

Review Paper

A Discourse on The Atheism within The Malaysian Society

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Abstract: Belief in God is the first of several principles enshrined in the *Rukun Negara of Malaysia* which makes it one of the important principles to be upheld by any Malaysian citizen. However, there are some who do not accept this concept of believing in God and they are referred to as atheists. The existence of this group can be seen clearly when issues that concern this group became public knowledge like the meeting of atheists in Kuala Lumpur that took place in 2017 and the existence of a Facebook group called *Warung Atheist* (Atheist Stall). Therefore, this article is prepared to discuss a discourse on the atheism within the Malaysian society including: [1] to analyze past studies related to the definitions and history of atheism; [2] to analyze past studies related to atheist thoughts and arguments and [3] to analyze past studies related to the response and objection to atheism. This article is written using qualitative method with content analysis design. In general, the research findings show that, in Malaysia, there are so few studies conducted on this topic. The study on the definitions and history of atheism among Malaysian researchers is still lacking because many researchers make the studies as a side topic only. This also happens to studies on themes related to atheism, but it should be noted that there are several studies that have begun to focus on atheism. However, most researchers in Malaysia conduct studies which concern the objection against and criticism towards atheism.

Keywords: Goddess; atheist; atheism; kalam; logic

Introduction

Malaysia is known as a country that practices a governing system that is based on parliamentary democracy under the rule of Constitutional Monarchy which centers on God, Islam as the official religion and, the belief in God as the foremost national principle. This shows how important the role of religion and the belief in God is in the building of the Malaysian nation. Belief in God is such a disparate subject in Malaysia. Even though Malaysia is known for its diversity of races and religions, the people have been able to live in harmony ever since the inception of the nation. Although many issues happened pertaining to matters of religion and race, life in this diverse nation is still in peace and harmony (Muda, 2021). However, the situation is different to the atheists who do not believe in God. The first national principle that is the belief in God has become an indication that atheism is not suitable to be practiced in Malaysia. Although apostasy is not considered a crime, the identity of every Malaysian citizen that is based on the national principles must be upheld (Sherman, 2017).

The existence of atheists in Malaysia was discovered when a few incidents took place and one of them was the meeting of atheists in Kuala Lumpur. According to the portal *Peraktoday*, the meeting of the atheists was organized by a club called The Atheist Republic Consulate of Kuala Lumpur led by Armin Navabi, a Tehran-born man. The club membership is not limited to any race, in fact anybody who professes that God does not exist can join the club (Peraktoday, 2017). In addition to the atheist club, there is also a group on

Facebook called *Warung Atheist* (Atheist Stall). According to Faisal, M. and Hanisah, S. (2018), most of the group members make insulting remarks, insinuate, and make fun of matters concerning religion and belief. This has motivated researchers to begin identifying the kinds of writing and studies related to atheism which have been 'practiced' in this country.

Even though the issue of atheism started to arise since 2017, scientific studies related to atheism in Malaysia are still lacking and not highlighted. For this reason, the purpose of writing this article is to collect and analyze the scope and domain of research that has been done on atheism in the Malaysian context. This article can be a benchmark for the level of research done in Malaysia on the subject of atheism and will help future researchers in choosing a scope and domain that has not yet been studied in Malaysia.

Methodology

Research methodology referred to systematical planning of the research procedure is implemented in order to obtain the accuracy of the results (Munawar, A. & Shahizan, M. N. 2019, p. 49).

1. Research Design

This article employs qualitative methodology with content analysis design that focuses on the quality of a particular context without involving measurement in numerical form. The focus of qualitative study is its quality and organized narrative whether in discussing themes or the opinions of scholars (Munawar, A. & Shahizan, M. N. 2019, p. 43). In obtaining quality of research outcomes there are two main processes that need to be carried out by the researchers which are, one, the process of collecting data and, two, the process of analyzing data.

