Critique and Analysis of Modern Arab Maghreb Neo-Etizal Empiricism in Interpreting the Teachings of the Qur'ān

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article type: Research Article **Article History:** Received 03 November 2024 Revised 01 January 2025 Accepted 04 January 2025 Published Online 06 January 2025 **Keywords:** Qur'ān, Interpretive streamology, Empiricism, Neo-Mu'tazila, Arab Maghreb.	The neo-Mu'tazila movement in the contemporary Arab Maghreb has adapted its interpretation of Qur'ānic verses to align with modernity, influenced by Western thought. This deviation from traditional Mu'tazila, which emphasizes rational principles and monotheistic philosophy, reflects a dialogue with modernity that critiques the perception of Islamic societies as lagging behind their Western counterparts. The movement seeks to reconcile Islam with contemporary values, leading to distinctive methods of Qur'ānic interpretation. A study employing library research and analytical-descriptive methods reveals that this group encounters significant fundamental and methodological challenges, including a materialistic view of supernatural phenomena, a historical relativism of religious knowledge, and a reductionist interpretation of the Prophet's recitation. Methodologically, they exhibit an inadequate engagement with reason and a limited understanding of the Qur'ān's complexities.

Introduction

Neo-Mu'tazila is an ideological movement that emerged in 19th-century Egypt, revitalizing the tenets of the ancient Mu'tazila school through the contributions of Ash'ari Sunni thinkers. Notable figures including Seyyed Jamal al-Din Asadabadi and Sheikh Muhammad Abd al-Masri played crucial roles in this revival, further popularized by Ahmad Amin's historic writings, which highlighted the Mu'tazila's relevance in contemporary discourse. Parallel developments occurred in the Indian subcontinent, with thinkers like Shah Waliullah Dehlavi and Seyyed Ahmad Khan discussing Mu'tazili thought (Husaynī Shāhrūdī, 2012).

The Neo-Mu'tazilite movement can be categorized into two factions: revelatory Neo-Mu'tazila and secular Neo-Mu'tazila. The revelatory group, including figures such as Mohammad Abdu and Rashid Reza, advocates for a harmonization of reason and revelation, asserting that reason devoid of revelation is flawed. Conversely, the secular group champions an independent and absolute reasoning framework, often critiquing religious epistemology, with prominent critics including Mohammad Arkoun and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abu-Zaid. This faction's perspective echoes modern Western rationality, promoting a view of reason as the sole arbiter of knowledge, unconstrained by religious authority ('Arab Ṣāliḥī, 2014; Waṣfī, 2010).

The Neo-Mu'tazilite, a contemporary extension of the Mu'tazila sect, is characterized by a rational approach to religion, emphasizing the reasonableness of religious propositions (Abū Zayd, 1994). These scholars, as rationalists and self-defined reformers, prioritize knowledge acquisition through reason, influenced by Western philosophy, which distinguishes reason from revelation (Waṣfī, 2010). In their framework, tradition and revelation acquire meaning through contemporary reasoning (Waṣfī, 2010). A notable exegetical trait among Neo-Mu'tazilites, particularly in the modern Arab Maghreb, is empiricism, which is rooted in positivism. They argue that "knowledge" is limited to scientifically verifiable sensory experiences, thereby disregarding non-sensory experiences (Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2003).

The main question addressed in this article is the critique, examination, and analysis of the empiricist approach of the contemporary Neo-Muʿtazilite movement in interpreting Qurʾānic teachings. The aim is to evaluate how this movement attempts to reconcile Islam with modernity through a unique method of interpretation characterized by rationalism influenced by Western culture, empiricism rooted in sensualism and positivism, and material interpretations of metaphysical concepts. The article utilizes library research and analytical-descriptive methods to evaluate Neo-Muʿtazilite literature and its critics, with a focus on the intellectual shortcomings and methodological issues within the movement's Qurʾānic exegesis. It also explores the impact of modernity on these interpretive approaches and the compatibility of their rationalist-empiricist stance with traditional Islamic exegesis.

