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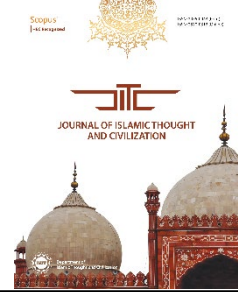
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Reconciling Religion and Reason: An Epistemic Perspective of European Muslims

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Abstract

Religion is a hallmark of human life, manifesting today in various guises. Hence, reason and belief are two essential human qualities, which add depth and meaning to life. Every human mind, at some point in life, questions whether belief is reasonable or whether reason itself should be believed. Thinkers have spent most of their lives grappling with these timeless questions. It is not sure whether they found satisfactory answers, as it remains uncertain; because they lived and died without leaving behind any trace of convincing and epistemic responses for their contemporaries or to future generations. This article aims to offer the premise that secular philosophers maximized their arguments to prove that their preference for reasoning over beliefs comprehensively supplies the epistemological solution to the problem. However, they have ultimately failed to draw a parallel connection with an epistemic reality. Their arguments could not surpass the reasonable act of belief from an epistemic perspective. This study aims to prove that all their efforts failed from an epistemic point of view. Thus, striving to get rid of believing, they ended up believing in reason itself, which is the most unreasonable act from an epistemic standpoint. This research holds an intrinsic view that neither reasoning has any value without believing nor believing makes sense without reasoning. Reason compels us to believe, just as believing compels us to reason; as a result, they are not contradictory but complementary to each other. These are two intrinsic human capabilities, which are necessary for the growth of our knowledge, and serve as the constituents for our progress in understanding and interpreting the universe. Reason cannot exist without belief, and likewise belief cannot exist without reason. Humans have always struggled to rationalize their instability, beliefs, and reasons to achieve full confidence in their claims and to constitute prosperity towards better and more useful epistemic solutions to the existing challenges of reality.

Keywords: epistemology, European Muslim, philosophical inquiry, reason, religion

Introduction

Reality is a human and perennially complicated problem concerning nature and natural phenomena. It remains uncertain whether it is an inherent property of nature and surroundings or an invented concept, which has no actual existence. The quantum theory denies the existence of any reality out there, what humans call reality; certainly, our surroundings are not an independent objective reality but a kind of reality that would cease to exist without us. Our surroundings are necessary for our living, but our understanding and interpretation of them is their lively spirit. Our ability to understand things is the spirit that brings interpretation into existence, which is the only factual sign of the existence of any reality and the only human activity that keeps reality alive. The role in revitalizing reality solely relies on humankind; especially humanity that safeguards reality from death; thus, a dead reality that is not dynamic does not exist. If belief is accepted blindly, then

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reality fades and, ultimately, as a result, it dies. The authority of science has always consisted of human consideration as a procedure for understanding reality; otherwise, no one would have shown interest in science. Thus, understanding something leads to interpretation. Hence, understanding does not seem to be an end in itself, but it is a means for interpretation of reality. It is human inner desire, which is essential for interpreting ideas and reasons. This can be understood as understanding is not an intrinsic end, but it is just an instrumental end, which requires reality to be interpreted, otherwise, reality becomes non-functional. The uninterrupted interpretation of every generation of it keeps it always real, alive, interesting, and fresh. In fact, different interpretations of every generation of it reflect the infinite beauty and attractiveness of the same reality and the only way of the continuation of its existence. Our thoughts and interpretations constitute the necessary spirit that keeps reality alive. Reality has no home out of our thoughts and interpretations. It seems to us that science cannot offer us any help as far as reality is concerned. The concept of accurate knowledge was introduced with the hope of providing a deeper understanding of reality, including the relationship between individuals and their surroundings. However, it appears that, at least for now, this concept may not be effective in this context. We are rushing behind something we do not know how to reach to it. Our mind and the senses, which are the only constituents of this path, cannot provide us with satisfactory steps on this journey. We are not even sure whether we are stepping further or we have not yet taken even one step along this important path. Indications are such that we have not even begun our journey on this important task, and the most confusing is the fact that we do not even know how to make a beginning.

