

**THE GOLDEN MEAN BETWEEN SECULAR
AND RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISMS:
REVISITING AL-FARABI'S *AL-MADINAT AL-
FADILA* AND IDEOLOGIES OF ABU BAKR AL-
RAZI AND AL-GHAZALI**

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Abstract

Throughout the medieval period, regardless of internal discords, Islam happened to possess a considerable influence over the world. Despite the presence of Christian Byzantium in the mix of Islamic states, the Middle Ages in large part, borrowing Adam Mez's phrase, saw 'The Renaissance of Islam'. As Islam flourished, the world outside the realm of Islam positioned itself with the Muslim world. However, things steadily started to change towards the end of the medieval period and at the outset of the modern age, and eventually, the roles reversed between the Muslim world and the west in the wake of the European Renaissance and Enlightenment. As the realization of the fading political influence set in, the Islamic world sought to address the west's ideological challenge in the guise of secularism and modernism, and scrambled for relevance in the new world order. The Muslim response to modernism, in a broad sense, can be divided into two fundamentalist tendencies, secular fundamentalism and religious fundamentalism; trends inherited primarily from thoughts and ideologies of medieval Muslim polymaths and philosophers. In view of the above, this article, first, attempts to examine the two fundamentalist tendencies of Muslim attitude by tracing their roots in the works of Abu Bakr al-Razi and Muhammad al-Ghazali. Secondly, an ethical review of al-Farabi's concept of happiness and his treatise *al-Madinat al-Fadila* (The Virtuous City) will be presented as a *sui generis* reference point for mapping out an ideal tendency for devising a balanced Muslim

response to the phenomenon of modernism which shall certainly take position between the two extremes of religious and secular fundamentalisms. A contemporary reconstruction of the ideologies of the mentioned Muslim philosophers, and most importantly of al-Farabi's work, in conclusion, may enable us to effectively put our past to use in order to address and tackle the doctrinal and functional challenges that lie before the Muslim world in the present times.

Keywords: Religious Fundamentalism, Secular Fundamentalism, al-Farabi, al-Ghazali, al-Razi

Introduction

Arguably, the question of Islam's position and pertinence within the liberal and secular fabric of the modern world order is among the most recurrent themes for discussion among Muslims and the rest. Against the backdrop of the explosion of knowledge and scientific advancements, and in the environment where religion has been conveniently relegated to the peripheries and pushed outside the sphere of society and politics, Muslims at places have found it difficult to devise an appropriate ideological response to the change and failed to productively adjust with the modernity which is championed by the west. The western dominance, which coincided with the separation of church and state sparked off the Cartesian revolution, named after the founder of modern philosophy Rene Descartes (d. 1650) had become clear at the outset of the modern era. However, in the early centuries of the Modern Era, the realization of shifting of power axis to the west along with the ideological and political stagnation of the Muslims remained unnoticed in view of the presence of powerful Islamic states including the Ottoman Empire, Safavid Iran and the Mughul Empire. Relevance of religion was never challenged throughout the medieval period and conflicts between Christendom and Islamic Empires were primarily political; in fact, clashes occurred to secure religious supremacy. Subsequently, following the end of the Ottoman Empire in 1923, the Muslims unpredictably saw themselves facing unheard-of phenomena called secularism and modernism (that had developed in the wake of the industrial and scientific revolution) in the west, culminating in the separation of state and church.

Secularism in the guise of modernity did not just object to Islam, but the essence of religion as a whole. Talal Asad argues with the words of

Charles Taylor that ‘secularism emerged in response to the political problems of Western Christian society in early modernity—beginning with its devastating wars of religion’.¹² Christendom conceded to the phenomenon by separating state and church; however, the response of Islam would not be as straightforward. Religion had always been at the center of politics in Islam. Similarly, affairs of state and civil policies were set up on the basis of the tenets of faith. The sudden exposure to the wind of modernism momentarily brought about an ideological paralysis among the Muslims, splitting them, in overall into two polar blocs based on their response. Aspects of modern society were perceived in flagrant contradiction to Islamic values by one group which rejected the west’s limitation of religion ‘to the sphere of individual piety and subjective dispositions’³ and believed their resistance to western modernism as a defense of Islam against infidels. The other bloc, on the contrary, submitted to the western propagation of progression and development approving to the fact that religion ought to be considered a segment belonging to the period before ‘the end of history’ and that in the modern world order religion is purely a part of private sphere and inferior to political affiliation. The two blocs that are tilted towards the opposite extremes of fundamentalism; one in the context of religion and the other in secularism, creatively exploit the process of interpreting Quran and traditions of the Prophet (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) in a way that serves their own point of view to obtain legitimization and popularity.⁴ Responses of the two groups to modernism have crystalized into distinct ideologies that prevail over the Muslim tendencies to date, as religious fundamentalism and secular fundamentalism; the former termed by Shahrough Akhavi as ‘maximalist view’ and the latter as ‘minimalist view’.⁵ Admittedly, secularism is more closely linked to the western views regarding religion and is often held as synonymous to neo-liberalism in the west; however, the term secular fundamentalism will be decontextualized in the current study and employed in terms of Muslim response toward modernism, which places Islam as secondary and often a rival to the phenomenon of modernism. Despite the stark ideological contrast between the two tendencies, both intersect on a point of agreement that the modern political world order is unsuited for the functioning of Islam; hence, one resorting to religion and the other siding with modernity.

