

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Rethinking the Relationship between Metaphysics and Qur'anic Theology in Light of the Critique of Positivism and Developments in Twentieth-Century Philosophy of Science

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## ABSTRACT

This study reexamines the relationship among metaphysics, Qur'anic theology, and the positivist perspective, seeking, based on developments in twentieth-century philosophy of science, to explicate and critique the epistemological and ontological foundations of each. Positivism, by rejecting non-empirical concepts, limits knowledge to sensory experience, whereas Qur'anic theology emphasizes the unity of reason, revelation, and intuition. In this context, Wittgenstein's later reflections on religious language, along with those of physicists such as Heisenberg and Planck, indicate that science and philosophy are not intelligible without metaphysical presuppositions. Accordingly, this study argues that the Holy Qur'an, through its emphasis on the unseen, spirit, and the levels of being, offers a rational and comprehensive picture of reality that can serve as a philosophical critique of positivist empiricism. The research concludes that a renewed understanding of the relationship between reason and revelation provides a path toward reviving metaphysics and meaning in an age of scientism.

## KEYWORDS

Metaphysics, Qur'anic Theology, Positivism, Wittgenstein, Philosophy of Science, Empiricism, Reason and Revelation.



## Extended Abstract

### Rethinking the Relationship between Metaphysics and Qur'anic Theology in Light of the Critique of Positivism and Developments in Twentieth-Century Philosophy of Science

#### Introduction and Research Problem

The relationship between metaphysics, theology, and empirical knowledge has been one of the central issues in modern philosophy. The emergence of positivism, particularly logical positivism in the first half of the twentieth century, significantly transformed the understanding of knowledge and meaning. Positivist philosophers attempted to establish scientific knowledge on the foundations of sensory experience, logical analysis, and empirical verification. Within this framework, propositions that could not be empirically verified or reduced to analytic truths were frequently regarded as meaningless. Consequently, metaphysical and theological propositions concerning God, the soul, the afterlife, ultimate reality, and the purpose of existence were placed outside the boundaries of meaningful knowledge.

The present study examines this epistemological position from the perspective of Qur'anic theology and Islamic philosophy. Its central question is whether the restriction of meaningful knowledge to empirical and analytically verifiable propositions can provide an adequate account of reality and human knowledge. It also asks whether the developments of twentieth-century philosophy of science and philosophy of language provide grounds for reconsidering the radical empiricist and anti-metaphysical assumptions associated with positivism.

The significance of this question derives from the fact that positivism was not merely a methodological doctrine concerning the natural sciences. In its stronger forms, it proposed a criterion of meaning according to which statements about God, metaphysical reality, and religious values were excluded from genuine cognitive discourse. The study therefore investigates the epistemological foundations of positivism and compares them with the Qur'anic conception of knowledge, in which reason, experience, and revelation are presented as interconnected dimensions of human understanding.

#### Methodology

The research employs a descriptive-analytical and comparative approach. First, the basic principles of positivism and logical positivism are reconstructed through the works and positions of thinkers such as David Hume, Alfred J. Ayer, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and the Vienna Circle. Second, the concepts of metaphysics and Islamic theology are examined through the philosophical and theological traditions represented by al-Farabi, Avicenna, Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Mulla Sadra, and contemporary Muslim thinkers. Third, selected Qur'anic verses concerning knowledge, divine reality, causality, observation, creation, and the unseen are analyzed in order to clarify the epistemological and metaphysical structure of Qur'anic theology. Finally, the study considers developments in twentieth-century philosophy of science, particularly the philosophical implications associated with Max Planck, Werner Heisenberg, and Albert Einstein.

#### Positivism and the Rejection of Metaphysics

Logical positivism sought to distinguish meaningful propositions from meaningless ones through logical analysis and empirical verification. According to this approach, meaningful statements are either analytically true or empirically testable. Statements that fall outside these categories, including many theological and metaphysical claims, cannot be treated as genuine cognitive propositions.

Ayer's formulation of the verification principle provides one of the clearest examples of this position. From this perspective, a proposition such as "God exists" is not necessarily false; rather, if no empirical procedure can establish its truth or falsity, it is regarded as metaphysical and therefore cognitively meaningless. This distinction between falsity and meaninglessness is crucial for understanding the positivist critique of theology.

The roots of this position can also be found in Hume's empiricism. Hume questioned the possibility of deriving necessary causal relations directly from sensory experience. Human beings observe sequences of events, but the necessary connection between cause and effect is not itself an

object of sensory perception. This analysis contributed to a skeptical empiricism that placed substantial restrictions on metaphysical claims concerning God, causality, and the ultimate structure of reality.

The Vienna Circle subsequently developed a more systematic version of this anti-metaphysical orientation. Its members emphasized logical analysis and empirical verification and attempted to eliminate metaphysical propositions from the domain of genuine knowledge. In this context, metaphysics was not simply regarded as false but as lacking cognitive significance.

### **Wittgenstein and the Problem of Religious Language**

The development of Wittgenstein's philosophy demonstrates that the relationship between language and theology cannot be reduced to the early positivist model. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein emphasized the limits of meaningful language and famously associated philosophical problems with the limits of what can be meaningfully said. This position was later interpreted by logical positivists as supporting the exclusion of metaphysical discourse.

However, Wittgenstein's later philosophy moved in a different direction. In *Philosophical Investigations*, meaning is closely connected with use, context, and forms of life. Language operates through different language games, and its meaning cannot always be reduced to a single scientific or descriptive function. From this perspective, religious language can be examined within the practices and forms of life in which it functions.

