

Introduction: Religion in the Modern World

At the threshold of the third millennium, does modern humanity need religiousness and religious research any longer?1 With the ascension of humankind to the heights of empirical knowledge, has the era of religious faith truly passed? Does the endless horizon of empirical research leave any room for religion? In the modern world, is religiousness a thing of superstition and religious research an obsolete and futile activity? In light of amazing scientific developments and through utilization of our collective intellect, has humanity truly been able to create their promised Paradise on this mundane globe and thus no longer needs to endeavor to gain access to a heavenly Paradise? Ultimately, has contemporary humankind been successful in attaining true beatitude and happiness through its accomplishments?

These and many similar questions are among the basic quandaries that face modern humanity. Particularly, religious people, who believe that religion affects their lives, seriously need to illuminate their positions regarding such questions.

There is no doubt that the modern era lures religious people into uncertainty with its colorful and deceptive appearance. Many of those who have been seduced by the charm of materialistic civilization consider religion an ebbing current and eagerly await its sunset and finale. They regard religion as a phenomenon linked to the outdated traditions and bygone history of humanity, which like cuneiform and the Ptolemaic system, has reached its expiration date. According to this notion, religion does not have (or should not have) an important or irreplaceable role in the life of modern humanity and thus in modern times, religiousness is a thing of superstition and foolishness.

Correspondingly, religious research (theoretical research concerning religion)—assuming that its usefulness and necessity is endorsed—must be limited to research in the context of psychology, sociology, history, and similar fields. In these studies, researchers must regard religion from an external perspective. For example, they must study the mental or social effects of religion or its historical evolution, without concerning themselves with examining the truths behind its claims or trying to understand and benefit from its teachings.

A superficial examination of the exterior appearance of modern human life and the astonishing results of

modern technologies and industries, confirms the above notion or at least seems compatible with it. Nonetheless, more comprehensive, penetrating, and critical analyses of the condition of the world and the modern human² reveal the flagrant dramatization of the allegation that the era of faith has come to a conclusion and that modern humanity no longer requires religion. Even though many modern humans verbally deny need of religion, their condition states otherwise.

Despite modern humanity's astounding developments in science and technology, it is faced with massive crises³ that either possess completely new identities, or hold much more terrible and horrific features compared to their historic parallels. A thorough and chronicled explanation and clarification of these crises would be too long a narrative to cover in the limited pages of this introductory chapter. What can be covered in this synopsis is an overview and brief explanation of several aspects of this discussion.

Doubtless various cognitional, social, economic, etc. factors have been influential in creating and intensifying what we call modern crises. Correctly understanding these factors can be effective in more accurately comprehending these crises and their historic origins. Here we will suffice it to mention several of the most important factors that have caused the outbreak of modern crises and brought about an overall transformation of the ideas of modern humans about themselves and the world around them.

Rationalism

The modern form of rationalism emerged in seventeenth century Europe through the contemplations of the famous French philosopher and mathematician, René Descartes (1596 – 1650) and was later advocated in the works of philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677) and Gottfried Leibniz (1646 – 1716). Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) set to critiquing pure reason and finally concluded that pure reason cannot prove the existence of God. He then endeavored to secure the foundations of intellectual belief in God based on ethics and practical reason.

Additionally, he maintained that empirical truths (or objects per se), cannot be understood as they truly are, rather, we understand objects through previous concepts and categories within our minds. Although rationalist philosophers have presented differing philosophical systems, the common feature of modern day rationalism is that discursive or deductive reason is considered the most basic tool for understanding. Moreover, according to some of the more extremist narratives, reason can comprehend all fathomable things and nothing that reason cannot fathom is comprehensible.

The rationalist approach to religion, especially in the West and within Christianity, gradually deprived revelational theology [ilḥāḥāt al-wahyān] (theology based on divine texts) of its credibility. In this way, the seemingly unmatched rival of revelational theology—i.e. rational theology—was consolidated.

