JTI

A Bi-Quarterly Journal of

Theosophia Islamica

Vol. 4, No. 1, 2024 Issue 7

7

Islamic Sciences and Culture Academy

In The Name of God

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Bi-quarterly Journal of
Theosophia Islamica
EISSN: 2783-3240
Vol. 4 ● No. 1 ● 2024 ● Issue 7

How Is Religious Intellectualism Understood in Iran?

Jalal Peykani[1]

Received: 2025/05/01 Accepted: 2025/06/04

Abstract

Religious intellectualism is a term used to refer to a group of influential thinkers in contemporary Iran. Given the diversity and dispersion of their thoughts, as well as the way they combine local and regional elements with certain global aspects, it is essential to present a general and relatively comprehensive picture of this approach. However, the eclectic nature of these thinkers makes this task challenging. This article, written primarily with the aim of introducing religious intellectualism to a non-Iranian audience, first provides a definition, general characteristics, and prominent figures in this field (Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, and Mostafa Malekian). It then outlines the most important issues they address and their specific approaches to those issues (such as capital punishment, human rights, abortion, and homosexuality). The challenges arising from the confrontation between these ideas and traditional ones are also briefly discussed.

Keywords

Religious intellectualism, Abdolkarim Soroush, Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, Mostafa Malekian, contemporary Iran.

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* Peykani, J. (2024). How is Religious Intellectualism Understood in Iran? *Theosophia Islamica*, *4*(7), pp. 7-42. https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.64801.1071

Introduction

The concept of "intellectualism" is a familiar notion in Western culture. Although there is no precise definition of the term, the historical role of intellectuals in the intellectual, social, and political transformations of the West has been significant. Over the past century, this form of intellectualism also took root in many non-Western countries, where a class known as "intellectuals" likewise emerged. In these contexts as well, intellectuals have played an important socio-political role.

The first intellectual thoughts were introduced to Iran around the time of the Constitutional Movement.[1] The intermediaries for the transmission of these ideas included some Qajar princes,[2] merchants, students who had studied abroad, and Western military advisors. Intellectualism had a secular nature, as its representatives often translated Western ideas into Persian, primarily acting as intermediaries. However, almost simultaneously with the emergence of secular intellectualism in Iran, a subcurrent also formed that took a relatively sympathetic approach to religion and made it the subject of intellectual reflection. Perhaps Talibov Tabrizi and Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Asadābādī (or al-Afghānī) (1838-1897) can be regarded as the

1. The Constitutional Movement, also known as the Constitutionalist Movement, Constitutional Revolution (*Mashrūṭa*), refers to a series of efforts and events that culminated in the signing of the Constitutional Decree by Mozaffar al-Din Shah Qajar on August 5, 1906, aiming to transform the autocratic monarchy into a constitutional government. The movement continued through the reign of Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar, ultimately leading to the establishment of the National Consultative Assembly (Majlis) and the ratification of Iran's first constitution. The movement persisted for several years after the decree, seeking to solidify the rule of law and resolve related challenges.
2. The Qajar dynasty ruled Iran from 1789 until 1925.

main representatives of this current during the Constitutional period. This movement continued at a slow pace. During the second Pahlavi period, Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati accelerated its development, though their attention to religion and their critical stance toward the West marked a significant departure from the previous generations. However, in the second and third decades following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, this movement reached its peak, becoming a major player in Iran's intellectual, social, and political arenas. In the past three decades, this current has been referred to as Religious Intellectualism or Religious Rethinking in Iran.

The first part of this article aims to clarify what is known in Iran as religious intellectualism: how it differs from pure or secular intellectualism, the path it has taken, the impacts it has had, and its current state. It seems possible, through this approach, to demonstrate that religious intellectualism is a category quite distinct from pure or secular intellectualism, and that it has played a more prominent role in Iran than its secular counterpart. This study will focus on religious intellectuals of the past three decades. The second part will concentrate on the engagement of religious intellectuals with the issue of human rights, examining how they deal with concrete and practical challenges in the real world and whether they have, in fact, succeeded in doing so.

1. The Debate over the Definition and Nature of Religious Intellectualism and Its Boundary with Secular Intellectualism

In Western texts, intellectualism is typically used without any qualifier, and adding the adjective "secular" to it is considered redundant or meaningless, since intellectualism is, by its very nature, secular. For those unfamiliar with the intellectual climate of Iran, the expression "secular intellectual" may sound unfamiliar or unnecessary.

The addition of the qualifier "secular" implies the existence of another type of intellectual—namely, the religious intellectual. The latter term is widely used in Iran's intellectual discourse. This group of thinkers tends to enjoy greater popularity among the general public than secular intellectuals, engages in extensive intellectual activity, and is active in publishing, giving lectures, and offering public courses.

Although the terms "religious intellectual" or "religious intellectualism" are frequently used in Iranian texts and intellectual discourse, like many broad labels and general terms, they have been coined more for the sake of convenience in discussion. It is difficult to arrive at a properly inclusive and exclusive definition of the term. Nevertheless, in order to refer to phenomena and to classify them, we inevitably rely on such general terms—religious intellectualism being one of them. Whatever definition is offered, some of those who fall under this label are likely to find it flawed or inadequate. On the other hand, since religious intellectualism largely emerged in response to socio-political necessities, the simplest way to grasp its nature is to look at its concrete instances. In simpler terms: religious intellectualism is what, in practice, is called religious intellectualism.[1] In this respect, religious intellectualism in Iran finds itself positioned between two rival camps: secular intellectualism and traditional clericalism. This in-between status further complicates its definition. Moreover, religious intellectualism encompasses a wide range of individuals with relatively diverse intellectual orientations—from seminary-trained scholars to university academics, from those who have studied in the West to those who have not, from specialists in the humanities to experts in technical and natural sciences. In fact, discussions around

1. This type of definition has a precedent in philosophy. For example, Nigel Warburton, in *Philosophy: The Basics*, proposes defining philosophy as whatever is actually called philosophy in practice.

this topic are among the key interests of Iran's reading public. One may arrive at a workable definition of religious intellectualism by identifying its main characteristics. The primary features of religious intellectualism in Iran are as follows:

Connection and attachment to religion. Religious intellectuals are often personally devout. Historically, most of them also originate from the religious class of society. Many were formerly traditional clerics. At the very least, they believe in the essence of religion. Of course, what exactly constitutes the essence of religion is itself a complex and contested issue among religious intellectuals.

Reformism. Religious intellectuals consider the traditional understanding of religion to be flawed for two reasons. First, it is, in some respects, incompatible with modern rationality and can hinder development and modernization. Second, contemporary individuals can only be kept religiously committed if a new, modern interpretation of religion is offered. Some religious intellectuals have even used the expression "Islamic Protestantism."

Preventing alienation from religion. Many people, when they see religion as conflicting with modern rationality and development, naturally prefer to abandon religion rather than give up development and modernization. Therefore, in order to prevent people from turning away from religion, changes must be introduced within religion itself.

The experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran represents the most prominent example and realization of a religious government in the contemporary era. The dominant views of contemporary Iranian religious intellectuals are largely a critical reaction to this experience. As a result, one of the points of consensus among religious intellectuals is doubt regarding the possibility and effectiveness of religious governance. This is why religious intellectual

discourse in Iran has gained momentum especially in the second and third decades following the Islamic Revolution. Since religious intellectualism critiques traditional religiosity and, consequently, religious government, it faces opposition from the state, and thus most religious intellectuals find themselves among the government's critics.

Humanities. Religious intellectualism takes a serious interest in contemporary Western humanities, particularly philosophy and subjects such as hermeneutics. In fact, much of its theoretical content is derived from this field. From this perspective, religious intellectualism after the revolution is deeper and more enriched than the religious intellectualism before the revolution.

Innovation. Religious intellectualism is not merely an imitative and descriptive movement that confines itself to reproducing the ideas of Western philosophers and thinkers. Often, they have presented local versions that are adapted to the cultural context of contemporary Iran. Therefore, religious intellectuals, unlike some prevalent movements in the Islamic world that proclaim the so-called "return to oneself and to one's own civilization," do not simply limit themselves to citing the virtues and values of the past and their own culture. Instead, they have produced original writing and introduced new theories. Religious intellectuals combine both critique and reconstruction, meaning they critique the present state and also offer alternatives. They critique both the Western tradition and the indigenous Islamic tradition. The intensity of the critique of both tradition and the West varies among Iranian religious intellectuals. However, in general, critique of both tradition and the West, followed by the reinterpretation of religion in light of the present age, is a common thread among them.

Fluidity and intellectual transformation. Iranian religious intellectuals are the most prominent examples of continuous intellectual transformation. Almost all of them have undergone multiple phases of

thought. Most have emerged from a traditional religiosity or clerical background and gradually moved closer to humanistic and secular approaches. Some have strayed so far from religion in its conventional sense that they can neither be considered religious nor their thought regarded as an example of religious intellectualism.

Based on this, religious intellectualism can be defined as follows: It is an influential movement in contemporary Iran that, on the one hand, seeks to preserve the foundations and essence of religion in the modern world, while on the other hand, does not view Western culture and civilization as free from flaws and shortcomings. Thus, it takes a reformist perspective on both, a perspective whose theoretical content is largely derived from Western humanities and leads to a new interpretation of religion.

If we consider the measure of success for a movement to be its level of effectiveness, then religious intellectualism has been a successful movement so far. The reason for the success of religious intellectualism in Iran is that Iranian society is still a religious society. As a result, the religious language is more appealing to its audience. However, the traditional clergy also uses religious language, so why has religious intellectualism been more successful than the traditional clergy in Iran? The answer is that the religious language of religious intellectuals is not traditional; rather, it is more in tune with the spirit of the age (not in the Hegelian sense, but more in terms of common sense) and the worldview of contemporary Iranians, especially the middle class (Malekian, 2007 b, p. 286). However, this success has been in decline in recent years. On one hand, religious intellectualism has stagnated, and on the other hand, Iranian intellectual society has lost the enthusiasm it once had for religious intellectualism.

However, there are many debates and disagreements on this matter. For example, some of these figures are reluctant to accept the

label "religious intellectual." For instance, Malekian, at certain times, implicitly preferred that his work be referred to as religious rethinking rather than religious intellectualism. In his view, religious intellectualism seems to be a contradictory and paradoxical concept, whereas religious rethinking is not paradoxical or contradictory (Malekian, 2002, p. 10). However, he has now moved beyond this stage of thought, and it would be difficult to call him a religious rethinker today. Furthermore, many religious intellectuals do not accept the paradoxical nature of the concept of religious intellectualism. Some scholars argue that intellectualism in Iran was religious from the very beginning (Aghajari, 2000). However, this judgment seems rather imprecise. On the other hand, some go even further, asserting that neither rethinking nor intellectualism can be possible within the religious domain. Therefore, there are numerous disputes regarding the nature, legitimacy, meaning, and compatibility of religious intellectualism.

Religious intellectualism must be understood within a broader context—one that spans more than a century. Due to its rational theological aspects, which closely align with the Mu'tazilite school of thought, Shia Islam has cultivated a wide and profound range of theoretical discourse. These discussions, transmitted through religious scholars, gradually permeated segments of the traditional and religious society. The advent of modernity in Iran brought with it serious theoretical challenges. Unlike many traditions, such as the Japanese tradition, where the foundational principles of modernity did not clash significantly with tradition, the situation in Iran was markedly different. In many contexts, Western civilization entered without provoking major theoretical debates, focusing primarily on modernization—meaning the tangible manifestations of modern Western civilization, such as bureaucratic institutions and technological tools. In contrast, in Iran, the theoretical foundations of modernity—issues such as the relationship

between religion and state, individualism, freedom, legal systems, and so on—became topics of intense debate from the very beginning. Consequently, the idea gradually took shape that an indigenous model of development and governance could be formulated based on local traditions, as an alternative to the version prescribed by modernity. Efforts then concentrated on articulating this indigenous model. The Islamic Revolution of Iran was the practical, localized embodiment of this idea. However, nearly a decade after the revolution, critiques emerged from within—voiced by individuals who had themselves played a role in shaping this indigenous model. With a critical and revisionist perspective, they began to reassess it. It was at this juncture that religious intellectualism was born.

2. Prominent Religious Intellectuals in Today's Iran

The group of religious intellectuals who have shaped a significant part of the intellectual landscape in contemporary Iran emerged in the post-Islamic Revolution period. Their thought differs in many ways from that of earlier intellectuals. In this section, we focus on this group of religious intellectuals. A few years after the Islamic Revolution of Iran, a new generation of religious intellectuals came to the fore—one that differs from the pre-revolutionary generation in two significant ways. First, they are familiar with concepts from the humanities as well as modern and contemporary philosophy. Second, they have witnessed the experience of a religious government firsthand and, based on their observation and analysis of its performance and outcomes, approach religion from an intellectualist perspective. The most prominent post-revolutionary religious intellectuals—whose ideas have profoundly influenced Iran's intellectual, social, and political space over the past two to three decades—are as follows:

2.1. Abdolkarim Soroush

After Ali Shariati, the most influential religious intellectual in contemporary Iran is Abdolkarim Soroush (born 1945). Among post-revolutionary religious intellectuals, his influence and renown are unparalleled. One of the traits he shares with Shariati is a fluent and eloquent command of language, delivering impactful speeches. However, unlike Shariati's emotionally charged oratory, Soroush speaks in a calm tone, with steady rhythm, well-structured sentences, and poetic flourishes that captivate his audience. His ideas played a significant role in shaping part of the contemporary political landscape of Iran. Soroush was also the leading figure behind *Kiyan* magazine, the most important intellectual and philosophical publication in the history of religious intellectualism in Iran. Nearly all individuals who are now considered key figures in Iran's religious intellectual movement began as relatively unknown writers contributing articles to this magazine. *Kiyan*'s peak period of activity was from 1991 to 1999.

Given the vast number of lectures, articles, and books produced by Soroush, it is difficult to offer a brief and comprehensive picture of his thought, especially considering the significant evolution it has undergone over time. Nonetheless, we attempt here to outline the general framework of his intellectual approach. Soroush's thinking is not purely philosophical; rather, he embodies a blend of theologian, philosopher, and poet. His main non-Iranian intellectual influences include: Empiricist and analytic philosophy, particularly the work of Karl Popper; Gadamerian hermeneutics; and Arab religious intellectuals, especially Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. Despite these influences, Soroush regards his primary field as modern theology. Drawing from the Islamic tradition, he aligns himself with the Mu'tazilite school, frequently speaking in praise of its virtues (Soroush, 2002). In general, religious intellectualism falls within the broader category of rational

theology, a description that largely applies even to Western religious intellectuals.

Two major theories form the core of Soroush's intellectual framework. The first is the Theory of the Expansion and Contraction of Religious Law, which he introduced in the 1990s, and the second is a more recent work published in 2014, presented in a two-part article titled "Mohammad (PBUH), the Narrator of the Prophetic Dream." The Theory of the Expansion and Contraction of Religious Law contains within it several subsidiary ideas and sub-theories. In fact, it might be more accurate to describe it as a project rather than a single theory. Soroush initially published this theory as a series of essays in *Kiyan* magazine. These essays were later compiled into a book of the same name, with the subtitle *The Evolution of Religious Knowledge*. Today, this book is considered one of the most influential works published in Iran over the past few decades. In total, Soroush has authored around 200 articles, books, and essays. Among his other important works is the book *Straight Paths* (*Ṣirāṭ-hāyi mustaqīm*).

Alongside the many positive reactions to it, few theories have been subject to such extensive criticism. Interestingly, Mustafa Malkiyan, another prominent religious intellectual, has presented a critical analysis of this theory, questioning its logical coherence and philosophical rigor. Key figures from the clergy and traditional religious circles have also responded by writing books and articles that argue against it. These reactions have greatly contributed to the dynamism of Iran's intellectual and philosophical landscape.

This theory, as a standard theory, has three main components: description, explanation, and recommendation. In the description stage, it presents the evolution and transformation of religious knowledge as a reality that has existed throughout history, providing numerous pieces of evidence for it. In the explanation stage, it outlines the

causes of this transformation and, based on his knowledge in the field of philosophy of science and the relationship between science and religion, explains the reasons and causes for this change. Finally, in the third stage, it recommends that we accept this truth and, by using natural sciences and empirical knowledge, further refine and transform our religious knowledge (Nasri, 2002, pp. 229-230). He considers the foundation of his theory to be based on these three propositions:

> The (correct or flawed) understanding of Sharia is entirely dependent on and interconnected with human knowledge, and there is a continuous exchange and dialogue between religious and non-religious knowledge (the principle of nourishment and alignment).
>
> If human knowledge undergoes contraction and expansion, our understanding of Sharia will also experience contraction and expansion (the conditional principle).
>
> Human knowledge (human understanding of nature and existence: science and philosophy) undergoes transformation, contraction, and expansion (the principle of transformation). (Soroush, 1991, p. 347).

In a clearer expression: While religion is fixed, religious knowledge is always changing and evolving. All human knowledge is in a state of transformation, such that a change in one scientific domain influences other domains as well. Religious knowledge is a consumer of human sciences. That is, any significant change in human sciences affects religious knowledge. Therefore, since religious knowledge is contingent upon human knowledge, it is a human, contemporary, and, at the same time, evolving phenomenon. Sharia, like nature, is silent. It is a phenomenon that is open to multiple interpretations. The meanings of phrases are preceded by theories, and since scientific theories are subject to change, the meanings are also open to interpretation.

According to Soroush, the transformation of religious knowledge occurs in the shell of religion, not its core. He repeatedly distinguishes between different kinds of religion and religiosity. In one of his famous articles titled Essential and Accidental in Religion, he compares religion to a phenomenon with a core and a shell. The core of religion is religious experience, and its shell is Sharia. The shell of religion is historical and influenced by the lived experiences of the Prophet, followers of religions, and scholars of jurisprudence (Soroush, 1998). Additionally, drawing from a hadith by Ali ibn Abi Talib, he differentiates between three types of religiosity: pragmatic or goal-oriented religiosity, knowledge-based religiosity, and experience-based religiosity. For him, the third type is the most desirable form of religious practice, which can be found in mystics such as Rumi, Ghazali, and Ali ibn Abi Talib (Soroush, 1999). The first type of religiosity, namely pragmatic religiosity, often leads to a swollen, fat, and maximalist form of religion, where jurisprudence dominates ethics and religious experience, squeezing out the latter two, restricting individual freedoms, opposing modernity, fueling religious conflicts, and being incompatible with tolerance. In contrast, minimal religion focuses solely on the core shared by all religions, i.e., religious experience, fostering tolerance, dialogue between religions, and peaceful coexistence (Soroush, 1998). The minimal religion emphasizes what is essential to religion, i.e., its core, while the majority religion focuses on the accidental aspects of religion, i.e., its shell.

The main goal of Soroush in these theoretical discussions, which seemingly have no direct relation to politics and society, is to create space for tolerance. He arrives at the necessity of religious pluralism through his theory of contraction and expansion, and refers to it with the metaphorical term “the straight paths.” He attempts to demonstrate that the juridical interpretation of Islam, which exemplifies

majority or pragmatic religion, is incompatible with pluralism and the demands of the modern world: "A pluralistic society, which is a non-ideological society, meaning one without official interpretations and interpreters, based on the reason of multiplicity, not the emotion of unity, and characterized by civility, tolerance, and the free flow of information and the competition of ideas, i.e., full of actors, and nature-like, i.e., full of spring, autumn, snow, and rain, begins at the point where rulers and subjects alike acknowledge that the essence of nature and society is multiplicity, not unity; diversity, not similarity; and the determination to impose a single model for life, religion, language, culture, ethics, habits, and customs of humans is an impossible task and a burden to bear" (Soroush, 1997, p. 16).

However, in 2014, Soroush published a two-part article titled Muhammad: The Narrator of Prophetic Dreams, which was met with even sharper reactions from traditional religious people and even some conservative religious intellectuals. The article begins unexpectedly, with Soroush's claim being stated with relative clarity:

> Jalal al-Din Muhammad Balkhi [Rumi] said: "The Quran contains the states of the prophets," and I would like, with permission from the spirit of that dear one, to say: "The Quran contains the dreams of Mustafa." And of course, those dreams are the ones where: "I dream, but in my dream, I am neither a claimant nor a liar." My claim in this writing is that we have overlooked a simple and important point in our understanding of the divine revelation. Until now, we have insisted on the correct meaning that the language of the Quran is human and earthly, and that the Quran is directly and immediately the composition, experience, and the spiritual growth of Muhammad's soul, his language, and his expression—Muhammad, who is historical and in the process of evolution, who, step by step with time, becomes more prophetic, whose soul

> blossoms and whose eyes become sharper, and who becomes more adept at grasping meanings and knowledge. He understands and describes God better, his understanding of the resurrection and the higher and lower realms deepens, and to resolve the problems of his society, he suggests new paths. And had he lived longer, if he had learned the art of deep diving and had a wider patience and stronger digestion, it is likely that from the sea of truths, he would have caught more precious pearls, making the Quran richer and the world wealthier. We have said that those grand achievements were presented in the Arabic language, an ordinary, human language understandable to people, and that they arose from the inner consciousness of the Prophet. The sacredness of the experience has not sanctified or divinized the language of the experience. Even in the process of its formation, the personal states, mental images, environmental events, geographical conditions, and the tribal life of the Prophet were the shaping factors of his experiences, and they clothed them in the garments of history and geography. That is, God did not speak, nor did He write a book, but a historical human spoke on His behalf and wrote the book, and his speech was indeed His speech. It was as if divinity entered the skin of humanity and became human, as if the supernatural reality clothed itself in the garment of nature and became natural, and the transcendent beyond history entered the domain of history and became historical. Despite all this, the windows opened to the understanding of revelation still leave one large window unopened, and this article aims to open that unopened window. (Soroush, 2014).

However, the content of the article is not as unexpected and radical as its opening section. Soroush attempts to soften the tone of his words with explanations and clarifications: "The reader may replace the word "dream" with terms like revelation, event, parable,

imagination (both detached and connected), the eighth realm, Jablqa, Jabsah, and the celestial earth, as has been done... Furthermore, in choosing the word 'dream,' there has been no departure from the circle of tradition. Mystics who speak of the 'complete Muhammadan revelation' refer to an intuitive, super-conscious, supra-sensory, and dream-like perception" (Soroush, 2014) Since then, Soroush has not done any notable work in the field of religious intellectualism, focusing instead on explaining Masnavi (Rumi's Mathnawi) and delivering lectures in Western countries.

2.2. Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari

Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari has focused on a relatively narrower scope of work compared to Soroush, publishing fewer works, and has almost exclusively borrowed from Gadamerian hermeneutics among Western philosophical thoughts. Having spent many years in the clergy, he became acquainted with Gadamerian hermeneutics during his time in Germany. He then sought to view Islam and its sacred texts from this perspective. His book *Hermeneutics of the Quran and Sunnah* is his most influential work, which had a significant impact in Iran during the 1990s. The next most important and influential book is *A Critique of the Orthodox Interpretation of Religion*. His latest book, *A Critique of the Foundations of Jurisprudence and Theology*, was published electronically in 2018 through his personal website.

