



ETHICAL FOUNDATIONS AND ETHOS OF MUHAMMADIYAH MOVEMENT: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE



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Abstract

The Muhammadiyah Movement has become a moral and civilizational force in Indonesia; however, studies on its ethical foundations remain fragmented and have not yet been integrated in an interdisciplinary manner. This study aims to examine the ethical foundations and reformist ethos of Muhammadiyah through the perspectives of theology, philosophy, sociology, and education, as well as to formulate an integrated ethical model that connects theology, rationality, and social transformation. The study employs a qualitative approach based on a literature review. Data were collected through the identification, selection, and documentation of primary and secondary sources, then analyzed thematically. The research findings indicate that: (1) the theological foundation is rooted in tawhid, al-Ma'un, and al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar; (2) philosophically, Muhammadiyah harmonizes revelation and reason through the neo-akhlaqiyyah framework; (3) sociologically, this ethos is realized through anti-fatalism, community empowerment, and the formation of a modern Muslim middle class; and (4) institutionally, this ethos is embedded through 5,354 Muhammadiyah schools and 178 Muhammadiyah universities. The novelty of this research lies in its integrated theological-philosophical-sociological-educational model for understanding Islamic reform. The study affirms Muhammadiyah as a civilizational project that transforms Islamic ethics into sustainable social transformation for Indonesian society.

Abstrak

Gerakan Muhammadiyah telah menjadi kekuatan moral dan peradaban di Indonesia, namun kajian mengenai landasan etikanya masih parsial dan belum terintegrasi secara interdisipliner. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji landasan etika dan etos reformis Muhammadiyah melalui perspektif teologi, filsafat, sosiologi, dan pendidikan, serta merumuskan model etika terintegrasi yang menghubungkan teologi, rasionalitas, dan transformasi sosial. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi kepustakaan. Data dikumpulkan melalui identifikasi, seleksi, dan dokumentasi sumber primer dan sekunder, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa: (1) landasan teologis berakar pada tauhid, al-Ma'un, serta al-amr bi al-ma'ruf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar; (2) secara filosofis, Muhammadiyah menyelaraskan wahyu dan akal melalui kerangka neo-akhlaqiyyah; (3) secara sosiologis, etos tersebut diwujudkan melalui anti-fatalisme, pemberdayaan masyarakat, dan pembentukan kelas menengah Muslim modern; dan (4) secara kelembagaan, etika tertanam melalui 5.354 sekolah dan 178 perguruan tinggi Muhammadiyah. Kebaruan penelitian terletak pada model teologis-filosofis-sosiologis-pendidikan terintegrasi untuk memahami reformasi Islam. Penelitian menegaskan Muhammadiyah sebagai proyek peradaban yang mentransformasikan etika Islam menjadi transformasi sosial berkelanjutan bagi kehidupan masyarakat Indonesia.



Background

Muhammadiyah, founded on November 18, 1912, by K.H. Ahmad Dahlan in Yogyakarta, stands as one of the most influential Islamic reform movements (*tajdid*) in Southeast Asia. Established during the late colonial period, Muhammadiyah sought to reconcile Islamic orthodoxy with modernity through rational education, social service, and ethical reform.¹ With over 112 years of continuous Activism, Muhammadiyah has evolved from a local reformist association into a global Islamic civil society movement. As of 2024, the organization counts approximately 52 million members and sympathizers, operating over 5,000 schools and 178 higher education institutions across Indonesia.^{2, 3} This immense educational and social infrastructure exemplifies Muhammadiyah's sustained commitment to realizing Islam as a *rahmatan lil-'ālamīn*, a mercy and reforming force for humanity.

At the core of Muhammadiyah's reform lies a distinctive ethical foundation shaped by the integration of *tawhīd* (divine unity), *'aql* (reason), and *'amal ṣāliḥ* (righteous action). This ethical orientation underpins what scholars describe as Muhammadiyah's work ethos (*etos kerja Islami*), a disciplined, service-oriented, and rational Activism deeply embedded in its social, educational, and philanthropic activities.⁴ The Movement's motto, "*Islam berkemajuan*," or progressive Islam, encapsulates this synthesis of moral conviction and transformative engagement. A 2024 Kompas Research and Development Survey revealed that over 91% of Indonesian respondents view Muhammadiyah positively, recognizing it as a moral force that contributes significantly to education, health, and humanitarian services.⁵

Scholars have long examined Muhammadiyah's reform spirit and socio-religious identity from various disciplinary perspectives. Zakiyuddin Baidhawiy and Azaki Khoiruddin, in "*The Core Ethos and the Progressive Spirit of Muhammadiyah Socio-Religious Movement*," identify Muhammadiyah's ethical foundation as the central driving force behind its modern reform initiatives, conceptualizing it as an adaptive movement that balances puritanism and progressivism.⁶ Similarly, Djamila Abbas and Rahmat Abd Fatah, in "*Integrating Religiosity and Work Ethics: Shaping an Ethical and Productive Work Culture in Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership*," embody religiosity and professionalism

¹ Mohammad Syifa Amin Widigdo and Awang Azman Awang Pawi, "'Reason' of Political and Religious Moderation in the Book of Ghiyath al-Umam by al-Juwaynī and Its Contemporary Southeast Asian Context," *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 10, no. 1 (2023): 2223815, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2023.2223815>.

² Amir Baihaqi, "Hasil Survei Terbaru Capres-Cawapres Pilihan Warga Muhammadiyah," *detikjatim*, accessed November 12, 2025, <https://www.detik.com/jatim/berita/d-7185453/hasil-survei-terbaru-capres-cawapres-pilihan-warga-muhammadiyah>.

³ "Hasil Survei Litbang Kompas untuk Melihat Harapan Publik dalam Milad Muhammadiyah pada Tahun 2024," *Kompas.tv*, accessed November 12, 2025, <https://www.kompas.tv/nasional/554021/hasil-survei-litbang-kompas-untuk-melihat-harapan-publik-dalam-milad-muhammadiyah-pada-tahun-2024>.