Even so, sole reliance upon deductive reason and also the discovery of several limitations of reason as an instrument of cognition have caused new complications for rationalist theologians. For example, today, many western philosophers and theologians believe that religious teachings, including the

existence of God, cannot be proven by reason. That being the case, they endeavor at least to demonstrate that accepting these teachings is not unreasonable.⁴

Empiricism

Empiricism is an ideological movement that developed parallel to rationalism following the western Renaissance. Even though rationalism had a long record in the history of philosophy, empiricism ultimately surpassed rationalism. This neo-rationalist movement emerged through the innovative assertions of Francis Bacon (1561 – 1626) regarding the necessity of utilizing induction instead of deductive reasoning. Subsequently, distinctive forms of this school appeared in the philosophies of John Locke (1632 – 1704), George Berkeley (1685 – 1753), and David Hume (1711 – 1776). Positivism is also a form of twentieth century extremist rationalism.

The common element in the various narratives of extremist rationalism is that they all regard sensory experience as the only method of cognition and consider exterior senses the source of all human knowledge. Generally, rationalists have difficulty accepting the metaphysical teachings of religions because according to them the verity of these teachings cannot be established through sensory experience.

The most severe opposition of contemporary rationalism with religion manifests in the criterion logical positivists propose regarding identification of meaningful statements. They allege that a meaningful statement is a statement that can be empirically analyzed. According to one description of the principle of empirical analysis, an empirically analyzable statement is a statement whose verity or falsehood can be demonstrated using specific practical conditions that can occur in the real world.

According to this criterion, religious statements (and metaphysical and moral statements) essentially lack any cognitive meaning. Therefore, it is a waste of time to investigate the truth of these statements! Even though serious criticism of positivism in the first few decades of the twentieth century resulted in the loss of its original authority, there are still residues of positivist thought in some western philosophers.⁵

The two doctrines of rationalism and empiricism, despite their fundamental differences, are identical in one issue: they both view with skepticism all knowledge that is beyond the reason or the senses. Furthermore, they regard no credibility for the revelation sciences or intuition.

Scientism

Another one of the instigators of modern crises is the prevalence of scientism upon the minds of many empiric scientists. According to this doctrine, which is an offshoot of empiricism in the domain of empirical knowledge, empirical knowledge is humanity's only reliable guide to the truth. Scientism itself is without doubt a philosophical and epistemological belief that cannot be scientifically proven because no scientific experiment can be orchestrated showing that science is the only reliable method of attaining

the truth.

It has been quite some time that science and scientism have become one within the minds of many empirical scientists (physicists, biologists, psychologists, etc.). This unacceptable union has developed grounds for the encroachment of empirical science upon the territory of philosophy, metaphysics, and religion.

Humanism

Another aspect of the modern era is the dominance of humanist views. According to traditional thought, even though humans have an elevated standing in the world, they are still creations of God. Therefore, they must carry out their divine obligations. The traditional humans sought their truth and identity through their connection with God and realized perfection through servitude and intimacy with God.

Whereas according to humanism, humanity is the center and basis of all truths and goodness; everything, even God and religion must be justified and interpreted through humanity; humans are egoistic and have no responsibilities towards anyone but themselves; and in order to gain profit they are permitted to use anything in every way possible. Influenced by humanism, modern humanity measures everything by human quantities and standards and thus, they have desecrated all things holy. According to René Guénon:

“In the era of the Renaissance, one term has been subject to much reverence and credence and has beforehand epitomized the complete plan of modern civilization. This term is Humanism—a philosophy that considers humanity to be the criterion for the evaluation of all things. In truth, the intention for which this term is used is to limit all things according to human standards and measurements, and to make abstract all principles and doctrines containing spiritual and sublime characteristics. Indeed, it could be said as an exemplum that the intention was to turn our backs on the heavens with the excuse of having mastery over the world.”⁶

The aforementioned factors along with several additional factors such as liberalism and individualism—which are too comprehensive to discuss here—have united together to present humanity with a world full of crises, tension, and turmoil, albeit they do have some positive aspects. Crises and troubles in the modern world are so severe, abysmal, and extensive that we not only cannot consider modern humankind more happy and prosperous than traditional humans, in fact we find the situation to be exactly the opposite.

Here we must emphasize the fact that we do not deny the positive results of modern civilization—such as advancement in empirical science and technology or establishment of more complex (and sometimes more efficient) social systems—yet we believe that these developments have not helped modern humankind appreciably in its advance on the path of perfection and human bliss.

Modern humankind, as opposed to traditional humankind, has become more knowledgeable (meaning they possess more information) and more powerful (meaning they have the capability to utilize nature and machines without limit), although this fact does not necessarily mean that they have become more human. In order to verify this assertion, we must make a brief inquiry into several crises that confront modern humanity.

