

The Analysis of Rationalist Currents in Contemporary Quranic Studies in the Islamic World

Ferdin Darabi Meydani¹,

¹ Faculty of Theology and Islamic Studies, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran;
fardindarabi@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between reason and revelation has long been central to Islamic thought, particularly in contemporary Qur'anic studies, where rationalist approaches continue to evolve. In the modern Islamic world, debates between rationalism and textualism have intensified, raising questions about rationalism's legitimacy as an independent intellectual current. This study analyzes the development and characteristics of rationalist currents in contemporary Qur'anic studies and determines their status within Islamic intellectual discourse. This research employs a descriptive-analytical method using thematic analysis of relevant scholarly literature on rationalism, Qur'anic studies, and Islamic thought. The study examines both Western and Islamic perspectives, tracing the historical evolution of rationalism across traditional, modern, and postmodern periods. The findings show that rationalism has undergone three major phases of development and manifests in both religious and critical approaches. In the Islamic world, a clear tension exists between rationalism and textualism, particularly among contemporary thinkers and Neo-Mu'tazilite trends, where reason is often positioned as a critical tool toward religious texts. The study also highlights that rationalism is not a uniform movement but a diverse, evolving intellectual current shaped by both internal and external factors. The research suggests that a balanced integration of reason and revelation is essential to avoid intellectual extremism and foster a more constructive, moderate understanding of religion in contemporary Islamic discourse.

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Corresponding Author:

Ferdin Darabi Meydani
Faculty of Theology and Islamic Studies, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran;
fardindarabi@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

The concept of reason and religion involves examining the relationship and interaction between these two elements. This topic is one of the significant and extensively debated issues in the humanities and religious studies. Reason, understood as the faculty that enables humans to understand and analyze various issues through reasoning and thought, and religion, defined as a system of beliefs and ethics encompassing divine narratives and principles, are two fundamental concepts that, when they interact with one another, give rise to diverse perspectives and viewpoints.

Some define rationalism as any viewpoint that invokes reason as a source of knowledge or justification. Within rationalism, varying degrees of emphasis exist, leading to a spectrum of rationalist viewpoints that range from the moderate position asserting that "reason takes precedence over other means of acquiring knowledge" to the more extreme stance that regards reason as "the exclusive path to knowledge" (Audi, 1999: 771).

In an article by Bhat and Bisati, the authors state: "Presently, the Muslim Ummah lacks both a rational and global perspective, primarily due to the absence of effective global leadership, leading to a failure to achieve collective goals. The Muslim Ummah finds itself caught between two opposing approaches: one being an outdated conservative stance devoid of modern sensibilities, and the other a radical secularist perspective seeking liberation from divine guidance. Both of these approaches are deemed anti-rational and contrary to a rational approach to life. Contemporary Islamic revivalist thinkers endeavor to reconcile rationality with conservatism and divine guidance, viewing rationality as a means of liberation. The modern age is perceived as a design reminiscent of jahiliyyah due to the rejection of divine guidance as the foundational source of societal principles." (quoted in: Bisati & Bhat, 2025: 4).

While rationalism actively functions as a current in contemporary Quranic studies within the Islamic world, it is neither radical secularism nor an outdated conservative stance devoid of modernity. Rather, it is a dynamic movement rooted in the teachings of Islam. To further understand this subject, we aim to investigate the currents of rationalism in contemporary Quranic studies in the Islamic world to ascertain whether it has emerged as a significant intellectual movement.

Rationalism in religious studies generally emphasizes the priority and sovereignty of reason. To uncover the genealogy of rationalism in contemporary Quranic studies within the Islamic world from both applied and content perspectives, it is essential to examine existing studies. From an applied perspective, rationalism is divided into two domains: religious and critical. In the religious approach, reason is accepted as a valid tool for elucidating religious principles and truths. In contrast, the critical approach positions reason in opposition to textual sources, experience, and faith. From a content perspective, rationalism can be analyzed within three domains: traditional, modern, postmodern, and Western self-founded rationalism (or neo-Mu'tazilism).

