
Anti-Corruption Theology: A Kalam and Sufism Approach to Moral and Spiritual Crisis

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Abstract. *Corruption is a multidimensional problem rooted not only in weaknesses of legal systems and institutional governance, but also in the moral and spiritual crisis of individuals. Within this context, the Islamic intellectual tradition, particularly kalam and Sufism, offers a normative and ethical framework for strengthening anti-corruption efforts. This study analyzes the construction of anti-corruption theology in the tradition of kalam and examines the internalization of Sufi values as a preventive foundation for personal integrity and public ethics. Using a qualitative library research approach, the study examines classical and contemporary theological sources alongside key Sufi concepts. The findings indicate that kalam establishes an ethical foundation for anti-corruption through the interrelation of qadar divine decree, moral freedom, taklif moral responsibility, and divine justice adl. The doctrine of kasb in Asharite theology and the emphasis on moral rationality in Maturidite thought reject fatalism and affirm human accountability for corrupt acts, which bear moral and eschatological consequences. The concept of hisab further nurtures transcendental accountability beyond formal legal control. Sufism complements this framework through spiritual purification tazkiyat al nafs and inner awareness, fostering internal moral restraint. The integration of kalam and Sufism thus provides a comprehensive ethical and spiritual foundation for sustainable anti-corruption efforts.*

Keywords: *Corruption Theology; Kalam and Sufism; Moral Responsibility; Spiritual Purification*

INTRODUCTION

Corruption constitutes a structural problem that not only damages legal systems and governance (Karsona, 2011), but also erodes the moral and spiritual foundations of society (Umar, 2019). In Muslim majority countries, anti corruption efforts are generally concentrated on juridical and institutional approaches, including regulatory reform, strengthening oversight mechanisms, and law enforcement (Yani et al., 2023). Although these measures are indispensable, legal formal strategies often fail to address the deeper dimension of behavioral formation, namely the theological and spiritual structures that shape individual moral consciousness. Therefore, an analytical framework is required that moves beyond normative legal approaches to incorporate theological and spiritual perspectives, particularly those derived from kalam and Sufism.

Several previous studies have examined corruption from the standpoint of Islamic ethics and moral education. Mu'allim (2010) emphasizes the importance of cultivating honesty and trustworthiness in building an anti corruption culture; however, his analysis remains focused on normative ethical dimensions without a systematic exploration of kalam theology as its foundational basis. Siahaan et al. (2024) discuss integrity based anti corruption education strategies in higher education, yet their approach is largely pedagogical and practical, without linking moral responsibility to the theological doctrines of qadar and kasb.

In the field of theology, Latif (2017) and Zulkarnain (2023) analyze the relationship between human freedom and divine decree within classical kalam, but they do not specifically relate these discussions to corruption or contemporary political ethics. Meanwhile, Umar (2019) highlights the role of spirituality in the moral crisis of modern society, though his study does not systematically integrate Sufi frameworks with normative theological constructions. Consequently, these works remain fragmented, addressing legal, educational, theological, or spiritual dimensions separately, without offering an integrative conceptual synthesis.

In contrast to previous studies, this article brings together two principal disciplines within the Islamic intellectual tradition, namely kalam and Sufism, as a theological and spiritual foundation for an anti corruption paradigm. Whereas

earlier works have largely emphasized legal normative aspects or character education, this study positions the doctrines of *qadar*, *kasb*, and divine justice *adl* (Nasution, 1986; Zulkarnain, 2023) as the ontological basis of moral responsibility, while simultaneously integrating Sufi concepts such as *muraqabah*, *muhasabah*, and *tazkiyat al-nafs* (Bakri & Wahyudi, 2021; Mutmainah, 2021) as mechanisms for the internalization of ethics. Accordingly, this research offers a more comprehensive approach: it not only explains why corruption is wrong in legal and social terms, but also demonstrates why it constitutes a theological deviation and a spiritual malady.

Within the Islamic tradition, kalam systematically examines the relationship between divine decree *qadar*, moral responsibility *taklif*, and human freedom. This discourse bears direct implications for accountability, as it affirms that human beings are moral agents responsible for their actions before God. Classical debates among theological schools, including Ashariyah and Maturidiyyah, reflect sustained efforts to maintain a balance between divine omnipotence and human freedom. In this framework, the doctrines of *kasb*, *qudrah*, and divine justice *adl* serve as normative foundations affirming that human actions carry ethical and eschatological consequences.