This development is significant for the present study because it challenges the assumption that all meaningful language must conform to the model of empirical scientific description. Religious language may have a distinctive function and meaning that cannot be adequately evaluated through the criteria applied to propositions in the natural sciences. The study therefore considers the development from Wittgenstein's early philosophy to his later conception of language as an important indication of the limitations of a rigid verificationist theory of meaning.

### **Developments in Twentieth-Century Philosophy of Science**

One of the important arguments of the present study concerns the developments in twentieth-century philosophy of science. The emergence of modern physics challenged the simple assumption that scientific knowledge consists merely of the accumulation of sensory observations.

The views associated with Max Planck, Werner Heisenberg, and Albert Einstein are particularly relevant in this context. Scientific theories employ concepts such as matter, energy, space, time, law, and causality that cannot simply be identified with isolated sensory data. Scientific observation is also conducted within theoretical frameworks that determine how observations are interpreted.

Heisenberg's reflections on quantum physics are especially important because they raise questions about the relationship between observer and observed reality. The role of measurement and the conceptual structure of quantum theory demonstrate that scientific knowledge is not simply a passive recording of an independently given reality. Einstein likewise emphasized the role of theoretical construction and rational insight in scientific discovery. Accordingly, twentieth-century philosophy of science weakened the simplistic identification of science with pure sensory experience.

This does not mean that modern physics proves theological or metaphysical propositions. Rather, it demonstrates a more limited but important point: scientific knowledge itself cannot be fully understood as an accumulation of uninterpreted sensory data. Scientific theories depend upon conceptual, mathematical, and philosophical assumptions. This observation creates room for a more nuanced relationship between science and metaphysics.

### **Islamic Philosophy and Qur'anic Theology**

In Islamic intellectual tradition, metaphysics is not regarded as an illegitimate extension of human reason. Avicenna defines metaphysics as the science of being qua being and investigates the universal principles of existence, including necessary and contingent being, causality, unity and multiplicity, and the first cause. Al-Farabi similarly connects metaphysics with the investigation of first causes and necessary existence. Mulla Sadra subsequently develops these questions within the framework of transcendent philosophy.

Qur'anic theology shares with Islamic philosophy the assumption that knowledge cannot be reduced to sensory perception. The Qur'an repeatedly encourages human beings to observe the natural world, reflect upon themselves, and employ reason. At the same time, it presents revelation as an

essential source of knowledge concerning realities that transcend ordinary sensory experience.

Accordingly, the Qur'anic epistemological framework may be understood as integrating three dimensions: reason, experience, and revelation. Experience provides access to the signs of reality; reason interprets and organizes them; and revelation provides a higher horizon concerning God, the unseen, human purpose, and ultimate reality.

The Qur'anic conception of divine knowledge also contains both affirmative and negative dimensions. The verse "There is nothing like unto Him" (Qur'an 42:11) establishes a limit to human conceptualization of the divine essence. Human beings cannot comprehend God as they comprehend material objects. At the same time, the Qur'an invites human beings to recognize divine signs through the universe and the human self: "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves" (Qur'an 41:53). Thus, Qur'anic theology simultaneously recognizes the limits of human knowledge and the possibility of rational and experiential knowledge of God through His signs and acts.

### **Metaphysics in the Qur'anic Framework**

Metaphysics in the Qur'anic framework concerns fundamental questions about God, existence, creation, causality, human nature, the unseen, and the ultimate purpose of reality. Nature is not presented merely as a collection of physical objects; rather, it is understood as a field of signs pointing beyond itself.

The Qur'anic conception of divine unity is particularly important. The verse "Had there been gods besides Allah in them both, they would surely have been ruined" (Qur'an 21:22) connects divine unity with the intelligibility and order of the universe. In this sense, the Qur'anic argument for monotheism is not presented merely as an emotional or traditional commitment but as an argument concerning the order and coherence of reality.

The Qur'anic approach also rejects speaking about God without knowledge. Verses such as Qur'an 7:33 and 17:36 emphasize the necessity of knowledge and caution against attributing claims to God without adequate epistemic grounds. This feature distinguishes Qur'anic theology from a conception of faith that is completely detached from rational justification.

From this perspective, Qur'anic metaphysics does not reject empirical observation. Rather, it places observation within a broader epistemological structure. Human beings are encouraged to examine the universe and themselves, but empirical observation is not regarded as the only possible route to knowledge. Experience requires rational interpretation, while revelation provides access to dimensions of reality that transcend sensory observation.

### **Critical Comparison**

The comparison conducted in this study indicates a fundamental difference between positivism and Qur'anic theology concerning the scope of knowledge. Logical positivism establishes empirical verification and logical analysis as criteria for meaningful cognitive discourse. Qur'anic theology, by contrast, recognizes empirical observation as one source of knowledge while also granting a fundamental role to reason and revelation.

The difference is therefore not simply a disagreement about particular religious propositions. It concerns the very definition of knowledge and meaning. For positivism, metaphysical propositions become problematic because they cannot be submitted to empirical verification. For Qur'anic theology, the inability of a proposition to undergo sensory verification does not by itself establish that the proposition is meaningless. Certain realities may transcend sensory observation while remaining open to rational reflection, indirect evidence, or revelation.

The study also argues that the positivist critique should be distinguished from a general rejection of metaphysics. The claim that a proposition is meaningless is primarily a semantic or epistemological claim; it does not automatically establish that the corresponding reality does not exist. This distinction becomes particularly important when discussing theological propositions. Rejecting empirical verification as a criterion for theological knowledge does not by itself demonstrate the non-existence of God or the impossibility of metaphysical reality.