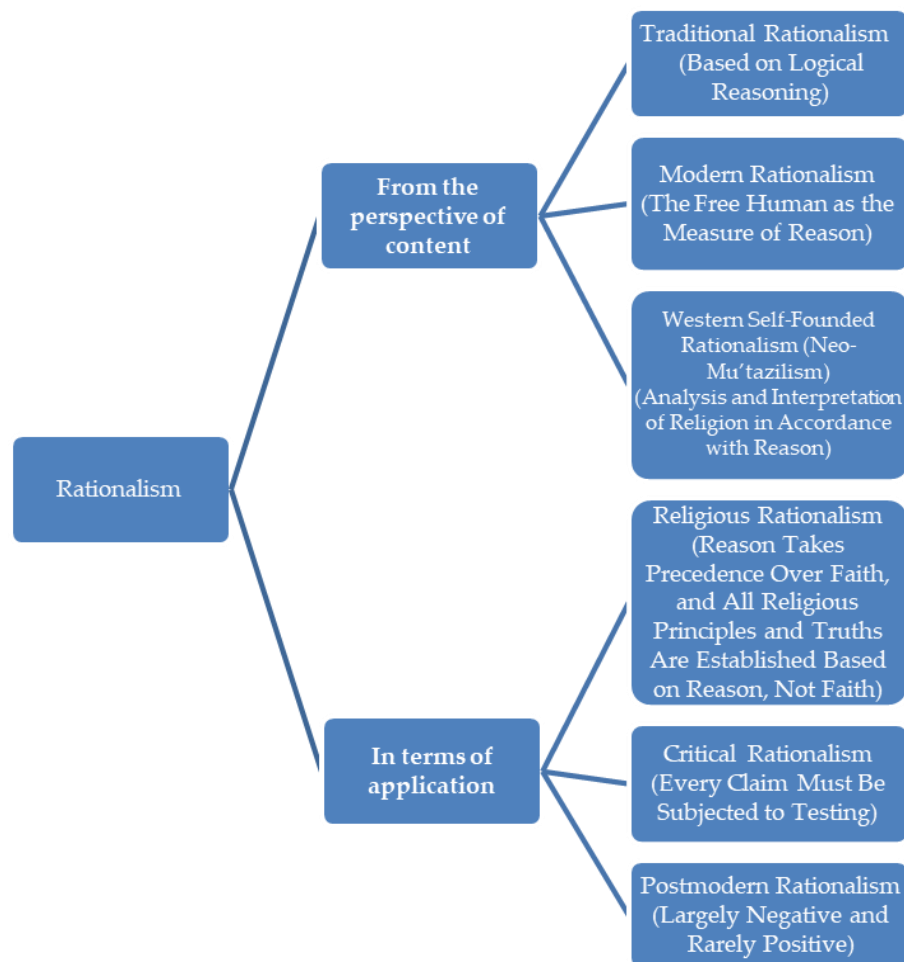


Figure 1. Classification of Rationalism

METHODS

This study examines the genealogy of rationalism in contemporary Quranic research within the Islamic world, employing a descriptive-analytical research method. Data is collected through the study and analysis of texts and scholarly articles related to rationalism and Quranic studies, utilizing thematic analysis for interpretation. The research is organized based on theoretical frameworks related to rationalism, textualism, and fideism, and it compares the historical trajectories of rationalism among Orientalists and Muslim thinkers across traditional, modern, and postmodern periods. The results derived from this analysis contribute to identifying the status of rationalism in Quranic research and exploring its interaction with textualism and fideism. This leads to a better understanding of this trend as an independent and coherent movement in contemporary Quranic studies.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The term “rationalism” is employed by Orientalists to refer to the primacy of reason. Historically, particularly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the label “rationalist” was often applied to free thinkers with an anti-religious perspective, acquiring a distinctly pejorative connotation during that time. Today, the use of the term “rationalist” to describe a worldview that leaves no room for metaphysics is less common (Boyd, 2012).

Within the Islamic world, the dichotomy between “rationalist” and “textualist” has been evident in philosophical, theological, ethical, and legal discussions since the early centuries of Islam. This division is largely due to the textual nature of the Quran and the compilation of hadiths, which together form the sacred heritage of the two weighty matters (thaqalayn). Conversely, outside the Islamic world and among Orientalists, there has been a gradual shift from a focus on sacred texts to engagement with worldly and empirical knowledge, leading to an increasing prevalence of the opposition between “rationalism” and “empiricism.” Moreover, “rationalism” in Christian theology stands in contrast to “fideism,” implying that, in the validation of religious doctrines, reason precedes faith. This establishes that all principles and truths of religion are proven based on reason rather than being grounded solely in faith (Audi, 1999: 771).

Table 1. The Interaction of Rationalism

	Aspect		Description	
	Confrontation of Rationalism with:	Textualism	The Traditional Era of the Islamic World	
		Empiricism	The Traditional Era of Orientalists	
		Fideism	The Contemporary Era of Orientalism	
		Revelation	The Contemporary Era of the Islamic World and Orientalists	

Rationalism from the Perspective of Application

In the study of religion, the primacy of reason emphasizes the importance and supremacy of rational thought. Accordingly, every rational and logical matter has a direction and cause that can be explained through reason and logic. Rationalism has applications in two domains: religious and critical. In the religious domain, it is grounded in the foundations of philosophy and theology, which recognize the significance of religion and the transcendent aspects that lie beyond reason, without denying their existence. Conversely, in the critical approach, the contradictions between reason and scripture, experience, faith, and revelation are examined.