He critiques the Islamic religious tradition on the grounds that its scholars have not approached the sacred texts with the intention of understanding them, but rather have simply sought to explain the religion. Accordingly, he believes that "the issue of faith in the ontological Islam is, in fact, the same as the philosophical ontological knowledge of the system of existence" (Shabestari, 1999, p. 367). For

Shabestari, the desired method is the method of interpretation, but not in the common sense used in Islamic sciences; rather, he means it in the hermeneutic sense. Understanding meaning occurs through interpretation (or, more precisely, taʾwīl). After emphasizing the distinction between correct and incorrect interpretations, he, inspired by Gadamerian hermeneutic principles, states that the understanding and interpretation of any religious text is limited to five conditions: the pre-understandings or pre-readings of the interpreter, the interests and expectations of the interpreter, the questions posed by the interpreter from history, the identification of the central meaning of the text, and the translation of the text within the historical horizon of the interpreter (Shabestari, 1996, p. 15). Accordingly, there is no single understanding but multiple understandings of a religious text. He uses the term "different readings of religion" to refer to these multiple understandings of religious texts, a term that remains one of the most significant in religious intellectualism. The multiple pre-understandings and assumptions make it possible for multiple readings of religion to emerge, and no reading can be considered final or definitive. Since Shabestari himself is a jurist, he shows, through historical examples, how the differing pre-understandings and expectations of jurists have led to differing rulings. In his view, the symbolic nature of the language of Islam further enhances the multiplicity of readings and their potential variability. However, he is not a relativist, and does not believe that all the existing readings are correct or legitimate. The validity of each interpreter's assumptions and foundations must be evaluated. Of course, all proponents of hermeneutics, while denying relativism, have always faced this accusation and challenge. Nevertheless, he goes on to show that if we approach the Islamic texts by adhering to hermeneutic criteria, aimed at understanding, we will realize that what is currently available as Islam or the body of Islamic teachings is, in fact, a reading of symbolic and allegorical religious

texts. He believes that another valid understanding of these texts is possible, one whose core and foundation is “a new transformation, a new birth, and a profound change in the depths of the human soul, discovering a new ultimate attachment” (Shabestari, 1999, p. 379). This is what Shabestari refers to as faith. Faith in Shabestari’s language is somewhat close to the concept of religious experience in Soroush’s terminology.

He introduces the term "reconstructing religious thought." The purpose of this reconstruction is religious reform. What he means by religious reform is the same as what was stated at the beginning of the article and is the common goal of most religious intellectuals: "a return to the raw material of Islam, that is, the Quran and Sunnah, in order to construct a new religious intellectual and doctrinal framework that aligns with the contemporary human experience and understanding of the world and humanity" (Shabestari, 1996, p. 160). As a prelude to this reconstruction, we should engage in criticizing the prevailing and traditional religious thought. He believes that religious thought is not equivalent to eternal truths that cannot be critiqued, but is rather a product of the contemporary and historical understanding of the individuals who shaped it. Not only should religious thought be critiqued, but this critique is of even greater importance than critiquing philosophical or scientific thoughts, as religious thought has a profound psychological impact and influences the entire being of a person (Shabestari, 1996, p. 194). He outlines the conditions and principles for a valid and acceptable critique of religious thought and continually emphasizes that not all critiques are necessarily valid and constructive.

2.3. Mostafa Malekian

Currently, Mostafa Malekian is the most active religious intellectual in contemporary Iran. There is hardly a week in which he

does not give a lecture somewhere. His written works are mostly available in the form of articles, pamphlets, lectures, and translations. His works are widely dispersed and overlapping, and unlike Soroush and Shabestari, he has not presented a standardized, complete, and detailed version of his theory. His thoughts have evolved more than those of the two religious intellectuals mentioned above and, in practice, have moved beyond the realm of religious intellectualism. However, according to the common categorization and labeling in Iran, he is still somewhat placed within this category. He considers himself a thinker with an existentialist attitude and an analytical approach, meaning that he strives to examine the human issues addressed by analytic philosophers using the methods of analytical philosophy. He believes that the issue of human suffering and finding a way to alleviate it is the most important issue in the humanities. "I am not concerned with tradition, nor with modernity, nor with civilization, nor with culture, nor with any abstract matters of this kind. I am concerned with human beings, flesh and blood, who come, suffer, and leave" (Malekian, b2010). He pursues this goal by translating and introducing the works and thoughts of contemporary humanities to Iranian audiences.

He has named his most important intellectual work the "Project of Rationality and Spirituality." He has expanded this project through a number of articles and lectures, but he has yet to fulfill his promise of presenting it in the form of an independent and comprehensive book. Additionally, he is one of the religious intellectuals who has always maintained a critical view of religious intellectualism itself, and one of the recurring themes in his reflections has been the nature of religious intellectualism. The goal of this unfinished project is the reconciliation of rationality and spirituality. In his view, a spiritual person is one who has a good life. A person

with a good life is someone in whom moral values, psychological well-being, and meaningful life are realized. His claim is that "not only do rationality and spirituality (in the sense I have mentioned) not contradict each other, but to be spiritual, we need nothing beyond a comprehensive and profound rationality. And contrary to the opinion of many throughout history, the matter is not about choosing between having rationality and abandoning spirituality, or having spirituality and forsaking rationality" (Malekian, a 2010, pp. 277-278). This project does not have direct social and political implications, but Malekian believes that it "came out of the core of religious intellectualism. When I first expressed this project in 2000 in a speech and mentioned it in an interview with the magazine *Rah-e-No*, at that time I was considered a religious intellectual by observers, although a humble, modest, and unpretentious one. But I was still considered a religious intellectual. Therefore, whether or not this project is now included within religious intellectualism, it was initially a project of a religious intellectual. However, it was very different from what religious intellectuals before and after the revolution had said" (Malekian, b 2010). This difference primarily stems from the individualistic and psychological aspects of the project and its lack of direct connection to social reformism. For Malekian, rationality and spirituality are not ends in themselves, but rather means to achieve an ideal and desirable life.

In fact, Malekian has only focused on social and political concerns for a period of time, and for the most part, his attention has been on individual issues. He even considers the path to societal reform as individual reform. In his view, a reformed person is a spiritual one, and spirituality is the essence of all religions (Malekian, a 2007, p. 279). However, the topic of intellectualism, especially religious intellectualism, is also one that he has addressed. His argument in sympathy with religious intellectualism is straightforward: "Today, in

my opinion, the spirit of the age is the spirit of modernity, and the spirit of modernity is much more aligned with what religious intellectuals are saying than with the clergy" (Malekian, b 2007, p. 286). As mentioned at the beginning of the article, Malekian offers subtle reflections on the nature of religious intellectualism, its characteristics, its relationship with religious rethinking, religious reformism, and secular intellectualism. In this regard, he is unique among religious intellectuals. Furthermore, he has a deep knowledge of Western philosophy and the humanities, which distinguishes him from other religious intellectuals.

However, in recent years, the issue of religious intellectualism has moved out of the realm of his focus. In recent years, he has increasingly turned towards psychology and has spoken about the neglect of the importance of psychology. Once holding a reformist view of religion, he gradually became disillusioned with this belief and shifted towards transcending religion, replacing it with spirituality.

3. Function and Impacts of Religious Intellectualism in Contemporary Iran

A significant part of Iran's intellectual landscape after Shariati is the product of religious intellectualism. Much has been said about Shariati's decisive role in laying the groundwork for the Islamic Revolution of Iran (Yazdekhasti & Mirzaei, 2012). Many individuals from the Iranian middle class and educated sectors were once supporters of Shariati. Although Shariati was not in favor of a religious government, he was among those who nurtured and ingrained the idea of political Shiism (which he referred to as "Ali's Shiism" in contrast to "Safavid Shiism"). After the Islamic Revolution, thinkers such as Soroush, Shabestari, and Malekian also had a significant impact on the intellectual space in different ways. During this period, a religious

government had been established, and the religious intellectuals who had previously supported it became its critics. As a result, the primary goal of many of the ideas they presented became focused on critiquing the one-sidedness of the system, defending tolerance, highlighting the flaws of the religious government, reconciling democracy with Islam, reconciling human rights with Islam, and addressing similar issues.

Religious intellectuals provided the best intellectual nourishment for a large number of Iranians who wanted to become modern while preserving their religious beliefs. Additionally, religious intellectualism greatly contributed to the translation and introduction of many contemporary Western human sciences and philosophical theories. In response to this movement, a large number of clerics, in a coordinated and organized manner, turned towards studying the new Western humanities and acquiring the tools necessary to critique and reject the views of religious intellectuals.

If we were to draw a parallel between the religious reform movement in Iran and the religious reform movements in the West, as many Iranian religious intellectuals do, we would say that just as religious reform in the West served as a bridge from religious and traditional society to modern and secular society, in Iran, it seems that religious intellectuals, at best, have attempted to play a similar role. However, it now appears that either this role has lost its appeal to society, or religious intellectuals can no longer propose new ideas. Religious intellectuals have distanced themselves from this role, meaning that they are largely engaged in other matters, though they occasionally reference their earlier ideas and revisit their concepts. Gradually, most religious intellectuals are shifting towards more radical interpretations of religion, in a way that the intellectual and rational aspects of their views grow stronger, while the religious and

traditional elements diminish. In simpler terms, their thinking is becoming more aligned with modernity.

Religious intellectualism is a domain that, due to its many facets and subtle complexities, generally does not lend itself to clear-cut and definitive judgments. This difficulty is further compounded by its connection to the social and political realms. However, regardless of whether this characteristic of religious intellectualism is acknowledged by its critics, the volume of critiques directed at the various interpretations and approaches within this domain, and even critiques directed at the attitudes and practices of the religious intellectuals themselves, is noteworthy. On one hand, religious intellectualism encompasses a diverse range of perspectives, and on the other, the criticisms leveled against this diverse domain are themselves numerous and varied. Additionally, religious intellectualism is largely a critical approach to the traditional understanding of religion. Therefore, most of the critiques directed at the diverse formulations and theories within religious intellectualism can be seen as critiques of critiques. For this reason, one of the prominent functions of religious intellectualism has been the creation of a critical space within Iran's intellectual landscape.

In the past decade, religious intellectualism has gradually become less vibrant. If we set aside Soroush's theory of prophetic dreams, almost no significant or challenging theories or ideas have emerged within this domain. The publication of *Religion on the Scales of Ethics* by Abolghasem Fanaei generated some brief excitement, but it quickly faded. In this book, Fanaei argues for the precedence of ethics over jurisprudence and Sharia, stating that when ethics and Sharia are in conflict, ethical considerations should be prioritized (Fanaei, 2005). Other figures, though less influential, within Iran's religious intellectual movement include Mohsen Kadivar, Habibollah

Peyman, Ahmad Ghabel, Abolghasem Fanaei, and Arash Naraghi.

After leaving Iran, Soroush lost much of his influence, as religious intellectuals tend to impact the intellectual space and public sphere more through lectures and speeches than through books and articles. Shabestari, too, has primarily focused on commenting on contemporary issues and delivering extensive lectures in fields such as hermeneutics and the meaning of life. Malekian, meanwhile, continuously lectures on a variety of subjects, with the common thread of his talks not being the idea of religious intellectualism, but rather alleviating human suffering.

4. Human Rights and Religious Intellectuals

The term "human rights" is often used by social activists. When these individuals use this term, they typically have the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in mind. Clearly, from this perspective, human rights cannot only not be the central or primary subject of discussion for religious intellectuals, but it would also be difficult for it to become a philosophical topic of discussion. On the other hand, if the philosophical foundations of human rights are considered, the situation changes, and it becomes possible to discuss the relationship between human rights and religious intellectualism. In other words, human rights can be understood in both a broad and narrow sense. In the narrow sense, human rights may refer to what is outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and social activists often emphasize certain aspects of it, aiming to realize it in societies. However, in the broader sense, human rights refers to a new understanding of humanity's place in existence and the relationships between individuals, society, and the state. In this sense, human rights can be seen as stemming from the humanistic aspect of modernity.

4.1. Humanism and Religious Intellectualism

The humanistic aspect of modernity is extremely important for religious intellectuals in Iran. Each of them, whether reluctantly or willingly, has stated that if religion is to have a place in the present age and not completely disappear, it must acknowledge the centrality of humanity in contemporary thought. The modern world and its philosophical outlook are centered around human beings. Everything is for the benefit of humanity; thus, religion, too, if it is not for humanity, will not survive and will not be embraced. Iranian religious intellectuals have addressed the question of what interpretation of Islam can be most compatible with humanism. According to them, in the traditional interpretation of Islam, individual rights, as demanded by humanism and modernity, are not adequately secured. Mostafa Malekian states, "One of the most important elements of modernism is its humanistic and anthropocentric character. This element is clearly evident in the thought of religious intellectuals... Religious intellectuals are, in the true sense of the word, humanists. Unlike the clergy, religious intellectuals are humanists both in terms of the issues they address and in their approach to finding solutions" (Malekian, 2007b, p. 286). Some religious intellectuals have even spoken of "Islamic humanism," attempting to defend and formulate its possibilities. In contrast, some traditional religious figures have strongly attacked this notion, for instance, Beheshti (2003). The term "humanism" is one that traditional religious figures in Iran strongly oppose.

In any case, the idea that "religion must be for humanity" has been most clearly explained and articulated by Mustafa Malekian. Under the title "The Expectation of Humanity from Religion," he introduces the idea that "religion gives meaning to our pain and suffering, and more generally to our lives. By giving meaning to our pain and suffering, it delivers us from them and leads us to a better

condition. Therefore, it is reasonable to claim that the expectation of human beings from religion is that it will take them from their current undesirable state to a more desirable one by giving meaning to their lives and removing the undesirable aspects" (Malekian, 2002, p. 285). He then builds upon this premise and asserts that "the modern human says, I need five things to live. Religion should give me these things in this world. If it does not, no matter what claims it makes, my ears are deaf to those claims, and in the end, I am indifferent and unresponsive. I can only live when I have psychological peace, happiness, hope, inner satisfaction, and when my life is meaningful. I cannot seek these five things from politics, economics, empirical sciences, or philosophy" (Malekian, 2015, p. 18). This perspective shows that Malekian emphasizes the individual's right to choose religion and religiosity, rather than the duty to adhere to religious practices and obedience. A similar idea is expressed by Abdolkarim Soroush, who says, "If we say that religiosity is our right, we have endorsed one of the main pillars of civil society. If someone says that religiosity is our right, they must also say that irreligiosity is our right. This means that we have the right to use this right, and we have the right not to. If we use it, no one should reward us, and if we don't, no one has the right to blame us… The ancient society was largely built on the idea that religiosity is an obligation for human beings, while modern society is built on the idea that religiosity is a right of humanity… Now, when we talk about the right or duty of religion, the question arises, 'If religion is an obligation, where does this obligation come from, and who has the right to reprimand us for irreligiosity?'" (Soroush, 1999b, p. 6). This discussion by Soroush sparked many heated debates about the relationship between right and obligation in Islam. In fact, one of Soroush's most significant impacts on the intellectual landscape of Iran was that whenever he raised an issue, a flood of critiques and sometimes endorsements followed, which contributed to the dynamism

of Iran's intellectual environment. This influence and power was unmatched by any other religious intellectual. However, it has been nearly a decade since he has had such influence.

4.2. Religious Intellectualism and Islamic Jurisprudence (*Fiqh*)

Religious intellectuals, however, have taken a general stance or approach to this issue that can largely clarify the position on human rights matters. Those laws that are in opposition to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its provisions have a jurisprudential ground. Consequently, jurisprudence is one of the most important areas that religious intellectuals critique. They believe that jurisprudence is not the core or essence of religion and that, therefore, depending on the circumstances of the time, it is subject to change. Soroush and most religious intellectuals argue that since jurisprudential rulings do not constitute the core of religion, they can be altered or even suspended. One of Soroush's main ideas, in fact, is that jurisprudence has become too inflated, meaning it has occupied a place that is beyond what it deserves. Of course, the position of an individual like Mohsen Kadivar, who has stronger attachments to jurisprudence, differs from the stance of Soroush or Malekian.

Overall, when there is a conflict between jurisprudential rulings and prominent human rights issues, religious intellectuals often prefer to modify or negate the jurisprudential ruling. However, this tendency should not be interpreted superficially, as though religious intellectuals are entirely surrendering to human rights. While for an intellectual like Malekian, jurisprudence has entirely lost its significance, for Soroush, it still holds some appeal. For Mohsen Kadivar, the appeal of jurisprudence is even stronger. Among religious intellectuals, Kadivar holds the most conservative positions and generally avoids making

explicit statements. His clearest statement on this matter is as follows: "By employing ijtihad in the principles and foundations, the result is human rights, not by measuring human rights as a criterion to achieve these results. In this regard, I have not made any slogans; rather, in every jurisprudential issue where I have had the opportunity, I have applied these principles and derived a new jurisprudential result. A specific case should be examined and worked on. When several dozen jurisprudential issues are resolved in this way, then a general rule can be extracted. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the solution to all issues at once; it requires time and the effort of research and deduction" (Heidari, 2016). Mojtahed Shabestari, in his latest book, *Critique of the Foundations of Jurisprudence and Theology*, which is a collection of his recent lectures and articles, unlike Kadivar, does not attempt to reconcile jurisprudence with human rights. Instead, he asserts that since human rights did not arise from religion, it is a non-religious matter and not an anti-religious one. Therefore, trying to reconcile it with religion is neither possible nor desirable. Rather, Muslims should accept it as one of the realities of the contemporary world (Mojtahed Shabestari, 2017, pp. 7-660). It seems that there are also tendencies toward this idea in the views of Malekian and Soroush.

4.3. Religious Intellectualism and Controversial Issues

Therefore, religion and religiosity are only justified and defensible to the extent that a place can be found for them within the framework of fundamental human rights. However, the matter is not limited to this. The religion that religious intellectuals find acceptable and desirable is one that does not contradict or conflict with other aspects of fundamental human rights, which are derived from modernity. This is why religious intellectuals have moved beyond generalizations and mere claims; they have sought to practically and

concretely present an interpretation of Islam that aligns with certain key principles of human rights. Areas of concern for religious intellectuals include the scope of governmental authority, rights versus duties, tolerance, pluralism, social freedom, women's rights, the rights of minorities, the issue of capital punishment, and more. However, none of them have consistently and systematically theorized on these issues; instead, they have addressed some of these topics in a scattered, case-by-case, and subjective manner.

Religious intellectuals have not addressed all topics with the same degree of attention and focus. For example, the issue of women's rights is less emphasized among religious intellectuals, whereas discussions on social freedom and pluralism are much more prevalent. The issue of the right to life or capital punishment has also been discussed to some extent, but not as extensively as social freedom and pluralism. The reason for this is that religious intellectuals are more concerned with the political realm, and they tend to focus on issues that are directly related to political governance. Therefore, while social activists prioritize issues like women's rights or the death penalty, religious intellectuals give greater importance to the theoretical foundations of the political sphere, which determine the broader trajectory of governance in securing the rights of citizens.

As an example, let us consider the views of religious intellectuals on the issue of capital punishment. In his most recent statement on the death penalty, Kadivar has said: "The 'logical possibility' of eliminating the death penalty from Islamic teachings is not out of the question," adding, "However, its 'practical possibility' within the framework of 'traditional ijtihad' seems highly unlikely, and within this framework, at best, we can only significantly reduce the application of capital punishment" (Kalaei, 2018). Therefore, as is typical of him, he refrains from making a direct statement. Soroush, too,

largely avoids making a clear statement and asserts that "the annulment of religious laws requires a rational justification, and if such justification is found, of course, a ruling can be changed" (Kalaei, 2018). Malekian's position on capital punishment is crystal clear: he is strongly opposed. His opposition is not surprising, as his considerations on human suffering, which were mentioned earlier, constitute the core of his thought. Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari, using his hermeneutical principles, attempts to demonstrate that the death penalty was specific to the tribal life of the Prophet Muhammad's time, and that in the modern world, not only is it unnecessary, but it must also be abolished due to its conflict with contemporary demands (Shabestari, 2014).

4.4. Challenging Issues: Abortion, Euthanasia, and Homosexuality

In the past two decades, among social activists, the issues of capital punishment, women's rights, and social-political freedoms have been the most significant and hotly debated. As briefly illustrated above, on these matters, religious intellectuals have cautiously aligned themselves, to a large extent (though not entirely), with social activists. However, when it comes to emerging issues that even in Western countries are considered challenges, the views of religious intellectuals vary greatly. For instance, Arash Naraghi, with caution, has worked on the compatibility of a form of homosexuality with Islam, or at least suggested the possibility of such a thing (Naraghi, 2014). Similarly, Soroush, not long ago, in the midst of one of his lectures—though the topic was not homosexuality—made a cautious remark about it, stating that since the modern human is a rights-oriented individual, for today's rights- oriented human, homosexuality is considered an accepted right. However, he avoided either endorsing or

rejecting it based on his own views and said, "The rights claim of homosexuals is a new issue, and I have not yet been able to provide a definitive stance on it..." (Soroush, 2012).

However, such efforts are rare and cannot be considered part of the mainstream religious intellectual movement. The reason for this is that religious intellectuals, due to their religious attachments, adopt a conservative stance on certain human rights issues that are widely debated in the West today, such as homosexuality, euthanasia, and abortion. Essentially, if this were not the case, they would not be referred to as religious intellectuals. On the issue of women's rights as well, their statements tend to carry a more or less conservative tone.

4.5. Religious Intellectuals and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Religious intellectuals have also made some statements regarding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but they have never made it the subject of their theoretical reflections. Instead, they have preferred to focus on the theoretical foundations from which the Declaration of Human Rights is derived and attempt to reconcile these with their own interpretation of Islam. For example, Soroush has said, "In truth, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the most beautiful and fragrant flower that has bloomed in this garden [i.e., Enlightenment thought]; a declaration that serves as the scale for the political behavior of rulers worldwide and a criterion for lawmaking and constitutional drafting in all countries and among all nations" (Soroush, 2006b). Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari also shares a similar, explicit stance on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "I believe that we Muslims must fully engage with the issue of human rights, precisely in the manner outlined in the Declaration. This is because we Muslims are currently part of the global community. We

cannot separate ourselves from it. Certainly, we are part of that global community which one day deemed these obligations essential for itself. In other words, the three issues of ‘freedom,’ ‘justice,’ and ‘global peace’ are of utmost importance for us Muslims as well. In other words, the observance of freedom rights, civil rights, and social rights is an obligation for us Muslims, wherever we live, and it is a vital necessity. We must inevitably have answers to these issues. The historical experience of the past fifty years in most Muslim countries clearly shows that there are serious demands regarding freedom, civil rights, and social rights" (Mojtahed Shabestari, 2016).

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Bi-quarterly Journal of
Theosophia Islamica
Islamic Sciences and culture Academy
EISSN: 2783-3240
Vol. 4 ● No. 1 ● 2024 ● Issue 7

A Critique of Western Civilization from the Perspective of Mahdist Doctrines

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Received: 2025/05/07 Accepted: 2025/06/10

Abstract

The dominant thought in the Western environment laid the necessary foundations for the formation of Western civilization. In fact, the Renaissance's approach to God, humanity, and the surrounding environment gradually caused profound changes in human lifestyles at various levels, eventually replacing the traditional, meaning-oriented relationship between humans and their surroundings with a modern, meaning-deficient one. This study presents a critique of Western civilization from the perspective of Mahdist teachings. The article is written using a descriptive and analytical approach. Today, the West faces numerous challenges at various levels, to the extent that, according to Western thinkers, these issues were not resolved even with the emergence of postmodernism. This is because the civilizational system,

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* Dehghani Arani, V. & Najafi Moghamir, M. (2024). A Critique of Western Civilization from the Perspective of Mahdist Doctrines. *Theosophia Islamica*, *4*(7), pp. 43-72.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.71822.1075

grounded in Renaissance thought, adopts a materialistic worldview and denies the unseen in its perception of God, self, and existence.

Keywords

Modernity, West, technology, Mahdism, mechanization, Era of Reappearance (of Imam al-Mahdi).