Sufism adds an inward dimension that deepens this structure of accountability. If kalam articulates responsibility at the doctrinal level, Sufism internalizes it through spiritual cultivation, including *muraqabah* as awareness of divine supervision, *muhasabah* as self examination, and *tazkiyat al-nafs* as purification of the soul. From a Sufi perspective, corruption is not merely a legal violation or rational error, but a disease of the heart rooted in the dominance of desire, excessive attachment to worldly life *hubb al dunya*, and weakened awareness of ultimate accountability (Umar, 2019).

In contemporary sociopolitical practice, however, the concept of divine decree is often reduced to a deterministic interpretation that fosters passivity and moral justification for misconduct, including corruption (Arifin, 2021). At the same time, the crisis of spirituality reveals the fragility of internal moral restraint. This situation exposes a gap between theological teachings and social praxis. Hence, an integrative reading of kalam and Sufism is necessary to reconstruct an anti corruption paradigm

grounded not only in legal and rational considerations, but also in theological consciousness and spiritual depth.

This article aims to conceptually analyze anti corruption discourse from the perspectives of kalam and Sufism through a literature based approach grounded in theological and spiritual analysis. The study departs from the assumption that corruption is not merely an administrative violation, but a theological deviation and a spiritual crisis that betrays trust and diminishes eschatological consciousness. By reconstructing the relationship between qadar, kasb, and moral responsibility, and integrating these theological principles with the Sufi concept of spiritual purification, this article seeks to propose a more comprehensive anti corruption paradigm. Such a paradigm combines metaphysical awareness, moral accountability, and spiritual transformation as the foundation of a just and integrity based public ethics.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design oriented toward theological and conceptual analysis. Library research aims to systematically examine ideas, doctrines, and normative arguments developed within particular intellectual traditions through the exploration of relevant primary and secondary sources (Creswell, 2014). The primary sources in this study consist of representative works from the schools of kalam and foundational Sufi teachings, while the secondary sources include academic books and indexed journal articles addressing public ethics and anti corruption discourse within the Indonesian context.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis to identify key concepts within kalam doctrines and Sufi values, complemented by a hermeneutical approach to interpret their relevance to contemporary issues of corruption. The analytical process involved conceptual reduction, argumentative comparison among theological schools, and normative reconstruction as the basis for an anti corruption theology. The validity of the study was maintained through source triangulation and argumentative consistency, resulting in a theoretically grounded synthesis that is academically accountable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Anti-Corruption Theology in the Kalam Tradition

The structure of anti-corruption theology within the tradition of kalam is constructed upon the conceptual relationship between divine decree (*qadar*), human moral freedom, the principle of moral responsibility (*taklif*), and divine justice (*'adl*). Within this framework, major theological schools, particularly the Ash'arite and Maturidite traditions, articulate a balanced formulation between God's omnipotence and human accountability as moral agents. This construction affirms that every human act unfolds within the scope of the divine will, yet remains situated within the domain of conscious choice for which individuals are accountable.

Accordingly, corrupt conduct cannot claim theological legitimacy under the pretext of destiny, since the principles of *taklif* and *'adl* necessarily entail moral and eschatological consequences. From this perspective, theology does not remain confined to metaphysical speculation; rather, it functions as a normative foundation that shapes personal integrity, ethical responsibility in public office, and a transcendent consciousness of accountability in public life.

1. Ontological Foundation: The Relationship between Qadar and Moral Freedom

The findings of the literature review indicate that, within the perspective of kalam, particularly in the Sunni theological traditions of the Ash'arites and Maturidites, the doctrine of *qadar* is not intended to produce fatalism but rather to affirm the cosmic order under the sovereignty of the divine will (Cory & Mustafiyati, 2024; Nasution, 1986). This concept positions God as the creator of all acts, while not negating the role of human beings as moral agents. Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, in *Al-Ibanah 'an Usul al-Diyanah*, maintains that all events are brought into existence through divine will, yet humans "acquire" (*kasb*) their actions through conscious volition (Sulaeman et al., 2023). Likewise, Abu Mansur al-Maturidi, in *Kitab al-Tawhid*, underscores the function of human reason as the faculty by which truth and falsehood are discerned, thereby preserving moral accountability (Mansur & Saputra, 2018). This doctrinal

framework bears direct relevance to anti-corruption ethics: corruption is not an absolute destiny, but rather an act of acquisition (*kasb*) that will be subject to reckoning in the hereafter.

