

## The Problem of Relativism and Its Implication on Contemporary Issues in Islam Based on Al-Attas' Worldview Theory

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### Abstract

The relativism problem –allegedly has become a frightening specter for a stable religious and social existence. Relativism which believes there is no absolute truth; the truth is relative, raises a problem by denying the existence of God's truth and declaring that human is the measure of all things. Even though human statements, when viewed from this review, also become very relatively charged. Therefore, an in-depth study of relativism and its implication for Islam must be investigated. This paper tried to provide a solution problem of relativism by using the worldview theory from Al-Attas, which can guide humans to know the direction and purpose of their behavior in viewing actual reality. The authors used a qualitative research method, collected data on the issues raised from various reading sources such as books and journals, and analyzed data using Al-Attas' theory. Critical analysis methods supported by solid historical reviews found that this understanding of relativism triggered other notions that deconstructed the truth claims of Islam as a complete religion and messed up fixed Sharia law '*sawābit*'. Relativism is the root cause of multi-dimensional problems, especially religion and social issues. Therefore, the existence of an ideal moral measure that is universal is necessary and manifest.

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## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the notion of relativism is considered the most significant contributor to the problems of Western thought (Al-Attas, 2001, 2019b). From several statements, 'there is no absolute truth' because every view of truth varies from individual to individual; thus, no general truths can unite. Truth is relative because truth from a human perspective is relative, so the truth is relative (Coliva, 2021). Then, the statement 'humans are the measure of all things' because recognition and knowledge of something are based on individuals who perceive through their senses. Furthermore, humans are relative because every view and statement is different. The consequences of these statements related to all matters that come from human relativism, impacting relativism thought that relativizes everything (Chandra, 2012).

The notion of relativism then spreads, even to something absolute or fixed, such as the policy of limiting child ownership in China, which increased the number of abortions, and the Chinese government's policy towards Uighur Muslims ethnic in anti-extremism laws (Ji, 2014), which resulted in a ban on adherence to religion (Islam), as well as religious thoughts, which distinguished the Qur'an in the form of a book with the current one in the cell phone and resulted in the Qur'an not being memorized and could be read anywhere including in a Lavatory. This understanding also triggers destructive thoughts such as anti-absolutism, individualism, subjectivism, anti-authority, and deconstruction (Boghossian, 2012). It is based on the desire of relativists to be free from attachment, restraints, and rules, both physical and metaphysical, to get happiness, pleasure, and a sense of security, and to be capable of living life easily without difficulty (Shin, 2021). It creates impact and implications for religion and society.

The impact and implications of the thoughts above have influenced religious and social thought. In religion, including in the study of the Qur'an, there is a case of the assumption that the Qur'an is man-made (Muhammad); hence, the Qur'an, which should be holy and true verses, is equated with plain texts (Donald & Borchert, 2006). Furthermore, in the study of hadith, an assumption that hadith is the result of human work; the hadith, which should be the sayings of the Prophet derived from Allah's revelation and has become true, is considered the result of relative human understanding (Madjid, n.d.). Moreover, cases of relativism also occur in the realm of ulema authority: rejections of the interpretations of the Qur'an exegetes '*mufasssirūn*', who should be followed, because they have studied absolute sources, considered limited to mere human activities so that interpretations can be changed as desired (Browsers & Kurzman, 2004; Shahrour, 2000).

It is also the case in religious thought by legalizing religious pluralism. One of the effects is to make inter-religious dialogue an alternative to religious harmony (M. Ali, 2003), which leads to the affirmation of the truth of all religions. This impact also occurs in social life, including equalizing men's and women's positions in the family and society. Hence, a leader (family or community) who should be a man can be led by a woman, even a woman may become an imam and preacher for Friday prayer (Subhan, 1999).

Seeing the negative impact of relativism that will be explained in the next discussion, makes this article very important, considering the efforts to implement relativism in religious and social life. The spirit of relativism is initiated from sophism in the Greek tradition which states that truth is relative and subjective so that everyone has the right to claim their own truth (Damyati, 2020). The real impact that is seen especially for science and understanding of religious and social problems is that there is confusion in understanding the phenomenon, which is so confused that it makes adherents of relative beliefs fail in demonstrating the reality of religious and social plurality (Dascal, 2021). As a result, it undermines belief in religion because it assumes that it is only a manifestation of the same essence. In short, all religions are considered equal and equal in relative truth, and therefore one is free to choose which religion one wants, including conversion or non-religion (Thoha, 2007).

Furthermore, the study of relativism at least has been studied in several studies in the form of journal outputs such as: In his article, Tove explains that the dichotomy between relativism and rationalism in viewing "truth" continues, especially in culture. Thus he concluded that relativist language can be used as a benchmark to overcome the problem. Language and thought are tools for classifying truth based on diverse cultures. Therefore, truth is no longer based on "true" at the cognitive level (Österman, 2021). Lisa Heller, in her article, analyzes relativism initiated by Feyerabend as a 20th-century relativist figure. She explains that Feyerabend reformulated moderate relativism. On the political aspect, relativism must be more moderate, and universal truth is needed. Whereas in the epistemic aspect, pluralism must be accepted to develop cultural equality (Heller, 2016). Zaprul Khan analyzes the significance of internal and external relativism for religious harmony. In his article, he concluded that external relativism is needed to bring about harmony in religion in a country that has a diversity of religious adherents (Zaprul Khan, 2020). Moh. Khoirul Fatih in his article, concludes that the dynamics of universality and relativism in human rights begin when there is a mismatch between human rights norms and the socio-cultural society (Fatih, 2018). Salamah Eka Sussanti, in her article, concluded that pluralism tries to find common ground between plural (relative) religious truths to overcome frictions and clashes between adherents of religions. Faizal, in his article, describes the problem of the relativism doctrine, which is based on the thoughts of Indonesian Muslim scholars. He concluded that not everything can be of relative value and not everything can be said to be absolute. But even so, the two cannot change positions; it should not be relatively absolute and vice versa. Human truth is not relative. Islam answers this accusation that absolute truth can be achieved with the senses, reason, and *khobar ṣādiq* and, indeed, cannot be separated from the guidance of revelation (Fauzi, 2018). In his article, Surya concludes that under certain conditions, with cultural relativism, the government or society can be

considered as not violating human rights even though universal provisions govern them (Oktaviandra, 2022). The research had their respective focus on determining relativism.

