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Deconstructing Contemporary Atheist Thought:

A Pragmatic Solution to Irrational Doubts

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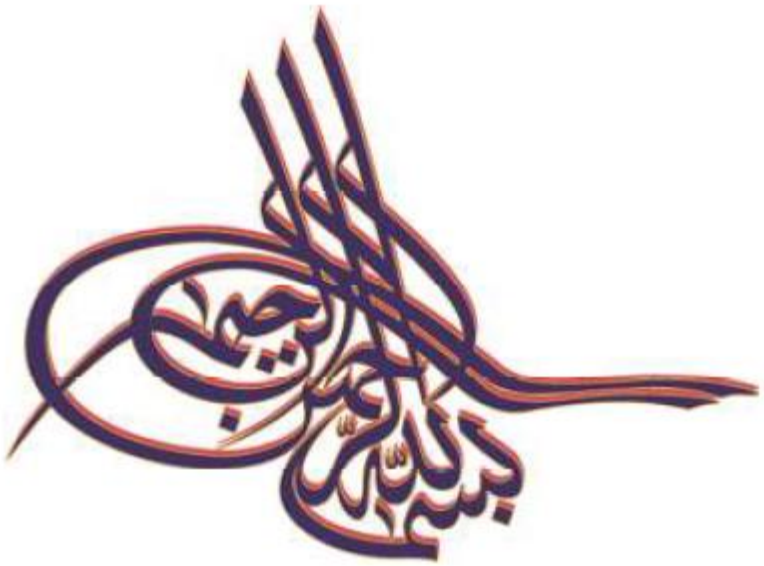
بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

CONTENTS

God's existence, or lack thereof, has been debated throughout human history. Theists and atheists alike have offered their best arguments to justify their positions on the matter, with most philosophers concluding that the discussion thus far having resulted in a stalemate. Although the majority of the world concurs with the proposition that God does indeed exists, overwhelming support should not be considered a determinant in any debate (even if the majority of the world were atheists, this would not settle the question as to who is right or wrong).

In fact, despite still being the minority view, atheism is on the rise globally, having become the fastest growing position on faith and religion in almost every society on the planet. Within Muslim majority societies more specifically, lacking religiosity has become an advancing trend.[1] These facts have startled religious scholars and politicians alike from Saudi Arabia to Egypt, with the former reacting rashly by defining atheism as a form of "terrorism"[2], and the latter being so completely unprepared to tackle the subject intellectually, that it has arrested and jailed many individuals for simply being atheists.[3]

These statistics – and the reactions to them – raise some very important questions, chief among them being, "Why?" For those who have doubts and for those of us who have studied why such doubts occur, it is easy to point out some of the major factors, from the lack of religious practice and oppressive rule in Muslim-majority societies to the dependency on and infatuation over Western ideals and political constructs. However, no doubt the most important influence behind the phenomenon of atheism today – especially among Muslims – are the apparent lack of valid reasons for believing in God or religion. This is not to say that Islam doesn't provide any good reasons for belief, only that scholars and academics alike are simply not providing them; either due to a lack of knowledge on how to deal with contemporary atheism or by virtue of intellectual apathy.

But an intellectual tradition cannot thrive if it cannot adapt to the changing circumstances which threaten its legitimacy. If it cannot rise to the occasion in tackling doubts towards its validity, then it will cease to exist. As such, we must examine the reasons for these doubts in the contemporary period before giving proper solutions – we must attempt to comprehend how our doubters are

1 *The Arab world in seven charts: Are Arabs turning their backs on religion?*. (2019, June 24). *BBC*. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48703377

2 Withnall, A. (2014, April 1). *Saudi Arabia declares all atheists are terrorists in new law to crack down on political dissidents*. *BBC*. Retrieved from https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48703377

3 Lynch, S. (2015, February 1). *In Egypt, atheists considered 'dangerous development'. USA Today*. Retrieved from https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2015/02/01/egypt-atheists/22038645/

thinking and the lineage of their ideas, careful to diagnose the problem before administering the cure.

1. What is Atheism?

Long before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) and the revelation of the Qur'an, Jewish scriptures (the Torah and Talmud) acknowledged the phenomenon of non-belief in an incredulous manner: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is no one who does good."[4] Other ancient religions have even disregarded belief in God as part of their theology, such as traditional Buddhism[5], whereas some early Hindu schools of thought – particularly the Mīmāsā School –saw no need for a god to explain the existence of their scriptures (the Vedas).[6] In general, it would appear that non-belief has existed side-by side with belief throughout the entirety of human history and would eventually come to be called 'atheism'.

'Atheism' is derived from the French athéisme (16th century) and originates from the ancient Greek noun *άθεότης* (*atheotēs*) – a composite of the privative *á* and *θεότης* – literally translated "without god". It was first uttered as a pejorative towards those considered in need of "severe censure and moral condemnation"[7] and would famously be used in this connotation during the trial of Socrates, when one of his accusers, Melitus, had impugned him of "corrupting the youth" and "encouraging them not to believe in the city's gods" because of the former's constant probing of people's beliefs. The term would later be more accurately applied in this sense to those who rejected a particular conception of the divine, specifically Jews and Christians assimilated into Hellenic Greek society.[8] Future debates among various religions, such as between Christians and Muslims, would exemplify similar usage – both sides exchanging the term 'atheist' due to theological disagreements.[9] The term would continue to be used as a general insult for centuries, which no one would dare use to ascribe to themselves or the philosophy they held.

4 Psalms: 14:1, NASB

5 Tiwari, K.N. (1987). *Comparative Religion*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, p. 50

6 Surendranath Dasgupta, S. (1940). *A History of Indian Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 42.

7 Drachmann, A.B. (1922). *Atheism in Pagan Antiquity*. London: Gyldendal, p. 6

8 McGrath, A.E. (2004). *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*. New York: Doubleday, p. 8.

9 Armstrong, K. (2011) *A History of God: The 4000 - Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. New York: Ballatine Books, p. 69

Contemporary use of the term to denote a universal and explicit disbelief in God[10] would first be uttered around 1630 as Europe was began to transition into modernity leading to some individuals willing to profess their non-conformity to traditional society.[11] However, the term would primarily be used as an overt rejection of the existence of any and all gods. It would take many more centuries for this label of to be explicated in a far more nuanced fashion, beginning with the British philosopher Antony Flew (d. 2010), considered the most famous defender of atheism of his time.[12] In his 1971 lecture at the University of Arizona, Flew would coin the term 'negative atheism':

> Whereas nowadays the usual meaning of 'atheist' in English is 'someone who asserts that there is no such being as God', I want the word to be understood here much less positively. I want the originally Greek prefix 'a' to be read in the same way in 'atheist' as it customarily is read in such other Greco-English words as 'amoral', 'atypical', and 'asymmetrical'. In this interpretation an atheist becomes: not someone who positively asserts the non-existence of God; but someone who is simply not a theist. Let us, for future ready reference, introduce the labels 'positive atheism' for the former doctrine and 'negative atheism' for the latter.[13]