### **Findings and Conclusion**

The findings indicate that positivism made an important historical contribution to the clarification of scientific language and the methodological requirements of empirical inquiry. Nevertheless, its

stronger anti-metaphysical formulations encounter significant difficulties when the verification principle is extended to all forms of meaningful knowledge. The developments of philosophy of science and philosophy of language in the twentieth century demonstrate that scientific theories themselves involve theoretical concepts, conceptual frameworks, and philosophical assumptions that cannot be reduced entirely to raw sensory data.

The study further finds that Qur'anic theology offers a broader epistemological framework in which reason, experience, and revelation operate in an interconnected manner. The Qur'an does not reject empirical knowledge; rather, it integrates observation into a larger account of reality. Nature is regarded as a field of signs, while reason is employed to interpret those signs and revelation provides knowledge concerning realities beyond ordinary empirical access.

The comparison between positivism and Qur'anic theology therefore reveals two different conceptions of the limits of human knowledge. Positivism tends to define meaningful knowledge through empirical or analytic criteria, whereas Qur'anic theology accepts a multilayered conception of knowledge that includes empirical, rational, and revelatory dimensions.

The final conclusion of the study is not that modern science should be replaced by theology, nor that scientific methods can directly prove metaphysical propositions. Rather, the argument is that science, philosophy, and theology address questions through different but potentially dialogical modes of inquiry. A reduction of all meaningful knowledge to sensory experience risks narrowing the scope of questions concerning ultimate reality, purpose, value, and transcendence. Qur'anic theology and Islamic philosophy, by maintaining a connection between reason, experience, and revelation, provide a framework within which these questions can remain subjects of rational and meaningful inquiry.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Metaphysics, Qur'anic Theology, Positivism, Wittgenstein, Philosophy of Science, Empiricism, Reason and Revelation

## Introduction

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the emergence of positivism in the philosophy of science, through its rejection of all non-empirical propositions, presented metaphysics and theology as unscientific and meaningless domains. This outlook deeply influenced modern epistemology and led to the exclusion of discussions concerning God, the soul, and the unseen world from the sphere of valid knowledge. In contrast, Qur'anic theology and Islamic philosophy maintain that reason, experience, and revelation are three complementary sources of knowledge, and that without accepting metaphysical foundations, any explanation of the world and the human being remains incomplete (cf. Āli 'Imrān: 190; al-Baqarah: 164).

The main question of this research is 'Whether a form of dialogue or compatibility can be established between positivist empiricism and the foundations of Qur'anic theology and metaphysics?' If not, 'What fundamental epistemological and ontological differences exist between them?'

The importance of this question lies in the fact that positivism continues to influence certain branches of the human and natural sciences. A Qur'anic-philosophical response may therefore open a path toward reviving the connection among science, religion, and metaphysics. The aim of this study is a comparative analysis and critique of the foundations of positivism based on Qur'anic teachings and the achievements of twentieth-century philosophy of science.

## 1. Literature Review and Research Background

From the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, positivism, centered on pure

empiricism, regarded all non-empirical propositions, particularly metaphysical and theological issues, as meaningless and unscientific (Comte, 1830; Ayer, 1936). In the human and natural sciences, this view marginalized discussions about God, the soul, and the unseen world.

In contrast, Islamic philosophy and Qur'anic theology emphasize three sources of knowledge: reason, experience, and revelation. *Ibn Sīnā* in *al-Shifā'* and *Fārābī* in *Ihṣā' al-'Ulūm* provided rational analyses of the truth of being and human nature, while Qur'anic teachings, especially verses concerning human creation, the soul, and the cosmos (cf. al-Mu'minūn: 12-14; Ṣād: 72), are accepted as foundations of a comprehensive epistemology.

Contemporary researchers in the history of philosophy of science have likewise shown that the positivist restriction of knowledge to experience conflicts with Qur'anic teachings, since the Qur'an holds that the human being is capable of knowing the truth not only through experience but also through reason and revelation (cf. al-Baqarah: 31; al-Naḥl: 78).

Within Persian and Arabic scholarship, contemporary works such as analyses of philosophy of science in Iran (Golshani, 1999 AD/1378 SH) and theological treatises of *Ibn Sīnā* and *Fārābī* demonstrate that explaining the world without attention to metaphysical and revelatory principles is incomplete. These works compare positivism with Islamic philosophy and Qur'anic theology, highlighting their fundamental differences.

The novelty of the present study lies in integrating Qur'anic teachings and Islamic philosophy with findings from twentieth-century philosophy of science to offer an analytical and Qur'an-based comparative

critique of positivism rather than merely reporting views.

Numerous studies have examined positivism and its relation to religion and philosophy. In Western scholarship, works by Auguste Comte, Ayer, and Carnap established the foundations of logical positivism. In philosophy of religion, works such as John Hick's "Science and Faith" and Ayer's "Language, Truth and Logic" offer critiques of the meaning and function of religious propositions. In the Islamic world, thinkers such as Mehdi Golshani "Physics and Philosophy in the Twentieth Century," Sayyid Hossein Nasr "Knowledge and the Sacred," and Abdolkarim Soroush have written on the relationship between science and religion. However, most of these works either focus on a general critique of positivism or examine it only from the standpoint of philosophy of science, and a direct comparison between metaphysics and Qur'anic theology with positivism is less common.

Ayer's "Language, Truth and Logic" (1936) is a book on meaning in which he formulates the verification principle of logical positivism, also known as the criterion of significance or meaning. He explains how the principle of verifiability may be applied to philosophical issues and presents the ideas of the Vienna Circle and logical empiricists.