2. Data Collection

This study is a bibliographic study which refers to studies that focus on analyzing literature or previous studies to obtain new information and conclusions (Mohd Shafie 1991). The main source for this study is the literature that makes atheism as a subject written in Malaysia or studies in the Malaysian context. The collection of this data involves searching through databases such as Google Scholar, Malaysian Theses Online (Myto) and others. There are two criteria to choose the research. Firstly, the research is subjected atheism in every domain or scope. Secondly, the research had been wrote in Malaysia, or had been published in Malaysia, or scoped in Malaysia.

3. Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, this article uses the inductive reasoning method. Inductive refers to specific observations to general by identifying patterns and habits in the definition of atheism and then classifying them according to sub domains (Berawi, 2017, p. 13). In this study, the researcher gathered the data found and classified the data according to the appropriate themes which are: [1] definition & history of atheism; [2] the thought of atheism and; [3] response to atheism. As a result of the breakdown of the theme, the classified data was analyzed and examined by the researcher in detail to obtain accurate conclusions. As a result, this study shows the themes and sub-themes that have been studied related to atheism in Malaysia.

Findings and Discussion

In analyzing past studies that have been compiled related to the main subject of the research that is atheism in Malaysia, the researchers will divide it into three main subtopics: [1] definitions and history of atheism; [2] arguments of atheism and; [3] critique and objection against atheism. All the three subtopics are organized based on the reading and examination of the subject, scopes, and domains of past studies.

1. Definitions and History of Atheism

Most studies related to atheism in Malaysia discuss the definitions either generally or in detail. Among the studies that give the detailed definition of atheism is the study that is conducted by Razak & Azam (2021, p. 54-55) takes the approach of examining the definitions from two types of sources which are primary and secondary. In defining atheism there is a problem in determining whether atheism is defined to mean non-

existence (of God) or denial (of God's existence). This problem also occurs in determining whether atheism is a form of belief or not. Razif et.al (2022 p. 344) is of the opinion that atheism can either be a belief or a principle. This is referring to Eller's opinion that atheism is a principle, not a belief. Belief, according to Eller, is the mental acceptance of the truth in relation to something, while principle refers to an individual's stance on something. As summarized by Bullivant (2013, p.21), this problem occurs when it is difficult to get the agreement among the scholars and researchers in defining a particular terminology like atheism that refers to the concept of God.

In resolving the problem of determining the meaning of atheism, Razak & Azam (2021) take the approach of dividing atheism into two: positive and negative. Negative atheism refers to not believing in God while positive atheism refers to the conviction that God does not exist (Razak & Azam, 2021, p. 55). Razif (et.al, 2022, p. 347) also states that there is the problem of defining the meaning of God as there are various concepts of God, gods-goddesses, and spirituality such as in Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism that show how diverse ideas and understanding concerning atheism are. However, one thing that the researchers manage to agree upon in understanding the meaning of atheism is in relation to God. Their agreement is that the denial of God is the main essence of atheism. Ali, A. (2014, p. 17) states that contemporary atheism that is understood today refers to explicit atheism refers to the objection against consciously believing in God. This contemporary atheism is the result of the problem of epistemology and he calls this type as atheism-evidentialist which refers to atheists who always demand evidence for every issue and problem.