Noting the privative in the word 'atheism', Flew would be the first to formally distinguish between the belief in God's non-existence and the mere lack of belief in God's existence. However, this appears to be a mere semantic trick as there seems to be little difference between believing that God doesn't exist and lacking the belief that He does. For Flew however, a positive position is a substantial belief with arguments in its favor, whereas a negative position is that which simply is unaware of or considers the positive position put forth as unsubstantiated. In the context of the positive proposition "God exists", the negative atheist would simply respond with "prove it", rather than contradict the notion, which sounds curiously like agnosticism.[14] Flew would respond in the contrary:

> The introduction of this new sense of the word 'atheism' may appear to be a piece of perverse Humpty-Dumptyism, going arbitrarily against established common usage. 'Whyever', it could be asked, 'don't you make it not the presumption of atheism but the presumption of agnosticism?' But this pardonably petulant reaction fails to

10 Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy 2 nd ed., s.v. "Atheism". (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199541430.001.0001/acref9780199541430-e-278?rskey=bsU4Y8&result=279

11 Hyman, G. (2010). *A Short History of Atheism*. London: I.B. Tauris, pp. 4-5

12 Flew, A. and Varghese, R.A. (2007). *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*. New York: HarperOne, p. vii

13 Flew, A. (1972). The Presumption of Atheism. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 2(1), p. 32

14 The belief that the concept of God cannot be proven to be true or false at a given time or indefinitely

> appreciate just how completely noncommittal I intend my negative atheist to be. For in this context the agnostic - and it was, of course, in this context that Thomas Henry Huxley first introduced the term - is by the same criterion of established common usage someone who, having entertained the existence of God as at least a theoretical possibility, now claims not to know either that there is or that there is not such a being. To be in this ordinary sense an agnostic you have already to have conceded that there is, and that you have, a legitimate concept of God; such that, whether or not this concept does in fact have application, it theoretically could. But the atheist in my peculiar interpretation, unlike the atheist in the usual sense, has not as yet and as such conceded even this.[15]

George Smith, another atheist philosopher, happened to study at the same university where Flew had given his famous lecture and was no doubt influenced by the latter. Smith would write later, and more forcibly, about the varieties of atheism in his book *Atheism: The Case Against God*. For Smith, atheism is not composed of positive or negative positions, but rather is distinguishable by awareness and attitude towards evidence. He, like Flew, also argues for two categories, buy suggests that implicit atheism is nothing more than a natural absence of belief which requires no justification:

> When the atheist is seen as a person who lacks belief in a god, it becomes clear that he is not obligated to 'prove' anything. The atheist qua atheist does not believe anything requiring demonstration; the designation of 'atheist' tells us, not what he believes to be true, but what he does not believe to be true. If others wish for him to accept the existence of god, it is their responsibility to argue for the truth of theism – but the atheist is not similarly required to argue for the truth of atheism.[16]

Where Smith and Flew diverge the most is in the former's concept of 'explicit atheism'. While Smith posits several motivating factors as to why someone may reject belief in god – such as for psychological or emotional reasons – he claims that the "most significant variety of atheism is explicit atheism of a philosophical nature. This atheism contends that the belief in god is irrational and should therefore be rejected…Faced with a lack of evidence, this explicit atheist sees no reason whatsoever for believing in a supernatural being."[17]

15 "Presumption of Atheism," p. 30.

16 Smith, G.H. (1979). *Atheism: The Case Against God*. New York: Prometheus Books, p. 16.

17 Ibid., p. 17

Contemporary atheists follow suit in that they refuse to openly reject the existence of God and rather opt for an epistemic rejection of belief. The call for theists to justify their belief as rational is the principle tactic used in validating atheism today. For one cannot rationally believe in God if they cannot first provide demonstrable evidence for His existence. The metaphysical cannot be established unless epistemically validated. This change of approach relies solely on the epistemology of *evidentialism*.

2. Evidentialism as Justification of Belief

This need for evidence to prove certain claims has been a natural tendency of mankind for millennia and manifest itself most strongly in the criminal justice system. This need has also been utilized when ascertaining basic claims to truth and the validity of particular beliefs. "[It] is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence", wrote British philosopher and mathematician W.K. Clifford (d. 1879)[18] Nearly thirteen-hundred years prior, the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) would state something similar to this effect: "Were people to be given according to their claims, some would claim the wealth and blood of others. But the burden of proof is upon the claimant and the taking of an oath is upon the one who denies (the allegation)."[19] But can this standard be applied in every situation and circumstance? What is 'evidence' and what effect does it play in determining truth? Although the scope of this research does not intend to include the various historical approaches to these questions or even recent debates on the subject, it will provide a brief overview of Evidentialism as explained by its most renown and contemporary advocates: Professors Earl Conee and Richard Feldman. who's master work, *Evidentialism*, is considered a primary reference in philosophy today.

Conee and Feldman define evidentialism as "a view about the conditions under which a person is epistemically justified in having some doxastic attitude toward a proposition. It holds that this sort of epistemic fact is determined entirely by the person's evidence"[20] Clarifying what constitutes "epistemically justified," they say:

> It is crucial that justification not be identified with whatever it is that, in addition to true belief, constitutes knowledge….Knowledge-level justification is stronger than

18 *Quoted in* Conee, E. and Feldman, R. (2004). *Evidentialism*. Oxford: Clarendon, p. 1

19 Ibn Daqiq al-'Id. (2014). XXXIII. In *A Commentary on Nawawi's Selection of Forty Prophetic Traditions*. Trans. Mokrane Guezzou. London: Kube Publishing Ltd, p. 131

20 *Evidentialism*, p. 1.

> this…We take it that the sort of justification we discuss is present in many of the ordinary beliefs that people have about the objects in the world around them. This justification is often sufficiently strong for knowledge, provided the other conditions for knowledge are met. But even when a person has a very strong justification for a believed proposition, the person can fall short of knowledge for three importantly different reasons: (i) the belief can be false; (ii) the person can fail to believe the proposition on the basis of the justifying evidence; and (iii) the justified belief can be true for reasons not properly related to the person's evidence…When a belief is based on justifying evidence, then, in our terms, the belief is "well-founded". It is a necessary condition for knowledge.[21]

For Conee and Feldman, there is a sharp distinction between what is considered a justified belief and well-founded knowledge. The former is supported by reasons that justify the doxastic attitude for the subject alone and can fail as knowledge despite being a true belief, whereas the latter constitutes what would be normatively necessary for a doxastic attitude to know what is true. In this way, there is justification for the belief in a proposition, and then there is justification for the truth of a proposition. For instance, in regard to the former, one may be justified in believing something on the basis of practical concerns. An army general's belief in the possibility of an ambush on his platoon – resulting in sending additional troops to protect their flank – is not based on sure knowledge that enemy soldiers are actually waiting ready to ambush, but on practical concerns for the safety of his men. The belief is rationally justified however, despite their being inconclusive evidence. Likewise, a cancer patient's belief that they will be cured is rationally justifiable if they seek not to jeopardize their mental or emotional health by drowning in self-defeat and depression, despite there being no evidence to support that the cancer will actually be cured. What this shows is "that the epistemic sort of justification that believing can have does not consist entirely in evidence that the belief is true. Epistemic justification for believing therefore does not have the hypothesized connection to truth."[22] For a belief to be justified as well-founded knowledge, it must have a 'truth-connection' that corresponds with the evidence, which is "a link between the epistemic justification that a person can have for a proposition and the truth of that proposition…[for which the] justification that is needed for knowledge consists in evidence."[23] Conee and Feldman include that the given evidence must also

