

THE DIALECTIC OF PARADIGMS BETWEEN ISLAM AND THE WEST REGARDING THE PURSUIT OF KNOWLEDGE

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Abstract: One of the complex issues in developing scholarly discourse is the dichotomy of knowledge. This research aims to delve into the paradigmatic dialectics viewed through the lens of modern civilization represented by the West and Islamic civilization, often seen as representative of the East, regarding the concept of knowledge. Employing a qualitative approach with descriptive-explanatory analysis of written sources, this study constitutes a literature review. The findings reveal that both Western and Islamic scholarship hold perspectives on knowledge that are challenging to reconcile, with little definite common ground. Consequently, the effort to bridge the dichotomy of knowledge through various paradigms remains tentative. Nevertheless, this should be understood as a positive dialectical process, particularly concerning the future of knowledge. As both the Western and Islamic traditions possess positive doctrines concerning knowledge, it would be more beneficial for the rejection of Western knowledge by Islamic circles to be reconsidered. This proposition arises from the notion that the essence of all knowledge is inherently good and true.

Keywords: paradigmatic dialectics; Islam; West; knowledge

Abstrak: Salah satu hal yang cukup alot dalam perkembangan diskursus dan wacana keilmuan adalah persoalan dikotomi ilmu pengetahuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendalami dialektika paradigmatis dari kacamata peradaban modern yang direpresentasikan oleh Barat dan peradaban Islam yang sering sebagai representasi dari Timur tentang ilmu pengetahuan. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan analisis deskriptif-eksplanatori terhadap sumber-sumber tulisan, sehingga penelitian ini juga merupakan penelitian kepustakaan. Temuan yang dihasilkan adalah kesarjanaan Barat ataupun kesarjanaan Islam, memiliki pandangan terhadap ilmu pengetahuan yang sulit untuk dicarikan dan didapatkan persamaan atau titik temu yang pasti. Oleh karena itu, upaya menjembatani dikotomi ilmu dengan beragam paradigma adalah sesuatu yang tentatif. Meskipun demikian, hal ini harus dipahami sebagai sebuah proses dialektis yang positif, salah satunya demi masa depan ilmu pengetahuan. Karena baik Barat maupun Islam memiliki doktrin-doktrin yang positif dalam memandang ilmu pengetahuan, sehingga secara khusus lebih baik jika penolakan dari kalangan Islam terhadap keilmuan Barat dihentikan. Hal ini ditawarkan karena hakikat setiap ilmu itu baik dan benar.

Kata kunci: dialektika paradigmatis; Islam; Barat; ilmu pengetahuan

Introduction

The progress of a nation's civilization or a country can only be achieved through advancements in knowledge and technology. Historical records can substantiate this statement. In the context of Islam, for instance, many scholars argue that the era of the Abbasid Dynasty marked a period of glory. One compelling reason is that the Abbasid Dynasty was characterized by intellectual life and the advancement of scholarly fields, which were highly developed and progressive. According to Madjid (1992), the Islamic civilization's ability to lead the world for approximately 600 to 800 years is attributed to the advancements in knowledge pursued by the Islamic community.

Similarly, in the West, starting from the Renaissance as a marker of the end of the Middle Ages and the birth of modern society up to the present, the growth and development of knowledge have been rapid. This is evident from the diversity of schools of thought in ontological and epistemological aspects. However, in the Western tradition, the rapid advancement of knowledge requires sacrificing religious values and roles. Cases of conflicts between science and religion due to the discoveries of figures like Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Hypatia, and others prompted scholars to challenge and eventually break away from church dogma (Ferngren, 2000).

If that is the case, it is not an exaggeration to state that progress can only be achieved through intellectualism. However, the coexistence of two civilizations (Western and Islamic) in the present era has positioned the issue of knowledge and its paradigms as complex. Each civilization's viewpoint constructs its understanding of knowledge and paradigms. This is characterized by what is known as the dichotomy of knowledge. However, in reality, knowledge plays a full and significant role in life without the need to excessively question ontological and epistemological aspects in an extremely dichotomous manner.

