


## The Pleasures of Subjectivity and the Position of Reason in Islamic Realism

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Article Info	Abstract
<p><b>Article type:</b> Research Article</p> <p><b>Article history:</b>  <b>Received</b> 11 January 2024  <b>Received in revised from</b> 02 February 2024  <b>Accepted</b> 12 March 2024  <b>Published</b> online 05 April 2024</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b>            Islamic Realism,            Subjectivity,            Rationality, Divine            Agency, Human            Agency,            Epistemology</p>	<p>The present study seeks to formulate a renewed conception of rationality within the framework of Islamic realist thought—one that, while remaining faithful to the doctrine of divine unity in action (<i>Tawhid-e Af'ali</i>, the unique and all-encompassing agency of God in the world), also accommodates meaningful discourse on human agency. Articulating epistemological agency within a world fully governed by divine will presents numerous theoretical challenges and social risks. On one hand, rebellion and determinism, and on the other, passivity, polytheism, and atheism, can all foster irresponsibility, purposelessness, and existential meaninglessness, thereby contributing to various social disorders and environmental crises. Although subjectivism and objectivism have evolved in parallel with scientific realism, they continue to undermine the coherence of science, technology, and other human endeavors. This article offers both a critique of these contemporary challenges and theoretical perspectives, and an explanation of rationality as understood in Islamic realism—especially through reflection on Qur'anic verses. It further proposes key principles and content essential for the advancement of Islamic rationality.</p>
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## Introduction

Our beliefs about reality and the possibility of accessing it fundamentally shape our worldview, framing our learning, actions, relationships, serious pursuits, leisure activities, and overall identity. In universities and schools, students' educational and career motivations are influenced by the perspectives of scholars who advocate for science and its outcomes. The economic justification for the high costs of research hinges on scientists' ability to articulate the significance of science and its achievements. The rationale scholars present to motivate students, persuade policymakers and private sector leaders, and shape sustainable development strategies is deeply tied to the technological accomplishments of science. The popularization and rapid access to welfare, health, pleasure, economic and security superiority, and solutions to social and environmental challenges are among the primary motives driving nations to expand scientific efforts.

Yet, in contrast to the widespread promotion of science and technology under the norms of development ideology, there exists a sobering and widely acknowledged concern regarding humanity's moral decline in the age of progress. According to the dominant development discourse, societies are classified as developed, developing, or underdeveloped. Despite this classification, modern society is plagued by mental illness, fear, anxiety, loneliness, and suicide, alongside widespread poverty, corruption, addiction, familial breakdown, educational deterioration, the devaluation of teaching professions, cultural alienation, and escalating violence—ranging from domestic and workplace conflicts to organized crime and international warfare. Together, these phenomena paint a disturbing portrait of the modern era, often regarded as a pinnacle of scientific and technological advancement.

It seems that the root of this deep human vulnerability in the face of life-threatening crises lies in a growing skepticism toward the very notion of reality. The challenge of accessing reality—as the foundational cause of many contemporary crises—remains a central concern in philosophy and continues to fuel ongoing debate. The issue of reality has historically divided philosophers, particularly realists and idealists. While early philosophers largely leaned toward realism (with exceptions such as Plato and Parmenides), idealism gained dominance following the emergence of Kant and Hegel, extending its influence beyond philosophy into the broader realm of the human sciences.

What ultimately paved the way for the dominance of idealism was not merely philosophical debate—for the general public has little interest in professional philosophical discourse, and philosophers themselves seldom guide the masses—but rather the experiential pleasures of subjectivity brought about by scientific and technological advancement. Mastery over nature and the objectification of all phenomena became a source of collective pride in modern society. This view of progress is continually propagated through scientific products, educational institutions, and modern media, with the enthusiastic participation of scientists and specialists.

The pleasures of subjectivity have so seduced modern individuals that they now strive to transcend nature itself, reducing humanity, compassion, justice, and even transcendent truths to objects of study and transformation. Public enthusiasm for scientific achievement has fostered the spread of subjectivity within philosophy itself, replacing a standard based on conformity to reality with one based on desire or utility. Consequently, philosophers have shifted the ultimate aim from human salvation and flourishing to material development and progress, giving rise to the ideology of development.

Today, while scientists, grounded in the ideology of development, remain preoccupied with planning and organizing scientific and technological activities, religious communities continue to frame all human activity within the guidance and cultivation of the soul. For them, the persistence of ignorance, enslavement, corruption, deviation, and oppression underscores the urgent need for a fundamental transformation of any condition that contradicts human dignity and the divine purposes of creation.

Moreover, the dangers of unchecked subjectivity have become especially evident within the human sciences. These threats are associated both with subjective methodologies—such as phenomenology and hermeneutics—and with conflict-centered theories rooted in the Hegelian tradition and the rise of existentialism. The prevalence of conflict in this tradition has not only eroded realism and justified relativism but has also introduced significant theoretical and practical challenges to human coexistence and the foundations of social life. It has seeded fragmentation, violence, and division among social groups.

Epistemological relativism, by intensifying doubt and skepticism, has exacerbated the uncertainties surrounding management and policymaking. At the same time, moral relativism has generated cultural confusion and instability. In the absence of certainty, conditions become ripe for new forms of domination. As the human sciences drift further from engagement with reality and its knowability, they increasingly lose their capacity to address societal problems or alleviate cultural disorder. The resulting crisis of uncertainty has severely compromised the human sciences' ability to fulfill their most basic purpose: to predict social trends and shape the future of communities.

While many theories in the human sciences have historically contributed to societal transformation, some—such as the social contract, psychoanalysis, certain existentialist interpretations, and various postmodern approaches—have gradually lost their explanatory and practical relevance. These theories, lacking both predictive power and practical utility, no longer meet the criteria of robust scientific inquiry.

Although the rise of qualitative methodologies has mitigated some of the limitations of quantitative methods and facilitated a more nuanced understanding of social phenomena, their inability to produce generalizable findings remains a major limitation. The transferability of

results across time periods, individuals, societies, and circumstances has declined, thereby undermining the explanatory power and foresight capabilities of these disciplines. As a result, researchers, confined to descriptive and analytical roles, have largely forfeited the ability to propose actionable solutions or optimal paths for societal improvement.

Today, the essential task of guiding society toward the most virtuous form of human flourishing suffers from a profound theoretical vacuum and a state of stagnation. Science and technology policies, like other areas of governance, are increasingly managed by bureaucrats and technocrats, devoid of a guiding philosophical or moral framework.

The separation of the human sciences from the realist foundations that underpin the natural sciences has diminished their credibility and influence. Denying the foundational assumption of a mind-independent reality has placed the very identity and survival of the human sciences in jeopardy. Reaffirming realism could offer a path forward: distinguishing the human sciences from pseudo-scientific trends and restoring their explanatory power and normative value. Through the revival of realism, the essential dignity and moral purpose of science could be reestablished, positioning universities not as followers of industry or fleeting social trends, but as leaders and guides for society.

### **Research Method**

In this study, an attempt is made — through contemplation on the verses of the Holy Qur'an and inspired by the methodological tradition of Muslim sages — to formulate a more precise conceptualization of realism. This refined formulation, taking into account the hierarchical order and the longitudinal and latitudinal gradations of beings, aims to present a more accurate picture of the hierarchy of existence. Islamic realism, on one hand, stands in opposition to idealism, and on the other, challenges crude realism.<sup>1</sup> Crude or naïve realism, by reducing all human characteristics to observable phenomena, is not only incompatible with the unmediated intuitions of ordinary people but also at odds with the idealistic methods of philosophical reasoning. While realist philosophers emphasize measurability and observability, they paradoxically abandon this very principle in their own speculative and non-empirical methodologies. This internal inconsistency in realist approaches — wherein they uphold observability while practicing otherwise — has led to contradictions within the human sciences and has, in turn, steered the natural sciences toward materialism.

Cultural factors, particularly the influential status of science and technology and the spirit of narcissism pervading the modern age, have contributed to the rapid expansion of various materialistic frameworks and even certain idealistic and relativistic schools of thought. The fact that the Qur'an repeatedly invites humanity to observe and learn from nature reveals that Islamic

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<sup>1</sup> Allāmah Sayyid Moḥammad Ḥossein Tabataba'i, *The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*. With commentary by Morteza Motahhari (Qam: Islamic Propagation Organization, 1996).

realism is indeed compatible with empirical methodology and the principle of observability. The verse “Then look again: can you see any flaws? Then look again and yet again; your sight will return to you humbled and weary”<sup>1</sup> explicitly entrusts critical judgments in important debates to unmediated intuition and common human experience. Regarding matters such as the uniformity or disparity of the heavens, divine governance of the cosmos, and the unity or plurality of the divine, the Qur'an calls upon ordinary people to observe and investigate.

## Research Background

The classification of philosophical doctrines into frameworks such as realism, idealism, liberalism, socialism, humanism, or feminism is a distinctly modern phenomenon. In earlier intellectual traditions, knowledge was often categorized based on belief in God, belief in human freedom and agency, or the acceptance of unity or plurality, among other metaphysical principles. Furthermore, the classification of academic disciplines has traditionally been organized around subject matter, with faculties and departments formed accordingly. Classifying philosophers based on their attitudes toward reality or rationality has largely emerged in the modern period, even though some scholars retroactively attribute such categorizations to earlier eras. These typologies are likely influenced by dominant philosophical trends and by prevailing tendencies within certain sciences or technologies. In this sense, the classification of philosophy itself might be considered a non-philosophical activity, contingent upon the institution of knowledge and its internal and external relations. As such, framing realism in opposition to idealism — and extending these categories to ancient Greek philosophers, medieval thinkers, or Islamic scholars — likely reflects assumptions shaped by modern intellectual currents. Notably, the subject-object dichotomy and its tension have, to some extent, permeated most of these categorizations.

