The Impact of Secularism on Religious Beliefs and Practices

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Abstract

Secularism is the most serious challenge of modernity posed by the West. Its main ideology is to liberate man from the religious and metaphysical values and expel religion from the practical aspect of man's life. It clearly presents its materialistic viewpoint, which is cut off from Divine, transcendent or supernatural principles and does not refer to revelation at all and is intact isolated from it. In terms of its intensity and scope as well as its discernable effects upon people's minds, the repercussion of secularism is both pervasive and universal. It has had a great impact on every facet of life, including individual and family lives as well as in the educational, political, economic and social-cultural realms. Most importantly, secularism affects the very tenets of traditional religious beliefs and practices. This paper tries to discuss the dangers of secularism and its principles, which are contradictory to the religious worldview, particularly, the Islamic worldview.

Key Words: Secularism, secular, secularization, modernity, religious worldview.

Abstrak

Sekularisme ialah satu cabaran moden yang serius yang diketengahkan oleh Barat. Ideologi utamanya ialah utntuk membebaskan manusia daripada nilai-nilai keugamaan dan metafizikal seterusnya menyisihkan ugama daripada aspek kehidupan manusia. Ia secara terang-terangan mengutarakan sudut pandangannya yang tiada hubung kait dengan konsep-konsep ketuhanan, samawi ataupun bukan tabii dan terpisah adaripada konsep wahyu dan kerasulan. Dari segi bidang dan skop pengaruhnya iaitu kesan-kesannya yang boleh difahami terhadap pemikiran manusia, sememangnya ia adalah amat mendalam dan universal sifatnya. Ia amat mempengaruhi aspek kehidupan harian termasuklah aspek individu dan kekeluargaan seterusnya aspek-aspek lain seperti pendidikan, politik, ekonomi dan sosio-budaya. Lebih-lebih lagi sekularisme turut mempengaruhi landasan-landasan kepercayaan keugamaan tradisional dan amalannya. Kertas ini cuba memberikan tumpuan kepada bahaya sekularisme dan prinsip-prinsipnya yang bercanggahan dengan pandangan sarwa keugamaan terutamanya Islam.

Kata Kunci: Sekularisme, sekular, sekularisasi, kemodenan, pandangan sarwa keugamaan.

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Introduction

Secularism as An Ideology and A Principle of Social Organization

As one of the elements of modernity, secularism emerged first in the Western world after Martin Luther[1] had led an ecclesiastical revolt against Roman Catholicism in the sixteenth century. The revolt resulted in the formation of Protestantism. Generally speaking, the rest of the sixteenth century saw the demarcation of the Catholic-Protestant divide in Europe along theological lines. By the end of the seventeenth century, some of the leading intellectuals, such as Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and John Lock (1632-1704) attempted to formulate new principles of political and social organizations that would extricate the political state from theological issues. Religious authorities of the Church at that time were seen as a major obstacle in the development of social institutions. This was the first movement that contributed to the emergence of secularism in the world.

Another origin of secularism can be traced from the conflict of science and religion between the advocates of science and the religious traditionalists of the Church. With the discoveries of modern science, its advocates began to explain religious precepts in the light of science, which involved the process of reasoning. Therefore, Church authorities were challenged gradually but systematically by the scientist and rationalist movements. For instance, the influence of Copernicus (1473-1543), Kepler (1571-1630), Galileo (1564-1642), and Newton (1642-1727) revealed that the Sun was the center of the universe and that the Earth was vast in extent. These discoveries were opposed to the Christian theologians' theory of creation and cosmology[2]. It was in this context that the conflict of science and religion contributed to the emergence of secularism within the Western Christian tradition.

During the eighteenth century, under the impact of the Enlightenment, there were many writings of the Western philosophers, which argued that

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[1]Martin Luther was born in November 10, 1483 in Eisleben, where his father was a peasant miner. After preparatory schooling in Mansfield, Magdeburg, and Eisenach, Martin Luther entered the University of Erfurt in 1501. For further explanation on Luther's development and the beginning of the Reformation, see Williston Walker, *A History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), pp. 302-311.

[2]Oloyede, "Secularism and Religion: Conflict and Compromise (An Islamic Perspective)," in *Islam and the Modern Age* (New Delhi: Islam and the Modern Age Society, February 1986), vol. 5 p. 23.

religious teachings were the major obstacle to the growth and progress of man. By the end of the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment attitude towards religion became a part of the intellectual debate taking place in Europe. The position of the philosophers on the need to remove religion from the public sphere was strengthened by developments in the socio-political realm. The modern nation-state was emerging to challenge the political supremacy of the Church in Europe. Consequently, the development of a political theory in Europe totally divorced the process of legislation from any reference to religious authorities. Religion became marginalized in the public affairs of the society.

Whereas the leading intellectuals of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had argued that the interference of religion in the public affairs of society hampered society's progress, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of thinkers who argued that the effects of religion were so pernicious that it should be banished from even the psyche of the individuals. The nineteenth century thinkers gave numerous arguments for the expulsion of religion from the private sphere as well. Karl Marx, for example, saw religion as merely a reflection of the material world and derived from the hopes of human beings. He criticized religion as a tool in the hands of the ruling class for keeping the masses under control. Religion was made to pacify humans, and reconcile them to the oppression that they suffer under capitalist society, and hinder their awareness of revolution. His famous quotation is "religion as opium of the masses." For Marx, religion seemed to promise people illusionary happiness. Therefore, the abolition of religion as the illusionary happiness of the people is required for their true happiness[3].