Building upon these arguments, this study delineates four issues: Western civilization's perspective on knowledge, the relationship between knowledge and modernization, Islamic civilization's approach to knowledge, and the paradigm of Islamic scholarship. The paper begins by discussing knowledge's conceptual boundaries from various scholarly foundations, such

as philosophy (epistemology), history, and sociology. Therefore, this paper is expected to provide a descriptive-explanatory exposition, highlighting themes considered crucial and directly linked to both civilizations.

Method

Considering the data aspect, this study falls under the category of library research, which treats literary materials as the subject of investigation. From an analytical standpoint, this study employs a qualitative analytical perspective that emphasizes a deductive-inductive and logically-scientific process of analysis and inference, excluding quantitative calculations (Kaelan, 2010; Kasiram, 2010; Moleong, 1996; Sugiyono, 2011).

The data sources for this research are obtained from personal collections, including downloaded scholarly articles and books. These data sources are subjected to descriptive-explanatory analysis and a philosophical approach to generate analyses and syntheses regarding exploring and examining Western and Islamic perspectives on knowledge (Azwar, 2014; Mustaqim, 2014). Consequently, procedurally, this study produces descriptive data consisting of written words concerning predetermined sub-subtopics outlined in the introduction.

Results and Discussion

The Essence and Conceptual Boundaries of Knowledge

Knowledge (referred to hereafter as "science" or "knowledge") is the accumulation of human understanding gathered through a process of study that can be accepted by reason or, in other words, can be reasoned. In simpler terms, science is a collection of collective human rationality (Baiquni, 1983). Science represents facts or the re-expression of facts. Complex and seemingly random events and occurrences can be easily comprehended with just a few sheets of written work, charts, sentences, or even a handful of terms (Muslih, 2016).

From the standpoint of the philosophy of science, science is grounded in three philosophical foundations: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. These philosophical foundations serve as the source for deriving scientific paradigms, which subsequently characterize a particular field of knowledge

with its paradigms and body of knowledge. Through these philosophical foundations, science can be divided into nomothetic and idiographic sciences.

At the ontological level, nomothetic science can be understood as the science that stems from the view that reality is singular and partial. In contrast, idiographic science is based on the perspective that the nature of reality is plural and universal. On the epistemological level, nomothetic science aims to establish axioms, principles, laws, or formulas. In contrast, idiographic science strives to be as descriptive, explanatory, and narrative as possible in its process (Kaelan, 2016).

Taking a historical approach, each field of knowledge emerges from specific situations and conditions, making it impossible for any knowledge to be ahistorical. This notion is introduced through the concept of the history of science (not the science of history) by Thomas Kuhn in his work "The Structure of Scientific Revolutions" (1970). Meanwhile, Max Scheler and later Karl Mannheim view the essence of knowledge from a sociological perspective, asserting that all scientific findings are inherently perspectivist (Baum, 1999). With these three foundations, something can be considered knowledge when it encompasses all the principles established, whether philosophically, historically, or sociologically.

Western Civilization's Perspective on Knowledge

When discussing knowledge from a Western perspective, it is inevitable to touch upon the fundamental and logical structures of a field of knowledge and its underlying assumptions. Referring to Archie J. Bahm's opinion, something must possess six fundamental construction and structural elements to be considered as science: 1) problems, 2) scientific attitude, 3) scientific method, 4) activities, 5) conclusions, and 6) influence. The problems referred to by Bahm are those capable of being presented with a scientific attitude and method. Meanwhile, the scientific nature of an attitude and method must encompass conditions such as curiosity, speculation, objectivity, openness, relativity, awareness of problems, proposal of solutions, testing of problems and solutions, and problem-solving that leads to an understanding referred to as conclusions (Bahm, 1980). With this exposition, the discussion of the fundamental structure pertains to knowledge ontology.

Discussing basic assumptions or logical structure leads to epistemological issues within Western civilization. Periodically, the epistemology of science in Western Civilization can be divided into several streams, each significantly impacting the scientific process. To avoid excessive elaboration, this study limits itself to four influential streams: rationalism, empiricism, criticism, and intuitionism.

