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Empirical Science, Philosophical Reason, and the Revival of Islamic Thought: Reconstructing Morteza Motahhari's Critical Engagement with Sayyid Qutb

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Morteza Motahhari's critical view of Sayyid Qutb through the relationship among empirical science, philosophical reason, and revelation within the project of reviving Islamic thought. The problem stems from an ambiguity in the scope of Motahhari's judgment. He explicitly places Qutb among Muslim writers who, in his account, gave prominence to the empirical study of nature in theology and moved away from philosophical reasoning. Yet Qutb's own writings contain a clear critique of scientific exegesis of the Qur'an, define the limits of the authority of empirical science, and reject the use of changing scientific theories as criteria for establishing Qur'anic truth. Employing a qualitative and comparative approach based on documentary analysis, the study examines a defined corpus of Qutb's primary writings together with a comprehensive survey of Motahhari's published works relevant to Qutb and to the intellectual current under examination. The findings reveal agreement between the two thinkers regarding the legitimacy of empirical inquiry, the civilizational importance of science, and the inability of science to provide a comprehensive interpretation of existence. Their principal disagreement concerns the epistemic authority of philosophical reasoning in questions that lie beyond the scope of empirical inquiry. Qutb assigns the Qur'anic method and revelation the primary role in forming the Islamic conception and limits the autonomous authority of philosophical traditions and systems. Motahhari, by contrast, regards philosophical reasoning as a valid and necessary route for developing Qur'anic theology. Accordingly, the strongest textual support for Motahhari's judgment concerns Qutb's restriction of philosophical authority in religious knowledge, whereas Qutb's own writings do not support attributing scientism or scientific exegesis of the Qur'an to him.

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Introduction and Problem Statement

The revival of Islamic thought over the past century has been accompanied by a range of questions concerning the decline of Muslim societies, the civilizational power of the West, and the possibility of restoring religion to an active role in social life. Modern science stood at the center of part of this debate. The success of the natural sciences in explaining phenomena and generating new technologies led a number of Muslim reformers to reconsider the relationship between religion and science. This reconsideration took different forms: at times the aim was to resolve apparent conflicts between religious claims and scientific theories; at times findings from the natural sciences were used to explain Qur'anic verses; and at times modern science was treated as evidence of the capacity of reason and experience to construct a new form of life. Alongside these approaches, another question emerged: can the empirical method move beyond the domain of nature and adjudicate questions concerning God, the human being, the ultimate purpose of life, and values? The answer to this question also shaped the place assigned to philosophy within projects of religious reform.

Sayyid Qutb and Morteza Motahhari both address the question of revival in the context of the Muslim world's encounter with modern civilization. In the introduction to *Maʿālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, Qutb does not regard Western civilization as deficient in material or scientific power; his concern is its depletion of values and its lack of qualification to lead humanity. From this perspective, he considers material progress necessary for an Islamic society and explicitly states that any new leadership of humanity cannot simply discard the achievements of material civilization (Qutb, 1979, pp. 3–7). In *The Future Belongs to Islam*, he likewise does not portray religion as opposed to knowledge or civilization and grants human scientific activity in nature a broad sphere of legitimacy (Qutb, 1998, pp. 122–125). Motahhari, for his part, defends the study of nature and the value of empirical science, and even in his discussion of contemporary opposition to philosophy he emphasizes the significant contribution of Muslims to the development of the empirical method (Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, p. 390). The disagreement between the two thinkers, therefore, cannot be adequately described through a simple binary between science and religion.

The point of departure for this article is an explicit statement by Motahhari. In *A Survey of Nahj al-Balagha*, after distinguishing the study of the sensible world from "pure rational reflections and philosophical calculations," he describes a current among contemporary Muslim writers that, under the combined influence of an anti-philosophical theological legacy and the success of the modern empirical method, sought the reliable path to knowledge of God in the study of nature. He then refers to writers associated with the Muslim Brotherhood, "such as Sayyid Qutb and others" (Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, pp. 386–388). At first sight, the precise scope of this classification is not self-evident: it may refer to Qutb's restriction of philosophical authority, or it may be read more broadly as assigning an expanded epistemic role to empirical science. Qutb's own writings make it necessary to distinguish these two possibilities. In *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*, he explicitly criticizes scientific exegesis of the Qur'an (*tafsīr ʿilmī*), treats scientific theories as limited and revisable, and maintains that science may affirm or deny claims only within its own proper domain (Qutb, 1992, Vol. 1, pp. 182–183, 280; Vol. 4, p. 2065).

