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Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	‘
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	’
ض	ḍ		ي	y

Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
اَ	a		اَ، اِيَّ	an
اُ	u		اُو	un
اِ	i		اِي	in
اَ، اِ، اِيَّ	ā		اُو	aw
اُو	ū		اِيَّ	ay
اِي	ī		اُو	uww, ū (in final position)
			اِيَّ	iyy, ī (in final position)

Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: <http://rotas.iium.edu.my>

Revisiting the Relevance of Religion in the Post-Covid-19 Pandemic: A Critical Analysis through the Lense of Religious Scholarship – Freud, James, and Dewey

Mohammad Syifa Amin Widigdo*

Abstract: The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic provides not only challenges the current states of economy, health, and society, but also the relevance of religion. Some scholars observe that Covid-19 pandemic triggers the rise of religious beliefs and attitudes that tend to deny scientific explanation of the pandemic and its rational coping. This unscientific religiosity is deemed irrelevant in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, others maintain that religious values and experiences are useful to cope with the consequences of the pandemic. In these two instances, religion's relevance in the modern world is revisited, whether religion should be ignored or considered to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic. Through the lens of religious scriptural and scholastic tradition of Sigmund Freud, William James, and John Dewey, this paper weighs in the relevance of religion and shows which aspects of religion are irrelevant and which elements of religion are relevant to cope with the pandemic and its ramifications.

Keywords: religion, Covid-19 pandemic, Freud, James, Dewey

Abstrak: Wabak pandemik Covid-19 bukan sahaja memberi cabaran kepada keadaan ekonomi, kesihatan, dan masyarakat semasa, tetapi juga kepada kaitan agama. Sesetengah sarjana memerhatikan bahawa pandemik Covid-19 mencetuskan kebangkitan kepercayaan dan sikap agama yang cenderung menafikan penjelasan saintifik tentang wabak itu dan penanganannya.

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Keagamaan yang tidak saintifik ini dianggap tidak relevan dalam menangani pandemik Covid-19. Sementara itu, yang lain berpendapat bahawa nilai dan pengalaman agama berguna untuk menghadapi akibat pandemik. Dalam kedua-dua keadaan ini, kaitan agama dalam dunia moden dikaji semula, sama ada agama harus diabaikan atau dipertimbangkan untuk menghadapi pandemik Covid-19. Melalui lensa Sigmund Freud, William James, dan John Dewey, makalah ini menimbangankan kerelevanan agama dan menunjukkan aspek agama mana yang tidak relevan dan unsur agama mana yang relevan untuk menghadapi pandemik dan akibatnya.

Kata kunci: agama, pandemik Covid-19, Freud, James, Dewey

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic puts religious scholars, institutions, and adherents in an uneasy position. They are challenged to answer a series of questions regarding how religions explain why and how the pandemic happens and what religions can do to deal with it. They are also forced to adjust their rituals and religious practices according to health-protocols and are imposed to accept the reality in which science, technology, and medical knowledge become the main reference and “guidance” of human life (Phuong, 2021; Regus, 2021). Some scholars maintain that some religious communities are causing a rapid spread of the coronavirus since they are reluctant to follow health protocols in their religious gatherings and suspending rational-scientific judgment in their behaviours (Al-Rousan & Al-Najjar, 2020; Begović, 2021; Singh, 2020; Vermeer & Kregting, 2020; Widiyanto, 2020). In this regard, religion is deemed irrelevant and obsolete in coping with the Covid-19 pandemic implications. Some others believe that religious teachings, values, and connections are helpful to prevent the spread of the virus and enable people to cope with the Covid-19 consequences (Chow et al., 2021; Dutra & Rocha, 2021; Hassan et al., 2021; Kowalczyk et al., 2020; Modell & Kardia, 2020; Molteni et al., 2021). Therefore, according to them, religion is still relevant and useful to overcome the pandemic Covid-19 and its adverse effects.

This debate on the role and fate of religion in the society has a precedence in the works of Sigmund Freud (1961a, 1961b, 1967), William James (2002), and John Dewey (1962). Sigmund Freud (d. 1939), the founder of psychoanalysis theory in psychology, provides

several critiques of religion. He examines various aspects of religion, ranging from its origin to its role in human civilisation. Religion for him is primarily a result of Oedipus complex, of a relationship between the son and the father. In the end, according to Freud, this kind of religion imposes an external-moral authority that is too demanding. This authority represses the human ego and leads to both individual and civilisational unhappiness. However, according to prominent philosophers and psychologists, namely William James (d. 1910) and John Dewey (d. 1952), this criticism of religion does not eliminate the significance of certain qualities and aspects of religion. They attempt to show that every individual has certain religious qualities of experience in life regardless of the sources of such experience. Religious experience can be derived from either one's relation with supernatural beings or with worldly ideal ends ranging from scientific, aesthetic, to civic ideals. In contrast to Freud criticism that religion produces human discontents because of the external forces, James and Dewey in their own way try to prove that human beings have a control over their own demands and wants. For James, through a healthy-minded perspective in life, religious experience can be used for solving human problems and uneasiness. This kind of healthy-mindedness eventually results in human happiness. In a similar vein, Dewey maintains that religious experience can be directed to effect a positive life adjustment and orientation (Dewey, 1962, p. 13).