According to the accounts of historians of philosophy, the main types of realism are: Direct Realism, Representational Realism, and Critical Realism.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, idealism appears in various forms. The term *Islamic Realism* was specifically employed by Allameh Tabataba'i to demarcate Islamic philosophy from idealism<sup>3</sup>

## Direct Realism

The central epistemological challenges of Western philosophy can, to a considerable extent, be reduced to the tension between realism and idealism. Most influential philosophical theories have revolved around epistemological concerns—defending either realism (the belief that reality exists independently of the mind) or idealism (the view that reality is fundamentally

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Qur'an, Surah al-Mulk, 67:3–4.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Hollingdale, *Realism and Its Variants in Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> Allāmah Sayyid Moḥammad Ḥossein Tabataba'i, *The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*.

mental or mind-dependent). While preference for the former may seem intuitively evident—given that virtually everyone, including researchers and specialists across disciplines, presupposes it as the basis for intellectual and practical activities—Western philosophy began with the idealism of Parmenides and Plato. This idealism first encountered serious opposition in the crude or naïve realism of Heraclitus and, more formally, in the realism of Aristotle.

Under the influence of Augustine’s faith-based hermeneutics and his student Plotinus’s mystical perspective, Platonic idealism gained significant prominence. In contrast, Aristotle’s realism, grounded in logic and causal explanation, was adopted only indirectly and belatedly, failing to achieve widespread acceptance among medieval scholastics whose primary focus was biblical exegesis. Instead, it sparked ongoing epistemological debates. Nevertheless, Western philosophy regards Aristotle’s position as the earliest formal articulation of realism—what later came to be known as Direct Realism. According to this view, objective reality exists wholly independently of the mind.

### **Representational Realism**

Roughly twenty-two centuries after Aristotle, John Locke introduced a new version of realism known as Representational Realism, or representative realism. According to this theory, perception consists of the reflection of external sensory data within the human mind. Locke held that sensory data represent copies of the primary qualities of physical objects<sup>1</sup>.

Compared to direct realism, the crucial distinction here lies in the claim that perception, due to its representational nature, is indirect. That is, while physical objects exist independently of our perception, their appearances can differ substantially from their actual nature. This opens the door to anti-realist interpretations of the theory. Moreover, representational realism carries phenomenological and anti-essentialist implications, as it asserts that the sensory data represented in the mind capture only the appearances and external attributes of objects, not their essence.<sup>2</sup> Historically, this account of realism has been profoundly significant, laying the groundwork for phenomenology and eventually Kant’s transcendental idealism.

### **Critical Realism**

Critical Realism is another formulation of realism, predominantly associated with the philosophy of science. It maintains that while the external world exists independently of the mind and human knowledge, valid knowledge about this world is obtained through critical reflection upon empirical experiences, allowing for the differentiation of credible experiences from invalid ones.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Audi, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 43

<sup>2</sup> M. Olalere and O. Adedokun, “The Epistemology of Perception in John Locke’s Representational Realism,” *European Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2021): 65.

Unlike Kantian realism, which emphasizes the inaccessibility of things-in-themselves, critical realism holds that reality can indeed be known as it is. Its most prominent advocate, Roy Bhaskar, proposed a layered model of reality, distinguishing between observable events, underlying structures, and generative mechanisms. Each layer operates with its own causal mechanisms that cannot be simply reduced to those of other layers. Events at different levels possess novel qualities, yet these levels remain hierarchically structured, with lower levels providing the conditions for the emergence of higher ones — without deterministically controlling them.

For Bhaskar, the mind is not a blank slate in knowledge production. Rather, science involves a cognitive movement from phenomena to underlying structures. Theoretical entities and primary scientific patterns are not external facts but products of scientific experience. He emphasized the agency of the mind in forming conceptions of reality while distinguishing these from the external phenomena themselves. Although Bhaskar was an ontological realist, affirming the independent existence of reality and natural events, he argued that true knowledge of the world comes only through identifying its operative structures. Simultaneously, he accepted hermeneutical theory, maintaining that knowledge is socially constructed through ongoing communication, interpretation, and shared beliefs over time.<sup>1</sup>

### **Idealism**

Idealism constitutes the more dominant side of the philosophical dispute in the West. Parmenides was perhaps the most influential pre-Socratic philosopher, and his influence on Plato's formulation of idealism was decisive. Parmenides believed that motion was impossible, and that the world was governed solely by stasis and immutability<sup>2</sup>. He explicitly considered the perception of motion to be an illusion and a mistake. In contrast, Heraclitus insisted that nothing existed in the world but change.

Plato synthesized this dual and opposing legacy into his idealistic theory of Forms. According to this theory, nature is the realm of constant flux, while the world of Forms is the realm of absolute stability and immutability. However, the primacy belongs to the world of Forms, and the material world exists on a much lower ontological level. The first critic of this formulation of idealism was Plato's own student, Aristotle, who viewed it as the source of significant epistemological difficulties.

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<sup>1</sup> Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (London: Verso, 2008)

<sup>2</sup> Gaile Fine, *Plato on Knowledge and Forms: Selected Essays*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

Throughout the history of philosophy, Plato has had both passionate supporters and severe critics. Interestingly, his followers gradually reduced the idealistic elements of his theory. Descartes, for example, recast it as a theory of innate ideas, which was far less idealistic.<sup>1</sup>

Yet, idealism in Western philosophy gained strength from unexpected quarters, namely from within the realist endeavors of René Descartes and the empiricist followers of Locke, such as Bishop George Berkeley. Berkeley formulated one of the most radical idealistic theories in Western philosophy, known as absolute idealism.

According to Berkeley, since the source of atheism is the belief in matter, one can eradicate atheism by proving that matter does not exist. Building on Locke's representative realism, he claimed that "to be is to be perceived." Hence, the material world is nothing but a collection of perceptions created by God within our minds.

Although this formulation of idealism never gained much traction, its effects can be traced in later philosophers, particularly Kant and Hegel. Immanuel Kant, undoubtedly one of the most influential figures in Western philosophy, proposed a sophisticated and nuanced formulation of idealism known as transcendental idealism. Kant maintained that direct access to the noumenal world was impossible since our understanding is constrained by a priori conditions and twelve categories, an ontological limitation with no escape<sup>2</sup>.

According to Kant, the distinction between the phenomenal world (the world as it appears to us) and the noumenal world (the world as it is in itself) is impassable. Human knowledge is existentially limited to the phenomenal realm.

Hegel completed Kant's unfinished project, inspired partly by Berkeley, and developed a stronger version of absolute idealism. Hegel argued that the unknowability of the noumenal world was practically equivalent to its non-existence. This form of absolute idealism, however, did not mark the end of the road.

In the Continental tradition, Hegelian idealism was eventually connected to relativism through the emergence of philosophical hermeneutics and postmodernism. Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics represents a radical relativist formulation of absolute idealism, asserting that the mind and understanding are entirely captive to their own presuppositions, prejudices, and historical situatedness.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, there exist multiple understandings, none of which bear any real relation to reality itself. In contemporary thought, approaches such as phenomenology attempt to navigate a third path beyond this dichotomy.

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<sup>1</sup> John Cottingham, *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Henry E. Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism: An Interpretation and Defense*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004)

<sup>3</sup> Dan Zahavi, *Husserl's Phenomenology*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

## Islamic Realism

The term “Islamic realism” was first used by Allameh Tabataba’i to demonstrate the relationship between foundational beliefs in Islamic philosophy and the dominant tendencies in modern philosophy. In fact, this naming is considered a kind of identity-building strategy for indigenous knowledge. Nevertheless, although some local scholars have welcomed the term “Islamic realism,” those who analyze Islamic thought in the style of Orientalists have introduced the main elements of Muslim philosophers’ thought based on the duality of realism and idealism. For example, contrary to Allameh Tabataba’i’s explicit statements about Islamic realism, some believe that Islamic philosophy possesses idealistic capacities. For instance, Avicenna’s idea of the “floating man,” which was proposed in defense of realism, is said to resemble Descartes’ idea of doubt and can be seen as having potential for idealism.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Neoplatonic and mystical dimensions in Islamic philosophy are sometimes regarded as grounds for idealism. Some have argued that Ghazali’s critiques in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* and his discussion about the inability of reason to discover reality entail strong idealistic implications.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, Leaman argues that the theory of the unity of existence, most coherently articulated by Ibn Arabi, is more of an idealistic than a realistic theory.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Suhrawardi’s light-based ontology, which never denied the existence of the material world but emphasized the precedence of immaterial light and spiritual reality over material reality, is said to have strong idealistic implications and to have injected them into Islamic philosophy. Thus, it remains unclear whether Suhrawardi is a realist or an idealist.<sup>4</sup> In any case, with the emergence of Mulla Sadra, Islamic philosophy took an entirely new path, and the two fundamental ideas of Transcendent Philosophy—motion and gradation—provided a new capacity for a different defense of realism.<sup>5</sup> Since Muslim philosophers have engaged critically with Western philosophies as well as with modern sciences, addressing the major issues in the realism versus idealism debate is considered a central topic in Islamic philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

