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Examining the Impact of Relativism on Religious Beliefs in Postmodern Thought: An Islamic Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Postmodernism is characterized by a celebration of diversity, difference in viewpoints and a rejection of universal truths. It often critiques the authority of institutions and traditional power structures and emphasizes the subjective nature of human experience. In terms of methodology, postmodernists use deconstruction and analysis of language and discourse to critique and challenge dominant narratives and beliefs. This paper explores the challenges that relativism, as viewed through the lens of postmodernism, poses to the concept of absolute religion. The areas of belief, epistemology, values, and laws are specifically examined. Acceptance of relativism carries significant implications for religion, such as the loss of religion's exclusive status and the promotion of pluralism - a key goal of postmodernism. A comprehensive literature review is conducted, drawing on the works of philosophers and scholars who have explored the topics of postmodernism and relativism, and their impact on religion. This study seeks to identify the challenges posed by relativism and offer a brief counterargument. The findings suggest that while relativism may recognize the existence of diverse truths and encourage believers to maintain their own beliefs, it ultimately creates problems when it assumes that the fact of truth itself is different and makes the plurality of truth absolute. This leads to skepticism about religion and the view that religion is only individual belief about truth.

Keywords: *Absolute, Islam, modernism, postmodernism, relativism, religion.*

In *The Histories*, Herodotus (2003) records a story about the Persian king, Darius summoning the Greeks. According to the account, Darius asked them what they would want in exchange for eating their own parents' bodies. The Greeks responded that they would not do it, even for a large sum of money, as cremation was a common burial practice among them. Darius then summoned a tribe from India called the Callataie, which ate its parents' bodies. The Greeks were also present, with a translator provided to facilitate communication. Darius asked the Callataie tribe what they would do

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if their parents' bodies were cremated, to which they responded with outrage and forbade Darius from making such a request.

This passage from a work by a Greek historian illustrates that the concept of moral relativism has been debated for over 2000 years. The Greeks considered it taboo to eat the bodies of their parents, but cremation of the dead was a common practice. In contrast, the Callatae tribe considered eating human bodies to be acceptable, but viewed the cremation of bodies as a grave error. Herodotus uses these two examples to demonstrate how different groups of people from different places can have conflicting values. In the modern age, the internet has greatly expanded the reach of relativism. The digital era has brought about the internet, which offers a vast array of information that can be true or false, valuable or worthless, and authentic or fabricated. This information is all presented as equal and coexists in the boundless space of the internet. Additionally, social media platforms have become a venue for netizens to express their views on any subject. Thus, Lanham (1993) argues that the personal computer itself is a definitive postmodern work of art.

The purpose of this paper is to examine postmodernist thought, the principle of relativity that underlies it, its distinction from modernism, and the implications of this understanding on the absolutism of religion. The discussion will start with a definition and history of the development of postmodernism, as well as postmodernist criticism of modernism. The paper will then delve into relativism, one of the main foundations of postmodernism, and its challenge to the absolute position of religion.

Exploring the Definition and History of the Development of Postmodernism

The term 'postmodern' was first introduced by Federico de Onis in his 1934 book *Antologia de la poesia Espanola e hispanoamericana* (Hasan 2006). It was later mentioned by Dudley Fitts in his 1942 publication, *Anthology of Contemporary Latin-American Poetry*. Arnold Toynbee, in his 1947 book *A Study of History*, identified the time period starting in 1875 and continuing to the present as the postmodern era.

Since the early 20th century, the term 'postmodern' has been introduced and written about, but a comprehensive and agreed upon definition cannot be given to it. It can generally be broken down into three factors. The first factor is that the discourse brought by postmodernism crosses almost all disciplines, including philosophy, politics, art, geography, music, biology, medicine, and others. Its nature of permeating every discipline makes it difficult to form a complete definition. The second factor is the ambiguity of the characteristics of postmodernism, whether it is a form of the development of the times, a theory and ideology, or a manifestation of the desires of society in the present era (due to disappointment with modernism), so that defining it remains a debate until now. The third factor is the attitude and position of postmodernists themselves, who claim that there is no 'neutral' definition in this world, resulting in no question of defining something, let alone something that wants to be defined, such as postmodernism itself, a concept that rejects specific definition. In fact, the characteristics of postmodernism itself are said to constantly change, causing postmodernists to be confused by their previous views (Hasan n.d.).

