

**THE RELEVANCE OF CONTEMPORARY  
EPISTEMOLOGY ON EXISTING  
KNOWLEDGE: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF  
WESTERN SCIENTIFIC WORLDVIEW  
ACCORDING TO AL-ATTAS PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract**

The progress of modern science and technology is considered very significant and provides convenience in every aspect. However, science has become the biggest challenge because it requires relevance to religion. The disparity between science and religion creates a dilemma, resulting in the secularization of science. This study aims to critically analyze the epistemology of Western science from the perspective of Al-Attas, which is specifically considered problematic by him. The method used in this research was content analysis, while the approach used was a critical approach. The results of this study prove that the paradigm of science is closely related to worldview. This proves that modern science and technology are not neutral and devoid of values, including religion. This has an impact on changing the way humans view and think about science and life, resulting in the deconsecration of value, desacralization, and disenchantment of nature. To map out the epistemological and Western worldview problems, al-Attas offers the Islamization of contemporary science and the epistemology of Islamic

science to answer the problem of the existence of contemporary science epistemology.

**Keywords:** Science; epistemology; worldview; Western; Islamization.

### **Khulasah**

Kemajuan sains dan teknologi moden dianggap sangat signifikan dan memberi kemudahan dalam setiap aspek. Walau bagaimanapun, sains telah menjadi cabaran terbesar kerana ia memerlukan kaitan dengan agama. Perbezaan antara sains dan agama mewujudkan dilema, mengakibatkan sekularisasi sains. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara kritis epistemologi sains Barat dari perspektif al-Attas, yang secara khusus dianggap bermasalah oleh beliau. Kaedah yang digunakan dalam penyelidikan ini ialah analisis kandungan, manakala pendekatan yang digunakan ialah pendekatan kritis. Hasil kajian ini membuktikan bahawa paradigma sains berkait rapat dengan pandangan alam. Ini membuktikan bahawa sains dan teknologi moden tidak neutral dan tidak mempunyai nilai, termasuk agama. Ini mempunyai kesan ke atas perubahan cara manusia melihat dan berfikir tentang sains dan kehidupan, mengakibatkan penyahsucian nilai, penyahsakralan, dan kekecewaan alam. Untuk memetakan masalah epistemologi dan pandangan dunia Barat, al-Attas menawarkan pengislaman sains kontemporari dan epistemologi sains Islam untuk menjawab masalah kewujudan epistemologi sains kontemporari.

**Kata kunci:** Sains; epistemologi; pandangan alam, Barat; Islamisasi.

### **Introduction**

It cannot be denied that the development and progress of modern science and technology have brought convenience to every human activity. Western science provides the basis of rationality and experimentalism in the understanding of faith and adopts practical technological advancements in its

ideas and mechanisms, inevitably freeing humanity from the domination of religion.<sup>1</sup> Such constructs and projections of science not only developed in the West,<sup>2</sup> but also entered and were adopted in the Islamic world.<sup>3</sup> Al-Attas asserts that this is the biggest challenge for the Muslim community, which is the problem of secular science.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, secular science erases the spiritual meaning in the understanding of nature and limits the way of knowing reality, which is referred to as the disenchantment of nature.<sup>5</sup>

Desacralization is also reflected in naturalism and mechanism, which are the main characteristics of Western science. Nature is understood mechanistically without the role of God controlling it. In this view, God is depicted as the Maker of the clock. After the clock is made, it is left to run on its own until it stops.<sup>6</sup> Western science brings consequences of relative values and deconsecration of value, so everything is always changing without any

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<sup>1</sup> Amar Benboudina, "The Illustration of Progress in the Discourse of Islamic Thought," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 23(2) 2021, 489; N. Berdiyev & A. A. Shidlovsky, "The End of the Renaissance: The Contemporary Crisis of Culture," *The Slavonic Review* 4(10) (1925), 1-17.

<sup>2</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 102.

<sup>3</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, Islam (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1993), 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 133; Helmiati, "Muslim Religiosity in a Challenging Secular State of Singapore", *Qijis* 9(2) (2021), 353.

<sup>5</sup> Nirwan Syafrin Manurung, "Epistemologi Islam dan Rekonstruksi Ilmu Pengetahuan Kontemporer", *Journal of Islamia* 12(1) 2018, 43-47; Syed Mohammad Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), 114-115.

<sup>6</sup> Budi Handrianto, *Islamisasi Sains: Sebuah Upaya Mengislamkan Sains Barat Modern* (Jakarta: INSIST, 2019), 124.

absolute value in life.<sup>7</sup> The statement highlights a perceived misinterpretation of science within the Western worldview. The contention is that science encounters significant challenges when it deviates from its fundamental essence and intended purpose.<sup>8</sup> Al-Attas argues that a noteworthy consequence of modern Western science is its role in the de-Islamization of Islamic thought.<sup>9</sup>

Fundamentally, science and technology are not purely neutral because they are built and projected based on certain worldviews and paradigms, just like Western science. Science certainly reflects and shapes one's views, goals, and even actions. In addressing these issues, a range of solutions and proposals exists, and al-Attas is among those advocating a particular approach. He advocates for the Islamization of contemporary science as a response to the challenges posed by Western epistemology.<sup>10</sup> Based on these issues, it is clear that science has a significant influence in life. Thus, what paradigms and worldviews dominate Western science? What solutions and implications does Al-Attas offer to answer these problems?