Cognition Crisis

Despite the awesome and rapid development of information⁷, regarding knowledge, modern humanity is in a state that can be defined as modern cognitional bewilderment. The initial roots of this confusion in the modern era go back to the contemplations of Kant regarding the limits of human knowledge. Kant's philosophy and epistemology brought about a deep and frightening gap between the external world, the cognitive world, and human knowledge: humanity does not have direct access to the external world (empirical reality) and it is inevitable that everything we perceive from the world is understood through previous concepts and categories within our minds. In other words, we constantly see the world through the glasses of our minds. Therefore, humanity has no understanding of external objects, as they are in themselves.

Many of the philosophical doctrines and theories that appeared in the West after Kant's philosophy were influenced by the Kantian epistemology. Additionally, many of them had much influence in intensifying the knowledge confusion of modern humanity.

For example, recent studies in hermeneutics (the science of interpretation) showed that there can never be a complete understanding of the words or writings of others. As an additional example, contemporary developments in logic and epistemology brought about the appearance of new theories regarding the meaning and verity of a statement—thus further increasing confusion.

In contrast to the traditional view that regarded any statement that conformed to reality true, in contemporary theories, "truth" has a completely different meaning. For instance, according to the coherence theory of truth, the truth of a statement depends on its congruity and accord with the rest of ones' beliefs; or according to the pragmatic theory of truth, essentially, a true statement is a statement whose merit becomes clear only through practical experience.

Furthermore, nowadays, the traditional theories about knowledge, which were mostly foundationalist, have gained powerful adversaries. According to several traditional foundationalist narratives, all statements are divided into two groups: axiomatic and theoretic. The credibility of theoretic statements is clarified with reference to axioms—which form the foundations of our knowledge—while axioms are regarded inherently true.

Today, we are witness to the appearance of substitutive theories such as the coherence theory of truth. According to this theory, there are no basic statements in our knowledge structure which are the

foundation of other statements; rather, the validity of our belief regarding a statement is based on its consistency with our other beliefs.

After encountering apparently impassable knowledge barriers in the domain of philosophy and metaphysics, modern humanity recovered their peace and tranquility in the empirical sciences. Yet not much time passed before it became apparent that what was considered with certainty to be an oasis was in fact a mirage. The escalating development in scientific knowledge resulted in swift substitution of rival theories.

On the other hand, several scientific philosophers performed in depth analysis of the nature of scientific theories and the role of mental and intellectual characteristics of scientists in the formation of these theories. It was soon revealed that empirical science is not the place of solace that the inquisitive minds of modern humans desired and for which they thoughtlessly refuted all metempirical cognition.

Today, the appearance of all manners of contradictory theories, especially in the humanities, has created a kind of confusion that can be called the “Crisis of Trust”. Modern humans are rapidly losing trust and confidence in empirical knowledge, for which, in the past few centuries following the development of scienticism, they substituted trust in religion and divine texts.

In any event, rationalism and empiricism in the modern world were not as successful in guiding modern humans towards trustworthy substitute sciences as they were in estranging them to the revelational sciences [maʿrif al-wahy].

Moral Crises

Considering the fundamental connection of humanity and morality, the definition of humankind as a “moral animal” is not an exaggeration. From ancient times, human philosophers have contemplated and speculated about morals and morality. Throughout history, there existed people of virtue, who purified and improved their inner beings, and afterwards endeavored to reform the human world and instruct people in ethics.

In the modern era, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century, the philosophical contemplations of various western thinkers regarding ethics and its foundations have formed original discussions in the domain of moral philosophy, which are hypothetically valuable and noteworthy. Even so, this great scientific outcome not only had little effect on the growth and development of ethics—especially individual ethics—rather, to some extent, it brought about the instability of the principles and foundations of human ethics. Moral relativism, utilitarianism, and hedonism—at least in some narratives—have had a great share in the spread of moral degeneration.

Moreover, the humanist and individualist views of various freethinkers have befouled the realm of moral thought to such an extent that history can find no parallel. In this realm, talk of exalted human virtues

and merits, and encouraging humans to oppose their abject self—which has always been the basic principle of all moral teachings of divine religions and traditional moral doctrines—is considered completely meaningless. It is thus that some moral theorists have acquired the audacity to devise so-called moral principles for heinous acts such as homosexuality and child molestation.

