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Islamic Epistemology, Comparative Theology, and Religious Diversity in the Post-Truth Context

Ahmet Taşkın  

Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir, Türkiye

 ahmet.taskin@deu.edu.tr

Abstract. Postmodern interpretive awareness, digital mediation, and post-truth epistemic instability constitute the broader context within which contemporary religious and intellectual diversity manifest itself today. These developments have required a new philosophical and theological understanding of how religious truths are acquired, interpreted and communicated in conditions of growing diversity. This study aims to examine whether Islamic philosophical epistemology, in particular, its integration of revelation, rational inquiry, graded certainty, and interpretive mediation, provides conceptual resources to address these challenges, as well as to evaluate comparative theology as a contemporary intellectual practice of rethinking that articulates epistemological orientations already present within this tradition. The study employs conceptual and philosophical analysis of Islamic epistemological traditions, with particular attention to Muslim scholars such as al-Fārābī and al-Māturīdī, alongside constructive engagement with contemporary comparative theological thought. It analyzes how classical Islamic theories of knowledge historically approached to the question of diversity, and evaluates their potential relevance to current philosophical discussions concerning diversity, epistemic authority, and interpretive mediation. The analysis shows that Islamic epistemology consistently integrates revelation and rational inquiry within a tiered theory of knowledge that recognizes interpretive mediation while preserving normative commitment. Within this framework, comparative theology appears to be a methodological articulation of similar epistemological structure. Its integration of confessional commitment with a disciplined intellectual inquiry reflects models already at work in Islamic intellectual traditions. The study concludes that Islamic philosophical epistemology remains a viable intellectual resource for contemporary philosophical and theological reflection. Comparative theology, understood as a reinterpreted continuation of these epistemological orientations, offers a constructive model for engaging with religious and intellectual diversity while maintaining confessional commitment in postmodern and post-truth epistemic conditions.

Keywords: Islam, interreligious, revelation, reason, knowledge, method

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Исламская эпистемология, сравнительное богословие и религиозное разнообразие в контексте постправды

А. Ташкын  

Университет Докуз Эйлул, Измир, Турция

ahmet.taskin@deu.edu.tr

Аннотация. Постмодернистское интерпретативное сознание, цифровое посредничество и постправдивая эпистемическая нестабильность составляют более широкий контекст, в котором сегодня проявляется современное религиозное и интеллектуальное разнообразие. Эти изменения потребовали нового философского и теологического понимания того, как религиозные истины приобретаются, интерпретируются и передаются в условиях растущего разнообразия. Цель данного исследования — проанализировать, предоставляет ли исламская философская эпистемология, в частности, ее интеграция откровения, рационального исследования, ступенчатой уверенности и интерпретативной медиации, концептуальные ресурсы для решения этих задач, а также оценить сравнительную теологию как современную интеллектуальную практику переосмысления, которая формулирует эпистемологические ориентации, уже присутствующие в этой традиции. В ней анализируется, как классические исламские теории знания исторически подходили к вопросу о разнообразии, и оценивается их потенциальная значимость для современных философских дискуссий о разнообразии, эпистемическом авторитете и интерпретативном посредничестве. Анализ показывает, что исламская эпистемология последовательно интегрирует откровение и рациональное исследование в многоуровневую теорию знания, которая признает интерпретативное посредничество, сохраняя при этом нормативную приверженность. В этих рамках сравнительная теология представляется методологическим выражением аналогичной эпистемологической структуры. Ее интеграция конфессиональной приверженности с дисциплинированным интеллектуальным исследованием отражает модели, уже действующие в исламских интеллектуальных традициях. Исследование приходит к выводу, что исламская философская эпистемология остается жизнеспособным интеллектуальным ресурсом для современных философских и теологических размышлений. Сравнительная теология, понимаемая как переосмысление этих эпистемологических ориентаций, предлагает конструктивную модель взаимодействия с религиозным и интеллектуальным разнообразием при сохранении конфессиональной приверженности в постмодернистских и постправдивых эпистемологических условиях.

Ключевые слова: ислам, межрелигиозный, откровение, разум, знание, метод

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1. Introduction

The academic study of religion operates within contemporary environments shaped by unprecedented religious diversity, intensified global interaction, technological mediation, and ongoing debates about epistemic authority. Under these conditions, religious traditions and cultures increasingly encounter one another through both social interaction and digital communication. Around three decades ago, these developments were present in more limited form and had already begun to stimulate renewed philosophical attention to the epistemology of religious knowledge [1. P. 233–246]. More recently, they have intensified a persistent theological and philosophical question concerning how religious traditions can maintain meaningful truth claims while engaging such religious and cultural diversity and its epistemological implications [2. P. 1–5]. This expanding diversity increasingly generates epistemological uncertainty, fragmentation, and contested orientations for understanding religious truth. Consequently, the central concern has shifted from merely affirming whether religious traditions advance truth claims within contemporary contexts of plural coexistence to examining how such claims are interpreted, justified, and articulated within intellectual conditions often described as both postmodern and post-truth.