In this regard, this study examines critically each intellectual position regarding the relevance of religion in the advancement of science and technology in dealing with a pandemic and provide a critical assessment of which aspects of religion that can be used to cope with the Covid-19 pandemic and which elements that cannot be employed through the lens of Freud, James, and Dewey. Knowledge and understanding of the relevance of religion will enable us to identify which aspects of religion should be strengthened and promoted to deal with the pandemic and its negative consequences.

Religion and Disaster

Disaster is viewed differently in religious normative and scholarship traditions. In the Islamic context, for example, there are several terms associated with the notion of disasters. The first term associated with disaster is *al-muṣībah*. This refers to unpleasant occurrences that

happen to human beings. The *muṣībah* generally happens due to human wrongdoings and sins that trigger God's wrath and decree to happen in the forms of disasters. The Qur'an employs this term in several places in the Qur'an, namely 42:30, 04:79, 07:100, 64:11, 02:157, and 57:22. The second term is *al-balā'* or *al-fitnah*, which means a test. Both terms are used to denote God's Will that is embodied in the forms of pleasant and unpleasant events, uneasiness, and sufferings to test human beings, forge their characters, raise their standings, forgive their sins, or purify their souls like what happened to Prophet Ibrahim, when he was commanded to slaughter his son, Isma'il. The key for the elevation of spiritual state and soul purification, according to prominent Islamic mystic, Jalāluddīn al-Rūmī (d. 1273), is the virtue of patience (*ṣabr*) and contentment (*riḍā*) (Rouzati, 2018). The third term is *al-'adhāb*, which is defined as a divine punishment. The Qur'an usually uses this word to designate a harsh punishment inflicted to a person, community, or even a nation for their sins and disbelieving acts such as what befell the people of Prophet Nuh and Prophet Lut (Aksa, 2020, p. 2; Zainuddin, 2013, pp. 48-57).

In Judeo-Christian scholarship, the understanding of disasters can be found in the dialectics between the notion of loving God and the reality of human sufferings: why loving God allows disasters to happen and make human beings suffer? Leibniz introduced the terms "theodicy" in 1917 to depict such problem and to understand further the concept of divine justice (Leibniz, 2007). Within Leibnizian tradition, there are three important models of theodicy, namely: the free-will, the best-possible of all possible worlds, and the retributive (Chester et al., 2019, p. 4). Chester et al. (2019) explains further that the free-will theodicy perceives human sufferings as a result of human freedom granted by God to human beings. With the freedom of action, humans are able to choose righteous deeds that result in happiness or sinful actions that end up in human sufferings. The sufferings (including disasters) in this context is not caused by God's action but triggered by human sinful deeds. Meanwhile, "the best-possible of all possible worlds" theodicy holds that universal laws of physics control the universe. The earth is the best possible worlds and sufferings (including disasters) occurs to achieve the greater good (Chester et al., 2019, p. 5). Volcano eruption or earthquake, for instance, happens for a purpose, which is not only to maintain balance in the universe but also to allow human spiritual

growth through dealing with sufferings. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111), a prominent medieval Muslim theologian, introduces the phrase “there is not in the possibility anything more wonderful than what it is (*laysa fī al-imbkān abda^c min mā kān*)” to describe the concept of the best of all possible worlds in the Islamic cosmology within the realm of divine unity and trust in God (Rouzati, 2018, p. 7). Lastly, the retributive theodicy maintain that human sufferings and disasters happen due to humans’ disobedient, disbelieving, and sinful acts that make God punish them in the forms of natural disasters. This is a prevalent narrative in the religious scriptures and religious adherents (Chester et al., 2019, p. 5; Joharry, 2023, pp. 226-228).

From the above exposition of religious normative and scholarship tradition, it can be inferred that disaster in religious traditions is perceived as events in human life that cause human sufferings and happen due to human sinful and harmful acts or due to God’s Will either to test or to punish human beings for their own betterment and spiritual development. This religious understanding of disaster and other forms of human sufferings is challenged and responded critically by the following influential scholars of religion and psychology, namely: Sigmund Freud, William James, and John Dewey.