The moral degradation of contemporary man is not specific to the uneducated masses; rather it has even afflicted many educated individuals. As an example, nowadays in many universities and institutions of higher education in western industrialized nations, there are official student homosexual clubs and despite the fact that they have not had much success in attracting students, they have much more promotional resources than other societies. In some of these countries, marriage of homosexuals is sanctioned by law, and the mass media and propaganda networks endeavor with all their might to justify and naturalize this issue. Widespread use of narcotics, hallucinatory drugs, and alcoholic drinks is another aspect of the moral decline of modern men, women and children, even in view of the fact that the destructive social and economic results of these substances are hidden to no one.⁸

The role of modern technology in the moral degradation of industrial societies cannot be overlooked. Nowadays a vast amount of the audiovisual products that are at the disposal of the public through telecast, satellite television, international computer networks (such as the Internet) are essentially immoral and desecrate even the holiest of moral principles. Many powerful world tycoons support the production and distribution of these programs in order to gain more wealth.

In the modern age, moral degradation has not only resulted in the decline of the spiritual aptitude of modern humans, it has greatly thrown their social existence into disarray. For example, today, in industrial societies the very foundations of family, which is the most primary social institution, are faltering. This is happening such that the number of people who live their entire lives or most of their lives as singles increases every day; a large number of children live with only one parent and many juveniles abandon their families and live their lives far from their homes.

Moreover, modern and intelligent instruments have given modern humanity the ability to recreate the inhuman catastrophes of history in a much more large-scale and severe manner and facilitate the justification of its actions with unprecedented skill.

For instance, the production of advanced military armaments and modern weapons of mass destruction has given the axes of power the ability to take the lives of hundreds of thousands of innocent people in the blink of an eye without even suffering the least physical or financial harm.

Additionally, slavery (which after centuries of struggle by the black peoples of the West was recently abolished in its traditional and undisguised form) continues in a new and obscure form. Every year, thousands of women and children who live in poor and underdeveloped countries are taken away from their homelands by human trafficking mafias and sold to the western rich and wealthy for their self-indulgence.

Mental Crises

In recent times, there have been important advancements in psychiatry, psychology, and especially psychoanalysis. The experts of these sciences have analyzed the uncharted dimensions of the human mind and have thus uncovered some elements of the complex synergy between the human mind, environmental and genetic factors, and physiological characteristics. Nevertheless, the indisputable truth is that parallel to the development of human knowledge in this area, mental illnesses and abnormalities have also increased in industrial societies.

Currently, many of the members of these societies are plagued by various forms of anxiety and mental pressure. Moreover, depression, in all its forms, has become an unsolvable problem. In order to treat these illnesses, many people have turned to synthetic medicine. Even when these drugs are successful in curing illness—because of their incompatibility with the natural structure of the human mind and body—they tend to cause new illnesses and abnormalities. In contemporary times, people suffer severely from a feeling of futility and lack of identity. The increase of the number of suicides, especially in industrial countries, is an obvious sign of the fact that a large portion of the society has despaired of their future, as a result, their feeling of unhappiness and defeat has left suicide as their only discernible alternative.

Even though communication among people has become much easier due to the growth of the communications industries, many people discover themselves completely alone and alienated, and can find no alternative to enduring the heavy weight of loneliness and estrangement.⁹

Why have the accomplishments of human knowledge regarding the human mind had little success in preventing or curing mental illnesses? We believe that the underlying problem is that essentially these sciences do not possess a realistic projection of the depths of humanity's being, their fundamental needs, or their wondrous abilities; and they mostly analyze the surface of human identity.