Introduction

Based on the intellectual framework of the Renaissance movement, a machine-driven civilization was launched, and as a result, compliance with this framework, willingly or unwillingly, will inevitably push societies towards further Westernization. Consequently, the architects of the Renaissance strive to implement the project of globalization and create a unified material front in the path of modernity; because this machine, by relying on human sensual instincts, is both highly attractive and possesses a spirit aligned with Renaissance ideals. Thus, if a society rides on this machine, it will lose its sense of meaning, and gradually, the Renaissance way of life will be injected into its thoughts and actions. The Renaissance philosophy is based on atheism, and this phenomenon manifests itself in various spheres of modernity. The Renaissance idea of change is rooted in the slogan of altering nature and deconstructing spiritualism, with Satan leading it; this call for change was one of his claims when he was expelled from the Garden of Eden. This stands in stark contrast to the ideal of Mahdism, which seeks to guide existence toward paradise, liberating humanity from all the perils posed by Satan.

Among the works written in the field of modernism and its associated challenges, the following can be mentioned:

1. "Religion in the Modern World" by Mahdi Nekouei Samani, published in 2007 in the *Maʿrifat* journal.
2. "The Necessity and Future of Religion from the Perspective of Modernism and Postmodernism" by Soleiman Khakban, published in 2018 by *Qabasāt* journal.
3. "Islam and Modernity" by Abdolhossein Khosropanah, published in 2013 by *Islamic Theology* journal.
4. "The Relationship Between Religion and Modernity:

Conflict or Compatibility?" by Abbas Yazdani, published in 2010 by *Comparative Theology* journal.

5. "The Relationship Between Science and Religion, Modernity, and Islamic Identity" by a group of authors, published in 2015 by the *National Conference on the Intersections of Humanities*.

However, the distinguishing feature of this work, compared to the above-mentioned works, is as follows: (1) This work addresses a critique of modernism; (2) It explores the confrontational relationship between modernism and the doctrine of Mahdism; (3) It offers the necessity of resolving the issues of modernism through the teachings of Mahdism. In this context, in order to provide a practical model for addressing the damages of Western civilization, this work will answer the question: From the perspective of the teachings of Mahdism, what are the flaws of Western civilization?

1. Science in the City of Reappearance and Renaissance Thought

The Renaissance was not merely a period in time, but rather a way of life and thinking. During this era, the school of empiricism and materialism gradually gained more prominence, paving the way for the dismantling of spiritualism in Western life and establishing a new culture based on novel principles.

The front that emerged after this period adopted a completely different doctrinal path compared to the past; as new beliefs were gradually established, new intellectual principles and foundations replaced the previous thoughts. Although the emergence of this new thinking appeared positive at first and seemed to advocate for a new scientific movement, the underlying thought behind it was in direct opposition to spiritualism.

In the monotheistic worldview, our knowledge is a reflection of divine knowledge, derived from the data that God has provided to us: "Allah has brought you forth from the bellies of your mothers while you did not know anything. He made for you hearing, eyesight, and hearts so that you may give thanks" (Quran 16:78). This noble verse refers to the origins of knowledge, which God has bestowed upon humanity. The origin of all perceptions lies in the external senses, primarily sight and hearing, while other senses, namely touch, taste, and smell, do not carry the same significance as these two. The origin of affirmation and thought, however, is the heart (Ṭabāṭabā□ī, 2009, vol. 12, p. 452).

The immaturity of knowledge during the era of the Church's dominance and the numerous doctrinal deviations among Western religious scholars at the time all contributed to accelerating the establishment of this new perspective. Empiricism gradually reinforced the sense of independence from the unseen in the societies that embraced the Renaissance, and new methodologies emerged in opposition to the previous church-based culture. Laboratory sciences and the new style of knowledge production helped foster widespread rational thinking in these societies, and anything beyond the tangible was denied. Jules Michelet, in his *History of the Renaissance* (1855), called the Renaissance era the absolute antithesis of the Middle Ages, as in the dark period of the Middle Ages, any discussion of natural and physical sciences was considered contrary to the teachings of the Church and harmful to society, with speakers being subjected to severe punishments (Nozari, 2000, p. 24).

In the era of the complete authority of God's proof after the occultation, knowledge will emerge in such a way that it will offer a program for all of humanity’s vital systems, without humans facing the challenge of alienation from themselves or being led into

forgetfulness. This is because, during this period, the truth of religion will become manifest, and people will witness the truths through their intellectual perfection, guided by God's comprehensive guidance. This will happen because the carnal desires, which have been the greatest obstacles to the formation of knowledge and understanding, will be eradicated. In fact, one of the pitfalls of thought, according to the Holy Quran, is the inclinations and desires of the soul. If a person does not guard against the danger of their own desires in their thinking, they will become lost in misguidance.

In this time, sciences will be free from harm, and healthy technology will create the most beautiful life for humanity, a life that no one has been able to envision until now. The process of emergence is never in conflict with the advancement and evolution of human knowledge; rather, lofty sciences will, within the framework of God's creation, progress from two letters to twenty-seven letters. The era of the appearance (of the savior) will be a time of the spread and flourishing of knowledge, and the Islamic ideal city will be a city of science and knowledge. With the arrival of the world's savior, just as oppression and tyranny will give way to justice and fairness, and social disorder will be rectified, ignorance and lack of knowledge will also give way to science and understanding, and the world will be filled with the light of reason and knowledge. Sciences and knowledge that had been hidden behind veils through ages and centuries will be revealed, and the boundaries of knowledge and learning will expand to the very homes and depths of every individual's being.

2. Spiritualism and Negation of Human Relation to the Supernatural Realm

After the Renaissance, it was the era of the peak of materialism and worldly affairs for Western humanity, a time when spirituality and its

inherent qualities, which had appeared in societies, were challenged. As a result, during this period, humanity, driven by a desire for comfort and an increasing attachment to material pleasures, distanced itself from spiritualism, seeing it as a limiting concept. Consequently, it deprived itself to a great extent of spiritual pleasures and the gifts of spirituality.

What the thinkers of the Renaissance school refer to as limitation, from a religious perspective, is spiritual freedom—an attainment achieved by restraining oneself from base desires and carnal inclinations. However, the restrictions imposed by the Church led Western humanity to develop a deep aversion to anything that seemed limiting, viewing it as incompatible with their freedom. Yet, no thoughtful person would regard absolute freedom as a correct or attainable ideal, for not only the individual but human society as a whole would inevitably deteriorate.

Based on the culture of Western modernity, the tradition of maximal diversity-seeking was also established, causing global society to become increasingly trapped in cultural consequences aimed at stimulating and inflaming humanity's primal and sensual desires, further fueling the pursuit of maximum diversity. Western society, in its pursuit, demands a world without spirituality, and such an approach, due to the inherent principles governing the world—such as decay, limitations, conflicting interests, and so on—can never achieve satisfaction in desires. Therefore, it constantly faces failure in its theoretical existence and will ultimately descend into a form of nihilism and existential emptiness.

In the vision of the Era of Appearance, God will support and accompany the believers through faith, the perfection of their intellects, and divine aid, ultimately leading to the governance of the

Earth being entrusted to His complete representative, the Supreme Guardian of God (*Walī Allāh al-Aʿẓam*). Through his guardianship, God's sovereignty on Earth will be realized and manifested. This is because the infallible Imam holds the highest station of closeness to God, to the extent that his guardianship is considered the guardianship of God Himself. The connection between this guardianship and God's will takes on the role of cause and effect, such that the Imam's guardianship in the world becomes the cause of God's sovereignty in existence. Some hadiths have described the soul of the believer as being in the closest position to God's divine proximity, reflecting this relationship: "The soul of the believer is more closely connected to the soul of God than the rays of the sun are to the sun itself" (Majlisī, 2007, vol. 61, p. 148).

With the establishment of the unified divine governance, the sects that had managed to root themselves by winning the hearts of the oppressed in various societies will be sidelined, allowing a single government to prevail over the entire world. The followers of different religions, upon witnessing the representative of God and his superhuman qualities, will join this faith, and after the era of prophethood, Islam will be implemented in its comprehensive form, eradicating all manifestations of disbelief and polytheism from existence. The Prophet of God regarding the breaking of crosses and the killing of pigs, which symbolizes the realization of the singular religion of Islam, said: "The Imam al-Mahdi (may Allah hasten his reappearance) will appear as a just ruler, breaking the crosses, killing the pigs, and instructing his officers to collect wealth and distribute it in the cities. They will search for those in need, but there will be no one to claim need" (Maqdisī al-Shāfiʿī, 2010, p. 166).

At this time, humanity will witness the true and comprehensive function of religion and will find self-sufficiency through it, no longer

needing materialistic pursuits. During this period, the light of God's guardianship will be revealed on Earth through His perfect representative, so that the path will be distinguished from misguidance, and servitude from polytheism and disbelief. In this context, humanity will reach the highest levels of guidance. Mufaḍḍal ibn ʿUmar reports: "I heard Imam Jaʿfar al-Sadiq (peace be upon him) say about the verse of Allah, 'And the Earth will shine with the light of its Lord' (39:69), he said: 'The Lord of the Earth is the Imam of the Earth.' I asked, 'What will happen when the Imam emerges?' He replied, 'Then people will be in need of neither the light of the sun nor the light of the moon, and they will suffice with the light of the Imam'" (Majlisī, 2007, vol. 7, p. 326).

The above narration reflects the truth that the Earth, before the appearance of the Imam, was immersed in a pervasive darkness, and the event of the appearance will transform the governing flow of the Earth from darkness to illumination. This illumination has its roots in the light of God and His guardianship, which will be realized through the existence of the infallible Imam in the world. The guidance associated with this light is such that individuals, according to their existential capacity, will reach the highest levels of knowledge, illumination, and guidance. This human perfection will result in the perfection of their servitude, and only the guardianship of God will prevail in every home and dwelling, both in the morning and evening. As Imam Ali said regarding the Quranic verse, “He it is Who has sent His Messenger with guidance and the true religion, to manifest it over all religions, even though the polytheists may dislike it” (9:33), he stated: "No settlement will remain except that in it, every morning and evening, the oneness of God will be proclaimed" (Ṭabarsī, 1997, vol. 24, p. 401).

3. Capitalistic Tendencies Against Equal Provision for Humans

Consumerism is the prioritization of consumption, with the goal of material well-being and wealth. In the process of consumerism, the Western world shifted from a production-oriented ethic, or Protestant work ethic, to a consumption-oriented ethic. As a result, the West transformed from a productive society to a consumer society, where the central principle became the maximization of consumption and pleasure-seeking. Following the West, under the influence of advertising and other factors, developing countries also became consumer societies. To accelerate the transformation of society into a consumer-based one, policies such as organizing exhibitions, establishing large chain stores, and introducing affordable consumer goods in large quantities were employed.

The difference between a consumer society and its predecessors was that, previously, the consumption of abundant goods was exclusive to the wealthy and affluent classes. However, in the consumer society, the consumption of these goods became widespread among ordinary people as well. Of course, in terms of consumption, expensive and high-quality goods were still reserved for the wealthy, while cheap and lower-quality goods were aimed at the general population. In other words, the construction of action follows the construction of thought. To build thought, belief and the connection between the mind and the external world are necessary. For creating this belief and the bridge of connection, language plays the most significant role. Language is filled with value-laden concepts and plays a crucial role in advertising and legitimizing. Mass media, alongside language, utilizes symbols and signs to construct action, and in our case, to promote consumerism. (Barber, 1991, p. 127).

Modern consumerism began in the late 19th century with the slogan "Let the borders be free" and reached its peak in the first half

of the 20th century. In this paradigm, people view consumption as something based on their desires, not merely on the fulfillment of needs. They seek to buy things that are ingrained in their minds through advertising via films, newspapers, television, and other promotional methods. In this desire and craving, an individual's financial capability is not taken into account, as the criterion for them is not need fulfillment, but rather want.

This phenomenon, dominant in modernism, stands in opposition to the era of the appearance (of the savior). The era of the appearance marks the death of the capitalist front. In this period, there will be no hierarchical classes of rich and poor, and no one will be able to accumulate wealth by stimulating humanity's greed and sensual desires, while others perish from hunger. During this time, the Earth will offer its wealth and resources to humanity, and by moving away from consumerism, wastefulness, and materialistic greed, people will reach a level of self-sufficiency where they will reject the acceptance of charitable gifts. The Prophet of God said in this regard: "When Imam Mahdi (may Allah hasten his reappearance) appears... wealth and alms will be distributed in the streets, but no one will be found who is willing to accept them." (Maqdisī al-Shāfiʿī, 2010, p. 166).

In this era, the sustenance of humanity will be pure and free from the impurities of wealth. On the other hand, in accordance with God's promise to bestow blessings upon the faithful communities, He will send down an abundant and boundless provision upon the people of the time of the appearance. During this time, blessings will flow into all aspects of human life, and the efforts and economic activities of people will yield exponentially greater results than before; because faith and piety are the two fundamental realms through which blessings enter human life in the most complete form during the era of the appearance. "And if the people of the towns had believed and been

God-fearing, We would certainly have opened up to them blessings from the heavens and the earth" (Quran 7:96).

Indeed, to the extent that a person treads the path of truths and follows the way of monotheism, humbling oneself before the Almighty, a flood of mercy and blessings will increasingly flow into their life. Imam al-Sadiq, regarding the blessings of the era of the appearance and the self-sufficiency of people, states: "When our Qāʾim [the Upriser, Imam al-Mahdi] rises... the earth will release its treasures, revealing them in such a way that people will see it with their own eyes on the surface of the earth. Those who possess the zakat will seek someone in need to give their zakat to, but they will find none." (Mufīd, 2011: p. 363).

4. Mechanization and Human Freedom from the Constraints of Machines

Among the distortions in the economic landscape of the world after the Renaissance is the dominance of human desires over the natural foundation of creation. During this period, the West sought to push the world further towards industrialization in order to reap greater profits. In this process, products were produced that filled the pockets of Western companies with wealth, while pushing humanity into serious physical, psychological, and spiritual dangers. Nature, in turn, was suddenly devastated, with industrial factories and a vast shift in consumption patterns replacing the healthy model. This type of exploitation of nature for economic growth is condemned and rejected in the Quran, as, on the one hand, human beings and their spiritual qualities take priority and are given precedence over mere economic considerations. On the other hand, this form of economy has led to serious issues and challenges for humanity.

With the emergence of modernity, societies increasingly moved towards industrialization, which led to an unprecedented rise in pollution, including air and water pollution, as well as contamination of all food products. As machinery and industrial equipment proliferated in human life, carbon monoxide in the air caused the spread of various respiratory diseases, cancer, and other ailments. Meanwhile, factory waste has posed serious environmental threats to seas, lakes, and aquatic life.

In addition, machine-based life can be used through artificial intelligence to diagnose various human diseases. However, when industrial automation is prioritized for economic purposes and material benefits, and the world moves towards virtuality for the sake of human convenience, essential human activity will be endangered. One of the common consequences of this is the spread of physical inactivity in humans, which leads to an increase in cardiovascular diseases, strokes, cancers, as well as elevated blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar levels.

With the dominance of this trend, human labor will gradually be reduced, and only the owners of capital will be able to participate in such industries. This phenomenon increasingly widens the gap between the rich and the poor, and its effects will not only endanger the mental health of workers and labor forces but also threaten their families. The famous French sociologist, Émile Durkheim, in his book, introduces the concept of alienation of the individual from society, stating that traditional societies had a single function, and the various parts within that society worked for that common goal and function. A collective conscience prevailed within them, whereas, with the advancement of machine-driven societies, this moral density led to the emergence of a new form of collective conscience. This new form is realized through the individuality of individuals, and there is

no longer the prior commitment to a single collective conscience in society (Durkheim, 2012, p. 152).

The Mahdist front does not aim to confine humanity to a machine-driven life. In that era, science will reach such a level of prominence that it will have a comprehensive plan for all the vital systems of humanity, without causing individuals to face alienation from themselves or leading them into forgetting their true nature. This is because, during this time, the truth of religion will emerge, and people, with their intellectual perfection, will witness the realities in the light of God's comprehensive guidance, as the selfish desires that have been the primary obstacles to the formation of knowledge and understanding will be removed. In fact, one of the pitfalls of thought, according to the Quran, is the inclinations and desires of the soul. If a person does not guard their thoughts from the danger of selfish desires, they will become ensnared in misguided paths.

In this era, sciences will be free from harm, and healthy technology will create the most beautiful life for humanity—one that no one has yet been able to envision. The process of the appearance will never be in opposition to the progress and evolution of human sciences. Rather, noble sciences will continue to develop within the framework of God's creation, just as they evolved from two letters to twenty-seven letters. The era of the appearance will be a time for the expansion and flourishing of knowledge and wisdom, and the Islamic utopia will become a city of science and knowledge. With the arrival of the world’s Savior, just as oppression and tyranny give way to justice and fairness, and social disorders are resolved, ignorance and lack of knowledge will also give way to science and wisdom, and the world will be filled with the light of reason and knowledge. Sciences and knowledge that have remained hidden behind the curtains through the ages will be revealed, and the boundaries of knowledge and

learning will expand to the farthest corners of human existence.

In this era, with the growth of intellects, human knowledge will reach a level where women will also be capable of making sound judgments. Imam al-Baqir has elaborated on this scientific progression, stating: "When our Qāʾim [the Upriser, Imam al-Mahdi] rises, God will place His hand of mercy upon the heads of His servants, completing their intellects and nurturing their thoughts" (qaa, vol. 1, p. 25). In the time of that Imam, women will judge within their homes according to the Book of God and the Sunnah of the Prophet (Majlisī, 2007, vol. 52, p. 352).

With the intellectual and scientific evolution of humanity, a new civilization will emerge in the world that will make the inherent superiority and distinction between spiritual and material civilizations evident to humankind. In this new civilization, without relying on the material technology and godless ideologies of the West, humans will be able to meet one another across the world by utilizing the components of faith and the guardianship that will govern among the believers throughout existence. It is narrated that, during the time of that Imam, a believer in the East will be able to see his brother in the West, and a believer in the West will see his brother in the East (Majlisī, 2007, vol. 52, p. 391). In another hadith from Imam al-Sadiq, he said: "When our Qāʾim [the Upriser, Imam al-Mahdi] rises, God will strengthen the ears and eyes of our Shi'a in such a way that there will be no need for an intermediary between them and the Qāʾim. He will speak to them, and they will hear his words, and while he is in his place, they will see him" (Kulaynī, 2008, vol. 8, p. 240). The expression of strengthening ears and eyes refers to activating a potential that God has placed within the human being's existence, which will be realized in the era of the appearance. Interpreting this as modern-day tools, given the inherent differences between the Renaissance paradigm and

the concept of the appearance, would be an unjustified and baseless interpretation.

Just as during the era of Prophet Solomon, God granted him the means to communicate between humans and animals for understanding matters and facilitating interactions, in the era of the appearance, with God's permission, this process will be realized on a much larger scale. This is because the time of the appearance is the most significant historical event that has been prepared for since the beginning of creation. It holds a far greater potential for the emergence of human and cosmic capacities than the temporal scope of that Prophet of God. Moreover, the faith and influence of Imam al-Mahdi (may God hasten his appearance) surpass those of that Prophet, and his realm of dominion encompasses the entire universe, whereas the dominion of Prophet Solomon was limited. Imam al-Baqir says: "Prophet David and similarly Prophet Solomon ruled over the region of the Levant, extending to the lands of Istakhr (from Palestine and Lebanon to Iran)" (Majlisī, 2007, vol. 14, p. 5).

This civilization, in addition to its architecture, will encompass all aspects of human life. The formation of globalization under the servitude of God, along with the effects mentioned earlier, is one of the most significant gifts of this civilization—an achievement unparalleled in history. Never before have humans, despite differences in thoughts, tastes, and actions, been able to live in a unified manner, free from any kind of contradiction or conflict, in an environment of peace and tranquility under one flag with heartfelt contentment. As some have rightly pointed out regarding this important characteristic of the new civilization: "Civilization is the establishment of order and harmony in the relationships of the people of a society, eliminating destructive collisions and conflicts, and replacing them with a race towards growth and perfection. In such a way that the social life of

individuals and groups in that society brings forth and activates their constructive potentials" (Jafari, 1996, vol. 16, p. 233).

5. Security and Rights of the Human Society in Renaissance and Mahdist Utopia

Sexual ethics is a part of ethics in the broader sense, encompassing those habits, traits, and human practices that are related to the sexual instinct. The belief that abstaining from marriage leads to human spirituality disturbs the souls of both men and women equally, creating a painful struggle between the natural instinct on one hand and religious beliefs on the other. The emotional distress, which brings about severe consequences, always stems from the conflict between natural desires and social oppositional conditioning. Modern sexual ethics in non-Islamic societies, particularly in the West, does not accept any limitations or prohibitions on this matter, advocating for the complete freedom of individuals in this domain. However, the logic and reason dictate that we should fight against traditions and superstitions based on the impurity of sexual desire, and at the same time, we should not create conditions for rebellion, defiance, and distress of the sexual instinct under the guise of freedom and free development (Motahari, 2010, p. 128).

In the doctrine of Mahdism, religion has always emphasized the necessity of controlling this instinct so that the innate desire of humans does not erupt and take control, ensuring that the safety and rights of the human community are not jeopardized. On the other hand, the eruption of this instinct in individuals and society weakens human social character. This is because the social boundaries will be broken by this phenomenon, and individuals will transgress the boundaries of others. The falsity of the hypothesis of absolute freedom

in this regard becomes increasingly evident, and even the Renaissance society itself has become aware of this harm. However, the governing structure of Western civilization, if it wishes to maintain its standards, must justify these deviations. Otherwise, it must turn to a spiritualist ethical framework and acknowledge that all its material assumptions, which have been presented to Western humanity over several centuries, lack the necessary foundations.

The West sought to equip itself with modern weapons in an arms race and, by utilizing military power, dictate its goals to weaker societies. In this process, human rights were recognized to the extent that they did not conflict with Western interests. This trend grew to such an extent that the current world has become a storehouse of gunpowder, and developed countries are unwilling to practically accept international commitments to reduce their inhumane weapons. This is because they view military pressure as a strategic tool for achieving their grand agendas. The current arms race is the result of the Renaissance school's perspective on human rights on a global scale. This school espouses the doctrine of superiority and expansionism, and consequently, justifies aggression for itself, as it defines ethics as relative, tailored to its own objectives.

The West's struggle to access the resources and wealth of weaker nations has led to discrimination in the enjoyment of human rights, exposing the lack of sincerity in their humanist rhetoric. They view their own humanity as superior to second- and third-world nations. They perceive the superiority of a nation in its capacity for destruction and openly discuss the power to annihilate all of humanity: "The destructive capacity currently at America's disposal is sufficient to destroy the enemy, namely the Soviet Union, twenty-five times over. The opposing force in the hands of the enemy—the Soviet

Union—can annihilate us ten times, and the combined power of both the United States and the Soviet Union is enough to destroy humanity seven times over" (Kennedy, 1963: p. 66).

Indeed, the West, through its intellectual process, has endangered human security on various levels, including the spiritual, psychological, and even material realms. This is despite the fact that a doctrine lacking security will never have a place or widespread support. One of the most fundamental and essential aspects of any intellectual and practical movement is the provision and establishment of security for the people and the defense of their rights. Security is the cornerstone of individual and societal life, and it is a prerequisite for any kind of development, growth, well-being, and material and spiritual advancement. Security is not only confined to the social sphere, where it ensures the community's protection from corruption and evil, but a secure society must also embody this trait in the intellectual, spiritual, and psychological domains. Otherwise, it will not be able to create the promised historical society for humanity.