The period of modernity brought science into a position of humanity's trust and hope as far as reality is concerned. Its impact upon humans was that science is the only source that tells or can tell the truth about our surroundings. *"Anything hinting of disturbance in science also became a threat to the political status quo. Uniformitarian science was acceptable socially and politically even if it did not make sense scientifically"*.¹ Thus, *"nature"* replaced *"god"*; *"science says"* replaced *"god's will"*.² Even believers turned to science and did, and still are doing, all that they can to assure themselves what they believe is scientific. Science cannot help us become either a convinced atheist or a convinced theist or a deist. A scientific society is one that never believes in science but always keeps under inspection whatever is scientific. A scientifically minded religious society is a society that always behaves with doubt about whatever interpretation concerning their religion. This is the only and necessary characteristic of a developed and scientifically minded society, religious or non-religious alike. Theologians have tried to get help from science to show that what they believe is rational and scientific, but this is all *useless*. The behavior of the modern mentality with science does not differ from that of religious mentality with religion. Modern mentality blindly believes in what is scientific and the religious mentality believes in what is religious. The modern mind understands science the same way religious minds understand religion. Both are inherently religious and serve the same sense as both are indubitable foundations for their respective beliefs, *"having once accepted the biblical accounts literally, we now accept science's findings literally"*.³ The status of religion is not different from that of science regarding the problem of reality. The current switch of individuals towards religion reflects their struggles to find proper answers. That's their adherence to religion and religious beliefs, which ultimately showcases the trust; they put in different foundations for finding truth and meaning. No one would willingly identify as a member of a particular religious group unless they truly believe in the truthfulness of that religion. The human quest for certainty, of which he cannot proclaim himself, and his inability to convince and enlighten himself, regarding the problem of reality by appealing to his capacity, pushes him to feel in need of becoming religious or non-

¹Vine Deloria Jr, *Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths* (Colorado: Folcrum Publishing, 2002), 16.

²Ibid., 37

³Vine Deloria Jr, *Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths*, 36.

religious. In this context, we're considering revealed religions, specifically Islam, among the various types that exist.

Islam, as a religion, is based on fact, which is not merely a thought and an idea of an individual; it is the given reality. In this sense, it has no difference from other facts that are surrounding us. Muslims believe that the universe is a God's creation, which is a representation of God's work i.e., Islam, on the other hand, is a concrete book which contains in itself words of God and these words are accepted as an act of belief. It is a necessary duty of every Muslim and a necessary duty for a Muslim is nothing else but a Qur'anic order to do his best in understanding and interpreting both God's work (i.e., the universe) and God's words (the Qur'an). From an Islamic perspective, interpretation and locating the magnificence of God's creation and revelations brings light to Muslims, and this is why it is considered as equal to worshipping. In fact, to understand the truth of the two books' interpretations, God's work (the universe) and God's words (religion), Isaac Newton (1643-1727) suggests, interpretation is the activity that keeps both the universe and religion alive.⁴ For example, engaging with the writings of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1057–1111) and others about the Qur'an involves understanding their thoughts and interpretations of the text, not the Qur'an itself. Adhering strictly to the ideas of past scholars, without applying independent reasoning, contradicts the dynamic spirit of revelation. While the works of earlier scholars provide valuable guidance, they should inform personal interpretation rather than dictate actions entirely. Maintaining a fresh interpretation of religion ensures a connection with faith; without this effort, there is a risk of drifting away from its true essence, similar to those who abandon it. A generation reliant solely on the views of past thinkers' mirrors individuals who live off inherited wealth without contributing anything meaningful to their lives. We won't be rewarded for Al-Ghazali's actions. He'll receive his own reward, but we need to earn our own way into "paradise." We know for sure that we cannot betray God and gain reward with the works of others. Al-Ghazali began his inquiry process by doubting, and this is the main reason he took action.