The fundamental distinction from some previous studies is seen from the focus, where previous studies explained more about how the dynamics of relativism are associated with religious pluralism problems and human rights problems. This paper is positioned to provide a different perspective and strengthen previous findings. Suppose the articles of Tove and Heller are more anthropocentric (visible world), where moderate relativism needs to be applied at the political-cultural human level. In that case, this paper is theocentric (visible and invisible world), which illustrates the need for moderate relativism on religion, where not all religious or social religious aspects can be confronted with relative truth. At the same time, the author's study emphasizes how worldview (way of view) has an essential role in seeing existing phenomena, especially seeing relativism damage the human view in seeing religious and social phenomena. Therefore, the research focus was different from the previous research. This paper attempted to explain relativism and basic concepts responsible for multi-dimensional degradation events. This problem is circumvented by offering a worldview as a differentiator and savior from destructive relativism. Moreover, the research also seeks to describe the impacts and influences that arise on religion, which are classified into the Qur'an, hadith, scholars, and religious thought, and also the impact on the social realm, which is classified into family and socio-politics.

## METHODS

This research was a critical analysis research that explained the problems related to the notion of relativism. The notion of relativism imported from Western philosophy and culture created an extremely acute contradiction with religion in particular and social life in general. Relativism, which annihilated absolute and relativized everything that exists, made modern humans live full of tragedy and without direction and purpose. The research process employed the *library research* method: researchers collected various reading sources, both books and journals, related to the issues raised (Fauziah et al., 2021).

Viewed from an application point of view, this research is a type of pure research because it is intended for the development of science (Kountur, 2009) and has a primary concern for the continuity and integrity of science and philosophy (Nazir, 2014). Pure research can also be referred to as basic research which is intended to find, develop, prove theories with hypotheses proposed. This basic research is interesting, because it provides conceptual intellectual contributions to problems in society (Rahardjo, 2020). Meanwhile, based on the data managed, this research is qualitative research (Kountur, 2009). In qualitative research, content analysis is closer to discourse analysis which is more intended as a method of data analysis and even more to a method of text interpretation (Rahardjo, 2014). This means that in data analysis, researchers essentially provide interpretation of primary ideas and are confronted with other primary ideas or secondary ideas.

In this research method, the author uses the theory of the concept of worldview to explain a few problems that exist in relativism. The worldview referred to by the author refers to the notion of worldview defined by Syed Naquib al-Attas. From his explanation, there are at least three interesting points in its definition: First, the Islamic worldview has a central point mainly with existence in its totality which includes the visible and invisible worlds. Second, the vision of the Islamic worldview is a survey of metaphysics and knowledge that uncovers the truth, clears confusion and establishes reality and truth. Third, the non-dialectical and non-historicity of the Islamic worldview of the source is expressed as a complete and comprehensive text that provides a clear and profound interpretation of reality and truth (Al-Attas, 2014). By using this worldview theory, the author will carefully analyze the reality problems that exist in relativism (Muslih et al., 2022). Based on the subject matter, according to M. Atho Mudzar, this writing can be categorized in cultural writing. Cultural writing is a writing model that has concerns about cultural thoughts, values and ideas as products of human thinking (Mudzar, 1992). In addition, based on the formulation of the problem, the writing of this scientific paper is related to social, cultural, artistic

and philosophical phenomena in an interdisciplinary manner (Kaelan, 2012).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Understanding Relativism: Definition and Historical Background

The meaning of relativism (in English) can be understood in language and terms. According to language, the word relativism comes from the Latin word *relativus*, which means 'related to'. Something is relative insofar as it is related to something else (Bagus, 1996). Meanwhile, the word relative, according to terms, is a view that states that truth depends on the individual and group that controls it (Merriam-Webster, 1828). The truth has authority or partiality to something. In the Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy, relativism is a rejection of belief or judgment and detachment from the tendency to accept someone (Blaackburn, 2005). Thus, it can be said that rejecting accusations or judgments against someone makes people unsure and unable to judge anything. Hence, according to this view, right and wrong, good and evil, depending on a particular society (Teichman, 1998). Ultimately, an ongoing case is paralyzing all thoughts, judgments, ideas, or views (Blaackburn, 2005).

The early history of relativism emerged when the Sophist group brought their teachings (*sophism*) into Athens in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Athens, which became the center of Greek world civilization during that period, was one of the leading destinations for spreading his views after traveling to various places. The deployment was accepted and attracted the interest of the Athenian people because of their cleverness in speeches, which utilized persuasive ways to attract attention and get many students (Krausz, 2018). Due to the spread of this considered new school of thought, Greece (Athens) began to be aware of the diversity of other cultures and accepted them in contributing. Finally, they tended to reject the old-fashioned and accept the new from other cultures (Neufeldt, 1996). However, this group had negative views or values toward Greek culture at that time because many traditional values in religion and religious morality made them stubbornly reject established conventions, for instance, religion, etc., in their words and actions when teaching their students. Therefore, the relativism of truth was concluded as a valid teaching method (Zarkasyi, 2012).