Islamic philosophical epistemology can be positioned as an intellectual resource capable of reinterpretation under contemporary conditions. It should therefore be understood not as a nostalgic return to a historical intellectual legacy but as an epistemic resource structurally suited to postmodern pluralism and post-truth epistemic instability. Its stable integration of revelation, rational inquiry, and interpretive mediation offers a way of understanding diversity and post-truth instability without reducing all traditions to equally relative perspectives or confining truth into uncritical confessionalism. Within this perspective, diversity can be treated as an epistemic condition requiring interpretive responsibility and intellectual reflexivity. Revisiting Islamic philosophical and theological epistemologies therefore can offer a constructive orientation for navigating contemporary religious diversity and the epistemological uncertainty it generates.

Within this context, contemporary comparative theology [2] can be articulated primarily as a reinterpretive theological practice structurally continuous with the classical Islamic sciences and their established modes of interpretation, rational

inquiry, and theological reflection. It integrates revelation, rational inquiry, and interpretive mediation while engaging religious and intellectual diversity without suspending confessional commitment. From this perspective, comparative theology can be employed as a contemporary reinterpretive practice that draws upon established Islamic epistemological orientations while remaining a distinct contemporary intellectual approach.

This article argues that Islamic philosophical epistemologies, particularly their integration of revelation, rational inquiry, and interpretive mediation, provide a constructive basis for engaging contemporary religious plurality, and that comparative theology may be productively employed as a reinterpretive intellectual practice compatible with these epistemological principles. The discussion focuses primarily on Islamic philosophical and theological epistemologies within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition, with particular attention to their interpretive engagement with religious diversity. The discussion focuses primarily on Islamic philosophical and theological epistemologies within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition, with particular attention to their interpretive engagement with religious diversity. In terms of method, the study combines conceptual analysis of Islamic epistemological principles with constructive engagement in contemporary comparative theology, aiming to articulate a reinterpretive model for intellectual reasoning under postmodern and post-truth conditions.

The article proceeds in three stages. First, it examines the epistemological implications of contemporary religious and intellectual diversity within postmodern and post-truth conditions. Second, it analyzes key features of Islamic philosophical epistemology, particularly its integration of revelation and reason, as historically operative and conceptually relevant. Third, it proposes comparative theology as a contemporary reinterpretive intellectual practice that remains structurally continuous with Islamic epistemological principles. Understood in this way, comparative theology draws upon Islamic epistemologies as constructive philosophical resources for addressing contemporary epistemic conditions, including diversity, interpretive mediation, and contested epistemic authority.

2. Epistemology of Religious Diversity in Postmodern and Post-Truth Era

Religious diversity presents significant theological and intellectual challenges insofar as different traditions articulate truth claims within distinct religious and cultural contexts. Although diversity itself is not new, contemporary conditions have intensified direct exposure to other traditions beyond one's own. In other words, individuals now encounter alternative doctrines, practices, and forms of religious life as immediate social realities, which, in many cases, generates frictions within or beyond a particular tradition.

Social and political sciences describe this diversity descriptively as the coexistence of traditions shaped by distinct beliefs, ritual practices, and intellectual orientations. From an epistemological standpoint, however, the problem runs deeper. Religious traditions differ in truth claims concerning certain teachings such

as ultimate reality, salvation, authority and religious experience. These claims are typically articulated within systematically structured theological systems that present themselves as normatively authoritative. Under contemporary conditions of intensified interaction and digital mediation, such diversity brings out a condition of epistemic tension by placing competing understandings of epistemic justification and authority in more direct relation.

Classical philosophical responses often address religious diversity through typologies such as exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Among them, exclusivism has historically functioned as a principled approach aimed at preserving the epistemic authority of a particular tradition by maintaining that one religious understanding uniquely holds truth while others are not [3. P. 57]. It is true that the coexistence of multiple religions does not logically disprove an exclusivist claim. However, continuous exposure to other traditions weakens the psychological and epistemic certainty of one's own tradition. The resulting challenge does not stem from contradictions within the tradition itself but from awareness that equally structured alternative systems exist, which complicates claims to exclusive epistemic authority

John Hick's pluralist proposal represents a major philosophical response to this tension. He asserted that structural similarities across traditions challenged strict doctrinal and soteriological exclusivism and proposed that diverse religions constitute differently mediated responses to an ultimately transcendent Real [1]. Hick repositioned the focus from doctrinal propositions to moral, spiritual, or existential life. Yet pluralism did not eliminate epistemic tension and relocated it to questions of the criteria by which the truth is to be evaluated and obtained.

Philip L. Quinn has further argued that awareness of many religions reduces the epistemic status of claims for tradition's exclusive truth claims [3. P. 76]. If religious claims supporting intolerance against others are epistemically weakened by awareness of diversity, then moral or philosophical arguments empowering toleration can carry more epistemic credibility than them [3. P. 77]. Religious diversity thus gives rise to both the practical problem of coexistence that makes toleration necessary and the epistemic constraints on intolerant claims, providing intellectual grounds for toleration.

This epistemic tension within postmodern conditions has become more pronounced as confidence in stable, traditional articulations of truth is increasingly questioned. Growing awareness of religious diversity, historical and cultural conditioning have led the understandings of claims for epistemic authority to be understood more as historically situated articulations rather than self-evident foundations. As a result, both assumptions of unquestioned epistemic authority and traditional forms of epistemic authority are called into question.