21 Ibid., 2-3.

22 Ibid., 250.

23 Ibid., 254.

be 'undefeatable', or accepted without the existence of any contrary evidence that would undermine the doxastic attitude towards the proposition.[24]

Understanding the differences between justified belief and justified knowledge, one should question what Conee and Feldman consider 'evidence'. The answer rests in the strength or weakness of belief in the proposition. If a 'weak position' is one that supports a minimal amount of evidence, then a very broad interpretation may be adopted:

> Part of a person's evidence that it is a warm day might be her feeling warm. The feeling itself is part of her evidence…This understanding of what counts as evidence significantly affects the implications of the theory. Because one's evidence includes one's private experiences, it is not the case that all evidence is in any straightforward sense public and capable of being shared. Of course, one person can tell another about his experiences, but this does not quite make them have the same evidence. And it may be that some experiential evidence can only be described in ways that fail to convey significant aspects of its content. Such evidence could not be put into an argument in any useful manner.[25]

If however, a 'strong position' is one with a great amount of evidence normatively accessible to everyone and beyond contradictory personal experiences, Conee and Feldman would cautiously suggest the following:

> An evidential account of the truth connection is not overtly naturalistic. The relation of giving evidence is not obviously within the ontology of any current or prospective science. This might seem problematic. It might be contended that the account is unsatisfactory until the relation of giving evidence receives some acceptable naturalistic reduction… But sympathetically construed, the guiding idea behind the imposition of naturalistic constraints is that there is something dubious about putative properties and relations that seem not to be reducible to those of present or foreseeable science.[26]

This suggestion is not only concerned with evidence however, but also with the structure by which it is understood and interpreted. Conee and Feldman insist that evidentialism "does not

24 Ibid., 4.

25 Ibid., 2.

26 Ibid., 253-254.

recommend any procedure for theorizing, in epistemology or elsewhere,"[27] yet they make clear that they have some theory in mind about how their views on epistemic justification should be applied. As will soon be learned, this 'cautious suggestion' is more forcibly promoted by contemporary atheists who fashion it into a full-blown dogma of scientific necessity. This is made explicit in the very comments of prominent atheists today, such as the late Victor Stenger (d. 2014) who claimed that 'God' was a "scientific hypothesis" meant to "explain the natural world".[28] Richard Dawkins, eminent Oxford biologist, writes in his best seller *The God Delusion*, "God's existence or nonexistence is a scientific fact about the universe, discoverable in principle if not in practice. If he existed and chose to reveal it, God himself could clench the argument, noisily and unequivocally in his favour."[29] The late Christopher Hitchens (d. 2011), an esteemed journalist, wrote in his *god Is Not Great*, "Religion has run out of justifications. Thanks to the telescope and the microscope, it no longer offers an explanation of anything important."[30] Similarly, Sam Harris, an American neuroscientist, writes in his *The End of Faith*:

> There is now way around the fact that we crave justification for our core beliefs and believe them only because we think such justification is, at the very least, in the offing…in any other spheres of life, a belief is a cheque that everyone insist on cashing in this side of the grave: the engineer says the bridge will hold; the doctors says the infection is resistant to penicillin – these people have defeasible reasons for their claims about the way the world is. The Mullah, Priest, and the Rabbi do not. Nothing could change about the world, or about the world of their experience, that would demonstrate the falsity of many of their core beliefs. This proves that these beliefs are not born of any examination of the world, or off the world of their experience (they are, in Karl Popper's sense "unfalsifiable").[31]

Harris' reference to Popper is a clue to how he and his atheist colleagues of interpret the nature of evidence, justification, and rationality in general; a form of understanding that has come to be known as 'scientism'.

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27 Ibid., 18

28 Stenger, V. (2007). *God: The Failed Hypothesis. How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist*. New York: Prometheus Books

29 Dawkins, R. (2006). *The God Delusion*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., p. 73

30 Hitchens, C. (2007). *god is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, New York: Twelve, p. 282.

31 Harris, S. (2004). *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*. (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, p. 66.

3. A Genealogy of Doubt

While classically the demand for evidence of any proposition has been standard in most discourse, the popular sentiment of scientism and its subsequent utilization in contemporary atheist thought is a more recent phenomenon that has no clear evolutionary path from previous ideologies. What makes any clear analysis on its origins more difficult however, are certain scientists and philosophers who dismiss the label as anything but meaningless and irrelevant. For instance, esteemed cognitive scientist from Harvard University, Steven Pinker, claims "The term 'scientism' is anything but clear, more a boo-word than a label for any coherent doctrine".[32] Daniel Dennett, a popular philosopher of cognition and the author of several anti-religious polemics, describes the label as "an all-purpose, wild-card smear" and as the "the last refuge of the sceptic" because "when it comes to facts, and explanations of facts, science is the only game in town".[33]

Given that certain scientists and philosophers – considered experts in their fields – are unaware of what scientism is, or consider it as a mere insult in the face of objective fact, it would appear to be a word created *ex nihilo*; from the minds of the ignorant and spiteful.

Contrary to the accusations above, however, the word 'scientism' has existed since the early 20th century, and has been used as a "pejorative term for the belief that the methods of natural science, or the categories and things recognized in natural science, form the only proper elements in any philosophical or other inquiry."[34] It has also been used to describe a type of fallacy that is committed when someone uses science or scientific claims improperly, failing to recognize the scope of either, or the biases inherent within themselves and the researchers.[35] Accordingly then, there appears to be a distinction between the Philosophy of Scientism and the Fallacy of Scientism; the latter appearing to lack any necessary contingency on the former.[36]

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32 Pinker, S. (2012, September 6). Science Is Not Your Enemy: An Impassioned Plea to Neglected Novelists, Embattled Professors, and Tenure-Less Historians. *New Republic*. Retrieved from http://www.newrepublic.com/article/114127/science-not-enemy-humanities

33 Byrnes, S. (2006, April 1). When it comes to facts, and explanations of facts, science is the only game in town. *New Statesman*. Retrieved from http://www.newstatesman.com/node/152968

34 Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy 2 nd ed., s.v. "Scientism". (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199541430.001.0001/acref9780 199541430-e-2788?rskey=6TKC1v&result=1

35 Peterson, G.R. (2003). Demarcation and The Scientistic Fallacy. *Zygon* 38(4), pp. 751-761

36 Both may be referred to as "Explicit Scientism" and "Implicit Scientism". The Fallacy of Scientism (Implicit) does not require its use to be predicated on the belief in the Philosophy of Scientism (Explicit) itself, since the former may be committed in certain circumstances or on certain issues without open endorsement of the latter. In other words, one must distinguish between the activity of scientism and its belief, much like one must distinguish between the activity of being skeptical and of being a follower of 'Skepticism' as a philosophy

Those who adhere to scientism in both its forms have often been referred to as 'scientismist'[37] and share in common a trait of promoting their perspective to the point of suggesting other views outside their own are "less valuable" or "inadequate" in ascertaining the truth, society, ethics, etc.[38]98

