free act* is an action born from a rational human will and in harmony with revelation. Man acts consciously and responsibly, but remains within the scope of God's knowledge and power (Rudolph, 2015: 302–305). According to Qadariyah, *free acts* are seen as actions that are completely the result of human will. Man is fully responsible for his actions without the involvement of God's destiny in the process of his actions (Nasution, 2019: 34–36).

Meanwhile, Jabariyah rejects the concept of *free act*, because all human actions are considered to be direct manifestations of the absolute will of God (Watt, 2017: 81–83). In general, in traditional Islamic theology, *free will* and *free act* are closely related to the concept of God's will and destiny. In Ash'ariyah and Maturidiyah, man is given the freedom to choose and act, but the final result remains in the power of Allah (Rahman, 2018: 100–102). Meanwhile, Qadariyah emphasizes human freedom more broadly, and Jabariyah rejects the existence of such freedom. Thus, human freedom in traditional theology cannot be separated from the recognition of God's destiny and will, thus creating a balance between human moral responsibility and divine sovereignty (Nasution, 2019: 40–45).

### **c. Free Act in Traditional Theology**

*Free act* refers to human actions carried out based on their free will (Nasution, 2019: 40–45; Watt, 2017: 80–83). This concept is understood differently depending on the theological view adhered to.

- In Ash'ariyah, even though man has the will to choose an action, the final outcome of each action still depends on the will of Allah. Man is seen as a subject who "acquires" (*kasb*) his actions, while the ultimate creation remains the property of Allah (al-Ash'ari, 2018: 58–60; Fakhry, 2016: 212–215). Thus, *free act* does not diminish God's role as the final arbiter of all things.
- In Maturidiyah, *free act* is an action born from the will of man who is rational and in harmony with revelation. Reason has an important function in judging good and bad, although the final realization remains in the knowledge and power of God (Rudolph, 2015: 302–305).
- In Qadariyah, *free act* is seen as the complete result of human will that is not influenced by Allah's destiny. Man is fully responsible for his actions without God's intervention (Nasution, 2019: 33–36). This view was later widely criticized by Sunni theologians as limiting God's omnipotence (Watt, 2017: 78–80).
- Meanwhile, Jabariyah rejects the concept of *free act* because all human actions have been determined by Allah. There is no freedom of action, because everything is a manifestation of God's absolute will (Nasution, 2019: 31–33).

In general, in traditional Islamic theology, *free will* and *free act* are closely related to the concept of destiny and God's will (Rahman, 2018: 97–102). In Ash'ariyah and Maturidiyah, humans are given the freedom to choose and act, but the final result remains in the power of Allah (Fakhry, 2016: 210–215). Meanwhile, Qadariyah emphasizes the absolute freedom of man, and Jabariyah rejects the existence of such freedom altogether. Thus, human freedom in traditional theology cannot be separated from the recognition of God's destiny and will, thus creating a balance between moral responsibility and divine sovereignty (Nasution, 2019: 44–45).

## **2. The Concept of *Free Will* in the View of K.H. Abdul Malik**

K.H. Abdul Malik in *Nadharat al-Afkar* develops the concept of *free will* as the ability of humans to choose and strive within the framework of Allah's will (Abdul Malik, 2015: 15–20). He places free will as part of man's moral responsibility that remains within the bounds of divine destiny. This approach shows continuity with the classical kalam discourse (Nasution, 2019: 40–45).

He emphasized that free will is not absolute because it remains under the permission and supervision of Allah. *Free will* is understood as a mandate inherent in humans as sentient beings and consciences (Rahman, 2018: 101–102). The concept of *endeavor* is used as a middle way between human freedom and submission to Allah, in line with the synthesis of Sunni theology (Fakhry, 2016: 213).

Against Jabariyah which emphasizes total determinism, K.H. Abdul Malik rejected it because it was considered to negate human moral responsibility (Nasution, 2019: 32). According to him, humans still have an active role through *effort*, even though the final result is in the corridor of divine destiny (Abdul Malik, 2015: 18).

Against Qadariyah which emphasizes the absolute freedom of man, he also rejects this view because it ignores the omnipotence of Allah as the Absolute Sovereign (Watt, 2017: 79–80). *Free will* cannot be separated from the will and permission of Allah.

His thinking is very close to Ash'ariyah, particularly in the concept of *kasb*, but with a stronger emphasis on human ethical responsibility (al-Ash'ari, 2018: 58–60). In addition, there is conformity with Maturidiyah in terms of the role of reason as a moral instrument in making choices (Rudolph, 2015: 303–305).