We are part of the total *action* called the universe as reality. Our efforts to understand it, which we call scientific activity, are the only opportunities that make us feel as part of the active *action*. However, people are still uncertain whether science-called activity is the required *password* to enter the *action of reality* or if there is any other interpretation to look for meaning that exists around us in this universal reality. At times, significant advancements in science give the impression of uncovering the ultimate key to understanding. This sense of achievement brings momentary joy, but soon, a new discovery or idea emerges—like a message declaring, "Attention: Incorrect password." This revelation upends our assumptions and returns us to the starting point, compelling us to rethink everything once again. Every single revolution in science reminds us of only classical reality regarding science in which science cannot unblock the windows for our epistemic penetration, i.e., participation in the *active action* of reality. Significantly, beliefs have the utmost consideration in reality "*which we may have previously rejected as childish superstitions, may turn out to be our only glimpse of the real planetary past.*"⁵

2. Religious vis-à-vis Secular

No religion is based on what we call scientific facts. The only and the most valid fact they have is belief, which is more than a scientific fact. Every religion aims towards the realization of some purpose. The measure of a respected religious person or society is his commitment to the realization of the respected religion's purposes. What constitutes a religion are the common duties and orders to be obeyed by its members. In this context, there is no society which is not subject to some common

⁴See for further details, Isaac Newton, *Newton's Philosophy of Nature: Selections from His Writings*, Ed. H. S. Thayer (New York: Dover Publications, 2010).

⁵Vine Deloria, *Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths*, IX.

orders or duties, which represent the necessary constituents of that society. If religion is constituted of orders, duties and purposes, then there is no non-religious society. There may be non-religious, or what we call secular societies, but we must not forget that non-religiousness and secularism are based on some common purposes and duties even non-religion, or secularism, is a sort of “religion.” The emergence of secularism both as a concept and as a philosophy of living is the product of the continuation of the process of inventing *new* religions rather than an outright rejection of religion. The process of inventing a *new* religion appears when some members lose their trust in the existing religion or find no interest anymore in their actual religion, as is the case with secularism. As far as the revealed religion is concerned, there is a significant difference between losing trust in religion as a source, and critically examining its available interpretations. In this context, the Islamic version of radicalism equals rationalism and open-mindedness. It guarantees the human mind the freedom of direct access to God’s revelations; in fact, the human mind is the only address of the Qur’anic words. Suspicious attitudes towards socially well-established taboos and customs, especially in knowledge, may end up with dangerous consequences. This is the essence of the quarrel among the members or groups of a revealed religion. Interpretation is knowledge and disagreements in interpreting religion mean progress in knowledge regarding religion; but rushing towards uniformity in understanding it represents nothing else but the ego’s desire to monopolize religion and then, of course, to misuse it. Religion has played and still is playing the greatest influence in *manipulating* people, and manipulation in understanding it (i.e., in knowledge) is the greatest help for domination. This is the main reason for the establishment of the official religious institutions in every society and/or country. Every official religious institution is in the service of the officials in power, and those in power are mostly in need of uniformity and stability, which are nothing else than signs of their good ruling in the eyes of the masses and a guarantee of the continuation of their stay in power. Progress in knowledge comes from individuals, and individuals are God’s creatures from a religious perspective. The essential reason for the existence of individuals is service to God, which is clearly stated in the scripture. The invention of the concept of official interpretation of the scripture is a step towards the replacement of God by the officials, and not their effort to protect religion, as it is usually stated. So, the quarrel, in essence, is not among researchers but among those who try to preserve uniformity and stability in every aspect. They need this to remain in power, but those who seek progress come only through *change*. *Change* in knowledge causes necessary changes in every aspect and *change* in every aspect necessarily implies change in power, which is the most difficult obstacle to progress, which is the only real cause of all the quarrels in society. This is very clear from the history of the development of every religious society. Whenever an interpretation of a religious claim or problem has not gained the support of the officials, the interpreter is compelled to officially sustain what he says, and if not, he would be either interned or imprisoned. This has been the fate of every public holder or advertiser of a *new* claim of knowledge which is or was in contradiction with the officially held interpretation. The concept of official knowledge or interpretation is the most dangerous enemy of creativity and the growth of knowledge. We must not forget the fact that “*It isn’t Nature that evolves slowly and peacefully but science (knowledge) itself: The theory of uniformity is a projection of academia unto nature.*”⁶