Freud, Critiques of Religion, and the Covid-19 Phenomenon

Unlike religious theological and scholastic tradition that perceives human problems and sufferings as originating from God (either due to human sinful conduct or God’s will), Freud argues contrarily from anthropocentric and empirical perspectives. To him, it is essentially human problems and sufferings that create “religion.” He writes, “God was the exalted father, and the longing for the father was the root of the need for religion” (Freud, 1961b, p. 28). Human beings are destined to live in the world facing the force of nature, the coming of death, and the occurrence of sufferings in human civilisation. They are helpless in the face of these natural phenomena. They cannot rely on themselves to solve this problem, so they create a more powerful authority, the exalted and powerful fathers, with the aims of defending themselves against those natural threats. The formation of religious ideas according to Freud is exactly coming from this feeling of helplessness and the construction of the idea of the father who allegedly can provide the necessary security help (Freud, 1961b, p. 38).

The above security reason becomes a psychological foundation for Freudian concept of religion. To Freud, religious ideas including the existence of the exalted gods (or fathers) are illusions. They are illusions because their existence is constructed by human wishes that need to be fulfilled. Human beings wish that there is an authoritative and powerful being out there who can protect them from childish helplessness in front of the superiority of nature. He writes:

As we already know, the terrifying impression of helplessness in childhood aroused the need for protection—for protection through love—which was provided by the father; and the recognition that this helplessness lasts throughout the life made necessary to cling to the existence of a father, but this time a more powerful one (Freud, 1961b, p. 38).

In addition to the above security reason (i.e. a defence against natural forces) and psychological foundation (i.e. a wish fulfilment) for the emergence of religion, Freud also presents an interesting neurotic explanation. If a human child grows through neurotic process—from early trauma, defence (repression), latency, to the outbreaks of the neurosis including a partial return of the repressed materials—the formation of religion has an analogous neurotic phenomenon (Freud, 1967, pp. 101-107). He explicitly says, “Religion is the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity, like obsessional neurosis of the children” (Freud, 1961b, p. 55). The idea of God, for example, emerges not only as a wishful fulfilment but also a result of human neurotic development. After disposing and killing the father by violence, in the scheme of neurosis symptoms, children have a sense of guilt. This happens in the early trauma period of neurosis. As a reaction to that impious deed, they repress their sense of guilt by punishments. They feel deserved to be punished as a consequence of their mischievous action and at the same time as a sign of respect towards their father’s wills (Freud, 1961b, p. 54). In this defence stage of neurosis, the children begin to fear the father and at the same time to honour him as an example to follow.

In this regard, the Covid-19 pandemic posits what Freud calls “the force of nature, the coming of death, and the occurrence of sufferings” that make humans cling to God and religion for the purpose of finding answer and help. God and religion provide a sense of security for humans to face those natural problems and sufferings. This psychological and religious attitude can be seen in societies in dealing with Covid-19

pandemic. For example, Muslims in Aceh, Indonesia, still celebrate *Meugang* (a family fest welcoming the holy month of Ramadan and Eids), *Nuzulul Qur'an* (the night of the Qur'an's revelation), and *Eid al-Fitri* in a gathering, overlooking official health protocols and gathering restrictions from the central government in Indonesia and local government of Aceh (Desfandi, 2021). The Acehnese's incomppliance with the health protocols and restrictions is not due to their disobedience or resistance to the government nor their ignorance of the danger of Covid-19 virus, but they rely more on God and religious practices to deal the Covid-19 pandemic. They believe that obeying God's commands, remembrance of God, reciting the Qur'an, and prayers can avoid them from any disasters, including sufferings rendered by the Covid-19 pandemic (Desfandi, 2021, p. 10).

In addition to criticism towards religion that is used as an escape vehicle to find a psychological security and comfort, Freud also launches series of criticism towards God's rules or commands and civilisation that it produces. To Freud, the norms and the rules to build a civilisation are not instituted by God, but by human beings. For civilisation to work, human beings need some rules and norms to regulate their behaviours. These norms need authority, an aura of demandingness, and a degree of sanctity so that human beings are willing to obey them. In this respect, human beings then attach authority to these norms and rules, give them a hollow of sanctity, and call them "a divine command." The divine command, according to Freud, contains a high degree of moral demands that are peculiar to monotheist religions. Among those moral demands are those related to the doctrines of love commandments; first, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" and second "Love thine enemies" (Freud, 1961a, pp. 65-67). These two doctrines of love imply the necessity of universal, non-preferential, non-discriminatory, selfless, and self-sacrifice love. According to the love commands, we are expected to love our neighbours regardless of their distance (close or distant neighbours), strangers who have no relation to us at all, and even our enemies.