There are several studies that look at the definitions of atheism from the Islamic perspective. In the Arabic language, the term that is often used to refer to atheism is *al-ilhād*. Semantically, *ilhād* means diversion from the main objective and terminology, means the denying the existence of God (Qaṭṭān, 2020, p. 43). Razif (et.al, 2022, p. 347) states that *ilhād* refers to the group that rejects the pillars of faith and those who believe that this world is eternal, and reject the notion of resurrection or life after death. Razak & Azam (2021 p. 63) explain the meaning of *ilhād* based on Quranic evidence: *al-A'rāf* verse 180 and *Fuṣṣilat* verse 40. Based on the sentence, it can be concluded that the term *mulhidūn* does not refer to those who oppose religions, but it rather leans towards a negative meaning. Razak & Azam (2021, p. 63) also state the opinion that there is no equivalent word in Arabic with same meaning as atheism but related in the works of Islamic scholars which are *al-dahr*, *zindīq* and *al-ilhād*. Qaṭṭān (2020, p. 37) explains the term *al-dahr* and *al-dahriyyah* refers to materialism that considers time, atoms, and the universe as *qadīm* (they have no beginning) and reject the existence of God as the Creator of the universe. According to Khairuddin (2022, p. 126) *al-dahriyyah* is already explained in *al-Jāthiyyah* 45:24 which means: "There is not but our worldly life; we die and live, and nothing destroys us except time." Razak & Azam (2021, p. 61) state, the terms *al-dahriyyah* covers a few types of people who believe that time is infinite, that is it has no beginning and no ending, and leads to the rejection of the life after death. Razak & Azam (2021, p. 57) explain, both the terms *al-dahr* and *zindīq* are used to refer to the group of 'innovators' (*bid'ah*) and the deviant group. According to Ab.lilah (2009), the continuity between atheist and *zindīq* can be seen from three categories which are: misinterpretation of *Asmā' al-Ḥusnā*, deviation from the words of Allah and the action of hindering Muslims from carrying out Allah's commands. Baderun (2021, p. 17) meanwhile adds that there are two words which are related to atheism: *al-ṭabī'īyyah* and *al-lā dīniyyah*. *Al-ṭabī'īyyah* refers to the philosophers who argue about the nature of the natural world like animals, plants, and others, and it may also refer to the scientists who prioritize empirical studies which have caused this group to reject the hereafter, heaven and hell because all these cannot be proven empirically to exist (al-Ghazali, 2001: 182-183). *Al-lā dīniyyah* semantically means is not part of any religion or does not believe in religion (al-Mu'jam al-ʿArabi, 2003, p. 100). Khairuddin (2022, p. 127) adds that *māddiyyah* is a term that is synonymous with *al-ṭabī'īyyah* which refers to materialism.

Razak & Azam (2021, p. 57) also elaborate the term atheism from sociological and psychological perspectives. Psychologically, there are four levels to be fulfilled for a person to be called an atheist. First, the action and practice of the atheists which are strange and illogical. Second is questioning and doubting every matter concerning religion. Third is the rejection of religion. Finally, it is the confession of the atheists themselves and they have a secular belief. Sociologically, atheists are from upper-class society and many of them control their lives independently. Additionally, Khairuddin (2022, p. 128) concludes that atheism can be seen from two related aspects: symptoms and ideology. Three symptoms related to atheism are sceptic,

materialistic, agnostic and atheistic, while ideology that is related to atheism covers naturalism, materialism, liberalism and secularism.

Besides the definition of atheism, the history of the emergence of atheism is also one of the subjects that is written by the researchers. Wahab (2018, p. 11) states an opinion that the Renaissance era around the 14th century until the 16th century AD was an era when modern Western thoughts were appearing like humanism, secularism, liberalism, and atheism. He added, this happened because of the action of the Church institution that coerced the Western community to accept the edicts and authority of the Church. According to Mat (2020, p. 143), during this era there were oppositions towards Christian theology from among the theologians themselves: the monks, priests, philosophers, and scientists. The application of the term atheist or atheism during the classical era, meanwhile, refers to the title that was used in order to demean a certain belief, especially an orthodox belief. It was usually used to refer to people who have a different religious belief as what happened to Socrates.

