

Research Article

An Analysis of the Implications of Modernity on Humanity: Developing an Epistemological Framework

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Abstract: The paper seeks to explore the hidden assumptions that are imbedded in a modern, atheistic, naturalistic philosophical outlook, and the conclusions of which are often overlooked. Particularly, the authors highlight that a philosophically naturalistic outlook leads to untenable conclusions regarding human morality, volition, and subjective conscious experience. The analysis finds that a modern approach, if taken to its logical conclusion, would leave humanity bereft of meaning. The authors argue that the naturalistic approach requires leaps of faith regarding human cognitive capacities, as it assumes sound reasoning without justification to such a premise. The authors conclude that religious grounding, specifically an Islamic conceptual framework, is necessary to account for consciousness, logic, and morality, while the abandonment of this tradition along with the metaphysical foundation it provides leaves the modern man struggling to justify rationality, moral arguments, and even basic articulation with which he rejects faith in God. Thus, the authors conclude that modernity, while commended for its advancements in the sciences, must not lose the metaphysical underpinnings upon which it is founded.

Keywords: Modernity, atheism, freewill, morality, identity, soul.

Introduction

We live in strange times. If one were tasked to define our current global climate, one word which would comprehensively encapsulate the present tone is: modern. Our current zeitgeist is drudging ever faster towards modernity and has been for centuries, as Anthony Giddens writes, "'modernity' refers to modes of social life or organization which emerged in Europe from about the seventeenth century onwards and which subsequently became more or less worldwide in their influence".¹ Yet most people cannot clearly define what "modernity" is. Unfortunately, it is a concept which is rarely examined under the microscope yet assumed to be beneficial for humanity. When scrutinized carefully, we discover that the dominance of such a weltanschauung is detrimental for humanity from a plethora of perspectives.

Epistemologically, modernity depends on two of man's abilities in order to assess truth: reason and sense perception. After questioning which sources of knowledge are valid, Basit Bilal Koshul writes, "Epistemology is the study of the various ways in which man has attempted to answer this question. This question has been the preoccupation of all civilizations known to man, and the manner in which this particular question was answered greatly determined the character of each civilization. Modern Western thought has answered this question by categorically stating that only 'scientific' knowledge is capable of providing an accurate description of Reality and Truth."²

The modern man believes that he is autonomous, able to conquer any and all of life's challenges using the power of his empiricism to assess, and intellect overcome. This is in stark contrast to the religious worldview. Religion teaches that humanity by itself is lost, challenged by both inner and outer influences that will guide them towards perdition. It is through divine assistance that man is steered towards success in both this life and the hereafter. Humanity can trust in this divinely revealed wisdom because its teachings stems from the Eternal Creator who exists beyond time matter and space. Thus, religious instruction is not to be abandoned or tampered with; it is by definition perfect, timeless, applying to all ages, and an enlightenment in all circumstances.

Modernity, on the other hand, recognizes no eternal truths. As Astradur Eysteinnsson states, "Modernism' signals a dialectical opposition to what is not functionally 'modern,' namely 'tradition.'"³ All is to be questioned, and all is to be reevaluated. The very term "modern" is synonymous with: "recent", "fresh", and "novel", whereas its antonym is: "tradition". The modern man has no use for old values, ideas and beliefs as he is constantly searching to reinvent himself.

Impermanence is a major motif in modern thinking, as Charles Baudelaire asserts, "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is the one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable."⁴ This implies that nothing is fixed,

Islam's Encounter with Modernity, p 4.

¹ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990, p1.

² Basit Bilal Koshul, *Defining Modernity* in unpublished work "Recounting the Milestones: An Appraisal of

³ Astradur Eysteinnsson, *The Concept of Modernism*, Cornell University: Press Ithaca and London, 1990, p1.