However, several definitions of postmodernism will be explained based on the foundation and characteristics of this thought or movement. If we look at the etymological aspect, this word is a combination of three words: 'post' which means 'after', 'modern' which means 'now' and 'up to date or contemporary'; and 'ism' which means idea, belief or system of belief (Merriam-Webster n.d.). Therefore, it can be understood as "a belief that surpasses the present" or "something after the present." In terms of terminology, Encyclopedia Britannica (n.d.) defines postmodernism as a philosophical movement that reacts to the assumptions of philosophy and values accepted in the modern era in Europe, particularly starting from the scientific revolution in the 16th century to the mid-20th century. In summary, the doctrines associated with postmodernism are a direct rejection

of the philosophical views that developed during the 18th century Enlightenment era. Ziauddin Sardar (1998) defines postmodernism as a 'state' when equating it with postmodernity, meaning something that surpasses modernity and thereby denies tradition. Therefore, according to Sardar, the main principle of postmodernism is that anything that is considered valid and accepted in the modern era is evaluated and rejected in the postmodern era.

The prefix 'post' in postmodernism signifies its close connection to modernism, whether as a protest against or a replacement for it, or as a chronological form that follows it. Therefore, understanding modernism can help to clarify the concept of postmodernism. Here are some differences between modernism and postmodernism:

Modernism	Postmodernism
Accepting 'master narratives' or 'metanarratives' which are the main narratives that form the framework (experience, ideas, and knowledge) of history, culture, and nationality (particularly narratives prior to World War II), such as the myth of American or European progress.	Rejecting and being skeptical of the existence of 'master narratives' as a framework for history and culture; supporting locally-based narratives (rather than universal ones) and viewing 'modern progress' as the failure of a grand narrative.
Adopting grand theories that aim to unify and explain all knowledge related to history, science, and humanity.	Rejecting absolute theories that claim to be able to explain every discipline of science, but at the same time accepting specific, subjective and speculative theories.
Believing in the importance of social and cultural unity, the existence of hierarchies in social class, and the importance of national values in achieving unity and harmony.	Celebrating social and cultural diversity (pluralism) but not having a clear basis for national unity.
Believing that science and technology are the main framework for progress and development.	Being skeptical of ideas of development; reacting by taking an anti-technology stance (neo-Luddism) which is a view that sees technological progress as more harmful to humans and the environment.
Focusing on the self (individualism) and a unified identity.	Diversity and conflict in self-identity.
Adheres to the idea that the 'family' is the main unit of social structure: for example, a nucleus family (consisting of parents [man and woman] and children); emphasizing the importance of the middle class and promoting heterosexual norms (relationships between people of different genders).	Rejecting the importance of a single model of family. Promoting polysexuality (tendency towards relationships with same or different genders), supporting same-sex relationships as a reflection of a response to previously rejected homosexuality.
Emphasizing the importance of 'big politics' (nation-states and parties).	Emphasizing micro political issues that are specific to a particular location or region, as well as the competition among institutions to acquire power.
Depth tropes: Emphasizing inner issues (regarding meaning, values, and subject) rather than outer matters (appearance, superficiality, and symbols).	Rhizome/surface tropes: Emphasizing outer issues (images and symbols) without paying attention to inner aspects; celebrating differences.

According to the definitions and categories discussed, postmodernism is a set of ideas and a movement that arose after the start of the modern era in the 20th century. It is characterized by a rejection of the ideas, beliefs, and philosophies that were widely accepted during the modern era (Mohd Khairul Naim 2018). Therefore, postmodernity refers to the characteristics, principles, and conditions brought and developed by postmodernism, while postmodernists are those who support the postmodern movement and philosophy. Among the figures who played a role in developing this philosophy were Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) who proposed the idea of rejection of universal and absolute values and subsequently supported the philosophy of nihilism. For him, humans who were freed from the ‘control’ of God have a greater potential for further development. Here, Nietzsche (2015) has positioned God as an ‘antagonist’. Another influential figure is Martin Heidegger, who introduced the concept of existentialist phenomenology, which is the truth built or constructed by the human himself from within and simultaneously rejects universal truth. Heidegger (1988) believes that humans are not born into an existing reality but construct their own reality based on their experiences in the world based on their basic intuition. Another influential figure, Michel Foucault (1971), believed that absolute truth needed to be denied because it was only part of the rhetoric in a particular discipline, while the claim that there is only one truth is a ‘mask’ for ideology to maintain survival and desire for power. Jacques Derrida (1976) also introduced the method of deconstruction as a critical process of texts, especially in searching for and unraveling the meanings behind what is written in the text. Through this method, there is no dominant and authoritative interpretation.