Ayunni, (2019, p. 16-21) divides the history of the development of atheism into two: Middle Ages atheism and new millennial atheism. Baderun (2021, p. 19-26) meanwhile divides the history of the development of atheism into three phases. Phase one is described as the advent of atheism thought with the emergence of the school of naturalism. Phase two involves the emergence of atheism during the Renaissance era which was attributed to the opposition towards the Church. Phase three is dubbed New Atheism pioneered by the Four Horsemen. New Atheism movement is described by Razif (et.al, p. 352) as being made up of 5 factors which are new, aggressive in criticizing religions, promote scientism and rationalism, promote secularism and command comprehensive media coverage. In addition, New Atheism does not invent anything new except they are much more vocal in criticizing religions (Malik, 2018, p. v). Fahmi (2019, p. 22) provides an opinion that this New Atheism idea is mostly based on scientific method dominated by the activities of the philosophers of the Enlightenment period. According to Pitafi et.al (2022, p. 115), the socio-culture of New Atheism of this era is seen as the successor to colonialism that appeared during the era of Enlightenment. Razak & Azam (2021, p. 60) have the opinion that in the beginning atheists were more inclined to criticizing Judaism and Christianity. However, the current New Atheism is more focused on attacking Islam by accusing Islam as the religion of the extremists, illogical and barbaric.

Based on the researchers' early observation, within the research scope of definition and history of atheism, specifically the research on the definition of atheism, the level of interest among the researchers is low. The research scope on the definition of atheism was carried out from only four perspectives which are the Western perspective, Islamic, sociological, and psychological. While the general research on the definition of atheism written by Malaysian researchers is at a moderate level. Next, the specific research on the history of the development of atheism, only one literature has been found. Meanwhile, the research within the scope of the history of atheism is in general at a moderate level as not all researchers write about the history of atheism. The general research on the definition and history of atheism is still at a moderate level, while the specific research is at a low level.

2. The Thought and Arguments of Atheism

Generally, the research on the thought of atheism is still at a low level in this country. However, it cannot be said that research within this scope does not exist. One such research that has been identified is by Ayunni (2019, p. 35-41) who listed five arguments of why atheism is against religion and God. First, the problem of evilness which is in the structured deductive form that aims at making religion as its antithesis or also called self-contradictory. For examples, if He is the Almighty God for sure He is evil because He is the One Who creates evilness. If He is the Most Beneficent, then he is not powerful because evil does not exist. Second, the paradox of the qualities of the Almighty God. For example, when God gives total freedom to humans, it gives the connotation that God is unable to control humans' actions. If God does not give freedom to humans, then it gives the connotation that God is incapable of giving total freedom to humans. Third, it is the ignorance fallacy argument. The atheists demand that the empirical proof of God's existence. If it cannot be proven empirically that God exists, then God does not exist. Fourth, atheism also uses straw man fallacy by deriding and mocking religious practices. For example, when someone is saying his gratitude to God for saving him from a bad health condition although the one who treats the disease is the doctor. Finally, atheism brings the

argument fallacy that is misleading by giving the definition of atheism that is the absence of conviction in the existence of God. With this definition, they argue that atheism is not a belief but rather a denial. Thus, they are free of the burden of providing proof.

Besides that, research on the arguments and the thoughts of atheism has also been carried out specifically to analyze the arguments presented in the book *Brief Answers* written by Stephen Hawking. The concept of God as understood by Stephen Hawking covers five aspects which are God has no role in the creation of the universe, God's power is limited in relation to the natural law, the universe came into existence through a natural process so God is not the creator of the universe, and God did not have the time to create before the big bang, and finally God does not exist (Azdi & Wahab, 2020, p. 200-201). The concept of the existence of God as introduced by Stephen Hawking is in line with his scholarship in the knowledge and theories of physics, and he was one of the main figures in the field of physics and has introduced the black holes and big bang theories in explaining how the universe came into existence (Rahayu, A. M. M, 2018, p. 2). This concept of the existence of God does not run away from the discussion of the theory of the creation of the universe since the universe is the proof of the existence of God (al-Ghazali, 2004: 24). The clash between the two fields of knowledge i.e., the knowledge of science and theology has existed for a long time especially in the West to a point that there are thinkers who feel that science would not be able to develop unless the knowledge of theology and the knowledge of philosophy are side-lined (Majdina et.al, 2019, p. 2).