Though jinn seem obscure,

Humanity is even more obscure than they

The wise know, though jinn are obscure,

Humans are a hundredfold more unknown

Pitiable humans have not fathomed themselves;

They came in abundance and left in poverty

Humans sell themselves cheap;

They are satin, but stitch themselves on coarse robes¹⁰

On the other hand, the absence of mental abnormalities in people who live away from the turmoil of modern civilization and live in comparatively simple social structures, shows that technological advancement and the social complexities and problems caused by this advancement have resulted in the emergence and expansion of mental crises in advanced industrial societies. Unfortunately, these crises are not limited to adults and teenagers; rather, nowadays, many children suffer from various mental abnormalities.¹¹

Technology

There is a seemingly endless history of humans using their scientific knowledge to build tools and utilize them. However, in recent centuries, parallel to the furtherance of practical sciences, a phenomenon called “technology” has appeared in industrial societies.¹²

Doubtless, modern technology has increased the material provisions of human livelihood and it has even brought about relative welfare and comfort in some areas. It also serves cultural and humanitarian aims. However, this is just one side of the coin. The other side reveals the destructive results and unfortunate effects of technology in various aspects of human life, such as culture, ethics, health, environment, etc.¹³

Modern technology forces its own culture and moralities upon advanced societies. Unlimited freedom in utilizing machines has shriveled the mentality of contentment and avoiding waste—which have been considered moral virtues for centuries. It has roused the fire of lust for lordship over nature in the hearts of modern human and thus has sown the seeds of the delusion of self-sufficiency from Allah, which is one of the most terrible plagues of ethics existent in the minds of humanity.¹⁴

Colorful products, which are launched into the market every day by manufacturers and are placed at the disposal of consumers, enthrall and spellbind people to such an extent that they have forgotten issues that are more important. In the western societies, luxury products have caused the prevalence of the desire for diversity and vogue; all kinds of plagues and calamities have befallen humanity because of the development of these mentalities! The unbelievably vast amounts of information, which are at the disposal of humankind because of the development of the media industries, have confused and perplexed their cognitive systems to such an extent that nowadays reaching unity in thought is wistful thinking.

In recent decades, modern technology has instigated fundamental and far-reaching crises such as the energy crisis and the environmental crisis. The avarice of modern humans has caused unprecedented extravagance in the use of the limited energies of the Earth. Thus, the question has been brought up that in a world whose energy resources are not sufficient for its inhabitants, who has the right to live? Now that modern humans have mindlessly and wastefully exhausted so many of the gifts that God through nature has freely given them, it has suddenly come to their minds that perhaps future generations may also have a right in using these gifts!

It has been a while that the environmental problems caused by modern technology are being considered seriously. Even so, in industrial countries, many critics of technology severely doubt that humanity can save themselves from this menace.

The destruction of vast forests and grasslands, the pollution of extensive quantities of water resources of the Earth due to industrial drainage and oil wastes, the thinning of the ozone layer as a result of chemical contaminants, and the deadly air pollution in many megacities are some scenes from the tragic drama that humankind has written with its own hand and is in the process of performing!

On the other hand, the advancements in various branches of medicine and the development of pharmaceutical and hygiene industries have made diagnosis, prevention, and curing many illnesses simple. Nevertheless, the fact is that in this era, new and unidentified illnesses have spread whose dangers are no less than the dangers of illnesses whose cures have been found.

In any event, the beautiful snake of technology that modern man has nourished for some time has turned into a horrific fire-breathing dragon that is burning away blissful human life on Earth; furthermore, the insubordinate demon of industry is determined to crush all human values. Today, a question that has been reinforced in many minds is: Are machines the servants of humanity or its master? With the marvelous advancement of robot industries, a fear has risen in the hearts of many people that some day human-made robots may become completely independent and make them their slaves and subordinates!¹⁵

The Role of Religion in Solving Crises

That which we have discussed in complete brevity is only a small aspect of the problems and dead ends that modern humanity faces. Now, let us look anew upon the questions we posed at the beginning of this chapter and ponder their answers. In our opinion, the only correct answer to all these questions is a negative one.

During the last few centuries, modern humanity has taken quick and hasty steps to insure the elimination of religion, humanization of all divine aspects of their being, and desecration of all things holy. Then they drunkenly bellowed throughout the world of their independence and self-sufficiency from religiousness and belief in God and arrogantly declared the end to the era of religion and religious spirituality.

Now, at the periphery of the twenty-first century, it has come time to awaken from the deep sleep of negligence that has embraced us for centuries; discern the oasis from the mirage; stop endeavoring towards our doom; stop driving through the byways of aberration; open an aperture towards the light; and clear the visions of our eyes and hearts.

