A Comparative Analysis of Rationalism Paradigms: An Islamic and Western Perspective

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Islam; Rationalism; West.	This study aims to analyze the concept of rationalism from both Islamic and Western perspectives through a comparative approach. Previous research indicates that the two traditions share the use of reason as an epistemic instrument but differ significantly in their sources of truth, methodological foundations, and philosophical orientations. This research adopts a library-based method with a philosophical-descriptive approach to examine the ideas of key thinkers from both traditions. The findings reveal that Western rationalism anchors truth in the autonomy of human reason through deductive methods, methodological skepticism, and the coherence theory of truth. In contrast, Islamic rationalism integrates reason with divine revelation, particularly in interpreting theological and metaphysical realities. These distinctions influence the development of scientific thought, the structure of epistemology, and ethical orientations within each civilization. This study concludes that Islamic rationalism is characterized by a theocentric-integrative framework, whereas Western rationalism tends to be anthropocentric and secular. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the discourse on comparative epistemology and provide a foundation for further studies on the integration of knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Rationalism is a school of philosophy that places reason as the main instrument for gaining knowledge and establishing truth (Arapov et al., 2016). In this context, rationalism developed in two different traditions: Islam and the West (Nasr, 2020; McGinn, 2019). Although both traditions emphasize the use of reason, they differ fundamentally in their approaches and applications. Islamic rationalism tends to operate within a theocentric framework, integrating reason with revelation (Al-Farabi, 2021; Al-Ghazali, 2019), whereas Western rationalism develops in an anthropocentric direction, emphasizing the autonomy of reason as an independent source of knowledge (Descartes, 2020; Kant, 2021). These epistemological differences between Islam and the West make a comparison of rationalism not only a historical study but also a philosophical contribution to modern epistemological discourse (Bello, 2022; Okasha, 2021).

Several previous studies have addressed aspects related to rationalism, but these have been partial. Suwari (2023) examines rationality in Islamic da'wah (Jabbar, 2021), Wahda (2024) highlights the influence of Greek philosophy on Islamic thought (Ali & Khan, 2020),

while Nurzeha (2022) discusses Ibn Rushd's rationalism in Islamic law (Hassan, 2022). Other studies address Ibn Khaldun's rationalism (Amir, 2022; El-Hassani, 2021), a comparison of Western and Islamic epistemology (Anshari, 2024; Ford, 2020), and modern rationalism, such as Descartes' (Amalia, 2023; Gómez, 2021). Despite their important contributions, these studies have not comprehensively compared the epistemological structures of Islamic and Western rationalism in a single systematic study (Nasr & Schmidt, 2021).

Therefore, this research aims to analyze the differences in rationalism paradigms in Islamic and Western traditions through a comparative-philosophical approach. This study will not only identify the foundational drafts and methodologies of each tradition but also trace their implications for the development of knowledge, metaphysical thinking, and modern epistemology. Thus, this research is expected to enrich comparative epistemological discourse and provide an integrative perspective for the development of knowledge in the contemporary era.

The objective of this research is to conduct a comparative analysis of the rationalism paradigms from both Islamic and Western perspectives, exploring the key differences and similarities in their approaches to reason, logic, and knowledge. The study aims to shed light on how rationalism is understood and applied in both intellectual traditions, focusing on the historical, cultural, and philosophical contexts that shape their respective views. The benefits of this research include providing a deeper understanding of the intellectual foundations of both traditions, promoting cross-cultural dialogue, and offering insights into how these paradigms influence contemporary issues in philosophy, science, and ethics. By highlighting the unique contributions of each perspective, this study contributes to the broader discourse on epistemology and rational thought, fostering a more nuanced understanding of how reason operates in different cultural contexts.