The post-truth conditions introduce a further complicating dimension. People become more willing to accept epistemologically unsupported claims, repeat such assertions instead of developing arguments, deny well-established knowledge, and rely on emotions rather than reason and evidence. Kathleen Higgins characterizes

this condition as a cultural erosion of the commitment to truth as a normative ideal [4. P. 9]. She rejects the view that philosophical relativism caused this complication. Thinkers like Kant or Nietzsche, she inserts, questioned absolute certainty, but they did not reject truth itself. Rather, they emphasized epistemic limits, interpretation, and intellectual honesty. In today's conditions, post-truth discourse misuses or distorts these philosophical insights into indifference toward rational and evidential accountability and truth. So, the problem becomes the commitment to truth itself.

Digital mediation certainly supported this epistemic erosion. As Stewart Hoover points out, religion in contemporary global culture is not merely represented through media but increasingly constituted by processes of mediation [5. P. 610]. Mediation shapes the circulation, reception, and authority of religious insights [5. P. 614]. In globalized digital environments, religious symbols, narratives, and claims often detach from their traditional institutional and scholarly contexts, entering a transnational marketplace of images and meanings [5. P. 618]. This circulation weakens established epistemic authorities, encourages selective or appropriated presentations of complex theological material, and complicates distinctions between disciplined theological knowledge and decontextualized assertions.

Vittorio Bufacchi has deepened the analysis by arguing that post-truth operates through the manipulation of consensus. Drawing on Habermasian themes, he notes that truth is frequently understood as consensus, which would command agreement under conditions of rational deliberation [6. P. 350–354]. Post-truth discourse exploits the structure by manufacturing alternative consensus designed to destabilize established standards of justification. In other words, instead of seeking real agreement through evidence and reasoning, post-truth discourse creates fake or manipulated agreement to weaken trust in real standards of truth. He describes this as a “Consensus on No-Consensus Paradox”, in which consensus is mobilized not to establish truth but to erode trust in it [6. P. 354–355].

These developments have produced a layered epistemological challenge. First, the coexistence of religious and cultural diversity is ubiquitous and decisive, so commitment to one single truth has become weaker. Second, postmodern thinking makes people more aware that beliefs depend on interpretation and history, which has destabilized epistemic universality. Third, post-truth conditions have eroded trust in evidence, rational deliberation, and justification for truth, leaving shared standards of evaluation contested and unstable.

Ultimately, the result is not only coexistence of different traditions with different theological and philosophical standpoints, but a meta-epistemological instability. Therefore, the central question becomes how religious truth claims to be formed, justified, evaluated, and obtained under contemporary conditions.

Questions of authority, interpretation, evidence, transmission, and epistemic responsibility become decisive, particularly where traditional approaches intersect with rapidly transforming informational environments. Religious diversity under postmodern and post-truth conditions does not invalidate religious truth claims but

requires a shift of attention to the epistemic conditions under which such claims are articulated, communicated, and critically examined.

The epistemic tensions at stake should not be regarded solely as threats. In fact, it may also serve as a natural course and source of intellectual vitality and richness. The challenge lies less in the existence of religious diversity than in the interpretive and epistemic sources of mediation through which religious knowledge is constructed. Under contemporary conditions, epistemological reflection becomes necessary for maintaining serious intellectual engagement without collapsing either into relativistic indifference or unreflective and uncritical forms of mediated religious knowledge.

3. Islamic Epistemological Resources for Religious Diversity

3.1. Epistemic Structure of Islamic Philosophy

Islamic philosophical epistemology offers a structurally and conceptually relevant epistemic resource for addressing contemporary religious diversity, interpretive mediation, and post-truth epistemic instability. Its relevancy stems from its integrative treatment of revelation, rational inquiry, graded certainty, and interpretive accountability within a unified theory of knowledge. This integrative orientation historically enabled Muslim scholars to articulate religious truth claims while engaging diverse religious, intellectual, and cultural contexts. Reconsidered under present conditions, it also provides conceptual resources for navigating epistemological uncertainty and maintaining philosophical and theological reflection.

As noted in the previous section, the typologies of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism remain influential in contemporary philosophy of religion. Yet their classificatory function can obscure deeper epistemological processes. By privileging presumed similarities, imposing tradition-specific evaluative categories, and predetermining interpretive strategies, such typologies may limit interreligious engagement by directing attention away from the epistemic conditions through which religious truth claims are formed, interpreted, and justified [7. P. 21–42]. A more adequate philosophical approach begins by examining how religious traditions articulate truth claims epistemologically. It may focus on how revelation, reason, testimony, interpretation, and transmission function within their respective theories of knowledge, before assessing their doctrinal positions.

Religious knowledge, unlike empirical knowledge, is inseparable from sacred texts, linguistic structures, historical transmission, and interpretive practices. It is historically situated and linguistically mediated, yet capable of expressing rationally meaningful claims for the followers of traditions. Interreligious engagement through religious diversity thus involves the interaction of interpretive horizons rather than the mere juxtaposition of doctrinal statements. From this perspective, religious diversity becomes an epistemological condition revealing

how traditions justify, communicate, and interpret their claims to truth across changing historical and intellectual contexts.

Within Islamic epistemological thought, revelation, rational inquiry, and interpretive mediation form a structurally integrated theory of knowledge. Such a theory has earlier philosophical articulation in Islamic philosophy, most systematically in al-Fārābī's division of the sciences. In his hierarchical ordering of the sciences, theoretical sciences ultimately culminate in political science, where truth finds its realization within life. Jurisprudence, prophecy, and revealed law or religion therefore do not function as epistemic alternatives to philosophy. In other words, they do not replace rational inquiry or stand in opposition to it. They constitute modes and methods through which philosophically apprehended truth becomes communicable, normatively binding, and operative within religious and social life.