From the perspective of the Quran, the Medina of the Reappearance (of the Savior) will usher in an era of peace and security for humankind—an age in which people will no longer suffer from any form of fear, and human rights will not be violated in any way, whether physically, materially, emotionally, or otherwise. As the Quran states: “Allah has promised those among you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely grant them succession [to authority] upon the earth just as He granted it to those before them; and that He will surely establish for them their religion which He has chosen for them; and He will surely substitute for them, after their fear, security” (24:55). This divine promise will be fulfilled when the school of the Reappearance achieves complete succession and

leadership on earth, and when no trace of the Renaissance worldview or materialist culture remains.

Among the goals and principles of a religious government are establishing security, defending against and confronting enemies, protecting the rights of the oppressed and downtrodden, resisting tyrants and aggressors, ensuring welfare and comfort, maintaining societal peace, and collecting and properly distributing public treasury. Such a government must combat disorder, foreign invasions, and the domination of bullies, while securing the rights of the underprivileged. These goals are to be fully realized in the era of the Reappearance, as the current security challenges facing humanity will no longer exist. Prophet Muhammad spoke of the security during this time, saying: "The government of the Mahdi will be such that two women will travel at night without fear of injustice or oppression" (Ṭabarānī, 1985, vol. 8, p. 197). And he also said: "Surely, God will complete this matter (His religion) so that a rider may travel by night from Sanaa to Hadhramaut and fear none but God" (Bayhaqī, 2003, vol. 9, p. 180).

Material security—in areas such as the economy, politics, and more—will be achieved through the tireless struggle and continuous battles waged by the companions of Imam al-Mahdi. This period will mark the peak of the confrontation between the forces of truth and falsehood, where faith and disbelief will clash until, by God's permission, the camp of truth attains ultimate victory and triumph. During this phase, the enemy will deploy all its efforts to destroy the school of God's guardian, and Satan will mobilize all his instruments so that the forces of falsehood might prevail. However, the divine will is that truth shall prevail in this historical moment of existence. After the martyrdom of a great number of believers under the banner of the Imam of the Age, this long-awaited historical hope will be realized.

Imam al-Baqir referred to this struggle, saying: "By God, the companions of the Mahdi will fight to such an extent that God alone is worshipped and no partner is ascribed to Him. So much so that an elderly and frail woman will be able to travel from one end of the world to the other, and no one will harass her" (Nuʿmānī, 2010, p. 283).

Based on this, alongside external security, inner security is also one of the major and fundamental objectives of the school of the Reappearance. In this era, due to the dominance of monotheism and servitude to God on earth, human beings will attain spiritual richness and reach such a level of cognitive and intellectual maturity that they will no longer be drawn to base desires and worldly attachments. This distinctive trait will lead to the flourishing and actualization of their spiritual and inner capacities. It is in this time that Satan and his powers of seduction will be destroyed by Imam al-Mahdi, the savior.

6. Complication of Human Life and Leading Humans to Unity

The current advancements of the West have not only failed to bring it true peace, but have also produced a climate marked by plurality, disorder, and anxiety—preventing individuals from pursuing the true purpose of their existence. In reality, modernity is composed of numerous seductive manifestations that, by implanting false material desires and aspirations, alienate humans from their true selves. It convinces them that the void left by the absence of spirituality can be filled with these superficial means.

This is the very nature of modernity and Western civilization—to intensify materialism in human life and increasingly entangle individuals in its various forms. In such a state, human life expands outwardly day by day, with ever more dimensions and aspects entering one's existence. A person's desires, shaped by a modernist

environment, are constantly renewed and redefined, to the point where they become overwhelmed by the multitude of material complexities—unsure of what they truly want from life or what they should be seeking. The legacy of modernity is complexity, frustration, and the bewilderment of the human being in the realm of materialism.

In such a way of life and worldview—unlike the era of the Reappearance—the more a person runs, the farther they seem from reaching their destination, and naturally, they find no real satisfaction in life. The complex, bureaucratic system not only threatens the individual dimensions of human existence but also disrupts its social aspects. Even for the simplest tasks, one must spend long hours in offices, banks, and various institutions. The crowded industrial cities, transportation systems, and constant air pollution only add to this sense of frustration. How can a human being, submerged in the environment of modernity and entangled in such levels of complexity and busyness, possibly reflect on themselves, their purpose in life, or spiritual meaning?

Modernity, relying on empirical science and its material achievements, seeks to establish a new domain of human life—one in which the individual can attain the utmost pleasures without ever feeling the need for religion. Yet it remains heedless of a crucial truth: that the only remedy for the human being amid the chaos of materialism is a return to religion and spiritualism, for the human soul inherently yearns for purpose. The fundamental question is this: when material existence itself leads to disillusionment, how can it possibly offer peace and fulfillment through the same tools that caused the despair? It is a false notion to believe that material civilization, with its vast complexities and endless distractions, can bring humanity tranquility and true well-being.

In the era of the Reappearance, human life will be freed from

material complexities and pluralities—unlike the current materialist system, which has drawn people into an endless competition driven by unceasing material desires. At the heart of this system lies a manipulative cycle of stimulation, where the constant creation of new needs and fleeting satisfactions keeps individuals trapped. Within this cycle, people suffer from the inability to compete and are psychologically conditioned to feel insignificant in society—believing they are lesser simply because they possess fewer material resources. In such a structure, one person owns private jets and yachts, while another dies from hunger due to the inability to afford food. In this unjust hierarchy, those with greater wealth rise to the top of the pyramid, while those unable to compete are buried at its base. As Gare (2001, p. 49) observes: "To be poor is to be without argument... Scientific language games have turned into the language games of the wealthy, where the richer one is, the greater the chance of being right." Within this framework, the Medina of the Reappearance represents the return from multiplicity to unity, and the liberation of humanity from the burdensome constraints of material excess and pluralities—products of Western modernity.

7. Material Justice and Realization of Inclusive Justice in the Universe

Human beings inherently possess a natural inclination toward justice, and this innate trait becomes one of the key components of the era of the Reappearance. Prior to that era, the world will be engulfed by a sweeping tide of oppression and discrimination. One of the primary reasons for humanity's desperate need for the school of the Reappearance—and a necessary precondition for the establishment of the Medina of the Reappearance—is precisely this overwhelming prevalence of injustice in the world. Only the divinely appointed

guardian will have the capacity to uproot such global oppression in a comprehensive and lasting way.

The materialist system of the West has never been able to present the concept of justice as an appealing and meaningful ideal to humanity. This is because, given the foundational principles of this worldview—the primacy of materialism, the pursuit of maximum pleasure, and an emphasis on endless diversity and consumption—true justice becomes unattainable. The world, under such a system, turns into a battleground of conflict and competition, where those with wealth and power dominate and reap the most benefit. The material order is inherently a field of constant struggle and conflict, and when the very nature of materialism carries such internal contradictions, how can it possibly serve as a foundation for justice?

On the other hand, as long as the standards in human society are shaped by the whims of the ego, satanic temptations, and aligned with the interests of the guardians of the Renaissance worldview, it is only natural that justice will be interpreted in ways that serve their agendas. In this way, the moral scale is distorted and manipulated, and the lines between truth and falsehood become blurred. As we witness today, values have been turned into disvalues, and those very disvalues now sit at the center of judgment—functioning as the criteria for measurement and analysis. In this state, the scales of social relations are thrown into disarray, and the ability to discern between good and evil becomes inverted and confused.

In this era, people long for the establishment of a just government and the emergence of a savior who will deliver them from the whirlpool of material entanglements and the corruption of moral standards. With the onset of the Reappearance, the first step will be the rectification of these distorted criteria—restoring values and disvalues to their rightful places, so that people’s understanding and

expectations of justice can be properly realigned. Once this moral and intellectual framework is corrected, society will gain a clear and accurate understanding of the oppressive ruler versus the righteous reformer. Then, through their own choice and free will, people will form the foundation for the rise and global expansion of the movement led by the Imam of Justice. In this renewed context, people's aesthetic sensibilities will be transformed, motivating them to seek the correction of deviations and decline, and to dispel the pervasive darkness that has overshadowed the earth.

This process of reform will culminate in humanity reaching the realization that the Imam himself embodies the essence of truth, justice, and the very standard by which justice is measured against oppression. The fulfillment of his will on earth will equate to the establishment of absolute justice throughout existence. This is because, apart from the will of God, the Imam will have no other desire, and his divine will will be perfectly in harmony with the will of the Almighty. It is for this reason that some have referred to religion as the measure of human actions. Both the Imam and the religion move in the same direction, reflecting God's will without any deviation or deficiency. As ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī (2009, vol. 18, p. 54) states: "The measure refers to the religion contained in the Book, and the Book has added to it. Religion is called the measure because the beliefs and actions of human beings are judged by it, and on the Day of Judgment, their deeds will be weighed according to it, and they will be recompensed. Therefore, the measure is the religion with its principles and branches."

The Imam, who embodies the essence of justice and the standard by which truth is distinguished from falsehood, will, in the City of the Reappearance, judge the people without needing evidence or falling into error. His judgment will restore true justice to the

world. As is narrated: "The judgment of Imam al-Mahdi (may Allah hasten his reappearance) will be based on reality and will be informed by divine knowledge, while the judicial practices of Prophet David (peace be upon him) and Prophet Solomon (peace be upon him) were based on testimony and oaths. It was only for a very brief period that Prophet David (peace be upon him) judged according to reality" (Majlisī, 2007, vol. 53, p. 90).

Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, one of the hadith narrators from the Sunni tradition, reports from the Prophet that the just conduct of the Mahdi at the time of his appearance will be such that all people, as well as the inhabitants of the heavens and the earth, will be completely pleased with him. The Prophet said: "I give you glad tidings of the Mahdi. He will be raised among my community at a time when people are in conflict and earthquakes occur. He will fill the earth with justice and equity, just as it had been filled with oppression and tyranny. The inhabitants of the heavens and the earth will be pleased with him. God will enrich the hearts of the nation of Muhammad with contentment, and none will be in need of another" (Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, 1981, vol. 4, p. 104).

Thus, in that era, the world will no longer witness the overwhelming injustices of arrogant global powers who, under false pretexts, annihilate thousands of innocent people—while humanitarian institutions not only fail to prevent these atrocities but, through their silence and official resolutions, effectively endorse the crimes of the oppressors. In that time, oppressive powers will no longer be able to dominate weaker nations, and the resources of such lands will no longer be plundered under excuses like combating terrorism. Instead, people of every race, language, and nation will enjoy equal access to resources and blessings. Imam al-Baqir states: "When the Qāʾim (the Upriser) from the Ahl al-Bayt (peace be upon them) arises, he will

distribute wealth equally and will deal justly with the people" (Majlisī, 2007, vol. 52, p. 351).

Conclusion

Today, the schools of Modernism and Postmodernism are fraught with numerous challenges, reflecting the materialistic spirit that pervades their various dimensions. Within this context, the Renaissance school and the doctrine of Mahdism represent two fundamentally distinct paradigms—each rooted in a different essence and reality. As a result, their respective governing structures reveal inherent contradictions. For instance, the Renaissance promotes values such as hedonism, the pursuit of diversity, and a sense of independence from the unseen (supernatural realm). In stark contrast, the doctrine of Mahdism is founded on principles such as the necessity of connection with the unseen world, the imperative to control and guide human desires, and adherence to the moral frameworks established by God. Thus, any fair-minded and perceptive individual will quickly discern the profound opposition between these two paradigms—both in their theoretical underpinnings and in the societal models they advocate.

Some view modernity as a double-edged sword—like a knife—claiming it can be used for either beneficial or harmful purposes, depending on the user. However, as previously explained in detail, there exists an intrinsic and essential conflict between modernity and Mahdism at both the foundational and structural levels. This is not a superficial or practical disagreement but a fundamental clash between faith and disbelief, light and darkness. Modernity is grounded in materialism and inspired by satanic teachings about existence. As such, it denies monotheism, belief in the unseen and the hereafter, and the spiritual dimensions of human beings, working vigorously to distance mankind from these truths. In contrast, the

movement of the reappearance of the Mahdi is destined to realize these divine realities in their most complete form within the cosmos. In the era of reappearance, a unified and global servitude to God will emerge, laying the foundation for a new Islamic civilization and other promised transformations. Each of these outcomes will arise only after the downfall of the dominant Renaissance-rooted culture. Thus, it is not coherent to promote the idea of coexistence or harmony between the Mahdist vision and modern technology, nor to speak of a machine-centered life within the era of reappearance. The relationship between modernity and Mahdism cannot be framed as one of mutual cooperation—because to do so would require reconciling deep-rooted contradictions in both principles and practical application.

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Bi-quarterly Journal of
Theosophia Islamica
Islamic Sciences and culture Academy
EISSN: 2783-3240
Vol. 4 ● No. 1 ● 2024 ● Issue 7

The Foundations of Standing on the Right Side of History Based on Civilizational Confrontation in the Thought of Iran's Supreme Leader

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Received: 2025/04/26 Accepted: 2025/05/28

Abstract

The term "the right side of history" was used by Ayatollah Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Revolution, in a letter addressed to the conscientious students supporting the Palestinian people at universities in the United States. He stated: "You are now standing on the right side of history— which is unfolding before us." This research aims to provide an analytical and explanatory foundation for the movement toward "the right side of history," based on civilizational confrontation, using the analytical, inferential method. To gather information, the research has utilized the documentary method. In this study, the foundations of this movement are examined and explained from Quranic, narrative, historical, and rational perspectives, with a focus on the statements of the

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Supreme Leader of the Revolution. The findings of the research indicate that through various transmitted and rational methods, one can understand this civilizational confrontation and its underlying principles. The diversity of these methods, considering the variety of tastes and interests in the fields of promotion and advocacy, will be very beneficial. Additionally, gaining insight into this matter can serve as a good prelude to explain the issue in various international spheres.

Keywords

The right side of history, civilizational confrontation, Quranic and hadith-based principles, Sayyed Ali Khamenei, Western civilization, truth (right) and falsehood (wrong).

Introduction

The expression "on the right side of history" was used by Ayatollah Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Revolution, in a letter addressed to conscientious students supporting the Palestinian people at American universities. He said: "You are now standing on the right side of history—which is unfolding before us" (Khamenei, Letter to Students Supporting the Palestinian People in Universities of the United States, May 26, 2024). This expression is based on an understanding derived from the confrontation between two fronts and two civilizations, which deserves to be examined on this basis. What are the foundations of this movement? And what are the roots of this thought? By presenting these foundations, a clearer understanding of this civilizational confrontation and the reasons behind the Islamic Republic of Iran's positions in regional events will emerge, leading to better persuasion regarding how we should engage with the West. These foundations can be analyzed in four domains: Quranic foundations, hadith-based foundations, historical foundations, and philosophical foundations.

Various studies have been conducted on the topic of civilizational confrontation, such as:

"Analysis of the Confrontation and Interaction between Islam and the West in the Virtual World, Focusing on the Letters of the Leader of the Revolution to Western Youth," by Mostafa Alimardani, *Rahavard Noor* Quarterly, 2016. This paper, by focusing on the letter of the Supreme Leader to Western youth, aims to explain the anti-Islamic movements of the West and strategies for defending Islam against these attacks in the virtual space, as well as introducing Islam through authentic and primary sources.

However, there has been no independent research on the

foundations of this movement; it has only been briefly mentioned in books on the foundations of the Islamic Revolution, such as:

The Islamic Revolution: Foundations and Characteristics, with Emphasis on the Thoughts of Imam Khomeini and the Supreme Leader by Mohammad Haghi (al-Mustafa International Translation and Publishing Center, 2018). The goal of this book is to introduce the foundations and characteristics of the Islamic Revolution, with a focus on the thoughts of Imam Khomeini and the Supreme Leader. This work, which is based on scholarly articles and published books, addresses topics such as: the nature of the Islamic Revolution, the necessity of an Islamic government, the philosophical, legal, and mystical foundations of the Islamic Revolution, the theory of the Islamic Revolution, the theory of the Guardianship of the Jurist (*Wilāyat al-Faqīh*), the historical rationale (both rational and textual), the conditions for the Guardian Jurist, the concept of absolute guardianship of the jurist, the factors behind the victory of the Islamic Revolution, Islamic democracy, the cultural, political, social, and economic goals of the Islamic Revolution, the distinguishing features of the Islamic Revolution, and a comparison of the Islamic Revolution with other world revolutions.

Introduction to the Foundations of the Islamic Revolution by Mehdi Sheikh (Sepehr Andish Publishing, 2015). In this book, the author analyzes and examines the Revolution, focusing more on its roots, various dimensions, and historical course. The author argues that, while engaging in struggle and resistance in the political, military, economic, and intellectual arenas, it is crucial to both remind the revolutionary generation of the ideals of the Revolution and, by transmitting these ideals to subsequent generations—who were not witnesses to the revolutionary events—counter the political plots of the enemies aimed at gradually deviating the Revolution and creating a rift between the revolutionary generation and the later generations.

Foundations, Goals, and the Impact of the Fundamental Messages and Slogans of the Islamic Revolution by Morteza Ashrafi (al-Mustafa International Translation and Publishing Center, 2017). This book presents the essential and foundational concepts regarding the goals and ideals of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, aiming to inspire nations around the world. By drawing on the lofty objectives and ideals of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, it encourages others to follow this unparalleled and unique revolution, ultimately achieving their goals and liberation from the oppression and tyranny of ruling regimes. In this research, through the analysis of the slogans and messages expressed during the Iranian Islamic Revolution, and inspired by goals such as the policy of "Neither East nor West, an Islamic Republic," a new vision is offered to the global community. This vision encourages nations, Islamic liberation movements, and even secular freedom movements to gain independence and establish their own distinct identity.

1. The Concept

1.1. The Right Side of History

The expression "the right side of history" was used by Ayatollah Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Revolution, in a letter addressed to the conscientious students supporting the Palestinian people at universities in the United States. While expressing solidarity with the anti-Zionist protests of these students, he regarded them as part of the resistance front and emphasized the need for a change in the status and destiny of the crucial region of Western Asia. He stated: "Dear student youth in the United States! This is our message of solidarity with you. You are now standing on the right side of history—which is unfolding before us" (Khamenei, Letter to the Students Supporting the Palestinian People at U.S. Universities, 26 May 2024).

1.2. Civilizational Confrontation

In a general view, the West remains in a state of ignorance or neglect regarding the origin of humanity (see: Kamal, 2018, pp. 76-82). A glance at the works of the founders and researchers of modern sciences, regardless of their success or failure, reveals that these sciences are inclined towards filling the gap left by religious faith with scientific belief (see: Khaki Gharamaleki, 2010, pp. 107-109). The situation is different in the West when it comes to the ultimate model and aspirations of humanity. The idea of progress based on material forces has, since the eighteenth century, been almost worshiped as a dogma and in the form of a false religion (see: Nasr, 1999, p. 21). Durkheim, who is considered one of the founders of modern sociology, believes that the devotion of the believer to God is because it is from God that they believe their existence, especially their mental and spiritual existence, is derived. We have the same reasoning for this feeling of ours toward society (Durkheim, 2012, p. 149). Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, apart from their divine thoughts, speak about the social contract and the formation of civil society based on it (see: Sabzei, 2007, p. 67). According to Western researchers such as Pasmore, the Renaissance instilled widespread confidence in humanity, convincing it that perfection lies in relation to fellow humans, not in connection with God or the pursuit of ethics and striving for worldly success, and certainly not necessarily through a bond with the supernatural realm. Self-love has replaced all other attachments (Shojaei-Zand, 2002, p. 82). Western science, despite its rapid progress and its help in empowering humanity—allowing humans to dominate nature, use it for daily life, and enjoy material benefits—has distanced itself from the true purpose of knowledge about the world (Shariati, 1957, p. 8). This is evident in various sciences developed within Western civilization. Educational sciences, for instance, grew with this orientation and focused on moral

education without a divine perspective. As a result, such education conflicted with religious foundations, because what the prophets brought from God in the name of religion had no other goal than the moral education of humans, rooted in a divine source, explained through reason and revelation. Education based on anything other than a divine foundation is based on whim and desire, reinforcing illusion, lust, anger, and passion (Javadi Amoli, 2001, pp. 32-34). Motahari expressed concern over non-religious education in the current era, describing it as combining law with adherence to it, detached from divine faith and based on elements such as humanity (Motahari, 2005, vol. 4, p. 314 and vol. 22, p. 674). In discussing the views of Western scholars on education, he noted that these scholars mainly relied on moral education based on reason and will, free from religious sentiment (Motahari, 1983, p. 55). According to what education researchers have stated, the general structure of modern education is based on the assumption that humans are conscious, linguistic beings with civilization, but without metaphysical or spiritual aspects in their lives. Accordingly, all hypotheses, theories, models, and recommendations in the field of education are the result of the assumptions of modernity, among the most important of which is the rejection, neglect, or denial of the spiritual and supernatural aspects of humanity (Alamolhoda, 2003, pp. 119-121). Perhaps for this reason, despite all the efforts made in educational sciences in the West, research in Western societies indicates that this method of education has encountered practical problems. These studies reveal a rising trend in moral deviations, especially among teenagers and young adults. The World Health Organization's report also reveals high rates of violence and other moral deviations in various countries, including the United States. In the U.S., moral deviations nearly doubled between 1980 and 1994, with an increase in drug use, criminal activities, and other forms of moral decay (Armand,

2007, p. 45). Thus, according to researchers, it can be said that at least in some areas, Western civilization has reached an impasse (Nasr, 1973, p. 207).

2. Research Method

In this article, the information is examined using both analytical and descriptive methods, with the content being collected through library research, the use of software, and reference to credible Islamic sources. For gathering data, this research will employ a documentary library method and note-taking, using an analytical-descriptive approach.

3. Analyzing the Research Findings

3.1. Quranic Foundations of Standing on the Right Side of History

The Quran repeatedly illustrates this conflict from the beginning of the prophetic movement and speaks of the opposition of Satan's forces: "And thus We have made for every prophet an enemy, the devils from mankind and jinn, inspiring some of them to others with deceptive speech, in order to lead astray. And if your Lord had willed, they would not have done it, so leave them and that which they invent" (Quran 6:112). In this ongoing confrontation, the Quran mentions the alignment of the forces of truth and falsehood: "That is because those who disbelieve follow falsehood, and those who believe follow the truth from their Lord. Thus Allah makes clear to people their examples" (Quran 47:3), "Say, 'The truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Indeed, falsehood is ever bound to vanish'" (Quran 34:49). The forces of truth are attributed to God, and anything other than Him is described as falsehood: "That is because Allah is the Truth, and what they invoke besides Him is falsehood. And that Allah is the Most High, the Grand" (Quran 31:30; 22:62). Further descriptions are given: "He

sends down from the sky water, and it becomes rivers according to its measure, and the torrent carries a foam of its own. And from what they heat in the fire, seeking to make jewelry or goods, there arises a foam like it. Thus Allah presents the examples of truth and falsehood. As for the foam, it disappears as scum, and what benefits people remains on the earth. Thus Allah presents examples" (Quran 13:17). And the final outcome of the struggle is the victory of truth: "Rather, We dash the truth against falsehood, and it destroys it, and it is gone. And woe to you for what you describe" (Quran 21:18), "And say, 'The truth has come, and falsehood has perished. Indeed, falsehood is ever bound to perish'" (Quran 17:81).