Within the Ash‘arite construction, the doctrine of *kasb* explains that human beings “appropriate” their actions through deliberate choice, thus remaining subjects deserving of reward or punishment. The Maturidite perspective, meanwhile, emphasizes rational capacity and human ability (*qudrah*) as the basis of ethical responsibility. These findings demonstrate that, within classical *kalam*, human moral freedom is theologically affirmed, albeit situated within the scope of divine will. Its implication for the issue of corruption is clear: corrupt practices cannot be justified under the pretext of destiny. Every abuse of power remains within the sphere of conscious human choice and, consequently, entails moral and eschatological consequences.

2. Moral Responsibility and the Principle of *Taklif*

This study finds that the concept of *taklif* (the imposition of legal and moral obligation) constitutes a central pillar in the ethical structure of *kalam* (Putera & Sudirman., 2024). *Taklif* refers to the process by which God imposes religious and moral duties upon human beings as *mukallaf*—that is, as morally accountable agents fully responsible for their choices. Within the Ash‘arite tradition, al-Juwayni in *Al-Burhan* argues that *taklif* arises from the divine attribute of wisdom (*hikmah*), which requires human beings to employ both reason and desire in obedience to God. The Maturidite perspective, as articulated by al-Maturidi in *Kitab al-Tawhid*, further emphasizes the rational dimension: human reason, by its innate disposition, possesses the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, such that the rejection of *taklif* constitutes a betrayal of one’s primordial nature (*fitrah*).

In the context of anti-corruption discourse, *taklif* underscores that public office is not merely an administrative position, but a divine trust, as affirmed in Qur’an 4:58. A corrupt official thus engages in the acquisition (*kasb*) of structural sin and violates the principle of divine justice (*‘adl*) inherent in God’s attributes. Corruption, therefore, is not solely a breach of state law (Law No.

31/1999), but also a form of theological disobedience that entails eschatological accountability. The implication is that anti-corruption efforts must be holistic, integrating positive law, the cultivation of *taklif*-based moral consciousness through religious education curricula in Islamic boarding schools, schools, and universities, as well as the strengthening of state institutions such as the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and internal inspectorates. Such an approach transcends institutional reform alone, extending toward the transformation of conscience through awareness of humanity's entrusted role on earth, with the aim of realizing a just and prosperous society.

3. Divine Justice ('*Adl*) as a Framework for Public Ethics

The literature review demonstrates that the principle of divine justice (*'adl*) in *kalam* carries far-reaching ethical implications, extending beyond the theological domain into the formation of social moral structures. Within the *kalam* framework, divine justice is understood as an attribute that necessitates all human actions being subject to objective and proportionate evaluation (Nurhalimah et al., 2025). No deed escapes divine knowledge or reckoning, and no recompense is dispensed arbitrarily. Every act, whether virtuous or wrongful, entails consequences commensurate with its moral quality and underlying intention.

This principle cultivates a transcendent consciousness: the conviction that human accountability does not terminate within legal systems or institutional oversight, but continues into the eschatological realm. In this regard, the concept of *hisab* (final reckoning) serves as the foundation of a profound moral awareness. Unlike worldly legal mechanisms, which are constrained by space, time, and the possibility of manipulation, divine justice is absolute, comprehensive, and inescapable.

From an anti-corruption perspective, awareness of eschatological reckoning functions as an internal moral control mechanism that surpasses mere external supervision. Individuals who believe in accountability before God possess an ethical restraint operative even in the absence of formal oversight. Integrity, therefore, is not shaped solely by the threat of legal sanction, but by

spiritual consciousness of the moral consequences inherent in every action. In this sense, *kalam* theology provides a robust normative foundation for the cultivation of bureaucratic ethics and personal integrity. The principles of *'adl* and *hisab* establish an orientation of responsibility that transcends pragmatic interests, directing public officials and individuals toward moral commitment grounded in faith and awareness of God's perfect justice.