Al-Fārābī reflects his epistemological theory in division of the sciences. Such division is epistemologically very significant because, in al-Fārābī's theory, knowledge finds its meaning and purpose through the coordinated integration of what he calls the four sciences. In *Tahsīl al-Sa'ada* (The Attainment of Happiness), he defines these sciences as theoretical virtues, deliberative virtues, moral virtues, and practical arts. In such, theoretical virtues provide demonstrative knowledge of beings, deliberative virtues guide practical judgment and governance, moral virtues determine the virtuous ends, and practical arts make knowledge communicable and socially operative [8. P. 13–32]. Al-Fārābī further emphasizes the epistemic hierarchy or gradation within this fourfold structure by identifying theoretical virtues as foremost, since it gives an account of beings as they are grasped with certainty by the intellect. The remaining sciences employ persuasion or symbolic representation of those same truths to instruct communities [8. P. 41]. His division reflects his view that philosophical knowledge provides demonstrative certainty, whereas religion, rhetoric, and related social practices articulate such knowledge into forms accessible to non-philosophical majority.

Al-Fārābī also articulates a hierarchical or gradational relation among these four sciences, assigning theoretical science a primary epistemic role. At the same time, he maintains that all four sciences remain structurally interdependent and cannot function properly in isolation. He argues “the theoretical virtue, the leading deliberative virtue, the leading moral virtue, and the leading practical art are inseparable from each other; otherwise the latter [three] will be unsound, imperfect, and without complete authority” [8. P. 32]. Practical reasoning therefore presupposes prior theoretical understanding. That is why he emphasizes that theoretical virtue, deliberative virtue, moral virtue, and practical arts ultimately function together and cannot be fully separated without compromising their validity. When these four sciences are collectively cultivated within a society through appropriate modes and methods, then, al-Fārābī asserts, human happiness and perfection are achieved in nations and cities [8. P. 41].

Al-Fārābī distinguishes between the intellectual elite (elect) and non-philosophical majority (vulgar) in epistemic terms. The elect ground their convictions in reasoning and critical scrutiny, whereas the general populace tends to rely on commonly accepted but unexamined opinions. This distinction has social and political implications, as reasoned knowledge is associated with intellectual leadership, while persuasive and symbolic forms of knowledge, including religious discourse, make truth accessible to the general populace [8. P. 41–42]. This indicates that epistemic authority in al-Fārābī carries political implications because theoretical knowledge legitimates intellectual leadership and shapes the governance of communities. Consequently, the modes and methods of theoretical sciences are reserved for instructing the intellectual elite, while persuasion and imaginative representation are used to communicate truth to the general populace.

He describes Philosophy, referring to Greeks, as “the scientific state of mind,” *the quest and the love for the highest wisdom* [8. P. 43]. Yet he does not regard theoretical science alone as sufficient for human happiness and perfection. The true philosopher must also possess the capacity to apply and communicate this theoretical knowledge within nations and cities so that philosophical truth becomes accessible and operative within societies [8. P. 43]. In this context, al-Fārābī emphasizes that philosophy gains its full realization only when knowledge is transmitted into social and political practice. Such implementation necessarily involves multiple modes of communication, including reasoning for the intellectual elect and persuasive or symbolic forms, including imagery, for the vulgar [8. P. 43]. Philosophy and religion thus converge in the task of making theoretical knowledge socially effective and beneficial.

This relationship between philosophy and religion becomes clearer when al-Fārābī distinguishes the epistemic methods through which knowledge is communicated. He explains that instruction involves both understanding and assent. Understanding may occur either through intellectual apprehension of essences or through imaginative representation by means of symbolic images, while assent may arise through demonstrative certainty or persuasive conviction. When beings are grasped intellectually and affirmed through demonstration, the resulting knowledge constitutes philosophy. When the same truths are conveyed through imaginative representations and accepted through persuasion, they constitute religion [8. P. 44–45]. Religion, therefore, does not address different subjects from philosophy but presents the same ultimate realities, particularly happiness and perfection, but through symbolic and persuasive forms suited to vulgar. In this sense, religion functions as an imitative or representational articulation of philosophical truth, symbolically articulating theoretical knowledge into communicable forms that guide human life comprehensively.

Eventually, al-Fārābī explicitly maintains the precedence of philosophy over religion, describing philosophy as prior in time [8. P. 45]. Consequently, he characterizes religion as philosophy’s imitative or representational counterpart.

Epistemologically, this discussion suggests that revelation and reason are not competing or contradicting sources of truth but differentiated modes of accessing and communicating the same realities. In al-Fārābī's theory of knowledge, philosophy produces intellectual certainty through rational investigation and religion conveys those same truths through imaginative representation and persuasive discourse. The difference lies not in the subject-matter of knowledge but in the method of apprehension and the mode of communication. Revelation does not negate rational inquiry, nor does reason invalidate religious expression. Both aim at understanding ultimate principles and guiding human beings toward happiness and perfection. Their distinction reflects epistemic gradation and differentiation rather than contradiction. For al-Fārābī, philosophy addresses the intellectual elite through demonstration, while religion addresses the general populace through symbolic and persuasive forms.