The article "Metaphysics among Logical Positivists and Early Wittgenstein" (Valeh and Javadi, 2018 AD/1397 SH) notes that Wittgenstein, through his picture theory, did not regard metaphysical propositions as images of reality and therefore judged them meaningless. Understanding this claim requires distinguishing ontology from linguistics, since his view concerns the limits of language rather than the denial of a domain of being. In contrast, logical positivists also considered metaphysics meaningless, but their

understanding of meaninglessness differs from Wittgenstein's. Even in the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein refers to the mystical dimension of existence, though such statements also fall into the category of the nonsensical.

## 2. The Nature of Islamic Theology

Islamic theology is the discipline that rationally explicates revealed teachings and defends the foundations of faith based on reason, transmitted sources, and inner experience. It developed within the framework of monotheism and, unlike Christian theology with its emphasis on Trinity and Incarnation, rests upon ontological unity and absolute divine lordship (Nasr, 1989: 24). In the Islamic tradition, theology is not merely dialectical disputation but an epistemological system that organizes the relationship between reason, revelation, and religious experience, seeking to explicate divine truth across the *درجات* of being and humanity's relation to God (Motahhari, 1983 AD/1362 SH: 87).

*Fakhr Rāzī* defines theology as "knowledge of the principles of belief through certain proof" (*Asās al-Taqdīs*) (Fakhr Rāzī, 1999 AD/1420 AH: 15). Allamah *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* in *al-Mīzān fī Tafṣīr al-Qur'ān* considers theology a discipline in which reason and revelation are the two pillars of interpreting truth, for reason without revelation is incomplete and revelation without reason unintelligible (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1994 AD/1374 SH: 1, 22). *Faḍl al-Raḥmān* describes Islamic theology as an effort to reconstruct religious thought in a rational and living form attentive to both history and the meaning of revelation (Raḥmān, 1982: 12).

Islamic theology thus has three essential dimensions: theological (defense of faith), philosophical (explication of being, God, and soul), and mystical (existential knowledge of truth through spiritual realization) (Nasr, 2006:

57). Unlike positivism, which reduces knowledge to sensory experience, Islamic theology stresses the unity of reason and revelation and extends knowledge into the realm of metaphysics and meaning.

Avicenna regarded metaphysics as the science of being qua being, considering its aim to be the discovery of the universal principles of existence. Its subjects fall under several general headings: the immaterial causes of beings, at the head of which is the existence of God; the attributes of being as being, such as causality and effect, origination and eternity, necessity and possibility, unity and multiplicity; and other principles and subjects that function as essential attributes of being qua being (Avicenna, 1983 AD/1404 AH: 1, 12). Likewise, *Fārābī*, in *Ihsa' al-'Ulum* (Enumeration of the Sciences), describes metaphysics as the science concerned with the knowledge of first causes and the Necessary Being (*Fārābī*, 1996: 73). The views of these two thinkers formed the foundation of rational theology in the Islamic tradition, which later reached its culmination in the works of Mulla Ṣadrā, particularly in *al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah fi al-Asfar al-Arba'ah* (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, 1981: 1, 45).

In Islamic thought, Qur'anic theology is based on the unity of reason and revelation. The Holy Qur'an presents faith as the result of both rational and heartfelt understanding (al-Baqarah: 164). Major exegetes such as *Fakhr Rāzī* in *al-Taḥfīr al-Kabīr* and *Ṭabāṭabā'ī* in *al-Mīzān* maintain that reason is the instrument for understanding revelation, while revelation represents the transcendent horizon of reason (*Fakhr Rāzī*, *ibid*: 2, 87; *Ṭabāṭabā'ī*, *ibid*: 1, 24). *Mullā Ṣadrā* describes revelation as "Transcendent Intellection," which goes beyond empirical reason (Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, n.d.: 1, 33).

### 3. The Nature of Positivism

Logical positivism- the philosophy of the Vienna Circle- was prominent in Anglo-American philosophy between 1930 and 1960. It holds that genuine knowledge consists either of analytic definitions or factual statements derived from sensory experience. Other ways of knowing, such as intuition, introspection, or religious faith, are rejected as meaningless (Macdonis, 2010: 12).

Positivists are divided into two tendencies: "Phenomenalism, which reduces everything to sense data, and physicalism, which translates all meaningful statements into the language of physical objects."

Logical positivism combines empiricism with mathematical logic. According to this epistemological theory, the source of knowledge is sensory experience, and any meaningful scientific statement must be verifiable. It is closely linked to the general law model of scientific explanation (Smith, 1986: 314).

David Hume held that knowledge ultimately returns to sense impressions and divided the sciences into abstract sciences (e.g., logic and mathematics) (Barbour, 1997: 52) and sciences concerning matters of fact (e.g., physics and chemistry), dismissing other forms of knowledge (Hume, 1903: 38).

Logical positivism, also called logical empiricism or neo-positivism, rests on the principle of verification as a criterion of meaning. Only statements verifiable through direct observation or logical proof are meaningful in conveying truth or information (Godfrey, 2010: 23).

Logical positivists opposed theology and metaphysics, holding that empirical verifiability was the sole criterion of meaningfulness. Metaphysical, religious, and ethical propositions, being empirically unverifiable, were deemed meaningless. Rooted in Viennese

empiricism and the anti-metaphysical scientism of Ernst Mach, this movement sought to unify the sciences and purge them of metaphysical elements. According to the picture theory of language, only propositions that represent possible states of affairs in the world are meaningful.

#### **4. The Role of the Vienna Circle in the Development of Anti-Theological and Anti-Metaphysical Thought**

The thinkers of the Vienna Circle were the most important proponents of logical positivism. Among them were Moritz Schlick, Hans Reichenbach, Herbert Feigl, Kurt Gödel, Hans Hahn, Philipp Frank, and Otto Neurath. During the 1920s and 1930s, they gathered in Vienna to exchange views on philosophy and the foundations of the new sciences. They were influenced by Wittgenstein's "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus." Albert Einstein and Ludwig Wittgenstein had close connections with this circle (Cirera, 1994: 54).