Philosophy is both a product of thought and a guide for it, thus holding a more significant role than other sciences. Although philosophy is a branch of the humanities interacting with other disciplines, its content comprises foundational beliefs that underpin the cognitive bases of sciences and cultures. This study aims to identify some general works and challenges related to

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<sup>1</sup> Lenn E. Goodman, *Islamic Humanism: Philosophical Perspectives in the Islamic Tradition*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali’s Philosophical Theology*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Oliver Leaman, *A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

<sup>4</sup> Hossein Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination: A Study of Suhrawardi’s Hikmat al-Ishraq*. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

<sup>5</sup> Sajjad H. Rizvi, *Mulla Sadra and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being*. (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Nidhal Guessoum, *Islamic Science and the Contemporary World: Relevant or Irrelevant?* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

various forms of realism. The emergence and development of idealism partly stem from expanding epistemological debates on realism and the challenges arising not only from naive realist claims but also from realist critiques themselves. The twin challenges that appeared following the decline of realism are relativism/absolutism and the subjective/objective dichotomy, which oppose the universality and stability of knowledge and values and have further evolved into the religious/anti-religious debate. The challenge of relativism itself is rooted in the problem of unverifiability, which concerns aspects of human life that are not observable or measurable—such as emotions and social feelings that form the basis of social relations and communities. Collectively, these challenges point toward a final idea of consensus or agreement as a solution. However, reflection on the history and institutional relations of science shows that consensus is itself problematic, as it depends on power relations and varies according to the power and capacity of these centers.<sup>1</sup>In fact, consensus depends on the ability to dominate the prevailing culture. Moreover, consensus can only justify the prescriptive dimension of knowledge, which intervenes in policymaking and planning, while the explanatory role of science may remain awaiting justification.

### **The Challenge of Objectivism**

Realism, defined as the worldview encompassing all beings and reason as the faculty capable of accessing the world's reality as it is, promotes truth-seeking through empirical and observable frameworks, pursuing an "objectivity imperative." However, it soon became evident that naive or primary realism faces fundamental challenges and cannot easily develop objectivism. Advances in transportation technology have facilitated migration and cultural mixing, leading to ethnocentric competition to consolidate cultural values. Cultural interactions in migrant societies foster a rationality that emphasizes adherence to "our method" in research, imposing empirical objectivity as a demand to follow "our method" within the scientific community. This "consensus imperative" and solidarity with "our community" are prerequisites for participation in scientific groups. For example, researchers working on Middle Eastern studies, human rights violations in Islamic countries, or case studies of the Iranian revolution face support, while research on the Holocaust, 9/11, or U.S. chemical and mass weapons is often restricted.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, the democratic claim in the U.S. political structure requires public approval and legitimization of power institutions in public opinion. This leads to extensive institutional investment by scientific foundations to direct values and justify government and capitalist policies.<sup>3</sup> Research funding becomes conditional on outputs that justify specific ideologies; for instance, studies on women's rights violations in Islamic countries receive substantial support.

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *Knowledge and Power*, trans. Niku Sarkhosh and Afshin Jahandideh, new edition with an introduction by Zeymoran (Tehran: Hermes Publishing, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Alireza Hadadi, *The Political Economy of Science in Contemporary America* (Tehran: Mehr Publishing, 2021).

This shows that although science management is opposed rhetorically, scientific flows in the U.S. are effectively managed—for example, the National Endowment for the Humanities funded a \$12,000 project on Iranian immigrants in California.<sup>1</sup> Another example is the publication of scientific journals, typically supervised by multinational corporations.<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, realism faces the challenge of citation and referencing. Citation, defined as membership in a real or imagined elite community comprising numerous legendary figures,<sup>3</sup> replaces empirical objectivity with consensus-seeking. Thus, emphasis must be placed on textual and referential methods. Observability is a highly restrictive condition; therefore, returning to authoritative historical texts, especially sacred scriptures, and paying close attention to archaeological evidence can justify cultural dynamics among competing groups.

The development of research methods focusing on the credibility of documents and providing justifications for reliable citations is increasingly emphasized. Consequently, unlike empirical methods that justify truth through observation, there is a clear expansion of textual and referential approaches, especially through the advancement of hermeneutics. The ongoing tension between two prevalent conceptions of truth—truth as a true belief (corresponding to reality) and truth as a justified belief (accepted by a community of rational agents)—fails to progress when each prioritizes either utility or observability exclusively.

### **The Challenge of Unverifiability**

Unverifiability highlights that the meanings and references of expressions, symbols, and concepts used in one society, era, or culture differ from those belonging to “us.” It has become a self-undermining tool for all formal philosophical ideas, confronting us with institutionalized norms.<sup>4</sup> As a result, sufficiently developed societies tend to replace philosophy with practical reason and substitute vague, obscure negotiations with codified laws.<sup>5</sup>

We all engage with the logical positivists’ idea of “language rules” and accept a conception of rationality shaped by local cultural norms. This constitutes a form of epistemic or philosophical racism imposed by developed societies on others and serves as a foundation for cultural exploitation. Hilary Putnam, in *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy*, argues that just as positivism is a scientific theory inspired by the exact sciences, the idea of language rules is a scientific theory derived from anthropology. He critiques scientism as a form of rationality

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<sup>1</sup> Office of Communications, “NEH Grants for Humanities Projects,” National Endowment for the Humanities, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Alireza Hadadi, “Types of Transformation in Human Knowledge: From Theory to Practice,” *Journal of Social Theories of Muslim Thinkers* 11, no. 3 (2021): 139–176.

<sup>3</sup> Rorty Richard, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

grounded in the application of criteria originating in a specific culture.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Richard Rorty asserts that pragmatists must acknowledge the ethnocentric dilemma and recognize that any perceived superiority of their group is not innate but rather a result of their current way of life.<sup>2</sup>

### Implications

This epistemic relativism challenges the universal applicability of empirical verification and demands recognition of diverse hermeneutical traditions. It also exposes how dominant epistemologies marginalize alternative ways of knowing, often along cultural or racial lines, a phenomenon known as epistemic racism. Such dynamics restrict whose knowledge is considered legitimate and whose voices are heard in academic and professional contexts.

This summary integrates your points with contemporary philosophical debates on truth, epistemology, and the sociocultural dimensions of knowledge validation, drawing on sources like Putnam, Kuhn, and Rorty, as well as recent discussions of epistemic racism. If you want, I can help you expand this into a full paper or provide more detailed citations. Would you like that?

### The Challenge of Consensualism

In cultural encounters, two types of engagements are typically observed, which Bernard Williams refers to as “real encounter” and “conceptual encounter.” Real encounters—those that occur between cultural groups—are asymmetrical, as they lack a genuine element of choice and often involve a degree of self-deception.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the beliefs and values of dominant cultures are perceived as superior or more advanced. Those who do not share these values find no common ground for consensus. Although propaganda and promotional policies may attempt to bridge these gaps, from the standpoint of rationalist philosophers, such efforts are a poor substitute for genuine philosophy and theoretical reasoning, as they impose values rather than discover them.<sup>4</sup>

The celebratory interpretations of liberal culture often emerge from within their own lexicons and frameworks, making it problematic for them to critique authoritarian or religious cultures effectively.<sup>5</sup> Thus, beyond the problem of unverifiability, even consensus—which Rorty proposes as a replacement for correspondence—is often unattainable.<sup>6</sup> Some argue that the real value of humanity’s collective inquiry lies not in epistemology or metaphysics, but in ethics.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1*

<sup>3</sup> Bernard Williams, *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973–1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

<sup>5</sup> Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays*.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

Kant, for instance, excluded theology from the domain of pure reason and instead brought religion closer to ethics in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, assigning moral responsibility to it. Following this trajectory, contemporary philosophers also challenge objectivism and its failure to reflect an objective reality, seeking instead to align science more closely with ethical concerns. In this view, the alignment of scientific findings with external reality becomes an ethical responsibility shared by the community through consensus.

### **The Challenge of Relativism**

Relativism, understood as the flexibility or contextuality of truth, is presented by Rorty in two forms: the “desire for objectivity” pursued by realists and the “desire for consensus” pursued by pragmatists.<sup>1</sup> He outlines three pragmatic accounts of truth: (1) truth as goodness, in which the truth of a belief depends on its coherence with other beliefs—a self-defeating view; (2) a decentered account, where the meanings of truth are as numerous as the methods of rational justification; and (3) an egocentric account, where truth is bound to the rationality defined by “our method” within a given culture. Rorty criticizes this third approach as ethnocentric and sees it as aligned with the desire for consensus, in contrast with the realist pursuit of objectivity.<sup>2</sup> the desire for consensus may also manifest through claims of authority and scientific legitimacy, revealing the intricate relations between knowledge and power as Foucault argues in the history of science.<sup>3</sup>

The inclination of religious thinkers to influence the construction of meaning has existed since antiquity and was intensified by the rise of modernity, which sharpened tensions between religion and science.<sup>4</sup> the influence of both religious and secular orientations can be observed in all aspects of scientific development—from its assumptions and methods to its applications. As a result, two divergent systems emerge: one aligned with religious values and another with secular or anti-religious values<sup>5</sup>.