METHOD

This study used a library research method with a comparative-philosophical approach. The research data were obtained from primary and secondary works containing the ideas of rationalist figures in both Islamic and Western traditions, such as Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali, Ibn Rushd, René Descartes, and Immanuel Kant. The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, a conceptual analysis identified the foundational ideas about reason, truth, and the sources of knowledge in both traditions. Second, a thematic classification grouped the thoughts based on epistemological aspects, such as the position of reason, the relationship between reason and revelation, methods of reasoning, and philosophical orientations. Third, a comparative analysis was performed to compare the epistemological structures of Islamic and Western rationalism to identify similarities, differences, and implications for the development of knowledge. This approach allowed the study not only to be descriptive but also to provide a critical evaluation of the rationalism paradigms in both traditions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS
Rationalism: Sources and Methods of Verification

Rationalism is a school of thought in the philosophy of science that emphasizes the role of reason, believed to reveal principles of truth according to sound reason. This school of thought, which reached its maturity in the 17th century, emphasizes reason as the primary

source of knowledge, reality, and truth. In the rationalist view, knowledge can be acquired through logical and deductive reasoning, without relying entirely on sensory experience.

Overall, this school of thought holds that knowledge can be acquired through reason. With reason, one can evaluate arguments, identify logical fallacies, and distinguish between right and wrong. This is essential for achieving a proper understanding of truth. Furthermore, reason can filter and select what constitutes knowledge and what does not, which is why it is used as the primary source of knowledge.

In fact, thinking is a common practice. It begins with dialogue with our own minds, with other human beings, speaking, reading, writing, listening, and drawing conclusions. It's something that goes hand in hand with life, constantly, without us realizing it. However, upon closer inspection, correct thinking is not an easy task. The thinking process demands several things, such as observing certain things, such as oddities, errors, and truths, which of course require careful observation. However, these difficulties then become the driving force for the mind to produce critical thinking. Thus, a field of science was born: logic , pioneered by Aristotle, famous in his work, *To Organon*.

In this context, to obtain knowledge from reason, there are several methodological foundations in rationalism. Logical analysis, through formal logic, syllogisms, deductive reasoning, and general narratives. These methods are tools in the effort to construct valid arguments and produce reliable knowledge. Through this understanding, we can appreciate how reason functions in the process of seeking knowledge and its contribution to the development of rational thought in various disciplines.

First, logical analysis through formal logic. Logic is a formal system for acquiring knowledge. Formal logic is often referred to as major logic. Formal logic is a system used to study the principles, rules, and laws of thinking that must be followed to obtain truth. This means that logic, in this case, emphasizes rational, critical, straightforward, coherent, and methodical thinking.

Second, the syllogism. A syllogism is a form of deductive reasoning consisting of two premises followed by a conclusion. There are several ways to analyze truth, one of which is through deductive reasoning. Deductive reasoning is a way of thinking in drawing conclusions by applying the syllogistic pattern of thought. Syllogisms are categorized into two statements, namely, a major premise and a minor premise, and then from the general narrative a conclusion is drawn. This method is one that emphasizes systematic, logical, and critical thinking, and uses ratio (reason) in an effort to gain concrete knowledge. This theory is then called rationalism.

Based on the statement above, to obtain knowledge that has a basis in truth, verification is the next step to confirm the reasoning. In this case, the rationalist school of thought uses the theory of coherence or consistency (Coherence Theory of Truth). This theory is a theory for achieving truth based on coherence and consistency criteria. Namely, a statement is considered true if it is in accordance with a comprehensive network of logically related issues. This school of thought argues that a decision is considered correct if there is witnessing or justification from previous decisions, the truth of which has been validated.

Thus, coherence theory in rationalism is an approach to determining the truth of a proposition or belief system by assessing the extent to which the ideas support and are

consistent with each other. In this context, truth is not measured by conformity to empirical facts, but by the logical relationships between propositions within a system of knowledge.
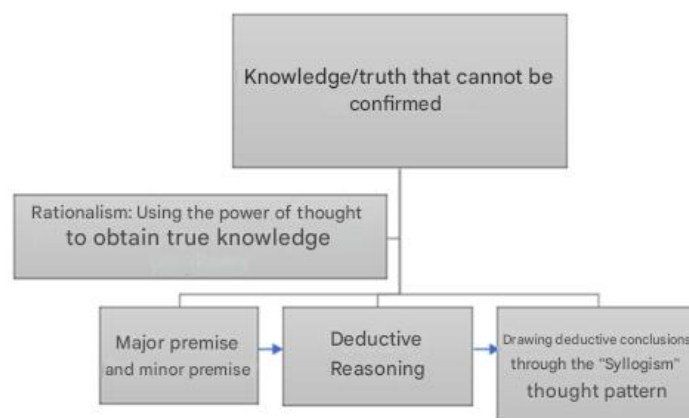