Rationalism with a Religious Approach

Rationalism in theology and the philosophy of religion stands in contrast to “faith-based thinking,” meaning that reason precedes faith, and all religious foundations and truths must be established on the basis of rationality rather than mere belief (Azimi Dokht, 2000, p. 33). Some philosophers, such as Clifford, Brand Blanchard, Bertrand Russell, Michael Scriven, and Antony Flew, have argued that belief in God is unreasonable, incompatible with logic, or intellectually irresponsible due to the insufficient evidence supporting such beliefs (Nooralizadeh, 2010).

Descartes is recognized as the first modern rationalist and is often referred to as the “Father of Modern Philosophy.” Many subsequent Western philosophical ideas respond to his writings, which continue to be closely studied today (Russell, 2004, p. 511; Watson, 2012). Although Descartes considered himself a devout Catholic, one of the goals of his “Meditations” was to defend the Catholic faith. His endeavor to ground theological beliefs in reason faced significant opposition during his time (Garstein, 1992, p. 510). Descartes laid the foundations for seventeenth-century continental rationalism, later supported by Spinoza and Leibniz, and subsequently confronted by the empirical school of thought represented by Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume (Grondin, 2004, p. 126).

Tahaṭawi is regarded as one of the early adopters of Islamic modernism. Islamic modernists sought to integrate Islamic principles with European social theories, asserting that these principles are compatible with European modernity (Ellen McLarney, 2016). Although most of Sayyid Qutb's criticisms were directed at the Islamic world, he maintained that belief in matters that are unseen (or imperceptible) is a significant indicator of humanity's capacity to acquire knowledge from areas beyond science: "The concept of the unseen is a determining factor that distinguishes humans from animals" (Qutb, 1993, Vol. 1, p. 35). According to Hassan al-Banna, Islam is not merely a religion but a political ideology encompassing religion, state, nation, nationality, spirituality, work, the Quran, and the sword (Mura, 2012). Al-Banna, following Rashid Rida's beliefs, asserted that moral decline is the primary cause of social and political decay, arguing that discussions held in mosques are insufficient to combat the tide of social liberation encouraged by political secularization (De Bellaigue, 2017, p. 376).

From Talaghani's perspective, all beliefs, values, and principles of Islam are grounded in wisdom and sound reason, leaving no room for doubt or flaw while rejecting superstition, fantasy, and illogical claims (Talaghani, 1963, Vol. 2, p. 172). He considered one of the hallmarks of rationality in Islamic rulings to be the legislator's attention to contemporary human interests, emphasizing the importance of time and place in people's lives. The necessities of time do not imply conforming to fleeting and unfounded human preferences, but rather focusing on the real needs of humanity (Talaghani, 1980, p. 259).

Rationalism with a Critical Approach

Critical rationalists assert that scientific theories and any claims regarding knowledge can—and should—be rationally critiqued and subjected to tests that may invalidate them. Therefore, claims of knowledge can be evaluated both contradictorily and normatively. They are either falsifiable, thus empirical (in a broad sense), or unfalsifiable, and hence non-empirical (Quintanilla, 1982). Unlike contemporary 21st-century scientists, 17th-century readers, when accusing Spinoza of atheism, generally meant that he challenged orthodox beliefs, particularly regarding ethical matters, rather than denying the existence of God (Carlisle, 2021, p. 10). His theological studies were inextricably linked to his political thought. He is grouped with Hobbes, Locke, Leibniz, and Kant, all of whom "contributed to the emergence of a genre of political writing known as secular theology" (Smith, 1997, p. 2). According to Leibniz, theological (religious) truths and philosophy cannot contradict one another, as both reason and faith are "gifts from God." This implies that any conflict between them would suggest God's opposition to Himself (Magill, 1990).

Hegel, influenced by Hume, used his views to support, rather than oppose, Christianity (Griffith-Dickson, 2017). Regarded as the father of modern anti-rationalism, Hegel promotes the view that faith alone is the sole guide to human behavior. Utilizing David Hume's work, he argues that everything people do is ultimately based on faith (Redmond, 1987, p. 97). Weber also maintained a dualistic view of rationality, acknowledging that the responsibility for many advancements—particularly the liberation of humanity from restrictive and irrational traditional social directives—was limited. However, he criticized how individuals were treated as "cogs in a machine," diminishing their humanity and freedom (Ritzer, 2009). Wittgenstein opined that "Christianity is in fact the only sure way to happiness," but he rejected the notion that religious belief is merely about thinking correctly about a specific doctrine (Monk, 1990, p. 122). Barbour considered critical realism as a substitute for competing interpretations of scientific theories: classical or naïve realism, instrumentalism, and idealism. The critical realist perspective sees scientific theories as providing knowledge that is partial, revisable, abstract, yet referential to the world, and expressible through metaphors and models (Taylor, 2011). Ali Abd al-Raziq, in his book *Islam and the Foundations of Governance*, argues that Muslims

may agree on any form of government—whether religious or secular—provided it serves the public benefit and welfare of their society (Thomas, 2006, p. 878).