### **The Development of Western Science Paradigm**

The starting point of the development of Western science can be identified through the paradigm or basic assumption that still dominates the epistemological construction of Western science. Rationalism as a scientific paradigm was first proclaimed by Rene Descartes, famous for his slogan "*Cogito Ergo Sum*", (I think, therefore I am).<sup>11</sup> This paradigm promotes freedom of thought and states that

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<sup>7</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-132.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>10</sup> Wan Mohammad Nor bin Wan Wan Daud, *Filsafat dan Praktik Pendidikan Islam Syed M. Naquib Al-Attas*, trans, Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi (Bandung: Mizan, 2003), 51; Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 105.

<sup>11</sup> Richard Watson, *Cogito Ergo Sum: The Life of Rene Descartes* (Boston: David R. Godine, 2002), 3.

reason is the primary factor of one's existence, and therefore, reason is the only source of knowledge, the objective standard of truth, and the benchmark for everything.<sup>12</sup>

This view shows a denial of the existence of God and at the same time a form of desacralization of nature because the sanctity of nature as a sign of God's existence and also a source of knowledge is eliminated. Within the Western worldview, science appears to be in direct conflict with religion and the concept of God. This conflict arises as humans and their intellect are often elevated to an equal status, potentially supplanting the role traditionally ascribed to God.

Descartes' freedom of thought is opposed to David Hume's empiricism. According to Hume, factual knowledge must be based on facts through observation and confirmed by factual experience, not just ideas. The only reality and measure of truth are what can be sensed. It explains why ideas cannot provide definite truth.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, scientific knowledge is aimed at systematically describing what happens in nature and the objects of events that occur within it.<sup>14</sup> This shows that spiritual or metaphysical elements, religion, and metaphysics are eliminated and removed.

Kant in his paradigm states that metaphysical ideas such as God, causality, and self-substance cannot be acquired through sensory impressions. He rejects the idea that knowledge can only be acquired through experience. According to him, there are *synthetic a priori* judgments

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<sup>12</sup> Harun Hadi Wijono, *The History of Western Philosophy* vol. 2, (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 1980), 21; J. Sudar Minta, *Basic Epistemology Introduction Philosophy Knowledge* (Yogyakarta: Kanisius, 2002), 26.

<sup>13</sup> Akhyar Yusuf Lubis & Donny Gahral Adian, *Pengantar Filsafat Ilmu Pengetahuan* (Jakarta: Teraju, 2003), 50.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas. F. Wall, *Thinking Critically about Philosophical Problem* (Canada: Thompson Learning, 2001), 126.

that can be found in metaphysics, physics, ethics, and mathematics. Kant's idealism rejects metaphysical claims to knowledge about nature beyond appearances.<sup>15</sup> Here, it can be seen that Kant tries to reconcile the conflict between rationalism and empiricism.

Hegel's dialectic also influenced the paradigm of Western science. According to him, one can only understand reality through idealist views. Scientific knowledge is considered an ongoing and temporary process. This means that scientific knowledge will continue to evolve. The knowledge that has been achieved will always be challenged for its truth, questioned, and will continue to be replaced with more stable knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Actually, this view is truly in a chaotic condition. They doubt the truth and justify the doubts they believe in.<sup>17</sup>

In line with Hegel's thinking, Auguste Comte, with his positivist paradigm, states that scientific knowledge can be measured through positive or empirical data, experiments, observations, and comparisons. Scientific knowledge necessitates observability, repeatability, measurability, testability, and predictability. This emphasis underscores the assertion that the human mind is incapable of attaining absolute truth.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Justus Harnack, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, trans. M Holmes Hartshore, (London: Macmilan, 1968), 142-145; Akhyar & Donny, *Pengantar Filsafat*, 52.

<sup>16</sup> Franz Magnis Suseno, *Pemikiran Karl Marx: Dari Sosialisme, Utopis ke Perselisihan Revisionisme* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2001), 56; Syarif Hidayatullah, "Epistemologi Pemikiran Sir Muhammad Iqbal", *Jurnal Filsafat* 24(1) (2014), 109.

<sup>17</sup> Mujamil Qomar, *Epistemologi Pendidikan Islam dari Metode Rasional hingga Metode Kritik* (Jakarta: Penerbit Erlangga, 2005), 58-61; JHarnack, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, 142-145.

<sup>18</sup> Adnin Armas, "Westernisasi dan Islamisasi Ilmu", *Islamia*, II, No. 6, (Jakarta: INSISTS, Juli-September 2005), 11; Mohammad Muslih, *Filsafat Ilmu Kajian Atas Asumsi Dasar Paradigma dan Kerangka Teori Ilmu Pengetahuan* (Yogyakarta: 2008, Belukar), 89.

Furthermore, Sigmund Freud believed that scientific work was the only way to guide towards scientific knowledge, which was obtained through reason and logic. Religions were perceived as illusions, deemed incompatible with the actualities of the world, and certainly not recognized as sources of scientific knowledge.<sup>19</sup> This perspective found affirmation in Friedrich Nietzsche's declaration of "God is dead" and Jacques Derrida's renowned slogan, "The author is dead."<sup>20</sup>

The preceding explanation underscores that both rationalist and empiricist convictions dismiss and exclude the spiritual dimension and the role of God in life. Hegelian dialectics and Comte's positivism, in particular, express a repudiation of religion, God, and non-empirical metaphysics, deeming them as illusions incapable of contributing to intellectual and societal progress and potentially fostering backwardness. This perspective influences the relativism of values and erodes the objectivity of truth in knowledge.<sup>21</sup> The knowledge cultivated in the Western context deliberately endeavors to disentangle science from life, religious and spiritual values, culminating in the emergence of secularism, materialism, and atheism. Consequently, science is regarded as impartial and devoid of inherent values.<sup>22</sup>

The explanation above shows that Western science's paradigm and basic assumptions are based on the physical and natural aspects of *tabi'i* as objects of knowledge, truth, and objectivity of knowledge. This shows that all forms of knowledge that refer to non-empirical or metaphysical aspects are considered unscientific, incorrect, and not

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<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W Norton and Company, 1961), 40.