This philosophical integration of revelation and reason provides the intellectual foundation upon which later theological articulations within the Islamic tradition would build.

The integrative epistemology outlined above did not remain a purely theoretical construct but was historically enacted through processes of reinterpretation, cross-cultural engagement, and philosophical reformulation. Muslims, contrary to portrayals that treat them as static or unchanging, engaged in reinterpretation, reformulation, and contextual adaptation rather than passive preservation of earlier thought. They did not simply repeat inherited ideas, conceptual frameworks, or interpretive approaches without philosophical reflection. As David Burrell observes, Islamic philosophical theology often proceeded through a dialectical interaction in which rational inquiry clarified revelational sources while those sources simultaneously reshaped philosophical categories [9. P. 109–110]. This reciprocal process allowed reason and revelation to support one another without cancelling their distinct epistemic roles.

This dialectical interpretive interaction becomes particularly visible in the intellectual environment of al-Andalus, what is often described as the notion of *convivencia*. Interaction among Muslims, Jews, and Christians stimulated sustained philosophical engagement across traditions rather than mere coexistence. Muslim thinkers interpreted inherited Greek philosophical materials through Islamic theological concerns while also engaging Christians and Jews. This environment fostered both competition and collaboration in philosophy, science, and the arts [10. P. 80–81].

The thought of Ibn 'Arabī may be read as an illustrative case of this Andalusian intellectual interaction. While he firmly grounds his ideas in Qur'ānic revelation, his approach involves philosophical reinterpretation. According to David Burrell, drawing on William Dobie's interpretation, Ibn 'Arabī treats revelation as inseparable from rational understanding while emphasizing imagination as a mediating faculty capable of articulating meanings beyond purely conceptual reasoning. Qur'ānic imagery thereby functions as an epistemic resource that enables

deeper meanings of creation to manifest through interpretive engagement. In other words, creation itself becomes intelligible through the divine names revealed in the Qur'ān, so that the “book of nature” and the “divine book of revelation” mutually illuminate one another. The key implication here is that interpretation involves a continual existential enactment through which revelational meaning becomes accessible. When the imagery of revelation does not contradict reason, it is accepted as a direct manifestation of the “Real” [9. P. 108–112].

3.2. *Historical Functionality Under Conditions of Diversity*

Among these later articulations, the Māturīdī tradition offers one of the most systematic theological developments of this epistemological integration. Within this theological articulation, revelation, rational inquiry, and interpretive mediation form a structurally integrated theory of knowledge. Şaban Ali Düzgün asserts that al-Māturīdī's project is fundamentally oriented toward understanding and explicating the Qur'ān, indicating that revelation is approached through rational and hermeneutical engagement rather than uncritical acceptance [11. P. 27]. In other words, revelation is not approached as raw or uninterpreted data but as linguistically articulated discourse that necessarily requires rational engagement and hermeneutical clarification. Because the Qur'ān is conveyed through language, its meaning is accessed through interpretive mediation, situating revelation within the same epistemic field as other forms of knowledge, not beyond rational scrutiny.

This hermeneutical orientation presupposes an epistemological structure within which revelation can be interpreted, justified, and normatively applied. As Hanifi Özcan notes, epistemology functions as a “condition of possibility” for *uṣūl al-dīn* (the principles of religion) itself [12. P. 9–10]. In this context, al-Māturīdī stands as one of the exemplary figures of the Islamic intellectual tradition that conceives reason as “God's scale on earth” [13. P. 5]. Indeed, at the very beginning of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (The Book of Monotheism), one of his two major works extant today, al-Māturīdī addresses the epistemological problem posed by religious and intellectual diversity, noting that different communities claim exclusive access to truth while often grounding their convictions in inherited authority. He refuses *taqlīd* (uncritical adherence to tradition without evidential grounding) on the grounds that different traditions can equally appeal to established claims [14. P. 2]. Faith thus requires epistemic accountability. In other words, adherents must examine the grounds of belief themselves and adopt positions justified by reasoned evidence capable of overcoming opposing claims.

As Düzgün further observes, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* represents one of the earliest systematic theological works to begin explicitly with the question of knowledge, thereby introducing epistemology into *kalām* as a foundational component. After this intervention, theological works increasingly incorporated dedicated discussions of knowledge prior to doctrinal exposition [15. P. 21]. This development indicates that doctrinal articulation in Islamic theology, particularly in the Māturīdī tradition, presupposes an epistemological grounding.

Within this, al-Māturīdī assigns reason a foundational and evaluative role in the grounding of religious knowledge. He identifies *akhbār* (transmitted reports) and *‘aql* (rational intellect) as the fundamental sources through which religious knowledge is acquired [14. P. 2]. Transmitted reports provide historically mediated knowledge through revelation, prophetic teaching and tradition, while rational intellect functions as the critical faculty that evaluates, interprets, and rationally grounds those claims. It means that al-Māturīdī does not treat transmitted tradition as epistemically self-sufficient. By rejecting uncritical *taqlīd* and insisting that faith must be grounded in rationally compelling evidence, he positions intellect as necessary for evaluating and validating transmitted religious claims.