The case with secularism as a philosophy or a worldview is not hyphenated. Secularism, a philosophy of interest, developed as a product of modernity. Modernity is the transference of power from a Christian authority to a new one who named himself as modern, and a modern authority needed a modern *religion*, a *religion* that did not appear before, a newly invented one. A *new religion* will, need new temples of obedience, new prophets, and new religious rituals. Scientific revolution resulted in the appearance of a new class that was previously in a quarrel with Christian representatives and its interpreters, i.e. theologians. When these people came to power, their primary task was the spread of non-interest in religion, blaming religion and religious people for

⁶Philip Slater, *The Wayward Gate* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1977), 67.

backwardness. They used everything they could in this context, and in the end, the act of separation of state and religion gave birth to a *new* religion called by the new class of nobles as *secularism*. The hold of power by the secular strengthened the secular's action of spreading *secularism* and advertising it as a rational, right, and modern philosophy of living. What accelerated the rise of secularism were the personal benefits that the secular promised people when they got power. The necessary condition for securing jobs from the government was the spread of a secularist philosophy of living. Michael Burleigh has stated and argued the longstanding history of the hostility of the secular to the right to religious freedom. More importantly, this hostility was never based on any serious, rational arguments. "In Epperson the state attempted to exclude the subject of evolution from its schools, justifying its position by finding that it was injurious to the religious freedom of those who considered it antireligious."⁷ The concepts of exactness, finality, objectivity, and absoluteness are nothing but obstructions in the way of reason to progress towards the attainment of the *sumum bonum* in understanding, which is unattainable from an epistemic perspective. A rational person or society knows no borders in scientific analyzes and solutions. The endpoint of human advancement in knowledge is infinite, an inherently unattainable horizon, and the only guiding force that enlightens reason's way towards reasonable solutions.

Most of us consider authority as the biggest obstacle to creativity and innovation, but everyone becomes happy when an authoritative post is offered. The case with secularism is not different, the secular, the so-called modern men of Europe, after their long struggle with the church and its representatives, especially after their victory over Christianity, as a long-standing and un-fallible authority, became and still are the greatest obstacle in our way of benefitting from our differences. The real problem between the secular and non-secular according to Strauss, is primarily about authority.⁸ Is political authority to be grounded in the claims of revelation or reason, Jerusalem or Athens? Whether justification of political authority be given to reason or the sacred? The efforts of the secular were with the purpose of the replacement of revelation with reason, i.e. god with man, and the conflict ended with the triumph of man over god. Today, some political theorists maintain that even coercive laws must be justified by appeal to the public, and the question arises "are we so brave as to appeal to the public on the question whether our political system will be built on the secular or non-secular ground."⁹ If there are open-minded secularists there are open-minded non-secularists too and in both groups the open-minded ones are the minority. The secular forbade powers access to the sacred and sacred access to power. The act of prohibition of power getting religious or religious' getting powerful is the only way to the permanent reservation of the seat of power for the secular.

3. An Epistemic Discourse

From an epistemic perspective, the conflict between the secular and non-secular has replaced the quarrel between rationalists and empiricists; the actual clash among rationalists and empiricists was about which party may help more for the progress in knowledge, i.e. which one is the right source of knowledge: reason or experience. Since this problem was addressed by Emanuel Kant (1724-1804) in his magnum opus *The Critique of Pure Reason*, the next step was the unification of both empiricists and rationalists, not all of them, of course, but only those thirsty for getting rid of the sacred against those who were trying to preserve the absoluteness of the sacred as a source of knowledge. Hence, the genesis of the problem among secular and non-secular was an epistemic kind. Which source

⁷Vine Deloria Jr., *Evolution, Creationism, and Other Modern Myths*, 7.

⁸For further detailed discussion, see Leo Strauss, *City and Man* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1977).