The tension between the scope of Motahhari's statement about Qutb and the position that emerges from Qutb's own writings constitutes the central problem of this study. If Qutb himself limits empirical science and rejects the use of scientific theory as a criterion for understanding the Qur'an, what exactly does Motahhari find problematic in his intellectual framework? The article proposes that the clearest textual basis of the disagreement lies in the status of philosophical reason, while treating the broader intellectual context of Motahhari's classification as a separate question. Once Qutb delimits empirical science, he entrusts the formation of the "Islamic conception" (*al-taṣawwur al-Islāmī*) to the Qur'an and the "Qur'anic method" (*al-manhaj al-Qurʾānī*), while maintaining a critical relationship with the philosophical heritage, from Greek philosophy to Muslim philosophers and modern philosophy (Qutb, 1979, pp. 11–14; Qutb, 1992, Vol. 6, p. 3732). Motahhari recognizes a different division of epistemic labor: experience for the study of nature, revelation for guidance and religious teachings, and philosophical reason for argument concerning the general questions of existence and theology. In his view, many Qur'anic and *Nahj al-Balagha* teachings concerning divine unity cannot be derived from observation of nature and require rational demonstration (Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, pp. 386, 391–392).

The aim of the study is to reconstruct this disagreement on the basis of the primary sources of the two thinkers. It does not seek to pass judgment on the truth or falsity of Sayyid Qutb's entire intellectual project, nor does it presuppose the correctness of Motahhari's critique. First, Qutb's position on empirical science and philosophy is reconstructed from his own writings. Second, Motahhari's understanding of science, worldview, and philosophical reasoning is examined. Finally, Motahhari's explicit statement about Qutb is analyzed in light of these two reconstructions. This procedure makes it possible to define the scope of Motahhari's judgment and to avoid transferring to Qutb statements made by other writers whom Motahhari quotes in describing the broader current.

Research Objectives and Questions

The primary objective is to clarify the epistemological rationale underlying Motahhari's view of Sayyid Qutb in the context of the revival of Islamic thought. Three more specific aims follow from this objective: to clarify the scope and limits of empirical science in Qutb's writings; to determine the place of the Qur'an and philosophy in the formation of the Islamic conception in his thought; and to reconstruct the basis on which Motahhari simultaneously defends empirical science and philosophical reasoning.

The main research question is: What understanding of the relationship among empirical science, philosophical reason, and revelation underlies Morteza Motahhari's critical view of Sayyid Qutb in the revival of Islamic thought? The subsidiary questions are: (1) What validity and what limits does Qutb assign to empirical science? (2) What place does philosophy occupy in the formation of the Islamic conception in Qutb's thought? (3) How does Motahhari distinguish empirical science from a scientific worldview? (4) To what extent is Motahhari's classification of Qutb supported by Qutb's own writings, and what epistemic and intellectual considerations explain Qutb's placement within the broader current Motahhari criticizes?

Literature Review

Theoretical and Empirical Background

Studies of Sayyid Qutb from the perspectives of epistemology and science have followed several identifiable lines of inquiry. Erfanmanesh and Parsania (2012), using documentary analysis, examine Qutb's social knowledge in relation to creed (*ʿaqīda*), jihad, civilization, science, and culture, and emphasize the influence of textual literalism and Ashʿarite theology on his intellectual method. The importance of this study for the present article lies in its attention to Qutb's sources of knowledge and intellectual background, although it does not focus on Motahhari's judgment of Qutb.

Zarnooshe Farahani and Khalili (2021) directly investigate the relationship between religion and modern empirical science in Qutb's thought. They conclude that Qutb distinguishes between pure sciences and sciences laden with values, and allows the acquisition of Western empirical sciences within their proper domain. In criticizing his position, they point to what they regard as insufficient attention to the interaction between pure sciences and sciences laden with values, as well as the lack of an adequate discussion of Islamic empirical science. Their study is highly relevant to determining Qutb's position on science, but the status of philosophical reason and its relation to Motahhari's judgment are not its principal concern.

Research on Motahhari has likewise addressed the relationship between science and religious knowledge. In comparing Motahhari and Soroush, Nourani and Parsania (2018) argue that empirical science in Motahhari's framework is connected with other forms of knowledge and emphasize the possibility that philosophical and religious foundations can shape the orientation of science. This conclusion helps clarify the place of science in Motahhari's intellectual system, but it does not pursue his encounter with Sayyid Qutb.

Along the same lines, Hossini et al. (2021), in a review of contemporary Ashʿarite attitudes toward philosophical inquiry, place Sayyid Qutb among figures who adopt a negative stance toward philosophy. They explain this position by reference to philosophy's Greek origins and its perceived incompatibility with the tawḥīdic structure of Islamic thought. Their study does not directly examine the relationship between science and philosophy in Qutb's project, but it is relevant in showing that the status of philosophy has already become an issue in contemporary scholarly readings of Qutb.