Some Iranian scholars point out that ethnomethodology, Husserlian phenomenology, symbolic interactionism from American pragmatism, Weber’s qualitative methodology influenced by Dilthey, the Frankfurt School’s critical theory, and Marx’s dialectical materialism all reflect this secular tendency.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, religion has also shaped scientific practice—affecting everything from foundational assumptions and methods to hypothesis generation,

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*, 21–34.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 23–29.

<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> Ali Shariati, *Religion vs. Religion* (Tehran: Shariati Foundation, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Mohammad Mohahed Abtahi, *Science and Religion in Contemporary Thought* (Qom: Bustan-e Ketab, 2016), 217.

<sup>6</sup> Hamid Parsania, *Philosophy of Social Sciences in the Islamic Tradition* (Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 2016).

judgment, and even the quality and scope of data collection. These influences range from<sup>1</sup> epistemological and ontological to anthropological in nature.<sup>2</sup>

The cultural, civilizational, and historical significance of science arises from this mutual shaping between religious and secular paradigms. Increasing institutional complexity in both science and religion has led to science's role in promoting secularism while also contributing to the diversification of religiosity. Similarly, both religious and secular currents have influenced the direction and evolution of science, each introducing new modes of interaction. At the core of these competing cultural currents is the effort to validate the truth and moral legitimacy of their values—essentially, their correspondence to reality—bringing the enduring challenge of objectivism to the fore.

### **The Challenge of Mass Conformity**

There is a legitimate concern regarding the influence of political economy on theoretical frameworks and theological underpinnings. The history of science illustrates that, akin to other social institutions, science is subject to prevailing customs and intellectual trends. It is imperative to examine the extent and impact of traditionalism, particularly the phenomenon of "traditionalism fatigue," alongside the influence of modernism or "fashionism," each presenting challenges to the preservation of rationality. Scientific consensus and social agreements often grapple with value conflicts framed within the dichotomy of modern versus traditional paradigms. Consequently, the contemporary challenge of consensus manifests in numerous dualities of "modern or traditional."

A prevalent and disruptive phenomenon impeding innovation within educational and research institutions, such as universities and governmental research centers, is "path dependence," which serves as a significant barrier to reform and the optimization of research productivity.<sup>3</sup> The dominance of historicism and conservatism, coupled with the profound influence of senior figures in governmental research centers, educational institutions, and universities, are outcomes of bureaucratic structures within science.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, "fashionism" denotes the populace's tendency to embrace and emulate new trends, occasionally adopting them superficially. While innovation—defined as the inclination toward change and novelty in social and scientific life—can propel progress, it also risks disregarding authentic values and historical experiences, potentially leading to identity crises and cultural disconnection.

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<sup>1</sup> Ahmad Piroozmand, *Religion and Science: An Epistemological Approach* (Qom: Ma'refat Publications, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Morteza Motahhari, *Understanding Religion*, 10th ed. (Qom: Sadra, 2011), 16–17; Mohammad-Taqi Mesbah Yazdi, *Anthropology from the Islamic Perspective* (Qom: Imam Khomeini Institute, 2012), 15–17; Mehdi Mahroozadeh, *Religion and Science: A Comparative Inquiry* (Tehran: SAMT, 2007); Ali Reza Hadadi, *The Political Economy of Science in Contemporary America* (Tehran: Mehr Publishing, 2021).

<sup>3</sup> Hadi Yousefi, *The Institutional Structure Model of Iran's Higher Education System* (PhD diss., Shahid Beheshti University, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Max Weber, *Politician and Scholar*, trans. Mohammad Mohammadi (Tehran: [Publisher], 2021).

## **The Pleasures of Subjectivity**

Subjectivism, characterized by reliance on self-founded human reason, offers a sense of gratification by linking the interpretation of reality to subjective experiences. The pleasure derived from mastering and appropriating the "other" to ascribe meaning inherently strengthens the drive toward rebellion. Francis Bacon's perspective that modern science aims not merely to uncover reality but to justify dominion over nature resonates with those captivated by successive inventions and discoveries. The emergence of self-founded rationality, through the critique of prior knowledge and traditional reasoning methods, unfolded amidst political and economic disputes between the Church and its adversaries, yielding profound and unforeseen consequences. These critiques, directly challenging religious doctrines and ecclesiastical methodologies, instigated widespread social and cultural transformations collectively referred to as secularism.

The critique of traditionalism and deference to predecessors led to a diminished credibility of their knowledge. In contrast, the emphasis on empiricism and sensory methodologies gradually validated scientific knowledge, fostering extraordinary trust in science and empirical rationality. The assertion that reason and free will are exclusive to human nature, though not substantiated by scientific methods, was propagated ideologically. Secularism, entailing the desacralization of religious teachings and methods, is intrinsically linked to scientism, or the trust in scientific content and methodologies. Subsequent contradictions emerged within belief systems that, on one hand, regard humans as rational beings endowed with free will, yet, on the other, fail to provide a precise and distinct delineation of rationality's domain. This paradoxical trust in reason is problematic, as the acceptance of contradictory findings and beliefs by all either constitutes deception or leads to ideological disarray.

The notion that rationality is exclusive to humans gained traction with support from economic-political currents opposing the powerful European Church between the 14th and 18th centuries. The modern concept of exclusive rationality and freedom engaged prominent European philosophers such as Locke, Descartes, Kant, Spinoza, and Hegel, who expressed concerns about the proliferation of absolute liberal culture and sought mechanisms to preserve faith and moral constraints. Despite the recognized importance and necessity of ethics and belief in God, modern Western society could not prevent the "sovereign subject" from prevailing, resulting in numerous consequences. While subjectivity facilitated the establishment of idealism and curtailed the pervasive influence of realism, realism necessitates acknowledging that subjectivity is inherent in human nature. To stabilize their natural and particular existence, humans must employ reason to comprehend themselves and their environment. Understanding and transforming nature through reason engenders trust in it. The expansion of cognitive capacities and degrees of freedom, facilitated by modern research industries, led to the

emergence of subjectivism, which manifests the freedom of reason across various domains, including art, science, religion, industry, governance, and all facets of human life.

According to Quranic verses, human life is intertwined with various attractions that ensure movement in this world and the organization of eternal life. As previously noted, four virtues—wealth, knowledge, beauty, and ability—are central to human attention and shape aspirations<sup>1</sup>. These perfections possess both worldly and eternal dimensions, with the worldly forms typically being more accessible and actionable. Identity formation hinges on efforts to augment one's share of these virtues, which play pivotal roles in determining final identity and eternal life. Through the exercise of will and cognitive development, subjectivity gradually materializes. The allure associated with wealth, knowledge, beauty, and ability elucidates the pleasures of subjectivity. Consequently, the pleasures of subjectivity emerge across at least four domains. Social institutions such as science and technology, family, religion, government, and the market exemplify human rationality and currently showcase various aspects of subjectivity.

Thus, the pleasures of subjectivity manifest in domains that, on one hand, pertain to most social institutions and, on the other, reveal human rational nature. The four rational virtues are connected to the realms of meaning, emotion, exchange, and transformation. Accordingly, the capacity for meaning-making is accompanied by a strong desire to discover and express meaning. Moreover, the perception of meaning's attractiveness is linked to persistent efforts to influence others' mindsets and potentially captivate audiences. Meaning serves as the foundation for numerous activities, materializing in artistic, religious, scientific, and technological forms, particularly within educational endeavors of families and schools. Indeed, policymaking, elections, legislation, and other governmental functions often revolve around the discovery, expression, and construction of meaning. However, a significant threat to the human condition is false self-confidence and the proliferation of egocentrism.

The initial and perhaps most enduring domain of subjectivity's emergence is the realm of meaning. Human self-awareness encompasses needs and talents essential for life. These diverse needs and talents provide individuals with the capacity for objectification. Human existence, especially knowledge and understanding, relies on the perception of meaning. Among the constraints of human perception is egocentrism, which influences understanding. Individuals frequently interpret others based on their own perceptual conditions, categorizing others by physical proximity, size, or elevation, and assigning values such as good and bad, beautiful and ugly, according to personal understanding and needs. Awareness of these perceptual constraints prompts comprehensive evaluation and scrutiny of others. However, due to inattention to these constraints, individuals often overlook essential aspects and significant dimensions of external realities. Subsequently, they may become enamored with these oversights and objectifications,

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<sup>1</sup> Jamileh Alamolhoda, *Nazariyye-ye Elmi va Maʿhume 'Elliyat dar Falsafe-ye Islami* [Scientific Theory and the Concept of Causality in Islamic Philosophy] (Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 2003).

even perceiving them as beneficial. Whenever opportunities arise, humans endeavor to objectify others and dominate them to advance personal objectives. For this reason, Allameh Tabataba'i introduced the concept of "employment" as the foundational social concept in the strictest sense.<sup>1</sup> He also identified the division of labor as the basis of society, grounded in this fundamental concept of employment.<sup>2</sup>

Since humans are not self-sufficient, to meet their needs, besides their own talents, they rely on the capacities present in other objects and persons and desire to dominate them. While striving to discover the meanings of others, humans also seek to influence them. Influence and being influenced, on the one hand, strengthen the will to dominate and make social interaction pleasurable, and on the other hand, expand the possibilities of exchange. The exchange of needs and talents develops in various forms such as exchange of goods and money, power exchange, exchange of knowledge and science, exchange of pleasure and affection, and so forth. The pleasures of subjectivity appear in all these types of exchange and perhaps direct free will and its manifestations. Moreover, subjectivity imparts meaning to market competencies and virtues and develops perfections such as honesty, perseverance, diligence, etc. It also guides rewards given for professional and general competencies under market exchange, such as trust, reputation, price, and profitability, playing an important role in directing human life and identity.