<sup>20</sup> Handrianto, *Islamization of Science*, 69.

<sup>21</sup> Fathul Mufid, "Islamic Science Integration", *Qijis* 2(2) (2014), 151.

<sup>22</sup> Shamsuddin Arif, *Orientalism and Diabolism Thought* (Jakarta: Gema Insani, 2008), 100.

objective. Therefore. Western science ignores or even denies metaphysical aspects including God as the main source of knowledge. This is of course contrary to the paradigm framework built in Islamic epistemology which recognizes non-empirical and metaphysical aspects as one of the main sources of scientific knowledge.

### **Identification of the Worldview in Western Science**

A worldview or a way of life is a commitment that lies deep within the human heart, as the heart is the primary element that reveals and operates human thoughts and actions.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, a worldview that contains a belief system, experiences, and accumulated ways of life plays a significant role in shaping a real perspective, thoughts, and ideas. Al-Attas observed that thinking style influences the framework of thinking that shapes scientific knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Hence, the Western worldview has a close correlation with its scientific epistemological framework. Western science, designed in such a way, can clearly threaten human life as it is imbued with elements of secularism, utilitarianism, materialism, and pragmatism.

Based on the basic assumptions or paradigms as previously explained, according to al-Attas, modern Western science is built on the intellectual and psychological vision of culture and civilization that is driven by five factors. According to al-Attas:

“Reliance upon the powers of human reason alone to guide man through life; adherence to the validity of the dualistic vision of reality and

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<sup>23</sup> David Naughel's, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2002), 267-274; James W. Sire, *Naming of the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Mohamed Safiullah Munsoor & Che Zarrina Sa'ari, "Knowledge and Islam on the Non-Rational and Rational-Heart-Brain Inter-Connection", *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 19(1) (2017), 155.



truth; affirmation of the reality of the evanescent—aspect of existence projecting a secular worldview; essay on the doctrine of humanism; emulation of the allegedly universal reality of drama and tragedy in the spiritual, or transcendental, or inner life of man, making drama and tragedy real and dominant elements in human nature and existence — these elements altogether taken as a whole, are, in my opinion, what constitutes the substance, the spirit, character, and personality of Western culture and civilization .”<sup>25</sup>

Western civilization from the beginning emphasizes and believes that “the priority of theoretical and practical animal reason as the source of knowledge.” Knowledge in the Western view is based on rationalism and empiricism, the reality of material objects, experience, and the senses. Truth is the coherence between what is in the mind and what is real and happening. The West believes that ‘reason’ is different from ‘intellect’. Reason is a tool for understanding what is visible, while intellect is a tool used to understand and contemplate the essence of the soul. They are understood as two separate things that are not suitable for each other.<sup>26</sup>

Al-Attas distinguishes the terms ‘intellect’ and ‘reason’ to explain the problems in Western intellectual history and to prove the rejection of the dichotomy between them.<sup>27</sup> Reason is the projection of the intellect, functioning according to the intellect, which is a spiritual substance and part of the spiritual organ of the heart (*al-qalb*). With the

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<sup>25</sup> Al Attas, *Islam and Secularism*,137; Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1991), 45.

<sup>26</sup> Syed Muhammad. Naquib al-Attas, *Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1995), 191.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*,34.

intellect, the rational soul recognizes truth and distinguishes truth from falsehood. Thus, it can be understood that if an understanding of spiritual reality falls within the scope of reason, it does not have to be separated from rational understanding.<sup>28</sup>

Al-Attas emphasizes that 'meaning' cannot be understood directly. Intuition or the intuitive faculty such as the heart as a spiritual cognitive organ that is attached to spiritual substance or intellect is necessary. In this way, reason as an aspect of intellect is integrated with intuition. This is what is denied by the Western scientific worldview.<sup>29</sup> In addition, al-Attas also states that the knowledge and meaning that humans achieve and understand about perceived objects are not the same. That is, there are differences in the degree of certainty.<sup>30</sup>

In Western science, the human mind is considered equivalent to consciousness and sensory experience. Authority and intuition as sources and legitimate methods of knowledge are reduced to reason and sensory experience. Thus, Western science narrows reason and experience to an external level. It can be concluded that Western science highly upholds empiricism and believes in 'seeing is believing'. In Islam, the senses are the lowest channel of knowledge, and the highest level or degree of human experience and consciousness is intellectual and spiritual cognition and transcendent experience whose limits are only known by God.<sup>31</sup> So, a more appropriate expression is 'believing is seeing', where belief leads to the greatness of God.

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<sup>28</sup> Al-Attas, *Risalah*, 193; *Prolegomena*, 35.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 116-119.

<sup>30</sup> Wan Mohd Nor, *Filsafat dan Praktik Pendidikan Islam*, 331.

<sup>31</sup> Syed Muhammad. Naquib al-Attas, *Islam dan Filsafat Sains Islam dan Filsafat Sains* (Bandung: Mizan, 2005), 29-30; Handrianto, *Islamisasi Sains*, 124-125.