Halimi (2025), focusing on *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*, examines the ontological foundations of Qutb's thought and identifies divine unity and divinity as central to his view of the world. This conclusion is broadly consistent with the present article's emphasis on the role of the Islamic conception and the priority of a Qur'anic framework in providing a general interpretation of existence, although Halimi's study does not assess Qutb's position on philosophy or Motahhari's judgment of him.

Behniafar and Mokhtari (2016) examine the relationship between reason and religion in Motahhari's writings from a philosophical perspective. They show that reason, in his framework, is not merely an external instrument for defending religion but plays an epistemic role in understanding and evaluating religious claims. Their study is useful for clarifying the status of

philosophical reasoning in Motahhari's thought, but it does not examine his encounter with Qutb or the relation of that encounter to empirical science.

Taken together, the literature has concentrated mainly on three themes: the epistemic structure of Qutb's thought, his relationship to empirical science, and the place of science and reason in Motahhari's works. Yet among the studies reviewed here, none directly compares Motahhari's recurring references to Sayyid Qutb with Qutb's own positions on science and philosophy, or reconstructs the rationale of this classification across Motahhari's corpus. The present article addresses this gap by testing Motahhari's classification against Qutb's primary texts and distinguishing a critique of philosophical authority from scientism or scientific exegesis of the Qur'an.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework distinguishes among four concepts. "Empirical science" refers here to forms of knowledge that proceed through observation, experimentation, measurement, and inference concerning natural phenomena. A "scientific worldview" refers to the use of findings from the empirical sciences to offer a general interpretation of existence, human beings, origins, and ultimate ends. "Scientific exegesis of the Qur'an" (*tafsīr ʿilmī*) refers to attempts to determine or establish the meaning of Qur'anic verses through theories and findings from the natural sciences. "Philosophical reason" refers to demonstrative reasoning about general questions of existence, causality, God, human beings, and value.

In analyzing Qutb's position, criticism of philosophy is not treated as equivalent to a rejection of reason or rational argument as such. Three levels must be distinguished. The first is Qutb's critique of historical philosophies, especially Greek philosophy and what he regards as its effects after its introduction into Islamic thought. The second is his critique of philosophical systems that seek to provide a final interpretation of God, human beings, and existence independently of revelation. The third is the activity of reason itself in understanding, arguing, and knowing reality. The evidence used in this study supports the first two levels as characterizations of Qutb's position, but it is insufficient to attribute to him a rejection of rational argument as such. Accordingly, when this article refers to the limited place of philosophy in Qutb's thought, it means a reduction in the authority of philosophical traditions and systems in forming the Islamic conception, not a suspension of reason.

In this article, "Islamic conception" refers to the comprehensive picture of God, the world, human beings, the purpose of life, and the order of values in Qutb's thought. "Qur'anic method" refers to a mode of inquiry in which the Qur'an functions as the primary source for forming this conception and as the criterion for ordering other human forms of understanding. These two terms are used to explain Qutb's epistemic logic and should not be equated with a suspension of experience or reason.

This distinction is necessary for an accurate reading of both thinkers. The comparison is therefore organized around three analytical dimensions: (1) the jurisdiction assigned to empirical science, (2) the epistemic authority assigned to philosophical demonstration in questions beyond

empirical inquiry, and (3) the formative authority assigned to revelation in constructing a comprehensive religious conception. These dimensions make it possible to compare different configurations of epistemic authority without reducing the issue to a binary opposition between science and religion or between reason and revelation. They are used here as a heuristic derived from the two cases, not as an established typology of modern Islamic revival. Their wider applicability requires examination against additional cases.

Methodology

This study is qualitative, based on documents, and comparative. For Sayyid Qutb, primary sources were selected purposively on the basis of their direct relevance to four themes: empirical science, scientific worldview, philosophy, and routes to religious knowledge. *Maʿālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*, and *The Future Belongs to Islam* formed the core analytical corpus because they contain his most explicit discussions of the natural sciences, scientific exegesis of the Qur'an, the Islamic conception, the Qur'anic method, and philosophy. Qutb's *al-ʿAdāla al-Ijtimāʿiyya fī al-Islām* was also examined in its thirteenth Dar al-Shuruq edition, particularly for its account of the sources of the Islamic conception (Qutb, 1993, p. 20). For Motahhari, a comprehensive survey of his published works was conducted to identify direct and contextual references to Sayyid Qutb, Muhammad Qutb, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the broader intellectual current with which Motahhari associates them. Relevant passages concerning Western empiricism, empirical inquiry, natural theology, Ashʿarite thought, and philosophical demonstration were also examined in context. The survey identified the most pertinent discussions in volumes 1, 6, 8, 16, and 24 of the *Collected Works*, together with related passages elsewhere in Motahhari's published corpus. The Sadra metadata provide publication years but not edition numbers for the newly cited volumes; the editions used are those listed in the references.