Though scientism is believed to have been understood and practiced in some forms since the 17th century,[39] the concept – and the term used to describe it – was crystalized by the sociologist, Friedrich Hayek (d. 1992). Hayek defines the concept in his work *The Counter Revolution of Science: Studies in the Abuse of Reason*:

> It need scarcely be emphasized that nothing we shall have to say is aimed against the methods of Science in their proper sphere or is intended to throw the slightest doubt on their value. But to preclude any misunderstanding on this point we shall, wherever we are concerned, not with the general spirit of disinterested inquiry but with slavish imitation of the method and language of Science, speak of "scientism" or the "scientistic" prejudice. Although these terms are not completely unknown in English, they are actually borrowed from the French, where in recent years they have come to be generally used in very much the same sense in which they will be used here. It should be noted that, in the sense in which we shall use these terms, they describe, of course, an attitude which is decidedly unscientific in the true sense of the word, since it involves a mechanical and uncritical application of habits of thought to fields different from those in which they have been formed.[40]

According to Hayek, the French term *scientisme*[41] functioned in a similar way to describe the activity of fallaciously applying scientific reasoning to fields of study outside of its scope. A contemporary of Hayek, the Austrian-born British philosopher Sir Karl Popper (d. 1994), mostly agreed with the former's definition, though he would admit being a follower of scientism himself to some degree:

> But if by 'scientism' we should mean the view that the methods of the social sciences are, to a very considerable extent, the same as those of the natural sciences,

37 Lehr, F. and Osborn, J. (1994). *Reading. Language and Literacy: Instructions for the Twenty-First Century* Hillsdale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates, p. 79

38 Sorell, T. (1991). *Scientism: Philosophy and the Infatuation with Science*. London: Routledge, p. 1

39 Ibid

40 Von Hayek, F.A. (1952). *The Counter - Revolution of Science: Studies on the Abuse of Reason*. Glencoe, IL.: Free Press, pp. 15-16.

41 Ibid, Ch. 1, fn. 9

> then I should be obliged to plead 'guilty' to being an adherent of 'scientism'; indeed, I believe that the similarity between the social and the natural sciences can even be used for correcting wrong ideas about the natural sciences by showing that these are much more similar to the social sciences than is generally supposed.[42]

It seems that the notion of scientism as an overarching philosophy was not yet fully developed at this time, though active participation in it as a fallacious form of reasoning had been evident for a few generations prior. Despite the overwhelming criticisms by his peers, Popper himself advocated for a weaker form of this approach, assuming there to be no considerable distinctions between the natural and social sciences. He would later clarify his sentiments in his influential work *The Poverty of Historicism*, suggesting that the appropriate definition for scientism was not the "slavish imitation of the method and language of science," but the imitation of what was *incorrectly assumed* to be the method and language of science.[43] Hayek would eventually come to agree with Popper in this respect.[44]

The question remains as to what exactly Hayek and Popper were targeting in their critiques and why they were so adamant in refuting this fallacious form of reasoning. As it so happens, during their time, a philosophical movement had come to dominate academia and society that would eventually not only create a rift that would define the nature of philosophical and scientific discourse for all future generations to come, but would set the stage for an overt philosophy of scientism: logical positivism.

The Vienna Circle

Logical positivism was born in 1920 in the city of Vienna by a group of mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers who would come to be aptly known as 'The Vienna Circle' (formally named the 'Ernst Mach Society').[45] Some of the members included Moritz Schlick (d. 1936), a physicists and the leader of the group; Kurt Gödel (d. 1978), mathematician; Hans Hahn (d. 1934), mathematician; Otto Neurath (d. 1945), economist; Phillip Frank (d. 1966), physicist; Friedrich Waismann (d. 1959), physicist; and Herbert Feigl (d. 1988), the only trained philosopher among the original members. Rudolf Carnap (d. 1970), another trained philosopher and physicist who would

42 Popper, K. (1966). Chapter 9. In *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 5th ed. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, fn. 5.

43 Popper, K. (1957). *The Poverty of Historicism*. Boston: Beacon Press, p. 105, fn. 1.

44 Popper, K. (1972) *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 185, fn. 35.

45 Ernst Mach (1838-1916) was a German-speaking empiricist and physicist known for his contributions to physics, such as the 'Mach Number' and study of shock waves.

become one of their leading proponents, would join the Vienna Circle much later in the 1930's. Other influential members worth mentioning who were either based elsewhere (Berlin) or joined later were Carl Hempel (d. 1997) and A.J. Ayer (d. 1989). Even Karl Popper met with the logical positivists and was influenced by their thinking to some degree.[46]

Though the Vienna Circle would eventually disband around 1936, their ideas would hold sway over most of Europe and the United States till the 1960's.[47] Much of their thinking was inspired primarily from the philosopher of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein (d. 1951) and his seminal work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*The Logical Philosophical Treatise*).[48]

Wittgenstein was born to a wealthy Viennese family, to a father who was one of the most successful industrialists in Austria at that time. Later in life he became interested in physics and followed the advice of his father to study engineering in England. At the University of Manchester, he came upon a work on the philosophy of mathematics known as the *Principia Mathematica*, written by the esteemed British philosopher, Bertrand Russel (d. 1970). As he read, his interests turned into an intellectual obsession over the issues it discussed relating to whether or not mathematics could be reduced to logical axioms or if numbers were actually real existing things in some other world. This obsession led him to give up his career in engineering and begin pursuing studies in logic and the foundations of mathematics at Trinity College, Cambridge University in 1912, under the tutelage of Russel himself.

Overtime, the two would become close friends. However, not long after, Wittgenstein would become dissatisfied with academia and leave Cambridge, although he still held a deep interest in discovering the ontological reality of mathematics. This interest would follow him even as a soldier in the First World War. Any time that he was allowed leave, he would spend his days and evenings jotting down his philosophical thoughts in his notebooks. Not much else captured his attention.

By 1918, the Austrians began to lose the war and Wittgenstein and his unit were taken prisoners by the Italian army. During this time, his primary concern was attempting to smuggle out his notebooks and have them sent to Russel for review and publication. Even in captivity, all he could think of was philosophy.

A year later, Wittgenstein was released from prison and returned to Vienna. Upon his arrival, he denied his right to his father's inheritance and took up employment as a grammar teacher, feeling

46 *Schwartz, S.P. (2012). A Brief History of Analytic Philosophy: From Russel to Rawls*. Singapore: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, pp. 58-59

47 Ibid, p. 46

48 Ibid, p. 47

that he had solved all the major problems of philosophy and that no more contributions to the field were necessary.[49] His sentiments would explain the great risks he took to trying to get the *Tractatus* published, as well as Russel's difficultly in meeting his request.