In addition to illustrating the division between truth (right) and falsehood (wrong), the Quran refers to a concept called "Tāghūt" as a symbol and embodiment of the forces of falsehood, identifying those who disbelieve as following this path: "Those who believe fight in the cause of Allah, and those who disbelieve fight in the cause of *Tāghūt*. So fight the allies of Satan. Indeed, the plot of Satan is weak" (Quran 4:76). It also describes the protectors of the believers as those led by Allah, who brings them from darkness to light, while the disbelievers are under the guardianship of *Tāghūt*: "Allah is the protector of those who believe, who brings them from darknesses to the light. And those who disbelieve, their allies are *Tāghūt*, who takes them out of the light into the darknesses" (Quran 2:257). Those who reject *Tāghūt* and believe in Allah are described as holding on to the "strongest rope" that cannot be severed: "So whoever renounces *Tāghūt* and believes in Allah has certainly grasped the most trustworthy handhold, which will never break" (Quran 2:256), for "the guidance has become distinct from error" (Quran 2:256). In this conflict, those who avoided worshiping *Tāghūt* and turned to Allah, the "right side of history," are given glad tidings: "And those who avoided the worship of *Tāghūt* and turned to

Allah, for them is good tidings. So give good tidings to My servants" (Quran 39:17). This confrontation between the forces of good and evil is prominent in the verses that address the concept of *Wilāya* (guardianship) (see: Khamenei, 2013).

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution, in his letter to the American students supporting the Palestinian people, concludes his message by advising them to familiarize themselves with the Quran. He writes: "The lesson of the Quran to us Muslims and to all people of the world is steadfastness in the path of truth: 'So remain steadfast as you have been commanded' [Quran 11:112]; and the lesson of the Quran regarding human relations is: 'Do not wrong yourselves or others, nor accept oppression' [Quran 2:279]. The resistance front moves forward and will achieve victory by following these instructions and hundreds of similar ones, with the will of Allah." (Khamenei, Letter to the Students Supporting the Palestinian People at U.S. Universities, 26 May 2024). He also references this divine source and states: "I recommend that you become familiar with the Quran" (Ibid).

3.2. Hadith-Based Foundations of Standing on the Right Side of History

In the hadiths, great emphasis is placed on understanding the true position, background, and future of humanity's movement, and those who are aware of this truth are praised: "May Allah have mercy on a person who... knows from where, in what, and to where [they are going]" (Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, 1985, vol. 1, p. 116). On the other hand, the division between the forces of truth and falsehood (*Tāghūt*) is extensively discussed in the narrations. Recognizing these divisions and aligning oneself with the side of truth is a concept derived from the elevated notion of Wilayah (guardianship) (see: Khamenei, 2013, discussion on Wilayah). This truth is so crucial that it is considered one of the five main pillars

of Islam, and it is highlighted as being distinct from the other pillars: "Islam is built upon five: prayer, zakat, fasting, pilgrimage, and Wilayah. Nothing has been called out for as much as *Wilāya*" (Kulaynī, 2009, vol. 2, p. 18). Further narrations provide hints about people's behavior toward this important truth: "The people have taken four, but left this one — meaning *Wilāya*" (Barqī, 1992, vol. 1, p. 286). There is no allowance or exemption regarding it: "Among the four, there is a concession; however, no concession is given for *Wilāya*. Whoever does not have wealth is not obligated to pay Zakat; whoever does not have the means is not required to perform Hajj; a sick person prays sitting down and breaks his fast during Ramadan. But *Wilāya*, whether one is healthy, sick, wealthy, or not, remains obligatory and binding" (Ibn Bābawayh, 1983, vol. 1, p. 278). With the settlement of humans in the "earth," they become subject to divine commandments. In the hadiths, a clear depiction is provided of how humanity fits into the system of divine guidance. The most important pillars of this system, as presented in the hadiths, involve the institutionalization of reason within human existence, a system that is shaped by the angels and follows the prophets. In contrast, ignorance, accompanied by Satan, stands in opposition.

With the settlement of humans on the "earth," they become subject to divine commands and orders. The hadiths present a clear depiction of how humans are positioned within the system of divine guidance. The most important components of this system, as described in the hadiths, involve the establishment of reason within human existence, which is shaped in harmony with the angels and the following of the prophets. In contrast, ignorance, accompanied by Satan, stands in opposition.

The positioning of reason as the first spiritual creation of Allah, along with its forces, in opposition to ignorance and its forces,

is central to divine address (Kulaynī, 2009, vol. 1, p. 21). The relationship between reason and religion dates back to the beginning of human life, with the choice of reason being one of the first choices of Adam, accompanied by modesty and faith (Kulaynī, 2009, vol. 1, p. 10). As observed, reason within human existence can be explained both in the realms of thought and action. In contrast, ignorance has also accompanied humanity in both the realms of thought and action since the beginning of their life, leading to problematic choices. This ignorance is so deeply rooted that the act of eating from the forbidden tree was a manifestation of humanity's ignorance (Qummī, 1985, vol. 1, p. 43).

Along with the ignorance inherent in humans, Satan, as their enemy, is a crucial element in the realm of "where" (*fī ayn*) concerning human life. Satan's point of leverage is his exploitation of both intellectual and practical ignorance within humanity. He uses human ignorance, tempting them to eat from the forbidden tree, thereby pushing them into worldly life (Qummī, 1985, vol. 1, p. 43). Satan also works to strengthen ignorance within humans, reinforcing the ignorant processes he seeks to reinforce (Qummī, 1985, vol. 1, p. 165).

In contrast to the current of ignorance, which gains strength through the companionship of Satan, the current of reason is supported by the angels and the divine prophets. The companionship of the angels has been of great significance for humans from the very beginning. Adam, as the first human, was deeply dependent on the divine angels, and his distance from them caused sorrow and grief within him (Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, 1990, p. 49).

The process of guidance is completed with the sending of the divine prophets, who stand in opposition to the onslaught of ignorance and the spread of Satan's influence. The path of prophethood is a

continuous journey, grounded in human nature and reason, and reaches its peak with the mission of the Prophet Muhammad (Sayyid al-Raḍī, 1992, First Sermon).

3.3. Historical Foundations of Standing on the Right Side of History

According to ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī's thought, the divine unity (*tawḥīd*), which is the ultimate goal of the divine laws, cannot manifest and emerge in human society merely through knowledge and opinion. Rather, in order for divine unity to be realized in the social realm, Allah Almighty has sent the prophets as practical embodiments of divine unity. Perhaps this is the reason why the Quran devotes so much attention to the lives of the prophets (Ṭabāṭabā□ī, 2011, vol. 6, p. 260). In this regard, Imam Khomeini has considered the stories of the prophets in the Quran as containing numerous benefits and teachings, and has regarded the incident involving Adam as having secrets and mysteries (Khomeini, 1999, p. 75). Therefore, the prophetic line of *wilāya* (guardianship) and guidance throughout history, which Sadr refers to as the "line of martyrdom" (Sadr, 2008, p. 119), can be considered a millennia-old movement (Abedini, 2016, p. 52), beginning with Adam and continuing until the Seal of the Prophets and the appearance of the Mahdi. This perspective will particularly influence the understanding of history and its philosophy, distinguishing it from the basis of modern historiography (Parsania, 2009, pp. 51-52). Accordingly, the prophets are the pioneers of the covenant made in Alast (the pre-eternal covenant), and at key moments in history, they shape the course of humanity in society through their social presence. The perfect human (*Insān Kāmil*) plays a crucial role in the divine journey of societies throughout history and civilization, and this journey will pass through the path of the perfect human. Societies are categorized

based on their adherence or lack thereof to the covenant made. When societies awaken to the covenant, they respond to the invitation of the prophets and manifest the covenant in the social realm. This manifestation will continue until it culminates in the realization of the "Noble State" (*al-dawlat al-karīma*) as the ultimate ideal in divine civilization. Therefore, it can be concluded that since the ultimate goal of human life, according to Quranic verses, is to reach Allah (Quran 84:6), what matters throughout human history are the efforts made by the prophets and their followers in this regard (Āṣifī, 2007, vol. 9, p. 92), gradually fulfilling the divine will to guide humanity toward happiness.

3.4. Philosophical Foundations of Standing on the Right Side of History

According to the philosophical foundation, it must first be understood that today's environment is one where there is an opposing front against humanity. Therefore, one must adopt a "frontline perspective," recognizing that all people of truth are aligned in a single front, while there exists a unified enemy that concentrates all its forces in this confrontation: "Beware, Satan has gathered his party and mobilized his cavalry and infantry" (Nahj al-Balāgha, Sermon 10; Mufīd, 1994, vol. 1, p. 251). Under such circumstances, understanding this front and the civilizational confrontation becomes essential. Each person must realize their position and role within this front. The people of one front are not opposed to each other; they must not be. Rather, they are united against one singular and unified enemy. Alongside the importance of the sovereignty of religion and jurisprudence in safeguarding the faith, it is equally necessary for the forces of believers to unite as a front. This understanding of the front is a key

point that is emphasized in the statements of the Supreme Leader of the Revolution:

> When a person looks at their opposite, they see a front. In front of us is the political and cultural front of the West; within this front, there is also a dangerous and cannibalistic capitalist front; alongside this, there is a Zionist front with specific goals; next to that, there is a front of intellectual regression and the pig-like state of humanity's life; these kings, rulers, and those responsible for many governments live an animalistic life like pigs, with goals that are those of the enemies and minds that are backward. All of these have formed a collective in opposition to us, a front. If we want to act in opposition to this front, we must have diversity, creativity, motivation, and plans. Our work must be guided, and this can only happen through the formation of a front; on our side, a front must be formed as well. The work of individuals and even isolated groups is not enough; a vast collective effort is required (Khamenei, Speech at the Meeting with Cultural Officials of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, 2 May 2013).

When the enemy has formed its own front and, despite its internal differences, has united in opposition to the front of truth, there is no escape from forming a front in return (Alavi, 2017, p. 133). The term "front" is clearly evident in the letter of Ayatollah Khamenei to the Palestinian-supporting students at universities in the United States:

> You are now part of the resistance front, and under the ruthless pressure of your government – which openly defends the oppressive and merciless Zionist regime – you have begun an honorable struggle. The great front of resistance, in a distant location, has been fighting with the same awareness and sentiments that you

possess today for many years. The goal of this struggle is to halt the blatant oppression inflicted upon the Palestinian people by a terrorist and ruthless network called the 'Zionists,' who, after seizing their land, subjected them to the harshest pressures and tortures. The genocide of today by the apartheid Zionist regime is a continuation of the extremely oppressive behavior carried out over the past decades (Khamenei, Letter to Palestinian-supporting Students in U.S. Universities, 5 Rajab 1403 [May 5, 2023]).

Conclusion

1. The phrase "the right side of history" was used by Ayatollah Khamenei, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, in a letter addressed to conscientious Palestinian-supporting students at U.S. universities. This expression is based on an understanding arising from the confrontation between two fronts and two civilizations, and it is essential to examine its foundational principles. By exploring these foundations, a clearer understanding of this civilizational confrontation and the rationale behind the positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran in regional events will emerge, leading to better persuasion regarding our approach to the West. These foundations can be analyzed in four areas: Quranic foundations, hadith-based foundations, historical foundations, and philosophical foundations.
2. In its discourse, the Quran repeatedly depicts this confrontation from the very beginning of the prophets' mission and speaks of the conflict with the forces of Satan. In this eternal confrontation, it refers to the division between the forces of truth and falsehood, associating the forces of truth with itself, while

describing everything opposed to it as false and providing various descriptions of it. The Quran ultimately declares the triumph of truth over falsehood. Alongside explaining this division of "truth and falsehood," the Quran also introduces the concept of "Tāghūt" as a symbol and embodiment of the forces of falsehood, identifying those who disbelieve as part of this path. It describes those who, in this confrontation, reject *Tāghūt* and embrace faith in Allah as holding on to "the firmest handhold, which cannot be broken." Furthermore, the Quran gives glad tidings to those who, having refrained from worshiping *Tāghūt*, have turned to Allah, the one on "the right side of history."

3. In the hadiths, great emphasis is placed on recognizing the true position, history, and future of human movement, and those who understand this truth are praised. On the other hand, the division between the forces of truth and *Tāghūt* in the hadiths is a detailed topic. The understanding of these divisions and being aligned with the forces of truth is deeply tied to the concept of "Wilāya" (Divine Authority), which is so important that it is counted as one of the five fundamental pillars of Islam, even standing out among them. With the settlement of human beings on Earth, they became the recipients of divine commands and instructions. The hadiths present a clear image of how humans fit into the divine guidance system. The most crucial elements of this system in the narrations are the establishment of reason within the human being, which is guided by angels and follows the prophets. In contrast, ignorance, accompanied by Satan, stands opposed to it. The alignment of reason, as the first

spiritual creation of God, with its forces in battle against ignorance and its followers, is central to the divine discourse.

4. According to the thought of ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī, the divine unity (*tawḥīd*), which is the ultimate goal of divine laws, cannot manifest and be realized solely through knowledge and theory in human society. Rather, in order for divine unity to manifest in the realm of society, God has sent the prophets as the practical exemplars of divine unity. This may also be the reason why the Quran places such great emphasis on the lives of the prophets. Therefore, the movement of *Wilāya* and the guidance of the prophets throughout history can be regarded as a millennia-old movement, starting with Adam and continuing through to the last of the prophets and the appearance of the Awaited Imam (may Allah hasten his reappearance). This perspective will especially influence the understanding of history and its philosophy, distinguishing its foundation from the framework of modern historiography.

5. Based on the principles of reason, it is first important to recognize that the current environment is one in which a front exists against humanity. Therefore, one must adopt a "frontline perspective," meaning the awareness that all people of truth are united in one front, and there is a single enemy that has unified all of its forces for this confrontation, forming a cohesive front. In such circumstances, understanding this front and its civilizational confrontation becomes crucial: each individual is placed in their rightful position and serves within this one front. The members of a single front are not and should not be in opposition to each other, but rather are united in confronting a

single, unified enemy. Alongside the importance of religious governance and jurisprudence for safeguarding the faith, it is also essential for the believers' forces to unite in a front. This notion of “forming a front” is one of the key points highlighted in the statements of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution. When the enemy has established its own front and, despite its internal differences, has united in opposition to the forces of truth, there is no avoiding the formation of a counter front.

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Bi-quarterly Journal of
Theosophia Islamica
Islamic Sciences and culture Academy
EISSN: 2783-3240
Vol. 4 ● No. 1 ● 2024 ● Issue 7

Comparative Study of the Capacities of Artificial Intelligence in Reconstructing Human Identity and Consciousness from the Perspective of Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy and John Searle's Philosophy of Mind

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Received: 2025/04/19 Accepted: 2025/05/27

Abstract

This article provides a philosophical analysis of identity within the context of artificial intelligence, from the perspective of Transcendent Philosophy (especially the views of Mulla Sadra) and contemporary philosophy. With the rapid advancements in artificial intelligence as one of the most significant innovations in computer science, issues such as the reconstruction of human identity and its comparison with natural intelligence have come to the fore. The paper examines the philosophical capacities and limitations of this phenomenon, exploring the perspectives of Mulla Sadra and John Searle, and offers a comparative

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https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.71614.1061

analysis of their views on identity and consciousness in machines and artificial intelligence. According to the views of these two thinkers, artificial intelligence, despite its advancements, cannot achieve human identity, as it lacks essential characteristics such as consciousness, intentionality, and abstraction. Searle argues that artificial systems will never be able to attain genuine consciousness because understanding meaning and consciousness are intrinsic to the human brain and mind, qualities that cannot be attributed to machines. He consistently supports this belief through the Chinese Room experiment and various critiques of artificial systems.

Keywords

Artificial intelligence, identity, Transcendent Philosophy, Mulla Sadra, John Searle, philosophy of mind, consciousness.

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI), as one of humanity's most advanced achievements and a prominent innovation in computer science, began in the mid-20th century with efforts such as the creation of the Turing machine and early projects aimed at simulating human behavior. In recent decades, advancements in machine learning and deep neural networks have transformed AI into a vast and influential field. This technology has not only contributed to solving complex scientific and industrial problems but has also posed new challenges in philosophical discussions on topics such as identity and consciousness.

Among the issues raised in this context are the potential of AI to reconstruct human identity and consciousness. The question arises: could AI one day surpass or match human natural intelligence by acquiring consciousness, or serve as a suitable substitute for it? Is it possible to attribute identity to AI, or not?

This article analyzes and compares the views of Transcendental Wisdom and the perspectives of Mulla Sadra and contemporary philosopher John Searle. The paper aims to offer a comparative examination of the capacities of AI in reconstructing human identity and consciousness from the viewpoints of these two philosophers.

Definition of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence refers to a branch of computer science that focuses on the design and development of systems and algorithms capable of performing tasks that typically require human natural intelligence. These tasks include natural language understanding, pattern recognition, learning from experiences, decision-making, and

problem-solving. In other words, artificial intelligence refers to the ability of machines to perform tasks that were previously thought to require human thought and reasoning. (Russell, S., & Norvig, P., 2021). In fact, artificial intelligence may potentially serve as a complement to or substitute for human intelligence and decision-making in tasks that require precise pattern analysis, prediction, and assessment of future outcomes.

1. A Philosophical Examination of Human Identity in Mulla Sadra's Thought

1.1. Substantial Motion

In his philosophical system, Mulla Sadra presents "substantial motion" as the foundation for explaining the dynamism and transformation of human identity and the restless nature of the world. He argues that since the natural world is not pure actuality, but rather a display and blend of potentialities and actualities, with motion being the transition of an object from potentiality to gradual actuality, both the nature of the natural world and the essence of human existence are constantly undergoing change and development. This transformation forms the foundation of human identity (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 3, p. 101). From this perspective, artificial intelligence is not considered a natural object or part of the natural world, but rather a product and extension of human existence. Therefore, in its independent form, it lacks substantial motion and cannot be regarded as an entity capable of human-like identity development. Clearly, with the perfection of human substantial motion, achievements such as artificial intelligence—being a product of natural intelligence—will continue to grow and evolve. However, since it lacks an independent essence, nature, and soul, it will not be subject to substantial motion. Even its potential for self-

expansion is based on pre-existing data that human intelligence encodes, rather than the growth and development of its own essence and nature.

1.2. Unity of the Intellect and the Intellected

One of the key principles in Transcendental Philosophy is the unity of the intellect, the intellector, and the intellected (*ittiḥād al-ʿaql wa-l-ʿāqil wa-l-maʿqūl*). This principle asserts that, in the process of cognition, a person becomes one with the object of knowledge. Importantly, humans possess "self-awareness" and have direct, intuitive knowledge of themselves and their essentially known objects. In other words, awareness, the object of awareness, and the identity of the aware individual are united. In Mulla Sadra's philosophy, this is referred to as the unity of intellect, the intellector, and the intellected, or the unity of knowledge, the knower, and the known, or perception, the perceiver, and the perceived (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 3, p. 312). This unique feature of humans creates a fundamental distinction between them and artificial intelligence, which merely processes data. Artificial intelligence does not possess self-awareness and operates solely based on data from natural intelligence. It is not aware of the data processing itself, and thus cannot be considered to have self-knowledge or its data and analyses in the way that humans do, with its knowledge being united with its essentially known object and itself—the knower. In contrast, this philosophical concept is realized in humans according to the framework of Transcendent Philosophy.

Philosophical Analysis

In his philosophy, especially in his theories concerning the primacy of existence, substantial motion, and the unity of the intellect,

the intellector, and the intellected, Mulla Sadra views humans as transcendent and evolving beings who reach their ultimate perfection through substantial motion. According to him, human identity, from both an epistemological and ontological perspective, is not only connected to material dimensions but also to spiritual ones. In other words, humans are "corporeal in origin and spiritual in survival" (Mulla Sadra, 1989, vol. 8, p. 345). Within this framework, humans are beings rooted in the earth and the natural world, but they do not remain there. Through their progressive motion, they continually strive toward perfection, connecting with the divine truth. In this process, their potentialities and capabilities also have the capacity for growth. According to Sadra, humans are not merely material beings; they have the ability to reach the level of abstraction and even transcendence, attaining divine and godly capabilities. This is what the Qur'an refers to as the station of God's vicegerency (*khilāfat Allāh*). Moreover, humans are not simply rational animals, but in the realization of their perfection, they are the most noble type, in which all meanings and perfections are contained and united. Through acquiring knowledge and action, they can ascend to the higher realms and attain the station of *Liqāʾ Allāh* (encounter with God). Sadra believes that the primary material of the human body is clay, which, through development and evolution, takes various forms until it becomes capable of receiving divine grace. When the divine light shines upon the elemental body, another kind of creation occurs. This potential is present in all humans, but in some, with the strengthening of both intellectual and practical faculties, it is actualized through conscious choice and will to attain ultimate perfection (Mulla Sadra, 1989, pp. 129-135). The creation of the universe is for these beings, referred to as the perfect human and the vicegerent of God. Only the perfect human is worthy of the name

"human" and the station of divine vicegerency, embodying the Most Great Name of God and divine perfections. Therefore, from Sadra's perspective, the true identity of humans arises from the earth and, through knowledge and free will, ascends to the heavenly realms, becoming a divine identity that no other being can reach.

Based on this perspective, it is clear that, although artificial intelligence, with its lack of self-awareness and free will, and with its limited capabilities and computational and data structures, may serve as a useful tool in facilitating certain aspects of human life, it possesses a fixed, predefined, and mechanical identity that is imposed by an external agent. According to the philosophy of Mulla Sadra, AI cannot enhance its identity through knowledge and action without the intervention and programming of a human agent. Mulla Sadra believes that humans, in their spiritual development, attain true knowledge. In this view, humans possess specific spiritual dimensions that cannot be confined within data and mathematical algorithms. These qualities, such as connection to the truth and innate understanding, distinguish humans from machines. Mulla Sadra refers to humans as beings capable of receiving the truth through intuition and reason. Therefore, artificial intelligence, which can only process data, is incapable of comprehending the truth in its deeper sense and cannot grasp human identity.

Mulla Sadra is completely opposed to materialistic views. He perceives humans as composite beings, consisting of both body and soul, where the human "soul" or spirit functions as an independent and immaterial essence. Thus, artificial intelligence, which operates fundamentally based on material data and algorithms, cannot attain true consciousness, as this consciousness requires the soul and abstraction.

2. A Philosophical Examination of Human Identity in John Searle's View

John Searle, one of the most prominent contemporary philosophers, has proposed foundational theories in the philosophy of mind and language. He analyzes human identity by focusing on concepts such as intentionality, consciousness, subjectivity of mental states, and biological naturalism.

2.1. Intentionality as the Basis of Human Mental Identity

Searle introduces the concept of intentionality, or the "aboutness" of mental states, as the fundamental characteristic of the mind. Intentionality refers to the mind's ability to refer to objects, states, or matters. This concept, which has also been discussed in phenomenology, according to Searle, is the key distinction between humans and machines. He believes that intentionality is the feature that allows the human mind to refer to something beyond itself, whereas machines lack this ability (Searle, 1983). In this framework, human identity is shaped by the ability to understand, generate meaning, and interact with the external world. However, from his perspective, intentionality is not limited to intentions but also includes beliefs, desires, hopes, fears, love, hatred, greed, disgust, shame, pride, anger, joy, and all conscious and unconscious mental states that refer to or are about the external world (Searle, 2003, p. 24).

2.2. Consciousness: A Necessary Condition for Human Identity

Searle emphasizes the importance of consciousness as a vital element in human identity. He considers consciousness a qualitative and subjective state that is dependent on the internal experiences of

the human being. Searle regards consciousness as the central and fundamental reality of human existence, as without it, human aspects such as language, love, and humor would all be impossible (Searle, 2003, p. 24). Contrary to behaviorist or physicalist theories that reduce consciousness to physical processes, Searle argues that consciousness has an irreducible quality. In his view, consciousness cannot be simply reduced to physical or neural states; it must be analyzed as a mental phenomenon independent of them (Searle, 1992). From this perspective, human identity is not only dependent on brain activity but also on the conscious experiences of the individual.