Next, Wahab (2019, p. 36) analyzed the incoherence of atheist thoughts based on an interview with an atheist. The results of the analysis show that there are 12 questions listed which cover the questions related to divinity, morality, and belief. Out of the 12 questions, Wahab (2019) narrows it down to two main questions only:

- i. "Why can't God be proven to exist visually and through empirical studies?"
- ii. "If it is true that God created the universe, then who created God?"

The other questions are merely trivial questions which were only meant to create doubt. Besides that, Fahmi (2019, p. 27-43) in his study discovered that there are three thought ideas brought by New Atheism. First, God maybe does not exist because New Atheism is based on scientism that belief only through empirical evidence. In addition, the theory of evolution is sufficient to understand the origin of the creation of the universe from the perspective of New Atheism. Second, religion is evil, by looking at something from the perspective of religion, it is merely a social system in believing in the supernatural. Third, morality that is based on science. Due to the absence of authority that can dictate what is right or what is wrong, New Atheism makes science as the source of morality to measure humans' quality and behavior using a scientific method.

Baderun (2021, p. 30-33) in his analysis has discovered that doubts cast by the atheists can be divided into three i.e., to doubt the essence, attribute, and action of God. To doubt the essence of Allah concerns questioning the essence of Allah, for example "who created Allah?". To doubt the attributes of Allah on the other hand is related to the attributes of God's Words and the attributes of Allah's knowledge. To doubt the action of Allah meanwhile involves matters related to Allah's justice. Questioning Allah's actions is the most common type of doubt cast by the atheists compared to other types of doubts i.e., to doubt Allah's essence and attributes. In fact, the main doubt that is cast is on Allah's essence, that is the existence of Allah's essence. This is also mentioned by Wahab (2019) who focuses on the question in the form of origin concerning the existence of Allah.

Based on the analyses of past studies, the researchers are unanimous that the main thought of atheism is to cast doubt on the existence of God. Meanwhile, the doubt on matters related to morality is considered ancillary. Also, the matter brought by atheism involves the doubt on religion with questions and criticism towards theism or Islam specifically.

3. Response and Objection against Atheism

The atheism in general were not welcomed by most Malaysians because they are not in line with the first national principle of Malaysia that is belief in God. Therefore, most research on atheism in Malaysia focus more on responding and stating objections against atheism. In objecting and arguing against atheism, there are several themes and methods that have been constructed.

The most popular themes used is the theme of the evidence of God's existence. According to Wahab (2018, p. 36), this is the main theme used in stating objection against atheism. In order to prove the existence of God, two main sources are utilized: the intellect that thinks rationally and *naqlī* that investigates the existence of Allah by revelation i.e., al-Quran and al-Sunnah. Among the methods of obtaining the evidence through the intellect is the method called *al-tadarruj min al-a'ālā* (i.e. gradually from above method) which is taken from al-Būfī. This method has four phases. First, it is impossible for anything to have weight without any force that gives it weight. Second, *tasalsul* (infinite links of a chain) is impossible. Third, *dawr* (infinite cycle) is impossible. Finally, the law of cause and effect (Ayunni, 2019, p. 45-49).