Another secular view can be traced in the psychobiological arguments of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939).[4] Growing up devoid of any belief in God,

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[3]See Malcom B. Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge Publications, 1995), p. 82.
[4]Freud was the founder of psychoanalysis. He was born in Freiberg, Moravia. When he was three years old, his family moved to Vienna, and in 1873 Freud entered the University of Vienna, where he studied medicine. He specialized in neurology and contributed to the field through valuable laboratory researches, which were published in 1885 and 1886. He also published several clinical studies. Under the influence of some of his friends, Freud turned his attention to the psychological aspects of neurology. See Paul Edward (editor), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3 & 4, p. 249.

Freud insisted that religious claims about the world are invalid. He sought to account for the empirical phenomenon of religion in naturalistic terms. Religious ideas, according to Freud, are only the outcome of a psychological process. In his *The Future of an Illusion,*[5] Freud argued that it was culture that created and produced religious ideas within the individuals. According to him, like all other cultural attainments, religion springs from the necessity of defending oneself against the superpowers of nature and fate. Thus, an impotent man creates God for himself like a helpless child seeks comfort in the parent.[6] The origin of religion, in this sense, is a form of wish fulfillment of mankind. For Freud, religion is both illusion and error- an illusion because it is the fulfillment of man's wishes and error because it cannot be independently established on rational and scientific grounds.[7] Unlike empirical assertions, the assertions of religion are not based on observations of the external world that can be either verified or falsified but rather on inner convictions. Therefore, Freud sees all religious ideas as illusion and error.[8] They are indemonstrable; thus, no one can be compelled to believe them.

Another nineteenth century secular thinker was Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Nietzsche was not interested in the metaphysical truth of either Christianity or any other religion. Being convinced that no religion is really true; he judged all religions entirely by their social effects.[9] Nietzsche's famous proclamation is the "death of God," and in his searching for a new foundation for values, he turns to the aesthetic of human nature as the most promising alternative to religion. According to him, existence and the world

[5]For further explanation, refer to Sigmund Freud, *The Future of Illusion* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1961).

[6]See Hans Kung, Edward Quinn (trans), *Does God Exists? An Answer for Today* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), p. 34.

[7]Patrick Masterson, *Atheism and Alienation: A Study of the Philosophical Sources of Contemporary Atheism* (New York: Gill and Mac Millan, n.d) , p. 128.

[8]The idea of religion as illusion has been expressed earlier by Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1972) nineteenth century German philosopher. See his idea of the belief in God as a projection of the human mind in John Hick, *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* (New Jersey: Englewood Cliffs, 1990), pp. 149-163.

[9]See Bertnard Russell, *History of Western Philosophy: And Its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: Routledge Publications, 1961), p. 732.

are eternally justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon.[10] Religious beliefs have no significance in the social life of modern society. In a contemporary discussion, secularism is related almost synonymously with the term secularization except that the former implies belief in certain ideas and values or as an ideology, while the latter depicts a process of socio-cultural-cum-intellectual revolution.[11] The term secularism has been defined in various interpretations. According to C. Williams, secularism is derived from a Latin word *saeculum,* which means 'of this age'[12] which pertains to this world, is temporal and related to worldly things. N. Berkes defines it as emphasis on the worldly affairs regardless of what happens in the hereafter.[13] *Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary* defines secularism as the belief that the state, morals, education and all aspects of life should be independent of religion.[14] Meanwhile, the *Lexicon Webster Dictionary* explains it as a system of beliefs, which rejects all forms of religious faith and worship.[15] *The Encyclopedia Americana* defines secularism as an ethical system founded on the principles of natural morality and independent of revealed religion or supernaturalism. Its first postulate is freedom of thought, that is, the right of every man to think for himself. Secularism asserts this right to discuss and debate all vital questions, such as opinions regarding the foundations of moral obligation, the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the authority of the conscience. Secularism also maintains that the good of the present life is the real good.[16]

Other writers on secularism basically emphasize on the replacement of religion with scientific and rational thought as well as separation of religion from the core institutions of the society. For instance, G. A. Almond and G.

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[10]See Samuel Enoch Stumpf, *Philosophy: History and Problems* (New York: Mc Grew Hill Book Company, 1983), vol. 1, p. 358; see also Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory: A Materialist Perspective* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1983), pp. 40-42.

[11]Trevor Ling, *A History of Religion: East and West* (London: Mac Millan Press, 1968), p. 5.

[12]C. Williams, *Faith in a Secular State* (London: Fontana Books, 1966), p. 34.

[13]N. Berkes, *Islam and the Modern West* (Harvard: Monton and Co., 1957). p. 34.

[14]Kirkpartrich (editor), *Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary* (London: W.R. Chambers Ltd., 1983), vol. ii.

[15]*The Lexicon Webster Dictionary* (U.S.A, 1971), vol. ii, p. 869.

[16]*The Encyclopedia Americana* (Connecticut: Grolier Incorporated, 1991), vol. 24, p. 510.