Literature reviews

The intersection of modernity, rationalism, and religious interpretation in the Arab Maghreb has spurred significant academic discourse, particularly in relation to the contemporary Neo-Muʿtazilite movement. Prior research studies have been conducted in Arabic and Persian regarding the formation of this movement. These studies can be categorized into several groups such as: general views of the Mu'tazilites, Qurʾān and revelation in the Mu'tazilite view, and monographs on Mu'tazilite views on hadith. Some studies found in the literature are: The Study of the Mu'tazilite Movement by Qulī and Yūsifīyān (2010); Introduction to Contemporary Mu'tazilites by Gharawī (2005); Critique and Analysis of the Nature of Qurʾānic Revelation in the Mu'tazilite Perspective by Qulī (2015); Contemporary Secular Trends in Qurʾānic Studies by Fāḍil (2008); Abdulkarīm Surūsh: The Neo-Muʿtazilite That Buries Classical Islamic Political Theology in Defence of Religious Democracy and Pluralism by Hashas (2014); Towards a Humanistic Approach to the Qurʾān: New Direction in Contemporary Islamic Thought by Akbar (2019); Interactions Between Traditional and Modern Theologies in Neo-Muʿtazilism: Revisiting the Theological Ideas of Dr. Hassan Hanafi by Raḥmānī Shamsī et al. (2023).

The distinctiveness of this present study from its subsequent ones lies in its innovative contributions, which include focusing on the contemporary Maghreb, classifying Neo-Muʿtazilites into revelatory and secular groups, and analyzing the implications of their empiricist approach for

understanding metaphysical concepts in the Qur'ān. Additionally, it presents a unique perspective on the challenges of integrating empiricism with religious texts.

Through this study, the principles of empiricism are critiqued, alongside their implications for the interpretation of the Qur'ān by the Neo-Mu'tazilites.

Empirical Interpretation of Neo-Mu'tazila

The Neo-Mu'tazilites exhibit a strong empiricist approach, prioritizing sense and experience in their interpretation of science and religious texts. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd endorses this perspective by arguing that scientific inquiries should be grounded in real-world experiences, particularly when analyzing the Qur'ān (Waṣfī, 2010). He contends that our understanding of its metaphysical aspects is inherently limited to what is revealed and suggests focusing on sensory, historical, and deterministic elements. This empirical analysis leads Abū Zayd to classify certain Qur'ānic concepts, such as angels and the divine throne, as mythological (Abū Zayd, 2002, 2015), asserting that they stem from the cultural context of the time rather than objective realities (Abū Zayd, 1994; Khalaf Allah 1972).

Similarly, Hasan Hanafi posits that Islam embodies reason and nature. He argues against traditionalism, advocating for a discourse rooted in human experience rather than mythological narratives (Waṣfī, 2009). Hanafi believes that this rational approach will promote unity within Islamic society and facilitate a universal understanding of concepts such as science and justice (Amara, 1995; Ḥanafī, 1992). He emphasizes the need to liberate modern consciousness from the constraints of ancestral traditions and advocates for knowledge derived solely from sensory experience, thus rejecting the unseen as a valid source of understanding (Amara, 1995). Consequently, Hanafi reinterprets prophethood within a tangible framework that addresses practical human interests (Ḥanafī, 1988).

The Shortcomings of Neo-Mu'tazila Empirical Principles

The contemporary empiricist Neo-Mu'tazila movement prioritizes reason, influenced by modernity, leading to a rejection of revelation and traditional religious concepts. Adherents view reason as the exclusive source of knowledge, interpreting all matters through this lens while downplaying other epistemological sources. They assert that the intellect should be subject to scrutiny, resulting in a form of relativism where all beliefs are seen as contingent and mutable. Consequently, their understanding of religion and sacred tenets is fluid, reflecting the evolving nature of reason. The subsequent discussion will address the shortcomings and adverse implications of Neo-Mu'tazila ideology and principles.

1. Sensationalistic Approach to Paranormal Phenomena

The neo-Mu'tazilites advocate for extreme rationalism, prioritizing reason as the primary source of knowledge, capable of understanding world events. They argue that if reason cannot comprehend a phenomenon, or if it lacks tangible existence, it should be scrutinized and explained rationally. They caution against literal interpretations of cultural and social concepts, which can lead to supernatural myths, advocating instead for rational reinterpretations (Abū Zayd, 1994).