⁴ Charles Baudelaire. *The Painter of Modern Life*,

and therefore nothing can be absolutely confirmed. All knowledge is speculative, all conclusions are hypothetical, and beliefs are doubted. Giddens describes this phenomenon as follows, "Modernity is a post-traditional order, but not one in which the sureties of tradition and habit have been replaced by the certitude of rational knowledge. Doubt, a pervasive feature of modern critical reason, permeates into everyday life as well as philosophical consciousness, and forms a general existential dimension of the contemporary social world. Modernity institutionalizes the principle of radical doubt and insists that all knowledge takes the form of hypotheses: claims which may very well be true, but which are in principle always open to revision and may have at some point to be abandoned."⁵

A religious man seeks to submit himself to his Creator, recognizing the waywardness of his impulses he relinquishes his desires to the divine will, trusting in its eternal wisdom to carry him along the path to salvation. However, the modern man is just the opposite. As an autonomous being, he sees himself independent of a deity. He considers enslavement to God a weakness relegated for simpletons who cannot pave their own way, whereas he perceives himself as the master of his own destiny. As for religious practices, they are permitted in the modern framework so long as they remain private, consigned to a silent bedside prayer or a service confined to the four walls of a religious establishment. Beyond that, a religion is unwelcomed in public space as separation between church and state is an integral principle. Even religious symbols and holidays must be secularized, as if religiosity is so hazardous that even dedicating one day in the year to it may be perilous.

Religious symbols are not only subject to perversion, but even mockery. Freedom of speech is an important modern principle which, to its credit, protects the right to dissent from unjust political and social policies. However, freedom of speech is not limited to such noble causes. It is often used to deride religious beliefs and symbols, with the justification that a healthy society is one in which unpopular opinions can be expressed without hindrance. This notion, delightful as it may sound, ignores the fact that speech is not 'free' as there are an abundance of speech restricting laws such as incitement of violence, false testimony, obscenity, hate speech, copyright infringement, defamation, libel, harassment, etc. All serve to protect from speech, nevertheless modernity has deemed that these restrictions should not be used to protect religious sensibilities.

Another important characteristic of modernity touches upon the realm of financial progress. In the modern world, greed is good. If one's physical needs are met, he is to continue producing, earning, spending and consuming under the guise of development, improvement, progress, profit, etc. This is a necessary component as spiritual goals have been removed from the modern mindset. This results in emptiness, a missing sense of purpose which is exacerbated the moment one's

wealth is sufficient to accommodate for all material obligations. Wealth transforms from a survival tool into a potential aid for any cause an individual believes in. This potential begs the question: "where will you dispense this wealth?" an inquiry that only accentuates just how purposeless said person feels. The only solution to fill the void is to keep earning, as material wealth is the only source of happiness modernity has to offer.

As was demonstrated, modernity is a multidimensional concept. Louay M. Safi explores its variety in the following, "Modernity, and the process of modernization leading to it, mean different things to different people. Almond and Verba associate it with structural differentiation and cultural secularization. Leonard Binder connects it with the growth in economic capacity, social differentiation, and political equality. David Apter links it to the expansion of individual choice. Manning Nash sees modernization in the application of science to production, and modernity in the social, cultural, and psychological conditions facilitating this application. S.N. Eisenstadt associates modernity with the rise of *rational* culture and the secularization of worldviews, with the emergence of efficient economies and specialized roles, and with political freedom and the creation of the system of nation-states."⁶

In spite of the variety of features inherent to modernity, perhaps the most salient feature is that of a shift away from God. Such a core belief strikes deep at the heart of the human identity; it is a change in perspective far greater than a difference in economic policies, ethnic and cultural pluralism, or minor shifts in social norms and values. The belief in God is a principle from which arguably all other values are derived from, and it is for that reason that modernity's disbelief in God will be discussed at length. In other words, to accurately assess the validity of modern thinking, we must consider the atheistic framework from which it operates.

Atheism: Under the Microscope

Atheism is the lack of a belief in God or gods. Atheists are often described as 'skeptics' because they find no evidence for a supernatural realm and thus deny it, and they have adopted the title 'freethinkers' as a way of differentiating themselves from believers who 'restrict' themselves to the precepts of their faith. Atheists can predominantly be categorized as naturalists, or materialists, i.e. those who believe that the natural/material realm is the only reality that exists. This material world, made of time, matter and space, is governed by the laws of physics and beyond that, there is no divine hand operating, judging, inspiring, or sending books and messengers.

The problem with such an outlook is the conclusions we as humans must make about ourselves if this belief is true. The denial of God forces us to discard a myriad of beliefs as well, most importantly, the belief in a soul. What is a human being if considered without a soul?

London: Phaidon Press, 1863, p.403.

⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991 p. 2.

⁶ M Louay Safi, *The Challenge of Modernity*. Lanham: University Press of America, 1994, p.10-11.

Man without a Soul

If we strip a human being of his spirit, then a human is the result of two factors: nature and nurture. Nature is the biological makeup of a human being which results from the DNA acquired from a father's sperm and a woman's egg. Such inherited genes are in no way selected by the child itself; rather it is imposed upon the child. Whether we are born male or female, light or dark skinned, tall or short, blond or brunette, healthy or sick, we must all concede that such qualities aren't of our own choosing; rather they are the brute facts imposed upon us without consent or even consultation. Nurture is defined as the experience humans undergo throughout their lives. Whether a child was born into an affectionate or argumentative, a sporty or sedentary, a humorous or humourless environment, each will have a different impact on said child's mind. When we evaluate the matter precisely we arrive at the conclusion that neither one of these factors are in our control. If all of our thoughts, words and actions are a result of two factors, nature and nurture, both of which are out of our control, then the only logical conclusion is to deny free will and accept that humans are, along with all other material in the universe, subject to determinism.

Atheism & Free Will

Some atheists try to escape this daunting reality by seeking refuge in quantum physics. They claim that a deterministic existence is necessary in a Newtonian framework, but recent discoveries in quantum physics demonstrate that atoms are not entirely predictable, that they sometimes jump to random positions, and as such the universe is not as calculable as previously believed. The problem with this rationale is that it is a non-sequitur. Free will implies that an individual is able to make choices himself, whereas quantum physics asserts that an individual is composed of atoms whose movement is entirely out of control. So, whether we are predictable carbon computers according to Newtonian physics, or if we're made up of chaotic, spontaneous, unpredictable atoms according to Quantum physics, in either case, we aren't in the driver's seat. Man is thus reduced to a processor whose programming he did not choose and thus cannot trust. Ironically, atheism would have us trusting our brains enough to come to the conclusion that we cannot trust our brains. Even from this brief assessment one can conclude that atheism is hopelessly self-defeating, and as such an unfitting foundation for any belief system, let alone the direction in which the whole world has been 'progressing' towards for centuries. Given the urgency of the matter, we must comprehend this matter more thoroughly by exploring some of the crucial deductions drawn from the atheist backdrop.

Implications of Atheism

What does it mean to be without choice? Reflect for a moment upon your daily life. It would be accurate to consider that life, for all people, is a series of choices. From the moment we wake to the moment we fall asleep, and indeed

sometimes even in our dreams, we are constantly making decisions. Given that it is our most immediate and constant reality, it is without a doubt, a fact that cannot be doubted. What greater proof could there be than the direct and relentless experience of choice in order to establish its reality? Even if the scientific community has no means to account for free will, then we must either conclude that our scientific ability is lacking, or that such a phenomenon exists in a realm beyond the scientific explanatory capacity. In either scenario, we cannot, as Stephen Hawking did, deny free will by stating, "...It seems that we are no more than biological machines and that free will is just an illusion."⁷ Such a statement begs the question: were you forced to such a conclusion? If so, how is this conclusion any different than the babblings of a madman if both the scientist and the madman are biological machines, predetermined to act in any way the blind forces of nature require them to act?

Morality

This view has important implications upon morality as well. Before proceeding, let us keep in mind that a worldview must address human morality if it wishes to contend on the public sphere. In other words, if modernity is competing to be the global framework upon which our contemporary civilization is built, then it undoubtedly must provide a clear and concrete foundation for ethical progress. Cognizant of this requirement, let us evaluate morality from an atheistic / modernistic understanding.

Firstly, where does morality come from? There are no "right" or "wrong" atoms or molecules, and as such, even the social sciences that aim to objectively collect data to assess human progress are built upon the subjective assumptions that "progress" (however it may be defined) is intrinsically good. In reality, morality without conceptual grounding in God is a biased assessment that has no tangible substance in the physical world. Yet human beings can hardly let a moment pass without making a moral assessment because morality is intrinsic to the human condition, a fundamental part of how we filter the world around us and interact within it. Unfortunately, we find that scrutinizing moral epistemology is becoming gradually less common, and as such, value judgments are increasingly held baselessly.