Freud considers this kind of love too demanding and repressive. It only creates greater frustration that requires us to repress our instinct for self-love. Those repressed instincts are going to return in various symptoms, much like sexual repression. In addition, we learn to love in families, not by loving neighbours indiscriminately. We learn love

by having received it, through the process of giving and receiving in a school of affection. This love is very concrete. It arises from an experience of being loved. In this respect, Freud goes on to question, how is it possible that we love strangers and enemies who are in fact unworthy of love? For him, one's love is too valuable to throw away without any consideration as to who deserves to receive it. Strangers in fact tend to render injury and harm to us. He writes:

I must honestly confess that he (i.e. a stranger) has more claim to my hostility and even my hatred. He seems not to have the least trace of love for me and shows me not the slightest consideration. If it will not do him any good he has no hesitation in injuring me, nor does he ask himself whether the amount of advantage he gains bears any proportion to the extent of the harm he does to me (Freud, 1961a, p. 67).

Furthermore, the price of civilisation is also too high for love commandment engenders unhappiness. According to Freud, the development of the individual is a product of the interaction between two urges: the urge towards happiness, which is called "egoistic" urge and the urge towards union with others in the community, which is called "altruistic" or "cultural urge" (Freud, 1961a, p. 105). The first aims towards personal happiness, while the second imposes certain restrictions so that an individual can fit and unite with other human beings in human civilisation. Love command, along with its religious authorisation and demandingness, plays a role of a cultural command that represses the egoistic urge towards individual happiness. As a result, there would be a cultural neurosis and unhappiness of the masses. Freud asserts, "if more is demanded of a man, a revolt will be produced in him or a neurosis, or he will be made unhappy..." (Freud, 1961a, p. 109).

In the face of Covid-19 pandemic, religious obligations and rituals are still observed in different ways. It means that God's commands, rules, and instructions are not waived in the time of calamities and difficulties. Some conservative Muslims in Indonesia, for example, argue that one should fear God more than fear the Covid outbreak. In the case of Friday prayer (which is obligatory for Muslim men and should be carried out in congregation), the prayer should be carried out regardless of the circumstances. The argument used in this context is that one needs to be patient in obeying and observing religious duties (*al-*

ṣabr ‘alā al-ṭā‘ah) (Widiyanto, 2020, pp. 3-4). This God’s command, which needs a total obedience from religious adherents regardless of circumstances, is what Freud criticises as too demanding and resulting in unhappiness. The obedience to God’s command is deemed repressing one’s need for safety and overriding communal safety interest in the aims of adhering the divine command, which in the end leads to insecure and unhappy feelings. This was what happened when a small number of Muslims who are tested positive for Covid-10 still attended congregational prayers, which then spreads to other members of the congregation (Rachmawati, 2020). A large meeting held by Tablighi Jamaat in Gowa, South Sulawesi, in 19-22 March 2020 triggered the outbreak of Covid-19 in the region (Apriyono, 2020).

Similar cases happened in other parts of the world. In Pakistan, of 5,000 Shi’a pilgrims returning from Iran, 2,600 were tested, where 140 of them were infected with the Covid-19. In Qom, Iran, 1,300 people were dead, which reportedly due to religious rituals and festivals around the “saint” shrine that run day and night. In Malaysia, a large gathering that involves 1,600 members of the Tablighi Jamaat was deemed responsible for spreading the virus since 600 cases in Malaysia, 70 in Brunei, and 10 in Thailand were linked with this gathering. In South Korea, a 61-year-old woman with Covid-19 attended two large meetings—each with more than 1,000 attendees—held by a Christian sect known as Shincheonji Church of Jesus in Daegu. After these events, 4,800 cases of Covid were found spreading from Daegu (Singh, 2020). These events were held with the spirit of being patient in obeying God’s teachings, whereas, in fact, created larger hardship and safety issues.

In addition, Freud also argues that another reason for human disappointment with the existing civilisation is the advancement of science and technology. This advancement not only challenges the existing civilisation but also shows that religion as the basis for such civilisation is irrelevant and unscientific. As science gains a strong momentum, human worries with regard to the natural world are handled secularly by science and technology, not by using religion (Freud, 1961a, p. 39; 1961b, pp. 47-49). Religion in turn no longer has the same influence on people that it used to be (Freud, 1961b, p. 48). Religion is considered unscientific in the sense that religious ideas are based on the claim of belief (Freud, 1961b, p. 31). Their teachings and assertions about facts and reality are to be believed because human

primal forefathers believed. They cannot be proved. Raising a question about their authenticity is even forbidden (Freud, 1961b, p. 33).