The view that Islam conflicts with the spirit of modernity is fairly problematic and can be called into question by a careful review of Islamic history. Religious fundamentalists dwell upon the establishment of the first Islamic state of Medina by the Prophet (The Last Prophet upon

whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) and argue that Islamic morals cannot be materially applied in the absence of political institutions functioning according to the fundamentals of Islam, as happened in the Prophet's (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) Medina. In order to accomplish the realization of such a political realm, at times religious fundamentalism often becomes prone to violence. The secular fundamentalists have the same thought but diverge from religious fundamentalism and conform to modernism by limiting religion from crossing the boundaries of individual piety. This view of Islam tends to obscure the part of Islamic history that bears extreme significance in the present context. The Prophet's (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) initial preaching of Islam transpired in Mecca under severe political circumstances and in the face of extreme adversity. Islam was first founded not through the establishment of an Islamic state, which took place twelve years after Islam's emergence, but under adverse political conditions which counters the prevalent view today that Islam can only be adequately practiced under an Islamic state. Furthermore, modernism can be evidenced tracing its roots back to the Renaissance and Enlightenment that primarily intended to revive Greek intellectual and cultural tradition. In other words, the Greek essence of reason and demonstrative sciences cultivated the roots of modernism. It must be pointed out that the Greek scientific tradition reached the European minds of Renaissance and Enlightenment passing through Islamic thought which played a vital role in the process of transmission of the Greek thought during the medieval years. Muslim philosophers and intellectuals efficiently attempted to weave the Greek intellectual heritage into the fabric of Islamic theology and doctrines. The introduction of Greek-Hellenistic philosophical sciences and their integration with Islam was perceived much in the same way as modernism is viewed by Muslim minds today and projected similar responses. A school of thought opposed and rejected the inclusion and employment of sciences and reason in the study of Islamic doctrines, laying the foundations of religious fundamentalism while another school of thought, on the contrary, subordinated religion to reason and sciences creating the basis for secular fundamentalism.

This study stands on the view that neither the challenge of the phenomenon of modernism nor the two fundamentalist and radical responses of the Muslims are new and unknown to Islam. Medieval Islamic thought encountered the roots of modernism in the form of Greek-Hellenistic philosophy which brought forth responses that reflect the

present Muslim reactions towards western modernism today. In view of this, it becomes vital to revisit the encounter of Islam with modernism in the past and re-examine the Islamic responses so as to better understand and find a solution to the modern problem of fundamentalism prevalent in Muslim thought, particularly since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The term fundamentalism commonly relates to ‘a modern phenomenon, dedicated to fighting the secular state’⁶; nevertheless, the term will be employed throughout the study as a reference to a mindset unable to let in reform or change. The current study will first draw on the works and ideologies of Abu Bakr al-Razi and al-Ghazali placing the former within the context of secular fundamentalism and the latter within religious fundamentalism and discuss (a) al-Razi’s blatant rejection of religion, need of the Prophet’s (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) and prophetic miracles which originated from his excessive dependence and engagement with sciences, particularly, medicine, (b) al-Ghazali’s objection to philosophy and reason and his conflicting rejection of philosophers who attempt to integrate sciences with Islamic thought and practices. After drawing parallels between the two tendencies of contemporary Muslim response to modernism and position of al-Razi and al-Ghazali with regard to science and reason, the study will secondly present a hermeneutic analysis of al-Farabi’s ideology and the political treatise *al-Madinat al-Fadila* within the framework of the current state of Muslims and endeavor to sketch a ‘Golden Mean’ between religious and secular fundamentalisms that could furnish the Muslims with a tendency to devise a suitable and balanced response to modernism comprised of the ‘preservation of the old and embracement of the new’.

