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## The Consistency between Postmodern Epistemological Assumptions with Islamic Teachings

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### ABSTRACT

*There is no doubt that the post-modern era is one of the periods in the history of thought in the Western world. The constituent elements of this era are diverse and one of the main components of this period is the approach taken towards knowledge. Since the adoption of any point of view about knowledge can have a direct impact on our view of religious knowledge, the following concern for religious epistemologists is significant: what is the position of religious beliefs in the post-modern era. The aim of the current research is to analyze and evaluate the above-mentioned issue. To do this, the author attempts to state briefly the epistemological assumptions of the postmortem era, and then trying to display that there is no conflict between the aforementioned assumptions and the fundamental religious teachings, emphasizing the teachings of Islam. In this regard, the author tries to present documents among Islamic teachings in order to derive this result, that is, to negate the incompatibility between the epistemological assumptions of the post-modern era and Islam.*

*Keywords: Islamic teachings, knowledge, postmodern, reason.*

The modern era was the result of the efforts of great philosophers such as Descartes and John Locke and others in the western world, and their efforts led to the development of human intellectual life. Despite the important analyzes that many questions of the human mind received in this period, the thoughts of some philosophers such as Kierkegaard and his criticisms to rationalism common in the modern era caused a different approach to be created in the intellectual culture of the West (Kierkegaard 1978). Nietzsche (2003) is one of the pioneers of the post-modern era. His criticisms and challenging the foundation of rationalism and fighting with it gradually brought modernity to its end, and a new period known as postmodern is formed. This period shows "the tendency of Western society to return to ancient concepts to respond to the problems of modern society and culture through a partial return to traditional cultural forms and reunification with it". He doubted the absolute duality that was taken for granted by Descartes and other philosophers of the modern age between man and the world. The first and second world wars caused the hope of absolute excellence with the help of reason to be questioned and reconsidered. In the meantime, we should not neglect Wittgenstein's thought and his linguistic views in the post-modern formation (Wittgenstein 1963).

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The post-modern era includes various fields such as art, literature, politics, and the like, and the author of this article pays attention to the issue of knowledge in this period. There is no doubt that the problem of knowledge in the post-modern era is a completely different project from what existed in the modern age. The distinction of postmodern thinkers from the new age thinking about the subject of knowledge is related to their attitude towards reason. The function of reason and the expectations that postmodern thinkers have of reason and the position given to it are clearly different from what existed in the modern era. Rethinking the place of reason and changing the attitude of postmodern thinkers towards knowledge and its objectivity will cause the impact and change of attitudes in religious knowledge. The question that the author tries to explain in the present research while proposing and analyzing his point of view is, what will be the epistemological fate of religious beliefs in the epistemic structure of the post-modern era? In other words, referring to Islamic teachings and thinking about them, assuming the acceptance of the epistemic system of the post-modern era, what fate can be imagined for religious beliefs? In this article, the author tries to show that the fate of the epistemological value of religious beliefs in the framework of the epistemic system of the post-modern era does not only indicate incompatibility, but numerous documents can be found in Islamic teachings that are consistent with it. It is worthy to note that the compatibility between the assumptions of the post-modern era and the cognitive value of religious beliefs has been proposed by some contemporary thinkers such as Plantinga (2000). Even according to some thinkers, the epistemological assumptions of this period provide the conditions for the possibility of reconstructing forgotten religious ideas (Hart 1995).

### **Epistemological Assumptions in Postmodernism**

Although philosophy focused on different topics in different eras, from the distant past, one of the important topics that philosophers were interested in was discussing knowledge and contemplating on questions about it. Plato is the first person who defined knowledge as justified true belief. (Plato, Theatetus: 405) With the emergence of Descartes and facing the epistemological crisis, the traditional concept of knowledge was adapted by him and he developed the foundational theory following Aristotle (Descartes 1955). According to this theory, beliefs are of two categories: basic beliefs and non-basic beliefs. Basic beliefs are beliefs that have self-justification, and therefore, there is no need for analogy and justification to confirm them, but beliefs that lack self-justification are called non- basic beliefs (Chisolm 1982) In the epistemic system of the new age, under the influence of Aristotle, beliefs are not considered the same for the possibility of knowing them, and some beliefs do not need justification. This presupposition is also criticized in postmodernism and everyone's opinions have the same value from the epistemological point of view.