A comprehensive account of all that religiousness can do to solve the crises of modern humanity necessitates extensive research and a lengthy volume. Nevertheless, what we can say in brief is that,

even if we cannot say all, at least a large portion of these crises will be eliminated through humanity's return to the bosom of religion and their connection with religious spirituality.

Religion and the Knowledge Crisis

According to religious teachings, the methods that humans use to obtain knowledge are not limited to sensory input and experience; rather, divine revelation, and reason (especially universal reason that can cognize metaphysical issues) are also complementary sources for human understanding. By relying on these complementary sources, humanity can realize a more solid and complete set of truths. By disclosing unerring truths about God, humanity, and the world, religions based upon revelation provide us with a secure pillar of understanding and wider horizons for thought.

Many truths—such as metaphysical issues or truths about the past and future of the world—can never be realized through sensory experience. Our need for knowledge about these issues can only be fulfilled through divine revelation. In the thought process of a religious person, religion and reason attain a blessed and productive union; reason reinforces the theoretical principals of religious beliefs and religion, by breaking the barriers of metaphysics, reminds us of the limits of reason and prepares the way for humanity's ascent to higher apexes. Intuition of divine truths—that has various forms and arises through one's deep connection with religious spirituality—establishes a secure foundation for humanity's beliefs and frees them from the clutches of absolute skepticism and cognitional bewilderment.

In brief, it is always possible for religious people to harbor the windswept ship of their thoughts, which has been caught in the maelstrom of bewilderment and skepticism, at the calm shores of faith [‘fāmān]. Naturally, by this assertion we do not mean that religious persons are instantly freed from bewilderment.

This is because the domain of metaphysics at least, is a confusing domain—the highest forms of bewilderment pertain to the miracles of prophets and Gnostics. Actually, we mean that persons who open themselves to religious guidance never feel absolute bewilderment in such a way that they become bereft of all reliable intellectual footholds. Religious wonderment is harmonious with faith and absolute certitude towards God, as opposed to modern cognitional bewilderment that negates all certainty and trust.

Religion and Moral Crises

Religion has always been a strong supporter of ethics and thus a significant amount of religious teachings are related to ethics. The link between religion and ethics is so deep that some essentially regard religion and ethics one and the same. The foundations for religious ethics cannot be found in social conventions, utilitarianism, or hedonism; however, by perfectly defining the connection between humans and their Creator and between humans and perfection and true beatitude, religion shapes the divine foundations of moral norms.

Of course, the role of religion in ethics is not limited to providing religious teachings based upon divine principles regarding the essence of humankind. The teachings concerning the absolute knowledge of God and His ceaseless and everlasting supervision upon the thoughts and actions of humans establish the most secure executive guaranty for moral regulations, in both personal and social aspects of ethics.

Religion and Mental Crises

Doubtless, portions of the theoretic principles of modern mental crises have resulted from humanity's inverted ideology towards their essence, faculties, abilities, and ultimate destination (telos). According to modernist thought, humans are creatures that, like all other creatures, have risen out of the heart of nature and have reached their current state through biological evolution; moreover, their only conceivable destination is material advancement and further domination over the natural world, whereas the religious ideology towards humanity is completely incompatible with this perspective.

Religion draws a different picture of humanity's genesis and journey's end. The human race, which is God's chosen and special creation, has unlimited capacity and the ultimate purpose of its creation is advancement in spirituality and intimacy with the divine Oneness. It is clear that such an ideology can result in a completely different confrontation with crisis—including spiritual and mental crises—producing elements.

For example, by virtue of this ideology, humans can endure even the most difficult troubles in life because they regard them as preparatory measures for reaching their ultimate destination. Such persons, while battling their problems and endeavoring to reach their goals, feel satisfaction and contentment in the depths of their soul concerning the outcome—whatever it may be—because they regard it as divine decree.

One's faith towards religious teachings about God, humanity, his genesis and destination (eschatology) has an important role in preventing and curing mental abnormalities. Moreover, many psychologists and psychoanalysts have confirmed this role. For instance, Carl Jung (1875 – 1961), the prestigious Swiss psychoanalyst, has declared:

“Among all my middle-aged patients...there was not even one whose problem was not the problem of finding a religious ideology towards life. Surely the reason for all of their illnesses was that they lacked that which living religions of all ages present to their followers; none of them was truly able to recover without recovering their religious beliefs.”¹⁶

Yea, persons who have faith in the divine destination of their souls never feel meaningless or causeless. Those who believe in the existence of the Sublime God and His divine qualities—Power, Mercy, Absolver of Sins, etc.—and trust in Him, never despair. Those who calm their heart through remembrance of their Beloved God are less troubled by anxiety and stress. The loving connection of humanity and God never leaves much room for feeling loneliness and isolation; rather, whenever the

sorrow of worldly isolation overcomes such people, they relieve it with fellowship with their Beloved.