Other researchers also use methods that suit the thinking framework of a particular such as research conducted by Fahmi (2019, p. 73-82), that opposes atheism thinking based on the evidence and arguments from al-Nurṣī. In general, al-Nurṣī emphasizes that it is impossible for the universe and its beauty to originate from an inexplicable source except that there is a God that Creates and Owns everything that He Creates. Besides that, Razif (et. al, 2022, p. 354) compiles all the responses of the Islamic scholars against atheism by dividing them into two epochs: the Classical Islamic era (7th until 10th centuries AD) and the modern Islamic era (18th until 20th centuries AD). During the classical Islamic era, among the popular anecdotes about atheism is the dialogue between Abū Ḥanīfah and *al-dahriyyūn*. The story of Abū Ḥanīfah is well known among Islamic scholars because it was successful in bringing down the belief of the *al-dahriyyūn* that questions the existence of God (Ibrahim, 2019, p. 56). There are other great figures who bring the evidence of the existence of Allah like Abū Ḥasan al-Ash'ārī, al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār. al-Zamakhshārī, al-Ghazali, and many other Islamic scholars during the classical era. There are also many modern Islamic scholars who write about their objections against atheism and among them is Farid Wajdi in his book *Mādhā Anā Mu'min* and *Li Mādhā Huwa Mulhid*, Sho'aib Ahmed Malik, Hamza Andreas Tzortzis, 'Amrū Sharīf and many others (Razif et.al, 2022, p. 367-373). Many people in contemporary society know about the Islamic scholars from the classical era even though many of them might have not read any of the scholars' works. However, very few know the modern Islamic scholars who write about atheism because there is very little writing and exposure towards matters relating to atheism especially in Malaysia.

Even though writings against atheism are so few, the writings with the theme of God's existence are quite encouraging. Among the articles is the one written by Khairuddin and Mahmood (2019, p. 107) analyzing the approach of Shaykh Daud Al-Fatani in the issue of the twenty attributes of Allah. According to them, one can recognize Allah by understanding the compulsory twenty attributes. Meanwhile, Latif & Abdullah (2009, p. 38) have done the analysis of the evidence of God's existence based on the book *'Aqīdah al-Najīn fī 'Ilmi Usūl al-Dīn* written by Shaykh Zainal Abidin al-Fatani or known as Tuan Minal. This book expounds the work of Al-Sanusi's *Umm al-Barāhīn* and it is suitable to be introduced to the public in order to get the people to become acquainted with the quality and value of knowledge heritage. An analysis like this highlights the strength of the great scholars of the Malay Archipelago in understanding and explaining the concept of divinity.

Besides that, other themes that become the focus of the researchers in Malaysia is morality and evilness. It is discussed by looking at how many doubts are cast in this theme. Baderun (2021, p. 64) mentions this in his study in which he states that the doubt that is cast by most atheists nowadays is the theme of morality and evilness. Ayunni (2019, p. 50-57) feels that the issue of morality and evilness must be looked at from the perspectives of God's Might, the purpose of the creation of man and human freedom. God's Might transcends all the universes, and this includes the creation of man. However, humans are given the freedom to decide the route that they want to take in their lives, either to take the route to righteousness or perdition. Fahmi (2019, p. 91) criticizes the morality brought by New Atheism by looking at it from the perspectives of authority and morality. Indeed, humans are naturally endowed with knowledge about what is right and what is wrong. However, to put morality as merely knowledge that humans acquire naturally will create a problem in determining the moral standard for all humans because each one of us is born into different environments. Therefore, humans need definite authority in determining what is right and what is wrong. To explain that, Nursī's opinion that Allah is the main source of morality based on the evidence from al-Quran dan al-Sunnah is accepted.

Other than that, the objection against atheism from the perspective of epistemology also comes from Ali. New Atheism has made science the indicator in determining a truth. However, this notion is rejected because, in this modern world, science is seen as just one of the many viewpoints, not a determinant (Ali, 2014, p. 77). Razak & Azam (2021, p. 65) make an objection against atheism by highlighting the concept of fitrah in Islam. Allah endows men with the intellect in order to be used accordingly in adhering to Allah's commands. In other words, all humans naturally and instinctively believe in God. In relation to that, it has been explained in detail by Ali (2014, p. 78) by taking into consideration the opinion of al-Attas who uses the Islamic term for intuition. He divides intuition into two: normal intuition and superior intuition. Normal intuition refers to the synthesis process due to and because of the experiences, with each one can work in silo without seeing the need for them to be merged in one coordination. Superior intuition is referred to a real knowledge that is given by Allah to a person through experience. This kind of intuition is much better understood with the term *fanā'* in *tasawwuf*. The atheists ignoring about intuition but focus on philosophy and science only. However, Fahmi (2019, p. 79) quotes the opinion of al-Nurṣī who argues that both religion and science are recognized in Islam and there are no contradictions between the two.