Another domain for the emergence of subjectivity is the realm of change, which has particularly developed in various technologies in a highly pleasurable manner. The pleasures of subjectivity have long been evident in various crafts and industries, and except for artifacts with artistic aspects or aimed at public welfare, industry has always involved objectification of others and is inherently pleasurable. Today, besides raw materials and high-energy natural resources, humans themselves are objects of purposeful change in soft technologies and social engineering. Policy and planning processes have played a fundamental role in changing human nature from subject to object. Even educational and training planning and policymaking involve a form of objectification. The series of processes transforming objects or anything considered an object is directly and closely related to the natural human desire for domination and conquest.

The fourth domain of subjectivity, which arguably has the deepest effects, is the realm of emotion. The formation of attachment, devotion, and commitment to the other represents the most diabolical configuration of subjectivity, as the profound transformations it induces can entirely determine the fate of those who have become objects. The emotional domain is the primary arena for the assaults of the devil and his agents, yet simultaneously it is the most fascinating arena and the most genuine opportunity that God has provided for the emergence of faith and religious striving among humans. From the Quranic verse "There is no compulsion in

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<sup>1</sup> Allāmah Sayyid Moḥammad Ḥossein Tabataba'i, *The Principles of Philosophy and the Method of Realism*.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

religion”<sup>1</sup>, it can be understood that religion is not contingent upon coercion arising from subjectivity, but rather is attained by relinquishing all configurations and pleasures of subjectivity. Indeed, our commitments to monotheism and worship of God, alongside the susceptibility to Satan’s deception, indicate that the depth and pervasiveness of the pleasures of subjectivity in the emotional realm surpass those in the realms of meaning, exchange, and change.

Undoubtedly, the overall shift in studies toward empirical methods and focus on sensory perception is linked to the development of research technologies, including the production of lenses and precise measuring instruments. These research tools have enabled the observation of extremely small and distant objects, expanding the scope of nature infinitely. Beyond scientific discoveries, research technologies and observational capabilities aid in much more precise prediction of natural events and ultimately their control. Some of these successes, such as predicting lunar and solar eclipses and even the birth of Moses (peace be upon him), were achievements of earlier scholars. Despite advances in research technologies and modern sciences, predicting specific events-such as the birth of a revolutionary figure, the emergence of a widespread social revolution, or the overthrow of a major political regime, as Egyptian scholars reportedly predicted regarding Moses’ uprising-has not yet been realized.

Nevertheless, what has contributed more than scientific achievements to the expansion of subjectivism are the technological accomplishments of science, which have enhanced human welfare and comfort and strengthened life’s attractions. The appeal of industrial successes, such as new household appliances and communications, is far greater to people than scientific news. The attractions of life and pleasures derived from applying rationality in technology and exploiting nature have escaped the monopoly of white landowning feudal lords, international oil and gas industry managers, and major factory owners. Trumpism, besides among whites, has spread among youth of other races. Today, even children take pride in human technological achievements and enjoy consuming Earth’s energy and polluting and damaging the environment. Environmentalists’ recommendations tend to focus somewhat on Earth’s interests for humanity’s future generations and less on respecting Earth as a goddess or angel, as was common in Eastern traditions.

### **The Position of Rationality in Islamic Realism**

Most scholars of the history of philosophy have considered Islamic realism a branch of Greek thought. For example, it has been said that Al-Farabi combined Aristotelian realism with Islamic theology. Therefore, he was able to fundamentally defend the idea of the “independence” of reality from the mind<sup>2</sup>. While Al-Farabi, inspired by Plato’s utopia, designed the ideal city and

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<sup>1</sup> The holy Quran, Al-Baqarah 2:256

<sup>2</sup> John W. Netton, *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1989).

intended to establish a rational government that would bring all the forces of society into the service of rationality, Ibn Sina considered the formation of the ideal city impossible<sup>1</sup>. This difference between Ibn Sina and Al-Farabi is probably due to Ibn Sina's diverse experiences in dealing with the rulers and scholars of his time. He clearly observed the dominance of ignorance and tyranny in society and considered Al-Farabi's ideal city contingent upon one of its necessary prerequisites. Inspired by the Qur'an, he knew that "reasoning" (ta 'aqqul) is an important and essential prerequisite for the formation of the ideal city and that "ignorance" (tajhīl) leads to the emergence of the corrupt city.

### **Ibn Sina's Rationality versus Cartesian Rationality**

Most authors in the field of philosophy consider Descartes' contribution to scientific transformations significant. They believe that Cartesian doubt has influenced the methodology of science and that his mathematization encompassed all sciences. Undoubtedly, measurement is useful both for understanding objects and for constructing objects, enabling things first to be definable and recognizable, and second, increasing their capacities for purposeful, timely, and spatial changes. Therefore, with the development of industries and measurement methods, various sciences advanced toward dominion over nature. Quantity is the only category that can be directly and precisely measured and makes accurate knowledge of realities possible; also, the construction of reality is possible with the help of measurement. However, there is a fundamental condition that appropriate methods and instruments for measurement must be available. For this reason, as humans gained research and measurement tools, their control and domination over everything they perceived as objects accelerated incredibly. But the speed of progress in natural sciences and related technologies left diverse effects on the ethical/social life of humans. On one hand, Cartesian doubt became a universal and inviolable model in scientific methodology. On the other hand, Descartes' insistence on quantification and his emphasis that "quantity" is the basis of natural realities helped the emergence of scientific realism. The criteria of truth in Descartes' method are clarity and distinctness, but critics did not consider these two as criteria of truth because they apply only when reviewing and criticizing theories, not at the moment of examining events and things.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in most scientific disciplines, induction, especially in interaction with deduction, is considered a necessary condition for examining reality. Thus, new rationality inevitably encountered the paradox of subjectivism/objectivism. Because on one hand, influenced by Descartes, it fell into a kind of epistemological optimism and attributed an exaggerated position to human reason in knowing and revealing truth; on the

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<sup>1</sup> Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, *The Formation of Arab Reason: Text, Tradition and the Construction of Modernity in the Arab World*, trans. The Arab Cultural Center (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Moein Arab, *Tā'ammulī dar Mabānī-ye 'Aqlānīyat-e Jadīd* [A Reflection on the Foundations of Modern Rationality] (Tehran: Elm, 2009), 87.

other hand, it emphasized the objective and measurable aspects of reality and insisted on generalizing scientific methods and the certainty of scientific results. Consequently, scientific realism was accused of naivety, could not withstand the critiques, and underwent fundamental changes.

The reduction of science to the level of measurement technology and its limitation to the domain of probabilities gradually changed the position of science within the new cultural sphere. The idea that “every rational individual is obliged, based on Cartesian methodological doubt, to doubt their own and others’ findings” means the dissolution of all scientific findings in the mind of every rational person. The notion that “every human being, as a rational creature, is a source of knowledge and can and must trust their human essence” implies distrust and fragmentation among the community of rational individuals. That is, self-confidence-which is considered a sweet fruit of the Cartesian method-has come into conflict with Cartesian doubt, posing a challenge to science and scientific realism.

“Rationality,” once considered a distinctive or defining feature of humans, is now introduced solely within the framework of criticality and critique. Critical rationalism became responsible for the continuous and conscious examination of scientific findings and grew within philosophical studies. Criticality and critique are two directions of rationality and root in an important property of reason itself: that reason is “self-critical” and continuously engaged in examining all rational matters, including beliefs and findings, and revising the results and effects of all rationalities. Therefore, Eastern wisdom forms a value hierarchy, and Avicennian rationality philosophically justifies this value hierarchy.

Avicennian rationality and Eastern wisdom have developed in a direction completely different from Western self-founded rationality and have contributed to the development of Islamic realism. Western rationality, both in idealism and realism, has almost always adhered to Cartesian dualism of “matter and idea” and has developed the subject-object contradiction. However, Avicennian rationality fundamentally focuses on relation. Existential relations are the key subject of this rational tradition and are thus always intertwined with theology. The separation of philosophy from theology is a modern phenomenon; philosophers themselves have not proposed such a separation and do not consider it conducive to theoretical rationality.<sup>1</sup> Probably, the separation of philosophy from theology is a continuation of the specialization prevailing in the bureaucratic structure of universities. Following the formation of organizational structures and competition among faculties for better positions and more credits, a kind of competition arose that led to disciplinary divisions<sup>2</sup>. Overall, the dominance of

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<sup>1</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Philosophical Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023), 45–47.

<sup>2</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Conflict of the Faculties*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 9–13.

bureaucrats and technocrats over natural resources and valuable goods has strengthened their role in directing research and controlling scientific education trends. The division of rationality among science and technology, among branches of sciences, and especially between philosophy and theology is a consequence of establishing bureaucratic order in the scientific domain. It seems that politics, not epistemology, directs science. Therefore, it appears that Ibn Sina tried to highlight the prerequisites for establishing Al-Farabi's ideal city because the development of a rational tradition is necessary for nurturing the individual and forming society.