The second characteristic is loyalty to the dualistic validity of reality and truth. Dualism can be understood as a view that combines two sides. For example, in humans; reason and desire, soul and body, are not related due to different compositions. As a characteristic of modern science, reality is understood as empirically real and independently true, denying non-material reality.<sup>32</sup>

The Western view of nature and humans shapes a view of truth and reality that is based more on cultural tradition strengthened by philosophical premises and speculations related to secular life. Humans are placed as physical entities with their minds at the center of power. To understand the results of speculations based on such premises, evolutionary ethical and moral values guide and regulate their lives accordingly. Here, al-Attas emphasizes that there is no certainty in philosophical speculation, unlike the certainty of religion based on revealed knowledge that is understood and experienced in Islam.<sup>33</sup>

The second characteristic has an impact on the third characteristic, which is the validation of the temporal aspect of existence projecting a secular worldview as the liberation of humans from the constraints of religion and metaphysics that govern their will and language. Al-Attas states that modern science is solely oriented toward the interests and fulfillment of worldly life, while religion is considered worthless or just an illusion.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Hamid Fahmy, *Misykat: Refleksi tentang Westernisasi. Liberalisasidan Islam* (Jakarta: INSIST-MIUMMI, 2012), 80.

<sup>33</sup> Dheen Mohamed Mohamed Meerasahibu, "Islamic Philosophical Tradition: What Can Be Contributed to the Present and Future of Human Civilization?", *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 22(1) (2019), 200; Mohammaddin Abdul Niri, et al., "Integration of the DIKW Model into Astronomy Based on the Islamic Science Framework," *Afkar: Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 24(2) (2022), 99-142; al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 135.

<sup>34</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy of the Future* (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1984), 14.

Secularization has manifested itself notably since the Cartesian and Copernican revolutions, during which the earth ceased to be the center of the cosmos. This shift marginalized humans in their significance and essence, simultaneously rejecting spiritual meaning. This perspective implies an absolute dualism where nature was opened up, granting humans the freedom to interact with it. The understanding of humans emphasized their humanity, individuality, and freedom, ultimately guiding them toward liberation from both God and the universe. This is a form of desacralization, the removal of the charm of the sacredness of nature, and the deconsecration of religious values in life.<sup>35</sup>

Furthermore, secularism entails the rejection of the presence and intervention of God in human life; essentially, it represents another facet of atheism. When secularism is perceived solely as the detachment of religion from daily life, belief in God persists, albeit without the necessity for worship - a state of being godly without adhering to religious practices.<sup>36</sup> This contradicts Islamic perspectives, as religion is no longer perceived as a regulator of human life; instead, individuals are seen as the architects of their own destinies. Secularism repositions religion and God, substituting them with a focus on human agency. This shift is evident in the fourth characteristic of the Western scientific worldview, which champions the doctrine of humanism. In this paradigm, humans are considered the ultimate measure of all things. Friedrich Nietzsche articulated this shift, stating, "God died, now we want the overman to live," while Feuerbach asserted a "religion that worships man" and proclaimed that "man is God."<sup>37</sup>

Fifth, accepting tragedy as a reality. In the Western view, tragedy is not just a dramatic understanding, but a

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<sup>35</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 35.

<sup>36</sup> Wall, *Thinking Critically about Philosophical*, 116.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 135-136.

philosophy of life that is established through its experience of rejecting religion and denying its God. This means that in life, there is no certainty in purpose, only confusion and futility. This is evident in the Western scientific paradigm, which shows that there is no absolute truth in science, only temporary truths that will always be replaced by clearer truths. This proves al-Attas' statement that Western culture does not have a standard of certainty and is skeptical, always in a state of tragedy (*shaqawah*), and always confused and confusing.<sup>38</sup>

In the view of the Western scientific paradigm, science requires a connection between a theory or hypothesis and factual observation. Although hypotheses and theories may contradict each other, they can be related to facts. This is because the tendency is not determined by objective truth criteria, while truth itself is always supported by facts. Thus, the assessment and determination of truth in Western science are highly subjective. Western science reduces the universe to mere physical facts because scientific knowledge according to Western science is empirical. This means that Western scientific knowledge has largely abandoned non-empirical knowledge. At this point, it can be concluded that Western science has lost or does not have objective truth,<sup>39</sup> losing its true essence and purpose.<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, it is not surprising that science is considered neutral, value-free, and even relative. Truth is only considered temporary and will always be faulted and cancelled by another truth. The Western scientific paradigm is only spinning around the point of doubt and endless confusion. Wan Mohd Nor emphasizes that the problem of science and the Western worldview confuses the way

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<sup>38</sup> Al Attas, *Prolegomena*, 91.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam dan Filsafat Sains*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 131-133.

human think by creating a meaningless structure of thought and a shared attitude in building life and science.<sup>41</sup>

Secular science exerts adverse influences on Islamic perspectives and ideologies, shaping modes of thinking, evaluation, and belief systems that are emulated by certain Muslim scholars. For al-Attas, what is formulated and disseminated is knowledge infused with the character and personality of that civilization - knowledge presented and conveyed as knowledge in that guise so subtly fused together with the real so that others take it unawares in toto to be the real knowledge per se.<sup>42</sup> Knowledge projected with a purpose in line with the Western worldview will ultimately cause secularization and de-Islamization of Muslim thought. From al-Attas' definition, it can be understood that secularism is:

"The delivery of man first from religion and then from metaphysical control over his reason and his language. It is the loosing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed world views, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols... the defatalization of history, the discovery by man that he has been left with the world on his hands, that he can no longer blame fortune or the furies for what he does with it. ...; [it is] a man turning his attention away from the worlds beyond and toward this world and this time".<sup>43</sup>

Secularism and secular knowledge mean the liberation of the mind and language from religious and spiritual values, while knowledge is a product of the mind. The

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<sup>41</sup> Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, "Islamization of Contemporary Knowledge: A Brief Comparison Between Al-Attas and Fazlur Rahman," *Al-Shajarah* 2(1) (1997), 5.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 127-128.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

Western worldview has eliminated the control, rules, and symbols of religion from human life. By removing religion from human life, knowledge is only related to phenomena, and the objects of knowledge are limited to observed reality obtained through sensory perception. This contradicts Islamic beliefs, which are largely based on metaphysical reality. This is why religion is not considered scientific in the West. This is also why al-Attas sees secularism as desacralization that erases all spiritual meaning in our understanding of nature and limits our ways of knowing reality.<sup>44</sup>

In addition, secularism is related to the mind and language. Science is a product of the worldview and way of thinking, while thoughts or ideas cannot be expressed and understood without language. This is because language serves as a crucial instrument for articulating thoughts, formulating ideas, and comprehending concepts. Al-Attas emphasizes that the ideology of a particular nation reflects a worldview that has basic beliefs, concepts, or ideas expressed in specific terms or language.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, the terminology of a specific worldview or civilization cannot always be applied to the ideology and worldview of other civilizations. When the terminology of a particular worldview or civilization is used by other worldviews and civilizations, it automatically changes the way of thinking. Unfortunately, the Western worldview has spread throughout the world, and as a result, secular knowledge has also spread throughout the world and changed the worldview of others.

In accordance with al-Attas, the paradigm that hegemonizes Western science is fraught with problems that also endanger Muslims. These problems are caused by

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<sup>44</sup> Nirwan Syafrin Manurung, "Islamic Epistemology and Reconstruction Knowledge Contemporary," *Islamia* 12(1) (2018), 43-47; Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 114-115.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 47.

science that has lost its essence and true purpose<sup>46</sup>, resulting in a crisis of the Muslim worldview that al-Attas calls the 'loss of *adab*', marked by the generalization of each individual to his own thoughts and attitudes, thus erasing official authority and social and scientific hierarchies. In addition, the loss of manners implies the loss of justice and intellectual confusion. When Muslims are confused about their knowledge of Islam and their worldview, their minds are influenced by views that are contrary to Islam. In this way, one cannot distinguish between genuine knowledge and the knowledge possessed by the Western worldview.<sup>47</sup>

Loss of *adab* can be understood in two conditions: First, the loss of spirituality, a state in which Muslims suffer from alienation, loss of ethics, and disregard for the law.<sup>48</sup> The loss of moral values, even dominated by materialism and arrogance.<sup>49</sup> There is imbalance and disorder; the destruction of humans and the universe.<sup>50</sup> Second, loss of identity, which is a condition in which Muslims suffer from self-doubt about their identity as Muslims and feel inferior in the grandeur of modern scientific knowledge.<sup>51</sup>

For al-Attas, *adab* refers not only to social-professional ethics and good behavior, but also to the truth of knowledge, its expression, and action. Therefore, for al-Attas, knowledge is a recognition based on truth, so that one can place something in its proper place and know God as its creator. If one knows oneself and one's Creator, one also knows how to place oneself before one's Lord, so that one knows how to act justly towards oneself and one's Lord. When one is wrong and fails to understand one's Lord, one

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-132.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy of the Future*, 104-105.

<sup>48</sup> C. A Qodir, *Philosophy and Science in the Islamic World* (London: Routledge, 1988), 5.

<sup>49</sup> Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi, "Makna Sains Islam," *Islamia* 3(4) (2008), 7.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 133.

<sup>51</sup> Hamid Fahmy, *The Meaning of Islamic Science*, 6.



is unjust to oneself. Therefore, knowledge is needed in order to be just, by placing something in its proper place.<sup>52</sup>

From the above explanation, it can be concluded that the concept of Western science is imbued with a secular worldview. Science is understood only as a logical and empirical natural phenomenon, supported by a philosophical foundation based on speculation and doubt alone. Meanwhile, nature is perceived as having self-created. Consequently, science is regarded as impartial and devoid of inherent values. This perspective leads individuals to overlook the role of God and undermines the very fabric of the universe. Such a stance implies a commitment to secularism, positivism, rationalism, empiricism, skepticism, and relativism within the epistemology of Western science. Essentially, knowledge is influenced by worldview, values, beliefs, or culture. Therefore, science is not neutral or value-free but is fraught with values because knowledge can be imbued with a nature that masquerades as knowledge. Thus, from the point of view of the problem of the Western scientific worldview and its epistemological paradigm, the Islamization of knowledge is clearly needed.

### **Islamization of Contemporary Science and Epistemological Implications**

Based on the identification of problems in Western science and worldview, Western science is very problematic, creating crises and damages while also posing the greatest challenge for Muslims.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the Islamization of science is needed.<sup>54</sup> Islamization is defined as the "liberation of man first from magical, mythological, animistic, national cultural, traditional and then from

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<sup>52</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 76-77.