Next, in research conducted on the group members of a Facebook group called *Warung Atheist*, Ashaari & Sabri (2018, p. 79) finds that in the attacks towards religions, 21% are made based on logic, while the rest are emotionally driven whether it is in the form of insults, cynicism and mockery. From the logic-based attacks, only 1% is based on facts, while the rest is fallacy. Ayunni (2019, p. 37-40) states that, there are at least three types of fallacy that is often used by the atheists in their arguments. The three types of fallacy are 'begging the question' fallacy, 'straw man' fallacy and ignorance fallacy. This indirectly shows that atheism does not based on truth, in fact most of their arguments are established based on emotions and fallacy.

Besides these, religion is also another theme which is equally important in denouncing atheism propaganda. Fahmi (2019, p. 78) lists five of the New Atheism's arguments in their attacks on religions as well as the counter against these attacks from the perspective of Islam. First, atheism labels religions as totalitarianism. Totalitarianism runs the opposite to freedom i.e., it is a very radical regime system. It is also the symbolism for evilness (Borchert, 2006, p. 254). Second, New Atheism creates the propaganda by accusing Islam as an extremist religion as it is linked to extremism due to the ISIS fiasco and so on, but truth is extremism not part of religion. Third, atheism accuses religions as human's creations and inventions, but the truth is in Islam is something that Allah has accorded to men. Fourth, there is no integration between science and religion. This is indeed false as Islam or any other religions do not reject science, but more than that religions make science to strengthen one's faith. Finally, religions do not teach their followers to be selfish, but they teach humans how to live as a society, to help each other etc. (Fahmi, 2019, p. 83-89).

Besides themes, there are three types of research that form the methodology in denouncing atheism. First, the research that uses the methodology in learning the 20 attributes of Allah to denounce atheism. In denouncing atheism, Baderun (2021: 49-56) divides the doubts brought by atheism into three: essence, attribute, and actions. By applying the study framework of the 20 attributes of God, doubting God's essence can be explained with the attributes *Nafsiyyah* and *Salbiyyah*, doubting the attributes and actions of Allah can be explained with the attributes *Ma'ānī* and *Ma'nawiyyah*. Second is the research on the methodology of al-Quran in shielding the mind from atheism. Among the methodologies found in al-Quran is the challenge towards the rejecters of Quranic verses whereby Allah challenges these rejecters to create one verse or one surah that is equivalent to al-Quran in every aspect. Al-Quran prohibits Muslims from believing in something blindly, and even more than that they are told to use their mental faculties to understand something. The messengers were sent to different peoples and situations, and this shows how expansive the sphere of da'wah carried out by the messengers was. The method of using analogy and repetition of some verses of al-Quran is intended to get a particular message across. Finally, al-Quran also records several dialogues between the messengers and their detractors such as the dialogue between prophet Ibrahim and Haman (Qaṭṭān, 2020, p. 202-207).

Khairuddin (2022, p. 130-134) uses a different approach in criticizing atheism. Three things which are emphasized and are relevant to the discourse of Islamic scholastic theology (*'Ilm al-Kalam*) are: epistemology and the incoherence of the Sophist, the existence of Allah Who is Most Unique and the oneness of essence, attributes, and actions of Allah. In Islamic scholastic theology, the debate concerning epistemology is so