However, this rational perspective faces challenges, particularly the absence of conclusive evidence that disqualifies entities like jinn, which experimental sciences may overlook. The evolution of the scientific method allows for empirical knowledge to be viewed as epistemologically valuable, yet aligns with the notion that few scientific theories can claim absolute validity. Therefore, conflicts between scientific theories and religious beliefs cannot unilaterally dismiss religious propositions, nor can they be labeled as superstitions without proper scriptural context.

The Qur'ān, as noted, distances itself from misconceptions surrounding supernatural beings, presenting a stance that rejects erroneous beliefs. To substantiate the relevance of supernatural theorems, Jawādī Amulī emphasizes the necessity of addressing both ontological and epistemological dimensions:

The discourse presents two principal arguments regarding the nature of existence and knowledge. From an ontological perspective, it contends that a strict materialist view invalidates the significance of non-material entities, yet the acknowledgment of non-material existence necessitates criteria for proof that extend beyond sensory perception. Empirical sciences can only validate experiences within their specific domain and cannot categorically disprove the efficacy of unexamined alternatives. From

an epistemological standpoint, the limitations posited by positivism—asserting that all knowledge must derive from sensory experience—are deemed inadequate, particularly with respect to metaphysical entities. Knowledge acquisition encompasses not only sensation and experience but also intellectual reasoning, emotional intuition, mystical insights, and ultimately, revelation, which provides a reliable form of understanding. The challenges faced by positivism in both ontology and epistemology demand considerations through rational philosophy and revealed knowledge (Jawādī Amulī, 2008).

The discussion emphasizes that understanding both material and immaterial realms requires diverse cognitive tools, as methods effective in the material domain may fall short in delving into the metaphysical context. Critics of this view, such as Jabri from the contemporary Neo-Mu'tazila movement, interpret Qur'ānic narratives as mythical, relying solely on empirical reasoning, and dismissing revelations and intuitive insights. They argue that what cannot be scientifically verified is deemed superstitious; yet, this stance contradicts the Qur'ān's intention to convey moral lessons through its narratives, which are grounded in reality rather than fiction (Qur'ān 6: 90). Arkoun's disbelief in the Qur'ān's teachings stems from his limited intellectual perspective, which neglects the complexities of understanding divine truths. This underscores the need to acknowledge the validity of Qur'ānic accounts, as several verses affirm their truthfulness and significance.

2. Relativity and the Impact of Religious Knowledge Based on Historical Circumstances

The contemporary Arab Maghreb's neo-Mu'tazilite approach to Qur'ān interpretation is fundamentally flawed due to its reliance on historicism, which posits that human knowledge is relative and influenced by historical contexts (Strauss, 1994). This perspective challenges the notion of definitive religious knowledge, emphasizing human interpretation influenced by the intellectual and cultural circumstances in each era (Surūsh, 2000). Scholars such as Mohammad Arkoun and Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd advocate for historical criticism and acknowledge the evolution of religious understanding, asserting that interpretations are not sacred and can change over time. However, this emphasis on human involvement in interpreting religious texts raises significant theological concerns, particularly regarding the integrity of "religious address" and the potential deification of human interpretations (Waṣfī, 2010).

Abū Zayd delineates the distinction between "religion" and "religious thought," defining "religion" as an unchanging set of sacred texts, while "religious thought" encompasses the human efforts (Ijtihads) to interpret these texts (Abū Zayd, 1994; Surūsh, 2000). He critiques the notion that religious knowledge can be entirely separated from religion, arguing that it is influenced by historical contexts and is not inherently sacred. Religious knowledge is characterized as systematic, scholarly, and validly acquired, regardless of whether it comes, directly, from experts or, indirectly, from followers (Rashshād, 2008). This perspective posits that objectively, there exists a unity between religion and religious knowledge, with the teachings of infallible figures serving as a benchmark for the understanding of others. Furthermore, the pursuit of religious truth is methodical, accessible, and rational, thus reinforcing that, with appropriate methodologies, no distinction exists between religion and its understanding (Rashshād, 2008).