Just as al-Fārābī, al-Māturīdī also establishes a hierarchical relation among the sources of knowledge. He most likely does this to secure the epistemic credibility of religion. Without a structured account of knowledge sources, revelation risks either uncritical acceptance through *taqlīd* or total rejection under rational scrutiny. He therefore distinguishes the epistemology of religion from the broader theory of knowledge. He states that religious knowledge in particular is acquired through *akhbār* (transmitted reports) and *‘aql* (rational intellect), while general human knowledge includes *‘iyān* (sense perception) as an additional and interrelated source of knowledge [14. P. 8] Unlike first two, sense perception remains indirectly relevant because it supports rational reflection. Therefore, it does not constitute an independent source of revealed content.

According to al-Māturīdī, *akhbār* (transmitted reports) is also not uniform in epistemic status. Some reports yield *‘ilm ḍarūrī* (necessary knowledge) through *mutawātir* (widespread attestation), while others generate acquired or speculative knowledge and therefore require *ijtihād* (juridical reasoning) to act upon or reject. In cases where the epistemic state of demonstrative certainty cannot be attained, epistemic decision-making proceeds based on the strongest probability [14. P. 11–13].

On this basis, this graded structure of knowledge situates *naẓar* (reflective reasoning) at the center of epistemological evaluation. Al-Māturīdī grounds the necessity of *naẓar* in two conditions. The first is the epistemic limits of sensory perception and the second is the fallibility of transmitted reports [14. P. 13–14]. Reflective reasoning therefore becomes indispensable wherever the senses cannot reach and wherever transmitted knowledge admits the possibility.

Since al-Māturīdī begins *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* by directly addressing the epistemological problem caused by religious and intellectual diversity, his project can be understood as an attempt at epistemic stabilization of religious belief. In a context where diverse communities each claim exclusive access to truth, faith cannot rest on *taqlīd* (unexamined adherence) but must be rationally grounded, interpretively mediated, and critically examined. Religious commitment, therefore, becomes intellectually defensible under conditions of plurality by situating revelation within a structured hierarchy of knowledge sources in which reason evaluates transmitted claims and secures their epistemic credibility amid diversity.

This epistemological approach of Islamic intellectual traditions does not remain confined to classical times but provides a conceptual basis for contemporary forms of theological engagement with religious diversity.

4. Comparative Theology as a Reinterpretive Continuation of Islamic Epistemology

Comparative theology may therefore be understood primarily as a contemporary reinterpretation of the epistemological logic already operative within Islamic intellectual traditions. In this sense, it may function as both epistemological and methodological continuity between classical Islamic theories of religious knowledge and contemporary conditions of religious diversity, interpretive mediation, and fragmented epistemic authority. It thus represents less an imported discipline than a historically continuous extension of Islamic epistemological principles under new intellectual conditions.

This continuity becomes most visible in the shared epistemological commitment to the complementary integration of revelation and rational inquiry. Within Islamic intellectual tradition, revelation provides normative orientation and metaphysical grounding, and rational reflection enables interpretation, clarification, and conceptual articulation. Comparative theology follows a structurally analogous methodological orientation that maintains confessional commitment alongside disciplined intellectual inquiry in engaging other religious traditions.

Islamic epistemology does not remain confined to abstract truth-grounding but necessarily entails methodological implications. If religious knowledge is grounded in revelation and made intelligible through rational inquiry, then engagement with other truth claims cannot be avoided at the epistemic level. The integration of revelation and reason already presupposes processes of interpretation, clarification, and evaluative comparison. Under conditions of religious diversity, these epistemic commitments necessarily and naturally entail methodological requirements.

Both historically and in contemporary contexts, preserving revelation as normative epistemic grounding does not preclude intellectual engagement but necessitates it. Precisely because revelation provides normative orientation, its intelligibility under conditions of religious diversity requires methodological articulation, rational inquiry, and hermeneutical interpretation. Intellectual engagement therefore appears but as a structural epistemic requirement inherent in religious commitment itself. Comparative theology may therefore be understood as the methodological expression of these prior epistemological commitments.

This epistemology–methodology continuity was historically articulated within Islamic intellectual engagements with religious diversity. Efforts to classify, evaluate, and interpret religious diversity appeared across Islamic intellectual traditions, including theological, philosophical, and historiographical writings. Muslim scholars such as al-Shahristānī [16], Ibn Ḥazm [17], and al-Bīrūnī [18] illustrate different modes of Islamic intellectual engagement with religious diversity. These include the systematic classification of religious traditions, rational

evaluation of doctrinal claims, and hermeneutically attentive representation of other cultures and religions. Although they did not practice comparative theology in the modern disciplinary sense, their works reflect an epistemological pattern in which religious commitment remained normatively grounding while rational inquiry and interpretive engagement operated as necessary intellectual responses to religious diversity.

This epistemological pattern finds explicit methodological articulation in contemporary comparative theology, particularly under conditions of intensified religious diversity and inevitable interreligious encounter. Comparative theology designates a mode of theological inquiry grounded in confessional commitment and rational inquiry while oriented toward learning from other religious traditions. Francis X. Clooney defines comparative theology as “acts of faith seeking understanding which are rooted in a particular faith tradition but which, from that foundation, venture into learning from one or more other faith traditions.” This learning, he continues, is pursued “for the sake of *fresh theological insights* indebted to both the newly encountered tradition(s) and the home tradition” [2. P. 10].