<sup>53</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 133; Nirwan, "Epistemologi Islam dan Rekonstruksi Ilmu", 47.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 169.

secular control over his reason and his language".<sup>55</sup> Islamization is liberation from physical impulses that tend to be secular and unjust to the essence of self or soul. Islamization is a process of returning humans to their *fitrah*.<sup>56</sup> In this definition, al-Attas emphasizes the liberation of reason and language from the influence of secularism, or it can be interpreted as the Islamization of thought and rationality aimed at the Islamization of science.<sup>57</sup>

The process of Islamization has at least two main stages; first, de-westernization, which isolates Western elements and concepts from science:

"... after the isolation process referred to, the knowledge free of the (Western) elements and key concepts isolated are then infused with the Islamic elements and key concepts which, in view of their fundamental nature as defining the *fitrah*, in fact imbue the knowledge with the quality of its natural function and purpose and thus makes it true knowledge".<sup>58</sup>

As for the Western elements that need to be eliminated include key concepts that project the Western worldview related to its methods, concepts, theories, and symbols. The empirical and rational aspects, that relate to values and ethics, theories and interpretations about the universe in terms of the rationality of natural processes, thoughts on the existence of the real world, classifications of knowledge and its limitations, and its relations with other sciences.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>56</sup> Alparslan, Acikgenc, *Islamic Science Towards a Definition* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1996), 8.

<sup>57</sup> Hasyim Rosnani, "Gagasan Islamisasi Ilmu Pengetahuan Kontemporer: Sejarah, Perkembangan dan Arah Tujuan," in *Islamia*, II No. 6 (Jakarta: INSISTS, July-September 2005), 34.

<sup>58</sup> Al Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 162-163.

According to al-Attas, if they do not conform to the Islamic worldview, then all facts become untrue.<sup>59</sup>

After eliminating secular elements, the next step is to introduce and replace Western concepts with key Islamic concepts, consisting of concepts of God, revelation, science, religion, freedom, values and policies, and concepts of happiness.<sup>60</sup> This is imperative because Muslims with secular inclinations can become estranged from their cultural roots, resulting in the transformation of numerous ideas and concepts within their worldview into ones that are non-Islamic. After proposing the Islamization of contemporary science, al-Attas offers an epistemological concept of science that projects key concepts of the Islamic worldview as a solution to the secularization of science.<sup>61</sup>

In his epistemological concept, al-Attas defines knowledge as "the arrival in the soul of the thing or the arrival of the soul at the meaning of things" (*husul ma'na al-shay' fi al-nafs, wusul al-nafs ila ma'na al-shay'*).<sup>62</sup> Al-Attas explains that all knowledge comes from and refers to God, and is interpreted by the soul through its physical and spiritual or intellectual abilities. There are two important sides to acquiring knowledge: first, the pursuit of knowledge or the human being itself. In acquiring knowledge, human beings require active mental and spiritual preparation to receive meaning which is one form of intelligence. Thus, knowledge as something that comes (*husul*) from God permeates into the soul of the seeker of knowledge. On the other hand, there is the pleasure and love of Allah SWT as the giver of knowledge. Knowledge

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<sup>59</sup> Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 114.

<sup>60</sup> Al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 43.

<sup>61</sup> Wan Mohd Nor, *The Educational Philosophy*, 291.

<sup>62</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam, Secularism and the Philosophy*, 211.

is something given and derived from God, then received (*wusul*) by the human soul.<sup>63</sup>

Three important elements constitute the dimensions of knowledge. These three elements are the soul, meaning and essence, and the usefulness of knowledge. In the Islamic tradition, the soul is known as *nafs*, *'aql*, *qalb*, and *ruh*. These four terms essentially represent a single reality with different conditions (*ahwal*), but all are involved in cognitive, empirical, intuitive, and spiritual activities. When the entity is involved in intellect and understanding, it is called 'intellect'. When it regulates the body, it is called 'soul', when it receives intuitive illumination, it is called 'heart', and when it returns to its own world, the abstract entity is called 'spirit'.<sup>64</sup>

The definition of knowledge portrays the process of achieving knowledge as a spiritual journey of the soul towards meaning.<sup>65</sup> 'Meaning' refers to the true meaning based on the Islamic vision of reality and truth, interpreted as "recognition of the right places".<sup>66</sup> Therefore, knowledge can also be interpreted as acknowledgment coupled with a belief in the truth, referred to as *haqq*, encompassing wisdom.

Based on its definition, knowledge consists of two main components: revelation (the Qur'an) from Allah as the source of true knowledge and the foundation of the metaphysical framework, and systematic learning methods

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<sup>63</sup> Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 14; Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and the Philosophy of Science* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1989), 16.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 148.

<sup>65</sup> Wan Mohd Nor, *Filsafat dan Praktik Pendidikan Islam*, 148.

<sup>66</sup> Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Tinjauan Ringkas Peri Ilmu dan Pandangan Alam* (Kuala Lumpur: Ta'dib International Sdn Bhd, 2019), 42; al-Attas, *Islam dan Filsafat Sains*, 45; Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Positive Aspect of Tasawwuf: Preliminary Thoughts on an Islamic Philosophy of Science* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Academy of Science, 1981), 8.

that are coherent, valid, and yield truth and reality.<sup>67</sup> These two components prove that science in the Islamic view has a wider source, object, and scope. It is not just knowledge, but systematic and proven knowledge, even in non-empirical, metaphysical, or theological fields that involve revelation in the process of acquiring knowledge. At this point, Islamic and Western science cannot be equated.