In view of the gravity of the situation between Islam and its orientation with modernism and its torchbearer, the west, the subject attracts fair amount of scholarly attraction. The growing corpus on the issue, in large part, engages with the problem from a political perspective and concerns mainly the policymakers instead of the masses. Moreover, apart from a small number of works, discussions on the issue focus mainly on pointing out faults of the opposing side. Works such as Talal Assad’s *Formations of the Secular* and Ole Woevers’ chapter titled *World Conflict over Religion: Secularism as a flawed Solution*⁷ deal mainly with the problems within the phenomenon of modernity and secularism on part of development of policies, and obliquely sympathize with Islam; on the other hand, Taner Edis’ *Islam Evolving: Radicalism, Reformation, and the Uneasy Relationship with the Secular West* in which the author dares to confess that as long as countries are not allowed to engage in inquiry

with an open mind, and as long as Muslim authorities continue to clip the wings of science in order to make it compatible with Islam, Muslim regions will continue to lag behind the west⁸, and Fazlur Rahman's *Revival and Reform in Islam*⁹ places the onus on Muslims to adjust and reform according to the modern world. The question of the extent of Islam's applicability and relevance in the modern world, at the same time, has prompted enquiries into the political history of Islam with the purpose of closely understanding the spirit of Islamic ideologies and extracting solutions to the challenges surfacing in the modern world such as E. I. J. Rosenthal's *Political Thought in Medieval Islam*¹⁰, Antony Black's *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present*¹¹ and Patrica Crone's *Gods Rule: Government and Islam*¹²: yet, much the same as studies pertaining to contemporary issues, the historical enquiries emphasize on policy making of the Muslim states and cultivating hospitable relationship between the legislative bodies of the two sides: Islam and the West. The current study will treat the problem of the Muslims' response to modernism against a philosophical backdrop than a political one and from the perspective of Muslim population at large instead of limiting the scope to the Muslim leadership. Through deviating from the conventional design of political analysis of the issue, the study will make an attempt to present an ethical angle to the problem and devise a moral answer to the question.

Laying the ground: Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites

The religious and secular fundamentalist attitudes of the Muslims are believed to have sprouted as a result of the challenge of modernism that appeared in the 20th century; however, the two fundamentalist bents can be traced back to the 8th century AD. Views of the religious group which propagates the so-called fundamental upholding of Islam and its practices, and the secular bloc which holds the view that the religion of Islam is deficient in harmonizing with modernity, and demands fundamental changes and reforms, can be found echoing from the two rival schools of early Muslim theology: the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites. The two groups of Muslim thinkers emerged in the process of argumentation about Islamic doctrines which had started with the Shia-Sunni split but reached its zenith in the ensuing centuries. Although the debate between the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites did not occur in response to any external influences and addressed principle doctrines of Islamic

faith, their line of reasoning arguably laid ground for the religious and secular fundamentalist attitudes.

Mu'tazilite thought, attributed to the theologian Wasil bin. Ata, argued for the importance of reason in matters related to religion, mainly God's omnipotence and The Holy Quran.¹³ The Mu'tazilites stressed upon the employment of reason viz. *'āql* in interpreting Quranic references that cannot be comprehended in the literal sense, primarily concerning the attributes of God. Among their principle arguments was the matter of free will, as they claimed that in the sphere of volitional activity God did not actually play any role and that humanity was central in all. Natural human reason, according to Mu'tazilism, was capable of knowing good and bad *per se* and hence, evil actions of humans did not have any connection with God's will.¹⁴ Through excessive dependence on the use of reason in matters of faith, the Mu'tazilites held revelation as secondary to human intellect; the same tendency that reflects the response of secular fundamentalists to modernism.

Ash'arism departed from the Mu'tazilite system of rationalistic theology to orthodox reliance on the literal interpretation of The Holy Quran and Prophetic tradition constituting the basis of religious fundamentalism. The central point of opposition of Abu-l-Hasan al-Ash'ari, the founder of Ash'arism, to the Mu'tazilites was their preference to reason over revelation and the argument of human free will. Abu-l-Hasan al-Ash'ari was himself a Mu'tazilite until he saw Prophet Muhammad (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) three times in his dream after which he abandoned Mu'tazilite thought and founded Ash'arism. Ash'arism rejected the idea that humanity can be validly said to act at all, let alone act freely.¹⁵ By completely excluding reason from theological affairs, Ash'arism dismissed any role of human intellect in matters of faith. Contrary to the Mu'tazilite claim that human reason is capable of discerning between good and bad, Ash'arism insisted that no right or wrong could be known through reason and that it is the role of revelation to declare what is good and what is evil. Ash'arism's orthodox view against rationalism and sole reliance on revelation gravely fractured the practice of constructive argumentation regarding the doctrinal principles of Islam. Revelation ceased with the demise of the Prophet (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) and literal references of The Holy Quran without a concordant interpretation coming from a single source and the traditions of the Prophet (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) *per se* could not provide Muslims exhaustive assistance in determining good and evil in every age and time;

as a result, the only option left for Ash‘arites, with elimination of reason and rational interpretation, would be to resort to religious fundamentalism, as can be witnessed in widespread Muslim response to modernism today. Anxiety and insecurity that laid at the roots of the Ash‘arites’ conservative response to the Mu‘tazilites and their utilization of reason is responsible for inducing Muslims to be skeptical of modernity and progression in present times.