2.3. Subjectivity of Mental States

The subjectivity of mental states is essentially the distinction between an individual's own perception and that of others. According to Searle, this subjectivity is marked by realities such as the fact that I can feel my pain, but you cannot. I see the world from my perspective, and you see it from yours. I am aware of myself and my internal mental states, which are completely distinct from those of other people and their mental states (Searle, 2003, p. 25).

2.4. Biological Causation: The Foundation of Human Identity

In his theory of "biological naturalism," Searle links human identity to its biological roots. He believes that consciousness and other mental characteristics are products of brain activity, but these activities must be understood in a biological context. In other words, human identity cannot be studied separately from the body or biological structures. Searle emphasizes that this view lies between extreme reductionism and mind-body dualism: mental properties are

real and part of the natural world, but they must be understood in the biological framework (Searle, 2004).

Searle criticizes Descartes' dualistic theories and argues that the mind and body are part of a unified system. He also considers the materialistic views that reduce consciousness to physical states as inadequate. From this perspective, human identity is a combination of mental and biological characteristics that function simultaneously. In John Searle's philosophy, human identity is based on concepts such as intentionality, consciousness, and biology. By rejecting Cartesian dualism and physical reductionism, he presents a comprehensive theory that addresses both mental experiences and biological foundations. Searle emphasizes that these characteristics distinguish human identity from other beings, particularly machines.

John Searle, with his materialistic view of the identity of the soul, believes that mental phenomena are the result of neurophysiological processes in the brain and its characteristics, which he refers to as biological naturalism. He argues that mental events and processes are as much a part of our biological natural history as the stomach, cellular division (both mitosis and meiosis), or enzyme secretion. To explain his view, Searle uses an analogy: Consider water. We are all familiar with the behavior of water at the macro level in everyday objects. We know it is wet, odorless (if pure), drinkable, and takes the shape of its container, among other properties. But why does water behave this way? The answer lies at the microscopic level, where we find that water is made up of millions of invisible molecules, each composed of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom (H_2O). The same principle applies to solid materials. He then provides examples, such as diamond and graphite, both of which

are made of carbon atoms, yet diamond is hard and graphite is soft. In any case, the macroscopic properties are the result of the behavior of the underlying microscopic elements.

Based on John Searle's views in *Minds, Brains, and Programs*, artificial intelligence can simulate human cognitive aspects and achieve similar capabilities to humans. In this approach, machines are capable of making complex decisions and exhibiting behaviors similar to those of humans, based on data and algorithms, although a deep understanding of the meaning of these decisions and their connection to human identity is not possible. In addressing the issue of artificial intelligence, Searle demonstrates that machines lack the key features necessary to form human identity. He argues that human identity depends on the ability to experience intentionality and consciousness, while machines simply process data. Searle uses his famous "Chinese Room" argument to show that machines cannot achieve true understanding, an argument that will be further discussed in this paper.

In his philosophical analysis of artificial intelligence, John Searle distinguishes between two types of AI: Weak AI and Strong AI. This distinction is one of the central debates in contemporary philosophy of mind, and Searle's view plays a pivotal role in critiquing the capabilities of Strong AI.

Weak AI

Searle argues that weak artificial intelligence is merely a simulation of human mental functions. Accordingly, weak AI systems can exhibit behaviors similar to those of humans, but these behaviors do not imply the existence of understanding, consciousness, or a mind within them. In other words, this type of AI is a tool for simulating the

human mind without actually possessing a true mind. Searle states that weak AI can be useful for testing theories about human cognition, but it will never truly understand meanings or possess intentionality (Searle, 1980, p. 417).

Strong AI

In contrast to weak AI, strong AI claims that if a machine can simulate the functions of the human mind, it can be considered to possess a mind, consciousness, and true understanding. Searle strongly disagrees with this view and refutes it based on his "Chinese Room" argument.

Searle's Critique of Strong AI

Searle presents three main criticisms of strong artificial intelligence:

1. Lack of intentionality or "aboutness": Machines lack the ability to refer to external objects or meanings. They only process data (Searle, 1980, p. 418).
2. Lack of conscious experience: Consciousness is one of the fundamental features of the human mind and cannot be easily reproduced in machines.
3. Inability to generate meaning: Machines only manipulate symbols, whereas the human mind is capable of generating meaning.

Searle emphasizes that understanding this distinction is essential to avoid scientific and philosophical misunderstandings. While weak AI can be useful in cognitive sciences and technology development, the claim of strong AI about creating a mind and consciousness in machines is not only exaggerated but also

philosophically incorrect. Searle's perspective on AI, with its distinction between weak and strong AI, provides a philosophical framework for understanding the limitations of this technology. Using the Chinese Room argument, he demonstrates that even the most advanced machines cannot achieve true consciousness and intentionality, underscoring the essential distinction between the human mind and machine functions.

Chinese Room Argument

This famous argument or thought experiment was presented by Searle in 1980, and its purpose was to critique strong artificial intelligence. According to Searle's explanation, imagine a group of computer programmers have written a program that enables a computer to simulate understanding the Chinese language. So, if a question is given to this computer in Chinese, it will match the question with its memory or database and provide appropriate answers in Chinese. To aid the reasoning, assume that the computer's responses are as good as those of a native Chinese speaker. Now, does this computer understand Chinese based on this? In other words, does it understand Chinese in the same way a native Chinese speaker understands it? Well, imagine you are locked in a room, and there are baskets full of Chinese symbols. Suppose you don't know a single word of Chinese, but you are given a book of rules in English for working with these Chinese symbols. These rules specify how to manipulate the symbols entirely formally, in terms of their syntax, not their semantics. So, for example, the rule might say: take a symbol from basket one and place it next to another symbol from basket two. Now, suppose more Chinese symbols are brought into this room, and suppose you are given additional rules for sending symbols out of the room. Imagine that, without knowing it, the symbols brought into the

room are called “questions” by humans outside the room, and the symbols you send out are called “answers to these questions.” Further assume that the programmers have done an excellent job designing the program, and you become very proficient in manipulating the symbols. Soon, your responses are indistinguishable from those of a native Chinese speaker. Here you are, locked in your room, manipulating Chinese symbols and sending out Chinese symbols in response to incoming ones. Based on this situation, there is no way you could learn Chinese merely by working with these formal symbols (Searle, 2003, pp. 60-62).

In short: A person who does not know Chinese is in a room. They have a manual that tells them how to match Chinese symbols in response to specific inputs. It seems that the person in the room knows how to speak Chinese, because they produce meaningful responses. However, in reality, they are simply following symbolic instructions and have no understanding of the Chinese language.

Searle argues that this is similar to how computers operate. They merely execute pre-programmed instructions without truly understanding what is happening. Machines may process information, but there is no awareness or meaning in this process. In fact, strong artificial intelligence cannot simulate the mind. In this thought experiment, Searle assumes that a non-Chinese person is sitting in a locked room and, using a manual, is able to process Chinese instructions and answer Chinese questions. The person in the room has no understanding of Chinese, yet they can still respond correctly to Chinese questions. Searle concludes that such a system (here, a machine) is not capable of "understanding" or "awareness" of the language; rather, it simply follows rules according to predetermined guidelines. In other words, merely matching symbols and signs together cannot equate to awareness and understanding. He argues that

for awareness to exist, a system must genuinely understand meaning, not just operate based on rules (Searle, 1980, p. 417).

Daniel Dennett's Critique of the Chinese Room Argument and Searle's Response

Daniel Dennett has strongly criticized Searle's Chinese Room experiment. In this thought experiment, Searle tried to show that AI systems cannot have consciousness because they only operate by processing symbols and rules, without truly understanding. Dennett disagrees with this idea and believes that understanding and consciousness do not mean awareness of meanings but are simply a functional process that can be attributed based on the intelligent behaviors of a system. In other words, Dennett believes that if a machine can behave correctly like humans, it can be considered conscious, even if it does not truly understand meaning as humans do (Dennett, 1991, p. 195). Dennett further elaborates on this in *Darwin's Dangerous Idea* (1995), where he discusses how mental processes and consciousness can arise from evolutionary processes. He argues that cognitive processes, as observed in humans and other living beings, can be fully modeled and simulated in machines. He believes that if an artificial system can exhibit human-like behaviors, it can be considered conscious, and there is no need for a soul or the concept of deep meaning understanding. In fact, Dennett believes that AI can imitate all the characteristics of the human mind without requiring true consciousness (Dennett, 1995, p. 302).

Daniel Dennett's views on artificial intelligence contrast with those of John Searle, who believes that machine consciousness is impossible. Dennett, emphasizing the theory of new behaviorism and intentional stance, argues that AI systems can behave like humans,

and for this reason, they can experience consciousness and mind in a similar way. According to Dennett, consciousness and intelligence are entirely linked to cognitive and behavioral functions and do not require specific characteristics of humans or living beings. However, Searle believes that human consciousness is inherently tied to the biology of the brain and cannot be reduced to algorithmic processes executed in machines. In other words, machines lack the necessary biological structures to create consciousness, and consciousness is only possible in living systems that possess the appropriate biological structures. Searle argues that strong AI cannot truly create a mind or consciousness because machines are merely symbol processors and lack the ability to understand meaning. He emphasizes the fundamental distinction between the biology of the human brain and the algorithmic processes of machines.

In his Chinese Room theory, Searle emphasizes that even if machines simulate human behaviors, they can never truly understand the real and philosophical meaning of these behaviors. In other words, machines only appear to act like humans but do not understand the substance or meaning behind these behaviors.

Searle has strongly criticized Dennett's views, asserting that although AI can provide simulations of human behaviors, such simulations do not equate to understanding and consciousness. Searle argues that consciousness is an understanding of phenomenological experiences, not merely the processing of information. He believes that consciousness is an irreducible feature specific to biological organisms and cannot be attributed to machine systems. According to him, the human mind has distinct characteristics that set it apart from artificial systems. He refers to this theory as the phenomenology of consciousness and asserts that consciousness is a mental state tied to

subjective experiences, emotions, and the understanding of the meaning of the world. While AI can behave similarly to humans, it cannot possess what Searle calls the real understanding of meaning. He emphasizes that consciousness, as it exists in humans, is a physical phenomenon related to brain function and cannot be fully simulated in machines (Searle, 1992, p. 174).

3. A Comparative Study of the Views of Mulla Sadra and John Searle

Mulla Sadra views the human identity as evolving through the process of substantial motion. He believes that humans are beings who have emerged from the earth and, through knowledge and free will, reach perfection. This perfection is attained through connection to the divine truth and the manifestation of the divine light in humanity. Therefore, from Mulla Sadra's perspective, human identity is not only material but also spiritual, and it has the potential to attain the state of immateriality (*tajarrud*) and divine vicegerency. Hence, humans possess qualities such as intuitive awareness and abstraction, which artificial intelligence cannot achieve. John Searle also understands human identity in terms of consciousness and intentionality; that is, humans have the capacity to refer to objects and states beyond themselves. Searle emphasizes the distinction between humans and machines in terms of intentionality, arguing that machines are incapable of understanding true meaning or self-awareness. Searle opposes fully mechanical and physical theories of the mind, asserting that the human mind cannot be reduced to mere physical processes or machine-like mechanisms. In contrast to theories such as the computational theory of mind (which likens the human mind to a computer program), Searle states that the mind and consciousness possess qualities that cannot be fully replicated by artificial systems.

Searle is one of the primary critics of AI-based viewpoints that claim consciousness and mind can be attributed to machine-like systems or computer programs. He also believes that the philosophy of mind must go beyond physical and mechanical perspectives, with the human characteristics of the mind being specifically considered.

Searle holds a generally pessimistic view about the future of artificial intelligence. He argues that even in the near future, AI will not be able to attain consciousness. While Searle acknowledges the scientific advancements in AI, he fears that attempts to fully simulate the human mind will ultimately fail because artificial systems will never reach a true understanding of meaning and consciousness. He emphasizes that although machines can be created to behave like humans, they will never be able to possess a mind similar to that of humans (Searle, 1992, p. 196).

Conclusion

In comparing these two viewpoints, it seems that while both philosophers emphasize the distinction between humans and artificial intelligence, Mulla Sadra's focus on the spiritual and transcendent aspects of humanity, including connection to the divine truth and substantial motion, views human identity as an evolved and spiritual being. In contrast, John Searle places more emphasis on the cognitive and conscious dimensions of humanity, highlighting intentionality as the key feature distinguishing humans from machines. Overall, both perspectives imply that artificial intelligence, despite its advancements, cannot attain human identity because it lacks essential qualities such as consciousness, intentionality, and abstraction. John Searle's views on AI and consciousness are particularly notable in opposition to theories by Daniel Dennett and other proponents of

strong AI. Searle argues that artificial systems will never achieve true consciousness because the understanding of real meaning and awareness is a characteristic of the human brain and mind, which cannot be attributed to machines. He has consistently supported this belief through the Chinese Room experiment and various critiques of artificial systems.

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Bi-quarterly Journal of
Theosophia Islamica
Islamic Sciences and culture Academy
EISSN: 2783-3240
Vol. 4 ● No. 1 ● 2024 ● Issue 7

The Soul-Body Relationship in the Views of Plato and Mullā Ṣadrā

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Received: 2025/05/07 Accepted: 2025/06/11

Abstract

The connection between the soul and the body has always been acknowledged by philosophers, as seeing, hearing, remembering, recalling, thinking, experiencing joy and sadness, and enjoying, while being psychological phenomena, are deeply influenced by the body. Without the nervous, glandular, and muscular effects, these psychological events cannot occur. Similarly, psychological states have a significant impact on the body and human organism, a point often highlighted by psychologists and philosophers. This study, using a descriptive-analytical and comparative method, aims to examine Plato's and Mullā Ṣadrā's views on the soul and its relationship with the body. Based on the findings, Plato makes a distinction between the soul and the body, but believes in their reciprocal influence on one another. He

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* Ahmadi Gezazi, F. & Mousazadeh, I. (2024). The Soul-Body Relationship in the Views of Plato and Mullā Ṣadrā. *Theosophia*, *4*(7), pp. 115-139.
https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.71824.1076

identifies the soul with the essence of humanity and views the body as a foreign entity after death. Mullā Ṣadrā, however, sees the relationship between the soul and the body as a union, where each represents a stage in the existence of a single reality called "human." He believes that the soul and the body mutually affect each other, and in its initial emergence, the soul is corporeal, later reaching the state of abstraction through substantial motion. The soul's attachment to the body is intrinsic, and the soul remains a soul only while connected to the body. Overall, this study shows that although Mullā Ṣadrā has been influenced by Plato in some aspects, he also presents his unique perspectives in this area.

Keywords

Plato, Mullā Ṣadrā, soul, body, soul-body relationship.

Introduction

A large part of the philosophical inquiries and discussions throughout the history of philosophy has been centered around the soul. Philosophers and thinkers from all regions, from the earliest times to the present, and from East to West, have all, in some form, ventured into this realm, engaging in writing and theorizing. No knowledge has been more important or vital to them than the knowledge of the self. A detailed examination of the works of Plato and Mullā Ṣadrā reveals many commonalities in the thought of these two divine philosophers. If we accept that Plato's philosophy exhibits a particular philosophical coherence throughout, despite the stages of development, as with any philosopher, then there are many aspects in which we can compare and align it with Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophical system. Throughout his works, Mullā Ṣadrā defends Plato's intellectual positions, referring to him as a divine philosopher and the leader of philosophers, and considers himself the reviver of Plato's ideas. Based on this, it is worth investigating whether, despite these similarities in their views, Mullā Ṣadrā's theories on the soul—especially his ideas about the relationship between the soul and the body—are truly innovative, or whether they have roots in Plato's philosophy, to the extent that it could be said that he was influenced by Plato's ideas.

1. Soul (*Nafs*)

The term "nafs" (soul), in its literal sense, refers to the essence and truth of anything, as well as spirit, psyche, and life (Mullā Ṣadrā, 2009, p. 206). Philosophers have provided numerous definitions of the soul.

Plato does not provide a precise definition of the soul. In his *Laws*, he says, "What is the definition of that object which has for its name 'soul'? Can we give it any other definition than that stated just now—'the motion able to move itself'?" (Plato, 2001, vol. 4, p. 2200, §896). In

Phaedrus, he states, "Only that which moves itself, since it does not leave itself, never ceases to move" (Plato, 2001, vol. 3, §245). In essence, for Plato, the soul is the initiator or source of motion (Copleston, 1996, vol. 1, p. 239). One could say that the soul is a motion that moves itself, and since its motion is intrinsic, nothing else makes it move. At the same time, it causes the movement of everything else. Therefore, according to Plato, the soul is the first and oldest of things because it is the originator of all motion. The concept of motion is closely related to life, as everything that moves itself is alive. The soul, too, is that motion capable of moving itself, and for this reason, it is the final cause of all motion. In *Timaeus*, Plato explains, "the one and only existing thing which has the property of acquiring thought is Soul; and Soul is invisible, whereas fire and water and earth and air are all visible bodies" (Plato, 2001, vol. 3, p. 1743, §46).

Mullā Ṣadrā, like the philosophers before him, does not limit the soul to the human soul; rather, he attributes a soul to other living beings as well. According to him, four types of beings possess a soul in this world: plants, animals, humans, and the celestial bodies. Based on the observation of signs of life, such as nourishment, growth and development, reproduction, sensation, movement, knowledge, and discernment, Mullā Ṣadrā conceives of a perfection (*kamāl*) within these beings that is bestowed upon matter, and he refers to it as the soul.

The definition that Mullā Ṣadrā provides for the soul is as follows: "The soul is the first perfection (*kamāl awwal*) of a natural, living, organic (*ālī*) body" (Mullā Ṣadrā, 2009, p. 283).

To clarify this point, let us examine the conditions mentioned in the definition.

The term "perfection" in this definition functions as the genus,

while the term "first" serves as its species. In fact, the term "first perfection" is used to distinguish it from the second perfection in the definition. The first perfection determines the essence of the species (or type or kind), so much so that without it, the species in question would cease to exist. Therefore, the first perfection is the complementary element that is added to matter, showing it as a complete species in the world (Mosleh, 1973, vol. 1, p. 9), and this perfection is referred to as the "specific form." In contrast to the first perfection, the second perfection occurs after the species has been actualized, manifesting in the effects and actions that emerge once the species is fully realized.

The phrase "for a natural body" indicates that external bodies are of two kinds: natural bodies and artificial bodies. By including this qualification, artificial bodies are excluded from the definition, as they do not possess a natural form to unify their components. Rather, they acquire their form and shape through an external agent, such as a chair. In fact, we do not have a natural form called a chair; rather, the chair is the wood shaped into a chair by the carpenter. Although the form of the chair is the first perfection for the chair, it is not the soul for it. However, plants, animals, and humans, which are called natural bodies, possess a natural form.

The term "organic" is used to exclude specific (i.e., species-related) forms that do not carry out their actions through organs and faculties, but instead directly and without mediation. In contrast, the natural body in question must be such that its second perfections—i.e., the vital actions such as growth, sensation, and movement—manifest through organs and faculties, rather than occurring immediately. Therefore, the elemental or mineral specific form, like fire, is not considered a soul in the philosophers' terminology, as the effects of fire, namely its burning quality, arise from the nature of fire itself and

are carried out without any organ or intermediary.

The phrase "having potential life" does not mean that the soul-bearing being lacks life in actuality, but rather that it does not need to possess all the signs of life in actuality; the potentiality for these signs is sufficient. If it has qualities and actions such as speech, perception, growth, and development, it will be considered as having a soul. With this qualification, celestial souls are excluded from the definition.

Up to this point, the definition of the soul encompasses all types of souls, including vegetative, animal, and human souls. However, with the addition of the clause "from the perspective of what perceives universal matters and performs intellectual acts" (Mullā Ṣadrā, 2009, p. 292), animal and vegetative souls are excluded from the definition. This is because only humans possess the capacity to perceive universal matters and engage in intellectual activities. In the stages of its ascending development, the soul not only acquires the attributes of the vegetative soul, which include nourishment, growth, and reproduction, as well as the attributes of the animal soul, which include sensation and voluntary movement, but it also acquires the power of intellect.

Up to this point, Mullā Ṣadrā aligns with the philosophers before him and accepts their definition of the soul. However, at the same time, he does not accept the foundations of their definitions.

Philosophers consider the soul from two perspectives: 1) in terms of its essence; 2) in terms of its attachment to the body.

In light of this, the philosophers believe that the soul, in terms of its essence, is not definable, as it is an immaterial and simple substance. Since the soul is immaterial, it is not composed of genus and species, whereas a definition is composed of genus and species. According to the principle "what lacks a limit and proof cannot be

proven," no proof can be provided for it. However, in the second sense, when the soul is attached to the body, it becomes definable (Mesbah Yazdi, 1996, p. 41). In fact, the philosophers take into account the second aspect of the soul, namely its attachment to the body, when defining it. They do not consider this definition as a quidditative definition (*ḥadd*) but rather as a nominal (*ismī*) definition, because, from their perspective, this attachment is subsequent to the soul's existence and, therefore, not an essential attribute of the soul but an accidental one. Consequently, they believe this definition does not reflect the true essence of the soul.

However, Mullā Ṣadrā does not accept this view of the philosophers. Based on his own principles, including "substantial motion," "the gradation (*tashkīk*) of existence," and "the soul's corporeality at origin and spirituality in survival," he proposes a completely different theory. He holds that the soul does not have two distinct aspects. He expresses his view as follows: the soul is what it is because of its attachment to the body. In other words, the soul's very nature is derived from its mode of existence, and its attachment to the body is identical with its essence. More precisely, the soul is not a substance that attaches to matter; rather, it is the very act of attachment and relatedness, and as long as it is attached to the body, it remains the soul.

However, Mullā Ṣadrā also assigns another existence to the soul's quiddity, one that the soul attains through substantial motion, gradual intensification, and progression through different stages. He emphasizes that at that stage, the soul is no longer the soul but is intellect (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1989, vol. 8, p. 12). Therefore, as long as the soul remains the soul, it is not intellect, and the distinction between the soul and intellect is that intellect is an immaterial substance, whose identity is not one of attachment and is not relational to any subject to

which it is added. The act of addition depends on potentiality, and the assumption of this potentiality necessitates the materiality of the intellect. In contrast, at the core of the soul's existence, its attachment to the body is inherent. In other words, attachment to the body (the relation to the body) is an essential and intrinsic part of the soul's very essence.

It follows from the above that the key point that distinguishes Mullā Ṣadrā from the philosophers before him is that, for other philosophers, the definition of the soul pertains not to the essence of the soul itself but to the "soulness" of the soul. In contrast, for Mullā Ṣadrā, there is no distinction between the essence of the soul and the soulness of the soul, and the definition he provides articulates the true nature and quiddity of the soul.

2. Quality of the Soul-Body Relation

From the discussion of the nature (quiddity) of the soul and its dominance and superiority over the body, we arrive at an important reality in Plato's thought, which is the distinction between the soul and the body. This distinction aligns with his metaphysical dualism, and in the dialogues where the soul is directly mentioned, it is evident that he certainly believed in an essential distinction between the soul and the body.

Plato views the soul as a substance that existed independently before the body in a realm that is divine, eternal, and unchanging. In other words, the soul, for Plato, is pre-eternal (*qadīm*), and once a body is prepared, the soul descends from its realm and attaches itself to the body.

Motahari remarks on this point, stating: "This theory of Plato is unequivocally dualistic; he regards the soul and body as two

separate and distinct substances, and the relationship between them as accidental and constructed, similar to the relationship between a bird and its nest or a rider and their mount. He does not believe in any substantial connection that indicates a type of unity, interaction, or essential relationship between them" (Motahari, 1999, vol. 13, p. 31).

In *Timaeus* (Plato, 2001, Vol. 3, §34) and *Laws* (Plato, 2001, §892), Plato refers to the soul's existence before the body, which can be seen as definitive proof of the distinction between the soul and the body.