From an atheist perspective, morality is make-believe. We cannot examine ethics under a microscope; there is no process to weigh morality on a scale, therefore it is a product of our imagination. In a material world, morality is simply an invention in the minds of men, and like any other thought, it can be applied, or transformed, or forgotten. Religion teaches us that morality is determined by God, and as such it is an immutable truth that exists eternally. Not only is morality theoretically rooted in religion, but many Holy Scriptures ground it in tangible consequences by narrating the history of past nations. The Qur'an and Bible are replete with warnings, stressing that God's ethics are to be obeyed and the penalties

⁷ Stephen Hawking & Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design*. New York: Bantam Books, 2010, p. 32.

of violating them results in both a punishment in this life and a torment in the life to come. From that perspective, ethical principles are as real as can be, firmly established ontologically, and applied in practice historically. If we are to remove the underlying concept of God from the equation, morality falls along with it.

Secondly, it is interesting to note that a subset of modernity is liberalism. Liberal values teach that tolerance is one of the highest ideals. We must respect each other's rights, even if forced to do so by law, yet self-respect is optional. In a libertarian world, people are free to do drugs, engage in the most depraved sex acts, practice masochism, and even commit suicide, so long as they don't infringe on the rights of others. But does this equation work? Why would an individual be compelled to respect others if they have not learned to respect themselves? Respect for others is a by-product of self-respect, and self-respect can only exist if a human knows that his life has meaning, purpose and some higher goal beyond the accidental consequences of blind physical forces. Thus, such a system is doomed to fail, as Steve Turner wrote, "If chance be the Father of all flesh, Disaster is his rainbow in the sky, And when you hear 'State of Emergency!' 'Sniper Kills Ten!' 'Troops on Rampage!' 'Whites go Looting!' 'Bomb Blasts School!' It is but the sound of man worshiping his maker."

Thirdly, from a deterministic platform, it is impossible to account for ethics. A moral decision can only be made with the freedom to choose. If man is reduced to the biological functions he did not select, and the environmental influences upon that biology which he also had no hand in, then man's morality is reduced to a series of eventualities, thus rendering it to naught. Atheism diminishes human beings to evolved animals. If a rattlesnake bites, or if a dog barks, it would be absurd to consider those actions either 'good' or 'bad'. The animal has no choice but to act based on instincts, and if man is simply a further evolved animal, then making a moral decision is as impossible for us as it is for an animal to override its instincts.

Logic & Reason

Even the very ability to reason is removed from the human according to atheism. An argument may appear to be logically sound, yet without choice, an individual cannot choose between rational and irrational claims or logical and illogical premises. Like a calculator, we may have the ability to process, but a calculator's software can always be verified by a higher intelligence, i.e. humans. If the software is faulty, then we as outside observers can rectify the calculator's malfunctions when necessary. Yet in our case, atheism would have us believe that we are despondently doomed to accept or reject arguments with a dubious instrument: a mind produced by no intelligence, supervised by no one, and completely out of control. If Darwinists are so adamant that our ancestry is closely linked with monkeys, then one must doubt that our monkey-like mind can arrived at truths of any kind. Atheism defeats itself as a belief concluding that our choices are predetermined, thus even making our choice to be an atheist as

irrational and inescapable as the mental patient who ends up in the psych ward. Both are helplessly a product of factors out of their control, so if one commits murder while the other wins a Nobel Peace Prize, both of them did so out of sheer physical necessity.

Identity

Within the atheist framework the very concept of an identity disintegrates. If one's choices including thoughts, words and deeds are not their own, then what is left as an identity? In popular vernacular, an identity mainly comprises of an individual's character based on the assumption that their personality is within their control. If we were to include automated responses within the definition, then even appliances such as laptops and cell phones would have "identities", a use of the term I have yet to hear from any sensible person.