A scientific approach towards reality is different. In Freud's view, science claims to be the only road that can lead human beings to knowledge of the reality of the world (Freud, 1961b, p. 40). By means of sciences and technology, the sources of human sufferings (i.e. the power of the nature, the feebleness of human body, and the inadequacy of regulations) are eliminated (Freud, 1961b, p. 37). The force of nature is no longer the factor frightening human beings. The phenomena of nature are known through measurable and empirical research, not by belief as religion claims. The feebleness of the human body is also overcome by a further development of science; for example, infant mortality is significantly reduced, and distant communication is bridged by internet-based devices. The high demand of religious regulations is also lowered and moderated by means of a more realistic, self-referring, and secular morality. The individual urge for happiness is no longer repressed. In this way, science improves the value and the scope of humanity. At the same time, too rigid religious morality is substituted by a more flexible, revisable, modest demand, non-repressive, and secular attitude of morality.

In relation to the Covid-19 pandemic, religion provides an explanation regarding the origin, the cause, and the cure for Covid-19 disease that is on some occasions different from scientific findings. When the nature of the Covid-19 disease is still a mystery and unknown to many, religious followers attempt to understand this phenomenon through various forms of religious lenses. Some believe that the Covid-19 is an act of God, others perceive that Covid-19 has nothing to do with God, and some others hold that God remains in control amid a devastating pandemic (Pieterse & Landman, 2021). The religious answers can be seen from the first and the third response categories, which state that the Covid-19 is an act of God and still within God's control. These religious responses perceive that the disease is either still within a divine plan (not coincidence), God's will, remainder of God's teaching, Godly test for humans (*muṣība* as *ibtilā'*), divine punishment, God's retribution to others, or a spiritual journey to be closer to God like the sufferings of Job (*Ya 'qūb*) (Gebretsadik, 2023; Pieterse & Landman, 2021; Sunarsa, 2021).

According to the data collected by Heron G. Gebretsadik (2023) in Ethiopia, 313 out of 1,118 (28%) Orthodox, Muslim, and Protestant respondents in Addis Ababa believed that the Covid-19 pandemic was God's punishment against the sinners and 278 of them (24.9%) believed that the virus was made in the laboratory by certain developed countries in the West to inflict harms and sufferings over the poor in developing countries, including those in Ethiopia. Some informants express a bold position on this issue, which is summarised in the following:

Covid-19 is a curse on our sins. All we have to do is wait for God Himself to stop it and end the curse. We should pray to him not to delay his punishment for too long. The disease is stopped when God has finished his punishment. Until then, we just wait; it doesn't help whether or not we adhere to human-recommended safety measures. If we are lucky, we will survive; we do not want to expose ourselves to the unimportant pressure of limiting our lifestyle, particularly to be told not to go church is unacceptable. We must pray together to curb the curse. Some did not comply with the recommendation to stay home to contain Covid-19 because they believed they could not be infected in churches. Some said that religion was above everything and claimed that they did not mind losing their lives for this cause (Gebretsadik, 2023, pp. 295-296).

This belief in God's punishment makes these religious positions susceptible to accept a conspiracy theory regarding the origin of Covid-19. Religious people who holds such belief (some labelled as fundamentalists or conservatives) tend to conceive that the origin of Covid-19 is the virus made by Westerners to attack opposing countries, tell people what to do to protect themselves, buy and use vaccine that the Westerners made, or put certain chips to control people's life (Gebretsadik, 2023, p. 296; Łowicki et al., 2022; Sriskandarajah, 2021).

The above religious and conspiracy explanations of the Covid-19 would be repelled by Freud. Those are deemed unscientific and unable to overcome human worries of the mystery of the natural world and human sufferings. Instead, he believes in scientific explanations and solutions to overcome sufferings resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic. Unlike those who maintain that Covid-19 originated from, and caused by, God's punishment and divine plan, Freud would accept scientific investigation and conclusion that the virus came from an animal in

Wuhan, China, and people need to comply with health restrictions and protocols to prevent the spread of the virus. Scientists, policy makers, and other related stakeholders work tirelessly and collaboratively to invent an effective vaccine to fight the Covid-19 virus and its mutations. Once the vaccine is invented, produced, and scientifically proven safe and effective, it needs to be applied to humans. When health protocols are obeyed and the vaccine is applied to a majority of the people, the Covid-19 pandemic will be gradually overcome. Freud would be satisfied when this scientific and technological solution can effectively put the Covid-19 pandemic to an end, including through forcing religious institutions and figures to comply with health restrictions and protocols and adjust their religious practices with the regulations regarding the Covid-19 health and safety policy. In this regard, Freud seems to be right. Science and technology replace religion (i.e. the doctrinal, legal, and institutional forms of religion) and make religious regulations lowered and moderated by a more realistic morality and practice in dealing with Covid-19. Some religious rituals and acts of worship that are normatively observed in congregation in public places are replaced with religious rituals that are performed privately at homes complying with health and safety procedures.