Al-Attas reveals that knowledge is acquired from experience and is supported by the senses (*zahir*) and the mind (*bathin*). In the Islamic view, the senses are one of the main channels and instruments that are very important for the soul in achieving knowledge, especially regarding empirical reality, certain aspects of nature, and knowledge of God.<sup>68</sup>

What humans experience through their external and internal senses is conceptualized, stored, and processed by the intellect. Al-Attas emphasizes the intellect with 'sound reason' because the human intellect can be influenced by many aspects, making it very possible to be erroneous or even negating its ability to understand spiritual reality. Sound reason is the mental ability to systematize and interpret empirical experience logically. The intellect is a spiritual substance that is attached to the spiritual cognitive organ, the heart (*qalb*), as the center of intuition that receives representations of revelation (*ghayb*).<sup>69</sup> What needs to be emphasized here is that sound reason is one of and not the only, sources of knowledge.<sup>70</sup> This means that God and revelation as the primary sources of knowledge do not deny the human senses and intellect as sources of knowledge, but rather strengthen and guide them together

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<sup>67</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Philosophy of Science.*, 33; Hartono, *Islamic Science and Islamization*, 64; Mulyahadi Kartanegara, *Panorama Filsafat Islam* (Bandung: Mizan, 2005), 58.

<sup>68</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Philosophy of Science*, 34-35.

<sup>69</sup> Acikgenc, *Islamic Science Towards a Definition*, 47-48.

<sup>70</sup> Wan Mohd Nor, *Filsafat dan Praktik Pendidikan Islam*, 159; al-Attas, *Islam dan Filsafat Sains*, 36-37.

with intuition to achieve true knowledge and belief that distinguishes it from falsehood.<sup>71</sup>

In more detail, al-Attas explains that the object of knowledge consists of the metaphysical realm ('*alam al-ghayb*) and the physical realm ('*al-alam al-shahadah*). The spiritual and metaphysical aspects actually take priority in the object of knowledge.<sup>72</sup> This indicates that knowledge in the Islamic worldview has a broader scope than Western epistemology. Consequently, knowledge is not limited because the object of knowledge is unlimited.<sup>73</sup> However, each object of knowledge has its own limits of truth. Knowledge of these limits is wisdom. With *al-hikmah*, knowledge achieves meaning and recognizes its limits. It can be concluded that truth is the measure of a certain knowledge.<sup>74</sup>

Al-Attas emphasized in Islamic epistemology that *al-haqq*, meaning truth and reality, and *al-yaqin*, meaning certainty, are essential concepts. *Al-haqq* refers to both what is true and what is real. As what is true, *al-haqq* represents the reality of existence, its modes, and aspects that we understand as 'events' and 'processes'. The 'true' (*al-haqq*) shows judgments that correspond to the external reality that emerges as 'things' from events or processes.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 143-148; al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam*, 12-21; Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud, "An Outline of the Educational Philosophy and Methodology of al-Attas", *Journal of Islamic Research* 7(1) 1993, 47-54; Wan Mohd Nor, *The Educational Philosophy*, 35-36; al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 118-120; Mohd Zaidi bin Ismail, *Aqal dalam Islam: Satu Tinjauan Epistemologi* (Kuala Lumpur: Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia, 2016), 6.

<sup>72</sup> Handrianto, *Islamisasi Sains*, 34; al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 134.

<sup>73</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks 1990), 4.

<sup>74</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and the Philosophy of Science*, 64.

<sup>75</sup> Wan Mohd Nor, *Philosophy and Practice of Islamic Education*, 83-84; al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 217; al-Attas, *Islam and the Philosophy of Science*, 45.

*Al-haqq* is a condition, quality, or attribute that can be found in wisdom, justice, accuracy, truth, reality, and conformity, as well as the state of existence that encompasses everything. This means that *al-haqq* refers not only to statements but also to actions, feelings, beliefs, assessments of things and events related to current and future conditions. *Al-haqq* can also be understood as verification, realization, and actualization. Therefore, *haqq* or *haqiqah* is reality and nothing but the Absolute Being or absolute reality attributed to God. God is called Absolute Reality because He is the *Wujud Wajib (wajib al-wujud)*, the most real.<sup>76</sup>

Human perception has varying levels and does not directly produce truth but must first be connected with the absolute reality which God is the only source of truth. Empirical reality or facts are not always true because the measure of truth is not always clear. Therefore, truth is not just conformity with facts. Something can only be considered true if that truth is declared by God. Truth can only be attained by humans through the revelation of the Qur'an and Hadith. This means that knowledge requires *al-haqq* as a measure.<sup>77</sup>

In addition to *haqq* as the metaphysical aspect of the object of knowledge, the universe (*al-ayat al-kawniyah*) is the object of physics created as a symbol and sign of God's power as stated in the Qur'an. This shows the presence of God in various forms while also showing symbolic existence based on the articulation of God's creation. Thus, al-Attas emphasizes that the Qur'an and the universe are both realities that are valid sources of knowledge.<sup>78</sup> In

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<sup>76</sup> Kartanegara, *Menyibak Tirai Kejahilan*, 32.

<sup>77</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (United Kingdom: Curzon Press, 2005), 7; Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ed., *Encyclopedia of Islamic Philosophy*, Part. I (Lahore Pakistan: Suhail Academy, 2002), 29; al-Attas, *Islam and the Philosophy of Science*, 54.