Indeed, an identity results from free will, and modernity has broken the very backbone of the self. After years of chipping away at the foundations of human identity, modernism has caused generation after generation to search for their identity in countless places. Currently the gender identity craze has prevailed in pop-culture. The atheist movement, which was once united upon the hatred of religion, now has been derailed and divided by the question of gender identity. Terms such as cisgender, transgender, bigender, agender, ambigender, pansexual, androsexual, auto androphilia, auto gynephilia, androgynous, dysphoria, biological essentialism and LGBTQQIAAP are making their way to becoming popular vernacular in an attempt to make up for what modernity has robbed them of: an identity. Sexual diversity has existed long before modernity, yet it is increasingly common to find gender identity defining every aspect of an individual. In other words, gender identity is no longer used to merely define sexual preference. For many it defines their entire lives, which results from modernity's shift away from the tradition groundwork upon which identity is built, i.e. God. It is stated in the Qur'an:

And be not like those who forgot Allah, so He made them forget themselves.⁸

Descartes once famously said, "I think therefore I am". It would seem that the "I think..." portion includes reasoning and choosing, and the "...I am" implies that the self is real. Perhaps an atheist revision of this famous phrase would be, "I have the illusion of free thought; therefore, I have the illusion of a self, but I really do not exist." Even one of atheism's leading spokesmen, Sam Harris, acknowledges that there is no justification for an identity in atheism, claiming that accepting one's subordination to blind chance is liberating for the atheist as it frees them from the perils of conceit and self-centeredness. The problem, however, is that, if we are to concede to his claims and declare that "I do not exist", then this is the definition of modernist nonsense, because the "I" referenced in this statement could never make the claim. The very notion of "I do not exist" requires an "I" to begin with,

⁸ Al-ashr: 19.

even if only to deny it. Thus, the atheist again is trapped in a self-defeating proposition.

Meaning

But the word “I” isn’t the only term whose meaning comes under question. Along that same vein, the meanings of all other words become contentious. Atheists often criticize religious people, stating that it is delusional to derive meaning from mundane acts of nature. They will argue that primitive man could not comprehend the physics of thunder and lightning, so they invented deities such as Zeus and Thor, and such a tradition is carried on by irrational religious Christian preachers who attribute natural disasters to God’s wrath when they should look no further than the physical conditions that lead up to and cause a natural disaster to come about. The problem however, is that they are speaking as outside observers. The atheist is part of this universe, he is not a freestanding spectator, so if every event can be traced back to its physical cause and thus be void of meaning, then that standard applies to the words that humans think, write and speak as well. The involuntary noises that come from their mouths when asleep (i.e. snoring) should be considered just as meaningful as the (supposedly) involuntary noises that come from their mouths when awake (i.e. speech), because each and every single word could, theoretically, be traced back to the electro-magnetic impulses that fired in the brain which caused those words. Each event in the brain is caused by the brute conditions of physics and therefore, according to atheism, is void of meaning. This puts the atheist in a painfully awkward position because the very word “atheism”, and all the words used to learn and teach the concept, stand in a position of self-contradiction. God says in the Qur’an:

Then by the Master of the heavens and earth, undoubtedly it [this revelation] is Truth - just as [sure as] it is that you are speaking.⁹ (51:23)

Why would Allah swear that the Qur’an is the truth, just as well as we know we’re speaking? There are many words for “speaking” in Arabic, but in this case, Allah used the word **نطق** which means to speak rationally, intelligibly. From this root you get the word **منطق** which means “logic” or “reason”. Thus, it is as if this verse is saying, “Without a doubt, this Revelation is the truth just as well as you know that you are speaking intelligible words”. In this passage, Allah is commanding humanity to stop being pretentious! We know we’re not just carbon computers, we know there’s a ghost in the machine. And just as we know that we have choice, and rationality, and that we speak with logic and intelligible words (why else would you read this text), then know that this Book is from Allah. Because acknowledging the meaning in our words, and the rationality in our ideas is implicitly rejecting materialism.

Atheism’s Failure

Thus, atheism cannot account for the immediate human experience of choice, morality, rationality, identity and

meaning. If we are to consider each of these illusory, we must ask: what is left? What is a human life without these fundamental factors? Could we make a conclusion about anything without these necessary tools? The answer is inexorably: no. Modernity is a mode of thinking that is pulling humanity away from God and thus away from the soul, which leaves humanity lost beyond description. Most westerners do not analyze modernity to such an extent, rather they recognize the weaknesses of Christianity and thus relinquish religion altogether. This, however, is truly throwing the baby out with the bathwater. We have collectively allowed ourselves to gradual shift away from the axiomatic principles which make us human.