This formulation indicates that comparative theology combines tradition-rooted theological reflection with the disciplined study of other traditions. Methodologically, theology retains its classical meaning as “*faith seeking understanding*,” a practice in which confessional commitment, intellectual inquiry, and interpretive engagement remain in productive tension [2. P. 9]. Comparative theology does not suspend theological positioning in the act of comparison. In other words, the comparativist stays normatively rooted within a particular religious tradition, and theological reflection remains accountable to its doctrinal, textual, and epistemological frameworks.

Comparison, likewise, functions as a reflective and contemplative practice through which the religious self and the religious other are interpreted in relation to one another [2. P. 9–19]. In this sense, comparison is not reduced to devotional appreciation or dialogical exchange alone. It involves disciplined intellectual inquiry, including close textual study, conceptual analysis, and attentiveness to historical and linguistic context. Such comparison seeks to understand religious materials within their own historical and cultural contexts before drawing theological and intellectual conclusions.

By integrating confessional commitment and rational inquiry, comparative theology remains oriented toward constructive theological understanding. Engagement with another tradition functions to clarify, deepen, and critically reassess one’s own theological commitments. The theological comparative act thus serves a constructive purpose, contributing to the ongoing articulation of truth within the horizon of a confessional epistemic framework.

Within contemporary comparative theology, a distinction is sometimes drawn between confessional approaches, which remain normatively grounded within a particular religious tradition, and meta-confessional approaches, which extend toward broader philosophical reflection across traditions. In the latter framework,

theological inquiry often begins with engagement among traditions but moves toward wider philosophical questions concerning ultimate truth, human condition and understanding. Scholars such as Robert C. Neville characterize this orientation as a shift from “faith seeking understanding” toward “understanding seeking faith,” emphasizing philosophical inquiry prior to or independent of explicit confessional commitment [19. P. 27]. This orientation broadens the intended audience beyond a single religious community to include multiple traditions, new religious movements, and secular intellectual contexts. This highlights the philosophical potential of comparative theology as a rational and epistemological inquiry alongside its confessional character. In both confessional or meta-confessional forms, religious diversity constitutes an epistemic condition requiring interpretive mediation, rational accountability, and openness to learning across traditions.

This methodological integration carries significant epistemological implications for comparative theological thought. Because comparative theology assumes the possibility of intellectual and theological development through engagement with other traditions, it calls for epistemic humility regarding the adequacy and completeness of one’s own claims to ultimate truth [19. P. 45]. Such humility acknowledges the historically mediated and interpretive character of religious knowledge without relativizing truth itself. In this respect, it parallels classical Islamic critiques of *taqlīd* (unreflective adherence), particularly in al-Māturīdī theology, where inherited belief retains normative validity yet is expected to be supported by rational reflection and awareness of interpretive limitation. Within this framework, transmitted reports are recognized as varying in evidential strength, certainty admits degrees, and *nazar* (reflective reasoning) becomes necessary wherever uncritical adherence could equally support competing claims. Comparative theology affirms that while religious truth remains normatively grounded, its human articulation is historically situated, linguistically conditioned, and open to ongoing clarification. Epistemic humility consequently functions as a methodological principle enabling responsible engagement with religious diversity while discouraging the absolutization of particular interpretations.

This emphasis on epistemic humility also finds an important philosophical precedent in al-Fārābī’s epistemology. His hierarchical account of knowledge distinguishes demonstrative certainty attained through philosophical reasoning from symbolic or persuasive modes through which that certainty becomes communicable within religious and social contexts. Such gradation does not relativize truth but acknowledges the plurality of its modes of apprehension and expression. It can also allow a limited parallel with meta-confessional comparative approaches. In this respect, al-Fārābī’s distinction implies that reflection on truths can proceed at a philosophical level not confined to any single confessional formulation, even while religious traditions remain normatively significant for their respective communities. Recognition of these differentiated epistemic levels implicitly limits claims to exhaustive comprehension and thus encourages intellectual modesty in the articulation of religious knowledge. In this respect,

comparative theology's emphasis on epistemic humility can be understood as a continuation of an epistemological sensibility already present in Islamic philosophical thought.

Under contemporary postmodern and post-truth conditions, where epistemic authority is contested, interpretive diversity is unavoidable, and digital mediation accelerates the circulation of decontextualized religious claims, such an integrated epistemological posture acquires renewed philosophical relevance. Religious diversity no longer refers merely to the coexistence of multiple traditions but increasingly to an epistemic problem characterized by the instability of epistemic authority, intensified interpretive diversity, and the insensitivity with which persuasive discourse can displace rational and evidential accountability. Within this context, Islamic epistemological categories provide a conceptual framework within which comparative theology can be understood as a structured response to contemporary epistemological instability, integrating normative revelation with rational accountability under conditions of diversity and post-truth era. It preserves revelation as normative orientation while requiring rational scrutiny, interpretive self-awareness, and disciplined engagement with alternative claims. These capacities become especially necessary when diversity creates an epistemic condition and post-truth discourse pressures religious communities either toward defensive religiosity or indifference to truth. By situating theological reflection within a graded and interpretively mediated account of knowledge, it stabilizes confessional commitment without insulating it from rational evaluation or interreligious encounter. Comparative theology, on this reading, constitutes a reinterpretive continuation of its epistemic dynamics under contemporary conditions. It articulates explicitly, and in a methodologically self-conscious manner, patterns of reasoning long present and actively employed within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This study has argued that contemporary religious and intellectual diversity, intensified by postmodern interpretive awareness and post-truth epistemic instability, presents theological, intellectual, and fundamentally epistemological challenges. The coexistence of multiple traditions, the fragmentation of epistemic authority, and the mediation of religious knowledge through global digital environments collectively destabilize inherited frameworks for articulating religious truth. Approaching this reality solely through pluralist typologies such as exclusivism, inclusivism, or pluralism, or alternatively through strictly confessional or purely secular frameworks, proves insufficient. Because diversity today is multi-dimensional, multi-layered, and multi-contextual, it shapes contemporary religious reasoning in the same way. The central issue concerns how religious truth claims are formed, interpreted, justified, and communicated under conditions of interpretive diversity, contested authority, and diminished commitment to rational justification and evidential accountability. This situation arises mostly from the