The unit of analysis is a textual statement or passage that expresses a clear position on one of the themes identified above. The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, Qutb's position was reconstructed independently of Motahhari's judgment. Second, Motahhari's criteria for distinguishing empirical science from philosophical reasoning were extracted from his own works. Third, Motahhari's explicit statement about Sayyid Qutb was assessed in light of the results of the first two stages. In this comparison, explicit statements by each thinker were given priority over secondary inferences. A distinction was also maintained among Motahhari's own statement about Qutb, his description of a broader intellectual current, and passages he quotes from writers such as Abu al-Hasan al-Nadwi. Where a primary source does not provide clear textual support, the attribution is not extended beyond the evidence.

Findings

A Shared Concern with Revival and the Place of Scientific Progress

Qutb and Motahhari both regard scientific progress as an important feature of modern civilization, yet neither treats it as a sufficient criterion for measuring the perfection of the human being or society. At the beginning of *Maʿālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, Qutb sees Western leadership as being

in crisis while explicitly acknowledging the West's economic, military, and scientific power. For him, the central problem is the exhaustion of the West's reservoir of values. Any new leadership, however, must preserve and further develop humanity's material achievements (Qutb, 1979, pp. 3–7). The same perspective continues in *The Future Belongs to Islam*. Qutb praises the success of reason in understanding and mastering the material world but criticizes the extension of that success into the governance of every dimension of human life. Religion, in his view, provides the orienting framework for science and civilization, and scientific activity in nature is compatible with the human vocation of vicegerency (*khilāfa*) (Qutb, 1998, pp. 122–125).

Motahhari likewise welcomes scientific progress, and his criticism is not directed at science as a method for knowing nature. In discussing philosophical reasoning, even while responding to the current he criticizes, he acknowledges the Qur'an's invitation to study the signs of creation and argues that Muslims should have taken that invitation more seriously. He also highlights the contribution of Muslim scholars to the development of the empirical method (Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, p. 390). The shared position is therefore evident: an Islamic society needs science and experience, and religion is not incompatible with the study of nature. The disagreement arises when science is asked to pronounce on existence as a whole and on its ultimate meaning.

This difference matters for the question of revival because both thinkers regard the restoration of Islam to social life as requiring a reconstruction of how religion is understood. In Qutb's project, revival begins with the correction of creed, a return to the Qur'anic source, and the formation of a person who can then engage in scientific and social activity (Qutb, 1979, pp. 4–14). Motahhari also sees the revival of Islamic thought as requiring responses to the intellectual problems of the modern world. In choosing the intellectual resources for such responses, however, he assigns serious importance to the philosophical and theological capacities of the Islamic tradition and cautions against modeling Islamic thought on figures such as Sayyid Qutb (Motahhari, 2011b, Vol. 24, p. 88). The discussion of science and philosophy in this article is therefore directly related to how the epistemic framework of Islam is reconstructed in order to confront new questions.

Empirical Science in Sayyid Qutb's Thought: Legitimate but Bounded

In the chapter on the "Islamic conception and culture" in *Maʿālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, Qutb lists a range of disciplines that Muslims may learn from Muslims and non-Muslims alike: chemistry, physics, biology, astronomy, medicine, industry, agriculture, technical management, and practical skills. This list shows that he does not make the transmission of empirical knowledge entirely dependent on the creed of those who produce it (Qutb, 1979, p. 126). On the following page, he draws a boundary between these disciplines and forms of knowledge that make claims about the human being, history, values, social order, and the general interpretation of life. In his view, these latter fields are more directly related to creed and to a person's conception of existence (Qutb, 1979, p. 127).

Qutb's boundary becomes still clearer on page 128. As long as the natural sciences remain within the limits of actual experience and the recording of results, they operate within their proper field of specialization. The problem begins when empirical data are turned into a "philosophical

interpretation" of existence (Qutb, 1979, p. 128; author's translation). He applies the same distinction in discussing evolution: observing biological changes is one level of inquiry, whereas drawing the metaphysical conclusion that the world has no need of God is another. He then presents the empirical method as an achievement that developed within Islamic civilization and was later transmitted to Europe (Qutb, 1979, pp. 129–130). This historical claim underscores the positive place of empirical inquiry in his narrative of Islamic science.

Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān provides more precise evidence concerning the boundary between science and the Qur'an. Qutb argues that once the Qur'an has set the human being and society on the right course, human beings are free in the field of science to investigate and experiment, to make mistakes, and to correct them (Qutb, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 182). The same page contains an important methodological warning: the stable truths of the Qur'an should not be tied to hypotheses, theories, or even what at a given moment is called a "scientific fact." His reason is the limitation of the human instruments of knowledge and the revisability of scientific conclusions. On the next page, he allows that scientific discovery may broaden human awareness of the signs to which the Qur'an points, but he distinguishes this use from determining the meaning of a verse on the basis of a scientific theory (Qutb, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 183).