One of the most influential sophist figures in the spread of relativism was Protagoras (de Ronde & Massri, 2023). His ideas are considered to have contributed significantly to the formation of relativism. These ideas include metaphysics, claiming he does not know the gods because of human limitations (Audi, 1999). It takes him on trial and to be expelled from Athens. Another idea is about the truth that makes humans the center point of truth. He says, "humans are the measure of all things, -of things that they are, and -of things that they are not" (Audi, 1999). It can be interpreted that humans are the measure of everything that exists and does not exist. Thus, the truth, according to Protagoras, is subjective. It is due to the judgment of right and wrong is based on the individual who sees it. Hence, the truth has no objective and universal value.

However, Protagoras' views on truth received sharp criticism from Plato in his work *Theaterus*, which focused on two problems. The first problem: his statement confuses what is right and wrong (Fleischacker, 2021). Second, the statement "all truth is relative" has created problems for itself. Perhaps, the statement is wrong because everything is relative. Plato's criticism then made the development of relativism hampered and passive. If paying attention, at this time, the phenomenon that exists is more concerned with methods (persuasive) to gather students, while the truth that is produced is more subjective that comes from humans. It impacts the rejection of everything metaphysical, such as God, because, for them, humans will not be able to know that (Chappell, 2019).

In modern times, the notion of relativism is seen in David Hume's statement written in his essay entitled *A Dialogue* (1751) he said, "the principles that people think about in moral matters are always the same, even though the conclusions they often draw are very different" (Hume, 1972). In this case, Hume rejects the existence of a universal standard of morality that applies, i.e., when religious and philosophical authorities determine the value system (Shomali, 2011). This

understanding also received support from Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, who considered that what is outside the world or within humans is nothing and has no purpose, so all views and actions are considered universally correct (Shomali, 2011), such an assumption is commonly called Nihilism (Zarkasyi, 2012).

Nihilism's view was initiated when Nietzsche saw adherents of Christianity as slaves of a God with limited nature, yearning for a God whose power is unlimited. Thus, he viewed that it makes humans not free to act (Statkiewicz, 2018). Therefore, he declared God is dead as a form of rejection of all values from God, which considered humans to be their Gods. Then, Nietzsche describes the reality of human beings at the time, wholly influence and control or will to power because every individual always wants to get honor, recognition, and attention more than others (Zarkasyi, 2012).

If observed, currently, the authority and values of truth that are fixed and absolute tend to apply no longer. It is due to human limitations to reach something that comes from God; thus, nothing can be trusted from reason, and in the end, the truth itself does not exist (Santoso, 2014). The perspective of human conclusions is put forward, so objective and universal truth are insignificant. Finally, knowledge is not always to find the truth but how that knowledge can be used for oneself (self-interest) (Santoso, 2014).

In the Post-modern era, the notion of relativism can also be seen from the thoughts of several figures, including Michel Foucault, who is known for his rejection of the universality of knowledge. The influence of this understanding can be perceived from the assumption that knowledge is not metaphysical, transcendental, or universal but based on time and place (Maksum, 2014). Furthermore, this notion also gets support from Jean Baudrillard, who is known for his views on present reality, simulacra, and hyper reality. He describes how people's lives nowadays are filled with media, simulations, and hyper reality (Maksum, 2014).

Current's society is dominated and controlled by the media, industry, and production, aggravating the public to see the real things. There is no definite measure of what is referred to as reality (Fleischacker, 2021). The existence (being) is only a simulation; there is no actual reality (actually exists) because there is only hyper reality. If we pay attention, knowledge in the post-modern era depends on time and place, so the truth can change and is not fixed. It has an impact on the rejection of facts or reality. Ultimately, the method is more valid than the results being authoritative (Trisakti, 2017).

Based on the explanations above, it can be seen that the background to the emergence of relativism is the rejection of absolute metaphysical truths, such as; moral values, religious teachings, etc., to prioritize human dignity and liberate humans from the shackles of slavery to religion (God), by making humans the measure of all things and even considering humans to be God himself. It makes no such thing as an error, or everything is correct even though it is illogical and cannot be justified, accepting something contradictory.

### **The Concept of Relativism**

The basic concept of relativism can be known from its view of truth and reality. In this case, reality and truth are thoughts about the physical world and human involvement in the historical, social, political, and cultural, which are limited to the visible world (Heit, 2016). According to relativists, the truth corresponds to or matches reality, and this reality is rational and empirical or based on reason and human sensory experience. Whereas its reality is in the physical realm and can be observed through the five senses, its existence changes based on history, culture, space, and time (James W. Sire, 2009).

Therefore, it can be seen that relativism prioritizes the physical realm so that views of truth and reality must appear and be rational and empirical. The consequence of this assumption is that any non-physical truth is rejected (Zhang et al., 2023). It causes relativists to distinguish between truth (metaphysics) and reality. The truth is unattainable. The one that can be achieved in reality. Indeed, the reality is the truth. Even though the truth can be achieved from reality itself, and is an

inseparable unity. This concept can be categorized into two senses of relativism: understanding of cognitive relativism and ethical relativism. Ultimately, the two will be interconnected and lead to a meeting point: the relativity of truth and reality. It means that truth and reality will not find their essence (Al-Attas, 2014; Ihsan et al., 2022).

The definition of cognitive relativism is a view that rejects absolute thoughts or statements. According to him, there are no universal truths in the world's knowledge. The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy explains that there are no universal truths about the world (Audi, 1999). Thus, it can be said that cognitive relativism believes that every human thought is always different in viewing something, for instance, there is a difference between young children and adults when viewing the fire. There are also those based on differences in time or place, such as traveling to Mecca by airplane, which is more efficient than land and sea trips, which take up to months (Armour, 2021).