James' and Dewey's Responses: Religious Experience for Covid-19

However, in his own account, Freud also maintains that psychoanalysis not only can be applied to argue against religion but also to argue for religion, especially a psychological or affective worth of religious doctrines (Freud, 1961b, p. 47). Freud chooses to use psychoanalysis to serve the first function whereas William James and John Dewey attempts to withstand Freud's critiques by explaining the second function, which is to argue for the affective significance of religion in the forms of religious experience.

William James refers religious experience to human emotions, feelings, and impulses that are derived from human connection with whatever human considers higher, divine, or all of which James called as the "more" (James, 2002, pp. 3, 512-513, and 524-525). Religion in the form of religious experience differs from religion in the sense of institution and of morality. The first concerns itself with the psychological fruits produced by human connection with the "more;" whereas the second concerns with intellectual, moral, and doctrinal aspects of

religion. Human feelings resulted from the union or connection with the “more” does not reside outside ourselves, but within the hither side of our sub-consciousness (James, 2002, p. 512). These feelings and emotions are experienced by human beings in a real and convincing way. He writes, “they are as convincing to those who have them as any direct sensible experiences can be” (James, 2002, p. 72). Human reactions towards such feelings are reflected in human solemn, serious, tender, and positive attitudes towards life (James, 2002, p. 38). People with such religious feelings usually adopt an optimistic turn of mind which engenders a healthy-mindedness. This turn of mind and attitude is transformative, in the sense that it can help an individual to cope with his/her wrongness, uneasiness, guilt, or deficiency (James, 2002, p. 502). This is also preventive and curative to certain diseases in the sense that this healthy-minded or mind-cure attitude provides human beings with serenity, moral poise, and happiness (James, 2002, p. 122). In the end of the day, in James’ view, human beings can attain happiness and will not suffer in life by means of religious experience.

The Covid-19 pandemic certainly engenders a severe impact on people’s lives in different degrees, including mental distress, insecurity depression, anxiety, trauma, psychological hardship, and despair (Chow et al., 2021; Dutra & Rocha, 2021; Lucchetti et al., 2020; Rababa et al., 2021; Szalachowski & Tuszyńska-Bogucka, 2021). Religion in the form of religious experience as defined by James, which is the connection with the “more,” helps the victims and people affected by Covid-19 in coping with their psychological problems. Research conducted on Pakistani British Muslim women with family responsibilities shows that belief in Allah’s decree and coping with supplication and prayers reduce the impacts of Covid-19 on their mental well-being. An informant named Nusret reveals how belief in Allah gives her a sort of protection and consolation:

The pandemic was a reminder that everything comes from Allah. The lockdown and Covid situation were reminders to me that no matter what we think or do, death is inevitable and comes to everyone. That bought me a lot of comfort during the pandemic (Iqbal et al., 2023, pp. 8-9).

Another participant of the research, Rifat, also states that praying, reading religious text, and supplication bring a sense of peace and strength to deal with uncertainties at a difficult time: “lockdown in

one way it was like, you know, stressful at the beginning but it was our religious readings and *namaz* (prayer) that brought more peace to ourselves (Iqbal et al., 2023, pp. 8-9).”

The psychological fruits of religious experience and devotion in the forms of positive attitudes toward life, healthy-mindedness, and ability to cope with uneasiness in life, can also be seen in the patients and healthcare workers who experienced hardship and difficulties during the Covid-19 pandemic. A group of researchers from Canada conducted research on 1,021 respondents of different religious backgrounds in the United States of America, and found that faith in God, personal worship and prayers, scriptural study, and other forms of religious devotion provide them with feeling of peace, belief in a brighter future, and gaining a sense of control and security. These psychological fruits of the religious experience can help them find meaning in life, alleviate stress and negative emotions, and navigate uncertainties due to Covid-19 (Leonhardt et al., 2023, pp. 15-16). The similar psychological effects are also found in the case of Malaysian healthcare workers and Italian families. Religious services, reading scriptures, prayers, and meditation can help them boost their mental health, reduce stress and anxiety, find comfort and solace, and cope with medical illness or have a positive reaction to illnesses (Chow et al., 2021, pp. 11-12; Molteni et al., 2021).