Another assumption in the epistemology of the new age is to trust reason in the process of cognition. Reason is able to achieve knowledge, and in other words, reason is able to discover all the basic beliefs, and after knowing them, it is able to determine the epistemological fate of other beliefs by observing the logical criteria. Descartes, the founder of the new philosophy, assigned such a position and program to reason (Descartes 1965: 263). Salvation with the help of reason was emphasized by philosophers in the new age and the age of enlightenment, and they were dissatisfied with any kind of faith except faith in the ability of reason (Stanley 2001).

### **Negation of Fundamentalism**

The opposition to fundamentalism is one of the epistemic characteristics of the postmodern era. Postmodern thinkers believe that fundamentalism is seriously dead end. It presents fundamentalism as a theory in relation to the rationality of normative beliefs, which itself lacks such a feature (Rorty 1991). According to fundamentalism, the acceptance of a belief in a rational way depends on the fact that the said belief must either be part of the basic beliefs or based on logical criteria, it can be deduced from the basic beliefs. The mentioned criterion itself is not part of the basic beliefs, nor can it be correctly deduced from the basic beliefs.

## Reconstruction of Truth

Truthfulness is one of the elements that are revised by the thinkers of the post-modern age. The traditional theory of correspondence, which was common in the new era, is denied in this period, and the truth in this period is always a reflection of culture and has a social-historical aspect (Rorty 1991: 13). The basis of such postmodern thinking is clarified by reflecting on postmodern thinkers' views on the dignity and value of reason. Reason is not a neutral and passive element of knowledge, and therefore not only is it not considered as the only means of salvation and redemption, but extreme rationalism and comprehensibility become the cause of not attaining knowledge and always puts man in a state of waiting on the path of knowledge. Also, reason is not neutral in its operation and what it presents as a description of the outside world is actually a picture of the mind. In such an epistemic state that man is in, speaking about the truth independent of the mind is an epistemological ideal and legend. In contrast to such a criticism against the theory of conformity to truth, the postmodern worldview suggests that instead of a prior perception of truth that truth is created in advance and the duty of man as a subject of knowledge is to discover it, a posterior perception of truth should be accepted. According to such a perception, truth is man-made, not revealed by him. Postmodern thinkers, including Rorty, after rejecting the theory of correspondence about truth in displaying the rationality of a belief and preferring it over other beliefs adhere to the coherence of a belief with other beliefs as a set, i.e. the theory of coherence (Rorty 1998: 171) and also adhere to the theory of pragmatism. In this period, although there is no standard for measuring the rationality of beliefs in advance, the coherence of a belief with other beliefs and the result that a belief leaves in practice can be considered as the basis of its evaluation and rationality (Rorty 1979: 198). As a result, the negation of the objective notion of truth and the proposal of non-objective and contextual notion of truth in postmodernism will not lead to epistemological relativism - in the sense of prescribing any belief as a true belief. It is necessary to pay attention to this understanding of postmodernism in establishing reconciliation and compromise between it and religion.

### The Status and Value of Reason in the Post-Modern Era

Contrary to the value that was given to reason in the modern age, post-modern thinkers such as Kierkegaard opposed it. From his point of view, the desire for extreme comprehensibility is the enemy of man and causes man to never achieve knowledge (Kierkegaard 1978: 81). Knowledge is not a product of intellect, but a product of commitment. If, in the path of acquiring knowledge, we only subject ourselves to the criteria of rationality proposed by the new era, we will never be able to achieve knowledge. In this period, not only reason loses its position and is placed in the ranks of other cognitive factors, but also found another characteristic. In the new era, rationality was equivalent to truth. The rationality of a belief also guarantees its truth, but there is no such guarantee in postmodernism; and there can always be a gap between rationality and truth. In the post-modern era, the lack of independence of reason and its sufficiency in the acquisition of knowledge are defended. This point of view is the result of the assumption that man is not passive in his observations and reflections but is seen as an active element whose performance result cannot be considered as a description of the world outside the mind. In order to acquire knowledge, the human mind has to start from a point, and there is no zero point of knowledge from which the subject of knowledge can impartially start studying and reflecting on the subject of knowledge (Stanley 1996: 41).

As stated, in this article, an attempt is made to analyze the theory of incompatibility between the epistemological assumptions of the post-modern era and Islamic teachings, and then to display documents in Islamic teachings that can be corresponded to it. By referring to Islamic texts and its teachings, important documents can be referred.

## **Practice and Knowledge**

One of these doctrines, which can be reconciled with postmodern epistemological assumptions, is the issue of accompanying knowledge with action in religious texts. That only the reasoning and mental capacity of man is not able to solve all the questions needed in human life, but besides that, attention should also be paid to practices is one of the important teachings that is mentioned in the verses of the Quran as well as numerous traditions, and it is almost a teaching that is not in doubt.