Considering these differences, adherents of cognitive relativism conclude that there is no longer generally accepted truth; there are only differences in interpretation and conclusion. It violates the notion that everyone knows and is aware of universal truths. As revealed by George Edward Moore, "...that snow is white is true, or that snow is white" (Armour, 2021). No one denies the truth that snow is white, humans will die, the father is male, and the mother is female, as a universal and absolute truth (Fauzi, 2018).

Cognitive relativism views reality and truth based on everything changes. In this case, reality has historical value, space, and time to produce a view of the truth that is not fixed or changing (Massimi & De Bianchi, 2013). The truth is not absolute or fixed but relative and constantly changing. It triggers the subjectivity of truth or freedom in determining the truth. This assumption encourages the notion that all the truths are before him. As stated by a contemporary philosopher, Rorty, who says, "... the truth is no more and no less than the best idea we currently have about how to explain what is going on" (Scott Davis, 2009).

When viewed from this statement, something that appears and is seen before each individual is used as a basis for seeing reality in determining subjective truth; as explained in Plato's book *Theaetetus*, "The way things appear to me, in that way they exist for me; and the way things appear to you, in that way they exist for you" (Farid, 2018). Even though not all reality has to be seen, but also those that are objective. That objective is universal, and universal never leads to real objects. Real objects are only sparks of universal reality, as in Islam which makes *al-haqq* a universal reality or a reality of existence that must exist in every real object. Then, what is called *al-haqq* is God and his name and attributes (Al-Attas, 2014).

Meanwhile, the notion of ethical relativism is the view that there are no universally correct moral principles. The truth of all moral principles is relative to cultural or individual provisions (L. Pojman, 1996). Such statements were affirmed by Ruth Benedict, who stated that no moral rules apply universally, so what is considered morally good in a society is determined by people's beliefs who have been institutionalized and people with different cultural experiences (Benedict, 1934). From this statement, it can be seen that ethical relativism believes that there are differences in each group, society, and culture; thus, morality is not fixed for him because every judgment on morals varies from place to place. It violates the notion that there are universal moral truths or at least one universal moral truth (Shomali, 2011), as Pojman mentions, "although cultures differ in their moral principles, some moral principles have universal validity. For instance, if a culture does not recognize an obligation to prevent gratuitous crimes that principle is still true, and the culture must follow it" (L. P. Pojman, 1996). The statement indicates that ethical relativism cannot violate that there is no universal moral truth entirely because every moral crime that threatens and harms others is a truth that everyone recognizes. Such stealing, killing, and destroying are universally recognized moral values.

In his view of truth and reality, ethical relativism adheres to the statement, "everything is different". Reality is the difference as well as the diversity of culture, society, and ethnicity when considering the truths that are diverse and different. The truth is not one but varies based on the

group or society. Society has the right to determine its moral norms (Shomali, 2011), and morals are a cultural agreement in society (Donaldson, 1992).

In this case, the Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy divides the notion of ethical relativism into two types: first, conventionalism states that moral principles apply relative to particular cultural or societal conventions or agreements. Furthermore, the second type is subjectivism, which states that individual choice determines the validity of moral principles or what applies. The truth comes from every individual who understands what is happening before him. As Ernest Hemingway wrote, "so far, about morals, I only know that what is moral is what you feel good after, and what is immoral is what you feel bad after" (Audi, 1999). It can be interpreted that a person is said to be moral if he is good to him. Otherwise, what is not suitable for him is immoral. Thus, the truth corresponds to personal feelings. Personal feelings and what he sees determine whether a person's morals are good or bad. This view makes relativists conclude that no universally applicable moral principles apply everywhere and at all times (Audi, 1999).

If we compare the basic principles of relativism with the concept of The Death of Author initiated by Roland Barthes; He explained that the role of the author is increasingly invisible (like a toy disappearing at the edge of the stage), this is not just a historical fact or a matter of the art of writing. But there is a paradigm shift that previously the author had full control in giving meaning to his own writing, shifting to the author could not be present in the writing he made (Denzim & Lincoln, 1994).

Barthes' argument resonates with Schleiermacher's, "an interpreter will be able to understand the text as well as or even better than the author himself and understand the author of the text better than he will understand himself" (Schleiermacher, 1992). In its application, the practice of hermeneutics is required to doubt all truths that come to him. They are required to be skeptical, and plunged into a hermeneutical circle where meaning will always change. They believe nothing is permanent, except change itself. The view of hermeneutics is closely related to relativism. So it can be concluded that Barthes also adheres to relativism (Arif, 2008).

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that relativism believes there is no absolute truth. However, it is relative and constantly changes according to time, place, and how an individual or group evaluates it. Then, he also believes that there is no truth and that the truth is fought for or is considered the most correct because all truths are different. All are considered valid according to a particular group or society. It is because relativism puts forward the senses and ideas in viewing reality that can change according to time and place (Azhary, 2015). The view of reality can change according to time and place and is valid if accurate, which impacts rejecting something metaphysical, universal, and fixed.

## **Problems and Implications of Relativism on Contemporary Issues in Islam: Refer Theory of Worldview**

A previous explanation can be understood as the main problem of relativism, which lies in its perspective on truth and reality. The discussion of truth and reality in the Islamic worldview cannot be understood in a dualistic way. This is because although it involves two elements, one element stands alone while the other element relies on it. Because one element is absolute, while the other is relative; one is real and the other is an explanation of the real one (Al-Attas, 2019b). Relativism, perspective also emphasizes the physical realm so that views of truth and reality must appear and be rational and empirical; hence, any non-physical truth is rejected. It causes relativists to distinguish between truth (metaphysics) and reality. In contrast to Islam, reality '*al-ḥaqīqah*' and truth '*al-ḥaq*' in Islam are not only in the notion of the physical world and human involvement in history, social, political, and culture as contained in the Western concept of the world, which is limited to the visible world (Maurya, 2021).