Wittgenstein was no fan of academic formalities or criticism. The *Tractatus* was a work with little to no arguments in support of its claims, written in an absolutists' style more akin to Holy Scripture; a series of numbered statements in which whole numbers were assigned to main propositions, followed by proceeding numbers with added decimals as supplementary clarifications. His style of writing was extremely unorthodox for Cambridge academia, and many of Russel's peers outright rejected it being associated with the university. Despite this, Russell attempted to assist Wittgenstein by writing a slightly critical introduction for the *Tractatus*, but the former was offended by his friend's minor criticisms and apparent misinterpretation of his work. As a result, Wittgenstein eventually gave up on publishing and left it to Russell to do with it as he wished. It wasn't until 1921 that the *Tractatus* was finally brought to the public in an obscure German periodical. Afterwards, it would be released in English by Keagen Paul Publishers, along with Russell's introduction. By 1924, the Vienna Circle had taken notice of the *Tractatus* and adopted much of the reasoning therein. By 1929, Wittgenstein's philosophical insights would finally be recognized, awarding him a PhD from Cambridge University for his work.[50]

The *Tractatus* had simplified the work of Russell in a concise and could be easily read and analyzed.[51] Although it was initially rejected for its unconventional presentation, Russel and many others within and beyond the Vienna Circle became convinced by its arguments that math and logic were ultimately tautological and had no content or reference beyond the definitions ascribed to them. For Wittgenstein, logic and mathematics were merely the scaffolding of reasoning – human constructs meant to convey facts through symbolic representations, but in and of themselves are empty of meaning:

> [6.1] The propositions of logic are tautologies.
>
> [6.11] The propositions of logic therefore say nothing. (They are the analytical propositions.)...
>
> [6.124] The logical propositions describe the scaffolding of the world, or rather they present it. They "treat" of nothing. They presuppose that names have meaning,

49 Ibid, p. 50
50 Ibid, p. 51
51 Ibid, p. 52

> and that elementary propositions have sense. And this is their connexion with the world. It is clear that it must show something about the world that certain combinations of symbols— which essentially have a definite character—are tautologies. Herein lies the decisive point. We said that in the symbols which we use much is arbitrary, much not. In logic only this expresses: but this means that in logic it is not we who express, by means of signs, what we want, but in logic the nature of the essentially necessary signs itself asserts. That is to say, if we know the logical syntax of any sign language, then all the propositions of logic are already given.….
>
> [6.2] Mathematics is a logical method. The propositions of mathematics are equations, and therefore pseudo-propositions.
>
> [6.21] Mathematical propositions express no thoughts.
>
> [6.22] The logic of the world which the propositions of logic show in tautologies, mathematics shows in equations.[52]

For Wittgenstein, the inescapable meaninglessness of logic and mathematics, and their inability to add anything to knowledge required a replacement to metaphysics and all of traditional philosophy. What follows would be Wittgenstein's alternative and the precursor to the foundational doctrine of logical positivism:

> [6.53] The right method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, i.e. something that has nothing to do with philosophy: and then always, when someone else wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions. This method would be unsatisfying to the other—he would not have the feeling that we were teaching him philosophy—but it would be the only strictly correct method.[53]

52 Wittgenstein, L. (2001). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Eds., David Pears and Brian McGuinness. London: Routledge, pp. 76-77, 80, 82
53 Ibid, p. 90

3.1 Verificationism

After the realization that mathematics and logic were ultimately tautological, there was a need for the logical positivists to discover an alternative way in which statements could be considered meaningful. Based on Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, the logical positivists constructed the principle of *verificationism*. A.J. Ayer, a member of the group who had popularized the movement's ideas in English, summarized the principle as follows: "We say that a sentence is factually significant to any given person if, and only if, he knows how to verify the proposition which he purports to express…"[54] What Ayer intended by 'verify' was that only empirical data (made coherent by scientific inquiry) or tautologies would qualify as the criteria for something to be "factually significant".

It was through this principle that the members of the Vienna Circle would attempt to eliminate all modes of abstract thinking; most of all, the philosophy of metaphysics, which they viewed as existing only on the basis of "confusions engendered by language".[55] For instance, statements like "God exist" are merely confused utterances, because 'God' is unverifiable. Therefore, to claim there is a God is ultimately meaningless.

However, it should not be thought that their motivations for eliminating metaphysics were based solely on intellectual grounds, for much of the logical positivists' program – especially Russell's – was deeply historical in its reaction. As professor of philosophy Stephen Swartz elucidates:

> Like Russell…the members of the Vienna Circle reacted against Hegelian German Idealism. From the end of the eighteenth century to World War I, Germans (including German speaking Austrians, Swiss, Czechs, etc.) were dominant in philosophy, mathematics and science. Historical events help explain why a reaction against this German tradition in philosophy would arise in Germany and Austria. Germany and Austria had been disastrously beaten in a hideous war…which overturned all of society and the governments of Prussia and Austria. Many blamed the Prussian aristocratic traditions for starting the war and for not being able to pursue it successfully. Marxism, based on German philosophy, had taken over Russia and was a real threat to German speaking nations. Philosophers were as fed up and disgusted with the traditions of Prussia, as was almost everybody else.[56]

54 Ayer, A.J. (1952). *Language, Truth, and Logic*. New York: Dover Publications, p. 35

55 *A Brief History*, p. 62.

56 Ibid, p. 47

Many within the Vienna Circle sought to undermine metaphysics because they felt it deeply tied to Prussian culture. While this in no way proves logical positivism to be wrong, it does reveal that the members of the Vienna Circle – who claimed to be inspired by a need for objectivity in knowledge of facts and meaning – were not exactly influenced by rational means. This agenda-based reasoning would ultimately blind the Vienna Circle to many of the errors in their own principles, paving the way for another philosophical movement to upend their program in a dramatic and devasting fashion.

4. The Rise of Pragmatism

In 1936, the leader of the Vienna Circle, Moritz Schlick, was murdered by one of his former students for his "arrogant Jewish attitude". The Nazis praised the murder and the student would be inducted into the Nazi Party after only receiving 10 years in prison for his crime. The irony was that Moritz wasn't even Jewish to begin with (and having 'Jewish ideas" – whatever that means – doesn't warrant murder). The views of the Vienna Circle, which were largely against Prussian culture, were now coming back to haunt them, eventually leading them to disband the group altogether.[57]

However, the demise of the Vienna Circle did not spell the demise of logical positivism. At this point, the group's muse, Wittgenstein, was beginning to retract his sentiments in the Tractatus and started critiquing the principles of logical positivism. Most apparent in his criticisms was his disappointment that everyone seemed to ignore one of his more explicit statements in the text:

> [6.54] My propositions serve as elucidations in this way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)[58]

For Wittgenstein, his work was not meant to be taken as a means to develop a new system of philosophy, but rather to close the door to unresolved issues of the past (primarily revolving around our understanding of mathematics and logic). However, his criticisms would not be strong enough to overcome the logical positivist program. What ultimately would begin the demise of the

57 Ibid, pp. 68-69

58 *Tractatus*, p. 90

philosophy was the self-refuting nature of the philosophy itself. As Swartz aptly points out, the principle of verification was itself a metaphysical proposition devoid of its own criteria:

> The verifiability criterion of meaningfulness came to be viewed as either nonsense or a dubious slogan. According to the verifiability criterion of meaningfulness, cognitively meaningful sentences are either tautologies, i.e. analytic, or empirically verifiable. Any other sentence is cognitively meaningless. But this criterion can now be turned on the verifiability criterion of meaningfulness itself. If it is a tautology, then it is analytic and has no force. It just represents how someone has chosen to define some terms. As a statement of the standard meaning of "meaningful", it is surely incorrect. One the other hand, it is not an empirical proposition, at least not one that has any hope of being true. Thus, the verifiability criterion of meaningfulness turns out to be an example of the very metaphysical nonsense that it was intended to eliminate.[59]

The very principle used to assist the logical positivists in their abrogation of metaphysics had turned out to be proof of their own indulgence in metaphysics. However, even then, it wasn't the death blow that would close this chapter in philosophical history. Still, the logical positivists held their ground and attempted to save the principle from doubt by redefining it as merely a "suggestion" rather than a rule.[60] What eventually made them realize the futility of their approach was a an intellectual assault from two philosophers from the United States: Willard Van Orman Quine (d. 2000) and Thomas Kuhn (d. 1996).