Following the logicism of Frege and Russell, the Vienna Circle regarded logic and mathematics as analytic. Later, under the influence of Wittgenstein's insights, they came to view logical and mathematical issues as tautological and devoid of factual content. They held that true logical propositions, like mathematical ones, do not express real facts (Frigg, 2022: 63).

Members of the Circle saw themselves as cognitive revolutionaries who, by showing that metaphysics was not merely false but cognitively empty and meaningless, rebuilt academic philosophy on a new foundation. They linked their struggle against metaphysics with public engagement and scientific enlightenment amid the dark political conditions of Central Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Unsurprisingly, the Vienna Circle

distinguished its views sharply from those of traditional philosophers (Hanfling, 1981: 25).

The Vienna Circle rejected metaphysics on the grounds that it was neither analytic and a priori nor empirical and synthetic. For somewhat different reasons, they also rejected the foundations of normative ethics, although conditional norms could be organized within a means, end framework. Only unconditional norms remained empirically unverifiable, essentially depending on disputed "Essential Intuitions." (Hanfling, 1981: 26) Neurath insisted that the Vienna Circle should act like a party and destroy old metaphysics, since he regarded it as a source of social and political reaction.

#### **5. Critique of Positivism Based on the Philosophical Theories of 20th-Century Physicists**

One of the most important theoretical challenges to positivism arises from developments in the epistemology of science in the 20th century. Major physicists such as Max Planck, Werner Heisenberg, and Albert Einstein, drawing on the philosophical foundations of modern science, showed that sensory experience alone is insufficient to explain reality; theoretical and metaphysical concepts are also present at the foundations of science.

Planck states: "No scientific theory can take shape without metaphysical presuppositions, because concepts such as matter, energy, and natural law arise from a metaphysical interpretation of the world." He believed that every scientific system inevitably rests on metaphysical foundations, since the fundamental concepts of physics are not themselves directly experienceable but theoretical and philosophical (Planck, 1932: 78).

Similarly, in *Physics and Philosophy*, Heisenberg criticizes positivism and argues that quantum physics taught us that the observer is part of the observed reality; science cannot be separated from philosophical and ontological issues. He writes that in quantum physics, the observer is part of the observed reality; thus, no sharp boundary can be drawn between subject and object. Every observation is an interpretation dependent on philosophical foundations (Heisenberg, 1958: 92).

Einstein also emphasized in his philosophical writings that experience alone cannot be the basis of theory; scientific theories arise from intuitive reason and metaphysical hypotheses. Experience is only raw data; meaning and order come from reason. Without metaphysical thinking, science would be merely a purposeless collection of data (Einstein, 1954: 272).

These developments in the philosophy of science weakened the foundations of positivism, which regarded science as merely the description of empirical data, and reopened the path toward reconnecting science and metaphysics.

Contemporary thinkers in the Islamic world argue that science without metaphysical support is not only incomplete but unstable. Golshani writes in "From Science to Faith" that major 20th-century physicists, unlike positivists, recognized that scientific theories cannot be interpreted without metaphysical assumptions and an overall worldview. Quantum physics in particular revealed the dependence of observation on mind and perception (Golshani, 1999 AD/1379 SH: 45). In "Physics and Philosophy in the Twentieth Century," he explains that positivists considered science independent of philosophy, but new scientific experience showed that model selection and data interpretation are impossible without

metaphysical presuppositions (Golshani, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 78).

Among contemporary Iranian thinkers, Gholamreza Aavani and Mehdi Golshani have offered precise critiques of positivism and scientism. Golshani, from the perspective of the Qur'an and Islamic tradition, emphasizes that science without metaphysical and divine foundations cannot attain moral and human direction (Golshani, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 44). Aavani likewise considers science without wisdom incomplete (Aavani, 2009 AD/1389 SH: 72).

## 6. Positivism and Metaphysics

Logical positivists denied the existence of transcendent metaphysics, claiming that metaphysical judgments are meaningless and cannot be verified empirically. Anything within the realm of possible experience cannot establish absolute and timeless claims; thus, such propositions convey no real meaning.

Hume called transcendent metaphysics sophistry and illusion, claiming it uses expressions without reference. Ayer adopted Hume's division of propositions into logical and empirical and grounded the verification principle upon it. According to this principle, a proposition is meaningful only if possible sense experience is relevant to its truth or falsity. Metaphysical propositions, containing neither logical truths nor empirical hypotheses, are therefore meaningless or at least "Neither true nor false." (Ayer, 1946: 57)

Ayer writes that to test whether a sentence expresses a genuine empirical hypothesis, he adopts a principle of verification: if a proposition cannot satisfy this principle and is not tautological, then it must be metaphysical, and since it is metaphysical, it is literally meaningless. Thus, many traditional philosophical claims, such as the existence of a

non-empirical realm of values, the immortality of the soul, or the existence of God, are classified as meaningless (ibid: 2).

Auguste Comte likewise regarded metaphysics and theology as empty. However, Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* did not claim that metaphysics and theology were simply false or obsolete. The Vienna Circle emphasized that meaningful propositions are analytic or empirically verifiable. Their main principles included: "Unity of science, the worthlessness of metaphysics, and the verification principle of meaning." (Price, 1936: 315)

Kant rejected the claim that metaphysics is a form of theoretical science. Mach sought to purify science of all metaphysical elements. Logical positivists, relying on Wittgenstein, regarded metaphysical propositions as nonsensical, not true or false but devoid of sense (Passmore, 1972: 5, 53).