Rationalism from the Content Perspective

Rationalism, from the content perspective, can be examined in three areas: traditional, modern, and postmodern, as well as in the context of Western self-founded rationalism (or Neo-Mu'tazilism).

Traditional Rationalism

Philosophers and scholars have identified various resources to uncover the truths and realities of the world and to discover the essence of phenomena. Some have chosen reason as the primary means of understanding, utilizing tools of reasoning and argumentation—a method referred to as traditional rationalism. Before the Renaissance, traditional rationalism primarily relied on Aristotelian methods as the foundation of knowledge. However, following the Renaissance, a new movement emerged in opposition to traditional rationalism, embracing experience, experimentation, and observation as its basis (Eskandari, 2006). Traditional rationalism posits that reason is superior to experience in acquiring knowledge, claiming that it can justify our beliefs, claims, and theories, thereby achieving an unequivocal and indubitable foundation of knowledge. In contrast, critical rationalism rejects these notions, asserting that neither reason nor experience holds priority in the pursuit of knowledge. Furthermore, critical rationalism does not regard reason and experience as equally primary (Popper, 1971).

One of the main concerns of Akhund Khurasani and other scholars was to familiarize the public with the ideas of a democratic nation-state and modern constitutionalism. Akhund Khurasani urged Iranian scholars to deliver sermons addressing the ambiguities propagated by Nuri and his contemporaries (Farzaneh, 2014: 156). Na'ini's political understanding of contemporary developments is framed through religious teachings and is based on rational and traditional methodologies. Consequently, the rationality evident in his political comprehension of societal developments is rooted in the use of Islamic verses and traditions. This indicates that he did not endorse maximalist rationality and did not perceive a conflict between reason and religion regarding the political and social transformations of contemporary society. Additionally, Allameh Tabatabai had a pessimistic view of the West, frequently regarding Western civilization in his writings as the benchmark of corruption and disobedience. In his commentary "Al-Mizan," he characterizes Western laws concerning rights as follows: "The civilization of the present era establishes and executes its laws based on the desires and whims of the majority of the populace. How can the tradition of Western society align with the preferences of human society while the prevailing religious community suggests that people prefer to yield to the idolatries of materialism" (Tabatabai, 1994, Vol. 4, p. 102)? Allameh Tabatabai consistently emphasized the necessity of rational comprehension of religion. According to him, the intended meaning of reason and rationality is the endeavor to derive new insights based on premises grounded in natural axioms (Islami, 2005). Morteza Motahhari believed that contemporary interpretations of the Quran are significant compared to ancient interpretations of Islam because the next generation possesses a better and deeper understanding of the Quran. However, he simultaneously refrained from subscribing to epistemological pluralism (Ghamari Tabrizi, 2013). Although neither he nor others regarded Motahhari as an intellectual, he was one of the most prominent critics and analysts of the intellectual movement, viewing the major accusation against contemporary Iranian intellectuals as a careless Westernization or deliberate betrayal of Islam and Iran (Rahmati, 2018, p. 19).

From the perspective of Makarem Shirazi, God explicitly states in the Holy Quran that true religion is born from thought, reflection, and reasoning. Islam engages with thinkers, intellectuals, and those of sound intellect everywhere, not with ignorant individuals or superstitions (Makarem Shirazi et al., 1995, Vol. 11, p. 201). In his view, four scenarios can be envisioned between reason and revelation: 1)

The judgments of reason and revelation are the same; 2) Reason makes a judgment, and revelation has no judgment regarding it; 3) Revelation makes a judgment about something, and reason has no judgment; 4) The judgments of reason and revelation conflict with one another. In the first three scenarios, there is no contradiction between reason and revelation. However, in the fourth scenario, one must choose between the two, and if one intends to submit to revelation, it would contradict rationalism (Makarem Shirazi, 2007, p. 155).

Modern Rationalism

Modernity is predominantly perceived as a system of values, ideas, and thoughts characterized by two elements: "1) Reason, which is considered the criterion and key to the manifestations of contemporary human life; 2) A free, modern human, liberated from the constraints of the church, who, according to René Descartes, occupies the center of existence and becomes the master and possessor of nature" (Savaji, 2004: 12). Some scholars have rightly distinguished between modernity and modernism, noting that modernity signifies a mentality. Dariush Shayegan writes, "The manifestations of Western civilization should not be confined to the astonishing efficiency of its technological products. Such neglect, along with the failure to separate the motivating ideas of this civilization from their practical applications, has led our training to be restricted solely to the implementation of functional sciences, rather than progressing toward identifying the central locus from which these sciences emanate" (Shayegan, 1977: 54-56).