Willard Quine had visited with the Vienna Circle in 1932. He was also a graduate of Harvard University who adopted and subsequently resurrected the pragmatist tradition of philosophy begun by begun by William James (d. 1910). This philosophical paradigm was relatively new on the scene and had little support in the Americas and had been given little attention by most European philosophers. However, its revival was supercharged upon the advent of logical positivism. While the latter was the new trend, philosophers struggled to deal with it's reductionist tendencies sufficiently. Only the pragmatists had the tools necessary to halt it in its tracks.

In pragmatism, 'truth' isn't necessarily about logic, abstractions, or verification; it's about what works to offer the best explanation possible. As such, pragmatists aren't bound by the principles

59 A Brief History, pp. 79-80

60 Ibid, p. 80

and axioms of prior philosophies but can choose among them depending on their utility. Dr. Greg Kimura summarizes the pragmatism as:

> …the rejection of Cartesianism and Kantianism and their attendant dualisms; the doctrine of direct realism; a fallibilistic theory of truth; methodological pluralism; the centrality of *praxis* and the revaluation of the ordinary; an experientialist emphasis; the democratization of inquiry; holism between nature and consciousness; an attraction to the mytho-poetic and other non-positivistic forms of expression and the reintroduction of religion and faith as serious philosophical topics.[61]

A pragmatist is thus one who challenges all previous philosophical traditions on the grounds that they should conform to human interests and natural inclinations – it revives both the spirit and religious consciousness of man in the philosophical tradition, throwing away abstractions and unnecessary principles that have no benefit to the productivity and knowledge of mankind. 'Holism' and 'coherence' are more central to pragmatism than certainty and verification, which to the logical positivists, amounts to blasphemy.

Operating under this paradigm, Quine saw the logical positivist's program as an inefficient system of ideas based on two principle errors, or what he called the "Two Dogmas of Empiricism". The first of these two dogmas was "the belief in some fundamental cleavage between truths which are analytic, or grounded in meanings independently of matters of fact and truths which are 'synthetic', or grounded in fact."[62] In Quine's discovery of the first dogma, he was attacking not only the basic foundations of logical positivism, but all of traditional philosophy prior to this point. Immanuel Kant's (d. 1804) inauguration of the distinction between the analytic and the synthetic – the very cornerstone of logical positivism – were now being directly challenged and overturned.

Quine insisted that "no boundary between analytic and synthetic statements" has ever been adequately drawn, and that said distinction cannot be verified empirically.[63] And the entire concept of 'analytic' cannot be explained but with circular reasoning. For instance, the statement "all bachelors are unmarried" is a statement defining 'bachelors', but the term 'bachelor' is synonymous with 'unmarried', therefore affirming itself with no real justification. The 'analytical nature' of the statement is assumed without realizing the meaning already imbedded therein[64] and its origin already

61 Kimura, G.W. (2007). *Neopragmatism and Theological Reason*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Limited, p. 38

62 Quine, W.V.O. (1961). The Two Dogmas of Empiricism. In *From A Logical Point of View: Logico Philosophical Essays*, 3rd ed. New York: Harper & Row, p. 20

63 Ibid, p. 37

64 Ibid, pp. 20-21

having come from experience. Analytic and synthetic statements are therefore identical. What this meant for logical positivists is that they could no longer verify the differences between meaningless statements of metaphysics and meaningful statements of experience.

The other dogma of logical positivism Quine criticized was that of reductionism, or "the belief that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience."[65] Quine considered the second dogma closely connected with the first in that the logical positivists had made words and phrases the point of significance for verification. In other words, they had confined meaning to statements and terms alone.[66] For Quine, meaning was not restricted to singular terms or statements, nor was it possible that it could be reduced to simpler constructs. Rather, meaning and knowledge are an interconnected web of experience; a web that acts as interpreter of every subsequent experience rather than the other way around. As Quine states:

> The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs…is a man-made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges…Or, to change the figure, total science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field.[67]

Quine's holism implied that all structures could be modified to create a more coherent and efficient system by which to interpret experiences. However, these modifications are only possible through the conventional values and desires of a society. Despite the force of his arguments, however, Quine's was criticized for lacking any demonstrable examples justifying his reasoning. For most philosophers, his thinking was far "too knew" and strange to be credited. Not until ten years later would his thoughts be vindicated.

4.1 Kuhn vs. Popper

Thomas Kuhn was an American physicist later turned historian *qua* philosopher of science. In 1962 he published what is perhaps considered the most influential treatise on the history of scientific development: *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. His book documented many of the ideas proposed by Quine, showing that science and its institutions did not function on objective, progressive grounds, but were deeply rooted in historical movements motivated, among other things, by

65 Ibid, p. 20
66 *A Brief History*, p. 87
67 The Two Dogmas, p. 42.

pragmatic concerns. In fact, it is not surprising Kuhn would vindicate the ideas of Quine, given the former claimed in his treatise that he was heavily influenced by the latter's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism".[68]

Kuhn makes three major points in his analysis of scientific history. The first is that science operates based on paradigms, or holistic culturally inherited theories that help to make sense of experiences. The second is that most applied science that makes anything close to progress – what he calls "normal science" – is mainly about solving puzzles within given paradigms, rather than challenging their foundational assumptions. And third, that there are paradigm shifts (i.e. revolutions) which result from normal science's inability to solve the anomalies its paradigm suffers from. Thus, overtime, an alternative paradigm is developed to resolve these issues (but not without conflict from its predecessor).[69]

Kuhn offered several examples to make his point, but the most important among them was the paradigm shift within astronomy; what many have come to call the "Copernican Revolution":

> Look first at a particularly famous case of paradigm change, the emergence of Copernican astronomy. When its predecessor, the Ptolemaic system, was first developed during the last two centuries before Christ and the first two after, it was admirably successful in predicting the changing positions of both stars and planets…By the early sixteenth century an increasing number of Europe's best astronomers were recognizing that the astronomical paradigm was failing in application to its own traditional problems. That recognition was prerequisite to Copernicus' rejection of the Ptolemaic paradigm and his search for a new one. His famous preface still provides one of the classic descriptions of a crisis state. Breakdown of the normal technical puzzle-solving activity is not, of course, the only ingredient of the astronomical crisis that faced Copernicus. An extended treatment would also discuss the social pressure for calendar reform, a pressure that made the puzzle of precession particularly urgent. In addition, a fuller account would consider medieval criticism of Aristotle, the rise of Renaissance Neoplatonism, and other significant historical elements besides. But technical breakdown would still remain the core of the crisis. In a mature science—and astronomy had become that in antiquity—external factors like those cited above are principally significant in determining the timing of breakdown, the ease with which it