⁴ M. Amin Abdullah, "The Manhaj of Muhammadiyah Progressive Islam: Theological, Philosophical, and Ethical Perspectives," *Progresiva: Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam* 13, no. 02 (2024): 165–80, Article, <https://doi.org/10.22219/progresiva.v13i02.33887>.

⁵ Kompas Cyber Media, "112 Tahun Muhammadiyah, Litbang Kompas: 91 Persen Publik Anggap Syarikat Berkontribusi Positif," *KOMPAS.com*, November 18, 2024, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2024/11/18/09153361/112-tahun-muhammadiyah-litbang-kompas-91-persen-publik-anggap-syarikat>.

⁶ Zakiyuddin Baidhawiy and Azaki Khoiruddin, "The Core Ethos and the Progressive Spirit of Muhammadiyah Socio-Religious Movement," *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 13, no. 2 (2018): 27–41, <https://doi.org/10.22452/JAT.vol13no2.3>.

to shape an ethical and productive work culture at the organizational level.⁷ Meanwhile, Selviyanti Kaawoan, Sisi Monita Prisilia Kristi Mamahit, and Andi Muhammad Fuad in *Etika Muhammadiyah dalam Merespons Oligarki di Indonesia* explore Muhammadiyah's moral response to the rise of economic oligarchy, showing that the organization consistently upholds ethical integrity amid pragmatic political pressures.⁸

Building on the Qur'anic ethical paradigm, Zakiyuddin Baidhawiy in *Muhammadiyah dan Spirit Islam Berkemajuan dalam Sinaran Etos Al-Qur'an* elaborates how Muhammadiyah's ethos is rooted in the values of rahmah, al-Ma'un, and al-'Ashr, representing compassion, social justice, and time discipline as pillars of Islam berkemajuan.⁹ In a complementary dimension, Nurul Hidayah, Faridi, and Hikmatulloh in *Muhammadiyah's Religious Ideology and the Challenges of Transnationalism in Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia* highlight the ideological consistency of Muhammadiyah in Islamic education amid global influences, underscoring its ethical and intellectual resilience.¹⁰ These studies have enriched scholarly understanding of Muhammadiyah's moral and institutional development but tend to focus on particular dimensions, such as work ethics, education, or ideology, without comprehensively integrating the philosophical, sociological, and cultural foundations of its ethical worldview.

The significance of examining Muhammadiyah's ethical foundation lies in the need to understand how its theological commitments are translated into sustained patterns of individual conduct, institutional practice, and social transformation. Without an integrated analysis, Muhammadiyah's ethical orientation may be understood merely as a collection of separate normative values associated with theology, education, philanthropy, or social activism. Such a fragmented understanding makes it difficult to explain how these values collectively sustain Muhammadiyah's reformist identity and long-term institutional development. Previous studies, including Baidhawiy (2017), which emphasizes Qur'anic ethics and the ethos of Islam berkemajuan, and Hidayah et al. (2025), which examines Muhammadiyah's religious ideology and Islamic education, have addressed important dimensions of Muhammadiyah's ethical and ideological orientation. Nevertheless, they do not specifically develop an integrated framework connecting theological foundations with philosophical reasoning, sociological manifestations, and educational institutionalization.

A multidisciplinary perspective is important because the ethical foundation of Muhammadiyah cannot be adequately explained through theology alone. Theology clarifies the normative sources of its ethical commitments, while Islamic philosophy helps explain the relationship between revelation, reason, moral reasoning, and character formation. Sociology of religion reveals how these ethical commitments are translated into collective practices, social activism, and forms of community empowerment, whereas educational ethics explains how such values are transmitted and institutionalized through educational institutions. Bringing these perspectives together therefore allows this study

⁷ Djamilia Abbas and Rahmat Abd Fatah, "Integrating Religiosity and Work Ethics: Shaping an Ethical and Productive Work Culture in Muhammadiyah Regional Leadership," *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 9, no. 3 (2025): 1003–15, <https://doi.org/10.33650/al-tanzim.v9i3.12007>.

⁸ Selviyanti Kaawoan et al., "Etika Muhammadiyah Dalam Merespons Ekonomi Oligarki di Indonesia," *Hulondalo Muamalah Journal* 1, no. 02 (2023): 111–32.

⁹ Zakiyuddin Baidhawiy, "Muhammadiyah Dan Spirit Islam Berkemajuan Dalam Sinaran Etos Alqur'an," *Afkaruna: Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Studies* 13, no. 1 (2017): 17–47, <https://doi.org/10.18196/afkaruna.v13i1.4202>.

¹⁰ Nurul Hidayah et al., "Muhammadiyah's Religious Ideology and the Challenges of Transnationalism in Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia," *Akhlak: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Dan Filsafat* 2, no. 3 (2025): 325–32, <https://doi.org/10.61132/akhlak.v2i3.1030>.

to examine not only what Muhammadiyah considers ethically valuable, but also how these values are intellectually justified, socially enacted, and institutionally reproduced.

Accordingly, this study seeks to explore "The Ethical Foundation and Ethos of Muhammadiyah's Movement: A Multidisciplinary Perspective." It aims to conceptualize Muhammadiyah's ethics not merely as normative teachings but as an applied moral system that bridges spirituality, rationality, and social transformation. The philosophical perspective provides a distinct analytical layer by examining how Muhammadiyah's ethical commitments are related to questions of moral reasoning, character formation, and the relationship between revelation and reason. Ibn Miskawayh's virtue ethics provides a basis for understanding ethical character as a process of moral cultivation; al-Ghazali contributes an account of the relationship between spirituality, moral discipline, and human conduct; while Fazlur Rahman's contextual approach helps explain how Qur'anic ethical principles can be interpreted in relation to contemporary social realities. These philosophical perspectives complement the theological analysis by explaining not only the normative sources of Muhammadiyah's ethics but also the intellectual and moral reasoning through which those values can be translated into reformist social action.