This perspective presents a significant drawback; it risks distorting religious knowledge by suggesting that advancements in human scientific understanding would invalidate previous religious insights. However, this claim is unfounded, lacking evidence to establish a clear link between scientific progress and the evolution of religious knowledge. It is essential to recognize that the transformations in knowledge, including religious knowledge, is a natural process. While some aspects may evolve, this does not mean that all knowledge is fluid or devoid of permanence. Revisions to certain knowledge need not entail a complete rejection of prior understandings; rather, they can serve to enhance and enrich existing insights. Thus, past knowledge remains valid, while new discoveries can provide a more profound understanding of it.

3. Considering the Holy Prophet's Recitation of the Qur'ān as a Form of Human Comprehension

The intellect-centered perspective, as articulated by Neo-Mu'tazila thinkers, such as Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, emphasizes the role of human understanding in interpreting the Prophet's recitation of the Qur'ān. Abū Zayd posits that the Qur'ān presents challenges to human reason, allowing it to be

viewed as a "human text." He contends that equating the Prophet's understanding with the intrinsic meaning of the text risks reducing the Prophet's humanity, and, instead, suggests a form of polytheism by conflating divine with human comprehension. Thus, he argues that such interpretations diminish the significance of the Prophet, ultimately obscuring the distinction between divine intent and human interpretation (Abū Zayd, 1994).

The critique of Abu Zayd's assertions reveals significant shortcomings in his argumentation, particularly regarding the nature of the Qur'ān and its divine origin. He claims the Qur'ān is a product of human creation, influenced by historical and cultural contexts. However, it is necessary to question the premise that all human-generated utterances must be transient and devoid of lasting truth. Universal moral values, such as justice and integrity, suggest an enduring knowledge that transcends temporal frameworks. Furthermore, the Qur'ān's unique structure underscores its divine nature, indicating that it cannot be replicated by human beings (Ramaẕānī, 2017). This principle is supported by the concept of Aayat Tadhadi (challenges verses), which asserts that the Qur'ān remains impenetrable to transformation into a mere human text. The miraculous essence of the Qur'ān, as articulated by scholars such as Zurqānī, emphasizes the significance of its precise wording, crucial for maintaining its divine nature (Zurqānī, 2014). Additionally, the infallibility of religious figures, as upheld within Shiʿa teachings, affirms that their understanding is divinely protected from error, further challenging the perspectives offered by critics such as Abū Zayd.

Imām Ṣādiq (PBUH) distinguishes between two types of divine knowledge: that granted to angels, prophets, and messengers, and the knowledge retained solely by God. He emphasizes that when significant events arise, God will communicate this knowledge, as He did with previous imams (Kulaynī, 2014). Usthauz Maʿrifat further asserts that prophets must receive revelations with "ilm al-yaqin"—absolute certainty—especially at the inception of their missions, to ensure that they remain steadfast against doubt or fear during divine encounters (Maʿrifat, 2009). He critiques those who regard the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as an ordinary human, arguing that such views diminish his monumental role in transforming the world (Maʿrifat, 2001). This misconception, exemplified by thinkers such as Nasr Hamed Abū Zayd, equates prophetic understanding with that of common individuals, failing to recognize the unique nature of divine revelation. Jawādī Amulī reinforces this perspective, indicating that while humans may grasp the words of revelation, they do not access its true meanings, which remain the domain of the infallible prophets (Jawādī Amulī, 2020). Thus, human interpretations of revelation are inherently limited and cannot equate to the absolute truth embodied in prophetic knowledge (Jawādī Amulī, 2020).

4. Negation of Metaphysical Components and Denial of the Impact of Supernatural Forces on Life

The exegetical works of the Neo-Mu'tazila reveal their commitment to sensory realism and empirical reasoning, leading them to adopt a materialistic perspective that dismisses metaphysical influences on human life. They reject beliefs in the supernatural, viewing concepts such as angels, jinn, and talismans as subjective rather than objectively true (Abū Zayd, 1998). Nasr Hamid Abū Zayd further argues that these phenomena, including Satan and magic, should be understood as historical constructs reflective of the cultural beliefs of the Arab society at the time of revelation. He posits that religious texts, shaped by linguistic and cultural contexts, do not authenticate the existence of these elements but rather illustrate the cultural milieu of their origin. Abū Zayd contends that conflating the signifier with the signified in the Qur'ānic text leads to a misunderstanding of these concepts (Abū Zayd, 1994).