Reality and truth in Islam are interpreted based on a metaphysical study of the visible and invisible world. The Islamic view of life includes a view of the world and the hereafter (relative and absolute reality). The world aspect must be connected deeply to the hereafter aspect, which has

ultimate and final significance (Al-Attas, 2014). The relativist distinction between metaphysical truth and physical reality emerges from thoughts derived from both relativisms, cognitive, and ethical. In cognitive, they include rejecting the fixed; everything is subject to change, and anti-authority (Ashton, 2021). Whereas in ethics, they include all truths are different, subjectivism, deconstruction and emphasize methods rather than results (Forsyth & O'Boyle, 2011); then, these thoughts have an impact on religion (Islam), as in the study of the Qur'an, Hadith, religious thought, and also affect social life such as in the family, society, and politics. It will be explained in the following discussion.

### *Study of the Qur'an*

The impact of relativism on studying the Qur'an can be seen in one of the controversial Egyptian Muslim scholars, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd. He is known for his views on the Qur'an, which sparked controversy and debate. One of his views states that the Qur'an is a linguistic text and a cultural product. He states in his book *Naqd al-Khittab al-Dīnī*:

The Qur'an, which has become the centerpiece of our discussion so far, is a religious text that is fixed 'Ṣābit' from the point of view of its pronunciation, but from the point of view of interacting with the human mind and becoming a 'concept/ context', it loses its uniqueness of the setting. Then, the fixed text shifts into a variety of meanings. Because a fixed nature is part of the absolute nature of the sacred, however, humanly, he is relative and changeable (Zayd, 2007).

The statement above reveals that Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd has rejected the provisions of the Qur'an as revelation and considers the Qur'an to be no longer absolute from God but the result of relative human perception. Thus, all forms of interpretation can be interpreted according to his wishes. In his attempt to relativize the Qur'an, he distinguishes *naṣ* 'texts' and meanings, which require understanding, explanation, and interpretation, and *muṣḥaf* 'books', which refer to aesthetic and mystical objects (Zayd, 1990b). The Qur'an is not a *muṣḥaf* because it is considered something (the talk of Allah) beyond human scientific investigation's reach and can lead to mythological views (Ichwan, 1999), it is only a *naṣ* 'text' (Zayd, 1990a).

These opinions were initiated by the notion that the textuality of the Qur'an necessitates the use of scientific tools, i.e., modern textual studies. Conversely, an abandonment will lead to freezing and fixation; thus, it will be easily manipulated according to a person's or reader's ideological interests (Ichwan, 2001). The text of the Qur'an is scientific. The outcomes of studies are relative when it is seen from a human perspective and become a human text. As Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd said, "from the event that the text was revealed and read by the prophet, it is transformed from a divine text into a human concept or text, as it directly changes from revelation 'tanzīl' to interpretation 'tāwīl'" (Zayd, 1990b).

In reality, the text was created from the Arabic language and culture at that time, then followed by human interaction, and the meaning of the text can be renewed. In short, the text of the Qur'an is a cultural product formed over twenty years of socio-cultural reality (Sukidi, 2009). The phase of its appearance is called the formation phase, and the current phase is called a formed phase, in which the Qur'an has been developed and becomes a new culture (Zaid, 2007). However, even though the texts of the Qur'an are in Arabic and some speak about the culture of that time, the Qur'an is not subject to culture. The Qur'an overhauled it and built new patterns of thought and civilization (Husaini, 2018), so the Qur'an and Islamic law made Arabs of high civilization value (Al-Ghazali, 1997). It impacts the notion that the Qur'an is only a human text '*naṣ insānī*', so its position is the same as other texts in culture (Zayd, 1994), and it is open to anyone interested in interpreting the Qur'an (Bayan, 2010).

To demonstrate the relative results of the interpretation, i.e., the suitability of the Qur'an exegete's reasoning with those situations, they read the text to produce the appropriate interpretation. Meanwhile, if we read the text with our minds and are supported by our times, we

will get different interpretations. In this case, the Qur'an develops according to the times. Thus, it is seen that there is no agreement on the meaning of the verse. It made Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd reject the provisions of the Qur'an as a revelation that was believed and true and considered it an ordinary human text '*naṣ insānī*' and a product of Arabic culture '*muntāj ṣaqāfi*'; hence, its truth was relative based on differences in understanding of text and culture. Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd applied the method of literary studies or literary criticism in understanding and studying texts (Zayd, 1990b).

Furthermore, the Qur'an is made as a literary work that has a history and is ongoing, while literary works are a product of a particular society. Thus, he concludes that the Qur'an is a cultural product (Zayd, 1990b). He also applies the hermeneutical method to obtain meaning and understanding under developments nowadays as states, "taking an understanding of the text and *ta'wīl* by releasing original historical understandings of society to gain more humanist and advanced understandings" (Zayd, 1994). Hence, Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd prioritized methods rather than the results of applying them. Thus, the historicism approach applied, positioning the Qur'an, which was previously a revelation, was changed to merely ordinary texts that could not be separated from the history, situation, and conditions of its development (Donald & Borchert, 2006).

As for the worldview of Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, the method of hermeneutics in the interpretation of the Qur'an is irrelevant when presented. This is because the authenticity of the Qur'an itself which is a reality (*tanzīl*) derived from *Kalāmullah* regarding His nature, concerning His creatures, the relationship between man and his God, leading man to the right path, and bringing the commandments that were later conveyed through his Messenger about the commandments and prohibitions from God will be questioned. Even though the Qur'an is a revelation that cannot be changed or interpreted carelessly (Al-Attas, 2019c). It also refers to the view that in Islam, there is no need for an overhaul, a change that leads to more perfection than is currently established. Therefore the deconstruction of meaning and language in the Qur'an will certainly cause damage, because it seeks to change something that is fixed with uncertain interpretation (Al-Attas, 2019a).