Based on this view, K.H. Abdul Malik's thinking on *free will* takes a moderate position by combining human freedom and submission to the will of Allah (Abdul Malik, 2015: 20–22). He avoids the extremism of Jabariyah and Qadariyah, and uses the Ash'ariyah and Maturidiyah approaches to construct contextual and relevant views. In his perspective, *free will* is a great responsibility that must be used to get closer to Allah, while still being aware of the limitations of being a creature (Rahman, 2018: 102).

This view provides a solid theological foundation for Muslims in living a balanced life between effort (*ikhtiar*) and tawakal within the framework of the divine will (Nasution, 2019: 45).

### **3. The Concept of *Free Act* in the Thought of K.H. Abdul Malik**

K.H. Abdul Malik in *Nadharat al-Afkar* develops the concept of *free act* as a human action that results from *free will* and the ability to do business (*ikhtiar*), but remains within the limits of Allah's will and power (Abdul Malik, 2015: 22–25). This view reflects the moderate position in kalam discourse, which affirms human freedom without releasing it from divine sovereignty (Nasution, 2019: 40–45).

According to K.H. Abdul Malik, *free act* is the result of the interaction between human will and Allah's permission. Humans have the capacity to choose and realize actions through effort (*kasb*), but the ultimate realization depends on Allah's permission (Abdul Malik, 2015: 24). This concept is in line with the *kasb* theory in Ash'ariyah which places human beings as subjects who "acquire" their deeds, while the essential creation remains the property of Allah (al-Ash'ari, 2018: 58–60; Fakhry, 2016: 212–215). Thus, *free act* is a form of human responsibility as well as a recognition of his limitations as a creature.

He also explained that *free act* does not only concern the physical freedom to act, but includes moral and spiritual dimensions. Human actions must be in harmony with the sharia and directed to draw closer to Allah (Rahman, 2018: 101–102). This perspective shows the close relationship between freedom of action and ethical responsibility in Islamic theology (Watt, 2017: 83–85).

K.H. Abdul Malik's thinking about *free act* is very closely related to the concept of *kasb* in Ash'ariyah. He illustrates the relationship between effort and destiny through the analogy of a farmer who plants seeds: planting efforts are the responsibility of humans, while the growth of plants depends on the will of Allah (Abdul Malik, 2015: 25). This analogy reinforces the principle of balance between effort and tawakal in Sunni theology (Nasution, 2019: 44).

K.H. Abdul Malik rejects extreme views in kalam discourse. He criticized Jabariyah which affirms total determinism because it is considered to negate human moral responsibility and is contrary to the concept of merit and sin in Islam (Nasution, 2019: 31–33). Similarly, he rejected the view of Qadariyah which stated that man is completely independent in his actions, because he is considered to ignore the omnipotence of Allah (Watt, 2017: 78–80).

K.H. Abdul Malik's thoughts on *free act* are relevant as a practical guide for Muslims in facing the challenges of modern life. Humans must try their best to carry out their

responsibilities, but still realize that the final result is under the power of Allah (Abdul Malik, 2015: 26). This concept creates a balance between effort and tawakal, while strengthening the awareness that humans are responsible beings but still subject to divine provisions (Rahman, 2018: 102).

### **C. Discussion**

K.H. Abdul Malik's thinking in *Nadharat al-Afkar* shows a theological construction that is not only repetitive to classical treasures, but dialogical and contextual. He positioned himself in the mainstream of the Sunni kalam tradition by making the debate on free will and human action the main axis of his theological reflection. In this framework, it can be seen that the building of his argument is rooted in the synthesis between the classical theological heritage and the spiritual-intellectual needs of modern Muslims (Abdul Malik, 2015).

Conceptually, the most dominant influence in his thought was the tradition of Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari through the construction of the doctrine of kasb. In the theology of Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, kasb is understood as a form of "acquisition" of man for his deeds, while the creation of deeds remains in the power of Allah (Al-Ash'ari, 2018). K.H. Abdul Malik adopts this principle by affirming that man has a will (free will) and effort (ikhtiar), but the actualization of actions (free act) still occurs within the scope of Allah's iradah and qudrah (Abdul Malik, 2015). Here it appears that he does not separate the ontological dimension (God's power) from the ethical dimension (human responsibility), but rather assembles them in an integral relationship.