The emergence of rationalism as a systematic philosophical school was significantly influenced by the birth of two rationalist philosophical systems: those of Descartes and Spinoza, which marked this era as the "Age of Reason" (Grondin, 2004: 126). Hegel was the first thinker to analyze modernity historically, positing that modernity reaches its position through its internal and modern critique and does not require external factors. A distinctive feature of modernity is the inherent and free will manifested through the participation of all citizens and their decisions in shaping the political will of society (Jahnbegloo, 1989: 3). Hegel asserts that modernity is a bridge in the evolution of spirit towards freedom. The self-awareness of the spirit is the paramount feature of the modern era, and critical thought serves as the driving force behind this self-awareness. Hegel believed that the foundation of modernity is a subjective element, maintaining that self-awareness necessitates freedom, deepening individuality, independent action, and, most importantly, criticism. He viewed criticism as the essence of the intellectual spirit, born of the modern era itself (Hegel, 1977: 6).

Seyyed Jamal al-Din Asadabadi can be considered a figurehead of modernity and modernization movements. His efforts toward Islamic awakening and promoting unity among Shia and Sunni Muslims were highly impactful, and his path was continued by his disciple, Muhammad Abduh, along with like-minded individuals who ushered in a contemporary quest for modernization among Egyptian thinkers. While Seyyed Jamal can be seen as a political figure with Mu'tazili inclinations, his disciple Muhammad Abduh is regarded more as an intellectual and theologian (Enayat, 1993, p. 79). In modern rationalism, Kuwakbi claimed that the most genuine expression of Islamic politics is democracy, provided it is based on brotherhood and unity among Arabs, regardless of religion or ethnicity (Thompson, 2021). He asserted that imitation causes stagnation for Muslims in religion and other forms of their sciences. Rather than striving to interpret the Quran and Hadith, Muslims relied on centuries-old interpretations. He believed that one of the reasons for the decline of Muslims was their abandonment of Islamic values in favor of superstitions, coupled with their disregard for science, which prevented them from keeping pace with the modern world.

Bazargan, in his book "Defenses," recounts that when he and his peers visited Notre Dame Cathedral and observed the "stylish and modern" individuals chanting and bowing, they were astonished by the "praying" of the Westerners. In "Religion and Civilization," Bazargan states, "The

main driving force behind this civilization cannot be anything other than God and religion" (Najafi, 2018). Fardid expresses, "My wish is to free myself from the modern cave filled with self-centered nihilism, the spell of earthly gods (despotism), and historicism. This is my ideal, and whenever I see anger and a proliferation of compromise, I become hopeless... Seizing and insisting on choice is the right path. For a hundred years, Westernization has dominated us... young people are seeking the God of the past and the future" (Quoted from Nasri, 2001, p. 64-66). Fardid regards Western rationality as despotic and juxtaposes it with Quranic rationality. Kadivar notes that Shariati was critical of both tradition and modernity; thus, he is undoubtedly regarded as a pioneer of religious innovation and religious intellectualism in Iran, with his movement inseparable from the current movement of intellectuals and recognized as a distinct religious entity in Iran (Kadivar, 2004). Qan'ani Rad perceives Shariati as a composite thinker capable of synthesizing concepts like Islam, existentialism, and socialism. He views Shariati's project as representative of modernity, focusing on the two elements of freedom and justice (Qan'ani Rad, 2016).

Modern Rationalism

In the twentieth century, the teaching of philosophy and rational sciences by Seyyed Jamal initiated a movement in Egypt that revived the memory of the intellectual debates of the Mu'tazilites among Sunni Muslims. Consequently, the movement that arose afterward through his disciples was dubbed "Neo-Mu'tazilism." Although Seyyed Jamal himself was not of Mu'tazili origin and thus not an outright Mu'tazili, he established a trend among Sunni Muslims in Egypt by promoting rationality within the community and educating disciples in this field, leading to the coining of the term "Neo-Mu'tazilites" (Arab Salehi, 2014, p. 40). The essence of Seyyed Jamal al-Din's thought, which inspired Neo-Mu'tazilism, can be summarized in two key phrases: "The solution to the decline of Muslims" through the "revival of rationality." Following him, his disciple Abduh continued to pursue his mentor's concerns and promoted rationality among Sunni Muslims in Egypt while training students in this regard. According to some, Abduh was the first to be labeled Neo-Mu'tazili (Ibid, p. 46). Recently, this thought has transcended the confines of the Sunni world, to the extent that even Abdolkarim Soroush openly refers to himself as Neo-Mu'tazili (Soroush, 2011). Thus, by the same criteria that Soroush identifies himself as Neo-Mu'tazili, individuals such as Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, Mostafa Malekian, and several other Iranian intellectuals can also be regarded as Neo-Mu'tazili.