During the same period when Mu‘tazilites and Ash‘arites strived for relevancy, the former through reason and rationalism, and the latter through orthodox Islam, Islamic philosophy appeared in company of Greek-Hellenistic thoughts and sciences as an arbitrator in the dispute between reason and revelation. It attempted to devise a golden mean between the Mu‘tazilite dependency on reason and the Ash‘arite rejection of rationalism and upholding of orthodoxy by representing theological doctrines through shades of Greek-Hellenistic concepts. However, the seeds of secular and religious fundamentalisms brought about by the two rival schools of thought had put down the roots and grew in strength through the radical responses to integration of Greek sciences with doctrines of Islamic theology. In the Greek intellectual tradition, Islam would engage with the roots of modernism and reactions of Muslim intellectuals would crystallize tendencies that have passed down through generations to the Muslims that are facing the challenge of modernism today.

Setting the trend: al-Razi and al-Ghazali

Modernism traces its origin to the rebirth of classical Greek intellectual tradition in the west, commonly referred as the period of Renaissance and Enlightenment. In this respect, it must be pointed out that centuries before the European Renaissance and Enlightenment, the first revival of Greek thought and sciences took place against the backdrop of the emergence of the neo-Platonic theology in Islam and establishment of philosophy. Philosophers aimed for a balance between reason and revelation and believed that Islamic doctrines could better be understood by employing Greek-Hellenistic sciences and discursive and inductive reasoning. This purpose called for an open-minded approach on the part of the philosophers towards knowledge and sciences as they drew on works translated into Arabic from a variety of ancient Greek, Sanskrit and Old Persian sources. Al-Kindi is considered to be the first Muslim philosopher who touched upon Aristotelian and Platonic ideas in his works; nevertheless, ‘his knowledge was deficient’ on the subject in

comparison to al-Farabi: the second master¹⁶ who systematically incorporated Greek philosophical ideas in his works that were based on Islamic views towards metaphysics, cosmology, human nature, ethics and politics maintaining a delicate balance between reason and revelation.¹⁷ The balanced approach, however, was swiftly relegated to the peripheries of Islamic philosophical thought by orthodox and fundamentalist responses by intellectuals such as al-Razi and al-Ghazali who somehow reinforced the radical tendencies founded by the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites.

Muslim modernists and secularists who place Islam as secondary to modernity are labeled as heretics by religious fundamentalists as even those who tend to hold a balanced view toward modernism. Similar was the fate of the famous medieval Muslim physician, Abu Bakr al-Razi, who was referred to as a heretic owing to his rationalistic approach in dealing with religious doctrines. Al-Razi was primarily a physician but also turned his hand to philosophy. He penned pioneering works on medicine drawing mainly from Galen. Al-Razi was deeply influenced by medicine and spent many years working in hospitals in Baghdad and Ray. His intense association with Greek medicine molded his extra-rationalistic approach against religion emitting a tendency similar to that of the secular fundamentalists today. Al-Razi propagated a theory according to which God's eternity was shared by four other principles namely soul, matter, time and place. The Five Eternal Theory of al-Razi was challenged and refuted by the Fatimid missionary Abu Hatim al-Razi in head to head debates in Ray.¹⁸ The reasons behind al-Razi's rejection of God's unity and compromise over the principle Islamic belief can assist in understanding the approach of secular fundamentalist Muslims who concede to compromising the spirit of Islam for modern living. Being a doctor and a physician, al-Razi was struck by the widespread suffering in the world. He could not accept the fact that the benevolent and wise God could be responsible for all the suffering and evil; hence, al-Razi found it convenient to put the blame on entities other than God. In the same vein, frustration of not being able to find suitable answers and responses to modern challenges from within religion compels Muslims to relegate religion to individual piety and deem Islam as unfitting for the modern world order.

Al-Razi's individualism can be seen in his rejection of prophetic revelation in favor of individual reason. He may be drawing ideas from the Mu'tazilites as he states that intellect viz. *'āql* is superior to revelation and hence, we should put our trust in reason and not in prophecy. Al-Razi's fundamental rejection of Islam is refuted by another Fatimid Dai

Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani. Dai Hamid al-Din employs a rationalistic strategy to counter al-Razi's view of reason's sufficiency and supremacy over religion. He records the crux of al-Razi's argument that intellect through education can achieve highest intellectual ranks and for this reason prophetic revelation is not obligatory. It should be pointed out that Muslims today who belong to the secular fundamentalist bloc bear much the same opinion that they can rely on their individual intellect and reason to maintain a proper and pious living in modern environment instead of resorting to religion for answers which, according to their views, is incompatible with modernity. Dai Hamid al-Din al-Kirmani argues that intellect of a newborn requires nurturing and fostering and if left alone in isolation, it would not acquire knowledge and sense on its own; similarly, while it is true that human intellect bears capacity to achieve highest of ranks, it requires nurturing and fostering which is provided by revelation.¹⁹ Al-Razi's rationalistic attitude which echoed the Mu'tazilite view founded the secular fundamentalist trend of the Muslim thought, and reflection of his opinions can be observed in the Muslim response to modernism in the world of today. Before long, even al-Razi's rationalistic stance would be overshadowed by the orthodox position of a personality who would make the conservative Ash'arite view the mainstream of Muslim thought and establish the religious fundamentalist mindset that is largely prevalent among present Muslims.