By adopting a multidisciplinary framework that interweaves theological, philosophical, sociological, and educational analyses, this research contributes to the growing discourse on Islamic reform movements and ethical leadership in modern Muslim societies. Ultimately, it situates Muhammadiyah as both a moral and civilizational project whose ethos continues to shape the trajectory of Indonesian Islam and its engagement with global modernity. This study employs a qualitative research approach with a multidisciplinary analytical framework integrating Islamic philosophy, sociology of religion, and educational ethics. The research design is based on library research, drawing on primary and secondary sources, including official Muhammadiyah documents, institutional reports, academic publications, and relevant scholarly literature on Muhammadiyah's ideology, ethical thought, education, and social activism. Data were collected through the identification, selection, and documentation of sources relevant to the study's research questions.

The collected materials were analyzed using thematic content analysis. First, relevant textual materials were identified and selected according to their relevance to Muhammadiyah's ethical foundations and reformist ethos. Second, the selected materials were coded and grouped into four analytical dimensions: theology, philosophy, sociology, and education. Third, thematic comparison was conducted across these dimensions to identify conceptual relationships between theological principles, moral reasoning, social practices, and educational institutionalization. Fourth, recurring patterns across the four dimensions were synthesized to formulate the neo-akhlaqiyyah framework proposed in this study. The analysis examined how theological concepts were connected to philosophical understandings of moral reasoning, how these principles were manifested in Muhammadiyah's social practices, and how they were transmitted through educational institutions. Finally, the interpretations were cross-checked by comparing evidence from different source types, including official Muhammadiyah documents, academic publications, institutional records, and previous scholarly studies. Particular interpretations were considered more robust when they were supported consistently across multiple relevant sources. This procedure enabled the study to move beyond a descriptive account of Muhammadiyah's ethical values toward an integrated interpretation of how those values are conceptually grounded, socially manifested, and institutionally reproduced. The multidisciplinary approach therefore enables a comprehensive interpretation of Muhammadiyah's ethics not merely as a theological doctrine, but as an

integrated system of values that connects religious principles, moral reasoning, social transformation, and educational formation within the broader context of modern Islamic thought.

The Ethical Foundations of the Muhammadiyah Reform Movement

The theological foundation of Muhammadiyah's ethical thought rests upon the doctrine of *tawhīd*, the unity of God, as the moral axis that integrates faith (*īmān*), reason (*‘aql*), and righteous action (*‘amal ṣāliḥ*). This concept does not operate as an abstract creed but as an epistemic and ethical paradigm that unites spirituality with social responsibility. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's theological vision positioned *tawhīd* as the dynamic core of human consciousness, where belief in divine unity must manifest in the purification of reason and the moral reconstruction of society. In this view, *tawhīd* becomes a civilizational energy (*al-quwwah al-madaniyyah*) that inspires *ijtihād*, discipline, and compassion, driving what Muhammadiyah terms *Islam Berkemajuan* (Progressive Islam). This orientation distinguishes Muhammadiyah from the more dogmatic currents of Middle Eastern reformism, transforming faith into a rational and socially engaged principle for civilization building.¹¹

The ethical system of Muhammadiyah is further structured by the Qur'anic command *al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy ‘an al-munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding evil), which serves as an ethical imperative for social transformation. This principle institutionalizes moral accountability as a collective responsibility, realized through education, health services, and humanitarian programs. Muhammadiyah interprets this injunction as a socio–ethical framework for liberating the weak (*al-dhu‘afā’*) and marginalized (*al-mustadh‘afīn*), forming what Ahmad Dahlan articulated as *the theology of al-Ma‘ūn*. This theology binds faith to social praxis, turning compassion, justice, and work ethics into essential modes of *‘ibādah* (worship). The ethos of *al-Ma‘ūn* thus functions as an ethical transformation of revelation, where scriptural devotion leads directly to the service of humanity.¹²

Similarly, the *ethos of al-‘Aṣr* represents the synthesis of *īmān* and *‘amal ṣāliḥ* as interdependent aspects of civilization. The verse's call to "mutual exhortation to truth and patience" (*wa tawāṣaw bil-ḥaqq wa tawāṣaw biṣ-ṣabr*) captures the Muhammadiyah spirit of moral perseverance and collective discipline in pursuing progress (*tajdīd*). This ethos connects religious consciousness with time awareness, urging Muslims to respond constructively to modern challenges while remaining faithful to divine guidance.¹³

The Muhammadiyah's moral philosophy operates as a *manhaj*, a methodological framework for civilizational reform rooted in compassion (*rahmah*), rationality, and social justice. This *manhaj* institutionalizes the ethical vision of *tawhīd* into an applied ethics of education, philanthropy, and civic engagement. Its principles are reflected in Muhammadiyah's vast institutional presence: by 2024, the organization managed more than 5,354 schools and 178 higher education institutions serving over one million students nationwide. In addition, the Movement operates over 400 hospitals and health centers,

¹¹ Richway et al., "Muhammadiyah Sufism: Building Students' Character and Faith Through Spiritual Education," *Journal of Islamic Education* 10, no. 2 (2025): 563–82, <https://doi.org/10.52615/jie.v10i2.363>.

¹² Kurniawan Arif Masputi et al., "Adab under Algorithm: Islamic Moral Challenges among Muslim Youth in Suburban Indonesia," *Knowledge on Sustained Education, Psychology, and Teaching for Universal Access to Learning* 1, no. 1 (2025): 1–13.