Wittgenstein suggested that the correct method of philosophy would be to say nothing except what can be said, propositions of natural science, and to show that anyone attempting to speak metaphysically fails to assign meaning to their signs (Wittgenstein, 1922: 53). Yet for him, the impossibility of metaphysics lay not in the nonexistence of its subject matter but in the inability of language to express it. He acknowledged the existence of the "Mystical" without committing to metaphysical doctrines.

Carnap and Schlick were surprised that Wittgenstein did not endorse their outright denial of metaphysics as a domain of being. Neurath argued that if one truly avoids metaphysics, one must say not "Silence about something," but "Silence, yet not about something," so as not to imply that something metaphysical exists (Neurath, 1983: 60).

## **7. Positivism, Language, and Theology: From Hume to Wittgenstein**

One of the central axes of positivism in Western philosophy is the denial of meaning and validity to metaphysical and religious propositions. This attitude was first systematically formulated by David Hume and later developed by Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle. A critical examination of these views, in light of later sources, shows that their theoretical foundations are at odds with Qur'anic theology and Islamic philosophy.

## **8. Hume and the Denial of Metaphysical Causality**

In "An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding," Hume argues that causality arises not from reason but from habit; we observe only constant conjunction, not a necessary connection between cause and effect. Thus, metaphysical claims about God, the soul, or cosmic purpose lack empirical validity (Hume, 2007: Section VII). Later scholars note that Hume thereby reached a skeptical empiricism rather than a total denial of metaphysics; in "Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion," he still defends the possibility of a form of rational faith, though outside the domain of science (Garrett, 2015: 132).

However, from the perspective of the Holy Qur'an, denying a causal relationship among things amounts to denying the divine order in existence, whereas the Qur'an regards this order as a sign of divine unity: "Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is Disposer over all things." (al-Zumar: 62) Accordingly, causality in the Qur'an is not merely a matter of sensory experience but a sign of divine action within the order of creation.

## 9. Wittgenstein and the Crisis of Language in Theology

In his early work, the "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus," Wittgenstein, under the influence of logical positivism, called metaphysical and religious propositions "Meaningless," since, as he said, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein, 1921: 7). In this view, only propositions that can be represented in logical language and are empirically testable have meaning.

However, in the later phase of his thought, especially in "Philosophical Investigations," Wittgenstein moved away from this position. He no longer regarded religious language as meaningless but as having its own distinct "Language-game," meaning that its significance is realized within the context of practice and faith (Wittgenstein, 1953: 19).

In later studies, philosophers such as D. Z. Phillips and Rush Rhees have shown that Wittgenstein in fact opened a path for reconstructing the meaning of theology, since he made the understanding of religious language dependent on the lived experience of faith. This development creates grounds for comparison with philosophical-religious interpretations in the Qur'an, which likewise emphasizes remembrance, reflection, and inner witnessing as forms of the language of faith: "Those who believe and whose hearts find peace in the remembrance of Allah, surely in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find peace." (al-Ra'd: 28) Thus, whereas Wittgenstein initially considered religious language meaningless, in his later philosophy he moved closer to recognizing its meaning and life-world function, an approach comparable to the "Language of faith" in the Qur'an.

## 10. Connection with Islamic Philosophy and the Qur'anic Critique of Positivism

From the viewpoint of Muslim philosophers such as Avicenna and *Mullā Ṣadrā*, meaning and truth arise from ontological and intellectual levels of being, not merely from sensory experience. In "*al-Ḥikma al-Muta'aliyah*," *Mullā Ṣadrā* considers existence to be primary and graded, and, contrary to Hume, regards causality as an ontological necessity. The Qur'an affirms this philosophical foundation: "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth," (al-Nūr: 35) indicating an ontology of existence and the unity of levels of being.

Thus, just as Hume reduced causality to mental habit and early Wittgenstein regarded religious language as devoid of meaning, the Qur'an and Islamic philosophy both seek to restore meaning and causality to the ontological and unseen dimensions of knowledge.

Studies of later thinkers show that, in its Humean and Wittgensteinian forms, positivism, by excluding metaphysics from the realm of meaning, remained unable to grasp the purpose and direction of existence. In contrast, the Qur'an, relying on reason, experience, and revelation, offers an epistemic system in which "Knowledge" and "Faith" are two aspects of a single truth.

From this perspective, Qur'anic theology is a response to the crisis of meaning in modern philosophy; in contrast to Humean skepticism and Wittgensteinian silence, it returns to "Ontological Discourse," in which speaking about God and the unseen is not meaningless but constitutes meaning itself.

## 11. Positivism and Theology

For positivists, theology is a form of metaphysics, indeed, its highest form, but since its propositions are not empirically testable, they are considered meaningless. Based on the

verification principle, they regard only two types of propositions as meaningful: "Analytic propositions, whose truth is logically necessary and empirical propositions, which can be examined through observation and experience." Consequently, any proposition that is neither analytic nor empirical, including religious and metaphysical propositions, is considered nonsensical and devoid of meaning (Warnock, 2001 AD/1380 SH: 104). One destructive consequence of the verification principle was the identification of metaphysics and theology with nonsense (Khorramshahi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 33).

Positivists argue that if theology cannot avoid concern with metaphysical issues, it must be wary of any philosophical principle that rejects metaphysics. If metaphysical discourse is meaningless when it attempts to say something about reality because it cannot be verified, then theological discourse must also be meaningless. Despite claims of neutrality, analytic philosophers effectively reject the possibility of a valid language referring to any transcendent reality, affecting not only metaphysics but also religion, theology, and scripture (Irving, 2011: 104).