In the tenth and eleventh centuries, during which the Islamic East was the hub of intellectual activities, philosophy blossomed. The Greek-Hellenistic philosophical and scientific traditions became closely integrated with Islamic theology owing mainly to the contributions of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and his likes. Chaos and turmoil befell the Islamic East in the last decade of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth as Islam came in direct conflict with the Christian west in the form of Crusades. This downturn of Islamic rule, which played a crucial role in shaping the Muslim attitude towards the west for centuries to come, coincided with decay in the Islamic philosophical thought brought about by Abu Hamid al-Ghazali. Innumerable works of al-Ghazali resulted in the revival of the orthodox Ash'arite thought - which had been sidelined by the predominance of philosophical discourse in the earlier centuries. Al-Ghazali challenged the utilization of philosophical sciences in dealing with Islamic theology and launched fierce attacks on the philosophers in general and Ibn Sina in particular. In his opposition to philosophers and sciences, al-Ghazali appears as a confused and insecure religious intellectual, in modern opinion.

Religious fundamentalists perceive aspects of modernism as fundamentally opposed to the spirit of Islam and call for an Islamic political system based on the ideals of the Prophet's (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) state of Medina. At the same time, they entertain modern elements that serve their cause contradicting their normal hostile sentiments to modernism. While they proclaim detachment from modernism in rhetoric, they fail to comply with it in application. This self-contradictory approach reflects off their confusion towards the phenomenon of modernism and leads them to the state of internal and external conflict. Better understanding of the aforementioned argument can be achieved from al-Ghazali's views with regard to philosophers and demonstrative sciences. Al-Ghazali's primary aim was to re-establish the Ash'arite view about the supremacy of religion by demoting reason and philosophy and his aim found perfect patrons in the Sunni Seljuqs who commissioned al-Ghazali to provide Islamic legitimization to their military control over the Abbasid Caliphate.²⁰ From this orthodox perspective, al-Ghazali took on the sciences insisting that they have nothing to do with religion; however, just like the religious fundamentalists fail to detach themselves from elements of modernism, al-Ghazali was unable to conclusively denounce demonstrative sciences and consequently, falling prey to self-contradiction and confusion. For instance, in his *Jawahir al-Quran*, al-Ghazali criticizes medicine, astronomy, and physics that although these are genuine sciences, they yield no benefit in this life or the next;²¹ on the other hand, in his *Mizan al-Amal*, he notes that although sciences hold a lower place than religion, they are essential in appreciating the truth in religious practices without which the 'the meaning of the content of prayer is just as religious as dancing'.²² Similarly, in his *Ihya- al- Ulum*, al-Ghazali denounces the science of law and relegates it to the lowest rank and lashes out at the bearers of this science as corrupt men of this world;²³ yet again, in one of his final works, *al-Mustafa*, he terms the science of law as the noblest of sciences.²⁴ Theology, in the same way, was condemned and glorified at the same time by al-Ghazali whose selective criticism can also be seen in his conflict with philosophers, as on the one hand he criticizes them and on the other accepts that their tool of logic and other demonstrative methods can be optionally utilized.²⁵ These self-contradictory views of al-Ghazali went unnoticed and were glossed over by his staunch advocacy of the Ash'arite view which received further radicalization through his partial shift to Sufism.

In their defense against the rising challenge of modernism, the religious fundamentalist tendency often appears aggressive and violent.