The impact of hermeneutics is explained by Adian Husaini who was a disciple of al-Attas. He explained that when the concept of the text Qur'an is dismantled, and relinquished its position as *Kalāmullah*, it will be treated like a regular text that allows for biased interpretation, which can be adapted to the interests of the dominant culture (West). These are among the real effects that the hermeneutic method is used as a method of interpreting al-Qur'an (Husaini & Shalahuddin, 2004).

### ***Study of Hadīth and Ulema***

Besides studying the Qur'an, the influence of relativism also spreads to thoughts about hadith, which can be seen from one of the leading Islamic scholars from Syria, Muḥammad Syahrūr. According to him, the hadith resulted from the Prophet's interaction with specific events and situations at his time (a product of history) and was an initial understanding of the *aḥkām* 'laws' verses in the Qur'an, so he concluded that hadith was not a revelation from God. He rejects the prophet's words, i.e., "*wahyu-yūḥā*" because he considered the Prophet Muhammad a prophet (herald/message) and a human who lived on earth, and the Prophet never ordered to collect and write hadith. Even the prophet and his companions did not consider it a revelation (Syahrur, 1990). This erroneous understanding of the person of *Rasūlullah* best on Muḥammad Syahrūr then led to a polemic against the schools of *fiqh*. Syahrur conveys, *kitābullah* is enough, nothing else is needed to understand it. The key is inside, not outside. Then, we do not need Abu Hurairah. We do not need Ibn Abbas".

He conveys that the *fiqh* methodology rests on awareness: the Prophet's message is relevant at every time and place, not only for the 7<sup>th</sup>-century Hijri society. Thus, it needs to be adapted to today's society (Syahrur, 2000). He recommends understanding it in a new light; in terms of worship, *mu'āmalah* 'social laws', and morals and no longer blindly following the existing schools of *fiqh* such as Ḥanāfī, Mālikī, Syāfī, and Ḥanbalī. Hence, Muḥammad Syahrūr initiated the need to initiate new *fiqh* (Muqtafa, 2003). Then, he offered the theory of *ḥudūd* 'limits' as an alternative

to *ijtihād*. This theory consists of a lower limit '*al-ḥadd al-adna*' and an upper limit '*al-ḥadd al-a'la*'. This theory triggers a new perspective on the recommendation to wear the headscarf contained in the QS. Al-Aḥzāb: 59, which means, "O Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and the wives of the believers, let them stretch their headscarves all over their bodies. Thus, they are more easily recognized. Hence, they are not disturbed". This verse is a form of teaching, not a shari'a, and was sent down in Medina to be safe from two disturbances, namely weather and social disturbances, which are local traditions so that they are not ridiculed (Syahrur, 2000). He applies the maximum and minimum limit methods to this verse. The maximum limit covers the entire body except for the face and palms, while the minimum limit covers only the *juyūbi* (cleavage, armpits, genitals, and buttocks). Meanwhile, it does not include the private parts and only conforms to community traditions (Syahrur, 2000).

The relative content of Syahrūr's thoughts was increasingly visible in his *ijtihād* view. He stated that the accuracy of *ijtihād* is determined by its suitability with reality. Consequently, the results of *ijtihād* can be seen as trustworthy and accepted along with objective reality when carrying out historical readings. Thus, understanding and compatibility with objective reality measure how far the interpretation or reading of hermeneutics is right or wrong (Syahrur, 2008). He emphatically stated that the Prophet and the scholars were held in high esteem because they became interpreters of revelation based on the light of their intellectual capacities and worldviews. Nevertheless, contemporary Muslims should read the text based on their worldview instead of glorifying their interpretation (Syahrur, 2004). It caused Syahrūr to reject several hadiths of the Prophet Muhammad even though Bukhārī, Muslim, and others narrated them (Syahrur, 2000).

Thus, it can be seen that Syahrūr rejected the Hadith's provisions as the second reference after the Qur'an, whose absolute truth is the same as the Qur'an. He also rejected the ulema's authority (anti-authority) as interpreters and *mujtahid* in determining *fiqh* law. He has changed the position of hadith and the role of the ulema in interpreting, which interprets revelation adapted to the culture, so a new interpretation is needed to suit the current culture. It was based on the method used by Syahrūr. He applied a linguistic method with a scientific-historical approach to understanding texts. The scientific-historical approach is critical in linguistic studies because grammar has changed throughout human history (Syahrur, 2003). Then, he also applied hermeneutics in interpreting the Qur'an and Hadith to get an understanding based on today's times. Hence, Syahrūr received support from B. Hallaq, who stated that Syahrūr's views in interpreting the Qur'an and Hadith are more logical and stronger because the method employed corresponds to the social context (Hallaq, 2000). Therefore, Syahrūr put forward Western methods so that the results of his research were also adapted to today's times.

Then if we examine using the worldview of al-Attas, we will find that the *sunnah* (hadith of the Prophet) contains everything exemplified by the Prophet as *uswah* 'role model' without anything in vain. As for what the Apostle exemplified contains the essence and truth that cannot be rejected by reason and heart, which through the knowledge and experience of human conscience he will realize his position as His creature (Al-Attas, 2019c). And we also need to realize that the position of the Prophet of Allah as the Prophet of the last days, the Great Lamp that spreads pure light, Divine Mercy for all beings, his character as a measure in judging humans, and the best example for Adam's children and grandchildren (Al-Attas, 2001). Therefore, the existence of other interpretations of the prophet's hadith will stain the sanctity of the Prophet's attitude and damage the understanding of knowing Islam (Al-Attas, 2001).