Islamic renewal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries aimed at intellectual reform and the elimination of civilizational stagnation, seeking to revive the Islamic Ummah in alignment with contemporary demands (Morad Sharif, 2021). Abduh is seen as one of the key figures in founding Islamic modernism based on rationalism, thus earning the designation "Neo-Mu'tazili" (Ahmed Al-Rahim, 2006). He argued that Muslims could not solely rely on interpretations provided by medieval clerics; they needed to engage their reason to adapt to changing times (Gelvin, 2008: 161-162). Rashid Rida, as a Salafi scholar, sought to revive Hadith studies and theorized about an Islamic state. He condemned the rising currents of secularism and nationalism throughout the Islamic world following the abolition of the Ottoman Caliphate, advocating for a united world. Hasan al-Banna was influenced by Rida (Ayubi et al., 2009). He defended the superiority of transmission over reason and denounced philosophy and mysticism (Aburabi, 1989: 191).

Ameen al-Khouli is recognized as a pioneer in the literary approach to Quranic interpretation, which, despite its sacred nature, can be analyzed like any literary work (Al-Alauna, 2013, p. 49). In his approach to the Quran, he recommends considering the text as a whole, avoiding disaggregation into verse-by-verse studies that undermine the coherence of the whole, and instead advises correlating similar themes (Izdiyan Muttaqin, 2020). Taha Hussein, on the other hand, sought to recreate the role that Descartes played in the Western philosophical tradition within the Islamic tradition, aspiring to

lay the foundations for a modern and philosophical understanding of Islamic and Arab heritage while theoretically enriching and solidifying the foundations of modernity. However, the reactions to his project were so tumultuous that he was convinced to revise his overall framework and to handle the essence of modernity more cautiously amid a more settled literary and intellectual legacy (Hawas, 2018). Everything that Arkon has written over the past forty years is encompassed under the title "Critique of Islamic Reason." He describes his project as follows: "The critique of Islamic reason does not confront a doctrine against other doctrines and does not halt with doctrines that have appeared in history or may yet emerge" (Arkon, 2000, p. 13). He argues that the Quran has been distorted, as its transmission is unreliable, and that the Druze, Ismailis, and Zaidis possess critical secret documents that assist us in recognizing the correct text (Rajabi, 2019, p. 18). In "Critique of Islamic Reason," Arkon discusses fundamentalism and the impossibility of tracing a different history of Islamic thought, avoiding a history of the fundamental tenets of Islam, nor does he seek to analyze the works of scholars (Arkon, 2000, p. 23). Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, with his academic project "Critique of Arab Reason," is regarded as one of the prominent intellectual figures in the modern and contemporary Arab world. The main motivation for critiquing the Arab mind is to engage in the path of modernity and enlightenment. Jabri states, "Modernity for us does not mean rejecting the heritage or breaking away from the past, but rather enhancing the way we engage with the heritage to a level we call 'contemporary.' By this, I mean keeping pace with global advancements" (Ben Hammed, 2021).

Hisham Jait's book "The Fitna" is an important historical resource for researchers, demonstrating that Muslims have resorted to new sciences to extrapolate history (Faleh Kilani, 2009). He primarily focuses on topics related to Arabic-Islamic culture, history, and philosophy, as well as the relationship between Islam and modernity and the status of Islam in the contemporary world. Jait believed that national identity and religious culture might be interconnected but are not mutually constitutive, and he supported the political principle of secularism (Hichem, 1974). Hassan Hanafi published a triad using Husserl's methodologies to reconstruct classical Islamic philosophy and critique resources, promoting European awareness as part of his "third way" project for interpreting tradition and modernity—one that is neither fully European-modern nor entirely Islamic-traditional; implicitly secular-worldly, as it interprets the sacred in light of the political and social needs of the people; a belief that has transformed for living (Mena al-aqidah ilath thawrah), as indicated by one of the volumes of this project (Hashas, 2018: 271).

Edward Said is also recognized as a founding figure in postcolonial theory (Robert Young, 1990). The postcolonial discourse presented in "Orientalism," postcolonial theology, and postcolonial biblical criticism was influenced by this method, allowing readers to approach the Bible analytically from the perspective of a colonial reader (Gandhi, 1998). In this context, Shukri Mustafa holds an extreme position, viewing all previous scholars as unnecessary and even rejecting the four Islamic schools of thought, insisting that every Muslim should engage in independent interpretation (ijtihad) based on the Quran and Sunnah (the actions of Muhammad and his followers) (Stanley, 2017). Unlike most similar groups, Jama'at al-Muslimeen encouraged women to join. Shukri personally married male members, and the group resided in communal dormitories, where multiple couples often shared a common room, separated only by hanging curtains. If a married woman joined the group without her husband, Shukri deemed the "ignorant" marriage valueless and permitted her to remarry (Kepel, 2003: 86). Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd is an avant-garde and progressive theologian known for his project of a humanistic interpretation of the Quran. He challenged "mainstream views" on the Quran, arguing that while he did not deny the divine origin of the Quran, it should be understood as a "cultural product" that needs to be read within the framework of the language and culture of the seventh-century Arabs and can be interpreted in more than one way (Nasr Abu Zayd, 2010). One of Abu Zayd's fundamental beliefs was his insistence on the humanity of the Quran. He also asserted that common sciences should