⁹See Amy Gutmann, and Dennis Thomson, *Democracy and Disagreement* (Massachusetts: Imprint of Harvard University, 1998).

deserves absolute authority in knowledge: reason or revelation, human beings or God? Later on, this was transformed into a political concern of who will dominate the other, but reality consists in the unification of them as humans, i.e., they both can benefit from each other both require each other as different world-views, and both may be of help to each other. What we need in this context is another Kant, if we may suggest. "Religion competes with science because both activities have been separated from human experience and boundaries have been created to isolate them from each other."¹⁰ We should not forget that those who mostly contribute to human progress were not secular. The greatest leaders of innovation in thinking, such as al-Kindi 801-873AD), al-Farabi (d.950), Ibn Sina (980-1037), Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274), Copernicus (1473-1543), Galileo (1564-1642) and Newton, were all deeply religious-minded geniuses. The secular are either aware of this reality or they are ignorant of the history of human progress. Their behavior with the non-secular is a sign of their ignorance, and clear evidence of their will for power, as Fredrick Nietzsche (1844-1900) would illustrate.¹¹ Every religious or political party is either pressed directly by appeal to force and ceased to exist or indirectly closed by calling the secular courts into action. The real reason is the secular's fear of losing the elections because they are aware of the religious mentality of the masses. Can we create a world where both sides will try to benefit from each other, instead of their struggle for domination, which brings nothing more than war and hatred among humans? A progressive and open-minded is that who strives to benefit from other minds, and not the one who does everything to restrict and imprison different minds, which are the only source of the acceleration of human progress and its salvation from monopoly, and in which is the greatest enemy of human free thinking and ultimately creativity. Even scientists, at least till the present, are of no help in this context. "Scientists occupy the status of priests in our society, and they will not willingly surrender this favorable status-even if they have to lie to us. Fundamentalist preachers have somewhat the same attitude and cherish the idea that they are sources of wisdom with a direct line to god."¹² Thus the secularist's conception of progress, as getting rid of the non-seculars, is a fascistic behavior of those eager for power, not a sign of somebody's care for human progress. The seculars were very much aware of the reality that the state cannot retain any long-standing authority when its principles are conflict with God's. For there is no normal human mind who will agree with secular philosophy of giving to natural (human) law the status of divine law. For what authority does the state retain when its principles conflict with God's, can the authority of the natural (human) law ultimately be grounded in divine law?

From an Islamic point of view, as far as we can understand, all humans have the same standing for God, they are all His creatures, God does not authorize anyone as a ruler among the masses, and this problem is left to the consensus of the society. If political authority in liberal democracy is grounded in the consent of the people to be ruled, the same is the case with religious society. We are not so familiar with the stand of other religions in this context, but at least from the Islamic perspective, the political authority is not solved with God's act of authorization, for there is no such an act of authorization in the Qur'an; contrary this is left to the people to decide. The only requirement is political authority's unconditional service to God's principles as stated in the source. These principles are considered the building blocks of human happiness with the condition of being obeyed sincerely by them and, as necessary, constituents of a peaceful and progressive society. The secular must be aware of the fact that peace in society cannot be maintained without the freedom of the faith, and the non-secular must accept reason's direct access to God's words to fulfill the duty of understanding and interpreting as required by God. Appealing solely to secular accounts of the good, such as Aristotelianism, Utilitarianism or others, is no more legitimate from a scientific point of view

¹⁰Vine Deloria Jr, *Evolution, Creationism, And Other Modern Myths*, 135.

¹¹For details, refer to the entire work of Fredrick W. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (London: Arcturus Publishing Ltd, 2018).