An atheist may allege that the believer is unable to provide a comprehensive definition for a soul, leaving room to doubt its existence. However, in actuality, all experiences are rather impossible to define except through invoking a similar experience. Can we describe a colour to the blind? Can we explain sound to the deaf? In a similar manner, we may not be able to elucidate upon the inner workings of the soul, but such a fact is irrelevant. Consciousness and choice are our most immediate experiences. If the natural world cannot account for our reality, the supernatural must suffice.

How can modernity be an acceptable worldview if it cannot account for virtually any of life’s experiences? To ignore reality is to be ignored by reality. If a religion, faith, or ideology cannot account for the facts, then we do not throw away facts, or avoid them by labelling them illusions, rather it is the religion, faith or ideology that must be abandoned. This is the position of modernity. It is built upon an atheistic framework which is unable to resolve our most direct experiences of mankind: choice, ethics, rationality, identity and meaning. It desperately attempts to evade these most obvious realities by labelling them misapprehensions, which begs the question: if all of this is a deception, then what is real? If we cannot trust the choices we make, the ethical justice we seek, the logical conclusions we reach, the meaning we recognize and the very thoughts in our minds, then from where do we derive the confidence to affirm anything, including atheism and modernity?

Human Design: God’s Masterpiece

Humanity must admit that we have strayed too far. We must appreciate our most immediate experiences, trust in them as they are inevitable facts, and believe that our faculties are not a result of blind random forces. We cannot live in denial of our reality, consequently our only option is to stop wasting our time denying it, and start asking: where is it coming from? Experiencing the precision in our faculties and the subtle perfection in our abilities should guide us to acknowledge just how wonderful our design is, and that such excellence is no accident, that there must have been a Powerful, Wise and Perfect Designer who assembled us with unmistakable mastery. As God says in the Qur’an:

We have certainly created man in the best of stature. (95:4)

Self-Evident Truth

⁹ Al-DharyÉt: 23.

Yet the belief in God is not only deduced from contemplation of the self. Prior to any inference from human nature, the belief in God is a self-evident truth. A self-evident truth is a fact that is a) foundational, meaning it provides a basis for more knowledge, b) it is not based on information transfer, and c) it is not culturally bound. The belief in God provides a foundation for understanding our universe and more importantly, ourselves, a foundation which, as has been demonstrated, atheism lacks. Secondly, the belief in God is not dependent upon information transfer as even a child, if left without indoctrination, will eventually develop the belief in a deity. Lastly, it is not culturally bound as each civilization known to man has had some concept of a deity, thus we cannot surmise that it is an idea imposed by a few upon the masses, rather it is a natural part of the human condition.

Consciousness

The belief in a supernatural Creator fits uniformly with the supernatural aspects of our human experience. If science cannot account for consciousness emerging from an assortment of atoms, then we must consider the possibility that God has inexplicably bestowed it upon us in a way that is beyond our comprehension.

This verse is typically translated as follows:

“And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam - from their loins - their descendants and made them testify of themselves, [saying to them], ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes, we have testified.’”¹⁰

However, in language, punctuation can change the meaning of a sentence entirely. A famous illustration is provided in the following two sentences: “Woman: without her, man is nothing.” & “Woman, without her man, is nothing.” Though the sentences deliver opposite messages, one may conclude that both sentences are true as men and women are co-dependent. In that same manner, the previous translation as well as the following translation are faithful to the language, yet it is the second translation that highlights the miraculous essence of consciousness as Allah uses it as an evidence for His lordship: “And [mention] when your Lord took from the children of Adam – from their loins - their descendants and (He) made them witness themselves. ‘Am I not your Lord?’ They said, ‘Yes! We witness!’” (7:172)

This passage is describing the ability to witness as an evidence of Allah’s existence. Allah bestowed this gift upon humanity prior to their entry into the physical world in order to equip them with the immediate and constant evidence of their Lord that is meant to drive them to seek Him out. This ability to witness, along with free will, rationality and ethics, do not have a material explanation and as such these metaphysical truths must be accredited to God. It is He who has endowed us with a soul. We cannot claim to have extensive knowledge about the soul as it is not a material substance that we can dissect, but a metaphysical reality we encounter through consciousness. Some may object by questioning: How can a will be free if we have been given our souls? Firstly, this

question isn't an objection to the absurdity of atheism; it is simply a shift in focus, in hopes that theism is equally deterministic. Secondly, indeed both the body and soul are given to the human being, but they are not the same substance. Our bodies are made of matter, and matter reacts to physical laws. The soul is not a physical substance, so claiming that it must react in a like manner is simply unfounded.