be utilized in interpreting the Quran (Nasr Abu Zayd, 1998: 45). Abu Zayd strongly opposed the belief in a “single, precise, and authoritative interpretation of the Quran transmitted by the Prophet at all times.” In Ahmad Qabel’s view, the area where “the judgment of reason is silent” is hypothesized to be that “the specific judgment of reason does not exist” (such as details of laws or partial ethical solutions). If “legal transmission” exists, the title of “evidence” is inappropriate, as there is nothing to support this claim. Therefore, “legal transmission” can be regarded as “clarifying and interpreting the details of the overarching judgments of reason,” signifying its “longitudinal authority” in “details” (Qabel, 2008).

Post-Modern Rationalism

In broad and somewhat ambiguous terms, postmodernism is a style of thought that diverges from classical concepts of truth, reason, identity, and objectivity. It moves away from ideas of general progress or liberation, as well as from unified frameworks and grand narratives that promise definitive conclusions. Unlike Enlightenment norms, postmodernism perceives the world as contingent, baseless, changeable, unstable, and uncertain, characterizing it as a collection of cultures or disparate interpretations. It harbors a degree of skepticism toward the objectivity of truth, history, and social norms, disrupting the notions of essences, coherence, and uniformity of identities.

What is certain is that postmodernism has drawn its intellectual topics from figures of Continental Europe, such as the German thinkers Nietzsche and Heidegger. According to Giddens, Nietzsche’s themes are particularly prominent in Foucault’s later writings, which express these ideas in a distinctly different—and arguably more intriguing—manner compared to other contemporary French writers. Montgomery Watt believed that while the Qur’an is divinely inspired, it may not necessarily be true (Montgomery, 2016).

Alston’s views on foundationalism, internalism, externalism, speech acts, and the epistemic value of mystical experience, among other topics, have been highly influential (Oppy et al., 2009). Essentialists argue that through the study of various mystical experiences across different religions and doctrines, a common core can be identified. Thinkers such as William James, Walter Stace, and Alston occupy this spectrum. They assert that religious experiences possess a shared core that transcends the boundaries of diverse religions, sects, and cultures. They contend that while differences in experiences exist, a crucial distinction must be made between the language of experience and its interpretation and description. This discussion is elaborated upon in the works of writers like William James and Walter Stace (Battaly, 2005).

Foucault’s theories primarily address the interplay between power and knowledge, focusing on how these elements are utilized as tools of social control within social institutions. He is often classified as both a structuralist and a postmodernist. His ideas have had a significant impact on scholars in various fields, including communication studies, anthropology, psychology, sociology, criminology, cultural studies, literary theory, feminism, Marxism, and critical theory (Burrell, 1998: 14).

Analysis of Rationalism and Its Historical Development

The Historical Course of Rationalism among Orientalists

The historical course of rationalism among Orientalists can generally be traced back to Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant, who employed a critical approach to the tools of reason in opposition to religion. Their rationalism primarily arose from historical confrontations with faith and shaped the modern rationalist movement, often referred to as the Age of Enlightenment. This movement emerged in the early 17th and 18th centuries, promoting the importance of reason and logic in analyzing religious, philosophical, and social issues.

Following Kant, the scientific revolution of the 19th century reinforced the role of reason in understanding and interpreting the world, advocating scientific methods and reliance on empirical data to substantiate concepts. During this period, scholars such as Hamann, Hegel, John Austin, Auguste Comte, and Max Weber not only continued the critical approach of reason against religion but also encouraged the historical opposition between rationalism and empiricism, maintaining substantive continuity with the previous modern rationalist movement.

In the 20th century, postmodernism began to challenge rationalist thought, prompting discussions about the limitations and capabilities of reason. This period witnessed the advancement and deepening of rationalist theories, epitomized in the thoughts of thinkers such as Montgomery, Alston, Barbour, and Foucault, who exemplified the historical confrontation between rationalism and revelation (or religious experience), alongside the rise of postmodernism. Overall, the historical trajectory of rationalism in the West reflects the varied influences of thinkers, events, and intellectual movements on the role and importance of reason in shaping thoughts and understanding the world—initially characterized by a critical approach using reason against religion. In the early modern period, this confrontation manifested itself in the opposition between rationalism and fideism, while in the postmodern period, the principal opposition arises between rationalism and revelation (or religious experience).