A summary of the ideas driven by the pioneers of postmodernism shows a radical rejection of modernism. However, what are the factors that led to the development of this philosophy? Did modernism fail to play a role in bringing good to humanity in general? In the following discussion, we will explore these issues further and examine the principles that underlie the postmodernist philosophy.

Postmodernism as a Protest against Modernism

For postmodernists, the birth of postmodernism is the result of global awareness after World War II. As previously explained, the meaning of ‘post’ in postmodernism does not refer to a movement to ‘return’ or ‘go back’ to modernism, or a form of repetition of modernism. According to Lyotard (1993), postmodernism is a procedure for analyzing and reorganizing various aspects that are intended in the world. Therefore, for him, it is a newly born idea, which is malleable and ongoing.

For postmodernists, the ideas of modernism are outdated and no longer suitable for use now. In the context of the model of progress and development introduced by modernism, it is described as having worse effects than the expected benefits. Postmodernists divide society in the modern era into two parts. The first group is those who face the challenges of modern progress that has been achieved while the second group is the society that faces the challenge of surviving a backward life. The project to ‘export’ the modern model by the West through colonization and modernization starting in the 18th century to the whole world is described as a failure because they force principles formed according to their own glasses to humanity as a whole, which is different from the experiences and culture of the Western world itself (Gellner 1992). This idea stems from the modern belief that development in various fields, especially science and technology, can benefit humanity as a whole. This is said to be incompatible with the context of humans living in different communities and requiring different models of development based on the suitability of their respective times and eras.

Postmodernists also challenge the idea of positivism, which is a central element of modernist thought. Positivism is the belief in objective facts that can be explained through objective and tested theories, which can be understood without considering the identity or perspective of the researcher. Postmodernists argue that the role of human reason in modern times is diminished by this narrow

focus on the objective and measurable, leading to a downgrading of science that emphasizes technological aspects. In addition, postmodernists critique the foundations of positivism, pointing out that researchers cannot claim that their theories are disconnected from their own experiences and identities. Rather, even when a researcher discusses their own theories, these should be evaluated relatively by others. Postmodernists also question the assumption that scientific truth must be proven through evidence, asking what evidence supports the validity of this evidence, and what evidence supports this supporting evidence. Therefore, postmodernists reject the idea of absolute scientific knowledge and the use of narrative knowledge to support it.

In addition, postmodernists critique the modernist approach to organizing and constructing knowledge as outdated and in need of reconsideration in the current era. For example, Fredric Jameson (2003) argues that the rapid expansion of capitalism globally, as well as the shift from industrial manufacturing to internet commerce through global broadband networks, necessitate a new analysis of ideas or theories of development. This includes reevaluating and reinterpreting the views of Marx, which are often considered to be no longer applicable in the present context.

Therefore, postmodernism rejects several modernist principles, including the belief that reason is absolute and universal, that individuals have autonomy that can transcend the influence of history, culture, and class, and that there are objective universal principles (including models of development) (Vanhooser 2003). These principles motivated the emergence of postmodernism as a new movement or perspective that challenges these views. In general, the principles of postmodernism are as follows:

1. There is no absolute truth. The idea of the existence of absolute truth is an illusion created by some parties to hold power and influence other people.
2. Right and wrong are synonymous. Something considered a fact today can be considered wrong in the future.
3. Self-conceptualization and rationalization. The scientific methodology based on objective theory is replaced by reliance on self-view.
4. The power of authority by traditional institutions such as religion is false and corrupt. Moral values guided by religion or secular institutions are called constraints while the existence of religious authorities is questioned.
5. Moral principles are personal. The moral code is determined individually by each individual without needing to refer and follow traditional values and regulations.
6. The importance of globalization and internationalization. The existence of nation-states hinders communication between humans and is even said to cause wars.
7. Each religion has an equal position according to the perspective of each follower (pluralism). The claim of exclusive truth by a religion should be condemned.