Adibah Binti Abdul Rahim

A. Powell cite secularization as the process whereby men become increasingly rational, analytical, and empirical in their political action. It involves the replacement of traditional orientations and attitudes with a more dynamic one.[17] For Arnold Toynbee, secularization is the replacement of religion with technology,[18] and for Wilbert G. Moore, secularization is the substitution of traditional or supernatural solutions of human situations with rational ones.[19] According to Harvey Cox, secularization involves the loosing of the world from religious understanding of itself, and the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols.[20] It symbolizes the liberation of the human mind from religious and metaphysical tutelage.[21]

Islam and Challenges of Secularism

Syed Naquib al- Attas in his book *Islam and Secularism* analyses some components of secularism, which form the essential characteristics of modernity. He mentions that secularism disenchants nature, desacralizes politics, and deconsecrates values. The disenchantment of nature implies the freeing of nature from its religious overtones. This involves the dispelling of God from the natural world, separating it from God, so that man may no longer regard nature as Divine entity, which allows man to act freely upon nature, to make use of it according to his needs and plans.[22] Meanwhile, desacralization of politics implies the abolition of sacral legitimization of political power and authority. This involves political modernization as the transformation of the political order from the traditional and religious to a secular authority free from religious control.[23] Deconsecrating of values, according to al-Attas, means the religious values in cultures and value systems are relative and not fixed. As such, it is open to future change. Thus,

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[17]G. A. Almond and G. A. Powell jr., *Comparative Politics* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1966), pp. 24-25.
[18]Arnold Toynbee, *An Historical Approach to Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 180.
[19]Wilbert G. Moore, *Social Change* (Eaglewood Cliffs: Prentice Halls inc, 1963), pp.79-80.
[20]Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Toward a Post Modern Theology* (New York: Mac Millan Company, 1967), pp.1-2.
[21]Ibid.
[22]Syed Naquib al Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1993), pp. 18-19.
[23]Ibid.

man is free to create the change and immerse himself in the evolutionary process. From the Islamic perspective, this is wrong because Islam has already fixed its value system or morality, which will not change throughout ages. For example, *zinā* (adultery) was forbidden 1400 years ago and will always be forbidden until the Day of Judgment. Whereas in the West, fornication was taboo a few hundred years back when Christianity was strong, but now, the values have changed due to secularism, and it has been accepted as all right. The implication of these interpretations is the disappearance of religious interpretations concerning the purpose of life. More activities of life are secularized, and men involved in any organization determine their roles rationally, which allow small scope for religious predilections. All practical purposes of secular society, therefore, attach little importance to religion. The religious consciousness of individuals in secular society is also greatly diminished, and religion has become extremely limited to a very narrow sphere of life, and it must not intrude in the running of the state.

Secularism implies that Divine guidance, worship of God, and obedience to Him should be confined to the personal life of man and all other affairs in this world should be determined by his own wishes and convenience. In such matters, it is irrelevant to think of what God may have commanded, what His guidance consists of and what the Divine Books may lay down. This attitude developed into a system of life and then became the foundation of modern civilization. The system of life built upon the foundation of this belief seeks to disassociate from the influence of God and religion all aspects of man's life, such as the educational, political, economic, and socio-cultural realms to name a few. The regulation of such matters is devoid of God's guidance and commandments, and instead it is based on man's knowledge and reasoning. The acceptance of a system formulated by man means a preference of the human's limited knowledge and experience over Divine guidance. For the Muslim society, the acceptance of secularism means the rejection of Islam as a way of life and the abandonment of *Sharīʿah*.[24]

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[24]Dr Muhammad Imara divides the secularists into two main categories: the extremists, the majority, who reject religion altogether: and the moderates, the majority, who believe in God,

Since secularism gives much emphasis on worldly matters, it brings the downfall of the religious institution, which leads to make the society rational, materialistic, individualistic, and utilitarian. The goal of the secular society is to achieve happiness in the worldly life only; thus, it does not tie in with the practice of religion. This can lead the society to have chaotic social problems. The following discussion will look into the impact of secularism on some aspects of man's life, particularly from the Islamic point of view.

1. Social and Cultural Aspects

The impact of secularism on social and cultural aspects is seen to be related to the role of media and ICT, like TV and internet, which occupy a central position in contemporary living. Both have adverse affects on Muslims and other faith communities primarily because they are controlled by people who are not sensitive to religion, introducing various values which are completely alien to the teachings of religion. A new generation has been exposed to all kinds of modern Western fashions and life-styles. To them, the religious values and teachings as embedded in their scriptures have simply become irrelevant. Programs shown on TV are highly detrimental to the development of a person's good character as they contain a lot of unethical entertainments, violence, and sex scenes. These will also affect the minds of youngsters. Such programs systematically ignore the religious and spiritual aspects of life.

With the idea of separating religion from worldly activities, secularism gives a very bad impact on the morality of people and turns them to the state of *jāhilliyyah* (ignorance). Under the influence of secularism, people are free to engage in immoral activities, such as homosexuality, adultery, abortion, etc. Secular governments, such as the United States of America have legalized the practice of homosexual marriage in the name of the freedom of expression and choice. It also validates adultery which destroys the institution of marriage and denies the role of the family institution. Adultery becomes a solution for the secularist to avoid responsibilities in married life. The practice of adultery brings many bad implications on society, such as the decline of lineage, the increase of disease, and opens the road to other ethical problems like abortion. The legalization of abortion by certain societies has

have no quarrel with religion, or even observe religious rites and duties but they advocate separation between religion and worldly life. Refer to Muhammad Imara, *Maʿrakat al-Islām wa Uṣūl al-Ḥukm* (Cairo: n. p., 1989), pp. 170-171.

made them like barbarians in attitude, despite their scientific and technological advances. The act of abortion is strictly prohibited in Islam, as it is similar to murder. It is a cruel act that destroys the very feeling of humanity.