¹³ Walaa Quisay, "Locating 'Praxis' in Islamic Liberation Theology: God, Scripture, and the Problem of Suffering in Egyptian Prisons," *Religions* 14, no. 9 (2023): 1085, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14091085>.

embodying the principle of *al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar* through its social service initiatives. According to the 2024 Litbang Kompas survey, 91% of Indonesians view Muhammadiyah positively, with 79.5% recognizing its vital role in education and 67.2% in healthcare, indicating that its theological ethics resonate deeply with societal values and national development. Hence, Muhammadiyah's *theological–ethical foundation* not only unites *īmān* and *'amal ṣāliḥ* but also demonstrates how Islamic ethics evolve into a civilizational force linking divine consciousness, moral reason, and social transformation in modern Indonesia.¹⁴

At the philosophical core of Muhammadiyah's moral framework lies the idea of rational Piety (*al-taqwā al-'aqliyyah*), a synthesis between reason, morality, and devotion. This concept reflects K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's vision that Islamic faith (*īmān*) must be both intellectually conscious and socially transformative, rather than confined to mere ritual observance. For Muhammadiyah, Piety is not blind obedience but a form of rational – moral awareness that guides *'amal ṣāliḥ* (righteous action) within the framework of divine unity (*tawḥīd*). As elaborated in *The Manhaj of Muhammadiyah*, this synthesis establishes an epistemic structure in which revelation and reason collaborate to generate ethical guidance for human welfare. Through this rational Piety, Muhammadiyah institutionalizes an Islamic ethics that values discipline, education, and civic virtue, embodying the Qur'anic injunction, *fa'lam annahu lā ilāha illā Allāh* (know that there is no deity but God).¹⁵

This ethical orientation resonates deeply with the classical Islamic philosophical tradition, particularly the *akḥlaqiyyāt* (virtue ethics) articulated by Ibn Miskawayh and al-Ghazālī. Ibn Miskawayh, in *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, defined moral excellence as the *i'tidāl* (balance) of the soul, achieved through rational discipline, where the intellect governs the desire to attain virtue. He classified philosophy into two dimensions: theoretical and practical. The theoretical dimension concerned intellectual perfection through knowledge, while the practical dimension reflected moral perfection through virtuous deeds. For Ibn Miskawayh, true human perfection (*al-sa'ādah*) is achieved when both dimensions harmonize, when the intellect disciplines the passions and moral education refines the soul. Muhammadiyah's emphasis on *tarbiyah akḥlaqiyyah* (ethical education) similarly aims to cultivate believers who are disciplined, rational, and socially responsible, embodying this Miskawayhian equilibrium between knowledge and moral conduct.¹⁶

Al-Ghazālī, in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, further deepened this synthesis by harmonizing intellect and revelation. For him, knowledge (*'ilm*) must illuminate moral action under divine guidance, leading to *tazkiyat al-nafs* (purification of the soul). He viewed education not merely as intellectual cultivation but as a process of inner refinement through balance, habituation, and spiritual discipline. The goal of moral education, according to al-Ghazālī, is the formation of an inner disposition that spontaneously inclines toward good actions and away from evil, thus achieving true happiness (*al-sa'ādah al-ḥaqīqiyyah*). Muhammadiyah's educational institutions, which integrate spiritual formation with

¹⁴ Mutiara Lubis et al., "Empowering Voices: Muhammadiyah Journey through Theology of al-Ashr and Ummah Development," *AMCA Journal of Religion and Society* 4, no. 1 (2024): 11–20, <https://doi.org/10.51773/ajrs.v4i1.377>.

¹⁵ Amit Dana Ikamah et al., "Recontextualizing Islamic Education in the 21st Century, A Study on the Thought of KH. Ahmad Dahlan," *Journal of Islamic Education Research* 6, no. 2 (2025): 179–96, <https://doi.org/10.35719/jier.v6i2.477>.

¹⁶ Nurul Salsabila Mohd Zaini and Megawati Moris, "Happiness, Purpose, and Well-Being: A Comparative Analysis of Ikigai and al-Sa'adah," *AL-ITQAN: Journal of Islamic Sciences and Comparative STUDIES* 10, No. 2 (2025): 39–56, <https://doi.org/10.31436/alitqan.v10i2.348>.

scientific inquiry, embody this Ghazalian synthesis by linking 'aql (reason) and shar' (law) in a balanced moral vision. Hence, Muhammadiyah's reformist ethics may be described as a neo-akhlaqiyyah movement, a modern continuation of classical virtue philosophy translated into civic, rational, and progressive practice.¹⁷ This continuity extends into modern Islamic reformist thought, particularly aligning with Fazlur Rahman's philosophy of moral contextualism. Rahman's *double movement* theory, which derives moral universals from revelation and reappplies them to contemporary realities, mirrors Muhammadiyah's *manhaj tarjih* and its commitment to *ijtihad jamā'ī* (collective reasoning). Both frameworks treat the Qur'an not as a static legal code but as a dynamic moral project oriented toward social justice, education, and human flourishing.

As detailed, Rahman's *double Movement* consists of two interrelated stages: the first involves returning to the essential principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah through a historically grounded hermeneutic, while the second requires reinterpreting and reapplying those principles to address modern challenges such as justice, gender equality, and governance. In this respect, Muhammadiyah's interpretive framework parallels Rahman's dynamic hermeneutics. His first Movement, the historical retrieval of Qur'anic intent, corresponds with Muhammadiyah's call to return to the Qur'an and Sunnah. In contrast, his second Movement, the contextual reapplication of universal values, reflects Muhammadiyah's concept of *Islam Berkemajuan* (Progressive Islam). Rahman's methodology "aligns Islamic teachings with the needs of contemporary life" while maintaining their ethical universality. This approach aligns seamlessly with Muhammadiyah's effort to interpret Islam as *rahmatan lil-'ālamīn* through education, social service, and public welfare. Both frameworks elevate reason ('aql) as a partner of revelation (wahy), producing a reformist ethics that is rational in method, moral in purpose, and transformative in practice.¹⁸

Through this integration, Muhammadiyah's *Islam Berkemajuan* may be viewed as the practical embodiment of Rahman's double Movement, a living theology that reconstructs faith into social ethics. In embodying Rahman's call for a historically conscious yet future-oriented interpretation, Muhammadiyah transforms the Qur'an from a textual reference into a civilizational paradigm, making Islamic ethics a dynamic instrument of social renewal and moral progress. Within this philosophical constellation, Muhammadiyah emerges as a uniquely Indonesian embodiment of Islamic moral rationalism. By integrating *akal sehat* (sound reason), *etika kerja Islami* (Islamic work ethics), and *'amal ṣāliḥ berkemajuan* (progressive righteous action), Muhammadiyah translates the universal ethics of Islam into a contextual civic philosophy suited for a pluralistic society. Its ethics are neither ascetic nor political but civilizational, promoting education, tolerance, and public welfare as expressions of faith. Thus, Muhammadiyah's ethical philosophy is not merely theoretical but a lived praxis of *tawḥīd al-ilm wa al-'amal*, the unity of knowledge and action. In this sense, Muhammadiyah bridges classical and modern Islamic moral traditions, positioning itself as a rational, ethical, and reformist

¹⁷ Omneya Ayad, "Divine Unity in a Qaṣīda Lamīyya (Ode Rhyming in Lam) of Abū Madyan al-Ghawth," *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 7, no. 1 (2022): 61–91, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jims.7.1.04>.