important and the group that is involved is the Sophist or also known as *al-sufasta' iyyūn* who are brilliant in presenting their arguments, but the arguments presented are fake with the intention to mislead the audience. Islamic scholastic theology has recorded discourses that explain in detail matters concerning the issue of epistemology such as al-Bayḍawī, *Tawali' al-Anwār min Maṭāli' al-Anzār* and al-Ījī *al-Mawāqif fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*. Then, the use of the evidence of God's existence is utilized with the purpose of looking at the knowledge of the existence of Allah by means of *badīhī* (intuition) and *ḍarūrī* (axiom). However, by following the science of *Manṭiq* (Logic), it can be concluded that the existence of God is different from the existence of beings, and that is why it is Most Unique. Finally, Khairuddin (2022, p. 130-134) contends that the oneness of Allah covers His essence, attributes, and actions. The knowledge and understanding of the 20 attributes of Allah, 20 impossible attributes of Allah and 1 permissible attribute of Allah can be the strong and practical wall in stopping atheism as well as other ideologies from corrupting and corroding the concept of *tawhid*.

Based on the analysis of scopes of objection against atheism, there are four themes and two methodologies that have been used. The theme of God's existence is the main theme in denouncing atheism, while the theme related to morality is just a secondary theme, but this theme has been utilized by several researchers. The theme of epistemology also plays an important part, especially when it concerns morality. Meanwhile, the theme that receives little attention from researchers is the theme of religion whereby only one researcher has done research on it. Then, with regard to methodology, only three methodologies have been utilized namely the methodology of al-Quran, the methodology of the study of the 20 attributes and the methodology of Islamic scholastic theology.

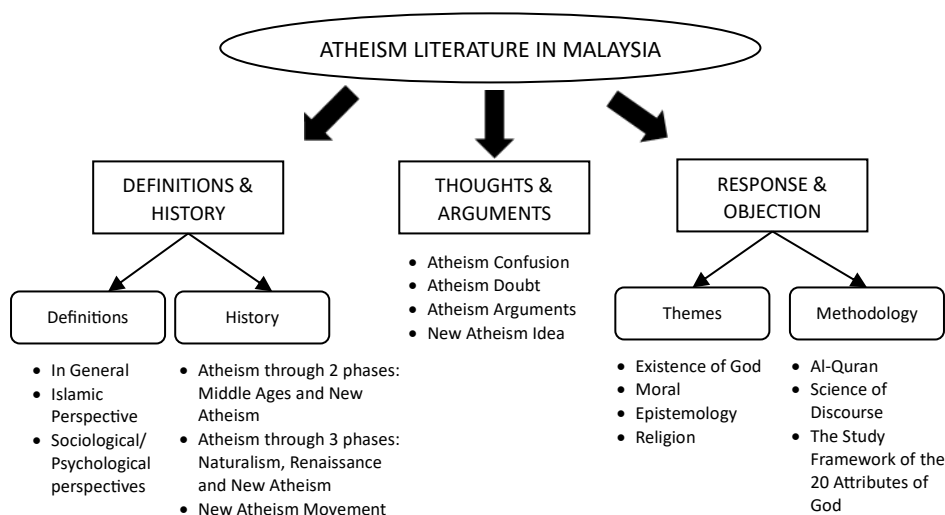


Figure 1. Literature on Atheism in Malaysia

Conclusion

Studies on atheism in Malaysia covers three main scopes which are definitions and history, thought and argument as well as response and objection. Of all these three scopes, the most popular type of study is within the scope of response and objection, especially from the perspective of Islam. The void or gap in the research on atheism is within the scope of objection against atheism from the perspectives of other religions in Malaysia, or objection to other themes etcetera. One of the biggest gaps is with the research methodology as researches conducted using interviews and questionnaires are still lacking. Most current studies are mostly in the form of content analysis only. However, it should be noted that most studies conducted are leaning towards response and objection, while the study on definitions, history and specific thought of atheism is still low. Therefore, atheism can be made one of the new subjects that can be chosen by future researchers. Future researchers can focus on field studies of atheism in Malaysia such as the factors of atheism's rejection of religion and the characteristic of atheism in Malaysia.

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