¹²Vine Deloria Jr, *Evolution, Creationism, And Other Modern Myths*, 216.

than appealing solely to religious reasons. On the contrary, to the predictions of many advocates of secularization theory, such as Karl Marx, Max Weber and Peter Berger, this mix of democracy, religious diversity, and religious criticism has not resulted in the disappearance of religion; but people's possessive interest in religion is even growing more. These criticisms did not give positive results either in the disappearance of religion from the political scene or in total privatization of it as well. A poll by people for the American way found that four out of five Americans support teaching creationism as well as evolution in public schools.¹³ Religion, especially in liberal democracies, such as the United States of America or the eastern part of the globe, is alive and well, shaping political culture in numerous ways. "Gallup reported that 44 percent of Americans advocated a biblical creationist view, 40 percent held a belief in theistic evolution, and only 10 percent were strict, secular evolutionists".¹⁴ Politicians of today still use religion for the realization of their political purposes; this was what happened with secular politicians of the post-communist countries, who were declaring themselves as patriots of secularism. Religion was, and is still, playing a great role in justifying state coercion, especially at the moments when they see that they will not succeed in achieving their aims with rational tricks. Religious reasons are always very helpful for the secular to justify a coercive law for which reasonable agents cannot find an adequate secular rationale. The pre-election oral propaganda programs of secular parties in Eastern Europe are full of religious sayings and instructions seen as useful in influencing the emotions of the masses.

In the beginning, those so-called seculars proclaimed themselves as very much willing and eager for a rational explanation of the world and its phenomena, but when they came to power, they fortified their authority in ruling. This eager for a rational explanation was transformed into an irrationally anxious desire for permanent insurance of power from the non-secular. The desire to find the actual source of truth and reality, and the most useful way of achieving it, was dominated by the human natural will to power. This, again, demonstrates the fact that scientific achievements and inventions are of no help to the masses. All scientific and technological developments go in favor of power holders, and disfavours are mostly prone to the masses. Every invention has its good and bad sides. The goods of the discovery are mostly for power and wealth holders, and the victims of the side effects of it are the masses. Those who use the benefits of scientific and technological developments are those who have access to power because they are those who either sell or give permission to the manufacturers to vend technological products to people based on how much the company contributes to the benefits of the permission givers. The permission is granted based on the mutual benefit of the company as a sponsor of the research, and the permission giver, i.e. the officials authorized for it. This is why the lovers of wisdom are doing all that they can to transfer scientific knowledge to wisdom. They hold the belief that knowledge is truly valuable only when it transforms into wisdom. For them, it is something that inherently encompasses the distinction between the quality of knowledge that is essential for moral and purposeful purposes.

4. Conclusion

The article tried to provide a profound exploration of the interplay between reason, religion, and secularism. It underscored the centrality of interpretation in sustaining the vitality of both science and faith, arguing that understanding and interpreting reality are inherently human acts that continually rejuvenate our connection to the universe and the divine. The narrative critiques the modern over-reliance on science as an ultimate authority, comparing it to the historical role of religion in shaping human understanding. It asserted that blind adherence to either science or religion without critical engagement reduces both to rigid dogmas. By contrasting the epistemic struggles of

¹³"Teaching Creationism," *Arizona Daily Star*, 14 March 2000, *Editorial*, 10 A; See also James Glanz, "Poll Finds that Support is strong for Teaching 2 Origin Theories", *The New York Times*, March 2000.

¹⁴See, "Creationism Evolves," *Washington Post*, 8 August 1999, National News Section, 22.

secular and non-secular paradigms, the article highlighted the dangers of monopolizing truth—whether by religious orthodoxy or secular authority. It emphasized that uniformity stifles creativity, while diversity in interpretation fosters progress.

From an Islamic perspective, the article championed the necessity of individual engagement with sacred texts and rejects passive reliance on inherited interpretations. It calls for a balance where religious faith and rational inquiry coexist, urging both secular and religious societies to embrace open-mindedness and mutual benefit. The article also critiqued the misuse of religion and secularism for political domination, illustrating how both have been co-opted to serve power structures rather than human advancement.

Finally, the article advocated for an epistemic unity that bridges reason and revelation, proposing a harmonious model where religion and secularism contribute collaboratively to the pursuit of knowledge and societal progress. This vision challenges both camps to move beyond their historical animosities and embrace a shared commitment to truth, justice, and the flourishing of humanity.

Conflict of Interest

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Data Availability

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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