¹⁸ Muhammad Ali Yusuf et al., "Fazlurrahman's Double Movement and Thematic Methods of Interpretation of the Al-Qur'an," *Indonesian Interdisciplinary Journal of Sharia Economics (IIJSE)* 7, no. 3 (2024): 6724–37, <https://doi.org/10.31538/iijs.v7i3.5647>.

movement that transforms theology into an instrument of social progress and civilizational renewal.¹⁹

Muhammadiyah's ethical philosophy does not remain at the level of abstract moral discourse; it is materialized through an extensive institutional network that operationalizes its theology of social responsibility. The Movement's commitment to *'amal ṣāliḥ* (righteous action) has been institutionalized in the fields of education, healthcare, and social welfare, transforming ethics into a form of moral Activism (*al-'amal al-akhlāqī*). As of 2023, Muhammadiyah manages 5,354 educational institutions across Indonesia, providing access to quality learning for approximately 1.05 million students at the elementary to tertiary levels (Muhammadiyah, 2024). These schools and universities embody K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's vision of *'ilm al-nāfi'*, knowledge that benefits society, by integrating intellectual excellence with moral formation.²⁰

In the healthcare sector, Muhammadiyah operates 122 hospitals and 231 clinics, where service delivery is guided by the principle of *rahmatan li-l-'ālamīn*, mercy for all creation. These institutions institutionalize compassion (*rahmah*) as an ethical imperative, ensuring that public health becomes a vehicle of *da'wah bi al-ḥāl* (preaching through social service). The organization's philanthropic arms, such as Lazismu and Muhammadiyah Disaster Management Center (MDMC), extend this moral Activism to humanitarian relief, community empowerment, and environmental ethics. Public recognition of this moral-institutional contribution remains high. A 2024 Kompas national survey reported that 91% of Indonesian respondents view Muhammadiyah positively, with 79.5% acknowledging its central role in education and 67.2% in healthcare. These figures empirically confirm that Muhammadiyah's ethical praxis has become a trusted civilizational force, linking faith, reason, and social transformation. Through its schools, hospitals, and social agencies, Muhammadiyah institutionalizes its ethical philosophy, translating *tawḥīd* into social justice, *'aql* into civic rationality, and *'amal* into sustainable human welfare.

Table 1. Ethical and Philosophical Framework of Muhammadiyah's Reform Movement

Dimension	Core Concept	Philosophical / Theological Source	Practical Manifestation	Empirical Evidence / Data
Theological Foundation	Tawḥīd as moral axis, unity of God integrating īmn (faith), 'aql (reason), and 'amalṣliḥ (righteous action)	Qur'an and Sunnah; K.H. Ahmad Dahlan's theology of al – Ma'ūn and al – 'Aṣr; The Manhaj of Muhammadiyah (2021)	Internalization of divine unity through social reform, discipline, compassion, and rational action	Litbang Kompas (2024): 91% of Indonesians view Muhammadiyah positively; 79.5% acknowledge educational role; 67.2% health sector impact
Ethical Imperative	Al – amr bi al – ma'rūf wa al – nahy 'an al – munkar, moral	Qur'anic command and Dahlan's theology of al – Ma'ūn	Humanitarian services, liberation of al – mustadh'afīn, education and	5,354 schools; 178 higher education institutions; 400 hospitals and health centers

¹⁹ Hyung – Jun Kim, "Purifying the Faith, Acting for Progress: Reinterpreting Muhammadiyah," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 62, no. 2 (2024): 241 – 76, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2024.622.241-276>.

²⁰ Hasnan Bachtiar and Zakiyuddin Baidhaway, "Theologising Democracy in the Context of Muhammadiyah's Ijtihad," *Indonesian Journal of Islam and Muslim Societies* 12, no. 1 (2022): 165 – 200, <https://doi.org/10.18326/ijims.v12i1.165-200>.

Dimension	Core Concept	Philosophical / Theological Source	Practical Manifestation	Empirical Evidence / Data
	accountability and social transformation		health as forms of worship (‘ibdah)	(Muhammadiyah, 2024)
Philosophical Basis	Rational Piety (al – taqwal – ‘aqliyyah), a synthesis between faith, intellect, and moral responsibility	Ibn Miskawayh's Tahdhīb al – Akhlq (virtue as balance between intellect and desire); al – Ghazlī's Ih̄y' ‘Ulūm al – Dīn (tazkiyat al – nafs, moral habituation); Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory	Ethical education (tarbiyah akhlaqiyyah), integration of reason and revelation, dynamic ijtihd and Islam Berkemajuan (Progressive Islam)	Implementation through curricula in Muhammadiyah schools and universities, emphasizing science – faith integration
Institutional Realization	Moral Activism (al – ‘amal al – akhlaqī), ethics embodied in institutions	Institutional theology of Muhammadiyah; praxis of ‘amal ṣliḥ	Schools, hospitals, clinics, Lazismu, MDMC as expressions of applied ethics; philanthropy as da‘wah bi al – ḥl	5,354 schools, 122 hospitals, 231 clinics; >1.05 million students served (Muhammadiyah Reports, 2023 – 2024)
Civilizational Outcome	Islam Berkemajuan, synthesis of classical and modern ethics	Fazlur Rahman's moral contextualism; Muhammadiyah's manhaj tarjih	Bridging faith and modernity, creating civic ethics, tolerance, and social justice	Positive public perception and global recognition of Muhammadiyah as a rational – reformist Islamic movement