The Historical Course of Rationalism in the Islamic World

Islamic scholars, drawing inspiration from Greek philosophy and the ideas of Plato and Aristotle, sought to align rationalist thought with Islamic principles. This alignment facilitated the development of rationalism in the Islamic world, although the influences of theological schools and Islamic philosophers such as Avicenna and Al-Farabi were also significant, prompting them to examine the role of reason in Islamic thought and doctrine.

However, in the contemporary era and over the past century, the effects of Orientalism have fundamentally challenged rationalism in the Islamic world, initiating discussions on the compatibility of reason and religion, the need for balance between faith and reason, and critiques of traditional thought. Generally, the historical course of rationalism in the Islamic world illustrates the diverse influences of thinkers and intellectual movements on the role and significance of reason in Islamic thought and understanding. Among Islamic thinkers, there exists predominantly a critical approach employing reason against religion, manifesting in the historical confrontations of rationalism first with textualism and then with fideism. This critical questioning of texts and deviation from them ultimately leads to confrontations with fideism, which represents the core stance of this Western self-sufficient rationalist thought (Neomutazilism), encouraging them to break modern constraints and engage with postmodernism. Notably, this contemporary Iranian rationalism shows a similar approach, albeit with somewhat less intensity, echoing the styles of earlier Islamic thinkers, primarily focusing on the confrontation between rationalism and textualism.

Critique and Review of Rationalism: Is It a Distinct Movement?

Rationalism stands as a prominent intellectual and philosophical current throughout the history of thought. This movement emphasizes the role and importance of reason, logic, logical reasoning, and critical thought in understanding and interpreting the world. Rationalism promotes ideas such as the independence of reason from religion, a focus on logic and logical argumentation, and an emphasis on the value of science and knowledge while advocating for a synthesis of reason and experience to achieve true knowledge. Thus, rationalism remains an influential intellectual and philosophical movement that has historically impacted, and continues to significantly shape, contemporary thought.

As demonstrated in the works of contemporary Islamic thinkers such as Amin al-Khuli, Muhammad Iqbal, Ahmad Amin, Tahtawi, Abduh, Kawakibi, Qutb, Arkoun, Al-Bouti, Abed al-Jabri, Hicham Jait, Hanafi, Edward Said, and others, the Western self-sufficient rationalist movement (Neomutazilism) dominates with a focus on the confrontation between rationalism and textualism. This same current can also be observed in the rationalist thought of Iranian thinkers, including Soroush, Shabestari, Malkian, Qabel, Hooshmand, Kadhim, Fanai, and others.

In summary, the findings indicate that the current of rationalism among Orientalists has undergone three distinct phases with varying approaches. Meanwhile, in the Islamic world—among both Islamic scholars and Iranian intellectuals—there is consensus that the Western self-sufficient rationalist current (Neomutazilism) emphasizes the confrontation between rationalism and textualism, and occasionally fideism. This dynamic is counterbalanced by revelation (or religious experience), particularly when it comes to attempts to challenge the core texts of Islam, including the Holy Qur'an. The primary application of rationalism remains its critical approach, suggesting that religion obstructs progress, positing that advancement in the West stem from their critical perspective on religion. This approach and current can be succinctly summarized in the following table.

CONCLUSION

Rationalism, as an intellectual and philosophical movement, emphasizes the role of reason, logic, and logical argumentation in understanding and interpreting the world. This current has undergone various phases throughout the history of thought, particularly evolving into a critical stance towards religion since the Enlightenment. The historical progression of rationalism reveals three distinct periods: the first features thinkers such as Descartes and Kant, who critiqued religion through the lens of reason; the second involves scholars like Hamann and Hegel, who emphasize the opposition of rationalism to empiricism; and the final period is marked by the emergence of postmodernism and new challenges concerning religious texts and revelation.

In the Islamic world, the rationalist approach has generally been influenced by Greek philosophies and efforts to reconcile them with Islamic teachings. The contributions of thinkers like Avicenna and Al-Farabi illustrate how reason and faith can coexist. However, in the contemporary era, influenced by Orientalism, rationalism has become a significant challenge, fostering discussions about balancing reason and religion and critiquing traditional ideas. Consequently, we observe multiple confrontations between rationalism and textualism among Muslim intellectuals.

In conclusion, rationalism as an intellectual current has always been in flux and influential, revealing the complexities of discourse on reason and faith among Orientalists and Muslim thinkers. This movement, particularly when confronted with the rising challenges of postmodernism, underscores the necessity for deep and rigorous explorations into the relationship between reason and faith. The opposition between rationalism and textualism, along with fideism, should lead to constructive dialogue that emphasizes reason and argumentation while safeguarding the significance of religious texts in modern society.

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