A thorough examination of the perspectives of contemporary neo-Mu'tazilites in the Arab Maghreb indicates a prevailing belief that the metaphysical and supernatural elements in the Qur'ān are culturally derived from the Arab society of the time. They argue that God employed these concepts to challenge the polytheistic beliefs prevalent then, viewing them as mere mental constructs lacking external reality. Consequently, neo-Mu'tazilites either reject or rationalize these interpretations, leading to a secular worldview that diminishes spirituality and the sacred.

Mullā Ṣadrā, in "Al-Mubdau and Al-Ma'ad," contends that distorting texts related to the afterlife signifies ignorance or deceit (Mullā Ṣadrā, 2001). He emphasizes the necessity of recognizing the afterlife for genuine human development, warning against prioritizing worldly pursuits over spiritual beliefs (Naṣr, 2001). He interprets Surah Yasin, verse 45, as a distinction between the

material world and the world of resurrection, underscoring the soul's intrinsic connection to the afterlife (Mullā Ṣadrā, 2001).

Additionally, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd's analysis of the Qur'ān's historical context raises questions about the selective interpretation of cultural influences, particularly regarding elements such as magic and usury. While acknowledging certain cultural norms, he overlooks the significance of foundational beliefs, such as the recognition of Allah as the creator (Qur'ān 31:25), which were integral to the society of that time (Wā'iẓī, 2013).

Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd posits that terms such as jinn, devils, envy, and amulets in the Holy Qur'ān lack tangible counterparts and objective identities, suggesting their incorporation by early converts to Islam. However, his argument can be criticized on several grounds. First, Abū Zayd fails to substantiate the non-existence of these phenomena, relying solely on positivist and empiricist principles while neglecting the experiential and emotional dimensions of concepts such as the unseen, heaven, and hell, which resist empirical validation. Furthermore, he does not extend this skepticism to miracles and prayers, which also elude empirical proof. Second, there is no definitive connection between ancient beliefs in supernatural entities and the assertion that they are mere subjective constructs, as these beliefs may reflect shared realities among ancient societies. Lastly, Abū Zayd's contradictory stance on "magic" and "envy" raises questions; if these terms lack objective reality, it is unclear what the Qur'ān is condemning (Abū Zayd, 1994; Hāshimī, 1997). The Holy Qur'ān explicitly discusses jinn and Satan as real entities and addresses envy and magic as significant forces, rather than mere historical myths, and does not endorse certain superstitions found in pre-Islamic Arab culture.

The Qur'ān delineates angels and devils as distinct entities with independent existence, consciousness, and will, transcending human perception. Several verses highlight the autonomy and faith of angels, portraying their intelligent actions (Qur'ān 50:21; 34:40-41). In contrast, the figure of Iblis, or Satan, is repeatedly depicted, particularly through his refusal to prostrate to Adam, leading to his declaration to mislead humanity, save for the faithful (Qur'ān 38:83). God's response underscores the punishment awaiting Iblis and his followers (Qur'ān 38:85). Additionally, the Qur'ān states that jinn, like humans, possess intelligence and will, with distinct communities and the capability to perish (Qur'ān 46:18). Their acknowledgment of divine revelation is exemplified when a group of jinn listens to the Qur'ān and returns as warners to their people, emphasizing the importance of responding to divine calls (Qur'ān 46:29-32). Thus, these verses affirm the unique attributes and roles of both angels and jinn within the broader metaphysical framework presented in the Qur'ān.

The progress and evolution of humanity within the material realm are characterized by inherent contradictions, dynamic forces, and the mobilization against formidable obstacles. The existence of Iblis embodies a negative force that ultimately serves to affirm the positive aspects of human nature, fostering resilience and the capacity for growth. The enduring conflict between good and evil constitutes a fundamental principle of the human experience, wherein the presence of falsehood highlights the path of truth, establishing a framework for reward and punishment.