Internalization of Sufi Values in Corruption Prevention

From the perspective of Sufism, corruption is not merely understood as a legal violation, an ethical deviation, or an unlawful act within the confines of formal jurisprudence. More profoundly, it is a manifestation of inner disorder, signaling a disjunction between the consciousness of divine unity (*tawhid*), the values of faith, and everyday conduct. When professed sacred beliefs are not reflected in concrete actions, Sufism interprets this inconsistency as an indication of a heart (*qalb*) afflicted by spiritual maladies and a weakened sense of *muraqabah*, awareness of divine oversight. At its deepest level, therefore, corruption is not solely a matter of social morality, but a question of spiritual hygiene: a disruption in the process of *tazkiyah* (purification) that obscures moral clarity and diminishes spiritual sensitivity. In this regard, Malik (2022) argues that corrupt behavior may arise from spiritual illness, existential emptiness, and a predominantly materialistic lifestyle, all of which estrange individuals from the transcendent dimension. Within the normative Islamic framework, corruption is not only categorized as unlawful (*haram*), but also as a form of *fasād*, destructive corruption that undermines social order and threatens collective well-being (Amelia, 2017).

In anti-corruption discourse, Sufism offers a preventive paradigm. Al-Khalidi (2013) defines Sufism as a discipline that guides individuals toward the purification of blameworthy traits, the preservation of sincerity in worship, and the protection of deeds from inner corruption. Within this framework, combating corruption cannot rely solely on external regulations; it must be accompanied by inner training, including the purification of the heart and the disciplining of the self, so that integrity emerges organically from inward moral clarity.

In the Sufi intellectual tradition, the term “heart” is commonly expressed through *qalb* or *qalbun*. This concept does not correspond exclusively to the biological heart as understood in medical science, although etymologically it refers to the physical organ as the center of bodily life. Abu Hamid al-Ghazali explains that the term encompasses two layers of meaning: first, the corporeal organ; and second, the inner reality that constitutes the deepest center of human consciousness (Al-Ghazali, n.d.). Just as the physical heart requires proper care, nourishment, and maintenance to perform its vital functions effectively, the inner heart (*qalb*) demands comparable attention. When this inward dimension is neglected, deprived of spiritual discipline, self-restraint, and sustained purification, it becomes vulnerable to psychospiritual disorders, including anxiety, existential disorientation, destructive tendencies, and ultimately moral deviation.

Historically, Sufism emerged as a critical response to growing worldliness, moral decline, and spiritual crisis (Bakri, 2020; Wahyudi, 2022). During that period, material orientation and political luxury were perceived as displacing the ethical and spiritual values exemplified by the Prophet. Sufism functioned as an ethical movement that reaffirmed asceticism, honesty, and integrity. In this historical sense, it has been understood as a source of public morality that serves to prevent deviant practices, including corruption (Supian, 2017).

Based on this account, corruption in the Sufi perspective is not viewed merely as a legal violation or formal deviation, but as a manifestation of spiritual crisis. When transcendent awareness no longer aligns with concrete behavior, individuals lose their spiritual integrity, and corrupt acts emerge as consequences of spiritual illness, distorted meaning-making, and the dominance of materialistic orientation. Within this framework, corruption is not only categorized as unlawful (*haram*), but also as a form of *fasād* that damages social order and threatens the public good.

Efforts to ground Sufi values as a foundation for preventing corrupt behavior cannot be undertaken instantaneously nor confined to normative rhetoric. The internalization of values requires a gradual and systematic process that engages the whole dimension of the human person.

At the cognitive level, individuals must first comprehend Sufi teachings in a rational and reflective manner. Values such as honesty, trustworthiness (*amanah*), ascetic restraint (*zuhd*), vigilance before God (*muraqabah*), and disciplined striving (*mujahadah*) need to be articulated as ethical principles relevant to contemporary social life, including within the framework of corruption prevention. Such understanding is essential to ensure that Sufism does not remain an abstract spiritual discourse, but develops into a mode of thought that shapes moral orientation and guides decision-making toward ethical conduct (Frager, 2014).

Human perfection lies in the optimal functioning of reason as the center of ethical deliberation. Reason does not merely represent intellectual capacity, but also critical analysis, profound reflection, and self-awareness. As a rational being (*al-ḥayawān al-nāṭiq*), the human person requires knowledge as “nourishment” for the development of intellect (Bakri, 2023). Strengthening cognitive capacity, therefore, becomes a prerequisite for the formation of personal integrity. Anti-corruption discourse cannot remain merely persuasive; it must equip individuals with a sound, productive mindset oriented toward the common good, what the Sufi tradition describes as *rabbānī* thinking.