Elsewhere Qutb formulates the rule succinctly: "science affirms or denies within its own field" (*fa-l-ʿilm yuthbit aw yanfī fī maydānihi*; author's translation). He regards scientific results as partial and qualified and denies their competence to issue final judgments about the divine message or absolute truth (Qutb, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 280). His explicit criticism of the "advocates of scientific exegesis of the Qur'an" (*duʿāt al-tafsīr al-ʿilmī li-l-Qurʾān*; author's translation) points in the same direction. In interpreting a verse, the context and logic of the Qur'anic text take priority over a hasty attempt to match it to a scientific theory (Qutb, 1992, Vol. 4, p. 2065). Attributing scientific exegesis of the Qur'an to Qutb is therefore inconsistent with his primary texts.

The Qur'anic Method and the Critique of Philosophical Authority in Forming the Islamic Conception

Qutb's limitation of empirical science does not open the way to an autonomous authority for philosophy. His positive model begins with the "source from which guidance is received" (*maṣdar al-talaqqī*). In the chapter "A Unique Qur'anic Generation," he describes the first Muslim generation as one for whom the Qur'an was the primary source of formation and reception. He emphasizes that Roman civilization, Persian culture, Judaism, Christianity, and the Greek intellectual heritage all existed at the time. The concentration on the Qur'an therefore did not result from a lack of available intellectual alternatives (Qutb, 1979, pp. 11–13).

Qutb then identifies one of the differences between the first generation and later generations as the entry of other sources into the Muslim intellectual framework, explicitly mentioning Greek philosophy and logic, Persian myths, and *Isrāʾīliyyāt*. In his view, this mixture affected Qur'anic exegesis, theology, and the very mode in which religion was received (Qutb, 1979, p. 14). Qutb's point is not to suspend reason. He understands the Qur'an as forming a kind of reason and personality that, once constituted, can act within social and natural reality. Philosophy, however, does not possess an independent formative authority within this process.

The same logic appears in *al-ʿAdāla al-Ijtimāʿiyya fī al-Islām*. Qutb argues that the "correct Islamic conception" is not to be sought in Ibn Sina, Ibn Rushd, al-Farabi, and similar Muslim philosophers, whose philosophies he regards as shaped by the Greek tradition. He locates its authentic sources in the Qur'an, Hadith, the Prophet's biography, and his practical Sunnah (Qutb, 1993, p. 20). This passage supports the restriction of philosophy's formative authority beyond the two works discussed above.

In *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*, his position on philosophy is stated more sharply. When comparing the Islamic conception of existence with philosophical systems, he criticizes Greek philosophers, some modern philosophers, and even Muslim philosophers who followed their method. In the same discussion, he also rejects an exclusive empiricism that treats empirical and applied science as the sole path to knowledge (Qutb, 1992, Vol. 6, p. 3732). Taken together, these two critiques show that Qutb places full confidence neither in autonomous philosophy nor in unrestricted empiricism. His primary route to a comprehensive conception of existence is Qur'anic reception.

Motahhari: The Limits of Empirical Science and the Necessity of Philosophical Reasoning

Motahhari likewise distinguishes empirical science from worldview. In his discussion of different types of worldview, he explains that scientific knowledge is precise and effective within its own sphere but cannot supply a general interpretation of existence. When a "scientific worldview" speaks about the beginning and end of the world, the totality of being, or the meaning of human life, it has in practice moved beyond the domain of experience and begun to rely on philosophical presuppositions (Motahhari, 2010b, Vol. 3, p. 33). This analysis does not discredit science. Rather, it seeks to define the limits of its judgments. In Motahhari's positive formulation, the "Islamic worldview" has a "rational-philosophical" form (Motahhari, 2010b, Vol. 3, p. 35).

In *A Survey of Nahj al-Balagha*, this boundary is carried into the discussion of knowledge of God. Motahhari distinguishes two paths: the study of created things and the signs of order in the sensible world, and philosophical reasoning concerning metaphysical questions. He regards a substantial part of the theology of *Nahj al-Balagha*, especially its discussion of the divine attributes, as belonging to the second category (Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, p. 386). The study of nature may direct the mind toward order, knowledge, and governance in the world. However, concepts such as the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*), divine eternity, causal dependence, and many questions of divine unity cannot be derived from experimentation on nature (Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, pp. 391–392). In the fourth volume of the Collected Works, Motahhari develops the same point under the heading of the inability of science, by itself, to prove the existence of God. Arguments from order and guidance, as well as the study of nature, are valuable to him, but they do not resolve every problem in the knowledge of God (Motahhari, 2010a, Vol. 4, p. 184). He likewise distinguishes the scientific question from the theological conclusion in his discussion of evolution. Acceptance of the evolution of species does not in itself negate belief in God, nor does a religious defense depend on proving the fixity of species (Motahhari, 2010a, Vol. 4, p. 202). This example shows that Motahhari addresses apparent conflicts between science and religion by reformulating the problem philosophically rather than by immediately matching Qur'anic verses to a scientific theory.