The fact that worship is a condition for certainty in Islamic mysticism has a detailed discussion. In mysticism, knowledge depends on purity, and the emphasis on worship as a method of attaining purity and purity as a condition for knowledge is obvious. Therefore, in gnosticism, especially Islamic gnosticism, knowledge does not have a purely theoretical aspect, and along with action, it provides human cognitive needs. It is also important to reflect on the word "certainty". This word, while it has an epistemological burden and is an epistemological concept, is linked with a non-epistemological matter such as "worship". This indicates the skepticism of knowledge, which is of interest in the post-modern intellectual space. In any case, consideration on Islamic texts and contemplation on them reveals that human happiness is not based on pure reasoning, but in the path of excellence and achieving happiness, besides reasoning, a person must have a practical participation in his life.

The discussion about the relationship between practice and knowledge or faith and action and religion and action contain detailed issues that are beyond the scope of this article, and many works have been written in this field. What is cited in this research to display the compatibility between the epistemological assumptions of the post-modern era and Islamic teachings is the fact that in Islamic thought, it is an indisputable fact that certainty, as one of the human concerns, cannot be achieved by the mind alone and besides that, action plays an important role.

## **Collective Participation**

Another element among Islamic doctrines that can be considered and cited as a proof in revealing the correspondence between the epistemological assumptions of the post-modern era and Islam is the element of collective participation. One of the important recommendations among Islamic teachings is to pay attention to collective participation. In Islamic thought, happiness is not something that can be achieved individually, but happiness, of which knowledge is one of its components, is achieved through collective participation. In other words, knowledge, action, and collective participation are elements of happiness. The importance of collective participation in Islamic thought is so obvious that it can be acknowledged that most of the recommendations in the verses of the Quran are plural and emphasize collective participation. The concerns of post-modern thinkers who do not consider the effective elements for the formation of knowledge to be a priori and pay attention to action also indicate the compatibility between Islam and the epistemological assumptions of the post-modern era.

Knowledge in the Islamic perspective is a collective category that is acquired by a person in interaction with others. The importance and value of culture and history is clear from this point of view. One cannot be indifferent to history, society and culture. Because man creates his human shape in interaction with the society. The idea that God does not change the state of human social life unless they act themselves may be a confirmation of this point: "Allah does not change what is in a nation unless they change what is in themselves." (al-Quran, al-Ra'd 13: 11). In any case, in Islamic thought, this teaching is of central importance, that man needs social life in the pursuit of his happiness, and collective participation is considered a central factor.

### **The Influence of Non-Cognitive Factors**

According to postmodernism, the division of object and subject is invalid, as a result, they present a different picture of the truth. The mind, as the agent of knowledge, is surrounded by factors that make it impossible for the mind to establish a complete and impartial relationship with the external world. If the mind's ability to establish an impartial cognitive connection with the world is denied, it is clear that our perception of truth will be different from what was customary in the modern age.

In the post-modern era, the division of beliefs into basic and non-basic is rejected for the reason that the basic or non-basic of a belief is limited by linguistic, cultural, etc. factors. Knowing from outside the mind is not completely possible for humans. In this regard, various arguments are presented by postmodern thinkers. Including the argument based on prejudice, according to which man is under the direct and indirect influence of psychological interests and prejudices, both in action and cognition, and what emerges as knowledge and action from man is under the influence of the aforementioned factors. This issue also has stubborn defenders regarding observation, such as Karl Popper, who believes that "our observations of the world are not pure". Some others also emphasize that (Goldman 1999: 230) man is under the direct and indirect influence of his living environment in terms of knowledge and action. For example, if I was born in another society and in another time, most of the beliefs that are accepted now would not be part of my beliefs. In other words, man's intellectual and cognitive life is not separate from his social life, and (Hick 1989: 2).

Some may find this part of postmodern thought in conflict with religion, including Islam. But close contemplation on Islamic teachings reveals that such an idea is incorrect. First, for this reason, those who present the idea of incompatibility of this part of post-modern thought with religion in general and with Islam in particular, think that such an understanding causes us to accept everything as truth and In other words, it causes us to fall into a kind of incurable relativism, while, this part of post-modern thought as such does not lead to such a result. The central post-modern message is that the possibility of cognitive communication with the world as a subject of knowledge is impossible for humans in an impartial way. Because whenever a person wants to create a cognitive contact with the objective world in an impartial way, he willfully and unintentionally imposes the color of the mind and the characteristics of the mind on it.