In *Laws*, this idea is expressed by stating that the soul is the origin and the source of the creation and the first movement of all things that exist at present, in the past, and future. In essence, the soul is the initiator of movement, or the source of every motion. In other words, it moves by its essence. Therefore, the soul is the first and the most ancient of all things, while the body is a moving entity that the soul sets into motion. This conversation thus proves that the soul precedes the body. In *Timaeus*, Plato states that the Creator designed the soul in such a way that, both in terms of time and perfection, it precedes the body and holds a status and rank that is older than the younger one; for the soul is meant to rule over the body and command it.

Plato refers to the rule of the soul over the body and the obedience of the body to the soul in several dialogues, highlighting the distinction between them. Among these, *Laws* (Plato, 2001, Vol. 4, p. 2026, §431), *Phaedo* (Plato, 2001, Vol. 1, p. 481, §80), and *Republic* (Plato, 2001, Vol. 4, p. 984, §431) can be cited as examples.

In *Laws*, Plato expresses that everything we have can be divided into two types: one that is noble and superior, meant to rule, and another that is inferior and base, meant to obey. The truth is that the first type is superior to the second. In *Phaedo*, it is stated that as

long as the body and soul are together, the body, according to nature, is condemned to serve and obey, while the soul rules and commands. In *Republic*, Plato presents this distinction by stating that humans have two parts: one superior and the other inferior, with the former being the soul and the latter the body. If in a person the superior part governs the inferior part, that person is considered to be the ruler of themselves and is praised; however, if due to bad training, the inferior part triumphs over the superior, such a person is criticized and is contemptuously called a "slave to oneself," becoming unruly.

It seems that the ideas presented in these dialogues convey that the soul exercises managerial control over the body and uses it as an instrument to carry out its actions. Without the material body, the soul would not be able to perform any action. Hence, the soul dominates the body and governs the realm of the body.

In another passage from *Phaedo* (Plato, 2001, vol. 1, p. 521, §115), when Crito asks Socrates how they should bury him, Socrates responds by saying that if they can hold him and prevent him from escaping, they may bury him however they wish. He then adds that the body before them is not truly him, and after drinking the poison, he will depart from them and journey to the realm of the blessed. He instructs them that if, after his death, they burn or bury his body, they should not say, "We have burned Socrates" or "We have buried Socrates," for such statements would be incorrect. Instead, they should say, "We have buried the body of Socrates." Here, the soul is identified with the true self of the person, while the body is regarded as an alien entity that is discarded after death.

Another piece of evidence that shows Plato believed in the distinction between the soul and the body is his statement that the soul and the body were created separately. According to him, the divine

soul was created by God, and the body was created by the gods (Plato, 2001, vol. 3, p. 1772, §69). Therefore, according to Plato's view, the soul and the body are two completely separate entities, as the creation of God can never be the same as the creation of the gods. The creation of God is eternal, unchanging, and divine, while the creation of the gods is material and perishable (Rahmani, 2010, p. 561).

Plato believes that the soul and the body are inherently different in essence and quiddity, and this is a clear indication that he viewed the soul and the body as distinct. This distinction is evident in his works. He maintains that the soul is simple and non-dissolvable, whereas the body, being composed of parts, is subject to dissolution and destruction (Plato, 2001, vol. 3, p. 271, §78 and onward). Plato considers the soul immortal, attributing this to its perfect resemblance to the Forms, since the theory of Forms and the soul are intrinsically connected. Immortality is based on the existence of the Forms, and our knowledge of the Forms is rooted in the eternity of the soul. On the other hand, the other part of a human—the body—resembles the perishable objects. In fact, the origin of the soul is the world of the Forms, which is above the physical world, and the true world consists of eternal realities (Werner, n.d., p. 89). The soul and the Forms are connected in terms of quiddity. Thus, the soul, like the Forms, is simple, imperishable, invisible, and unchanging, while the body and the physical world are composite, perishable, visible, and mutable.

Plato is the first philosopher who explicitly refers to the existence of a non-material entity. He states that the soul is something that can remain active even when the body is motionless. We can think, plan, understand, love, or hate when we are completely still. Therefore, thinking, willing, and feeling belong to the soul. In our language, we say, "I think," "I intend," "I love," rather than saying "My body thinks," "My body intends," or "My body loves."

Plato believes that the body obstructs the acquisition of knowledge (Russell, 1994, Vol. 1, p. 211). He argues that whenever the soul seeks to perceive something through the body—when it engages the eyes and ears—the body pulls the soul toward something that is never constant. As a result of this contact with such things, the soul becomes confused and disoriented, losing its balance much like a drunk person (Plato, 2001, Vol. 1, p. 480, §79). To elucidate this point, it can be said that the primary function of the soul is contemplation of objects, and true knowledge is attained through this contemplation. However, due to its union with the body, the soul inevitably acquires knowledge through the senses. Since the senses are incapable of perceiving the true reality, they deceive the soul, leading it into countless errors (Werner, n.d., p. 89). According to him, if a person seeks true knowledge, they must abandon the body. It is then that the soul remains free from error and attains the knowledge it has long sought—knowledge that is immaterial, eternal, stable, and of its own nature. Plato's statement suggests that he does not consider the recognition of truth possible in this material world. This is why he asserts that only one who frees themselves from the body can reach the truth. Those who are enslaved by the body can never attain truth, but can only grasp a series of illusions through the senses. Plato refers to this state of the soul as wisdom. Accordingly, another distinction between the soul and the body is that the soul is wise, while the body is ignorant. In other words, the soul has the ability to think, whereas the body is incapable of thought (Plato, 1985, p. 2474, section 984).

According to Mullā Ṣadrā, the issue concerning the relationship between the soul and the body is how it is possible for the soul, which is an intellectual and immaterial form, to have a connection with the body, which is material. This is because two things that have no affinity with each other cannot interact.

Before presenting his own view on the relationship between the soul and the body, Mullā Ṣadrā first explains the different types of dependence and attachment between one thing and another, to provide a clearer understanding of the issue. According to him, there are six types of attachment between one thing and another, which are as follows:

1. Attachment in terms of quiddity: This refers to the attachment of the essence to existence, which is the strongest type of attachment. The intensity of this attachment lies in the fact that essence, both in the mind and in reality, depends on existence.
2. Attachment in terms of essence and reality: This means that the essence and identity of a thing depend on the essence and identity of another thing, such as the dependence of the possible being on the necessary being.
3. Attachment in terms of individuation and specificity: This type of attachment occurs between a quality and its subject, where the quality depends on its essential subject for both its individuation and classification.
4. Attachment in terms of existence and individuation, both in coming into being and in persistence: This refers to the attachment of form to matter.
5. Attachment in terms of existence and individuation, in coming into being but not in persistence: This, according to Mullā Ṣadrā, is the attachment of the soul to the body at the time of its initial formation. In fact, he believes that the soul, initially, is in need of the body, but after progressing through stages of perfection, it reaches a point where it no

longer requires the body and, thus, can continue its existence without it.

6. Attachment in terms of perfection and the acquisition of virtues, not in relation to the essence and individuation of being: This type of attachment refers to the soul's need for the body from its initial formation until it achieves detachment from the body (or immateriality). In this case, the soul needs the body only to acquire secondary perfections. This type of attachment is generally accepted by most philosophers, as they considered the soul to be immaterial both at its origin and in its persistence. They believed that the soul only depends on the body for acquiring the perfections it deserves, which can only be obtained through the body and its faculties. However, Mullā Ṣadrā, according to his theory of "the soul being corporeal in origin and spiritual in survival," accepts both the fifth and sixth types of attachment. He posits that, in the beginning of its coming into being, the soul is like other natural forms, which depend on a matter that is ambiguous in its existence. Similarly, the soul's attachment is to a bodily matter, which is also ambiguous in its existence.

Therefore, the soul's attachment to the material body at the beginning of its existence is an attachment in terms of existence and individuation in terms of origination, not survival. However, this attachment changes after the soul reaches a certain stage of formal and natural maturity, when it becomes a rational (*nāṭiqa*) soul and, in terms of intellect, is actualized with the power of thought. That is to say, its theoretical intellect is still in potentiality and has not yet been actualized, existing at the level of the hylic (*hayūnlānī*) intellect. At

this stage, the attachment of the soul to the body is according to perfection and the acquisition of virtues, because human rational souls, at the beginning of their formation, are devoid of any existential perfections and qualities. Hence, in order to acquire existential perfections and spiritual virtues, they need tools and means through which they can attain these and be adorned with divine virtues.

According to Mullā Ṣadrā's theory, the soul is considered material at the beginning of its formation; however, through substantial motion and the use of bodily faculties, it reaches the stage of immateriality. Therefore, the nature of the soul's attachment to the body differs in terms of origination and survival. At the outset, the soul's attachment is tied to existence and individuation, while once it reaches the stage of immateriality, it only needs the body in its material actions. Through repeated actions, the soul gains such authority that it performs its actions without the aid of bodily tools and can even manipulate them.

Mullā Ṣadrā believes that the soul's attachment to the body is essential to it, meaning the soul remains a soul only as long as it is attached to the body (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1989, vol. 8, p. 383). More precisely, the soul cannot exist without the body, and the essence of the soul is a relational essence. Thus, the soul's inherent existence is dependent on the body, and it is connected to the body through a kind of bond. Mullā Ṣadrā describes the relationship between the soul and the body as a concomitance, but not in the sense of two additional things accompanying each other, nor like two effects stemming from one cause, where there is no necessary connection. Rather, it is akin to the relationship between matter and form, where each is dependent on the other without leading to a circular cause, which would be impossible (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1989, vol. 9, pp. 47 and 55). In fact, according to Mullā Ṣadrā,

there is an essential and necessary concomitance between the soul and the body, meaning that there is a kind of causality between them. This causal relationship is not efficient or final causality, but rather a type of causality that exists between matter and form. Since he views the soul and the body as similar to matter and form in many respects, he also compares their relationship to that of matter and form. He believes that just as matter and form depend on each other for their existence, the soul and the body also depend on each other for individuation and existence. Although the soul, in terms of intellectual existence, is independent of the body, in its initial stage of coming into being, it is dependent on the body in order to achieve individuation. Furthermore, as long as the soul remains in the corporeal realm or has not attained the intellectual realm, its existence depends on the body. The causality between the two is mutual: just as the body is the material cause of the soul, the soul is the formal cause of the body. This means that the constitution and final purpose of the body, as well as its individuation, depend on the soul. If the soul were to cease, the body would not remain. Moreover, Mullā Ṣadrā believes that the soul is the form of the body. Since, according to the principle of "something is what it is by its form" (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1999, p. 293), form is united with matter, he considers the combination of the soul and the body to be a union. The argument he offers for this is as follows: it is unquestionable that the soul is described by attributes that are dependent on the body. Whatever is attributed to something is identical with that thing. Therefore, the soul is identical with the body (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1989, vol. 5, p. 286).

The minor premise of the syllogism is established by the fact that each of us attributes our bodily actions to ourselves. For example, we say, "I sat down," "I ate," "I moved." The major premise is

established by the principle that an attribute cannot be attached to two distinct subjects.

Mullā Ṣadrā's explanation of the union between the soul and the body implies that the soul and the body are not completely separate entities. Rather, each of these two is a level of existence of a single reality called the human being. Thus, the soul and the body exist as one unified existence, and in reality, the existence of the soul is not separate from the existence of the body. The body is the lower level of the soul, and the soul is the higher level of the body. In Mullā Ṣadrā's own words, the soul is the perfection and completeness of the body (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1989, vol. 5, p. 247). Therefore, Mullā Ṣadrā argues that although the soul and the body differ in various ways, they are essentially one truth, possessing different degrees within their unity and simplicity. It is as if they are one entity with two aspects: one side constantly undergoing transformation and decay, which is subordinate, and the other remaining fixed, enduring, and primary. As the soul progresses in its ascent through substantial motion, becoming more perfected, the body also becomes subtler, and their union becomes stronger. When the human being reaches the level of intellectual existence, no further discrepancy remains between the two, and they merge into one entity, possessing the perfections of both the soul and the body in their most complete form. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, as the soul undergoes substantial transformations, the body evolves alongside it. Therefore, he views the soul as the bearer of the body, rather than the body being the bearer of the soul (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1985, p. 73).

Thus, it becomes clear that the soul is never free from some kind of body in any realm; rather, in each world, it is accompanied by a specific body that is suited to it. As it has been said, the body of the

soul, inasmuch as it is its body, cannot be separated from it. In fact, in every realm, the body is the lower level of the soul, and this body, in the form of its outward physical manifestation, is constantly transformed through the renewal of its instances and substantial motion. However, the body itself remains. And when the soul leaves this physical shell behind on Earth, its true body is still with it (Hassanzadeh Amoli, 1991, p. 489). In reality, what Mullā Ṣadrā means by this body is not the earthly body. Rather, the soul, through its virtues and attributes that become fixed in it through repetition, constructs its own body, and this body is its true body. However, as long as the soul remains in this world, it requires this outward body. After death, the body it has created becomes its true body. Moreover, Mullā Ṣadrā views the relationship between the soul and the body as reciprocal. If one ceases to exist, the other ceases to exist as well. When the soul leaves the body, the body will not survive. What remains is not the body but a lifeless mass. This body, which once contained a soul, was a body, but without the soul, it is no longer the same.

In summary, Mullā Ṣadrā rejects the theory of the pre-eternity of the soul and its spiritual origination. Instead, he adopts a different view on the origin of the soul, known as the theory of "the soul being material in origin and spiritual in survival." Based on this view, he considers the soul to be a fluid substance that, from the beginning of its materiality to the ultimate realization of its spirituality, is constantly in motion and intrinsic transformation. In fact, he explains the relationship between the soul and the body through the framework of the soul's material origin and its substantial motion.

From these points, it can be concluded that Mullā Ṣadrā does not view the relationship between the soul and the body as that of two completely distinct and separate entities. Rather, he asserts: (1) The

attachment of the soul to the body is essential and natural. In fact, the soul's connection to the body constitutes the very essence and truth of the soul. Without this attachment, the entity would no longer be the soul, but rather intellect. (2) The combination of the soul and the body is that of union. That is to say, although the soul and the body differ, they exist as one unified reality. There is no duality between them; rather, each is a level of the same single truth. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, the issue regarding the relationship between the soul and the body—that an immaterial being cannot combine with a material one—does not arise. This is because, initially, the soul is material, and after combining with the body, acquiring perfections, and undergoing its substantial motion, it attains the status of immateriality.

3. Soul-Body Interaction

Plato believes that the soul and the body are distinct from one another, yet at the same time, he acknowledges the reciprocal influence they have on each other.

The factors Mullā Ṣadrā presents regarding the influence of the body on the soul are as follows: He mentions in the Timaeus (Plato, 2001, vol. 3, p. 1791, §87) that every human being becomes bad and wicked due to bodily defects, illness, and poor upbringing. This is because all humans naturally strive to avoid evil; thus, one who is evil has been led to it against their will. He continues by stating that physical pain and illness cause various ailments in the soul. He explains this as follows: "For whenever the humors which arise from acid and saline phlegms, and all humors that are bitter and bilious wander through the body and find no external vent but are confined within, and mingle their vapor with the movement of the soul and are blended therewith, they implant diseases of the soul of all kinds, varying in intensity and

in extent; and as these humors penetrate to the three regions1 of the Soul, according to the region which they severally attack, they give rise to all varieties of bad temper and bad spirits, and they give rise to all manner of rashness and cowardice, and of forgetfulness also, as well as of stupidity."

In *Laws* (Plato, 2001, vol. 4, § 775), he also emphasizes the importance of inheritance, stating that the human being is nothing beyond the material and physical conception of the seed. If there are flaws or ailments in the bodies or souls of the parents, these effects are passed on to their children as inheritance. A person born from a mother and father is not only similar to them in physical characteristics but also in spiritual traits.

In *Republic* (Plato, 2001, vol. 2, Book 3, p. 911, § 401), he discusses the impact of various types of music on the soul. He explains that whenever someone listens to music or a melody, it affects their spirit. If they listen to sorrowful music, their soul is impacted and becomes sad, while listening to cheerful music makes the soul lively and joyful. Plato believes that music and poetry are the most important methods for the education of the soul, because rhythm and melody penetrate deeper into the soul more swiftly than anything else. He asserts that, since music is heard through the ear, which is part of the body, this can also be seen as an example of the body's influence on the soul. Furthermore, he states that anyone who engages in physical exercises and training nurtures their spirit through the testimony of their own existence (Plato, 2001, vol. 2, p. 922, § 41). This indicates that Plato believes the strengthening of the body has an effect on the soul.

In *Charmides* (Plato, 2001, vol. 1, p. 197, § 156ff.), Plato presents an idea that indicates the influence of the soul on the body. He explains that if someone goes to the doctor due to eye pain, the doctor will

advise that in order to heal the eye, the entire head must be healthy, and healing the head is not possible without treating the whole body. Therefore, the doctor prescribes treatment for the entire body, and through healing the body as a whole, he also addresses the eye, which is a part of the body. Plato uses this example to discuss the influence of the soul on the body, saying that just as every pain in the eye arises from the head, every good or bad influence also spreads from the soul to the body. In fact, Plato seeks to convey that since the soul affects the body, if we wish to have a healthy head and body, we must first focus on healing the soul with utmost care.

According to Mullā Ṣadrā, both the soul and the body influence each other. The common belief among people is that the soul is subordinate to the body, meaning that whatever state the body is in, the soul must follow. For instance, if the body grows and develops, the soul must also grow and develop; or if the body is in disorder, the soul will not function properly, and so on. However, this is not the case. On the contrary, the body is subordinate to the soul, and this subordination of the body to the soul is intrinsic. Since when a form is imparted to matter, it gains being and existence, and since the initial form of the soul is vegetative, the essence and determination of matter come from the soul. Therefore, the body has no inherent or genuine reality except as it follows the soul (Ardabili, 2002, vol. 3, pp. 256-260). Mullā Ṣadrā believes that the soul and its attributes and faculties are like the root and the brain, while the body, along with all that is in it, is like the branches and the skin of the soul. The influence the soul has on the body is such that, for example, when the soul adopts the attribute of humility, its effects become apparent in the body. If the soul becomes angry, its effect on the body is that the face turns red and the movements become more rapid. If the soul is frightened, the

face turns pale, and the body becomes weakened (Mullā Ṣadrā, 2004, vol. 1, p. 385). The impact of these passions of the soul on the body is such that emotions like fear, affection, and joy cause changes in temperament and the secretion of saliva. For instance, in a state of sadness, the level of carbon dioxide in the blood increases, and the body needs to expel it. This is why those who suffer from depression often sigh repeatedly (Shirazi, 2004, vol. 2, pp. 1803-1804). According to Mulla Sadra, physical illnesses and injuries also affect the soul. Furthermore, he believes that while the soul is an immaterial substance, and the body is a dark material substance, the soul is also affected by the body. He explains the soul's susceptibility to the body by stating that it becomes shaped by the body's qualities and attributes, and it becomes capable of hearing, seeing, and moving (Mullā Ṣadrā, 2001, p. 387).

Based on what has been said, Mullā Ṣadrā holds that the influences the soul and body exert on each other stem from the intrinsic and natural connection and dependence that exists between them.

Conclusion

Plato does not provide a precise definition of the soul, but he considers it the source of movement. Mullā Ṣadrā, on the other hand, defines the soul as "the first perfection of a natural, organic body" and views it as having stages, including the vegetative, animal, and human. Both philosophers attribute certain characteristics to the soul, such as simplicity, substantiality, immateriality, and persistence. Plato makes an essential distinction between the soul and the body but believes in their reciprocal influence on each other. He equates the soul with the essence of humanity and regards the body as a foreign

entity after death. However, Mullā Ṣadrā sees the relationship between the soul and the body as a union, where each is a level of the same existential reality called "human." He believes the soul and the body mutually influence one another, with the soul initially being material and, through substantial motion, reaching the stage of immateriality. The soul's attachment to the body is intrinsic; it remains a soul only as long as it is attached to the body. According to Mullā Ṣadrā, the body also evolves alongside the soul in its substantial transformations, and the soul is the bearer of the body, not the other way around. In general, this study has examined and compared the views of Plato and Mullā Ṣadrā regarding the soul and its relationship with the body, showing that although Mullā Ṣadrā was influenced by Plato in some areas, he also has his own distinct views on the matter.

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Bi-quarterly Journal of
Theosophia Islamica
Islamic Sciences and culture Academy
EISSN: 2783-3240
Vol. 4 ● No. 1 ● 2024 ● Issue 7

John Searle and the Mind-Body Problem

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Date Received: 2025/05/01 Date Accepted: 2025/06/04

Abstract

The mind-body problem is one of the most fundamental and complex issues in the philosophy of mind, addressing the relationship between mental states and brain processes. John Searle, the contemporary American philosopher, has attempted to offer a distinctive response to this problem through a theory known as biological naturalism. In his view, mental phenomena such as consciousness are not only the result of biological processes in the brain, but also constitute higher-level features of those processes. By distinguishing between causal reductionism and the ontological irreducibility of consciousness, Searle seeks to establish a middle path between reductive physicalism and dualism. Key concepts in his view—including intentionality, mental causation, and emergent properties—play a central role in explaining the workings of the human mind. Nevertheless, his theory has faced significant criticism from philosophers such as Dennett, Nagel, and Chalmers, some of whom consider Searle's biological naturalism to be a new form of property

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* Asli Beigi, F. (2024). John Searle and the Mind-Body Problem. *Theosophia Islamica, 4*(7), pp. 140-162.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.22081/jti.2025.71739.1072

dualism. This paper analyzes the theoretical foundations and structure of biological naturalism, aiming to assess its explanatory power in addressing the mind-body problem and to clarify its relation to competing philosophical approaches.

Keywords

John Searle, mind-body problem, biological naturalism, consciousness, intentionality, reductionism.

Introduction

The mind-body problem is one of the most challenging philosophical issues, for which a satisfactory solution has yet to be found. Some modern philosophers, such as Colin McGinn, even argue that the mind-body problem is so far beyond our grasp that we will never be able to solve it, as we lack the necessary concepts to understand how consciousness emerges from a material mechanism.

The question of what the mind essentially is, its relationship with the body, and how a moist, gray substance like the brain gives rise to such an astonishing phenomenon as consciousness has attracted the attention of many philosophers. The interaction between the mind and the body has been a topic of interest since ancient times. It seems that Descartes was the first to explain consciousness within a modern conceptual framework and to raise the question of how this consciousness is connected to the brain. How can we interpret the connections between the mind and the body, two entities that appear to be entirely different? On one side, we have mental phenomena, such as our thoughts and feelings, which we consider to be subjective, conscious, and immaterial. On the other side, there are physical phenomena, which we regard as entities that have mass and spatial extension and interact causally with other physical objects. Many unsuccessful solutions to the mind-body problem end in either denying the existence of one of these two kinds of entities or minimizing its significance. Given the successes of the physical sciences, it is not surprising that at this stage of intellectual development, we are tempted to reduce the status and nature of mental phenomena (Searle, 2002, p. 22).

The image we have of ourselves is that we are mental, conscious, and free beings, whereas the image that science presents of the world is that it consists of physical particles, mindless and

purposeless. So, how can we reconcile this understanding and conception of the world with the image we have of ourselves?

The response of neuroscientists to this question is monism; they say that the mind is nothing but the function of the brain. Monism includes various viewpoints. Reductive monism does not speak of the mind; the only truth they recognize is the brain. Another form of reductive monism believes that what is called the mind is a capability that arises from the brain (Ziaei, 2013, p. 32).