In general, postmodernism is characterized by several principles, including the rejection of absolute truth, the belief that right and wrong are interchangeable, a focus on self-conceptualization and rationalization, and the dismissal of traditional institutions such as religion as false and corrupt. Furthermore, postmodernism emphasizes the personal nature of moral principles and the importance of globalization and internationalization. Additionally, postmodernism espouses a view of pluralism in which all religions are considered equal in the eyes of their followers. These principles are rooted in modernist ideas and are exemplified by the concept of relativism, which emphasizes diversity over clarity of meaning and rejects universal truths such as religious doctrine. However, there is ongoing debate about whether relativism conflicts with the belief in absolute truth that is central to religion. The following section will delve further into this topic by exploring how relativism challenges religion.

Relativism as a Fundamental Feature of Postmodernism

Relativism, characterized by the belief that knowledge, truth, and moral values are shaped by culture, society, and historical context, has been identified as a fundamental feature of postmodernism. Baghranian (2004) defines relativism as the theory or knowledge that evaluations are relative and vary according to the situation, event, and individual experiencing them. In this view, truth is seen as relative rather than absolute, and varies between cultures, individuals, and situations. This perspective is in contrast to the concept of absolutes.

The origins of relativist ideas can be traced back to the development of Greek philosophy, specifically through the works of Sophist figures such as Xenophanes (570-475BC), Protagoras (490-420BC), and Euripides (485-406BC). Unlike other philosophical movements that focused on metaphysical and scientific aspects, the Sophists were interested in liberal humanistic issues. This led to their recognition as important pioneers in the fields of the humanities and social sciences within Western civilization. Their concept of skeptical pragmatism introduced a new element to Greek thought by making philosophy more speculative and centered on human thought (Tarnas 1991).

Protagoras claimed that “man is the measure of all things”, a slogan that became the foundation of relativist thinking. According to Plato’s *Theaetetus*, Protagoras stated that “everything that appears to me is for me, and everything that appears to you is for you--we are each the measure of our own experience” (Baghranian 2004). Euripides sought to demonstrate the validity of this concept by describing a culture that practiced incest and did not view it as taboo, because it was widely accepted in their society. Xenophanes, on the other hand, argued that different societies have different views of God, with Ethiopians believing in a deity with black skin and a snub nose and Thracians worshipping a god with blue eyes and red hair. These arguments about the diversity of values are considered the foundation of relativism.

It should be noted that relativism is not the same as subjectivism, which is the belief that knowledge, truth, and moral values are subjective and determined solely by an individual’s personal feelings and opinions. While relativism acknowledges that these things may be influenced by cultural and societal factors, it does not necessarily imply that they are entirely subjective. Specifically, the following are some characteristics of relativism:

1. Denying universalism: there is no universal agreement on truth, goodness, and other matters.
2. Denying absolutism: there are no values that are absolute and unchanging, such as values of truth, goodness, badness, and others.
3. Denying objectivism: cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic values are not free from the influence of the mind. These values are not able to be free without relying on human thought (which differs from one another).
4. Denying monism: there is no field that provides only one correct perspective, evaluation, and norm. Relativism may accept local evaluations (local monism), but not universal evaluations (universal monism).

From the characteristics stated above, relativism is related to certain subjects that are relativized. In short, it can be understood as follows:

1. The meaning of something is relativized by language.
2. Truth is relativized by theory.
3. Metaphysics is relativized by scientific paradigm.
4. Reality is relativized by culture.
5. The value of science is relativized by society.

6. Moral values are relativized by individuals.
7. Artistic values are relativized by historical period.

Therefore, relativism can be related and manifested in the following aspects:

1. Epistemological relativism or objective relativism, which is the belief that truth is considered true for an individual or group of people but not necessarily considered true by others. As such, there is no universal truth that is objectively considered right or wrong. It challenges the universally accepted and objective epistemological foundations of humanity.
2. Religious relativism: the belief that the truth of a religion is considered true for its followers but not for others. Therefore, no religion has an exclusively higher position that is universally accepted as true by all people throughout time.
3. Moral relativism believes that there are no absolute values and denies the existence of an objective ethical system that can determine right and wrong evaluations. The goodness or badness of a value is different and therefore there are no moral values that are exclusively right or wrong in general.
4. Cultural relativism is the belief that each culture has a specific set of beliefs, morals, customs, and practices that are different from others. It is the idea that these values are specific to and relative to that particular culture and cannot be judged or evaluated based on the standards of another culture.