This part of post-modern thought is not only not in conflict with Islamic teachings, but Islamic teachings confirm it. The involvement of emotions, inclinations and things like that in judgments, cognition process, and action is one of the teachings mentioned in religious teachings. Muslim thinkers who have a tendency toward fideism will not have a problem with such a post-modern doctrine. One of the reasons of fideism is due to this characteristic of man: man is under the influence of factors that he cannot trust reason and the results of its operation independently of faith. And in order to be able to achieve knowledge in the field of religion, faith is necessary. Paying attention to the role of non-cognitive factors in the acquisition of knowledge and happiness is one of the doctrines that has received much attention in Islamic texts.

As an example, the relationship between morality and purification with knowledge in Islam, indicates the role of non-cognitive factors in knowledge: Allah has surely been gracious to the believers when He sent among them a Messenger from themselves to recite to them His verses, to purify them, and to teach them the Book and the Wisdom (prophetic sayings), though before that they were in clear error (al-Quran, Ali `Imran: 164).

In such a perception, the pure epistemology of knowledge is basically negated, and knowledge also appears in a balanced ratio with non-cognitive factors of opportunity. In such a perception, the fact that knowledge is basically purely cognitive is negated, and knowledge also appears in a balanced relationship with non-cognitive factors.

### **Limitless Creator and Limitless Universe**

The point that needs to be noted here is that an infinite God, as a great and endless creator, must have created a world that is suitable for him. The world that He created must be so huge and grand that it is impossible to know it within the framework of the epistemological assumptions of the modern age. The world that he created must be so huge and grand that it is not possible to understand it within the framework of the epistemological assumptions of the modern age. The framework according to which the human mind is able to understand and comprehend it from a neutral and zero point and in complete distinction from the objective world. According to this idea, such a form of understanding God is not possible in Islamic texts. Therefore, the kind of relationship between the mind and the object developed in the epistemological system of the modern age cannot interpret and justify the relationship between man and God from a cognitive point of view.

### **The Occurrence of Event Prediction**

Another idea that can be relied upon in Islamic texts as a proof for the theory of compatibility between post-modern era assumptions and Islam is the idea of the occurrence of events without prediction and calculation. The occurrence of some things outside and beyond the imagination and calculation of a person is something that was also paid attention to in Islamic sources and it has been mentioned numerous times. "Whosoever fears Allah, He will appoint for him a way out, (al-Quran, al-Talaq 65: 2). Also, "And provide for him from where he does not expect, Allah is Sufficient for whosoever puts his trust in Him. Indeed, Allah brings about whatever He decrees. Allah has set a measure for all things". (al-Quran, al-Talaq 65: 3). And, "But Allah came upon them from where they did not expect, casting terror into their hearts that their homes were destroyed by their own hands as well as by the hands of the believers. Therefore, take heed you that have eyes.' (al-Quran, al-Hasyr 59: 2).

Objectivity, as a common concept in the epistemic system of the modern age, requires predictability and certainty. But in the post-modern era, certainty and determinacy lose their credibility. Computability, certainty, and objectivity are concepts that are compatible with each other. But the idea of the occurrence of things beyond calculation is compatible with the idea of uncertainty and unpredictability that is approved in postmodernism. In this way, postmodernism, by negating dogmatism, determinacy and objectivity moves towards the concepts taught by religious teachings.

To conclude, in the current research, it was stated that in the post-modern era, the intellect differs from the attitudes about the intellect, and the expectation of human wisdom is fundamentally revised compared to what was common in the modern era. The mission of intellect is not to reflect the world objectively and impartially. Because the intellect is not able to study the world from a neutral point of view and it imposes its own interests and characteristics in the description of the world outside of the mind. By presenting a different image of reason in the postmodern era, rationality is also viewed differently. Rationality does not guarantee the truth of a belief. The concept of rationality is revised in the postmodern era, and this causes the truth to be viewed as the result of the culture that shapes the world. This revised interpretation of rationality ultimately leads to the negation of epistemological foundationalism. Because, based on the postmodern era's perception of rationality, beliefs are considered in the same way, and the division of beliefs into basic and non-basic is baseless. At the end, in order to display the compatibility of epistemological assumptions of the post-modern era with Islam, various doctrines among Islamic texts have been pointed out and analyzed. The conclusion reached by the current research is that there are numerous documents among Islamic teachings that reveal the compatibility of Islam with the epistemological framework of the post-modern era.

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