Source: Author's Analysis

The Ethos of Muhammadiyah in a Multidisciplinary Perspective

From a sociological standpoint, Muhammadiyah represents not merely a religious reformist organization but a *moral community* that produces, reproduces, and institutionalizes a distinctive social ethos within Indonesian Muslim society. This ethos is rooted in discipline, rational work ethics, community empowerment, and a firm rejection of fatalism, forming what may be described as an Indonesian model of *Islamic civic culture*. The sociological significance of Muhammadiyah lies in its capacity to translate theological ideals, particularly tawḥīd, al – amr bi al – ma‘rūf wa al – nahy ‘an al – munkar, and the ethos of al – Ma‘ūn, into collective moral behavior and institutional practices that shape Muslim civil society. At the heart of this ethos stands *discipline* as a moral and organizational principle. Muhammadiyah understands discipline not merely as an administrative routine, but as *moral self-regulation* rooted in the ethics of the Qur'an. The consistent emphasis on punctuality, order, and responsibility in Muhammadiyah schools, hospitals, and community programs reflects a habitus of disciplined action. This resonates with the classical Islamic moral concept of *tahdhīb al-nafs* (ethical habituation), articulated by Ibn Miskawayh and al – Ghazlī, in which character is formed through repeated practice until virtue becomes a stable disposition. In Muhammadiyah's sociological life, discipline thus becomes a shared moral language, visible in the management of Amal Usaha

Muhammadiyah (AUM), the professionalism of its educators and health workers, and the reliability of its humanitarian operations.²¹

Closely connected to discipline is Muhammadiyah's *rational work ethic*, often described as an ethic of "practical voluntarism." Unlike fatalistic interpretations that encourage passive acceptance of destiny, Muhammadiyah's religious orientation promotes human agency, rational planning, and hard work as expressions of Piety. Following the teachings of K.H. Ahmad Dahlan, Muhammadiyah encourages its members to believe in the law of causality, which holds that success arises from strategic effort, not from wishful thinking. This position is sociologically significant because it aligns Muhammadiyah with Max Weber's ideal-type of rational action, where actions are systematically oriented toward goals and supported by organizational structures. The rational work ethic of Muhammadiyah has shaped a culture of professionalism and accountability that distinguishes its schools, universities, hospitals, and philanthropic bodies from more traditional religious institutions. This rational ethos also manifests as a strong stance against *fatalism*. Muhammadiyah rejects the belief that poverty, suffering, or social stagnation are fated conditions. Instead, it promotes the idea that social transformation is a moral obligation. This anti-fatalistic worldview is rooted in Muhammadiyah's theology of al-Ma'ūn, which defines faith through compassionate action and service to the weak. In practice, this theology encourages members to take an active role in solving real social problems, such as poverty, illiteracy, poor health, and disaster vulnerability, through systematic and rational efforts. Sociologically, this creates a community identity grounded in *agency, responsibility, and problem-solving*, distinguishing Muhammadiyah as a transformative movement rather than a ritualistic one.²²

The ethos of *community empowerment* further strengthens Muhammadiyah's sociological significance. Rather than viewing society as a passive recipient of religious teachings, Muhammadiyah positions communities as *moral subjects* capable of growth, self-governance, and collective action. Its empowerment programs, women's education through 'Aisyiyah, maternal and child health programs, Lazismu's economic empowerment, community resilience by MDMC, and civic advocacy by MAARIF Institute, establish a model of *developmental da'wah*. This approach prioritizes long-term social capacity-building over short-term charity, fostering a participatory culture where communities are encouraged to think critically, organize their own initiatives, and establish collaborative networks. One of the significant sociological contributions of Muhammadiyah is the formation of a *reformist Muslim middle class*. Through its vast educational system, Muhammadiyah has shaped generations of teachers, doctors, engineers, administrators, academics, and civil servants who embody rational religious ethics and civic-mindedness. This middle class, characterized by education, professionalism, and public ethics, becomes the backbone of Indonesian civil society. Their involvement in governance, education, public policy, and civil organizations contributes to national development and strengthens democratic culture. Many scholars argue that Muhammadiyah functions as a generator of *moral capital* for Indonesia: creating citizens who value transparency, meritocracy, accountability, and public welfare. From a collective morality perspective, Muhammadiyah aligns closely with *Īmile*

²¹ Akhmad Arif Junaidi, "Muhammadiyah and the Shifting Interpretation of Local Religious Traditions," *Walisono: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial Keagamaan* 30, no. 2 (2022): 169–94, <https://doi.org/10.21580/ws.30.2.16293>.

²² Iwan Kuswandi, "Actualization of Meaning and Motives for Entering the Sufism Order On Max Weber Perspective: (Study of the Experience of Tijaniyya Order Practioners in Pesantren in Madura)," *ATTARBAWIY: Malaysian Online Journal of Education* 8, no. 1 (2024): 39–51, <https://doi.org/10.53840/attarbawiy.v8i1.207>.