Rationalism can be understood as a process of human knowledge that teaches that the true source of knowledge is reason, and experience is only used to strengthen rational knowledge. Methodically, this approach questions and doubts everything radically so that something can be called scientific knowledge when it passes the test of doubt. This method is often referred to as a sceptical method or scepticism. The main figure of this stream is René Descartes, famous for his conclusion: "*Cogito, ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am) (Soemargono, 1988; Williams, 1992).

In contrast to rationalism, empiricism arises with the understanding that experience is the source of knowledge. Reason is not the primary source for this stream but rather a processor of material obtained from experience. This stream was pioneered by Francis Bacon and reached its pinnacle in the thinking of David Hume. In fact, as a prominent figure in this stream, Hume radically argued that the rationalist substance and the law of causality as sources of knowledge should be rejected (Kattsoff, 1992; Sudarsono, 2008).

Meanwhile, criticism is a scientific process that begins by first objectively investigating the capabilities of reason or rationality and determining its limits. At the forefront of the critical stream is Immanuel Kant, who played a crucial role in synthesizing rationalism and empiricism. According to Kant (1990), the source of knowledge or the process of knowing is a synthesis between a priori and a posteriori, or between active and dynamic rational activity in constructing and functioning as the forms of knowledge, consisting of categories with the absorption of experience that function as the matter of knowledge and consist of the phenomena of the object. Intuitionism, however, involves direct and immediate ways of knowing. It can also be understood as a higher form of knowledge, distinct from the knowledge presented by the senses and reason (Titus, 1984).

From this discussion, it is emphasized that the process of knowledge and knowing is different and dependent on one's perspective or belief, and Western civilization made progress in knowledge by rejecting the hegemony of the church (religion), leading to the assertion that knowledge can do everything and is more important than faith. The logical consequence is dichotomy and secularization between knowledge and faith (religion), resulting in the positivization or positivism of knowledge.

The Relationship between Knowledge and Modernisation

The rapid development and complexity of knowledge have given rise to monodisciplinary sciences and interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary fields. However, it is regrettable that, as mentioned earlier, knowledge is solely dedicated to scientific pursuits in Western civilisation, often disregarding values and norms. Consequently, the ontological character of knowledge in the Western context tends to be materialistic, mechanistic, and atomistic. In contrast, its epistemological character is rational, empirical, and positivistic, allowing for the possibility of knowledge to be devoid of values.

Nonetheless, no strictly positivistic science in practice implies value-free or neutral knowledge. While ontologically or epistemologically, knowledge could be value-free or neutral; axiologically, it is difficult to find knowledge completely devoid of values due to the influence of motives or intentions when using scientific discoveries. This is evident from the fact that colonialism and imperialism were founded on scientific knowledge, as highlighted in Michel Foucault's concept of the Power-Knowledge Relationship cited by Al Makin (2015).

Moreover, the Western understanding of knowledge began to influence and spread worldwide, including to the Islamic world in the modern era. The term "modern" is complex when linked with knowledge. The development of streams, paradigms, and processes of knowledge in the West has shown a growth in secularism and Westernism, neither of which aligns with Islamic teachings, as critiqued by Nasr (1997). A subsequent thesis is that modernisation is a value-neutral form of Westernization (Mughni, 2001).

According to Madjid (2008), modernisation is more accurately defined as rationalisation. This definition indicates a process of transforming old

patterns of thinking and work that lack rationality into rational patterns. Madjid further explains that the function of modernisation as rationalisation is to achieve maximum utility and efficiency through the latest discoveries in the field of knowledge. Thus, something is considered modern only if it is rational and scientific. Now, how does Islam itself view knowledge?

Islamic Civilization and the Issue of Knowledge

Islam views truth and reality not only as related to the physical world and human involvement in history, society, politics, and culture but also through metaphysical contemplation of both the visible and the unseen world. In this context, the world cannot be detached from the hereafter, and the hereafter cannot be dismissed for worldly purposes (Basuki, 2012). Hence, Islam perceives reality as something both seen and unseen.