Sayyid Qutb in Motahhari's Explicit Judgment

The most important piece of evidence for this article appears on pages 387 and 388 of volume 16 of Motahhari's Collected Works. Motahhari sees the modern source of opposition to philosophical reasoning in the success of the sensory and empirical method and the influence of empiricist philosophies. In his account, when this current combined with an Ashʿarite legacy in the Islamic world, some Sunni writers came to regard the study of nature as the reliable path to knowledge of God and to deny the validity of the rational method in metaphysical questions (Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, p. 387). He then names Farid Wajdi, Abu al-Hasan al-Nadwi, and Muslim Brotherhood writers "such as Sayyid Qutb and others" among those who promoted this tendency (Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, p. 388).

This classification recurs in *Causes of Inclination to Materialism*. Motahhari associates a contemporary current with Western empiricism and an Ashʿarite background, and includes Farid Wajdi, "to some extent Sayyid Qutb," Muhammad Qutb, and Abu al-Hasan al-Nadwi among its representatives (Motahhari, 2011a, Vol. 1, p. 582). He argues that the sensory study of nature can take inquiry to the threshold of the metaphysical but cannot replace demonstrative reasoning about divine attributes and other supra-empirical questions (Motahhari, 2011a, Vol. 1, pp. 582–583). His parallel discussion in volume 6 explicitly names Qutb among Muslim Brotherhood writers (Motahhari, 2010d, Vol. 6, p. 891). He subsequently develops the same critique through quotations from al-Nadwi. Statements in those pages to the effect that human knowledge is limited to sensible things, or that philosophy is responsible for the scientific decline of Muslims, are therefore quotations from Nadwi and cannot be attributed to Qutb without independent evidence. The present article maintains this distinction. A further discussion in volume 8 names Sayyid and Muhammad Qutb alongside al-Nadwi while reaffirming that an argument from natural order cannot resolve all the theological questions raised by the Qur'an (Motahhari, 2010c, Vol. 8, p. 467).

Motahhari's response is also significant. He does not equate a return to the Qur'an and the Sunnah with the suspension of argument. In intellectual matters, he does not regard the acceptance of a proposition without understanding and reasoning as an adequate solution. Religious texts, he argues, may provide principles for reflection that reason must understand and demonstrate (Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, pp. 389–390). His disagreement with Qutb, therefore, is not over the principle of returning to the Qur'an. The issue is whether philosophical reasoning can play an intrinsic role in understanding and demonstrating Qur'anic teachings.

The Critique of *Rah-e Tay Shodeh* and the Logic of Motahhari's Position

Motahhari's critique of Mehdi Bazargan's *Rah-e Tay Shodeh* ("The Path Traversed") further clarifies this logic. He does not reject the use of science as evidence of order in nature, but objects to moving directly from scientific description to a complete theological conclusion. Natural science, in his account, discloses a system of natural efficient causes. Questions of purpose, causality, and the relation between God and nature require philosophical clarification (Motahhari, 2010a, Vol. 4, pp. 67–68). The comparison does not equate Qutb with Bazargan. It illustrates

Motahhari's broader concern that empirical findings cannot by themselves perform the work of metaphysical argument.

Table 1. Comparative Configuration of Empirical, Philosophical, and Revelatory Authority in Qutb and Motahhari

Dimension	Sayyid Qutb	Morteza Motahhari
Empirical science	Valid for the study of nature and necessary for material progress; limited to the empirical domain.	Valid for the study of nature and necessary for social life; limited by its subject matter and empirical method.
Scientific worldview	Rejects a final interpretation of existence based on changing scientific theories.	Impossible without entering the domain of philosophical presuppositions.
The Qur'an and science	Scientific discovery may broaden understanding of the signs of creation; scientific theory is not a criterion for the meaning of the Qur'an.	Science may be used in the study of nature; theology cannot be reduced to empirical science.
Philosophy and philosophical reasoning	Critiques the autonomous authority of philosophical traditions and systems in forming the Islamic conception, without rejecting the activity of reason as such.	A valid mode of reasoning in general questions of existence and theology.
Formative authority in the comprehensive conception	The Qur'an and the Qur'anic method, together with reason and experience in their respective domains.	Revelation and philosophical reasoning, together with empirical inquiry in the study of nature.