The theory opposite to monism is dualism. Within this school of thought, various viewpoints have been proposed. One of them is property dualism. According to this theory, the brain is a physical substance with various physical and non-physical properties, such as being conscious, experiencing pain, and so on.

Both dualism and monism face intractable problems. John Searle, regarding the mind-body problem, suggests that the issue with the mind-body problem lies in the very formulation of the question. Terms like "mental" and "physical," materialism and dualism, body and soul, and so on, carry an erroneous assumption—that these terms must refer to entities that are distinct and separate. Furthermore, our conscious states, insofar as they are subjective, private, and qualitative, cannot be characteristics of the biological brain. Once we overcome this assumption, it seems that a solution to the mind-body problem becomes apparent. All of our mental states are the result of neurobiological processes in the brain and are realized as higher-level or systemic features of the brain. For instance, if we experience pain, that pain is the result of a chain of neuronal firings and is realized as an actual phenomenon in the brain (Searle, 2013b, pp. 51-52). In his book *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Searle refers to this view as "biological naturalism," which, according to him, is distinct from both dualism and monism. Although he explicitly rejects property dualism, some

believe that his view is a form of dualism with a different expression. Furthermore, while Searle considers traditional terms to be the source of the mind-body problem, he himself relies on these terms. This article aims to elucidate and evaluate Searle's perspective on the mind-body problem.

1. Biological Naturalism

Although the term naturalism has become common in scientific and philosophical discussions since the twentieth century, as some of its contemporary defenders have pointed out, there is no consensus on its exact definition. Nevertheless, a general framework can be established to limit its meaning. Broadly speaking, naturalism can be divided into two components: ontological and methodological. According to the ontological component, reality has no place for "supernatural" or "spirit-like" entities; reality is confined to nature and does not include anything supernatural. Based on the methodological component, the scientific method is fundamentally valid and should be applied to research in all areas of reality (Papineau, 2007, p. 1).

Craig and Moreland also distinguish between strong and weak naturalism. Strong naturalism refers to a strict form of physicalism, which tends to describe and explain all phenomena in terms of physics, chemistry, or biology. In contrast, weak naturalism acknowledges the existence of emergent, irreducible features and entities, such as consciousness and the mind.

In an article titled "Biological Naturalism," Searle states that this is a term he uses to replace the traditional mind-body problem (Searle, 2004). From this statement, it can be inferred that Searle's naturalism is the primary and most fundamental form of ontological naturalism, as its main concern is to provide a simple solution to the mind-brain problem. By adding the adjective biological, he seeks to

explain the mind and consciousness as part of biology, which is essentially strong naturalism. However, his defense of emergentism, first-person ontology, and the irreducibility of consciousness also brings weak naturalism into play. The question that arises here is whether biological naturalism can be maintained without dualism.

2. Mind-Body Interaction

John Searle believes that the traditional mind-body problem arises from the Cartesian assumption that the mental and the physical are two distinct categories of phenomena that are metaphysically different. Based on this assumption, the question arises: How is the relationship between the mind and the body established? And how can the causal relationship between these two be justified? In response to this question, Searle states that since neither consciousness nor matter can be reduced to the other, they are distinct and separate phenomena in the world. Those who believe that consciousness can be reduced to matter are called materialists; those who believe that matter can be reduced to consciousness are called idealists. Both are mistaken, as they attempt to eliminate what truly exists and cannot be reduced to something else. Therefore, since both are wrong, the only reasonable alternative is property dualism (Searle, 2002, p. 58). However, property dualism cannot be correct either, because it posits that the irreducibility of a phenomenon implies that it is more than just its physical foundation. This creates an unsolvable problem for property dualism, whether consciousness acts causally or not. If it does, we face a problem of overdetermination: if I intend to raise my hand, it seems that there are two causes—one physical and one mental. However, if consciousness does not act causally, then we would have a form of epiphenomenalism (Searle, 2013b, pp. 129-130). In his book *A Short Introduction to the Mind*, Searle argues that some aspects of

materialism and dualism are true, while others are false. He says that materialism correctly asserts that the world is made up of physical particles but falsely claims that there are no irreducible mental phenomena. Conversely, dualism correctly acknowledges that irreducible mental phenomena exist but falsely asserts that they are separate from the physical world in which we live. He believes that these two views can be reconciled, but to do so, we must challenge traditional terminology and offer new definitions. He argues that consciousness is simply a brain process, subjective and qualitative, and cannot be reduced to third-person neurobiological processes. Consciousness is part of the ordinary physical world and nothing over and above it, causally reducible, but ontologically irreducible (Searle, 2013a, pp. 126-127).

The irreducibility of consciousness does not imply that consciousness is something more than its neurobiological foundation. Since the causal powers of consciousness and its neural substrates are identical, consciousness and neural processes are not two independent things. We are not speaking about two different kinds of entities; rather, we are talking about a single system at different levels. Therefore, consciousness is a dimension of the brain that, ontologically, consists of subjective experiences (Searle, 2007, p. 176).

John Searle claims that the mind-body problem has a simple solution. The solution is this: mental phenomena are caused by the neurobiological processes of the brain and are also features of the brain. He calls this biological naturalism and argues that mental events and processes are as much a part of our biological natural history as the stomach, mitosis, or enzyme secretion (Searle, 1992, p. 1). To explain his view, he uses the analogy of water. Consider water. We are all familiar with the behavior of water in everyday, macroscopic terms—

for example, we know that it is wet, odorless, and liquid. The behavior of water can be explained by how the molecules of H_2O interact with each other. These macroscopic features are causally explained by the behavior of the smaller, microscopic elements (Maslin, 2009, p. 31). In this model, the mind is the macroscopic feature of the brain, and neurons are the microscopic features of the brain. Therefore, the mind is both caused by neurons and, at the same time, is a feature of neurons. The reason for this is that the mind is also physical.

But the question is, how is the relationship between the mind and the brain? The mind is caused by the brain, yet the mind and the brain have two separate identities. The mind is a mental entity, and the brain is a physical entity. Although the mind cannot exist without the brain, they are not the same. The relationship between the mind and the brain is like that between a building and its foundation. A building cannot exist without its foundation, yet the building and the foundation are two separate entities. Or, in another way, the relationship between the mind and the brain is like that between an astronaut and their spacecraft. The astronaut cannot survive without their spacecraft, yet the astronaut and the spacecraft are two separate identities. The mind and the brain are two different things. The mind cannot exist without the brain; however, the mind is not merely a feature of the brain but has its own separate identity. Despite the differences between the mind and the brain, they are not two separate domains but belong to one unified domain.

As you saw, Searle believes that mental phenomena are both caused by neurobiological processes in the brain and are themselves higher-level features. This view appears to be inconsistent, since it seems impossible for something to be both identical with and caused by something else. How, for example, can the liquidity of water be

both dependent on the behavior of its molecules and also a feature of the system of molecules? Causal relationships occur between two distinct entities. The relationship between the behavior of a microstructure and that of a macro-level system is too close to be considered causal. The behavior of water at the macro level is identical to the behavior of the molecules at the micro level; there are not two distinct phenomena here — the micro-level behavior and a numerically different macro-level phenomenon. Rather, there is a single phenomenon viewed from two perspectives. We cannot say that micro-level properties cause macro-level properties, because they constitute them. Micro-level properties are simply macro-level properties seen at a much closer range. It is meaningless to say that one causes the other, as that would amount to saying that a phenomenon causes itself (Maslin, 2009, pp. 248–249).

Another objection to Searle's view comes from the criticisms Thomas Nagel raises regarding the mind-body problem. Although Nagel does not directly address these criticisms to Searle, they are nonetheless applicable to his position. Nagel's central criticism of proposed solutions to the mind-body problem is that conceptual necessities are insufficient for resolving the issue. Causal explanations are essential in science—for example, the molecular composition H_2O allows us to understand solidity, liquidity, and other states. In contrast, there is no necessary connection between the physical and the mental. No matter how much we learn about the brain, we will never be able to fully grasp mental phenomena through it alone. As Michael Huemer points out, it is logically impossible to derive a subjective (mental) proposition from a non-subjective (physical) one. Similarly, as Hume famously argued, one cannot derive an "ought" from an "is," just as one cannot derive a geometric proposition from a non-

geometric one. Consequently, mental facts are not derivable from physical facts (Caplan, 1992).

3.Intentionality and the Mind-Brain Problem

Intentionality was employed by medieval philosophers in the concept of *intentio*, referring to the Latin term *esse intentionale* or intentional existence. Some have interpreted this as deriving from the word *intendere*, meaning "to aim at" or "to direct toward" (Maslin, 2009, p. 45). For instance, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) used the notion of intentionality to refer to anything capable of conceptually representing the mind (Crane, 1998, p. 817). Later, Franz Brentano (1838–1917) argued that mental phenomena possess this distinctive feature—namely, that they exhibit intentional existence, meaning that they are always directed toward an object. This object is related to the content and is directly referred to as the object. According to Brentano, despite apparent differences between the concepts of intentional existence and immanent objectivity, both relate to the same idea: a mental phenomenon that represents the world. Brentano believed that, unlike physical phenomena, mental phenomena arise immediately and directly; in this sense, they are inherently mental. This claim is known as Brentano's thesis (Brentano, 1995, pp. 68–69). As some commentators have rightly noted, the concept of intentionality forms a central pillar of Searle's thought. Not only his biological naturalism, but his entire philosophical project is built upon this concept. In the preface to *Intentionality*, Searle states that the main aim of the book is to provide a foundation for his two earlier works on language. In other words, what he sets out to do in *Intentionality* is to explain the fundamental features of language, which he sees as deriving from the essential features of the mind. However, in the subsequent pages, he lays out a

far more ambitious project—one that includes a solution to the mind-body problem and a comprehensive account of human behavior (Searle, 1983, pp. vii–x). It is precisely within this broader framework that the concept of intentionality is highlighted as an irreducible feature of the human mind.

According to John Searle, intentionality is the term used to describe the mind's capacity to be directed toward objects or states of affairs in the external world and the surrounding, or consequences arising from them. Thus, intentionality includes states such as belief, hope, fear, love, and hate, as well as sensory perception and intentional action. Searle summarizes intentionality as the mind's ability to represent objects and states of affairs in the world. He argues that every intentional state involves a direction of fit—a representation of the conditions under which it would be true or satisfied. Mental states such as desires and beliefs are inherently intentional. For example, if I have a belief about something, or a desire for something, or if I perceive an object or a situation in the world, these are all intentional mental states (Searle, 2013a, pp. 41–42). However, not all mental states are intentional, and not all intentional states are conscious. There is, of course, a significant overlap between the two. For instance, anxiety or unease may be conscious states without a clear intentional object—when a person feels anxious but cannot say what they are anxious about. Conversely, an intentional state can exist without conscious awareness; for example, it is not false to say "I believe that two plus two equals four" even while I am asleep (Searle, 2013a, p. 138).

Another key element of Searle's theory is the distinction between essential (or genuine) intentionality and derived intentionality, which helps explain the relationship between mind and language.

Only mental states possess essential intentionality, meaning that intentionality is a fundamental and irreducible feature of the mind. Speech acts, which involve a physical realization such as sound, derive their intentionality from the mind's genuine intentional states. Human actions, such as commuting from home to the university to give a lecture, acquire their meaning from human intentions—which themselves are a form of genuine mental intentionality (Searle, 2013a, p. 42). But how is this possible? How does this transfer of intentionality occur?

To explain how this is possible, Searle draws on the concept of mental causation, which he sees as a kind of efficient causation—a capacity of the mind to impose intentionality on non-mental entities and phenomena (Searle, 1983, pp. 117–132). It is through this form of efficient causation that the mind establishes a connection with the non-mental world. Linguistic events, in turn, make possible interaction and communication with other beings and social entities.

But after all this, one may still ask: What is the relationship between the theory of intentionality and biological naturalism? Or more precisely, how can the mental states approach resolve the mind-brain problem?

In fact, throughout the first nine chapters of his book, Searle defends the real existence of a class of irreducible and non-eliminable primary phenomena—namely, mental states. In these chapters, he confines himself to describing their essential features. It is in chapter ten that he attempts to show how mental states actually exist in the real world, and it is there that he introduces the term biological naturalism for the first time, where he asserts that mental states, like any other biological phenomenon—such as photosynthesis, mitosis, or digestion—are real. Mental states, like other phenomena, are caused

by biological processes. This view is called biological naturalism.

To defend the validity of his theory, Searle employs two distinct arguments. First, he asserts that there is no problem in accepting that mental states are both features emerging from the brain and realized within the brain at the same time. To explain this claim, he uses the analogy of water: The relationship between molecular behavior and the physical properties of water's surface is clearly causal. For example, if we change a molecule, the surface properties also change. We can have ice or steam, depending on whether the molecular motion slows down or speeds up. The liquidity of a surface of water is nothing beyond the H_2O molecules. When we describe the substance as liquid, we are simply describing those molecules at a higher level than individual molecular descriptions. (Searle, 1983, pp. 265–266)

In his second argument, Searle raises the issue of mental causation. For instance, can we explain that my conscious decision to raise my hand causes my hand to rise? Here, Searle again draws an analogy with the physical world, arguing that this situation is very similar to the combustion of fuel in a car engine. One might say that the oxidation of hydrocarbon molecules releases thermal energy, which then applies pressure to the molecular structure of the alloy. These are not two independent descriptions of two sets of causes but rather descriptions at two different levels of the same complete system (Searle, 2013a, p. 203).

In the final lines, Searle admits that his analogies are incomplete, and in fact, we currently have no theory explaining how the brain gives rise to mental states. However, he clearly expresses his belief that advancements in neuroscience will eventually resolve this issue (Searle, 1992, p. 272).

4.Consciousness as a Biological Problem

In *The Rediscovery of the Mind*, Searle systematically examines consciousness. In the book's introduction, he emphasizes that consciousness is the central phenomenon of the mind. One of the main objectives of the book is to explore the issue of consciousness and to overcome the dominant philosophical traditions regarding the mind, namely dualism and materialism, offering a new approach to the philosophy of mind. In this book, Searle introduces two scientific theories: the atomic theory of matter and the evolutionary theory. The atomic theory asserts that subatomic particles and their causal and systematic relationships constitute the ultimate reality of the world, such that many macro phenomena can be explained through micro phenomena. The evolutionary theory analyzes biological phenomena in terms of genetic mechanisms. Functioning at the molecular level, molecules in living organisms generate biological behaviors (for example, plants perform photosynthesis because their biochemical structure secretes auxins, causing the leaves to bend toward the sun). Thus, regarding both theories, Searle allows for the possibility of understanding consciousness (Searle, 1992, pp. 84–93).

In *The Mystery of Consciousness*, Searle states that if we distinguish between analytical definitions and the common-sense definition of consciousness, defining it would not be difficult. According to the common-sense definition, consciousness refers to states of sensory perception and awareness, which begin when we wake up and continue until we either fall asleep again, enter a coma or die, or become unconscious in any other form (Searle, 2014, p. 1). According to this definition, consciousness is an inner, first-person, and subjective phenomenon. In fact, by rejecting dualism, he views consciousness as a biological phenomenon, akin to growth, digestion, or bile secretion (Searle, 2014, p. 12).

He cites two reasons why his view is often considered dualistic. First, many people believe that if brain processes cause consciousness, then there must be two distinct things: the brain processes that act as the cause and consciousness that serves as the effect. The second reason is that causal relationships are typically assumed to occur between separate events that follow one another in time. In response to these misconceptions, he distinguishes between event causation and non-event causation. Consider the objects around you and the causal explanations for the fact that a table exerts pressure on a carpet. While this can be explained by gravitational force, gravity is not an event. Take the solidity of the table, for example. This can be causally explained in terms of the behavior of the molecules composing the table, yet solidity is not an external event—it is merely a property of the table itself. Examples of non-event causation, by providing suitable models, help make the relationship between my current conscious state and the underlying neurobiological processes that generate it intelligible (Searle, 2014, pp. 13–14).

Thus, according to Searle, consciousness is a natural biological phenomenon. While it arises from the brain's lower-level micro-processes, it is also considered a property of the brain at higher macro levels. The relationship between consciousness and brain processes is similar to the relationship between the solidity of a piston and the molecular behavior of H_2O, or the explosion in an engine cylinder and the oxidation of individual hydrocarbon molecules. In each case, higher-level causes are not over and above those present at the micro level of the system's components. Rather, causes at the level of the system's entirety can be fully explained in terms of the relationships between its micro-elements and are causally reducible to them (Searle, 2013a, p. 202). In short, Searle believes that the brain is the cause of

consciousness. The brain is an organ like any other, and consciousness is the result of lower-level neuronal processes in the brain, thus considered a property of the brain itself. Mental phenomena are both the result of and occur within the nervous system. Therefore, micro-level features give rise to macro-level properties that do not exist at the micro level. For this reason, Searle regards consciousness as an "emergent property" of the brain, arising from specific neuronal actions.

The emergent property of a system can be causally explained through the behavior of the system's components. However, this property does not belong to the individual components, nor can it be considered merely the sum of their individual properties. The liquid state of water provides a good example to illustrate this point. The behavior of the collective H_2O molecules explains the liquid state, but none of these molecules, individually, are liquid (Searle, 2014, p. 24).

5.Consciousness and Reductionism

Reduction means to explain or transform one phenomenon into another. When you reduce A to B, you show that A is nothing other than B. For example, material objects can be reduced to molecules, because material objects are nothing other than a collection of molecules. Similarly, if consciousness can be reduced to brain processes, then consciousness is nothing other than brain processes (Searle, 2013a, p. 111). However, the concept of reduction is ambiguous in several ways, and to resolve this ambiguity, it is important to distinguish between causal and ontological reductions. A phenomenon of type A is causally reducible to a phenomenon of type B if and only if the behavior of A's is entirely causally explained by the behavior of B's, and A's have no causal powers beyond those of B's. For example,

the solidity of an object is causally reducible to the molecular behavior of its components. The features of solid objects are causally explained by molecular behavior, and solidity has no causal power independent of molecular behavior. Phenomena of type A are ontologically reducible to phenomena of type B if and only if A's are nothing other than B's. Therefore, solid objects are nothing other than a collection of molecules.

Searle believes that consciousness is causally reducible, but it cannot be ontologically reduced without losing its meaning. Consciousness is causally explained by neuronal behavior, but we cannot say that consciousness is nothing other than neuronal behavior. The reason for this is that consciousness possesses first-person and subjective qualities. Therefore, consciousness differs from other phenomena that have outward features, such as liquidity or solidity, in that we do not wish to analyze the outward features and redefine the concept of consciousness in terms of the causes of those features. In fact, we recognize the concept by its subjective qualities, not by its outward characteristics (Searle, 2013a, pp. 119–121).

Searle, on the one hand, asserts that consciousness is reducible, but on the other hand, he denies its irreducibility. To resolve this apparent contradiction between eliminative reductions and non-eliminative reductions, he makes a distinction. Eliminative reductions suggest that the phenomenon being reduced does not actually exist. For example, reducing the sunset to the movement of the Earth is an eliminative reduction because it shows that the apparent movement of the sun downward is merely an appearance. However, the reduction of solidity is not eliminative. Eliminative reductions rely on a distinction between appearance and reality. We cannot show that the existence of consciousness, like the sunset, is an illusion because, in the case of

consciousness, the appearance is the reality (Searle, 2013a, pp. 122–123).

6.Criticism and Evaluation

Although Searle himself claims that his biological naturalism provides a suitable solution to the mind-body problem, many critics, including Dennett, Chalmers, and others, have raised objections to his view. Some even believe that his solution may simply be another form of property dualism.

Dennett argues that Searle's use of the term "ontological first-person" is vague and unprecedented. According to him, Searle never explains what he means by the term "ontological," but only uses it to deny that the subjectivity of the mental is merely an epistemological reality (Dennett, 1993, pp. 193–205).

The term "ontological first-person" only makes sense if we are precisely discussing two different domains, each as a distinct reality: a subjective reality and an objective/physical reality, each with its own ontology (just with different layers). Moreover, it seems that the irreducibility of the ontological first-person requires different levels of ontology.

Searle rejects the interpretation of biological naturalism as a form of property dualism, which denies the existence of different metaphysical realms: Property dualism wants to say that consciousness is mental and therefore not a physical feature of the brain. I want to say that consciousness is mental and therefore a biological and physical feature of the brain (Searle, 2002, p. 61).

Given this, the mental has the same ontological status as the physical, yet it is not reducible to the physical. Understanding this is truly difficult. Searle's claim is that mental events and processes are

just as much part of our biological natural history as the stomach, mitosis, or enzyme secretion are (Searle, 1992, p. 90).

No satisfactory epistemological explanation of consciousness is provided. Even if we sympathize with Searle's attempt to naturalize consciousness, we still cannot fully understand his description of consciousness and its irreducibility as higher-level properties of the neurobiological system (Ibid, 1992, p. 28). This is because all ordinary biological features are reducible to the physical.

Searle considers consciousness to have the same ontological status as a physical property, claiming that consciousness is simply an emergent higher-level property of the brain, much like liquidity is an emergent property of H_2O molecules (Searle, 1992, p. 14). When he states that consciousness is a result of the brain, it seems he overlooks the fact that liquidity is not the result of a physical feature of H_2O; it is constituted by the physical features of H_2O. (Chalmers, 1996, p. 130) The distinction between causing and constituting is crucial, and it can be illustrated with the following example: three straight lines, designed in such a way that their angles sum to 180 degrees, form a triangle. The triangle logically entails specific arrangement of the lines. However, the triangle is not created by the specific arrangement of the lines. It is made by a person who arranges the lines in such a way that they form a triangle. If consciousness is constituted by the physical, it logically must be physical, which brings the interpretation of consciousness closer to a materialistic view of consciousness.

There are also other problems with Searle's view. He claims that he wants to free himself from the philosophical tradition and its terminology, and overcome it. However, despite his repeated assertions that biological naturalism is new relative to its predecessors,

in reality, it is a repetition of several elements from the same tradition. For example, the influence of Brentano and Husserl on his theory of intentionality is not surprising, yet he never explicitly references either of them.

Similarly, the comparisons he draws between consciousness and biological functions such as digestion have been used by materialists since at least the eighteenth century, as has been shown elsewhere (Freitas Araujo, 20013).

The categories that form the framework of his discussions come from the very traditions he seeks to avoid (such as subjectivity, first-person perspective, etc.). Of course, in defending the irreducibility of consciousness, he refers to thinkers like Nagel and Jackson. However, according to him, they mistakenly treat subjectivity purely as epistemological, while he considers it ontological. Unfortunately, despite his efforts in this regard, he fails to present an independent ontological concept, as everything he says is based on the epistemological experience of human consciousness, as Churchland has also pointed out (Jackson, 1982, pp. 127–136).

Conclusion

John Searle, with his theory of "biological naturalism," has made a serious attempt to rethink the mind-body problem. By rejecting traditional dualism and physicalist reductionism, he has sought to explain consciousness within a biological framework, while also acknowledging its subjective nature, using concepts such as intentionality, mental causality, and emergent properties. According to him, mental phenomena are just as natural and biological as processes like digestion or photosynthesis, with the difference that they also have first-person and qualitative aspects.

However, a critical analysis of Searle's theory shows that, although it contains innovations, it ultimately fails to fully overcome the existing epistemological and ontological challenges. The ontological irreducibility of consciousness, despite Searle's emphasis on the unity of the nervous system, still raises the question of how one can bridge the gap between third-person and first-person realities. As a result, many of his critics accuse him of, in practice, reverting to a form of property dualism.

Despite these criticisms, Searle's theory is considered an important step in bridging the findings of neuroscience with philosophical analysis. While it may not be regarded as a final solution, it has undoubtedly opened new horizons for reflection on the mind-body problem.

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