Figure 1. Scheme of the Deductive Reasoning Process in Rationalism

Rationalism in Islamic Perspective

The concept of rationalism in Islam generally refers to issues related to theological science, prioritizing the use of reason and logic to understand religious teachings. This includes the effort to unite revelation (religion) and reason (rationality), emphasizing the importance of interpretation in addressing theological and philosophical problems. The tradition of using logic in Islam began during the prophetic era, particularly after the death of Prophet Muhammad. As Islam expanded rapidly, evidenced by the influx of non-Arab cultures and languages into the Islamic sphere, new challenges arose, such as misunderstandings and misapplications of religion, as well as issues in the political and social spheres. Thus, linguistic logic became a response to these challenges.

Islamic rationalism is closely associated with divinity and metaphysics, showing that reason and revelation are inseparable. Revelation serves as divine guidance, directing reason in alignment with religious principles, while reason is tasked with determining the correctness or error of every event according to Sharia principles. In the thought of Ibn Rushd, one key idea is the connection between reason and revelation. Ibn Rushd argued that religious issues should be addressed using the power of reason, and any contradiction between reason and revelation is a central theme in his work *Fasl al-Maqal*. He placed logic as the method for seeking truth and sought to reconcile reason and revelation through a framework of *ittisal* (connection), suggesting that philosophy is a means to understand God and His creations (*al-mawjudat*).
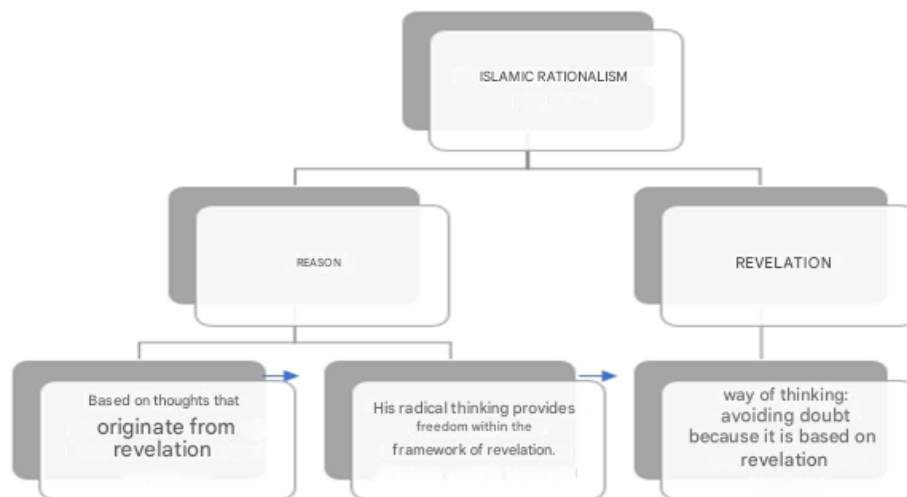
Figure 2. Integration of Reason and Revelation in Islamic Rationalism

Rationalism in Western Perspective

Western rationalism is also an important school of thought in the history of philosophy that emphasizes the role of reason as the primary source of knowledge. Etymologically, rationalism comes from the English words *rationalism*, meaning logic, and *ratio*, meaning reason. Terminologically, it is a school of thought that places reason as the primary source of knowledge. Western rationalism seeks to address the challenges faced by society, including significant social, scientific, and theological changes. The Western rationalist approach can be described as a method of thinking that emphasizes the use of reason and logic as the primary sources of knowledge and truth.

dhering to universal principles of reason. One of the hallmarks of Western rationalism is its skepticism toward dogma, which includes criticism of authority in both religious and social contexts.