In this respect, John Dewey also differentiates religion from religiousness. Religion for him refers to a systematic body of beliefs and practices along with its institutional organisations, whereas religiousness signifies human attitudes with respect to certain objects, ends, or ideals (Dewey, 1962, pp. 9-10). Religious experience therefore is not related with deities and divinities of religion but it is inseparably linked with effects in the forms of an adjustment of human attitudes, conducts, and outlooks as results of human (imaginative) connection with certain ideals (Dewey, 1962, p. 14). The ideals are inclusive and compelling to the extent that they can render betterment and reorientation in human life. Dewey writes, “for all endeavours for the better is moved by faith of what is possible, not by adherence to the actual” (Dewey, 1962, p. 23). In fact, religious experience can only be “proven” and evaluated through the existence of what Dewey calls “an adjustment in life, an orientation that brings with it a sense of security and peace” (Dewey, 1962, p. 13). In other words, the religious quality of experience can be

seen in a better adjustment of human attitudes and conducts that occurs as a result of human's imaginative connection with the inclusive ideals.

Therefore, religious experience in Dewey's account does not refer to human feelings in solitude, but refers to human attitudes, outlooks, and conducts pertaining to human action. His concept of ideals is also closer to human experience compared to the "more" of James. This is more natural, signifying low-flying ideals that are not beyond human reach and understanding. In other words, he makes James' notion of religious experience more doable and secular. Religious quality of experience in Dewey's signifies something wider and more natural. It denotes the sense of dignity of human nature as well as the sense of awe and reverence to religious objects; designates a new attitude that resulted from a devotion to a cause, a new perspective after reading a poetry, and a fresh understanding through a philosophical reflection; and, also signifies all experience that resulted from aesthetic, scientific, moral, political, civil, and friendship activities (Dewey, 1962, pp. 25, 14, and 10).

In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, Dewey's notion of religious experience can be found in different coping strategies to overcome psychological problems arising from the consequences of the pandemic. Religious experience is a psychological result of certain (imaginative) connections with low-flying ideals. These ideals can appear in the forms of arts, music, social support, social media, communication technologies, humour (comedy), games, spiritual services, sports and physical exercises, science-based health protocols, and many other instruments, which a connection with them engenders a better perspective, understanding, and attitude in dealing with the Covid-19 (Ahmadi et al., 2023; Bae, 2023; Basya, 2021; Cho et al., 2023; Lucchetti et al., 2020; Manap & Karadas, 2022; Oti-Boadi et al., 2022; Upenieks et al., 2022). For example, Leif Peng, a teacher of graphic design at Mohawk College, Canada, assigned his students to express how the Covid-19 pandemic affected them and how they coped with them. A student named Cassidy Scidmore wrote:

Isolation has been difficult at times because I've been alone with myself and my thoughts. I've chosen to focus and learn to be OK with uncertainty in my life. I've been painting, drawing, and reading, but my favourite pastime is taking my dog for a walk. I take this time to relax, listen to music, to

think/feel and let go. It has become a form of meditation for me and sometimes I even feel like I'm floating in the universe. I hope everyone can find a little peace and mindfulness in these crazy times! ("Coping, through art: Mohawk graphic design students reveal their coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic through words and art," 2020).

Meanwhile, another student, Rupal Kaur, shared her experience dealing with the Covid-19, lockdown, and isolation as follows: "it's been such a difficult time for everyone around the world. It is for me, too... However, I do feel better having the time to do the things I love, such as paint, sketch, dance, sing, bake and most importantly, even though I'm far away, talking to my family" ("Coping, through art: Mohawk graphic design students reveal their coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic through words and art," 2020).

The testimony of the above students reveals how certain healthy and better attitudes in dealing with Covid-19 are derived from a certain connection with ideals, a dedication to attaining certain goals, or a devotion to certain practices. These attitudes are the results of what William James considers as religious experience since the nature of religiosity for him resides in the "connection" that produces a betterment in life. Cassidy Scidmore overcomes her feeling of isolation and uncertainty by means of immersing herself in activities like painting, reading, talking to her dog, relaxing, and listening to music with the aim of finding a sense of peace and mindfulness. Meanwhile, Rupal Kaur employs her dedication in painting, sketching, dancing, singing, baking, and talking to her family as her coping strategy to overcome distress and loneliness during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Religion, Punishment, and Human Response

In this context, religion tends to explain disasters and human sufferings from theological perspective whether they are considered a trial or punishment. All of them come from God. Human beings must adapt and give a proper response to them. Meanwhile, Freud, James, and Dewey perceive unpleasant events in human life from a human perspective. Freud maintains that what is so called "God's punishment" essentially originated from human's feeling of guilt that resulted from a further development of the neurosis. On the one hand, accepting such punishment is deemed a necessary attitude to respect God. On the

other hand, one needs to avoid the punishment through obeying what is perceived as “God’s law and teaching” regardless of scientific findings. This blind obedience of being too demanding to God’s rule is what Freud criticises about religion.