### **Religious Pluralism Issue**

The influence of relativism also occurs in religious thought, emerging religious pluralism. It can be seen from the statement of one of the well-known Muslim scholars in Teheran, Iran, Seyyed Hossein Nasr. His thoughts support religious pluralism and reject Islam as the truest religion. He said, "no religion has claimed that the world on its level of existence is completely unreal". He also refused that Islam is not a manifestation of God or is called the religion of his choice. He conveyed,

"Islam emphasizes over and over again not how God has manifested Himself but What His nature is (nature in common meaning)" (Nasr, 1994). In this case, we can see how Nasr viewed Islam and rejected it as the best and most accepted religion. As explained in the Qur'an, Surah Ali 'Imrān verse 85 and the hadith of the Prophet narrated by Ad-Daruquthni, which states, "Islam is high, and nothing beats its height". He accepted religious pluralism, which justifies all religions (Nuriz et al., 2021). For him, religious pluralism is certain and God's will, so the assumption that all religions are valid is true and can be followed (Nasr, 1994).

Moreover, he views that every religion has the same doctrine towards Unity, and says, "every religion has been ultimately based on the doctrine of Unity so that in Islam it is said *al-tawhīd*" (Nasr, 1998). Therefore, he stated that in every religion, sacred traditions must be revived and maintained reasonably, without considering one superior to the other. He positioned all religions in the exoteric dimension or interpretation of the esoteric as the essence and primary substance of everything that was manifested (Thoha, 2007), as well as the Islamic religion. Thus, substances born from the absolute have unlimited rights, while in addition to other forms (exoteric), their rights are limited because they are relative (Shuon, 1993). It impacts actions by prioritizing absolute essential substances (esoteric) rather than rituals of worship so that they can carry out worship traditions of other religions because believing in one teaching means that one already believes in other religious teachings. As Nasr stated, all religions are paths leading to the same eternal truth (Nasr, 1998).

The results of Hossein Nasr's relative thinking can be seen in the view that all religions are essentially on the exoteric dimension (Raschid, 1983). It is a form of manifestation of the same esoteric substance. Because religion has been positioned parallel on the exoteric dimension, all religious traditions have the same truth values. He said, "each tradition is based on a direct message from Heaven and is not just the result of the historical continuity of the Primordial Tradition" (Nasr, 1998). It will impact that all religious traditions are relative and no longer have the full right to state the truth because the truth of other religions limits it. It causes Nasr to reject the determination of Islam as a religion that is universal and the most correct of all. Thus, he changed it by assuming all religions are true and none is the most correct because all have a single and universal truth value (Hasib, 2018).

Nasr's view was based on the notion that the development of secularism has reduced the traditions of religions, so it is necessary to restore religions as they should have sacredness by changing the way of understanding religion according to the era of globalization, modern or post-modern era, which have marginalized the role of religion (Hasib, 2018). It caused him to apply a perennial philosophical perspective that considers every religion has one form and substance, namely the esoteric dimension or archetype whose rights are unlimited (Nasr, 1998). In comparison, every religion is in the exoteric dimension, an interpretation of the esoteric, so their rights are limited and relative (Shuon, 1993). Nasr also applied Abrahamic faiths to equate Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Then, Hossein Nasr preferred Western methods, resulting in policies that were humane and in line with today's times.

Then in al-Attas's worldview about the nature of religion, we hold on to the understanding that religion is based on God to humans which was carried out through the medium of revelation revealed through the Prophet Muhammad. From this understanding, we can conclude that Islam is not the result of human contemplation, nor is it a human creation like culture that arises from human efforts in dealing with the natural world around them (Al-Attas, 2001). Therefore, Islam is not the same as any other religion in this world, and it is also not the same as the philosophical customs of Greece and the West (Al-Attas, 2019c).

If there are similarities regarding the understanding of God in the customs of various other religions that are understood and interpreted in Islam. This should not be used as an excuse to state that God, which is interpreted and understood by other religions, is all the same as that believed in Islam. This difference is due to the nature of culture and civilization between Islam and other religions which are also different, so we deny the existence of the understanding of the unity of religions which is considered the correct understanding today (Al-Attas, 2019c).

### ***Family and Society Issue***

Social life has valuable values and qualities and shows the quality of a human being (Hidayati & Huriyah, 2022). Nevertheless, with relativism, social life has inequality, for instance, the incongruity of views related to the position of men and women. One figure who has problems with this view is a Muslim woman from America, Amina Wadud. She is a Muslim feminist figure who attempts to equalize the position of men and women. She considers that gender equality is part of the monotheistic (theological) approach. She says that monotheism is the basic principle employed by Islam; thus, humans (men and women) are in an equal position (Wadud, 1999). She claims, in the interpretation of monotheism, there is an explanation of universal and particular things according to the Qur'an, as explained in the Surah an-Nisā verse 1, which means: "O mankind, fear your Lord who created you from a single person, and Allah created his wife from him...". For Amina Wadud, this verse explains that men and women are the same, considering the primary goal, i.e., the same creation process in the form of the *nafs*, which has no superiority over one another (Mu'ammār & Hasa, 2013). It then brings her view that the difference in sex between men and women is insignificant. She said that the Qur'an tries to eliminate differences between men and women. It aims to help people meet their needs and walk in a straight line. It is explained how Amina rejected the difference in position between women and men (Glapka, 2018). This claim was based on her views on patriarchal culture which marginalizes women; hence, women do not get justice more proportionately. Then, she also viewed that every interpretation of the Qur'anic verses carried out by the previous Qur'an exegete is subjective and nothing is objective "no method of Qur'anic exegesis is fully objective. Each exegete makes some subjective choices" (Wadud, 2001, bk. 45). She said in the Qur'an and Woman, Reading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective that:

The more fact that the Qur'an was revealed in seventh-century Arabia when the Arabs held certain perceptions and misconceptions about women and were involved in certain specific lewd practices against them resulting in some injunctions specific to that culture (Wadud, 1999).