The moral values among the youth are greatly being demolished under the influence of secularism. Since it minimizes the importance of religion and excludes God's guidance almost completely in the daily affairs of man's life, people are free to engage in wrongdoing, and thus, immoral acts keep increasing from day to day. I believe all religions provide a beautiful way and code of conduct for their followers to live a peaceful life in this world. It is important to be noted that secularism also affects the cultural values of each society. Under the influence of secularism, people show less concern about their cultural values because they feel that their cultural heritage is outdated and old fashioned. Culture should be protected for the new generation because it is the only element which preserves and imparts an identity, image, and uniqueness of each society and country. In the secularist point of view, people should forget their values, norms, and culture in order to achieve the standard of modern community. This justification is certainly invalid as we can still have a modern and developed country with a strong spirit of its own culture.

The idea of secularism has been the major preoccupation of the group of extreme Muslim secularists who endeavor to prove the supremacy of Western culture and civilization. Their attraction to Western culture and civilization prompted them to regard them as superior to Islam. One such secular Muslim who shares a positive attitude toward Western civilization is the Egyptian writer Ṭāhā Ḥusayn. He writes:

> We must become European in every way. Accepting both its good and its bad, we must follow the path of the Europeans so as to be their equals and partners in civilization, in its good and evil, its sweetness and bitterness, what can be loved or hated, and what can be praised or blamed."[25]

His ideas are especially known through his book entitled *Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfah fī Miṣr*. Providing a good introduction to the liberal secularist ideas

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[25]Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *Mustaqbal al- Thaqāfah fī Miṣr* (Cairo: n.p, 1938), pp. 41-42. The statement is quoted in Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939*, p. 330.

of the time, this book is written to identify Egypt culturally as part of Europe and outline a program of public education accordingly. He argues that Egypt has always been an integral part of Europe as far as its intellectual and cultural life is concerned in all its forms and branches. In one statement, for example, he writes: *Al-Azhar* will fail unless the culture that it propagates throughout the Islamic World is attuned to the personality of the modern Muslim molded nowadays by secular education and modern life."[26]

2. Educational Aspect

Education is one of the most important cornerstones of all human societies. The impact of secularism on educational systems is considered serious and dangerous since it is directly responsible for the intellectual quality of human beings. Under the impact of secularism, the importance of God is eliminated almost completely from public education; thus, it is not essential to the end or purpose of education. The common implication of such elimination is either God has no place of reference in education, or it is strictly a matter of private concern. In either case, it gives rise to a tendency to give religion a low priority in private life; or worse, to engender young people with no sense of responsibility to God. Such secular system of education has failed to inspire the new generation with moral and religious values; thus, led the society to an immoral and irreligious life.

In a secular system of education, knowledge is gained through certain methods like the experimental method, experience, rational thinking, and the scientific method. Scientism is one of the intellectual challenges posed by secularism. Scientism is the belief that science, especially natural science, is the most valuable part of human learning, and the scientific method is the only reliable and valid way of acquiring knowledge.[27] Thus, scientism adopts an absolute perspective on reality, where it assumes that only scientific knowledge is capable of providing an accurate description of reality, and the truth. Scientism rejects other sources of knowledge, such as Divine revelation, religious experience and inner intuition, and it avoids dealing with

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[26]See Sidney Glazer (trans), *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (Washington D. C: American Council of Learned Societies, 1954), p. 136. This book is a translation from the writing of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn entitled *Mustaqbal al- Thaqāfah*, which consisted of two volumes and which was published in Cairo in 1938.

[27]Tom Sorell, *Scientism: Philosophy and the Infatuation with Science* (London and New York: Routledge Publications, 1991), p. 1.

the metaphysical, philosophical, and religious knowledge, as the truths they proclaim cannot be discovered and rationalized by the scientific method. Signs of scientism could be found in writings as early as the seventeenth century. Scientism became the dominant ideology in the eighteenth century with the triumph of the Newtonian description of the universe. This description posed a serious challenge to religion because it professed to describe universal laws that govern the cosmos solely by scientific methods, such as through mathematical principles. The religious claims that the heavenly bodies obeyed the Will of God became unpopular with the rise of the Newtonian description of the universe. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, science was far more popular than religion. Writings on scientism became far more prevalent after the nineteenth century with the rise of scientific positivism, an ideology that was originated by Auguste Comte (1798-1875).[28] Comte saw the scientific method as an absolute method of acquiring knowledge and truth, and worthy of replacing the theological and metaphysical approaches. In this sense, Comte attempted to eliminate transcendent reality from the human consciousness in his declaration that all questions that cannot be answered by the sciences of the phenomena as illegitimate. Scientism clearly contributed to the loss of transcendental consciousness, and its development undermined the religious foundations of faith. The religious metaphysical elements that pointed toward the existence of a transcendent reality could not be reconciled with the immanent methods of scientism.

Another secular ideology emerging from the principle of secularism is scientific materialism. Scientific materialism does not differ much, in practice, from the principles of scientism. It is the belief that only objects and phenomena which can be observed and measured through scientific methods are real. Thus, scientific materialism accepts only one reality; that is the physical, empirical, and material universe. It sees all the claims of the religious and spiritual traditions of humanity throughout the ages as false.