Furthermore, the moderate approach of Ash'ariyah that avoids the extremes of determinism and theological libertarianism became an epistemological framework for K.H. Abdul Malik. He uses the classical kalam argumentation pattern to show that human moral responsibility remains valid because of the ability to choose, even though these choices do not stand independently of God's will (Watt, 2017). Thus, free act in his view is not absolute freedom, but participatory freedom—that is, freedom that operates within the horizon of metaphysical dependence on God.

In addition, the theological influence of Abu Mansur al-Maturidi can also be traced in the emphasis on the role of reason. In the Maturidiyah tradition, reason has the capacity to know basic moral values and distinguish between good and bad, although revelation remains the final authority (Fakhry, 2016). K.H. Abdul Malik absorbed this idea by asserting that human freedom must be directed by rationality in harmony with revelation. This means that free act is not only understood as the ability to act, but as a conscious action that has a moral and spiritual dimension. Here it is seen that he integrates theological rationality with ethical awareness, so that human actions are always within the horizon of accountability.

His criticism of Jabariyah's extreme determinism emphasized his moderate position. Jabariyah's view that negates the effective will of humans is considered to have implications for the fall of the concepts of reward and sin, thereby weakening the foundation of Islamic ethics (Nasution, 2019). K.H. Abdul Malik rejects this position by asserting that human beings are endowed with the capacity to choose and work, which is the basis for the legitimacy of moral responsibility (Abdul Malik, 2015). Without recognition of this capacity, the Islamic system of ethics and law loses its relevance.

On the contrary, he also criticized the absolute freedom associated with Qadariyah. In his perspective, the assumption that humans are fully autonomous in determining their actions has the potential to shift the position of Allah as the absolute Sovereign of reality (Rahman, 2018). Such freedom, according to him, gives birth to a theological reduction that separates man from his ontological dependence on God. Therefore, he emphasized that human freedom is limited and always within the corridor of divine will (Abdul Malik, 2015).

From the overall construction, it can be understood that the influence of classical theology in the thought of K.H. Abdul Malik did not stop at the adoption of terminology, but continued at the process of reinterpretation. He made the principles of Ash'ariyah and Maturidiyah as a normative foundation to respond to the problems of modernity, especially the tension between individual freedom and obedience to God's law. With a moderate and integrative approach, he presents a theological paradigm that balances effort and trust, rationality and revelation, and freedom and submission.

In its entirety, K.H. Abdul Malik's thought shows that free will and free act are not two concepts that stand alone, but are part of a theological structure that affirms human beings as active moral subjects as well as submissive servants. In this framework, freedom is not interpreted as absolute independence, but as a mandate that must be accounted for before Allah. It is this paradigm that makes his thinking relevant as a bridge between classical theology and the spiritual-intellectual needs of contemporary Muslims.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The conclusion of this study confirms that K.H. Abdul Malik's thought in *Nadharat al-Afkar* is not just a reproduction of the classical kalam teachings, but a systematic and contextual theological reconstruction of the relationship between free will and free act. The results of the textual analysis show that he builds a conceptual framework that places human free will as an authentic moral reality, while affirming the supremacy of God's will as an ontological foundation the whole action. Thus, the correlation between the results of the research and the discussion shows that freedom in his view is participatory—human beings are free to choose and make efforts, but the realization of their actions remains within the scope of divine iradah.

Theologically, this study finds that the construction is firmly rooted in the principle of kasb in the tradition of Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, combined with the emphasis on moral rationality as developed by Abu Mansur al-Maturidi. This synthesis is evident in the discussion that man is responsible for his efforts and ethical choices, while God remains the creator and final determinant of the realization of action. This finding also confirms that K.H. Abdul Malik consciously took the position of tawassuth by rejecting Jafariyah's extreme determinism that eliminates moral responsibility, as well as rejecting Qadariyah's theological libertarianism which has the potential to obscure God's sovereignty.

The relationship between the results of the research and the discussion also shows that the concept of free act in his thinking does not stop at the metaphysical dimension, but has ethical and practical implications. The free act is understood as the actualization of free will which must be in harmony with the sharia and directed at moral responsibility. Thus, freedom is not interpreted as absolute autonomy, but as a mandate that demands accountability before God. This is where it appears that his theological construction serves

as the foundation of productive religious ethics: encouraging maximum effort while affirming the attitude of tawakal.

In the context of modernity that often opposes individual freedom with adherence to divine norms, K.H. Abdul Malik's thought offers an integrative paradigm. He does not separate between faith and rationality, between effort and dependence, nor between freedom and submission. Therefore, his intellectual contribution is significant in enriching the discourse of contemporary Islamic theology, especially in reformulating the position of man as an active, free, and responsible moral subject, yet remaining within the corridor of the divine will.

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