From the statement above, Amina emphasized that the Qur'an merely interprets Arabic culture. Hence, its descriptions were frequently gender-biased and irrelevant to the condition of women today. It caused Amina to reinterpret the interpretation of gender verses with women's experiences (Wadud, 1999). Then, this condition creates the interpretation that women may become priests and deliver preaching *khutbah* for Friday prayer, wearing the hijab is not seen as a religious obligation and religious value but only as self-control. Thus, the hijab may be worn during formal events (Wadud, 2006) to control the men's desires (Wadud, 2006).

The relative value of Amina Wadud's thought lies in a feminist-based interpretation of the Qur'an, which refers to gender equality and justice and rejects the patriarchal system. According to her, it is essential to consider women's experiences in interpreting the Qur'an (Wadud, 1999). Women's experiences are different from men's experiences. The experiences of the two genders must receive equal attention in interpretation. She says:

There is no one strategy, one method, or one process. What works today may be unsuccessful tomorrow. What might work in one cultural circumstance may very form what works in another culture. The necessity for continued efforts to achieve gender justice...(Wadud, 1999).

From the statement above, it can be stated that every interpretation contains cultural values, and every culture is certainly different and will continue to develop according to the times. It causes Amina to reject the provisions of the Qur'an, which are interpreted by Qur'an exegete because she is considered gender biased. Thus, the gender-biased provisions must be changed by reinterpreting them from a woman's perspective or a feminist interpretation (Wadud, 1999). It is because the interpretations carried out by classical Qur'an exegete are often gender-biased and irrelevant to the

conditions of today's women who have complex problems and are different from women in the past. Therefore, it needs to be reinterpreted objectively to keep these interpretations relevant to today's human life. Efforts at deconstruction can also be seen by David S. Powers and Asghar Ali Engineer, who tried to criticize the laws of the roses that existed in the Qur'an (Wardani, 2020). To realize this deconstruction effort, they adopted one of the Western methods for interpreting the verses of the Qur'an, namely by employing the Hermeneutical method (Wadud, 2006), and also a methodological framework for discussing texts and introductory texts (background, perceptions, and conditions) was needed (Wadud, 1999). It can be seen that Amina put more emphasis on the method, thus forgetting and denying previous interpretations to suit the times.

Responding to social problems affected by relativism, logically, namely the human ability to absorb knowledge (Ismail, 2016). Man should already be aware that he has a limit of truth, and if he tries to go beyond it out of ego alone, then he will only gain wrong knowledge. Therefore the real challenge we face today is the destruction of knowledge (Al-Attas, 2019c). The damage to this science obscures our knowledge of the truth, so that ideas like feminism become fertile and free to destroy society. The notion of feminism which is based on its decision on relativism then also raises issues regarding identity (Jeenah, 2006). The crisis of identity makes humans confused to be fair to themselves. He can't put something in its proper place, just as he can't put himself in the proper place until he makes a mistake. Consciously or not, people who have been infected with feminism have been unjust to themselves 'zālim linafsihi' (Al-Attas, 2001).

From the explanation presented, we can draw a conclusion that the explanation above is different from the explanation from the discussion of the previous study. From several discussions in previous studies, especially those that support relativism, we can see their reasoning related to religious pluralism. For them, religious pluralism feels to represent one that is considered absolute with another absolute, whose meeting point lies in that plural which is used to deal with friction and collisions that occur in implementation to distance evil from good. So we need to have a neutral premise in understanding the claims of these religions so as not to arrogantly claim that only the religion is the most correct (Susanti, 2017).

In fact, the concept of religious pluralism is only a delusion whose emergence is based on human experience personally, not from the teachings of the true religion (Islam) (Al-Attas, 2019c). Then, especially with the emphasis on the worldview of Islam as a demarcation line that distinguishes between destructive ideas and which understandings are in line with Islamic teachings. Although it does not rule out the possibility that there are several other works related to the discussion of relativism, but at least some of the works revealed earlier are worthy and important enough to be considered. That way these works will be a valuable reference for the continuity of writing this paper. However, the study of the literature on the problem of relativism still needs to be developed, especially in the big theme of relativism which often deceives us as the idea that feels absolute truth.

## CONCLUSION

In short, the root of the problem above was the influence of immoderate relativism. It began with rejecting a standard decision, triggering other methods used as tools for destruction. One of them was disproportionate hermeneutics. There was nothing to use as a basis for action. Everyone could do anything freely, including reinterpreting the Qur'an and Hadith. In Islam, all actions are not carried out freely but based on the teachings contained in the Qur'an and Hadith. It means Islam accepts the existing provisions in the Qur'an and Hadith. Besides, relativists also crave the freedom to develop and change according to the changing times and periods. In Islam, it has been distinguished between the verses *śawābit* and *mutagayyirāt*. *Śawābit* is an order that is fixed and cannot be changed, so what must be done is to obey and carry out these verses. On the other side, if it is changed and reinterpreted, then something that happens is an imbalance, danger, and damage, such as allowing the *imām* and *khuṭbah* from women. As for *mutagayyirāt*, it is permissible to change and adapt to changing times; however, they must be considered with '*aqīdah, maqāṣid al-*

*syarī'ah*, and other. It means that everyone is not free to change it. If it is changed without reference, there will be hedonism, pragmatism, materialism, and the continuous degradation of values. Looking at a few problems present in relativism, judging from the Islamic worldview of al-Attas, we can conclude that the words of all are relatively meaningful; no one knows about the existence of an absolute God, including the truth of His absolute word. Though *al-ḥaqq min rabbika* 'the truth comes from your God', the truth is from God and is already in space and time. Denying absolute truth indicates his ignorance of what he does not know.

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