68 Kuhn, T.S. (1996). Preface. In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. viii, fn. 3

69 Fuller, S. (2004). *Kuhn vs. Popper: The Struggle for the Soul of Science*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 19-20

> can be recognized, and the area in which, because it is given particular attention, the breakdown first occurs.[70]

Of course, given the politicized nature of the Ptolemaic system, it was not easy for the theory to be overturned. Only with time would Copernicus (d. 1543) be claimed the victor. However, what many scientists and philosophers prior had believed about this history is that the revolution was a progressive event which carried no political or metaphysical baggage – it was only the result of one great mind convincing other great minds that they needed to change their ways. Kuhn considered this narrative a myth the scientific community uses to grant the new paradigm some form of genealogical legitimacy and "indoctrinate" newcomers regarding the progressive nature of science, contrary to its messier historical evolution.[71]

The dogmatic nature of the scientific worldview and its dependency on paradigms is still evident today. For instance, the case of Marc Hauser, a professor of biology at Harvard University who was "found guilty of scientific misconduct" only after a graduate student revealed his fabrication of data on primate behavior to show that "atheists were just as ethical as theists".[72] Despite this, Hauser's research had passed peer review, because his peers already affirmed the paradigm which they all worked under as dogma – an anti-theistic Neo Darwinism.[73]

Similarly, and in many other cases, scientists are usually more concerned with their jobs and how much grant money they can receive than whether they are operating with integrity. However, for Kuhn, this was to be expected and was not always a negative, since for normal science to function there must be some certainty in the paradigm if scientists wish push a paradigm to its operational limits.[74]

In 1965, Kuhn's thesis would be put to the test during a debate with the most eminent philosopher of science at that time, the aforementioned Sir Karl Popper. However, despite what was supposed to be a heated discussion on the nature of science, both had little to disagree on other than the degree to which their ideas were valid.[75] Popper was still influenced by the logical positivists despite being against them. Upon realizing that verificationism was self-defeating and nonsensical,

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70 *Structure*, pp. 68-69

71 Ibid, pp. 137-138

72 Sheldrake, R. (2001). *The Science Delusion: Freeing the Spirit of Inquiry*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, p. 311

73 A perspective on Evolution that sees no need for God or religion or is directly opposed to both.

74 *Structure*, p. 37

75 *Kuhn vs. Popper*, pp. 10-12

he developed his own criteria for distinguishing between 'good science' and 'pseudoscience' (i.e. metaphysics), what he called "falsifiability":

> Thus there clearly was a need for a different criterion of demarcation; and I proposed…that the refutability or falsifiability of a theoretical system should be taken as the criterion of its demarcation. According to this view…a system is to be considered as scientific only if it makes assertions which may clash with observations; and a system is, in fact, tested by attempts to produce such clashes, that is to say by attempts to refute it.[76]

For Popper, the merits of a scientific theory rested on its ability to be tested and possibly refuted. For him, this characterized the nature of scientific inquiry in general. Whereas for Kuhn, while such a method was characteristic of the latter half of a paradigm's life, it ultimately did not determine how science operates as a whole. What follows is Kuhn's take on Popper's criterion of falsifiability – a response that would be reiterated in their 1965 debate:

> A very different approach to this whole network of problems has been developed by Karl R. Popper who denies the existence of any verification procedures at all. Instead, he emphasizes the importance of falsification, i.e., of the test that, because its outcome is negative, necessitates the rejection of an established theory. Clearly, the role thus attributed to falsification is much like the one this essay assigns to anomalous experiences, i.e., to experiences that, by evoking crisis, prepare the way for a new theory. Nevertheless, anomalous experiences may not be identified with falsifying ones. Indeed, I doubt that the latter exist. As has repeatedly been emphasized before, no theory ever solves all the puzzles with which it is confronted at a given time; nor are the solutions already achieved often perfect. On the contrary, it is just the incompleteness and imperfection of the existing data-theory fit that, at any time, define many of the puzzles that characterize normal science. If any and every failure to fit were ground for theory rejection, all theories ought to be rejected at all times.[77]

The problem with Popper's criterion of falsifiability was that it was too much like verificationism – it objectified the problems and solutions of science without understanding the nature of paradigms: a holistic web of beliefs constructed to make coherent worldly experiences. However,

76 Popper, K. (1968). *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. New York: Harper & Row, p. 256

77 *Structure*, p. 146

more damning of Popper's ideas was Kuhn's point that the concept of 'falsifiability' unreasonably limits the adoption of theories. If at any point a theory was tested and failed, it would have to be discarded all-together. In other words, a simple demonstration of one problem would render a theory discardable without any concern for the possibility that future data (or a reassessment of certain assumptions) might resolve the issue. Further, many theories considered to be 'true' in the contemporary period would never pass Popper's criterion since they cannot actually be tested. For example, Darwinian Evolution, which relies much on historical data, is not falsifiable according to Popper – it's just "useful metaphysics".[78]

With the defeat of Popper's ideas, the remnants of the logical positivist program seemed to have met their demise. However, the legacy of logical positivism lives on in different form. Scientism has been resurrected by contemporary atheists as a means to undermine religious thinking. More popular than ever, it creeps into the minds of those unaware of its origins and its errors. As such, history repeats itself. We need only recognize that history to offer a solution.

5. An Islamic Response?

Over the past century or so, atheists have been advocating arguments founded purely on scientific-based reasoning. Given this, many of the arguments used to prove the existence of God are considered invalid on the basis that they do not fit into a rigid criterion of scientific justification. As such, Muslims should be more focused on challenging this narrow method of validation by attempting to *undermine atheistic epistemology* rather than meet their unrealistic and irrational demands. Doubts themselves can be irrational, so we must start treating all doubts with a healthy dose of doubt ourselves.

The essence of being doubtful is not an extraordinary gift endowed to a select few conjured like some superpower that can endlessly and arbitrarily be tapped into. Rather, it is an automated response triggered by an unexpected intake of data (anomalies) which appears to contradict our initial understanding of something. For instance, when I walk outside and see a tree, I've registered it as such because there is no reason for me to doubt my perception. However, if for some reason the tree begins to 'behave' or appear in a way contrary to what would otherwise be considered normal, then and only then would I have sufficient reason to doubt. In other words, human beings

78 *A Brief History*, pp. 81-82

do not begin their journey of discovery by *willing themselves to doubt*[79], rather, doubt is a natural response to confusion. As philosopher Peter Klein rightly notes:

> The point here is that…in all ordinary cases of incredulity, the grounds for the doubt can, in principle, be removed...If something is doubted, something else must be held fast because doubt presupposes that there are means of removing the doubt…That is, we think our general picture of the world is right—or right enough—so that it does provide us with both the grounds for doubt and the means for potentially removing the doubt. Thus, ordinary incredulity about some feature of the world occurs against a background of sequestered beliefs about the world. We are not doubting that we have any knowledge of the world. Far from it, we are presupposing that we do know some things about the world. To quote Wittgenstein, "A doubt without an end is not even a doubt".[80]

The "doubt without an end" mentioned by Wittgenstein refers to an ideology which is distinguishable from normal doubt, an ideology mentioned prior: evidentialism *qua* scientism. Unlike doubt, which assumes a set of axioms and then works through a trial and error process to reach a coherent understanding, evidentialism *qua* scientism brings into question anything and everything prior – even itself.