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[28]Comte was born in Montpellier, France. Although his family were ardent Catholics, he at the age of fourteen, announced that he had ceased believing in God. For an interesting biography of Auguste Comte, refer to Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Scientific materialism has considerable effects on the way a person would shape his life. For example, a believer in scientific materialism would believe and act only on that which is in line with scientific conclusions.

In its early stage, one of the materialistic philosophies that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century from this belief was Charles Darwin's (1809- 1882) theory of Evolution.[29] The publication of Darwin's works on evolution demonstrated the possibility that living organisms could be accounted for on a material basis without any need to refer to a supernatural source and creator. For Darwin, man is a part and product of the natural world.[30] In his Theory of Evolution, he claims that all living things have evolved by natural processes from pre-existing forms. The appearance of various species and the historical development of the universe are solely the result of a gradual evolution from within the space-temporal material matrix, which existed at the origin of the physical cosmos without the intrusion of any transcendental causes.[31] This displaces the traditional belief that species are designed by a wise and benevolent God.

The conception of knowledge in secular education has lost its true purpose by being unjustly conceived. Its formulation of vision and reality is

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[29]The word evolution literally means the unfolding or unrolling of potential. However, since the appearance of Charles Darwin's theory in the nineteenth century, it has been referred to the hypothetical process by which all forms of life are assumed to have arisen from inorganic matter. See Micheal Nequs, "Reactions to the Theory of Evolution" in Osman Bakar (editor), *Critique of Evolutionary Theory: A Collection of Essays* (Kuala Lumpur: The Islamic Academy of Science, 1987), p. 69.

[30]The idea of evolution is clearly opposed to the Qur'ān which states clearly that the world and all the species were created by Allah, and that the origin of man is not some prehistoric animal, but the Divinely created primordial man who in the Islamic tradition is called Adam. The idea of evolution destroys the spiritual meaning and sense of sacredness of Allah's creation. It also destroys the awareness of the continuous presence of Allah as the Creator and Sustainer of living forms as stated in the Qur'ān *al-Ḥayy* (living) and *al-Muḥyi* (the Giver of life). In addition, the theory alienates science from religion and creates a world in which one could go about studying the wonders of creation without having a sense of wonder in a religious sense.

[31]The original exposition of the theory of evolution can be found in Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (London: John Murray, 1959). The new edition about the theory is well presented by G.G Simpson, *The Major Features of Evolution* (New York: Colombia University Press, 1955), and *The Meaning of Evolution: A Study of the History of Life and its Significance for Man* (New Heavan: Yale University Press, 1966). See also Edward Craig (editor), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3, p. 795.

not based on revealed and religious belief, but rather upon cultural tradition reinforced by strictly philosophical premises based upon speculations.[32] As such, this knowledge projects that secular life, centered upon man and his intellectual capacity, is alone able to unravel the mysteries of his environment and existence. Consequently, man's life will accordingly be guided by such limited knowledge as acquired by his intellectual faculties.

In secularism, worldly sciences are exploited to produce a mechanistic and materialistic human being without the aspects of humanity and spirituality. However, from the religious point of view, these sciences should be used to achieve a firm knowledge of God and to strive for spiritual perfection. The science of cosmology, for instance, maybe viewed as a sort of contemplation or remembrance of God.[33] Furthermore, the objective of seeking knowledge in a secular education is simply to cultivate certain abilities of men, which will enable them to develop their country as well as to improve their standard of living. This is basically a worldly purpose alone, and is devoid of any spiritual element. As such, one can achieve success in his life, and at the same time, be an alcoholic, adulterer and atheist; and may commit any immoral act without consequence. Meanwhile, religious education gives emphasis on the teaching of *adab* or virtue because human action is accountable on the Day of Judgment. From an Islamic perspective, seeking knowledge is considered as an act of *ʿibādah* (religious ritual) and should be done for the sake of getting blessings from God. It should also be gained and used for a better life in this world as well as in the hereafter. That is why knowledge in Islam has been classified into two kinds. The first kind is acquired knowledge, which includes all natural and social sciences, such as physics, chemistry, biology, astronomy, psychology, politics, economics, etc. The second kind of knowledge is revealed knowledge (God-given knowledge) and religious sciences, which include knowledge about belief, Divine injunctions, proper conduct, etc. Revealed knowledge should be the utmost priority for any individual in the quest of knowledge since it would serve as the foundation or basis for one's thoughts or worldview.

The secular system of education only concentrates on acquired knowledge and concerns this world alone. The result is that man is no longer

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[32]Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam: The Islamic Concept of Religion and the Foundations of Ethics and Morality* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1992), p. 46.

[33]Islam, in fact, has made scientific inquiry a *Sharīʿah* obligation. The antagonism between religion and science is a Catholic-European phenomenon.

concerned about who he is, where he comes from, what is the purpose of his existence, who is his God and so on. Consequently, this system produces doctors, engineers, architects, economists, scientists, and politicians who lack religious foundation. How could we then expect these people to govern and administer the world in accordance with God's will?