Both Islamic and Western philosophy, rationalism upholds the principle that reason is the basis of certain knowledge even if it is not supported by empirical facts. Like the rationalism of Rene Descartes, which is one of the important milestones in the history of Western philosophy. The key to Rene Descartes' thinking is emphasizing the importance of doubt as the first step to finding the truth. In referring to this certainty, his method known as "*Le doute méthodique*" or the method of doubt is an approach in the search for certain knowledge, so philosophy for Descartes is questioning metaphysical subjects to find the basis of certain knowledge. In the journey to find the point of certainty, Descartes begins with doubt about everything. Doubt is evidence of thinking, which he later called the concept of "*Cogito, ergo sum*" (I think, therefore I am) which became the foundation of his philosophical thinking. From this was born the method of Rene Descartes which became the foundation of rationalism as the root of truth and knowledge.

Rationalism, in this context, has a secular foundation and does not refer to revelation. Truth and knowledge based on rationalism tend to be anthropocentric. The term anthropocentrism positions humans as the source of truth, ethics, knowledge, and wisdom,

leading to a distinction between them and revelation. This understanding holds that the benchmark for scientific truth lies not in revelation or scripture, but rather in the correspondence and coherence within the science itself. This is in accordance with Rene Descartes' principle above, which concludes that God's existence can be understood through perfection. This suggests that perfection can be created by God because humans cannot create anything beyond God. Therefore, rationalism here does not touch on religious grounds at all, but rather uses pure reason and logic.
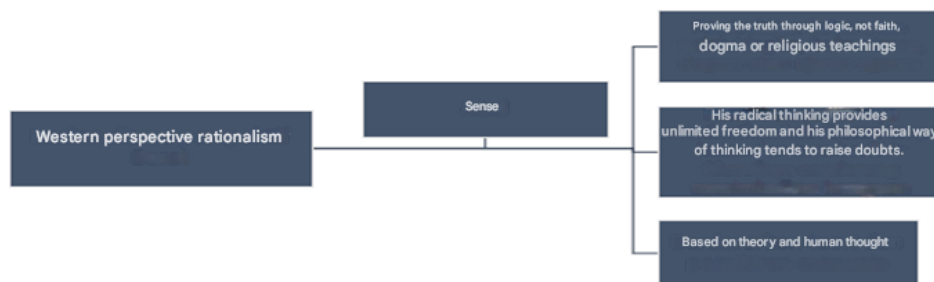

Figure 3. Structure of Rationalism in Western Perspective

In this context, Western and Islamic rationalism have different characteristics, although both still focus on the use of reason. Islamic rationalism has a uniqueness that distinguishes it from traditional Western rationalism. The following are several main points that explain this uniqueness.

First, the integration of reason and revelation. In the Islamic tradition, reason is considered God's grace that facilitates understanding and reflection on His creation. Thinkers such as *Al-Ghazali* and *Ibn Sina* emphasized that reason not only functions to understand the physical reality but also to delve into the meaning of revelation. *Al-Ghazali*, in his work *The Incoherence of Philosophers*, denounced views separating reason from revelation, confirming that both must complement each other to reach a complete understanding of truth and human existence. Thus, reason functions as a tool to strengthen faith and provide a deeper understanding of religious teachings.

In the Western perspective, rationalism asserts that reason is the primary source of knowledge. Philosophers like René Descartes argued that logical deduction and critical thinking are the most effective and reliable ways to reach the truth. Western rationalism tends to reject claims that cannot be verified by reason and logic. However, this form of rationalism is not fully skeptical of knowledge gained through the senses, as sensory experience is also necessary to stimulate the functioning of reason. Despite this, reason is still capable of producing knowledge independently of sensory input.

In contrast, Islamic rationalism focuses more on theological and metaphysical questions, such as the relationship between humans and God and the existence of the natural universe. Muslim thinkers use reason to understand holy texts and seek new insights into religious teachings. The aim is to defend and explain faith with rational arguments, such as the

existence of God and His attributes. However, a distinctive feature of Islamic rationalism is its recognition of the limitations of reason in explaining metaphysical and spiritual matters. In this context, revelation is considered a higher and more absolute source of truth. The tradition of *kalam*, or theological rationalism in Islam, uses reason to discuss theological issues, such as the existence of God and His attributes. This illustrates that, while reason plays an important role in understanding faith, revelation remains the primary source that provides ultimate guidance.