Hume's criticisms were mainly directed against natural or rational theology. He believed that arguments beginning from empirical premises can yield only probable conclusions; therefore, the necessary existence of God cannot be proven. Hence, belief in natural theology is mistaken. A Christian cannot prove faith, and many scholars welcomed Hume's conclusion that religion ultimately rests on faith and divine revelation (Hume, 1979: 38).

The fundamental dispute over the logical intelligibility of theological statements, about the soul, God, the afterlife, and similar issues, provoked major reactions. Antony Flew argued

that the instability of the verification principle lies in the question of which empirical observations could count against theological claims. If none can, then such claims lack real meaning (Mircea, 1987: 89).

In radical empiricism, the function of philosophy becomes distinguishing meaningful from meaningless claims rather than true from false ones. According to the verification principle, a proposition is meaningful only if it is analytic or empirically verifiable. Other assumptions are rejected as meaningless, including those of metaphysics, ethics, and theology. Logical positivists, therefore, challenged not only arguments for religious beliefs but their very significance. No proposition about God's existence or nonexistence can be meaningful, since it lacks "Literal" or "Factual" meaning (Kegan, 1922: 77).

According to Wittgenstein's doctrine, theology is not simply false or obsolete. The idea he derived was that meaningful propositions are analytic and logically certain, reducible to elementary propositions corresponding to simple facts (Wittgenstein, 1922: 52).

Ayer held that "God exists" and "God does not exist" are both metaphysical and meaningless statements about which truth or falsity cannot be discussed. This distinguishes a positivist from an atheist: the atheist considers "God exists" false, whereas the positivist regards it as neither true nor false but meaningless (Ayer, 1946: 116).

Ayer also analyzes statements such as "x is real." Idealists claim "x is real" or "x exists" (where x denotes an object) is equivalent to "x is perceived," implying that unperceived things cannot exist. Realists reject this, arguing that the concept of reality is unanalyzable (ibid.).

Berkeley held that material things cannot exist unperceived and that an object is nothing

but a bundle of sensible qualities, yet also claimed sensible qualities can exist without being sensed, an apparent contradiction. He resolved this by positing that God perceives everything. Critics argue that propositions affirming the existence of material objects have undeniable significance and cannot be reduced to divine perception (ibid: 94-95).

From the positivist perspective, myth, metaphor, and analogy are not literally true and resist logical analysis, yet this does not make them false. The language of theology lacks material or literal reference because it expresses the dramatic nature of religious language (Geddes, 1955: 38, 174). Still, it can convey truth. Another form of thought reveals mysteries (Foster, 1957: 15). If reality presents itself in dramatic form, truth may require dramatic language. Philosophy must find language suitable for expressing all forms of experience (Urban, 1939: 627). Theology cannot ignore human language; otherwise, it loses connection with religion (ibid: 576). Religious language must have real capacity. Urban argues that the problems of language culminate in metaphysics; the possibility of theology depends on the possibility of metaphysical language (ibid: 629-630). Art and science might proceed without metaphysics, but theology cannot (Vide, 1955: 38, 4). Even when theology approaches the logical abstraction of metaphysics, it must retain poetic elements: God may be logical, but His relation to the world and humanity cannot be expressed purely logically. Hence, theology must preserve a dramatic dimension in its reasoning and descriptions (Urban, 1939: 627).

## 12. Theology in the Qur'an

Theology in the Qur'an is founded upon divine unity, knowledge, and revelatory rationality. In contrast to anti-metaphysical approaches such

as positivism, the Qur'an presents an epistemological system in which reason, revelation, and experience are harmoniously employed in the path toward knowing God. Within this system, faith in the Qur'an is not merely emotional but a cognitive and rational phenomenon grounded in the observation of order and harmony in the universe (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1996 AD/1417 AH: 14, 362).

According to Avicenna, direct knowledge of the divine essence is impossible because attributes such as "Necessary Existence," "Power," and "Knowledge" are not material qualities but essential implications of the Necessary Being, beyond empirical categories (Avicenna, 2011 AD/1391 SH: 560-569). Thus, the Qur'an and Islamic philosophy agree in denying comprehensive knowledge of God's essence. This view forms the basis of Qur'anic negative theology, in which knowledge of God is attained through transcendence and negation of creaturely attributes. The Qur'an states: "There is nothing like unto Him." (al-Shūrā: 11)

Nevertheless, the Qur'an also affirms the possibility of affirmative, existential knowledge of God through His signs and actions. The verse "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and within themselves" (Fuṣṣilat: 53) indicates that knowledge of God proceeds through reflection on nature and the human soul. Thus, against the non-empirical theology attributed to positivists, the Qur'an offers a kind of theological empiricism, where observation of the world is a prelude to knowledge of God.

The most important theological principle in the Qur'an is monotheism. The verse "Had there been in them (the heavens and the earth) gods other than Allah, they would both have been ruined" (al-Anbīyā': 22) presents a rational and systematic argument for divine unity. Ṭabāṭabā'ī interprets this as evidence of a unified order in the cosmos and a rational

proof against the plurality of deities (1996 AD/1417 AH: 14, 362). Contrary to positivist assumptions, this reasoning is accessible to empirical reason and grounded in observed cosmic harmony, an example of Qur'anic revelatory rationality.

At the level of Qur'anic epistemology, three foundational principles govern human discourse about God:

1. Do not speak about God without knowledge (al-A'rāf: 33);
2. Consistency between speech and action (Şaff: 2);
3. The necessity of knowledge for action (al-Isrā': 36).