Note. The dimensions summarize the two cases examined here and are proposed as heuristic variables rather than as an exhaustive typology of Islamic revivalist thought. The table was compiled by the author.

Analysis and Discussion

Convergence on the Validity and Limits of Science

The findings presented above show that the first major point of convergence between Qutb and Motahhari is their acceptance of the validity of the empirical sciences. Both consider the study of nature necessary, both refer to the historical role of Muslims in the development of empirical inquiry, and both regard scientific progress as important for the life of an Islamic society. They also reject turning science into a final interpretation of reality. Qutb emphasizes the revisability and boundedness of scientific theory, while Motahhari argues that a scientific worldview inevitably crosses into the domain of philosophy. Describing Qutb simply in terms of scientism and Motahhari simply in terms of philosophical orientation therefore obscures the real point of disagreement.

A second point of convergence concerns the relationship between the Qur'an and scientific findings. Qutb warns against fixing the meaning of the Qur'an by means of scientific theory, while allowing scientific discoveries to deepen attention to the order and signs of creation (Qutb, 1992, Vol. 1, pp. 182–183). Motahhari likewise draws on scientific evidence in his discussions and does not oppose examining Qur'anic verses concerning nature in light of new knowledge. His concern begins when an empirical theory is made to take the place of argument in theology.

The Point of Disagreement: The Authority of Philosophical Reasoning in Supra-Empirical Questions

The substantive disagreement appears at the following point: when a question lies beyond the adjudicative scope of the empirical method, how is a comprehensive interpretation of existence to be formed? Qutb seeks the answer in the Islamic conception derived from the Qur'an. Within this model, reason remains active in reception, reflection, the understanding of reality, and the investigation of nature, but philosophical traditions and systems do not possess autonomous authority in forming the Islamic conception. His criticism of the mixing of the Qur'anic source with Greek philosophy, and his criticism of Muslim philosophers, clearly indicate this limitation (Qutb, 1979, p. 14; Qutb, 1992, Vol. 6, p. 3732).

Motahhari configures the issue differently. For him, revelation and philosophical reason do not stand in opposition. The Qur'an and *Nahj al-Balagha* themselves raise questions whose answers require rational concepts and arguments. The Qur'anic invitation to reflect on nature is one path, but it does not encompass the whole of theology. In matters beyond empirical adjudication, philosophical demonstration is, for Motahhari, a valid route of epistemic inquiry (Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, pp. 386, 391–392). It is within this framework that he interprets contemporary opposition to philosophy as the result of a conjunction between a theological legacy and modern empiricism.

Assessing the Scope of Motahhari's Judgment about Qutb

Motahhari's judgment operates at two levels. The first is the claim that Qutb belongs to a current that lowers the standing of philosophical reasoning in theology. Qutb's writings provide significant evidence for this part of the judgment: his critique of Greek philosophy, his objection to its influence on Islamic thought, and his explicit preference for the Qur'anic method in forming a comprehensive conception. In this respect, it is understandable why Motahhari places Qutb within that current.

The second level arises when this characterization is extended to "scientism," "unrestricted empiricism," or "scientific exegesis of the Qur'an." Qutb's texts do not support such an extension. He draws strict boundaries around science, criticizes the philosophical overextension of empirical results, and explicitly rejects scientific exegesis of the Qur'an. Motahhari's statement is therefore most precisely read by distinguishing between a reduction in philosophical authority and an unrestricted expansion of empirical authority. This distinction both sharpens the reading of Motahhari and avoids weakly supported attributions to Qutb.

The epistemic classification examined here should also be read alongside other interpretations of Qutb's legacy. Toth (2013), for example, traces the radicalization of Qutb's later political thought and examines its wider legacy. Yet the passage examined here situates Qutb within an explicitly epistemological genealogy: the conjunction of an Ashʿarite anti-philosophical background with modern Western empiricism (Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, pp. 387–388). In another setting, Motahhari includes Qutb among Sunni thinkers whom Iranian reformers need not adopt as models (Motahhari, 2011b, Vol. 24, p. 88). Political dimensions of Qutb's thought form part of the wider historical context. However, the Motahhari works examined in this study do not offer direct textual evidence that those political dimensions underlie the epistemic classification discussed here.

Implications of the Disagreement for the Logic of the Revival of Islamic Thought

This epistemic disagreement also affects the two thinkers' models of revival. In Qutb's thought, the reconstruction of Islamic life begins with the formation of the human being and society on the basis of the Qur'anic source. In *Maʿālim fī al-Ṭarīq*, he identifies the defining feature of the first Islamic generation as the fact that the Qur'an was its primary source of reception and formation, and that the Qur'an was received through a practical logic of action and the transformation of life (Qutb, 1979, pp. 11–16). This sequence is stated even more explicitly in *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*. The Qur'an forms the human personality, conscience, reason, and mode of thought, and helps establish a society within which human activity becomes possible. Once such a human being and society have been formed, the individual is free in the fields of "science, inquiry, and experiment" to investigate and test (Qutb, 1992, Vol. 1, p. 182; author's translation).