Durkheim's concept of *collective conscience*, whereby shared moral values shape the cohesion and ethical orientation of a community. Muhammadiyah's *manhaj tarjih*, organizational rules, meeting culture, and governance model create uniform ethical expectations across its millions of members. These shared norms promote a sense of *moral unity* and foster trust among individuals, institutions, and society.²³

Education has always been the most strategic medium through which Muhammadiyah internalizes its ethical values, work ethos, and reformist worldview. Since its establishment, Muhammadiyah has regarded education not merely as the transmission of knowledge, but as a comprehensive project of moral reform, intellectual renewal, and social transformation. K.H. Ahmad Dahlan envisioned schools as institutions that cultivate '*ilm al-nāfi*', knowledge that enlightens, empowers, and elevates the human spirit. For Dahlan, education serves as a multifaceted site of ethical formation, rational discipline, and liberation from backwardness. This educational strategy became the backbone of Muhammadiyah's reform movement and remains one of its most influential contributions to Indonesian society. At the core of Muhammadiyah's educational mission is the internalization of ethical values. The school environment, at both the primary and tertiary levels, is intentionally designed to instill moral consciousness through everyday learning. Ethical values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and compassion are not taught solely through formal instruction. However, they are cultivated through institutional culture, punctuality norms, structured routines, student leadership programs, community service, and the expectation of personal integrity. This *hidden curriculum* plays a critical role in transforming abstract ethical ideals into daily moral habits, fostering students who internalize Islamic ethics not as doctrinal commands, but as lived practices. Through this systematic internalization, education becomes a moral system that binds *tawhīd*, rationality, and social responsibility.²⁴

The Muhammadiyah school system also functions as a medium for integrating Islamic values with modern knowledge. Rejecting the dichotomy between "religious knowledge" and "worldly knowledge," Muhammadiyah adopts a holistic epistemology that integrates science, technology, and modern disciplines with Qur'anic principles. This integrative approach aligns with the organization's hermeneutic tradition, especially the *manhaj tarjih*, which emphasizes contextual interpretation and rational engagement with revelation. It also mirrors Fazlur Rahman's double movement theory, where universal ethical principles of the Qur'an must be reinterpreted to meet contemporary demands. As a result, Muhammadiyah's education system has produced generations of students who are both religiously grounded and intellectually modern, capable of navigating contemporary challenges through ethical reasoning and scientific literacy.²⁵

A critical dimension of Muhammadiyah's educational ethos is *intellectual liberation*. Early Muhammadiyah schools diverged from the traditional pedagogical model, which was dominated by rote learning, classical dogmatism, and mystical fatalism. Instead, they embraced modern pedagogical methods, curricular organization, classroom instruction, critical thinking, and scientific observation. This shift was not merely pedagogical but civilizational: Muhammadiyah sought to liberate Muslims from intellectual stagnation by

²³ Mu'taz Farham, "Comparison of Al-Ghazali and Emile Durkheim's Concept of Moral Education: Relevance for Contemporary Global Society," *Jurnal Multidisiplin Indonesia* 4, no. 1 (2025): 25–37, <https://doi.org/10.58344/jmi.v4i1.2142>.

²⁴ Ani Aryati and Eka Yanuarti, "The Eclecticism of Ahmad Dahlan's Ideas at Muhammadiyah Universities," *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan* 16, no. 4 (2024): 5600–5610, <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v16i4.5984>.

²⁵ Ruslan Fariadi et al., "Manhaj Tarjih: Navigating Ijtihad in The Disruption Era," *Indonesian Journal of Islamic Economic Law* 2, no. 1 (2025): 29–42, <https://doi.org/10.23917/ijoel.v2i1.7044>.

promoting reasoning, inquiry, and evidence-based knowledge. In doing so, Muhammadiyah effectively initiated a transformation from traditionalism to rationalism, from passive religiosity to active ethical engagement. Through this intellectual liberation, Muhammadiyah education has produced a new generation of *modern Muslim middle class*. These graduates, teachers, physicians, architects, engineers, activists, and civil servants embody a reformist identity characterized by professionalism, public ethics, and civic responsibility. Their presence in various state institutions and community organizations strengthens democratic culture, transparency, and social trust in Indonesia. This sociological impact demonstrates that Muhammadiyah education is not confined to individual development but contributes to national modernization.²⁶

Muhammadiyah universities function as intellectual engines of the Movement. They cultivate scholars, activists, and leaders who articulate Islamic ethics within contemporary discourses, democracy, human rights, bioethics, environmentalism, digital society, and governance. Many PTMA institutions serve as centers for research and social advocacy, producing policy recommendations, community engagement programs, and critical scholarship that extends Muhammadiyah's reformist mission. In this sense, PTMA institutions act as *think tanks* of Islamic reform, expanding Muhammadiyah's intellectual influence beyond organizational boundaries. Another important aspect of the educational perspective is the role of Muhammadiyah schools in enabling social mobility. Through affordable and quality education, Muhammadiyah provides opportunities for children from lower-income families to access modern skills and higher education. This mobility fosters a more equal and empowered Muslim society. Educational empowerment becomes a tool for transforming marginalized communities into productive and responsible citizens.²⁷

In the contemporary era, Muhammadiyah's ethical framework gains renewed relevance as modern societies confront unprecedented moral turbulence generated by consumerism, digital individualism, and moral relativism. These challenges expose a widening gap between technological progress and ethical maturity, producing crises of meaning, social fragmentation, and declining moral literacy. Within this landscape, Muhammadiyah's synthesis of rational Piety, civic ethics, and socially engaged spirituality offers a coherent moral paradigm capable of grounding Muslims in ethical clarity while enabling them to navigate the complexities of postmodern life. The rise of global consumer capitalism has transformed social life into a culture of endless desire and commodified identity. Contemporary individuals increasingly measure success through material accumulation, lifestyle branding, and performative consumption. Scholars like Bauman argue that "liquid modernity" destabilizes moral responsibility, while Schor highlights how consumer saturation erodes social solidarity and spiritual depth.²⁸

Against this trend, Muhammadiyah's ethical tradition functions as a counter-cultural force. Rooted in the principle of *tawhīd* and the ethos of *al-Ma'ūn*, Muhammadiyah promotes a disciplined ethical lifestyle characterized by self-restraint, frugality, productivity, and social responsibility. Its emphasis on productive labor (*amal*

²⁶ Ridho Al-Hamdi, "Consciousness to Liberate: In Search of the Political Paradigm of Muhammadiyah," *Journal of Contemporary Islam and Muslim Societies* 5, no. 2 (2022): 165, <https://doi.org/10.30821/jcims.v5i2.9537>.

²⁷ Greg Barton, "The Gülen Movement, Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama: Progressive Islamic Thought, Religious Philanthropy and Civil Society in Turkey and Indonesia," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 25, no. 3 (2014): 287–301, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2014.916124>.