In practical terms, relativism is linked to various fields that give rise to postmodernist ideas. Isaiah Berlin (2018) introduced the concept of Counter Enlightenment, which was a movement that emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as a challenge to rationalism, universalism, and empiricism. According to Berlin, this movement embraced the tradition of relativity and was characterized by skepticism, questioning the autonomy of reason and the methodology of natural science. Friedrich Nietzsche (1968) argued, for example, that the world has an infinite number of meanings and that everything is subjective, including human thought. These characteristics, as described by Berlin, demonstrate the role of relativism in generating postmodernist ideas. However, how does relativism challenge the previously absolute position of religion? The following discussion aims to address this question.

Relativism's Challenge to the Absolute Position of Religion

This discussion will subsequently detail the forms of these challenges, as well as provide a brief critique of the challenges presented:

Challenges to the Status of 'Belief' in Religion

The belief in religion is challenged by the acceptance of relativism, which leads to the devaluation of the unique status of religion. Relativism, which is characterized by tolerance and the acceptance of multiple truths, is paradoxical when it is elevated to an absolute requirement in the context of plurality. The promotion of tolerance, which is intended to allow for different viewpoints, becomes ironic when it is imposed as an absolute rule in the context of multiple truths. This creates a conflict between the idea of tolerance and the acceptance of relativism.

In addition, the perspective on plurality can be accepted at the level at which believers recognize the existence of 'different truths' for followers of different religions. This is because the diversity of perspectives on truth will continue to exist with different religions. However, it creates a problem when it is also assumed that the fact of truth itself is different and makes the plurality of

truth absolute. In this context, religion is understood as comprising multiple truths and believers are encouraged to have faith in their own religion without viewing it as the sole source of truth. However, this recognition of different truths creates an incongruous attitude and stance, as it portrays truth as absolute within one religion but relative in others. This leads to a lack of certainty in belief and generates skepticism about religion, causing it to be perceived as simply an individual's personal belief about truth rather than a definitive truth.

Islam acknowledges the diversity of religions that exists in the world, viewing it as part of God's divine plan. However, this diversity must be managed carefully to avoid either compromising one's own religion for the sake of harmony or causing tension through excessive tribalism. In matters of belief, it is important to base one's adherence to a particular belief on a reliable and certain source, supported by clear evidence or arguments. Therefore, individuals must undertake a process of research, evaluation, and selection when confronted with the diverse array of religions. When deciding on a guide for life, a person typically chooses what they believe to be true based on their own evaluation. It is not feasible for someone who has made a choice to also agree to or accept all the choices made before them. Attempting to choose a truth and simultaneously accept all previous choices as 'truth' is an impractical endeavor.

If everything is believed to be equally true, then there is no need to make a choice. If all religions are thought to be true and each has its own drawbacks, then there is no need to follow any religion and it is enough to take what is considered good and useful from each religion. Therefore, a pluralistic attitude that sees all religions as 'true' should not result from the selection process. On the other hand, belief in a religion that emerges from the selection process leads to an exclusive attitude, which is the belief that the chosen option is the best and true after research and evaluation. As a result, an exclusive attitude is inevitably present in the chosen belief. Adhering to pluralism in religion, which is based on the relativistic understanding of the status of religious truth, implies the elimination of the central characteristic of religion, namely 'belief'.

Challenges to the Epistemology of Religion

Each religion has its own sources, whether through written texts or claims. The presence of religious texts and the interpretation of theologians and scholars of these texts, which is then contextualized, creates a range of interpretations. The diversity of these interpretations is used by relativists to challenge the exclusive stance of religion. In the context of epistemology, at least two aspects are challenged by the relativistic perspective and further explored by postmodernism: the nature and reality conveyed by religion and its methods of understanding it, and the sources of religion, which usually refer to texts through a deconstruction of the verses within the texts.

Relativism challenges the truth of religion by claiming that the nature conveyed by religion is relative and therefore cannot be recognized as the most true and universal for all times and places. In this regard, the Islamic tradition of Kalam has already seen the threat brought by relativism to the authority of religion when Kalam scholars specifically criticized the Sophist group who claimed that the nature of something is subject to each person's belief. *Matan al-'Aqid al-Nasafiyyah* written by Imam al-Nasafi, for example, clearly provides a specific clarification on the basis of Islamic epistemology and rejects the relativistic doctrine of the Sophist group. This criticism of the early relativist group among the Sophists focused on the aspect of a reliable and accurate source of knowledge that can provide true knowledge about something (al-Taftazani 1988). The existence of this is not only limited to spatial-temporal dimensions or hyper-reality, but also involves aspects beyond the sensory and rational environment (suprarational and trans-empirical) such as issues of divinity and metaphysics that can be obtained knowledge about.