In Muslim countries, the significance of religious education has diminished with the establishment of secular schools. One of the main characteristics of a Muslim secular outlook of education is its influence from modern Western rationalism and scientific developments. There is no doubt that Islam, in general, is compatible with reason and science, but some Muslim modernists have gone further by over emphasizing on the role of reason and science in Islam. For example, a scholar of the Indian subcontinent, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898) laid down what he termed the criterion of 'Conformity to Nature'[34] to judge the contents of systems of belief and concluded that Islam justified itself on this principle.[35] Being influenced strongly by nineteenth century Western rationalism and natural philosophy, he argued that Islam was the religion of reason and nature. The Qur'ān must be interpreted in accordance with reason and nature, and the legal and moral code must be based on nature. Nature has been declared as a close-knit system of causes and effects, which allow no supernatural intervention. In this regard, Sayyid Ahmad Khan implies that there is nothing which transcended the world of nature, and that man is the judge of all things.[36] Clearly, he was influenced by a kind of deism,[37] which was fashionable among the nineteenth century scientific circles of the West.

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[34]This idea began to be introduced by him after his visit to England in 1869-70, whereby he applied the term '*nachariyya*' to Islam (Some said the term '*nachariyya*' is derived from the English word nature).

[35]Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, p. 218.

[36]Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī saw it as a new expression of a way of thought which had endangered true religion. For Afghānī, Ahmad Khan seemed to be too materialistic. He reflected it in his largest work, *al Radd 'ala' al-Dahriyyīn* (the Refutation of the Materialists). Those whom he attacked under the name of 'materialists' included all from Democritus to Darwin with their equivalents in Islam, who gave an explanation of the world not involving the existence of a transcendent God. Al-Afghānī seemed to complain the influence of nineteenth century Western Materialism on Sayyid Ahmad Khan. He said, "Materialists like Sayyid Ahmad Khan are even worst than the materialists in Europe for those in Western countries who abandon their religion still retain their patriotism and do not lack zeal to defend their fatherland, while Sayyid Ahmad Khan and his friends represent foreign despotism as acceptable." See J. M. S. Baljon, *The Reforms and Religious Ideas of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), pp. 117-119.

[37]Deism is naturalistic belief in the existence of a Supreme Being. It conceives of God as totally apart from the universe; God presumably created a well-ordered universe endowed

In order to assert the autonomy of nature and natural laws, Sayyid Ahmad Khan not only denied the miracles, angels, and jinn, but also the bodily resurrection, the Day of Judgment, Heaven and Hell, all of which, he insisted, must be rejected on principle. His secular view was also observable on the socio-cultural and political domain. In this sphere, he undertook the reformation of Muslim society in India by publishing a journal, *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq*, in which he discussed the prevailing customs and social habits of the Muslims from a rationalistic and utilitarian viewpoint. In intellectual terms, he attempted to integrate Western and Islamic thought because he believed that a Muslim's adjustment to the modern intellectual realities was absolutely essential. Therefore, he introduced among Muslims the Western educational system in order to transform their mentality and to enable them to enter government services. His Aligarh University, modeled on Cambridge University, aimed at the liberation of ideas and the inculcation of a scientific worldview and a pragmatic approach to politics. It gave a new direction to Muslims, politically and culturally. His visit to England was intended to study the culture and institutions of Europe for the progress and betterment of India.[38] It, however, strongly influenced him.

From the nineteenth century onward, the Muslim world experienced a dual system of education namely, religious and modern secular education. Religious education was normally available and aimed specifically for religious purposes; for example, learning Arabic and memorizing the Qur'ān. The syllabus of modern knowledge was almost completely neglected. Meanwhile, modern secular education only emphasized modern knowledge following the Western educational philosophy with no emphasis on religion. This new kind of education represented an important factor in the introduction of secularism.[39] The implication of a dual system of education in Muslim societies resulted in a division of schools of thought into two major categories: the traditionalists and the secular-liberal intellectuals. The traditionalists are the product of the traditional system of education, well versed with traditional sciences, loyal and committed to their religion and traditions, but completely ignorant of modern knowledge. Meanwhile, the secular liberal intellectuals are the product of a secular system of education,

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with immutable laws, which has thereafter operated without further Divine intervention. See *Encyclopedia Americana*, vol. 8, p. 644.

[38]Aslam Siddiqi, *Modernization Menaces Muslims* (Lahore: Shaikh Muhammad Ashraf, 1981), p. 47.

[39]See Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), p. 13.

well-acquainted with modern philosophical thoughts and ideas, exposed to modern culture and life-styles, but completely ignorant of their own religious traditions. Between the traditionalists and secular-liberal intellectuals, there was a mediating group of Muslim modernists who made efforts to remove a dual system of education in the Muslim world. In their educational reform, they were neither content with the traditional religious education because it lacked the modern subjects, nor with the modern education because it lacked the religious subjects, which degenerated moral standards among students. Therefore, they proposed to combine both types of education, so that the Muslim intellectuals would be able to trace the Western ideas and to participate in the development of their country and society as well as to maintain their religious beliefs and practices.

3. Political Aspect

In political terms, secularism is defined as a separation of religion from state. It means religion should not interfere with or be integrated into the public affairs of a society. This can refer to reducing ties between a government and a state religion, replacing laws based on scripture with civil laws.[40] Secularists would prefer that politicians make decisions based on secular reasons rather than religious ones. They deceive the people with democratic slogans like "personal freedom," "people governing people." Other secular slogans like "no religion in politics and no politics in religion," and "religion is for God and the state is for the people" portray the rigidity of Islam. They view Islam as a religion to be practiced in ritual worships only and deny it as a code of life.