James and Dewey do not address the question of the origin of where punishment comes from or the reasons why punishment and human sufferings occur. Instead, they focus on what proper attitudes and behaviours that humans should have to face any possible uneasiness, unpleasant occurrences, and sufferings that happen in life. James presents a healthy-mindedness to cope with uneasiness and Dewey offers the idea of human life betterment through adjustment to any circumstances and ideals. Religious scholars such as Leibniz, al-Ghazālī, and al-Rūmī (Jalāluddīn al-Rūmī) provides the idea of “the best-possible of all possible worlds (Leibniz)”, “there is not in the possibility anything more wonderful than what it is (*laysa fī al-imbkān abda^c min mā kān*, al-Ghazālī)”, and the virtue of patience (*ṣabr*) and inner contentment (*riḍā*) (al-Rūmī) (Chester et al., 2019; Rouzati, 2018). These religious attitudes towards sufferings are believed to be effective ways to achieve human’s mental and spiritual wellbeing.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above discussion, religious scriptural and scholastic traditions have their own notion of disaster in terms of *muṣībah*, *balā’*, and *‘adhāb* (as in the in Islamic context), which is relatively parallel to Leibniz’s theodicy models of the free-will, the best-possible of all possible worlds, and retribution in the Judeo-Christian context. However, scholars of religion severely criticise the role of religion. Sigmund Freud scrutinises critically when religion is understood as an escape from human helplessness due to an inability to deal with reality, a set of overly demanding rules and morality, and an anti-science attitude that generates unhappiness. Religion in this sense is irrelevant and not useful to address human hardships and difficulties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This kind of understanding of religion makes some (conservative or fundamentalist) religious adherents tend to believe in the conspiracy theory of the origin of Covid-19, ignore health protocols and restrictions in religious practices (including isolation and social distancing), and refuse to undergo vaccination to stop the spread of the disease.

However, according to James and Dewey, Freud's criticism of religion does not eliminate the significance of certain qualities and aspects of religion. They show that every individual has certain religious qualities of experience in life, regardless of the sources. Religious experience can be derived from either one's relationship with supernatural beings or with worldly ideal ends ranging from scientific, aesthetic, and civic ideals. In contrast to Freud criticism that religion produces human discontent because of external forces, James and Dewey prove that human beings have control over their own demands and wants. For James, through a healthy-minded perspective on life, religious experience can be used to solve human problems and uneasiness. This kind of healthy-mindedness eventually results in human happiness. In a similar vein, Dewey maintains that religious experience can be directed to affect an adjustment and peaceful orientation in life. Interestingly, religious scholars like Leibniz, al-Ghazālī, and al-Rūmī have a shared stance regarding disasters that should be responded to, not as punishment or retribution (*‘adhāb*) from God due to human mischievous deeds, but as the best-possible of all possible worlds, test (*muṣībah* or *balā’*) to maintain the balance of the universe, and to raise the mental and spiritual level of human beings.

In dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic and other forms of calamities, James and Dewey would agree with Freud when religion is viewed in a narrow understanding in terms of a set of overly demanding rules and anti-science attitudes that can put oneself and others in danger. This kind of religiosity is irrelevant since they do not derive positive attitudes towards life. Leibniz, al-Ghazālī, and al-Rūmī might agree with this intellectual stance as well. They further argue that trust in God (*tawakkul*) is not necessarily an act of escapism, as Freud claimed. For them, the belief and connection with the “more” can pave the way for healthy-mindedness, human happiness, life betterment, and peaceful orientation for humans, which eventually help them cope with the uneasiness and sufferings caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Similarly, Leibnizian's the best-possible of all possible worlds, Ghazālīan trust in God's decree (*tawakkul*), and Rūmīan virtue of patience (*ṣabr*) and contentment (*riḍā*) provide a religious coping mechanism to face unpleasant events and disasters, including the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, this experiential aspect of religiosity, which is derived from an experience with “the more,” certain ideals and ends, supernatural

beings, or God, is relevant and can be used to solve human problems and uneasiness, including Covid-19 pandemic and other possible disastrous events in the future.

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GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

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Book

In-text citations:

Al-Faruqi & al-Faruqi (1986)

Reference:

Al-Faruqi, I. R., & al-Faruqi, L. L. (1986). *The cultural atlas of Islam*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

Chapter in a Book

In-text:

Alias (2009)

Reference:

Alias, A. (2009). Human nature. In N. M. Noor (Ed.), *Human nature from an Islamic perspective: A guide to teaching and learning* (pp.79-117). Kuala Lumpur: IIUM Press.

Journal Article

In-text:

Chapra (2002)

Reference:

Chapra, M. U. (2002). Islam and the international debt problem. *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 10, 214-232.

The Qur'ān

In-text:

(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36

(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:

The glorious Qur'ān. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

Ḥadīth

In-text:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)

(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

The Bible

In-text:

Matthew 12:31-32

Reference:

The new Oxford annotated Bible. (2007). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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