Therefore, Islam emphasizes the need for thorough arguments and strong evidence. Assumptions, especially those that are relative, should not be used as arguments in matters of faith.

In order to establish the truth, Islam does not restrict the means of understanding something to a single methodology of science, such as written texts. This is because the evidence for the existence of a reality must be proven using a methodology that is appropriate for the claim being made. Matters related to the physical need to be proven through empirical studies through observations and experiments conducted by the senses. Something related to abstract thought needs to be studied through the laws of reason. As for matters related to information (such as metaphysical issues), the proof is carried out by examining the certainty of the relationship between the information and its source (Al-Buti 2014). Therefore, each source of knowledge, namely reliable reports, reason, and the senses, has its own limitations, roles, and purposes, all of which complement each other. Hence, it is impossible for the relativistic understanding to emerge if it is built on scientific methodology and standards in gaining knowledge about the nature of something.

The deconstruction method, introduced by Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, and other postmodern leaders, is a way of interpreting and examining texts. This approach criticizes the idea that texts, including religious texts, are fixed, universal and historical, which is a view held by those who adhere to structuralism, instead it emphasizes the idea that the texts are dynamic and relative in nature (Derrida 1976). Each text does not just show a specific meaning but rather behind the text is a network of other texts with various other meanings. As a result, texts or writings are no longer seen as a means of conveying true and absolute knowledge. This is because the deconstruction of texts aims to show the 'failure of the author' to present absolute truth through the effort of 'uncovering' hidden agendas contained within the text. It is therefore different from usual text reading because through regular reading, the goal is to obtain the correct meaning from the text, but for deconstruction it tries to see the 'inability' of the text as a medium of absolute truth.

A detailed explanation of deconstruction requires more space, but it is sufficient here to see its implications for religion when interpretations of texts that then become laws and regulations practiced by believers are no longer relevant and absolute to be implemented. The deconstruction of religious texts as a reference source necessarily implies the deconstruction of religion itself, including the destruction of the authority of religious scholars. This is what Derrida aims for, wanting religion to no longer be tied to 'traditions and past understandings' but to go beyond them. However, which text understanding can be held and represent the religion? In the end, religion becomes nothing more than a relative spiritual experience and personal thought of humans and not an absolute belief to guide their lives (Caputo & Scanlon 1999).

Challenges to Values and Rules in Religion

One of the basic characteristics of every religion is the presence of rules and laws for its followers. These rules and regulations come in the form of either obligations and encouragement for followers to do something, or prohibitions for followers to avoid something. The challenge of relativism is not solely targeted at the diversity of these regulations, but rather focuses on the values that lead to the laws and regulations in religion. In Islamic scholarship, the presence of differing interpretations of legal rulings among scholars, which gives rise to various schools of Islamic jurisprudence, is considered an acceptable form of diversity. However, there is a general agreement among scholars on the importance of basing the legal system on the primary sources of the Quran and the Sunnah. In this context, relativism holds that values are relative in both legal and ethical matters.

The ideas of Xenophanes and Protagoras demonstrate how laws and moral values can be seen as relative. This discussion will explore the issue of relativism in relation to moral values, as the topic of laws based on sacred texts has already been addressed. The idea that moral values are deemed correct based on the perspective of a particular religion or culture is not a valid argument. Just because a value is widely accepted does not mean it is good or should be upheld. For example, slavery and apartheid were once widely accepted practices, but that does not make them right or moral. The

idea that something is acceptable simply because it is widely accepted can be challenged. For example, there were movements within South Africa that opposed the apartheid regime. Similarly, the justification for colonization based on the idea of 'the burden of the white people' was accepted by the colonizers, but not by the colonized. Therefore, moral decisions should not be based on what is accepted by the majority or supported by institutions, but rather on universal values. In this context, people should be treated with fairness and respect, as taught by religion.