Let us see the major examples of Muslim secular response to political situations that occurred in the Ottoman Empire and Egypt. The modernization program in both countries began with a military structure, whereby Muslim rulers like the Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II (1808-1839) and Muhammad Ali (1805-1849) in Egypt tried to emulate the West's modern armies. They created military training schools staffed by Europeans. Military modernization was accompanied by government attempts to modernize their central administration, law, education, and economy.[41] It was Muhammad 'Ali who pursued science and modernization strongly without any particular regard to religion.[42] He founded schools on the European patterns where

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[40]Refer to Dr. Yusuf al-Qardhawi, *How the Imported Solutions Disastrously Affected our Ummah?*

[41]Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*, p. 41.

[42]H.A.R Gibb, S.J. Show and W. J Polk (editors), *Studies on the Civilization of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), p. 247.

European sciences were taught, at first by European professors whom he had specifically invited, and later by Egyptians trained in the West.[43]

The program of modernization was developed and systematized during the later half of the nineteenth century through an ambitious series of reforms known collectively as *tanẓīmāt*. During this period, Islamic institutions were challenged by the support of modern elements; for example, land reforms, new legal codes and courts to adjudicate civil, commercial, and penal affairs. Traditional institutions of the Islamic state moved to a gradual process of secularization; that was the separation of religion from the institutions and functions of the state. As a result, the ideology, law and institutions of the state were no longer Islamically legitimate, but were indebted to imported models from the West. Instead of turning to their Islamic past and to the *ʿulamā'* for advice, the secularists looked to the West. With the elements of secularism in all spheres of life, Muslims had tended to restrict Islam to the personal and moral sphere of life. Islam, for them, was merely a private religion, and was not directly involved in social and political life. They turned to the West to rejuvenate the socio-political areas of life. The secularist standpoint in politics was shared by Ṭāhā Ḥusayn in his political approach to his country. For instance, he said: "We seek no guidance in our government from the Caliphate. Instead we have set up national, secular courts and enacted laws in conformity to Western rather than Islamic codes."[44]

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[43]At the intellectual level, the defense and justifications of modern sciences were mainly provided by Christian Arab thinkers. Their ideas were channeled through some periodicals, such as, *al- Hilal* and *al- Muqtataf*. For example, Darwinism was introduced into the ʿArab world by Shibli Sumayyil (1860-1916) who, in his numerous articles dealt with the social and philosophical meanings of Darwin's scientific discoveries. In 1910, he published a book on Darwin's theory of evolution entitled *The Philosophy of Evolution and Progress*. In his view, only knowledge attainable and verifiable through the methods of physical sciences can truly be called knowledge. Thus, for him, ultimate validity consisted in scientific (verifiable) validity. Shumayyil also made a clear distinction between science (natural or physical sciences) and what he called the human sciences (*al-ʿulūm al bashariyya*). He subordinated the human sciences to the physical sciences as he claimed natural science is the source of all the sciences. It constitutes the grounding of the human sciences; they must precede everything else. See Charles D. Smith, *Islam and the Search for Social Order in Modern Egypt: A Biography of Muhammad Husayn Haikal* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1083), pp. 97-98.

[44]Quoted in Nadav Sadran, *Egypt in Search of a Political Community* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 157. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn also believed that the political system of early Islam was not prescribed by God through His Revelation to the Prophet; thus, had no Divine sanction behind it. Therefore, he saw it as not significant. See Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, *al- Fitnah al- Kubra* (Cairo: n.p, 1962), pp. 26-27.

The secular view in politics was also shared by 'Alī 'Abd al- Rāziq (1888-1966) in his book *Al- Islām wa Uṣūl al-Ḥukm* (Islam and the Principles of Government), which argued that the Prophet (ﷺ) had not established a formal system of government and that no such system was defined in the Qur'ān and *Sunnah*. He seemed to challenge that the sources of authority in Islam are no longer valid and that democratic principles are superior to the Islamic ones. According to him, the caliphate was not an obligatory or a necessary institution of Islam. Far from being a source of strength, he believed the historical Caliphate was a source of weakness and it gave rise to many evils. He said:

> We have no need for the Caliphate, neither in the affairs of our religious life, nor in those of our civil life because the Caliphate has always been, and continues to be, a misfortune to Islam and the Muslims and the source of evil and corruption.[45]

He also rejected the theory that the Prophet was a ruler,[46] and claimed that the Prophet had no coercive authority; he was only a preacher.[47] The denial of the role of the Prophet (ﷺ) as a ruler and the unnecessary institution of caliphate after him was an attempt to change the very essence of Islam. In his controversial work, 'Abd al-Rāziq also asserted that Islam was a religion and not a state, a message not a government, a spiritual edifies and not a political institution; this led to his defrocking by the Azharite *'ulamā'*.

4. Moral Aspect

Secularism advocates that morality should be separated from religion. Under the secular system of morality, religion should have no control over the code of behavior. There is no need to refer to any guidance of religion in the sphere of social morality. The secular Western philosophers have developed some of the basic ethical questions which are completely free from

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[45]'Alī 'Abd al-Raziq, *Al-Islām wa Uṣūl al- Ḥukm* (Cairo: n.p, 1925), p.38. The statement quoted in Charles C. Adam, *Islam and Modernism in Egypt: A Study of the Modern Reform Movement Inaugurated by Muhammad 'Abduh*, p. 263.

[46]Refer to Mazharuddin Siddiqi, *Modern Reformist Thought in the Muslim World* (Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1982), p. 157.