Historically, Islamic civilization experienced a period of glory in knowledge, particularly during the Middle Ages (the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties). One of the efforts to advance knowledge throughout Islamic history was the translation and study of works by ancient Greek philosophers (Wilkes, 1977). For Hodgson (1974), the success of Islamic civilization is intriguing because it is rooted in the spirit of the holy scriptures. Many sacred texts, such as the Qur'an and Hadith, highly regard reason (rationale) (Azra, 1998). This led to the development of various scholarly fields by Islamic scholars.

According to Islamic teachings, knowledge is a unity (*unitas*) of divine revelation and human creativity in developing the universe's potential. Islam directs individuals to maximize their abilities in all cultural aspects. Thus, within the Islamic civilization, knowledge can be acquired epistemologically through reason, senses, and intuition. Therefore, knowledge in Islam is a manifestation of utilizing the natural resources provided by God (Nasr, 1997). For example, Islamic art stems from dedication to divine values, whether in architectural forms of mosques, poetry, or the development of knowledge models.

However, from the 13th to the 18th centuries, the field of knowledge in Islamic civilization witnessed decline and backwardness. Several factors contributed to this decline, including rigid thinking, neglect by community leaders, the doctrine of closing the gates of *ijtihad* (independent juristic

reasoning), the destruction of educational and cultural centres (such as Baghdad and Granada), the dominance of Sufism and Ash'ari theology, and more (Majdi, 2019). Furthermore, the dichotomy of knowledge led individuals to prioritize one field of knowledge (religion) over others.

Regarding this dichotomy, al-Ghazali (n.d.) divided knowledge into two categories: *fardlu 'ain* (individual obligation) and *fardlu kifayah* (collective obligation). The first category encompasses knowledge that every Muslim must learn concerning the procedures of obligatory actions, like prayer, fasting, ablution, and similar practices. The second category refers to knowledge collectively obligatory for the community's welfare, such as medicine, astronomy, agriculture, and other practical disciplines. For al-Ghazali, not every Muslim must master the knowledge in the second category. However, throughout the history of Islamic prosperity, no clear distinction is found between religious and general knowledge. These two domains complement and strengthen each other. The knowledge dichotomy emerged from the understanding that general knowledge was introduced from the non-Muslim West (Hielmy, 2003), an understanding that needs to be avoided.

While Western civilization sees the axiological aspect of knowledge as neutral or value-free, knowledge in Islamic civilization must align with religious doctrines. This perspective draws heavily from Quranic texts and Hadith, the primary sources of Islamic teachings. The achievements in the field of knowledge within Islamic civilization are closely connected to these sacred texts, resulting in a dichotomy that emphasizes prioritizing religious knowledge over general knowledge, with the latter being learned only according to practical needs. From this point onwards, the decline of knowledge within Islamic civilization began, eventually leading to attempts to bridge the gap with the West and address the issue of knowledge dichotomy.

The Extremes Spectrum of Paradigms in Knowledge: Islamicization of Knowledge and Islamic Enlightenment

In contemporary times, the issue of the decline and lag of Islamic Civilization compared to Western Civilization in the realm of knowledge has led to various responses. At least three popular knowledge paradigms, particularly in Indonesia, have been used as pathways towards progress and

innovation: the Islamicization of knowledge, the Islamization of sciences, and the integration-interconnection of knowledge. The first paradigm gained prominence among Muslim scholars in the 1970s to the mid-1990s and possibly continues to exist, albeit to a lesser extent. The historical backdrop of the discourse on the Islamicization of knowledge is a response to the separation of religious knowledge and secular knowledge, which was perceived as being introduced by Western Modernity (non-Muslim scholars) into the Islamic world, as well as a reaction to the crisis of thought and education systems affecting the Muslim community (Arifuddin, 2015).