Avicennian rationality is the heart of the intellectual system and philosophy or Eastern wisdom and is in opposition and even antagonism to Cartesian rationality, which is the heart of Western philosophy. It is necessary to note that although the Greek philosophical heritage has been used in both rational traditions, surprisingly a significant part of this heritage—namely the “world of intellects” and the “world of imagination”—has been removed from Western philosophy. While these two key concepts of Greek philosophy, and indeed the more important part of the world structure in this approach, were emphasized by both Plato and Aristotle and constituted the basis of their worldview. In other words, Greek realism and Greek idealism are equally dependent on the metaphysical realm of intellect and the rational activities of metaphysical truths. The neglect by historians of Western philosophy of the serious and relatively long discussions of both groups of Plato's students—that is, both Aristotelians and Neoplatonists—is a major and perhaps deliberate error.

Since the effort to provide a more precise formulation of the theory of Islamic realism philosophically relies on the concept of rationality, it is necessary first to outline a general picture of the issue of rationality and then to reach a general explanation of the principles of rationality, of course with reflection on the verses of the Holy Quran.

### **The Issue of Rationality**

Examining whether external reality truly exists and whether the meaning of an object is independent or dependent on us genuinely requires a metaphysical discussion, and any proposal in this area relates to realism because it presupposes the reality of humans and the reality of rationality. Whether there truly is a distinction between scientific propositions describing objective and realized facts in physics and scientific propositions describing our behavioral or mental constructs remains both an epistemological and metaphysical question focused on reality. Supporters of subjectivism, who assume the constructed nature of all human affairs including ethics, face the challenge of explaining on what foundations and shared criteria their moral judgments are based. How is human coexistence and the stability of human societies possible? Therefore, rationality has been the issue of all scientists and philosophers, but Descartes transformed it into a title for overseeing philosophies and sciences. He attempted to show that mathematization of scientific knowledge reassures us about the reality of scientists'

claims. This kind of "epistemological optimism" later developed into a view that accepted human welfare and comfort as the ultimate goal, rather than growth and perfection, or defined perfection as comfort, pleasure, and absolute absence of pain.

However, the extensive changes in human conditions due to the excessive use of natural energies have been criticized by philosophers to some extent. For example, Heidegger in his famous work "The Question Concerning Technology" considered viewing nature as an energy bank to have destructive effects on nature and humans.

Additionally, studies have shown that a fundamental hostility and opposition to traditions have arisen based on this epistemological optimism, leading scientists and philosophers to replace all previous knowledge with new sciences.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there is still no report in the history of science about critical studies and methodical scientific research on important topics such as cosmology in ancient times or Persian medicine. When and where was it proven that traditional Chinese or Indian medicine and the sciences and technologies of Egypt were all wrong? In the historiography of science, perhaps due to the emphasis on empirical methodology, Galileo's trials have been referenced more than a historical event. The silence of historians of science regarding very important scientific events in the non-Western world and the disregard for the scientific heritage of ancient civilizations may partly explain the negative perceptions about the concept of tradition. Probably, the value of modernization depends on demonstrating the obsolescence of the heritage of other nations. Creating distrust toward the proud knowledge, enduring ideas, and indigenous technologies of non-Western societies and portraying them as "wrong and outdated" may be part of cultural invasion policies.

### **Critique of Skepticism**

Many philosophers opposed Descartes' skepticism from the outset, including Popper, who criticized the special and extensive attention given to Cartesian methodology and its presentation as the "scientific method" or the "correct method"<sup>2</sup>. This doctrine-that only the Cartesian method can guide reason and lead us to truth-is exaggerated.<sup>3</sup> Whenever an individual considers themselves as having attained truth, they classify their opponents as ignorant and misguided. Thus, the possibility of criticism and growth is denied for such a person and even for other researchers. This perspective leads to the exclusivity of science, restricting it to scientists and philosophers, as the general public, due to their inability to apply the correct method of thinking, are not considered rational and have no role in science. Whereas science and civilization are the products of the unity of human rationality.<sup>4</sup> Popper questioned the

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, trans. Ahmad Aram (Tehran: Sherkat-e Sahami-ye Enteshar, 1989). 52–55.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

assumptions of the Cartesian method, including: a) the possibility of “proving reality,” b) the possibility of “quantification and measurement,” and c) the possibility and effectiveness of the important idea of “correspondence with reality.” Instead, Popper emphasized falsifiability and defended the “principle of rationality” using this concept.

Although falsifiability itself was not immune to philosophical criticism, Popper’s principle of rationality, proposed against the Cartesian method, was welcomed. Various interpretations of the principle of rationality have been presented; for example, Caldwell offered three interpretations: first, as an absolute, universal, and unfalsifiable epistemic proposition; second, as a universal and approximately true law; and third, as a methodological principle that should be preserved for its usefulness<sup>1</sup>. Vanberg also proposed two completely distinct formulations of the principle of rationality: “subjective rationality” and “objective rationality.” Subjective rationality includes interpretations claiming that human action is rational given the actor’s goals and beliefs at the moment of action—that is, whatever the nature of goals and beliefs, if consistent with the actor’s action, the act is rational. In contrast, objective rationality includes interpretations asserting general, not merely momentary, consistency<sup>2</sup>. It has an empirical content that must be empirically tested. Given the variety of possible auxiliary assumptions, numerous hypotheses of rationality can be proposed and accepted or falsified based on explanatory power. Thus, the place of the principle of rationality in methodology and the role of the rationality hypothesis in theorizing were established<sup>3</sup>.

Inspired by Quranic verses, two types of doubt can be distinguished: rational doubt and satanic doubt. Rational doubt is constructive and facilitative because it prevents uncritical acceptance of popular and accepted notions and welcomes reasoning and argumentation, naturally aiding awareness, social reform, and individual growth. Satanic doubt appears where the truth is not hidden but clear and evident, yet its acceptance is unattractive for reasons such as conflicting with the desires, interests, or predefined plans of the audience or seekers of truth. This type of doubt is satanic because it is the first skepticism and initially doubted and then denied the superiority of Adam, as stated by God. The contents doubted usually have practical consequences and require following someone or something. Hence, reasoning, contemplation, and reflection generally pertain to matters that are either entirely practical or lead to action. Therefore, realism is mostly oriented toward future truths; it is not past-oriented but future-creating.

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Caldwell, *Beyond Positivism: Economic Methodology in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1991), 100–105.

<sup>2</sup> Viktor J. Vanberg, “Rational Choice vs. Program-based Behavior: Alternative Theoretical Approaches and Their Relevance for the Study of Institutions,” *Rationality and Society* 14, no. 1 (2002): 7–53.

<sup>3</sup> Mahin Arab, “A Critical Review of Methodology in Descartes’ Philosophy and Popper’s Views,” *Hekmat va Falsafeh* 5, no. 4 (2009): 53–74.

## Future-Building Realism

In the context of realism, emphasis can be placed on objectivity as conformity with reality. However, it is better or necessary to consider two perspectives on reality from the human viewpoint: the human and the transcendent. Because without considering both ends of reality, realism cannot be saved from the vicious circle it inevitably falls into. If reality is only what has already occurred, then everything related to the future of humanity is beyond its reach and free will, and any effort to predict and correct future events is neither rational nor justified. Therefore, science and technology are fundamentally unjustified. If a person is a realist, they are only waiting for death and surrendering to reality. But if free will is part of objective reality and the natural essence of humans, how does this component relate to other parts of human nature and the world? How does a human truly adapt to limitations related to their physicality, especially temporality, spatiality, and sensory perception constraints?

It seems that free will flees more than anything from natural limitations, especially temporality, spatiality, and sensory deprivation, and for this reason, it has attracted philosophical attention. Therefore, the debate over determinism or delegation is one of the longest philosophical discussions, which in most societies and throughout much of intellectual history has been among the most resilient philosophical issues and attractive to thinkers. In fact, freedom is an inevitable path toward a rationality that transcends temporal and spatial nature, and will is the requirement of a strong thrower who can introduce us beyond temporality to eternal truths. Islamic realism, especially with the specific rational tradition continuing from Aristotle to Farabi, Ibn Sina, Mulla Sadra, and Allameh Tabataba'i, provides such conditions. Ibn Sina presented Eastern wisdom against Peripatetic philosophy, which he called "wooden logic." According to him, Aristotle's critique and innovation in philosophy are not innovations, and as he states in the remaining pages of *Al-Insaf*, Eastern philosophy's superiority over Greek knowledge is affirmed<sup>1</sup>. Ibn Sina is indeed considered one of the main sources of Islamic realism.

Islamic realism is a fresh and lively type of realism that refers the dynamic and evolving reality to the ultimate reality of the world. This type of realism is considered Islamic because it relies on the Qur'an and is inspired by it. Philosophers themselves have repeatedly referred to Qur'anic verses. In referring the temporal and changing reality to the ultimate reality, the only abundant and timeless source that supports us is the Qur'an. How can realism, without resorting to a valid vision like the Qur'an, provide an accurate explanation of an intrinsic and non-temporal truth? Realism cannot, without such a valid and non-temporal vision, even offer a relatively credible narrative about abstract truths beyond matter, time, and place, and human affairs manifested in different historical periods. Due to our temporal nature, at best, we can

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<sup>1</sup> Ghasem Poorhasan, *Avicenna and Iranian Wisdom, Vol. 1: An Analysis of the Origins of Eastern Philosophy* (Tehran: Serat Publishing, 2021), 31.

only “reflect the historical moment in which we exist.” How can we, relying on the objective-subjective distinction, provide a more precise formulation of objectivity as conformity with reality or objectivity as coherence of viewpoints?<sup>1</sup> The presence of a valid timeless source like the Qur’an makes understanding both meanings of truth possible: 1. Truth as past reality and 2. Truth as future reality. Reflection on Qur’anic verses and scientific findings can help explain truths that arise with human free will. These truths include all human thoughts, behaviors, and observable constructions.