Moreover, alongside external malevolent forces, humans grapple with internal instincts and desires that clash frequently with their rational and spiritual faculties. This inner turmoil creates a battleground where the pursuit of virtue leads to individual and collective advancements (Jawādī Amulī, 2002; Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, 1997). The implications of such dynamics extend to the existence of jinn, who, like humans, possess consciousness, will, and accountability, as supported by various references in the Holy Qur'ān, to the Day of Resurrection (Ṭabāṭabāyī, 2010).

An evaluation of the Neo-Mu'tazilite perspectives, which dismiss the significance of metaphysical phenomena, reveals a critical misunderstanding. This viewpoint overlooks the objective reality of such issues and their profound influence on human life. It is essential to recognize that these metaphysical entities, including Satan, are not only integral to creation but also serve a divine purpose, illustrating the overarching wisdom of God in shaping the human experience.

The Methodological Shortcomings
1. Limitations of the Reason's Function and Disregarding its Shortcomings
The Neo-Mu'tazilites advocate for a contemporary interpretation of the Qur'ān and religious teachings, prioritizing a rational and innovative approach that aligns with advancements in Western civilization and modern sciences. This group maintains that all religious concepts must be logically

justified, rejecting ideas that contradict rational principles. They have reinterpreted certain miraculous verses and dismissed specific transmitted narrations that they consider irrational, seeking to reconcile these texts with their intellectual framework. Notable examples include their reinterpretations of the resurrection of a dead person during Prophet Moses's time, the revival of dead birds by Prophet Ibrahim, and the event of "Shaq Al-Qamar" during the era of the Holy Prophet (Rashīd Riḍā, 1990; Marāghī, 1952).

The influence of Western civilization during the colonial era significantly shaped the perspectives of scholars, such as Sheikh Muhammad Abdul, who sought to align Islam with the principles of wisdom and progress inherent in Enlightenment philosophy. Abdul and his contemporaries recognized the contributions of European scientific advancements to the emergence of modern civilization. In contrast, the contemporary Neo-Mu'tazilite movement, represented by thinkers such as Nasr Hamed Abū Zayd, Hassan Hanafi, and Muhammad Abed Al-Jabari, has taken a more radical approach by employing the rational foundations of Western culture to reinterpret Islamic texts (Gharawī, 2005).

This new wave of scholars emphasizes the historical context of the Qurʾān and the influence of contemporary culture on its interpretation, often diverging from traditional exegesis. They advocate for a reconciliation of religion with modern science and reason, prioritizing human intellect over divine revelation. Their approach involves utilizing philosophical hermeneutics to derive rational interpretations from the Qurʾān, reflecting a dynamic understanding of reason that evolves with cultural history (Jawādī Amulī, 2002).

In this framework, the Neo-Mu'tazilites redefine intellect to align with modern Western philosophical thought, viewing it as the cornerstone of justice and societal structure rather than relying on divine laws. They assert the supremacy of human reason, contending that it can autonomously explore various realms of knowledge without the need for validation from religious teachings. This perspective ultimately favors a secular interpretation of religion, promoting religious diversity and modernity while limiting truth to empirical and sensory experiences (Louay, 2003).

Muhammad Arkoun advocates for the supremacy of Islamic reason over Arabic reason but faces criticism for continuing to use the term "Arabic." Critics argue that "Islamic" should inherently encompass "Arabic" and question the exceptionalism attributed to Arabs within the Islamic framework. This perspective has been echoed by numerous Arab intellectuals, who seek a more inclusive understanding of Islamic civilization. Arkoun's critics expected him to distance himself from such reductionism (Mahdīnijād, 2019). Furthermore, a Qurʾān scholar notes that rational interpretation of reason extends beyond abstract thought in philosophy and theology, incorporating empirical reasoning pertinent to natural and human sciences. This broader understanding of reason signifies certainty and serves as a valuable tool for intellectual clarity, contrasting with mere abstraction or conjecture (Jawādī Amulī, 2020, 1999).

The discourse on intellect within rational interpretation encompasses a range of reasoning modalities, including empirical, semi-empirical, abstract, and pure reasoning. This intellect is also intricately linked to the art of storytelling, emphasizing that existence transcends the purely tangible and material, reaching into the realm of the unseen. In this context, it is crucial to acknowledge that the acquisition of knowledge is not limited to sensory experience or empirical evidence; it also incorporates intellectual methods that can substantiate or refute unseen truths (Jawādī Amulī, 2013).