Knowing what we know now about the genealogy of the atheistic doubt that has crept into the Muslim mindset, are we prepared to approach the topic by reinvestigating our own intellectual traditions and formulating properly tailored responses to atheism in the 21st century? To do this, we must first abandon outmoded methods of dawah – we must search deep within our tradition, and perhaps develop new models to curtail this new intellectual threat.

6. Pragmatically Addressing the Youth

The above discussion might seem intimidating to those just initiated into the history of philosophy. Understandably, much of this article is quite dense and requires a great deal of time and effort to properly understand. That said, I attempted to give as concise a history as possible of the

79 It may be proposed that people *do in fact* will themselves to doubt when trying to overcome their biases. However, I argue that people are only able to *suppress* doubt – through cognitive dissonance – and must cease doing so for their natural tendencies to take effect. In other words, when someone "wills doubt" they are simply allowing their mind (intuition) to perform as it typically would if uninhibited.

80 Comesaña, J. and Klein, P. (2001, December 8). Skepticism. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skepticism/#PhiSkeVsOrdInc

ideology leading the Muslim youth to doubt their faith, and the facts mentioned throughout must be understood prior to properly addressing their concerns. This article is for the sake of training imams and youth leaders so that they can properly think of ways to develop their own dawah further – arming their responses with accurate knowledge and discernment of the problems at hand. However, how can imams and youth leaders utilize all this information in such a way that it's not overwhelming?

Once our leaders fully grasp the root of the problem, they can easily address those youth struggling to find rudimentary answers to those who require more advanced responses. That said, I have developed a template of four general steps that can be utilized:

1. *Doubt the doubts, not the doubter:*

   Oftentimes when we speak with our youth, we are quick to assert that their education, *their* environment, *their* friends, *their* family; *their* everything is responsible for their doubts. While there is some level of truth to these sentiments, pointing the finger at things that they are heavily invested in is usually the first step in intimidation and ultimately their abandonment. As such, we should be more focused on questioning their doubts from a purely rational perspective by asking the right questions: "Why are you doubting?" "Where and when did you start doubting?" "Do you think there could be answers to your doubts?"

   Allowing ourselves to empathize with the doubter helps to make them comfortable to our introspective inquiries. Questioning things largely outside their control or beyond their (current) strength to remedy are not optimal approaches.

2. *Play by your rules, not the doubt's rules:*

   When we hear a doubt, our first instinct is to go on the defense. Rather than questioning if the doubts are rational to begin with, we attempt to answer them according to their own criteria. For example, when asked for empirical evidence of God's existence, many imams and dais will resort to attempting to offer scientific evidence. However, considering the above discussion, this is not only unnecessary, but counterproductive. By answering doubts in this manner, we *validate* the doubt as a rational one. This is incorrect. Rather, we should be questioning the rationality of the doubt itself and asking pragmatic questions. For example: "Are these doubts coming from a rational place?" "Do you think these doubts lead to a more rational alternative?" "Are you doubts consistent and relevant?"

As we've seen from the history of atheistic evidentialism (i.e. scientism), many doubts stemming from this ideology can be rectified by simply ascertaining the self-refuting nature of the ideology itself.

3. *Are their doubts consistent with the undoubtable?*

When speaking with the youth, I tend to bring up several topics – often controversial – to assist them in thinking critically. Rather than simply give them the answer, I attempt to make them work for it. In order to truly give yaqeen, one must only point in the right direction, not carry someone all the way through. By coming to conclusions on their own, the task of relieving a young Muslim of their doubts becomes far easier. That is why I often attempt to bring other examples of their thinking to the table; to showcase how their doubts are ultimately contradictory to how they perceive everything else in their lives.

Take for example our understanding of human rights, morality, aesthetics, love, and other cherished values. We go about our daily lives believing in the truth of these things – their existence as objective facts that cannot be seriously denied. In fact, most people believe these virtues are essential criteria for defining what it means to be human. Yet, not one of these concepts has any evidential support; there isn't one scientific peer reviewed paper on the planet that supports the existence or validity of any of these concepts in a serious manner.

So why do we still believe in them?

This is an important question which reveals an inconsistency in one's reasoning; a preference for disbelieving in religion (and God), while ignoring everything else that matters in our lives. Leading a young Muslim down this path towards doubting their doubts is really the first step in helping them to understand that rationality can exist beyond the scientific.

4. *What is the alternative?*

The last step in relieving doubts in Islam is to offer an alternative which holistically makes sense of the world around the doubter. As discussed above, doubts only occur in response to anomalies – they do not exist in a vacuum nor do they manifest *ex nihilo*. As such, we know that the paradigm of the doubter has been shaken and must be repaired by

showing the doubt itself as the problem.

By showing how Islam encompasses all forms of rational inquiry, from the scientific to the abstract, we can provide our youth with a comprehensive understanding of their reality. Compared to the narrow-minded and unrealistic expectations of things like scientism, we should explain that Islam is far more coherent in its holism.

But how do we show Islam to be that alternative? What examples can we give?

When discussing this issue with the youth, I often like to start off by asking a simple question: "Can anyone name me one atheistic anti-religious civilization in history?" Usually I receive silence, and for good reason: such a civilization has never existed. Although there have been attempts to fashion these regimes, they usually die out within a matter of decades. Why? Because they don't appeal to the natural inclinations of mankind. They don't appeal to our *fitrah*.

I then like to peak their interests further: "How did an illiterate inhabitant of the Arabian peninsula fashion a civilization which overthrew the two largest empires in a matter of decades and bring about one of the most scientifically and politically advanced societies the world has ever seen?" Usually there's puzzlement at my question, and for good reason: because it cannot be explained away so easily by scientific or historical reasoning. But more importantly is my follow up question: "Are there any atheist civilizations which reached this amount of success or lasted this long?"

And that's where the doubts usually end, upon the realization that good ideas drive civilizations, while bad ones paralyze them.

Naturally, some contend that atheists have done good things and have given a lot of civilization as a whole, but this still misses the point. Atheists have always been a part of civilization, never its drivers. Atheists have always contributed to civilizations, but never fashioned one worthy of consideration. On the contrary, we only have historical evidence that societies run by anti-religious sentiments are largely unsuccessful horrors shows which lead the deaths of millions.

"But what about Europe?" some may retort. And I say, "What about it?" Despite Europe's move towards non-religiosity, most of its laws, its values, and its sense of purpose are derived from religious ideas and institutions. Atheism? It hardly matters at all.

7. Concluding Remarks

To instill confidence in our youth and bring them closer to Islam, we must first be confident that our religion can answer their doubts accordingly, and we can only do so if we understand where their doubts are coming from and how to ask the right questions. And that is really the central purpose of this paper: to get our leaders to ask the right questions. If we continue to address our youth with outmoded forms of thinking (meant for doubts of a time past), then we will continue to experience a rise in Muslims leaving our beautiful religion. As such, we need to revolutionize our dawah efforts by pragmatically reforming our methods to counter the ideological influences of the 21st century. To bolster our tradition and cement the Muslim identity in our youth, we need to teach them the value of their ideas beyond the narrow, inhumane prejudices of the purely scientific mind.