#### Explanation of Rationality from the Perspective of the Holy Quran

In addition to numerous and detailed hadiths and narrations compiled to explain rationality, the practical conduct as well as important and influential literary works produced by Muslim thinkers and sages regarding what they have considered “rationality” bear witness to the fact that rationality is a very important subject for all Islamic intellectual currents. Nevertheless, reflection on the Quran to understand rationality remains an urgent need. According to the meaning of some verses of the Holy Quran, rationality stands in opposition to ignorance and folly: “They said, ‘O Moses, make for us a god just as they have gods.’ He said, ‘Indeed, you are a people who are ignorant’”<sup>2</sup>. The Quran’s use of the verbal noun and plural form of ignorance, and the attribution of acts of reasoning and ignorance to a people rather than an individual, indicates the social nature of rationality and ignorance. This special usage of the terms ‘reason’ and ‘ignorance’ probably implies epistemological realism. These implications are as follows:

1. Rationality is not an individual process but has a social nature; moreover, rationality is a continuous and ongoing activity, not a passive trait or a seasonal, periodic, one-time, or sudden activity. Therefore, rationality becomes necessary for shaping all collective activities.
2. Ignorance is also a collective matter and plays a fundamental role in the formation of false traditions and the development of the corrupt city. The general ignorance of the people is a major obstacle to the formation of correct and good traditions as well as the formation and development of the ideal city. Hence, explaining the structure and process of forming the utopia is deferred to the explanation of social rationality because “the suspension of reasoning” equals ignorance, which manifests in various forms such as doubt and skepticism, denial of truths, rebellion and revolt, and especially extravagance and wastefulness.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Science in a Free Society* (London: New Left Books, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> The holy Quran, Al-A’raf 7:138

3. If ignorance is an intentional act of the human soul, combating it depends on establishing a rational system capable of explaining both “divine agency” and “human agency.” The act of reasoning is one of the acts of our human soul, which the Holy Quran refers to about fifty times. Therefore, reasoning and rationality pertain to the inevitable relationship between the agency of the free human and the active will of God. While the nature of humans and their innate characteristics are “impatient, despairing, and varied,” God is the possessor of blessing, majesty, and generosity. Hence, during the flourishing period of Muslim intellectual life—from the fifth to the twentieth century CE—the important and debatable issue in most fields of study was the question of determinism and delegation. Classical philosophical tendencies often defended a theological necessity for “determinism” or “delegation,” while most modern philosophical tendencies imply the necessity of “individualism” or “collectivism.”
4. Reasoning includes important parts of the intentional acts of the soul. Part of the soul’s agency at the moment of “reasoning” relates to knowing the truth of various matters. However, a significant part of the soul’s reasoning is related to constructing—not knowing—various matters. The subjects of knowing include natural matters, social matters, or even metaphysical matters. The soul’s acts in knowing include attention, thinking, learning, and testing. Truth and falsehood in evaluation and self-criticism of reason are achieved. Error results from misunderstanding, but sin is not the result of the suspension of rationality; rather, it results from intentional ignorance occurring at the moment of decision-making. Truth and falsehood form in both categories of processes related to knowing and constructing. That which is the subject of knowing or constructing has metaphysical aspects and is the important subject and ultimate goal of divine evaluation of human actions. Therefore, the Holy Quran argues for the idea of the world’s teleology based on universal and certain return: “Did you think that We created you in play (without any purpose), and that you would not be returned to Us?”<sup>1</sup>
5. Reasoning requires attention, and attention depends on the attractiveness of matters. Attractiveness, on the one hand, relates to perfections that we lack at the moment of attention and, on the other hand, depends on their necessary degree. Therefore, reasoning involves evaluating various matters in terms of attractiveness and necessity. The phrase in the verse “To each is a direction toward which it faces. So, race to [all that is] good”<sup>2</sup> essentially means the nature or set of necessary determinations. Necessary determinations of an objective truth in philosophy and also in sciences are usually called essence or intrinsic properties. But “goodness” refers to attractiveness that is real, not imaginary, illusory, or deceptive. Because the Holy Quran does not use the term “good”

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<sup>1</sup> The holy Quran, Al-Mu’minūn 23:115,

<sup>2</sup> The holy Quran, Al-Baqarah 2:148

for false attractions or refers to their unreality by the concept of adornment, such as the verse “Beautified for people is the love of that which they desire-of women and sons...”<sup>1</sup>. Finally, the term “race” (fastabiqul-khayrat) indicates the importance and necessity of human rational interventions, including initial evaluations, decisions, planning, and actions oriented toward real goodness. In this regard, criticism of nafs illusions and deceptive propaganda about goodness and desirability is part of reasoning.

6. The criterion of sustainability for attractiveness that draws attention is emphasized in the Holy Quran. Because all the attractions that humans always desire and aspire to throughout all times are only a small part of the countless perfections of the Almighty God. Human desires are summarized in the fourfold of wealth, knowledge, beauty, and ability, which belong to divine attributes. Reasoning, meaning study, selection, decision-making, planning, and action for attaining happiness, must be directed toward achieving all or some of these fourfold desires.
7. Reasoning in the business methods and lifestyles of the wealthy and powerful becomes understandable to the general public. The stories of the prophets, which occupy a considerable part of the Holy Quran, focus on the collective opposition of people who, on the one hand, opposed the sciences, beliefs, and teachings of a perfect human or even the highest example of humanity, and on the other hand, opposed their lifestyle and social action models and did not accept their communication style and struggle conduct. For example, people in all eras, despite temporal differences, consider the conduct of great prophets toward the poor as irrational; they openly objected to Prophet Noah (peace be upon him), and in the era of Moses (peace be upon him)-several centuries later-they still praised the wealth and power of Qarun, even though they had recently been saved from Pharaoh’s tyranny. Even in the era of the Seal of the Prophets, people still regarded possessing wealth as evidence of prophethood and a sign of the prophet’s truthfulness, regardless of the sublime content of the prophet’s invitation. The masses still consider the methods of the wealthy and powerful as rational.
8. Reflection on the verses of the Holy Quran also argues for the importance of the social purpose of science. “Education,” as the “social purpose of science,” can be at the center of a new approach to the development of science and technology and serve as a noble goal for future studies. Scientists can henceforth argue for the importance and necessity of developing science and technology by considering educational effects and ethical outcomes. Regulation of scientific policies depends on scientists’ ability to predict social events and the educational and ethical orientations of societies. Also, planning of scientific centers and identifying research and educational priorities rely on the

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<sup>1</sup> The holy Quran, Al-Imran 3:14

predictive capacities of scientists who are sensitive to the social consequences, ethical outcomes, and educational effects of science and technology.

9. Contrary to common literature and prevailing interpretations regarding scientific texts and even sacred books, research on the Holy Quran differs from other books written at a specific time and later studied by others. According to the content of the verses of Surah Al-Qadr and other surahs, the active personality of the Quran is currently challenging and demanding. Moreover, the Holy Quran, as the “Greater Weight” (in the Hadith of Thaqalayn), protects itself from its domain and admits only the purified into its sanctuary (“None touch it except the purified” [56:79]). Books and works whose authors completed writing them in a distant or near past and then readers take them for study and research automatically become objects. But the Holy Quran is not a book written in the past to become an object for a researcher, teacher, or preacher at the time of recitation or reading. Although most researchers inevitably accept such notions, observing the etiquette of encountering the Holy Quran requires avoiding such a great injustice committed by those deluded by rationality or those obsessed with reason.

### **Skeptical Rationality**

In the Quranic sense, knowledge is the movement of the seeker from the hidden realms of the world to the realms of witness. Knowledge is neither merely sensory perception and direct experience nor entirely free from mental illusions. Knowledge is always in the process of unveiling and veiling the veils drawn over realities. Each time the knower uncovers a veil of reality, other veils are cast upon it. Knowledge includes the formulation of sensory-imaginative observations and, as long as it remains in imaginary abstraction, it remains imprisoned within the mind and soul of the knowing subject and never attains direct observation of reality as it is. This is because reality itself is dynamic and escapes capture. Likewise, the researcher, willingly or unwillingly, is in motion and cannot lie in ambush for reality. Therefore, the upward movement of the knowing subject toward observing realities requires a rich imaginary abstraction that includes not only the knowing subject but also the object of knowledge. The truths existing in the world and the entire universe, both as objects of knowledge and as knowing subjects, are in an ontological movement, and the unity of the knower, the known, and knowledge is not a simple, static, and effortless unity but a moving, practical, or ontological unity.