Qutb also regards the natural sciences and material progress as necessary for Islamic social life, but ties the overall direction of life and the qualification for leadership to "creed and method" (author's translation). He situates the study of nature within the framework of human vicegerency and the governing principles of faith (Qutb, 1979, pp. 7, 126–134). Within this structure, philosophical systems do not possess broad authority in forming the Islamic conception, and Qutb maintains a critical stance toward Greek and modern philosophies as well as some forms of Islamic philosophy (Qutb, 1992, Vol. 6, p. 3732).

In Motahhari's model, the revival of Islamic thought is connected with correcting Muslims' understanding of religious teachings and restoring the effects of those teachings to individual and social life. He speaks of damage to "the way Muslims think … about Islam" (author's translation) and relates the revival of Islamic thought to the restoration of divine commands in society (Motahhari, 2009, pp. 33–34; Motahhari, 2011b, Vol. 24, pp. 113–115). At the epistemic level, he describes the Islamic worldview as "rational-philosophical" and emphasizes that, in matters of belief, the Qur'an relies on reason, argument, and demonstration (Motahhari, 2010b, Vol. 3, p. 35). At the same time, he recognizes an independent and valid domain for empirical science, while denying that it is sufficient to provide a comprehensive interpretation of existence or to resolve all theological questions (Motahhari, 2010b, Vol. 3, p. 33; Motahhari, 2010e, Vol. 16, pp. 390–391). His treatment of issues such as evolution and miracles likewise shows that, in assessing the relationship between science and religion, he distinguishes empirical data from philosophical

questions and addresses concepts such as causality at the philosophical level (Motahhari, 2010a, Vol. 4, pp. 202, 382–383). Philosophy therefore plays a methodological role in his framework, both in formulating a worldview and in defining the limits of scientific judgment.

Conclusion

This article began with Motahhari's explicit classification of Sayyid Qutb within a contemporary current critical of philosophical reasoning, and it tested that classification against Qutb's own writings. The first conclusion is that Qutb cannot be regarded as an advocate of scientific exegesis of the Qur'an or of a worldview grounded in the empirical sciences. He assigns substantial validity to natural science, allows Muslims to acquire scientific and technical knowledge from others, and, in his historical narrative, links the empirical method to Islamic civilization. At the same time, he restricts science to the empirical domain and criticizes the transformation of its findings into final judgments about revelation, God, and the human being.

The second conclusion is that the principal disagreement between Qutb and Motahhari concerns the place of philosophy. Qutb relies on the Qur'an and the Qur'anic method in forming the Islamic conception, and he adopts a critical stance toward Greek and modern philosophies and even toward parts of the Muslim philosophical heritage. Motahhari likewise regards the Qur'an as a source of guidance and knowledge, but he understands philosophical reasoning as a valid path within the Islamic tradition. In his view, parts of the theology of the Qur'an and *Nahj al-Balagha* cannot be adequately explained without rational concepts and demonstrations.

On this basis, Qutb's writings provide substantial evidence for the part of Motahhari's judgment that concerns the reduction of philosophical authority in forming the Islamic conception. Qutb's criticism of Greek philosophy, its influence on Islamic thought, and some Muslim philosophical systems is consistent with this dimension of Motahhari's reading. The same evidence, however, is not sufficient to attribute scientism, unrestricted empiricism, or scientific exegesis of the Qur'an to Qutb, because in numerous passages he limits the scope of empirical science and rejects tying Qur'anic truths to scientific theories. On the textual evidence examined here, the most strongly supported element of Motahhari's attribution concerns the validity and role of philosophical reasoning within religious knowledge. Any broader attribution requires independent evidence from Qutb's writings. The example of Mehdi Bazargan's *Rah-e Tay Shodeh* further shows that Motahhari's concern is not with modern science as such. He objects to an unmediated passage from empirical data to a theological claim, and he regards philosophy as necessary for clarifying that transition.

The present comparison does not, by itself, provide sufficient grounds for generalizing a typology to modern Islamic revivalist thought as a whole. It does, however, suggest an analytical hypothesis for further comparative research: thinkers who share a commitment to Islamic revival and acknowledge the importance of empirical science may still differ significantly in how they order the sources of knowledge, particularly in the epistemic authority they assign to philosophical reasoning in questions beyond the empirical domain. In this limited sense, the distinction identified here between Qutb and Motahhari may provide a useful point of departure for examining other modern Muslim thinkers who have addressed science, Qur'anic interpretation, and philosophy.

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