The discourse on the Islamicization of knowledge was initiated and developed by Ismail Raji al-Faruqi and Naquib al-Attas. In terminology, al-Attas employed the term "de westernization of knowledge," while the term "Islamicization of knowledge" was introduced by al-Faruqi (Bagir et al., 2005). In terms of operational practice, al-Attas began the process of Islamicization of knowledge by emphasizing the influence of the Islamic world in the lives of Muslim communities. For al-Attas, the concept of Islamicization of knowledge means liberating humanity from magical, mythological, animistic, nationalist, and cultural traditions (which contradict Islam), as well as freeing knowledge and its language from the influence of secularism (al-Attas, 1993; Zarkasyi, 2005).

Meanwhile, al-Faruqi positions the Islamization of knowledge as a normative and comprehensive framework for individuals and societies, encompassing thought and action, education and practice, knowledge and organization, governance and the people, the present world and the future world. With this conception, al-Faruqi's focus on the Islamization of knowledge is to Islamicize academic disciplines, particularly concerning their methodologies. Al-Faruqi asserts that the Islamization of knowledge can only be achieved by recontextualizing the entire Western knowledge repository within the framework of Islam. Simply put, this is accomplished by writing books across various academic disciplines with insights from Islamic teachings. In other words, the first step of the Islamization of knowledge involves purifying essential Islamic elements from all Western influences. This conceptualization and operational practice are grounded in the principle of tauhid (the unity of God), consisting of five types of unity: the unity of

God, the unity of creation, the unity of truth and knowledge, the unity of life, and the unity of humanity as its epistemological foundation (Abidin, 2006; al-Faruqi, 1982; Nata, 2005).

The descriptions of the versions of Islamization of knowledge by al-Attas and al-Faruqi above demonstrate that there are differentiations between the two, even though they still share the same spirit and vision regarding the principle of tauhid as their epistemological basis. On the other end of the spectrum, Kuntowijoyo (2006) introduces what is known as the "Islamic Enlightenment" as a concept contrasting with the Islamization of knowledge. This is evident from its historical context, where Kuntowijoyo questions the use of the term "Islamization of knowledge" and asserts that human knowledge comprises both "*qauliyah*" (verbal) and "*kauniyah*" (natural) aspects. He also questions the unclear epistemology and methodology of Islam and the relationship between Islam as knowledge and reality/ethics. Hence, it is not an exaggeration to say that the Islamization of knowledge represents one end of the spectrum. In contrast, the Islamic Enlightenment represents the opposing extreme on the other end.

Conceptually, the Islamic Enlightenment is based on three pillars. Firstly, it involves a process of knowledge that moves from the text of the Qur'an towards the social and ecological context of human beings. Secondly, it embraces Islam as a paradigmatic outcome, introducing a new paradigm of integrative sciences that results from the fusion of reason and revelation. Lastly, it perceives Islam as knowledge, encompassing both a process and an outcome. In terms of practical operationalization, the Islamic Enlightenment or Islam as knowledge is formed through several methodical steps: (1) Demystification of Islam: This implies linking the text with its context, creating a correspondence between them. (2) Formulation of Quranic Paradigm Theories: This involves formulating theories based on the Qur'an, particularly in the social sphere. The approach employs both analytical-synthetic methods and transcendental structural theories. (3) Recognition of Humanities within the Qur'an: This step leads to the axiom that knowledge in the Qur'an consists of three forms: *qauliyah* (verbal), *kauniyah* (natural), and *nafsiyah* (self-related). These methodical steps are perfected through integration and objectivization. Through integration, Islam as knowledge

becomes a human intellectual asset intertwined with divine revelation. Objectivization transforms Islam into knowledge that brings mercy to all worlds (Kuntowijoyo, 2006).

Based on the explanations of the Islamization of knowledge and the Islamic Enlightenment, it can be highlighted that the key difference between the two lies in their intellectual operational movement. Islamization of knowledge progresses from context to the text (Qur'an), while the Islamic Enlightenment or Islam as knowledge moves from the text to the context. In other words, the Islamization of knowledge is more reactive, whereas the Islamic Enlightenment or Islam as knowledge is proactive.