historically unprecedented intensity and accessibility of diverse religious and intellectual perspectives. It is further reinforced by technological infrastructures that accelerate their circulation, amplification, and epistemic impact. Addressing these challenges therefore requires renewed attention to the formation, interpretation, justification, and communication of knowledge, particularly religious knowledge under contemporary conditions.

Within this context, Islamic philosophical epistemology offers a historically grounded and conceptually relevant intellectual resource open to reinterpretation in contemporary intellectual discourse. Classical Islamic thought consistently integrated revelation, rational inquiry, interpretive mediation, and graded certainty within a systemized theory of knowledge. This epistemological integration historically enabled Muslim intellectual traditions to engage religious diversity while maintaining confessional commitment without collapsing into relativism or dogmatic absolutism. The continuity of this integrative epistemology across philosophical, theological, and hermeneutical traditions indicates that Islamic philosophy retains conceptual resources capable of addressing contemporary philosophical concerns about pluralism, authority, and epistemic instability.

The present analysis therefore contributes to ongoing debates about whether Islamic philosophy represents an interrupted tradition or a living intellectual heritage undergoing reinterpretation. The evidence examined here supports the latter view. The epistemological structures articulated by figures such as al-Fārābī and al-Māturīdī demonstrate enduring philosophical relevance, particularly in their treatment of revelation and reason as complementary epistemic sources. Their emphasis on integration of revelation and reason, interpretive mediation, epistemic humility (gradation), and rational accountability resonate strongly with contemporary concerns in philosophy of religion, hermeneutics, and particularly comparative theology. Islamic philosophy, with its theories and methodologies, continues to provide epistemological resources remain actively relevant for articulating religious knowledge under contemporary postmodern and post-truth conditions.

Comparative theology, as discussed in this study, functions as a contemporary reinterpretive practice that makes these epistemological dynamics methodologically explicit. Rather than representing an imported methodological approach, comparative theology can be understood as articulating patterns of reasoning long operative within Islamic intellectual traditions. Classical Muslim scholars engaged other religious traditions through classification, rational evaluation, and hermeneutically attentive interpretation, demonstrating an epistemological openness grounded in confessional commitment. Contemporary comparative theology formalizes similar intellectual practices by combining theological rootedness with disciplined engagement across traditions. It presupposes epistemic humility, recognition of interpretive mediation, and openness to learning from religious others while maintaining confessional commitments.

This methodological articulation carries broader philosophical implications. Comparative theology has been recognized as situated between theology and the academic study of religion, raising questions about disciplinary boundaries, institutional authority, and the future of confessional intellectual traditions in pluralistic societies. From an Islamic philosophical perspective, this positioning reflects longstanding epistemological assumptions about knowledge emerging through interpretive engagement, rational reflection, and historically mediated transmission rather than through isolated doctrinal assertions. The integration of revelation and reason characteristic of Islamic epistemology therefore provides conceptual grounding for comparative theological inquiry.

Within contemporary philosophical discourse, this discussion intersects with debates concerning post-metaphysical thought, postmodern hermeneutics, and post-truth epistemology. Islamic epistemological traditions never abandon confessional commitment nor assume unmediated access to absolute certainty in religious knowledge. Instead, they articulate a graded epistemology that acknowledges interpretive limitation while preserving normative commitments. Such an approach offers a balance in faith which is sought in contemporary philosophy of religion under current situations.

Ultimately, the study suggests that the future contribution of Islamic philosophy to societies lies in rearticulating its epistemological insights within contemporary intellectual conditions. Contemporary comparative theological thought, understood as a reinterpretive continuation of these epistemological dynamics, represents one constructive avenue for such intellectual renewal. Islamic philosophy therefore remains an active participant in global philosophical discourse through critical reinterpretation responsive to the epistemological challenges of the present intellectual era.

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¹ Йельский университет имеет статус организации, деятельность которой признана нежелательной на территории Российской Федерации.

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About the author:

Taşkın Ahmet — PhD, Doctoral Faculty Member, Philosophy and Religious Sciences, School of Theology, Dokuz Eylül University, 144 Cumhuriyet Blvd., Izmir, 35210, Turkey. ORCID: 0000-0002-1215-714X. E-mail: ahmet.taskin@deu.edu.tr

Сведения об авторе:

Ташкин Ахмет — доктор философии, доцент кафедры философии и религиоведения, теологический факультет, Университет Докуз Эйлюль, Турция, 35210, Измир, бульвар Республики, д. 144. ORCID: 0000-0002-1215-714X. E-mail: ahmet.taskin@deu.edu.tr