²⁸ Mamdukh Budiman et al., "Muhammadiyah's Contribution to Shaping Progressive Islam in the Nusantara and Contemporary World," *NuMAS: The Journal of Nusantara Malay Archipelago Scholars* 1, no. 1 (2025): 15–32, <https://doi.org/10.63088/numasv1i17>.

ṣālih), anti-riba financial practices, philanthropy (*Lazismu*), and empowerment of marginalized groups offers a moral corrective to the excesses of consumerism. By framing economic activity not as an arena of desire but as a field of service and justice, Muhammadiyah recovers the Qur'anic ethos of moderation (*al-wasāṭiyyah*) as a guiding principle for economic ethics in modern Indonesia. Programs such as community-based cooperatives, microfinance for UMKM, and charitable redistribution embody a moral economy rooted in compassion and rational governance. In this sense, Muhammadiyah's ethical model restores balance between material progress and moral integrity.²⁹

The digital era has introduced new patterns of individualism: narcissistic self-presentation, algorithmic isolation, echo chambers, and declining empathy. Hyper-personalized digital environments weaken communal bonds, intensify polarization, and normalize fragmented identities. This digital individualism conflicts with Islamic ideals of mutual care, social cooperation, and moral accountability. Muhammadiyah responds by strengthening a communitarian ethic grounded in collective virtue (*al-faḍīlah al-jamā'iyyah*). As a mass organization, Muhammadiyah fosters moral agency not only at the individual level but through community participation, organizational discipline, and shared responsibility. It is through thousands of schools, mosques, and community forums that habits of cooperation, consultation (*musyawarah*), solidarity, and volunteerism are cultivated.³⁰

At the institutional level, Muhammadiyah educational institutions have begun incorporating digital citizenship curricula that emphasize media literacy, responsible engagement, anti-hoax awareness, and ethical use of technology. This initiative counters digital individualism by grounding digital behavior in moral reasoning rather than impulsive emotionality. Through these adaptations, Muhammadiyah demonstrates that ethical traditions can evolve to guide behavior in technologically mediated environments. Modern pluralism often leads to moral relativism, "my truth" replaces shared moral foundations, and ethical judgments become situational or subjective. While diversity is constructive, relativism threatens the normative anchor needed for communal life and legal order.³¹

Muhammadiyah addresses this challenge by affirming a model of ethical universalism rooted in Qur'anic values, rational inquiry, and contextual *ijtihad*. Through the *Manhaj Tarjih*, Muhammadiyah articulates a method that strikes a balance between textual fidelity and contextual sensitivity. This method rejects both rigid literalism and ungrounded relativism, offering instead a principled moral framework capable of engaging with new ethical dilemmas, bioethics, digital governance, gender justice, ecological crises, and public ethics. The process of *ijtihād jamā'ī* (collective reasoning) ensures that ethical decisions are the product of scholarly rigor, empirical analysis, and moral coherence.

²⁹ Sulistiyono Susilo and Reza Pahlevi Dalimunthe, "Moderate Southeast Asian Islamic Education as a Parent Culture in Deradicalization: Urgencies, Strategies, and Challenges," *Religions* 10, no. 1 (2019): 45, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10010045>.

³⁰ Wahyu Prihanta et al., "The Strength of Muhammadiyah's Existence in the Modern Era: Pillars of Empowerment and Community Strengthening," *Journal of Community Service and Empowerment* 5, no. 2 (2024): 264–71, <https://doi.org/10.22219/jcse.v5i2.33085>.

³¹ Atabik Luthfi et al., "Muhammadiyah Education Update Integration of Islamic Values and Global Challenges in the Digital Era," *At-Tarbiyat: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.37758/jat.88i2.29>.

Hence, Muhammadiyah provides a moral compass that can navigate the fluidity of contemporary moral landscapes without falling into dogmatism or ethical ambiguity.³²

Beyond social and digital challenges, Muhammadiyah's ethical Activism demonstrates resilience in confronting global disruptions. Its humanitarian arm, MDMC, stands among the most advanced Muslim humanitarian networks in Asia, participating in international disaster responses and promoting ethical disaster management. The Movement's growing commitment to environmental ethics, seen in green campus programs and eco-theology initiatives, provides an Islamic moral discourse for climate justice, a major ethical frontier of the 21st century. In governance and public morality, Muhammadiyah's emphasis on anti-corruption, transparency, and accountability provides an ethical framework for national development. Through civic education, forums of public reasoning, and religious guidance, Muhammadiyah advocates for a moral public sphere grounded in integrity and public trust.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Muhammadiyah's ethical foundation represents an integrated civilizational framework that unites theology, rationality, and social praxis into a dynamic ethos of reform. Anchored in tawhīd and strengthened by the moral paradigms of al-Ma'ūn, al-Aṣr, and al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar, this framework produces a disciplined, rational, and socially engaged Muslim identity expressed through education, healthcare, philanthropy, and community empowerment. Interdisciplinary analysis shows that Muhammadiyah aligns classical virtue ethics with modern reformist thought, creating a model of rational Piety that resists fatalism, consumerism, digital individualism, and moral relativism. Its institutional network further demonstrates how ethical principles translate into lasting social transformation. The academic contribution of this study lies in offering a comprehensive, multidisciplinary analytical model for understanding Islamic ethical movements, while identifying a research pathway for future empirical studies on how Muhammadiyah's ethics are internalized, negotiated, and transmitted within institutions and communities. Despite limitations inherent in library-based research, these findings enrich scholarly discourse by positioning Muhammadiyah as a significant contemporary Islamic reform movement whose ethical system continues to shape Muslim society and remains fertile for further academic exploration.

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³² Juliyana Junaidi et al., "Revisiting Social Justice: Exploring the Qur'anic Paradigm in Addressing Contemporary Challenges," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah Dan Pemikiran Islam* 25, no. 2 (2023): 153–92, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol25no2.5>.

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