It is not accurate to say that all aspects can be relative to things like culture and customs. While certain things like clothing, communication, and politeness may differ between groups and cultures, values like the immorality of slavery, injustice, and discrimination are recognized as wrong across the board. Additionally, relativists often make the mistake of applying relativism only to actions, rather than the moral principles behind those actions. In ancient India, the ritual of *sati* involved a wife being burned alive with her deceased husband as a display of her love and loyalty to him (Leslie 1991). Although loyalty and love are generally seen as positive values, this particular ritual is wrong because it involves a person sacrificing their own life. In Southern Greece, there is a tradition of crying out the name of the deceased in front of their house. While this might seem rude to outsiders, it is a way for the local people to show their condolences and say goodbye to the deceased (Pentaris 2012). Relativists sometimes make the mistake of disconnecting morals from the specific context and conditions in which they are applied. The fact that moral principles can be expressed in various ways does not mean that the principles themselves are different. The actions and behaviors stemming from these principles are grounded in universal moral values. The discrepancy lies in how these values are articulated. This argument is not to justify practices mentioned earlier but rather to highlight that these practices are rooted in universal values, that can be further fine-tuned to align better with it.

Additionally, the idea that right and wrong are determined by a society's cultural norms leads to the imposition of those values on every individual in that cultural group. People are viewed as good because they follow their society's cultural norms, even if those values may be fundamentally wrong. The practice of racial discrimination (racism) may be accepted in some cultures and, if viewed through the lens of cultural relativism, an individual's racist actions would be seen as correct within the context and perspective of their culture. Relativism suggests that moral values are simply the customs and traditions of a particular community, which prevents reform and progress in that community to abandon racist behavior and attitudes because they are seen as correct and perfect by both the community and the relativist. The ambiguous and unclear distinction between right and wrong allows individuals to do what they believe is right. For example, extremist groups may see carrying out bombings in public places that result in loss of life and damage to property as good in order to achieve their goals. Similarly, incestuous behavior may be considered moral or acceptable if both parties consent to the relationship. Ultimately, relativism in morality is a purely descriptive, rather than constructive, ideology.

Therefore, it can be asserted that when relativists claim that the assessment of right and wrong differs, they are not relativizing these values, but rather denying their inherent value. In conclusion, relativism in the realm of moral values is not acceptable because it does not have a positive impact on individuals and society and is therefore rejected. Instead, universal and absolute values, as demonstrated by religion, should be upheld.

In conclusion, postmodernism views change as an inherent reality. The very notion that something is considered certain is subject to change, except for the fact of change itself. This ultimately gives rise to a relative reality that is characteristic of Western civilization, which values change and embraces it in various domains, including religion. Relativism, in particular, merely promotes a culture of debate and polemic in order to challenge established authority. As such, it simply reacts to existing values rather than offering new insights and instead presents non-binding knowledge that breeds skepticism rather than understanding. Furthermore, the concept of relativism

within postmodernism is fundamentally self-contradictory, as the arguments it propounds should be relative to the individual and cannot be universally applied. However, the opposite occurs when these arguments are extended to all fields, including those of epistemology and ontology.

Relativity in postmodernism challenges the position of absolute religion in several ways. Firstly, it questions the belief aspect of religion, by arguing that there is no universal truth or understanding of the divine. Instead, what is considered true or false, right or wrong, good or bad, is subjective and varies among individuals and groups. This undermines the authority and validity of certain religious beliefs and practices and calls for a pluralistic approach to religion that recognizes the diversity of perspectives and interpretations.

Secondly, relativism challenges the epistemological aspect of religion, by denying the possibility of objective knowledge or certainty about the divine and spiritual matters. It asserts that all knowledge is relative and depends on the perspective and experiences of the individual, and therefore, it is impossible to claim that any one religion or belief system has a monopoly on truth or knowledge. This challenges the traditional roles of religious texts, teachings, and authorities as sources of absolute truth, and calls for a more critical approach to religion.

Lastly, relativism challenges the values and legal laws established by religion, by arguing that they are culturally and historically constructed and do not have universal validity or authority. It asserts that what is considered right or wrong, good or bad, moral or immoral, is not fixed or absolute, but varies among different cultures and societies, and is subject to change and evolution over time. This challenges the traditional roles of religion as a source of moral guidance and social control. Therefore, while postmodernism may appear to embrace diversity and differing viewpoints, it is in fact resistant to religion, which is characterized as absolute and universal. Ultimately, the features of postmodernism seek to deconstruct religion, particularly at its core aspects of epistemology and ontology.

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