This, in large part, stems from their didactic acceptance of Islam's superiority and failure to engage in dialectic argumentation; as a result, the religious fundamentalists exercise firm rejection of modernism and everything they believe which, according to them, may happen to contradict the fundamental values of Islam. This tendency of the religious fundamentalists mirrors al-Ghazali's didactic opposition to the philosophers in his *Tahafut al-Falasifa* a work dedicated to expose the limitations of philosophy and establish the unquestionable supremacy of revelation.²⁶ It is to be noted here that philosophers did not contest the superiority of revelation; in fact, they attempted to serve the cause of Islam and its beliefs through reason and sciences. In the preface of *Tahafut*, al-Ghazali chides philosophers stating that they think that they are smarter and more intelligent than the rest as they claim that they follow the teaching of the ancient philosophers Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, and their likes whom they regard as masters of all sciences.²⁷ Throughout the work, he keeps reiterating that while logic, reason, and demonstrative sciences can be optionally utilized, they remain secondary to revelation which alludes to his aggressive and orthodox attitude focusing on rejection of the philosophers rather than establishing the correct way as he notes in the third introduction of the work that 'I enter into objecting the philosophers as one who demands and denies not as one who claims and affirms'.²⁸ Impressions of the religious fundamentalist tendency's inclination to aggression instead of dialectic argumentation can be evidenced towards the end of al-Ghazali's work. For the most part, al-Ghazali appears to be moderate towards the errors of the philosophers and consider their mistakes forgivable; notwithstanding, al-Ghazali's tone towards the end of the work becomes harsh as he identifies three philosophical teachings that qualify for the label of heresy and claims that the philosophers are apostates and can be punished accordingly. Al-Ghazali's argument on prophetic miracles is also worth mentioning as it nullifies the significance of scientific investigations and research that lie at the heart of intellectual progression. Drawing on the Ash'arite view, al-Ghazali asserts that God creates all actions, and causes do not necessitate effects. He goes to argue that when we see fire causing burning it is not the fire that actually causes burning, but God simply creates these two things side by side. In this way, al-Ghazali invalidates the significance of scientific enquiries claiming that results of such enquiries are not based on necessary premises;²⁹ a view that continues to corrupt interest and inspiration of the religious fundamentalist towards sciences and research studies till date.

Al-Razi's rationalism and rejection of religious values and al-Ghazali's staunch opposition to philosophy and demonstrative sciences widened the split that had occurred with the differences between the Mu'tazilites and Ash'arites. Their response and reaction to the integration of Greek-Hellenistic intellectual tradition with Islamic theology set the trend for the fundamentalist responses of Muslims to modernism that we witness today. In the wake of the prominence of the two fundamentalist thoughts, the balance between reason and revelation, which was the true intention behind the harmonization of philosophy and theology, was neglected. Nevertheless, the Greek intellectual heritage met with philosophers who devised a balance between reason and revelation and contributed to the body of Islamic thought a 'Golden Mean' between the religious and secular fundamentalist ideologies whose implementation can revive Islam's relevance alongside modernism in the current times.

The Golden Mean: Al-Farabi's *al-Madinat al-Fadila*

A common element between religious and secular fundamentalists is their inability to perceive the true nature of Islam which reflects off the word 'Islam'; peace and tolerance. The approaches of al-Razi and al-Ghazali, as discussed above, confirm that they did not appreciate the integration of Islamic values and practices with philosophical and demonstrative sciences; hence, the former subordinated Islam to reason and rationality and the latter went the other way to subvert the role of philosophy and sciences. On the contrary, the intention of introducing Greek philosophical sciences and Neo-Platonic metaphysics into Islamic thought was to form a holistic balance between the two and promote the all-embracing spirit of Islam which is illustrated by al-Farabi, the pioneer of integrating Greek intellectual tradition with Islamic concepts through his works.

The ideologies of al-Razi and al-Ghazali were founded on the view that reason and philosophical sciences cannot be calibrated with the values and teachings of Islam. Al-Farabi's balance between the sciences and Islamic thought stemmed from the belief that philosophical sciences are part of Islam and serve its cause. He notes that the sciences, foundations of which were laid by Plato and Aristotle, rescues Muslims from confusion in religious doctrines and gives them a way by which the statements of *Shari'a* become clear that it is perfectly clear and true.³⁰ Al-Farabi expounds the idea of balance through the concept of *happiness*. Borrowing from the theories of Aristotle and Plato, al-Farabi states that the highest goal of mankind is achieving ultimate *happiness* which is

acquisition of all knowledge and truths by the intellect. Islam, according to him, constitutes the perfect path towards *happiness*; however, it contains bars that can only be unlocked through philosophical and demonstrative sciences. By the use of reason and sciences, al-Farabi claims, one can realize the potential for knowledge and grasp all the truths that rest in Islamic doctrines.³¹ Al-Farabi was a Muslim first and a disciple of Plato, Aristotle, and their Hellenistic successors and commentators second, and through this balanced approach, he formulates a dual-sided response to the religious and secular fundamentalists and their response to modernism. He makes it clear that revelation is most superior but its benefits cannot be reaped without reason; therefore, creating a ‘golden mean’ between the two fundamentalist views.³²