[47]The claim that the Prophet possessed no coercive authority sounds impossible. The Qur'ān prescribed punishments for many crimes, such as theft and adultery. How could these punishments have been administered if the Prophet had not the necessary authority to punish the criminals? It is also clear that the Prophet entered into treaties, such as the treaty of Hudaybiyyah with the non-believers of Makkah. If he had been merely a preacher, how could he have made these treaties?

the grip of religion. **The first question** is about the sources of the knowledge of good and evil. They have no agreed answer to it; rather, they turn themselves to diverse sources like human experience, intuition, reason, etc. So, people are confronted with a confused situation. The result is that the good of one individual or group is in conflict with the good of other individuals and groups. From a religious perspective, the real knowledge of good and evil is provided by Divine guidance. It is the primary source, while all others are considered secondary sources. For example, anything which Divine guidance states to be good would receive confirmation from human experience. The principles of justice, truthfulness, honesty, and equality are all good principles mentioned by Divine revelations and have proven to be good in the application of human experience.

The **second question** is about the sanction behind the moral law. In response to this question, some said the moral law does not need any external force; it is self-enforcing. Others claim that political power is the real sanction behind the moral law, and this group rests all these powers and functions to the state. Yet another group assigns the society to be responsible for it. Again all of these replies have created confusion in the life of humanity. In fact, we may argue that both the state and the society are not perfect and might be in error. For instance, the legalization of acts of homosexuality by the Western society is obviously wrong and contradicts human nature. From a religious point of view, the real sanction behind the moral law should lie in our strong faith and belief in God.

The **third question** is about the motive of moral conduct. It was again responded to with different answers by different schools of thought. Some said the motive is to get reward from a society in the form of esteem and to avoid punishment in the form of denunciation. Others said the motive is for the purpose of self-perfection and pleasure. Those sorts of questions clearly show that people face moral confusion. From a religious point of view, the feeling of ultimate purpose and fulfillment of convictions in seeking the pleasure of God and fearing His punishment in the hereafter should be the real motive of moral conduct.

As a result of this removal of God's guidance, people are faced with the crisis of an unstable system of morality with no standard of judgment. From the religious point of view, the system of morality cannot be formulated by man due to his limitations and weaknesses, like prejudice, greed, selfish desires, etc. Man's knowledge and experience are limited. Thus, when he tries to construct his own system of morality, it will never be perfect. It will need constant changing, updating, and modifications. The code of conduct

which is provided by God through His Divine guidance, however, will always be perfect as God knows and has provided the best way for mankind.

Conclusion

Islam is not compatible with the idea of secularism despite the numerous attempts to reconcile them. We cannot compromise with secular ways and institutions as it will lead to a dilution of Islam in all fields of activity. Muslims should have a full consciousness of their traditions, values, and beliefs in order to free themselves from the dangerous infiltration of secular and alien influences. They do not need to look for secularism as inspiration for progress and development since Islam itself endorses progress and development within certain limits. Islam also enjoins the use of reason. However, it is considered secondary to Divine guidance, unlike secularism, which gives no importance to Divine guidance; instead it emphasizes on human reason and self-interest as supreme values.

Secularism is completely unfit for Muslim life. It denounces the objective of Islam that is to purify the soul as well as to reform society. In fact, the Qur'ān provides many verses that emphasize the relationship of religion with state and society. Unlike Christianity which has defined for the church a certain domain, that of the salvation of the soul, Islam legislates matters of state and social relations. It leaves human reason and experience to lay down specific institutions, theories, and laws for the Islamic state within its determined philosophy, ideals, criteria, and objectives. Although the Qur'ān does not directly ordain a state for Muslims and does not mention in detail a constitution for an Islamic state, that does not mean that there is no relationship between religion and state. The Qur'ān prescribes certain religious duties, which cannot be fulfilled without the establishment of an Islamic state, such as, levying the *zakāh*, applying the *ḥudūd*, regulating the judicial system, etc. The establishment of state is not considered as an essential element of religion (*aṣl*); rather, it is a civil obligation required by religion for the well being of mankind in this life. It is important to note that the Islamic state is simultaneously civil and Islamic, and not secular in nature.

In no way can Islam be separated from state, or the spiritual affairs from the worldly affairs. Hence, it is different from Christianity, which is a purely spiritual religion that enjoins rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's, and unto God what is God's. Islam is both faith and law, a *Sharī'ah* that envisages a religio-political community governed by God's rules. Islam is

composed of two essential components: the creed or doctrine (*ʿaqīdah*), and a system of rules and regulation founded on this doctrine (*Sharīʿah*). The Islamic *ʿaqīdah* provides current and comprehensive answers to the fundamental questions regarding human existence and that of the universe; while the Islamic *Sharīʿah* provides a comprehensive law governing the affairs of human beings. Therefore, secularism is incompatible with the Islamic worldview since it separates between the two realms: the spiritual and the mundane. Secularism is only compatible with the Western concept of God, which maintains that after God had created the world, He left it to look after itself. This concept is inherited from Greek philosophy especially that of Aristotle who argued that God neither controls nor knows anything about this world. He leaves people to look after their own affairs. From the Muslim perspective, we believe that Allah is the Creator of the universe, the Owner and Controller of it; thus, His jurisdiction should not be confined to personal matters only. If we do not need God's guidance in society, state, politics, economy, culture and other aspects of life, then why do we need Him in our personal matters?