Qurʾānic scholars assert the necessity for a harmonious relationship between reason and narration, paralleling the interdependence of revelation and Shariʿa as foundational sources of human knowledge. Accordingly, reason stands as a vital source of understanding that complements revelation and Shariʿa, revealing an alignment in their conveyance of objective truths (Jawādī Amulī, 2011). However, the conception of intellect, proposed by neo-Mu'tazilites, diverges from traditional narration rather asserting itself as a fundamental basis. In this viewpoint, religious doctrines do not possess the authority to constrain the intellect; rather, the intellect imposes its own limitations. This form of rationality is independent of specific religious affiliations and holds the capacity to critique religious beliefs. Thus, reason is perceived as an autonomous source, endowed with the ability to make independent judgments (ʿArab Ṣālihī, 2014).

The Neo-Mu'tazilite group's approach to intellect is fundamentally flawed, as it underestimates the limitations of human understanding without the guidance of divine revelation. The Holy Qurʾān articulates this notion (Qurʾān 2:216), illustrating that human judgment may be misleading when

confronted with destiny, as demonstrated in the verse highlighting the paradox of what is loved versus what is beneficial. This underlines the importance of divine knowledge, suggesting that human comprehension is merely a drop in the vast ocean of the unknown (Makārim Shīrāzī, 2013).

Moreover, the Qur'ānic analogy of rain and its capacity emphasizes that the existence bestowed by Allah is limitless and transcends human understanding, which is invariably bound by specific contexts (Qur'ān 13:17). Human intellect, therefore, needs divine teachings to navigate the complexities of life and to discern true benefits from harms (Ṭabāṭabāyī, 2004).

The Neo-Mu'tazilite thinkers, such as Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd and Muhammad Arkoun, prioritize reason, yet their reliance, solely on rationality neglects the potential of metaphysical truths and the role of divine revelation (Ṭabāṭabāyī, 2004). This viewpoint diminishes the significance of religious teachings in human affairs (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 1984), confining religion and spirituality to the afterlife, ultimately adopting a secular rationalism reminiscent of the late 18th century. Such an ideology posits that human intellect alone suffices for understanding both material and spiritual needs, thereby rejecting prophetic guidance and limiting existence to tangible aspects (Barbour, 2015).

In summary, the Neo-Mu'tazilite perspective inadequately acknowledges the necessity of divine insight for a comprehensive understanding of existence and the true nature of reality.

2. Inadequacy of Sense and Experimentation in Comprehending and Interpreting the Qur'ān

The Neo-Mu'tazilites are characterized by their strong emphasis on empiricism; however, this focus is simultaneously regarded as a significant limitation. It is argued that empirical methods should only be utilized within their appropriate contexts, as experience cannot adequately address metaphysical and transcendental issues. It becomes clear from this point that the efforts of certain atheist philosophers who seek to present a materialistic and atheistic view of the world based on empirical knowledge and findings from natural sciences, considering perception and experience as the only possible and reliable knowledge, and confine existence to the observable and experiential world, are, from an epistemological perspective, futile. This represents an imposition on empirical knowledge that it cannot bear (Jawādī Amulī, 2011). While empirical knowledge is valuable for understanding observable phenomena, it is incapable of evaluating non-experiential realms or dismissing their significance (Jawādī Amulī, 2011). Contemporary Neo-Mu'tazilite scholars, such as Abu Zayd, Ḥanafī, and Arkoun, advocate for an empirical and sensible approach to interpreting religious texts, suggesting that metaphysical truths in the Qur'ān should either be cast aside or interpreted in a naturalistic manner.

The approach under discussion faces several significant challenges, primarily stemming from its reliance on empirical science as the sole avenue for reasoning (Jawādī Amulī, 1999). This narrow focus undermines a comprehensive exploration of reality, as it neglects the metaphysical and ultimate causes attributed to God. By confining itself to the material aspects of existence, this perspective reduces the richness of scientific inquiry to what can be termed "the carcass of science." A more holistic approach would integrate both empirical and metaphysical dimensions, allowing for a deeper understanding of creationism rather than adhering strictly to naturalism (Jawādī Amulī, 2020).