Knowledge as an ontological movement depends on free will because every movement requires a motivating agent cause and a direction of final cause. Therefore, knowledge is intertwined with action and is not far from the principles and values related to decision-making and action. The issue of free will is one of the most enduring metaphysical topics, and opposition and agreement with freedom, as well as considerations of the permissible and forbidden domains of volition, have appeared in various periods and forms. Muslim realist philosophers have

always engaged in such discussions. Some believe Averroes is the most important philosopher who seriously opposed the Ash‘arite view and defended Aristotle’s theory but in reality, the<sup>1</sup> main opposition to the two dangerous intellectual currents of Ash‘arites and Mu‘tazilites, and especially the foundation of the rational tradition in Islamic philosophy, is the significant and foremost work of Ibn Sina. This essential role of Ibn Sina has been especially noted by Iranian analysts and historians such as Dinani, Pourhasan, Hossein Nasr, and Ashtiani, and most Muslim authors, unlike Orientalists, have proudly referred to this approach in Ibn Sina’s philosophical tradition. Nevertheless, ontology in the Avicennian rational tradition predominates epistemology, so all Muslims, including all Muslim thinkers and philosophers, agree that the world is the manifestation of God and that the ultimate source of movement is God<sup>2</sup>.

In Islamic realism, which ontology implies for the classification of beings, the study and consideration of each being depend on classification. The fact that beings, despite their countless diversity, are divided into three general categories-material, imaginary immaterial, and rational immaterial-entails many methodological considerations. Ontology has implications for the concept of causality and explains the implications of skeptical causality and understanding skeptical causality<sup>3</sup>. Skeptical causality in ontology relies on the principle of possible deficiency, but in epistemology, it depends on the principle of the equivalence of knowledge and existence. Therefore, knowledge itself is inherently an ontological movement.

All share existence, and their differences are in the intensity, weakness, and effects of existence. At the head of the hierarchy of existence is God Almighty, whose light of existence is self-subsisting and without any condition or limitation; attributing existence to Him is an eternal necessary proposition without any conditional or limiting aspect. Other levels of existence depend on and belong to God Almighty. Thus, God’s existence is the fundamental truth of existence, and other levels of existence are reflections of Him. This kind of skepticism is essentially a logical discussion and is less raised in philosophical debates, as it resembles a verbal discussion more than ontology.

### **Specific Skepticism**

Anyone who is not a sophist accepts realities, and according to the principle of the primacy of existence, there is nothing other than existence of reality. The beings that truly exist differ from each other in reality, and since only existence has reality, these differences pertain to existence itself. These beings all exist in one sense, and attributing existence to them is the same and in one sense, although they differ from each other; for example, some beings are prior, stronger,

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<sup>1</sup> Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Richard C. Netton, *Allah Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>3</sup> Jamileh Alamolhoda, *Nazariyye-ye Elmi va Maflume 'Elliyat dar Falsafe-ye Islami*.

and more complete than others; for instance, the existence of a cause is stronger and prior to the existence of an effect. Similarly, existence in each of the intelligences is prior to the existence of another intelligence. The truth of existence also applies more to primary and essential substances than to accidents.

In this type of skepticism, our focus on the difference of beings is the same as our agreement on them; that is, their difference pertains to their own degree, not to extrinsic matters. In other words, according to the principle of the primacy of existence, we have nothing other than existence; therefore, the distinction of these external realities must be of the kind of our agreement. Existence has different degrees and levels, all sharing in being, and their differences are in the intensity, weakness, and effects of existence. At the head of the hierarchy of existence is God Almighty, whose light of existence is self-subsisting and without any condition or limitation; attributing existence to Him is an eternal necessary proposition without any conditional or limiting aspect. Other levels of existence depend on and belong to God Almighty. Thus, God's existence is the fundamental truth of existence, and other levels of existence are reflections of Him.

Skeptical Rationality also means that the content of rationality, depending on the levels of existence, includes different degrees of a single subject. Rationality is always engaged with issues that, despite their unlimited diversity, can be understood within the conceptual pair of "action and command." The meaning of most Quranic verses is the awareness of all the small and large parts of the universe. Therefore, rationality is both comprehensive and implies that the ontological movement is universal and coordinated. Hence, there is a kind of unity of command that necessitates obedience of beings to one another. Reflection on Quranic verses that criticize human weakness in reasoning through rhetorical questions shows that we are inevitably required to decide and take a stance regarding action and command. While through science and technology we confront the actions of nature and natural laws and commands, in theology, jurisprudence, and ethics, we are engaged with discovering God's will and how to direct our actions toward it. In the challenge between nature and human free will, sometimes we submit to nature and sometimes find ways to escape or even conquer nature. But at the level of imagination, we are often caught by three types of commands: those issued by our own soul, commands issued by social powers, and divine commands. We usually move in a direction corresponding to one of these three types of commands. Free will depends both on recognizing the sources of command and understanding the types of action, and on adapting the relationship between one's own will and them.

Therefore, Islamic realism implies at least three methodological principles in scientific explanation: 1) Scientific explanation depends on the systematic transfer of multiplicity and diversity from the axis of Ys to the axis of Xs. 2) Scientific explanation depends on truth-seeking or inquiry as an approach to the sacred realm of reality. 3) Scientific explanation undergoes

semantic changes by dividing the epistemology of the world into two parts: the unseen and the perceptible. 4) The knowing subject, based on its ontological position, is located at a specific level of the unseen or perceptible world. 5) The object of knowledge, based on the classification of matters into unseen and perceptible, can be among the unseen or perceptible matters. 6) Purification of the soul, meaning sincere request for knowledge, is an essential part of the research method for discovering and attaining reality. According to the Quranic view, only “the Knower of the unseen and the seen,” God, grants knowledge if He wills and perhaps upon the sincere request of researchers.

### **Summary: In the Light of Faith in Rationality**

Inspired by the Illuminationist sage Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, the modern era marks the Western estrangement of humanity. In this age, the conflict between knowledge and ignorance appears as a struggle between science and humanity, unlike earlier periods where it existed between scholars and the powerful. Humanism evolved alongside science and technology, but paradoxically, scientific progress led to the reduction of humans to animals (Nietzsche...). As materialist realism gained explanatory power through the natural sciences, belief in the “distinct nature of humans”—central to the humanities—waned. The humanities' assertion of human superiority over other species has been challenged by advancements in technology and science. Thinking machines suggest that humanities are valuable only insofar as they contribute to designing systems and humanoids, and as these machines proliferate, the relevance of many humanities fields diminishes.

Postmodern philosophers have sought to redefine rationality, spurring critical awareness of modernity's epistemic, social, and ethical impacts. Yet, traditional realism lacks the capacity to reestablish the explanatory role of the humanities. Idealism, exploiting the ambiguity of “reality,” has evaded critique and weakened the humanities' scientific status.

The divergence in “objectivity” between natural and social phenomena has fueled various forms of idealism. In Transcendent Theosophy, this divergence enables the formulation of layered ontologies—natural, social, and metaphysical—corresponding to the classical material, imaginal, and rational realms. Classical Eastern traditions (Chinese, Indian, Iranian, Egyptian, Greek) combined theological and metaphysical ideas, but anthropomorphic deities impeded philosophical inquiry. The rise of Aristotelian logic allowed Islamic rationality to engage with these traditions, culminating in the Avicennian tradition—an integrated realism rooted in demonstrative theology. However, after the Crusades, a fragmented version reached Europe, influencing Thomism.

Though Thomism spread Christian theology, it was shaped by Augustinian idealism and diverged from Orthodox (Greco-Iranian) Christianity, curtailing theological reason and unintentionally reawakening atheism. Influenced by Hume, Kant sought to protect faith by

restraining reason, which ironically turned faith into a ground for religion-making, blurring theology with superstition. Rationalist movements reacted swiftly.

In contrast, Islamic Iran's Avicennian tradition transformed under Mulla Sadra, who redirected focus to being itself, establishing a "gradational and skeptical ontology." This new realism—termed "Islamic realism" by Allameh Tabataba'i—is the foundation of what this study calls "Future-Building Realism," emphasizing the continuation of Islamic philosophy rooted in the Qur'an to harmonize faith and society.

The Qur'an emphasizes a unique injustice: injustice to the self, caused by modern atheistic rationality and self-deception through subjective pleasures. Only a return to the Qur'an can heal this, restoring the harmony between science and faith. Research, as a truth-seeking act, becomes a sacred journey toward God. In this vision, the Qur'an descends through rational hierarchies to address people according to their capacity, nourishing them with divine truths. Though initially silent in their knowledge, recipients can symbolically speak to the spiritually blind. Persian and Arabic literature abounds with such Qur'anic wisdom, expressed through metaphor and allusion.

Modernity has distorted art and poetry interpretation, burying aesthetic meaning under subjective veils. Education reduced art to technique, while aesthetic cultivation faded amid sterile academicism. Media industries took over beauty production, but repetitive depictions of material forms dulled perception, making even tourism ineffective in restoring aesthetic experience. Industrial objectification sidelined genuine aesthetics, prompting postmodern spiritual movements to seek aesthetic truth.

Research predates philosophical schools but implies specific methodologies. Most sciences, grounded in sense experience, assume objective truths. Thus, ontological and epistemological realism jointly shape methodologies. In Islamic realism, ontology determines the classification of beings—material, imaginal immaterial, and rational immaterial—guiding research. This affects causality, understood ontologically as based on deficiency, and epistemologically as equivalence of knowledge and being. Hence, knowledge is inherently ontological

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