<sup>78</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam dan Filsafat Sains*, 58; al-Attas, *Prolegomena*, 133.

contrast, the universe in Western views is nothing more than an object of scientific knowledge and is depicted as separate from spiritual meaning or symbolic interpretation, reducing the origin of the universe and reality to mere natural forces. This means that the universe has no meaning, sign, value, or even a role of God within it.<sup>79</sup>

The division of the object of knowledge by al-Attas has an impact on the classification of sciences, which is divided into two categories. First, *ma'rifah*, or the science of introduction and the second is called science (*'ulum*). This first science is knowledge related to metaphysical aspects, the supernatural world, or *al-ghayb*. *Ma'rifah* is knowledge given by Allah SWT to humans through sincere worship and based on true knowledge and accepted through reason and *qalb* which is also called a spiritual journey or inner vision, namely *dhawq* by way of *kashf* or opening his spiritual view, testimony direct (*mushahadah*) and the movement of the senses. What God gives in a subtle way is what is called wisdom, where man recognizes himself and recognizes his God. According to al-Attas, *ma'rifah* is the main requirement which he categorizes as *fard al-'ain* science.<sup>80</sup> *Ma'rifah* as knowledge can only be achieved through a journey of *qalb* experience which thereby achieves satisfaction, which is expressed in the Qur'an as *al-nafs al-mutma'innah*.<sup>81</sup>

Different from *ma'rifah*, the second knowledge in al-Attas' view is related to the world or the nature of *al-shahadah* which appears physically. This knowledge can be achieved through the collection of conclusions, the reality of worldly life, or experiences that can be captured by the senses, studied (*kasbi*) and understood by the mind. This

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<sup>79</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and the Philosophy of Science*, 58.

<sup>80</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam dan Filsafat Sains*, 78-80; al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 162.

<sup>81</sup> Acikgenc, *Islamic Science Towards a Definition*, 49.



knowledge is practical, theoretical, random, and unlimited. Al-Attas categorizes this knowledge as *fard al-kifayah*.<sup>82</sup>

Based on this classification, it can be concluded that in al-Attas' view, the categorization of knowledge is based on the nature inherent in the diversity of human knowledge and the process of achieving it. This categorization is nothing but a form of justice in placing knowledge as an object and humans as subjects. If described, then *ma'rifah* occupies the highest position and becomes the main foundation of the second type of knowledge. If not, then the second knowledge will confuse and trap humans in the atmosphere of searching for doubtful and wrong life goals and meanings. So, it is clear that the second knowledge is intended to improve oneself with the condition of guidance from the first knowledge.<sup>83</sup>

Based on the above explanation, knowledge in Islam is very sacred and has a high position because it comes from Allah, is closely related to metaphysics, and must be accountable on the Day of Judgment<sup>84</sup>. Basically, Islam and the Western worldview have similarities in the epistemological construct that involves reason and empirical aspects as sources and methods of acquiring knowledge. However, the fundamental difference that cannot be found in the Western scientific paradigm is the metaphysical aspect, including God, which is actually denied in the acquisition of knowledge.

The basic principle of al-Attas' epistemology emphasizes that the objects of science and knowledge in Islam do not stop and are limited to the physical and empirical levels. Apart from the *tabi'i* realm, God is the main source of knowledge, so knowledge in Islam is broader because it is aimed at understanding the nature and truth of God. Thus, science must not be aimed simply at

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<sup>82</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 146-147.

<sup>83</sup> Wan Mohd Nor, *Philosophy and Practice of Islamic Education*, 158.

<sup>84</sup> Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 133.

practical and pragmatic utility which ignores the essence and truth as in the West, but must refer to the essence of truth which is based on the rules established by God.

Islamization is not as easy as labeling. To Islamize knowledge, the identification of an Islamic worldview and a full understanding of Western civilization are the main prerequisites. Al-Attas' concept and perspective on Islamization are distinctive and robust compared to other concepts. This distinctiveness arises from being founded on a paradigm and Islamic worldview that is perceived to address the fundamental aspects of scientific issues. Therefore, the Islamization of knowledge is an epistemological program in building Islamic knowledge and civilization based on the Islamic worldview.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the current development of science is dominated by Western science, which is influenced by the secular and problematic Western worldview. This brings consequences for changes in perspectives, ways of thinking and evaluating knowledge, as well as changes in the essence and orientation of science. Western science is built on relying solely on reason as the only source of knowledge that guides life, reducing authority and intuition to reason and sensory experience. It ignores spiritual substance and human reasoning levels.

In fact, Western science is perceived as not adequately contributing to the progress of knowledge. This perception arises from the Western understanding of reality, limited to an independent truth. The pursuit of truth in this context relies heavily on speculation, doubt, and relativity, fostering a secular perspective that endorses humanist doctrine and elevates drama and tragedy as dominant elements in human identity and existence. The secular worldview is dominated by positivism, which reduces or rejects revelation, and eliminates metaphysical aspects,

including God. What is considered true and scientific is based only on empirical aspects. This means that Western science is no broader or superior than Islamic epistemology. Moreover, if viewed in the structure of the worldview, secular errors are in the structure of life that begins to separate and require a dichotomy between science and religion. The dichotomous perspective in the secular worldview shows confusion in thinking, resulting in the deconsecration of values and morals.

On the other hand, the problem with the Western worldview is closely related to its epistemology and scientific paradigm. As a result, science becomes neutral, value-free, and relative. This is what al-Attas called an intellectual and spiritual crisis. However, the problem is that the problematic Western science is actually adopted in the Islamic world. Instead of bringing progress, it causes the de-Islamization of Muslim thought. Therefore, the fundamental thing that al-Attas did was to propose the Islamization of contemporary science and develop the Islamic epistemology as a solution to the secularization of science, which emphasizes worldview as a tool for seeing and mapping the crisis of knowledge, so that every key element of the worldview will provide the appropriate implications in answering the problem of science.

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