The Solution: Islam

Islam and modernity are incompatible from multiple perspectives. The basic premise that man’s faculties are self-earned, self-sustained, and self-serving, all contradict the Islamic belief that Allah has endowed man with the ability to reason with his intellect and experience the world through his senses in order to better discover, appreciate, and ultimately worship Him. The Muslim’s relationship with Allah is one of a slave who submits himself wholeheartedly, recognizing that rejection of servitude towards Allah will not free man; rather it will subject him to submission to the creation instead of the Creator. Base desires, whims, fleeting passions, and other such ephemeral persuasions in lieu of spiritual devotion overtake the man who abandons his Lord.

Though this servitude seems demeaning, the humility taught by Islam is only for Allah, whereas man’s relationship with the world is one of dominance and as such man is not required to live ashamedly. Man was destined from his creation to be the vicegerent on the earth, governing the worldly affairs through the guidance of his Lord. In fact the Qur’an encourages him to travel the world, ponder the universe far and wide, utilizing the faculties Allah has bestowed upon him. It is upon this journey that man is to apply three epistemological faculties: *علم اليقين* (knowledge of certainty), *عين اليقين* (vision of certainty) and *حق اليقين* (the reality of certainty). These three faculties correspond with the “reason” and “empiricism” that are familiar to modernity yet include a third component which is beyond intuitiveness. It is an extrasensory perception that borders upon clairvoyance, a conviction that is reached as a result of sincerity and piety. These three levels of knowledge are explained in the Qur’an with the example of hellfire: someone who is rationally convinced of the necessity and reality of hell is considered to have *علم اليقين* (102:5). Once the criminal sees the hellfire on the Day of Judgment, they have a considerably greater knowledge of hell’s reality, a knowledge which is deemed *عين اليقين* (102:7). Yet when said criminal is entered into the fire of hell and experiences the torment for himself, this is indeed the greatest level of knowledge described as *حق اليقين* (56:93-95). The Qur’an makes reference to these terms a total of four times. Three of which were mentioned above. The only term that is repeated is *حق اليقين*, and it is used to describe the Qur’an itself:

And indeed, it (The Qur’an) is *Haqq al yaqeen* (the reality / truth of certainty). (69:51)

This series of verses outline Islamic epistemology. They explain that knowledge is indeed acquired rationally and empirically, however the story doesn’t end there. A rational

¹⁰ The Qur’an: 7:172.

argument may be convincing, but there can always be room to doubt one's own logic. As the saying goes, "seeing is believing", yet it is possible to doubt one's own senses as well as they are not infallible. However, if an individual gives himself to the Qur'an, and studies it with an open heart, seeking its wisdom and implementing its mandates, it will cause said person to experience the touch of the divine in a way that cannot be rationally explained or empirically verified. It will create a certainty about its veracity that cannot be dissected and explained away. Such an experience, though made of moments of seeing, hearing and rationalizing, is not simply the sum of those parts, but an all-encompassing conviction that can only be grasped by those who tread that same path.

Conclusion

So, we are left to contrast and conclude: which of these two worldviews are more viable? Are we to believe the philosophy of modernity, that humans are simply a collection of blindly assembled, incontrollable impulses? Or that we are Allah's purposefully designed creatures whose lives are spent seeking His truth? Are we to believe that all knowledge is segmented, compartmentalized, doubted and unsupportable? Or that Allah sent us a miraculous Book that explains reality, and whose textual interconnectedness and harmony stand as evidence that Allah's universe, our reality, is equally interconnected? Are we to believe that religion is born from primitive man's fear of plague, natural disasters and death which caused him to invent supernatural deities who would protect him? Or are we to acknowledge that prior to any sentiment of fear, a perceived blessing must first exist in the human psyche, and it is that sense of gratitude, not fear, that drives man to seek out the divine? Is this perhaps why Allah begins his divine message not with some complex esoteric obscurity, instead He skips the preamble and speaks directly to the heart of His slave when.

Acknowledgement

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