An increased understanding of al-Farabi’s concept of *happiness*, which is founded on the art of balancing, can be gleaned from a work titled ‘*Ara’-ahl al-Madinat al-Fadila wa Mudaadaatoha*’ (Opinions of the Citizens of the Virtuous City and of the Viscous City) commonly referred as ‘*al-Madinat al-Fadila*’ (The Virtuous City). The structure and form of the treatise elucidate al-Farabi’s art of balancing between revelation and reason. As the treatise primarily concerns the opinions of the citizens of the virtuous city, a large part of the work registers theoretical discussion pertaining to Islamic theological doctrines. Utilizing philosophical sciences and logic, the first twenty-five chapters of the work are taken up with a disquisition on God’s attributes and cosmology covering almost all fundamental Islamic beliefs. Through this technique of analysis, al-Farabi replies to the secular fundamentalist approach of al-Razi demonstrating that sciences and Islam viz. revelation and religion go hand in hand with each other and demonstrative sciences, in truth, compliment the hidden truths in Islamic doctrines. The remaining nine chapters, in the same vein, respond to the other radical tendency of religious fundamentalism. The discussion on the political matters and man’s perfection in the virtuous city in these nine chapters draws heavily from Plato’s *Republic* and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. Through synthesizing concepts of Plato and Aristotle and Islamic political ideology, al-Farabi stresses that Islamic principles can allow in and benefit from foreign elements and sciences without affecting the core values of Islam; in fact, Islam’s knowledge enhances through such fusions. A fine example in the case of the blending of Islamic and Greek notions is al-Farabi’s concept of philosopher-prophet who is alone qualified to rule the virtuous city. Al-Farabi synthesizes Plato’s ideal ruler ‘philosopher-king’ and Islam’s idea ruler the ‘Prophet/Imam’ and fairly weaves the Greek idea into the fabric of Islamic belief. Plato’s

philosopher-king possesses highest degree of intellect and ability to devise and implement laws that can help the citizens in acquiring the utmost happiness i.e. intellectual perfection. Al-Farabi utilizes and reconstructs the Platonic idea to proclaim and present the 'Prophet/Imam', whose intellect is most supreme so as to receive divine revelations and who devises the best law in form of religious practices, as the ideal ruler of the virtuous city.³³ Al-Farabi's utopian ruler of the virtuous city, which is the creation of his own balanced views, exhibits exactly the same tendency of harmonizing reason and revelation, sciences and religious doctrines, and epitomizes the notion of ultimate happiness. The inhabitants of the virtuous city under his rule can achieve the same state provided that they embrace ethics that are a prerequisite for the attainment of the ultimate happiness.

Al-Farabi's views concerning the opinions and virtues of the people who reside in the virtuous city outline ethical components that are essential for the attainment of happiness i.e. a balance. Review of the morals laid out by al-Farabi for the residents of the virtuous city offers answers to the problems that lie at the core of the religious and secular fundamentalist attitudes towards modernism in present times. Al-Farabi emphasizes throughout his treatise that man can attain happiness through mutual aid and solidarity, which is his natural disposition, and that it cannot be achieved in isolation. According to al-Farabi, man needs to be surrounded by other people so that he can overcome his shortcomings with their help.³⁴ Isolation is an acute problem with the religious and secular fundamentalist tendencies. The religious group detaches from the modern aspects and isolates within an orthodox environment; on the other hand, the secular group isolates from religious society. Muslims in the modern world need to let go of the isolationist attitude so that they can allow themselves to develop a balanced mindset presented by al-Farabi.

In the twenty-sixth and twenty-seventh chapter, al-Farabi takes on the ethic of cooperation by illustrating an analogy between the residents of the virtuous city and the human body. He states that parts of the body, which are designed in diverse forms and arranged in a hierarchy, cooperate as a single unit in order to fulfill a purpose. However, the body parts are naturally disposed to co-operate and collaborate whereas the inhabitants of the virtuous city ought to embrace differences among each other and cooperate by will and choice.³⁵ Again, the lack of cooperation which stems from the inability to embrace differences costs the religious and secular fundamentalists the 'golden mean' of balancing between Islam and modernism. This cooperation can be cultivated through the shared spirit of love for humanity. In view of the significance of the

subject, the notion of unity and harmony regardless of differences, forms the basis of al-Farabi's treatise. In the eighth chapter, al-Farabi talks about the differences among the creations. He adds that despite the differences, there are elements that can bring about unity and harmony, such as love and the essence of being created by one God. He stresses that differences ought to remain in the world. In the thirteenth chapter, he expounds on the very idea by discussing elements that form a human body which are earth, water, air and fire, and how the essences of the elements are in conflict with each other.³⁶ Through cultivating the ethics of cooperation and embracing differences, the Muslims on the fundamentalist sides can permit themselves to balance their response to modernism.