Beyond the rational dimension, Sufism emphasizes reflection as a means of self-evaluation. Contemplating the harmful nature of misconduct and recognizing its moral consequences can generate the resolve to renounce reprehensible practices. Fear of divine sanction and awareness of human limitation foster inner restraint. Al-Ghazali (1997)(1997) underscores the importance of *tawaqquf*—pausing to think before acting—as the opposite of impulsiveness and as an ethical mechanism that prevents one from falling into harmful deeds.

In the context of corruption, deviant behavior is commonly driven by three principal factors: pressure arising from needs or lifestyle, rationalization to justify misconduct, and opportunity resulting from weak oversight systems (Handoyo, 2022). The first two factors relate to the perpetrator’s internal condition, while the latter is structural. The Sufi framework primarily addresses the internal dimension, purifying the heart, rectifying intention, and restructuring patterns of thought so that individuals develop stronger moral resilience in the face of pressure or

opportunity for abuse of power. In this way, the internalization of Sufi values provides an ethical-spiritual foundation for sustainable corruption prevention.

Intellectual understanding alone, however, is insufficient to produce profound behavioral transformation. Sufism situates the affective dimension—inner feeling and spiritual awareness—at the center of self-transformation, since moral formation depends not only on knowledge but also on deep existential experience. Badrudin (2015) emphasizes that spiritual training requires engagement, emotional involvement, and existential awareness so that religious values truly become alive within the individual.

Such awareness encompasses consciousness of human existence before the Creator, fellow human beings, and other creatures; awareness of human potential; and awareness of human limitations and the need for divine guidance (Rahman, 2018). This consciousness cultivates humility alongside moral responsibility, preventing individuals from being easily trapped by egoistic impulses and material interests.

A concrete manifestation of this inner awareness is found in the concept of *muraqabah*, the constant sense of being under divine supervision. Bakri (2020) explains that a person in a state of *muraqabah* believes that all movements and actions are known by God. This conviction nurtures internal self-control, such that moral discipline no longer depends on external sanctions. When consistently internalized, this value generates sensitivity of conscience, fear of committing injustice, and an inner drive to uphold trust and integrity. *Muraqabah* thus becomes an indicator of spiritual maturity. It distances individuals from reprehensible acts because their lives are oriented toward divine pleasure rather than fleeting gain, safeguarding them from degrading conduct (Rahman, 2018). Junayd al-Baghdadi, as cited by An-Naisaburi (2007), affirms that one who realizes *muraqabah* fears losing closeness to God rather than fearing worldly consequences. Spiritual vigilance, therefore, constitutes the most fundamental ethical mechanism.

According to Mushofa (2022), the practice of *muraqabah* serves as an effective psychological fortress against behavioral deviation. In anti-corruption efforts, awareness that every action is accountable before God fosters strong self-

regulation, leading individuals to resist betraying entrusted responsibilities even when opportunities arise. The affective dimension of Sufism thus complements the intellectual dimension, forming integrity rooted in the depth of the heart rather than solely in external regulatory pressure. In this sense, Sufism functions not only as a spiritual teaching but as a comprehensive system of character formation that integrates reasoning, internalization, and action. Through the integration of these dimensions, preventive efforts against corruption acquire a more robust and sustainable ethical-spiritual foundation.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the traditions of kalam and Sufism offer significant contributions to the construction of a theological and ethical spiritual framework for corruption prevention. From the perspective of kalam, the relationship between qadar and moral freedom affirms that human beings remain accountable for every choice they make. The principles of taklif and divine justice *adl* cultivate the awareness that public office constitutes a trust *amanah* for which one is answerable not only before state law, but also before God through the mechanism of *hisab* or eschatological reckoning. In this regard, kalam theology provides a normative foundation that rejects any fatalistic justification of corrupt conduct. Sufism, meanwhile, deepens this approach by addressing the inner dimension of the human person. Corruption is understood as a manifestation of spiritual crisis resulting from weakened *tazkiyah* or purification of the soul and diminished *muraqabah* or awareness of divine supervision. The internalization of Sufi values through the strengthening of reason, sustained self reflection, and the cultivation of affective spiritual consciousness establishes a more enduring internal moral control than reliance on external oversight alone.

The integration of rational and spiritual dimensions thus generates a holistic model of corruption prevention, encompassing both structural reform and personal transformation. Sustainable anti corruption efforts therefore require synergy between legal mechanisms, moral education, and spiritual formation. In this light, kalam theology and Sufism are not merely relevant as normative discourses, but function as ethical foundations for cultivating a culture of integrity and public

accountability oriented toward responsibility in both worldly and eschatological contexts.

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