Furthermore, the argument posits that empirical knowledge, while valuable, should not be regarded as the pinnacle of understanding. Instead, divine knowledge holds the highest value, with philosophical and metaphysical inquiries providing essential insights that transcend empirical observations (Miṣbāḥ Yazdī, 2003). The interpretation of reason by the Neo-Mu'tazilites is critiqued for being overly restrictive, as they limit reason to empirical applications, overlooking its broader potential that includes various forms of rational thought. Additionally, the sensory theory is scrutinized for its assumption that sensory experiences directly convey external realities to the mind. This assumption can lead to confusion regarding the relationship between perception and reality, suggesting that certainty derived from sensory data is inherently problematic. Consequently, relying solely on sensory interpretation for understanding religious texts, particularly the Qur'ān, is deemed unreliable. Moreover, the application of experimental scientific theories to the interpretation of the Qur'ān is criticized (Jawādī Amulī, 2011).

Jawādī Amulī (2018) emphasizes the importance of adhering to established rules and measurements when engaging with sacred texts, arguing that hypotheses should serve only as preliminary interpretations until they are confirmed. Ultimately, the text asserts that scientific interpretation must

follow a structured process, ensuring that the integration of scientific ideas with religious beliefs is conducted with rigor and respect for the integrity of both domains (Jawādī Amulī, 1999).

The discourse surrounding Abū Zayd's scientific interpretation of the Qur'ān is fraught with criticism, yet it suggests that applying appropriate standards and criteria could mitigate these concerns (Abū Zayd, 2015). In this context, science may serve to enhance the understanding of the Qur'ān (Khusrupanāh, 2004). However, Ma'rifat (2009, 2017) contends that employing scientific methodologies to interpret the meanings of the Qur'ān presents significant challenges due to the inherently dynamic nature of science. Scientific theories and hypotheses are subject to change, evolving from uncertainty to certainty, or even becoming obsolete, which raises concerns about the reliability of using such fluctuating tools to elucidate Qur'ānic concepts. This reliance risks distorting the Qur'ān's stable and enduring meanings. Ma'rifat emphasizes that while certain scientific insights may clarify specific ambiguities within the Qur'ān, the prevailing uncertainty in experimental science poses a threat to the integrity of Qur'ānic interpretations. Historical examples, such as the initial interpretations of the Qur'ān through the lens of the Ptolemaic system, illustrate the dangers of linking scriptural texts to transient scientific paradigms. As scientific understanding progresses, such interpretations can lead to doubt among believers regarding the compatibility of evolving scientific theories with the teachings of the Qur'ān (Dhahabī, 1976). Therefore, Ma'rifat (2009) warns against the potential perils of scientific interpretation, advocating for a more cautious approach that recognizes the limitations and uncertainties inherent in human sciences.

Conclusion

The Neo-Mu'tazilite group emphasizes the primacy of reason in the interpretation of religion and the Qur'ān, adopting an empirical approach that posits all concepts arise from experimentation. They acknowledge that metaphysical knowledge is influenced by sensory experiences, leading to criticism of their simplistic and systematic methodology. This perspective often results in a sensory interpretation of supernatural elements, such as God's throne, angels, demons, and jinn, which they view as myths reflective of ancient cultural contexts. A significant limitation of their approach is the absence of empirical evidence for phenomena like jinn, which cannot be substantiated by experimental science.

Moreover, contemporary Neo-Mu'tazilites in the Arab Maghreb, influenced by historicism, argue that religious knowledge is shaped by historical and relative contexts, rejecting the notion of absolute truths. They perceive human understanding and scientific advancement as contingent upon historical circumstances, leading them to regard the Prophet's interpretations of the Qur'ān as products of human intellect rather than divine authority. This group prioritizes reason and authenticity, advocating for interpretations of the Qur'ān that align with Western scientific achievements. They assert that all religious concepts must possess rational justification, often reinterpreting miraculous verses through a rational lens and dismissing transmitted narrations that lack empirical support. Ultimately, they contend that while empirical evidence is crucial for material matters, it cannot adequately address metaphysical and transcendental issues, underscoring the necessity of appropriate methodologies in religious interpretation.

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