In the final chapters of the treatise, al-Farabi discusses opinions and views of the inhabitants of the *ignorant* states. It is noteworthy that he uses the word *jahila* meaning *ignorant* for the cities that stand in opposition to the virtuous city. This makes it clear that by the word *fadila* i.e. virtuous, al-Farabi implies *wise* and *knowledgeable*. The vicious ethics of the inhabitants of the ignorant states show a strong allusion to the tendency of the religious fundamentalists today. Al-Farabi states that residents of the ignorant cities are deprived of the ultimate happiness due to their views that instigate violence and chaos. Unlike the citizens of the virtuous city who help each other to obtain perfection and happiness, the residents of the ignorant states are always in pursuit of inflicting damage on others and hurting them. They consider themselves different from everybody else and believe that they cannot exist together; hence, they deem it legitimate to work for the destruction of others. Ignorance, according to al-Farabi, is the root cause for the origination of such viscous ethics. Religious fundamentalists who become prone to violence suffer from exactly the same cause. In their opposition to modernism, they become indifferent to knowledge and wisdom causing inner frustration and suffocation, which then translate into violence.

Al-Farabi's engagement with Greek philosophy and sciences are poised between the radical and orthodox ideologies of al-Razi and al-Ghazali. Review of al-Farabi's balance between reason and revelation and the notion of ultimate happiness renders it possible to employ a 'golden mean' between religious and secular fundamentalisms, and frame a balanced and suitable Muslim response to modernism in the current times.³⁷ However, adoption of balanced attitude and productive liaison with modernism shall only be possible if the Muslims, collectively, resolve to abandon an isolationist outlook, embrace the spirit of differences and develop a tendency of cooperation on the grounds of humanity and attaining ultimate happiness.

Conclusion

Modernism which had set down its roots in the wake of the European Renaissance and the Enlightenment emerged as an ideal socio-political thought and a *sine qua non* of survival in the post-Cold War period. Under the influence of the dominating secular West which identified itself as the guardian and champion of modernity the idea of modernism underwent a radical change in its connotation as it apportioned religion a reduced place in the social sector and completely restricted its presence in the political sphere. While Christendom conceded to the enforced allocation, the Islamic world resisted and viewed the phenomenon of modernism as a challenge to the spirit of Islam. The sudden encounter with modernism split the overall Muslim response into two fundamentalist and polar tendencies. Muslims who approved of the superiority of modernism and subordination of religion had a secular tendency while those who rejected the dominance of modernism and demanded the upholding of religion represented the religious bent. Despite stark differences in the dealings, views of both the groups boiled down to the same opinion that values of Islam are incompatible with aspects of modernism. In view of the fact that the secular group yielded to the fundamentals of modernism by relegating religion to the peripheries and the religious group resorted to the orthodox and radical implementation of the fundamental values of Islam it becomes permissible to utilize the concept of 'fundamentalism' and refer to the tendencies of both groups as secular and religious fundamentalisms.

The fundamentalist nature of the two tendencies has cost Muslims the balance in approach and ideological equilibrium. This stems from the view that modernism is an unheard-of phenomenon and that Islam is not equipped to cope with its challenges which makes it impossible to arrive at an agreement with it in any circumstances. However, a historical reconstruction of the case says otherwise. The very essence of modernism which embodies progression and advancement of knowledge and sciences and is considered to have originated during the rebirth of classical Greek intellectual tradition in the Modern Era can be traced back to the introduction of Greek sciences and philosophy into Islamic thought during the medieval period. From this perspective, Islam engaged with the roots and essence of modernism and so the phenomenon is not unknown to Islamic thought. The thesis is further supported by investigating the medieval Muslim response to the inclusion of Greek

sciences bearing close resemblance with the Muslim reaction to modernism.

In view of the above, the study relocated the contemporary case of Islam and modernism in the medieval period within the context of Islamic thought vis-à-vis Greek sciences and philosophy. Next, the study attempted to trace and explore the roots of secular and religious fundamentalisms prevalent in the Muslim thought today through reviewing the ideologies of al-Razi and al-Ghazali respectively. Impressions of secular fundamentalist thought can be observed in al-Razi's rationalism and rejection of Islamic fundamentals such as the supremacy of the Prophet (The Last Prophet upon whom, his Progeny and Companions be Peace) and unity of the God. In the same way, views of the religious fundamentalists can be found reflecting in al-Ghazali's critical attitude towards philosophical sciences and his orthodox and didactic defense of Islam. After establishing the premise that modernism is not an unknown challenge to Islam and tracing the roots of the secular and religious tendencies of the Muslims, the study endeavored to sketch a model for devising a balanced tendency between the two apparent fundamentalist bents through analyzing the ethical approach and ideology of al-Farabi who represented Greek sciences as an integral part of Islamic theology and stated that ultimate happiness can only be attained by intelligently harmonizing reason and revelation. In conclusion, the study highlighted ethical elements in al-Farabi's treatise *al-Madinat al-Fadila* and suggested an ethical reconditioning of the Muslim response on basis of the morals mentioned by al-Farabi.

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