This differs from the Western perspective, which emphasizes philosophical secularism in human life. Scientific knowledge in the West is not born from religious moral values but rather built and strengthened by traditions of human reason. According to *al-Attas*, there are several factors inherent in Western culture, including that Western civilization glorifies reason to guide human life, behaves with duality toward reality and truth, holds to the principle of a secular view of life, and adheres to the doctrine of humanism. These factors greatly influence the pattern of Western thought, which has typical idealism, secularism, materialism, and rationalism.

Tabel 1. Comparison Table Paradigm Islamic and Western Rationalism

Aspect	Islamic Rationalism	Western rationalism
Source Knowledge	Combination of revelation, reason, experience senses, and heart. Revelation remains the highest source	Reason as source main knowledge. Experience sensory can play a role, but not fundamental
The Position of Reason	Reason is a tool to understand reality and interpret revelation. It is not allowed to be contradictory with revelation.	Reason stands independent as the highest authority for finding truth
The Relationship between Reason and Revelation	Integrative: reason and revelation complement each other (Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Al-Ghazali).	Dualistic/secular: truth no dependent on revelation; revelation no become reference epistemic
Method of obtaining truth	Logic, reasoning, *qiyas*, interpretation, and thinking metaphysics based on text and reality	Priori deductive method (Descartes), logical analysis, methodical skepticism, and rational coherence.
View about God	The form of God is accepted through revelation and strengthened by reason; God is the ontological source.	The existence of God (if discussed) proven through reason/logic, not through authority revelation
Focus study	Metaphysics, theology, and ethics, alongside the relationships man–God and the order cosmos	Ontology rational, mathematics, science; epistemology critical. Focus on the natural world and the subject
Theory of Truth	Combined coherence + conformity with revelation (authority transcendent)	Internal coherence and rationality of the system knowledge; Not depending on revelation
Figure important	Al-Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, Al-Farabi.	Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant
Implications to civilization	Gave birth to kalam science, Islamic philosophy, and the integration of ethics–metaphysics–revelation	Give birth to modern science, secularization science, system science-based verification rational.

Of the several explanations above, the flow of rationalism has given significant influence to the development of modern thinking in various fields. Among them, first, in the

development of knowledge. Rationalism promotes a systematic and critical approach to scientific study. The scientific method, which is based on observation, experimentation, and logical analysis, developed from rationalist principles. This allows scientists to produce knowledge that can be tested and verified, which becomes the basis for technological progress and innovation in the modern era.

In addition, in the realm of philosophy and ethics. In the field of philosophy, rationalism has influenced ethical and moral thinking. Philosophers such as Immanuel Kant developed ethical theories based on reason, emphasizing the importance of universal principles in determining correct actions. This approach contributed to the formation of moral theories that prioritize rationality and justice, replacing more traditional and dogmatic views.

Islamic thinkers also contributed to the development of ethical theory. They emphasized the importance of reason in determining good actions and developing concepts of justice based on universal moral principles. Furthermore, regarding politics and basic human rights. Rationalism also influenced the development of modern political thinking. Thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau used rational principles to develop ideas about basic human rights, individual freedom, and government based on consensus. These concepts became pillars in the formation of modern democratic states.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that both Islamic and Western rationalism regard reason as a crucial instrument for acquiring knowledge, yet they diverge in their epistemological paradigms. Western rationalism emphasizes the autonomy of reason through an anthropocentric and deductive methodological approach, while Islamic rationalism integrates reason with revelation within a theocentric framework. These differences have shaped modern knowledge development, with the West advancing toward the secularization of science and Islamic traditions preserving the interplay of religion, reason, and ethics. The findings pave the way for developing a relevant, integrative epistemology for contemporary scientific discourse. Despite limitations in primary literature and analytical coverage, future research could expand this by incorporating underrepresented Islamic rationalist texts (e.g., from Al-Farabi or Sufi epistemologies) and quantitative comparisons of rationalist influences on modern STEM fields to enhance depth and applicability.

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