Integration-Interconnection of Knowledge: A Middle Path

Another conceptual framework that can bridge the gap of knowledge dichotomy is the idea of integration-interconnection of knowledge. A prominent advocate of this notion is Amin Abdullah. In simple terms, integration-interconnection is an effort to triangulate, not just dialogue, between subjective, objective, and intersubjective values. Subjective values encompass disciplines rooted in religious texts (*hadārat al-nash/nash/bayāni*), objective values are founded on the acuity of reason in understanding the anthropological-sociological reality of diverse eras of religious and cultural pluralism (*hadārat al-'ilm/'aql/burbani*), and intersubjective values pertain to disciplines that delve into the depths of human conscience (*hadārat al-falsafab/qalbb/'irfāmi*) (Abdullah, 2000).

The foundational assumption of the integration-interconnection paradigm is to comprehend the complexity of life's phenomena faced and experienced by humans. Accordingly, any knowledge domain, whether religious (including Islam and other religions), social sciences, humanities, or natural sciences, cannot stand alone. Therefore, this paradigm is marked by modesty, humility, and humanity (Abdullah, 2006). Through the integration-interconnection paradigm, Islamic knowledge and various forms of modern knowledge intersect, interact, and mutually enrich each other.

At the practical operational level, integration-interconnection is embodied in what Amin Abdullah terms multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary, and transdisciplinarity. Although distinct in their frameworks, these three concepts represent the essence of integration-

interconnection. Multidisciplinarity involves merging several disciplines to address specific phenomena and issues collectively. Interdisciplinarity advances beyond multidisciplinarity by integrating two or more disciplines, encompassing their data, methods, techniques, theories, and perspectives, to advance knowledge. Conversely, transdisciplinarity involves merging elements from various disciplines into a unified whole, resulting in new axioms or theories (Abdullah, 2021).

As mentioned earlier, the explanation compels diverse disciplines, both Islamic and Western, to move beyond the attitude of a single entity (academic arrogance, claiming exclusivity) and isolated entities (disciplines remaining in isolation, with no mutual engagement). Instead, they are urged to evolve into interconnected entities, acknowledging the limitations of each discipline and fostering collaboration, even if it involves methods from other fields. The relationship between these disciplines can be visualized as circular rather than linear or parallel. Linear assumes the dominance of one discipline, while parallel indicates a lack of interaction. In contrast, the circular form implies that each discipline understands the strengths and weaknesses of the others (Abdullah, 2002 & 2006).

Based on the above description, integration-interconnection offers hope and solutions for various disciplines to transcend their egos. When linked to the two previous concepts, integration-interconnection distances itself from the Islamization of knowledge and aligns more with the continuation of the idea of Islamic Enlightenment. As a result, it assumes a distinctive intellectual trajectory, wherein Islamic Enlightenment presents Islam as proactive knowledge, while integration-interconnection offers a dynamic and active movement within each discipline.

Conclusion

In concluding the discussion on knowledge from Western and Islamic perspectives, it is observed that when knowledge is examined from ontological and epistemological aspects, there is no qualification for calling it bad, evil, or undesirable. However, at the axiological level, there is a possibility of deviations due to inappropriate usage, as demonstrated by some Western scholars, which has led to resentment from certain Islamic circles. Meanwhile, the dichotomy of knowledge that has caused unease and restlessness among

Islamic scholars must be understood as a dialectic in its own right, thereby negating any sense of superiority or inferiority, especially based solely on theological grounds. Nevertheless, about the contributions and urgency of various concepts attempting to bridge the gap of the knowledge dichotomy, it is asserted that the concepts of Islamization of knowledge, Islamic Enlightenment, or Islam as knowledge, and integration-interconnection of knowledge are merely tentative solutions. This argument is rooted in the fact that, on the one hand, these concepts provide alternatives for a protagonist relationship between religious (Islamic) and general knowledge. However, on the other hand, they indirectly reinforce the idea that the dichotomy of knowledge is an inevitable necessity that cannot be avoided.

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