These principles form an epistemic framework in which knowledge, sincerity, and practical commitment are prerequisites for faith and theological discourse (Abbasiyan Chaleshtari, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 223).

In this framework, knowledge of God precedes faith and religious practice. Imam 'Alī (AS) said: "The beginning of religion is knowledge of Him." Thus, the Qur'an connects rational, experiential, and revelatory dimensions into a model of rational-revelatory theology that regards religion not as meaningless but as an intelligible, existential system.

### 13. Metaphysics in the Qur'an

From the philosophy of religion perspective, Qur'anic metaphysics concerns knowledge of being, God's existence, and His relation to the world and humanity. Some equate metaphysics with "First Philosophy" or theology, the science examining God's essence (Collingwood, 1940: 5). Others define it as the study of beings qua being, not in terms of specific determinations like body, quantity, or quality (Mutahhari, 2015 AD/1395 SH: 1, 139).

Metaphysics has always been the science of being: in Parmenides, being and thought were equivalent; in Aristotle, being as pure actuality; in Islamic philosophy, existence is equated with truth (Fārābī, 2000 AD/1379 SH: 77). In this context, "Metaphysical Monotheism" in Sufī thought interprets the Qur'anic principle "*lā ilāha illā Allāh*" as a metaphysical doctrine (Shah Kazemi, n.d.: 2).

Islamic metaphysics develops within religious and epistemic considerations, centering on the triadic relation among God, the human, and the world. Humans, as God's vicegerents, observe cosmic signs and judge aspects of creation, guiding action toward ultimate reality (Ashfaq, 2021: 72).

From the philosophy of science perspective, metaphysical discussions can be analyzed and compared scientifically. Religion can provide a metaphysical framework conducive to scientific progress while maintaining divine sovereignty over cosmic truth (ibid: 91).

The Qur'an presents nature as a divine sign and invites reflection to grasp ultimate purposes. It refers to various metaphysical realities: divine control over natural processes, the glorification of elements, angelic roles in revelation, and the determination of sustenance and lifespans (Fuṣṣilat: 11; al-Nāzi'āt: 15).

Observation and experience are paths to knowledge, but not the only ones; experience gains meaning alongside reason and revelation (Fuṣṣilat: 53). Thus, Qur'anic epistemology is empirical-metaphysical.

A key Qur'anic metaphysical principle is the unity of divine action: "All agencies depend on God, and no act occurs without His will." (Mullā Şadrā, 1981: 2, 216) This underlies understanding the sacred harmony of nature and divine will (Hasani, 2010 AD/1389 SH: 20).

The Qur'an uses imagery and symbolism to convey metaphysical concepts. Sensory images

express transcendent meanings (Sayyid Qutb, 1991 AD/1412 AH: 45; Rostami, 2017 AD/1397 SH: 57). The verse "To Allah belong the east and west; wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah" exemplifies metaphysical imagery (Ashfaq, 2021: 89).

### Findings and Conclusions

This study shows that positivism, by rejecting non-empirical propositions, deems metaphysics and theology meaningless. Though influential in refining philosophical methodology, it fails to explain spiritual and transcendent dimensions. Positivists overstepped their own logical limits by making ontological claims about meaninglessness, whereas their principle is linguistic-epistemological, not ontological.

In contrast, Islamic philosophy and Qur'anic theology, drawing on reason, experience, and revelation, offer a comprehensive account of reality. The Qur'an gives metaphysics a central place, creation, soul, resurrection, and human purpose, presenting it as life-guiding rather than abstract.

Comparing Islamic philosophers (Avicenna, *Fārābī*, *Mullā Ṣadrā*) with Hume and Ayer shows their fundamental difference lies in the possibility and necessity of metaphysics. Eliminating metaphysics narrows human intellectual and spiritual horizons, whereas Qur'anic theology shows metaphysics as the foundation of thought, ethics, and meaning.

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«مقاله پژوهشی»

## بازاندیشی در نسبت مابعدالطبیعه و الهیات قرآنی در پرتو نقد پوزیتیویسم و تحولات فلسفه علم سده بیستم

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### چکیده

این پژوهش به بازخوانی نسبت میان مابعدالطبیعه، الهیات قرآنی و دیدگاه پوزیتیویستی می‌پردازد و می‌کوشد با تکیه بر تحولات فلسفه علم در سده بیستم، مبانی معرفت‌شناختی و هستی‌شناختی هر یک را تبیین و نقد کند. دیدگاه پوزیتیویسم با نفی مفاهیم غیرتجربی، قلمرو معرفت را به تجربه‌ی حسی محدود می‌کند، در حالی که الهیات قرآنی بر وحدت عقل، وحی و شهود تأکید دارد. در این میان، تأملات ویتگنشتاین متأخر درباره‌ی زبان دینی و نیز دیدگاه‌های فیزیک‌دانانی چون هایزنبرگ و پلانک نشان می‌دهد که علم و فلسفه بدون پیش‌فرض‌های متافیزیکی قابل فهم نیستند. بر این اساس، پژوهش حاضر استدلال می‌کند که قرآن کریم با تأکید بر غیب، روح و مراتب وجود، تصویری عقلانی و جامع از واقعیت ارائه می‌دهد که می‌تواند نقدی فلسفی بر تجربه‌گرایی پوزیتیویستی به شمار آید. نتیجه‌ی تحقیق آن است که بازفهم رابطه‌ی عقل و وحی، راهی برای احیای متافیزیک و معنا در عصر علم‌گرایی فراهم می‌کند.

### واژه‌های کلیدی

مابعدالطبیعه، پوزیتیویسم، فلسفه علم، تجربه‌گرایی.

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