Religion and the Technology Crisis

The technology crisis originates not from its essence, but from its ungovernability. Even though the fact that humans have the ability to build machines and utilize them is inherently a type of perfection and virtue, the true plague of technology is in the construction of anything that can possibly be constructed and utilization of these constructs in any way conceivable without establishing reasonable restrictions.

As we have indicated, the report card of modern humans—who do as they please—shows that they have uncontrollable avidity and unending voracity towards building and utilizing machines, such that social conventions and political commitments cannot limit this urge. Consequently, there is need of an alternative restrictive factor.

We believe that religious teachings—provided that they become the governing factor in people's actions—can easily restrain the 'demon' of technology. By displaying the true status of humanity within the universe, its strengths and weaknesses and its rights and obligations, religion sets the conditions and limits for utilizing machines.

Religious individuals do not consider their perfection to be in absolute utilization of technology; therefore, they acquiesce to a set of limits and rules. For example, according to religious ideology, exercising restraint in consumption of energy is obligatory, even where there are seemingly unlimited energy resources and, in contrast to several modernist views, energy usage in itself cannot be considered a sign of advancement or an indicator of development.

Basically, according to religious ideology, domination over nature is not a value as such; rather, it is a tool for bringing out humanity's divine potentials and this purpose must establish the manner of machine utilization and draw the limits for technology. When in religious texts it is said that the world is the dominion of humanity, this does not mean that individuals are able to act without restriction; on the contrary, they are limited to the conditions and specifications defined in religious teachings. Religion regards the world as a divine proof and blessing; therefore, it deems the world worthy of respect and veneration. In various religious teachings, observing the rights of plants and animals is ardently advised.

In short, for religious humans, spiritual values have first priority and thus, while they regard technology advancement as an ideal, they endeavor to utilize it for moral and humane objectives, and if at any time they realize that this "preliminary" does not serve their purpose, they sacrifice the preliminary for divine purposes. Religious humans, as opposed to modern humans, never foster the motive of godhood over the Earth; rather, they regard themselves as the vicegerent of God on Earth and therefore consider themselves responsible for the preservation and maintenance of their natural surroundings.

Thus far, we have presented a short narrative of the lengthy adventures of the human race in the

modern era. We believe that modern crises and fundamental problems, some of which we have described in short, shall sooner or later reveal unto humanity the mirage-like truth of modernism and result in their endeavoring to return to religion and religious spirituality.

As might be expected, in the meantime, religious people have a great responsibility. Two of the most basic duties of all religious intellectuals and those who are sympathetic towards their religion are:

Analytic examination of religious references in order to deepen and extend religious knowledge

Presentation of life-giving religious teachings in a modern form, albeit preserving their originality, in a manner that can answer the diverse needs of modern society

-
1. – In the current discussion, by religion we mean divine monotheist religions that God has presented to humanity through His prophets throughout history. By religiousness, we signify devotion to religion and endorsing and having faith in its theoretical teachings and acting upon its practical teachings. Also by religious research, we mean theoretical research concerning religions and their teachings.
 2. By modern human, we mean men and women who consider the characteristics of the new lifestyle established in the West in the last few centuries desirable, and align their lifestyle and culture with this "modern" way of life. Several of these characteristics are Humanism, Empiricism, Rationalism, escape from tradition and aversion to worship, Secularism, Liberalism, and modern technologies. Because Europe is the source of modernism, today many modernists live in the West, but this does not mean that all westerners are modernists or that no easterners are such.
 3. – By crisis, we mean fundamental and widespread problems whose escalation and prolongation can critically harm life and civilization in general.
 4. – For more information, see Michael Peterson et al, Reason and Religious Belief, Chapters three and seven.
 5. – For information on the positivist approach to theology, see *ibid*, pp. 260–269.
 6. – René Guénon, *The Crisis of the Modern World*.
 7. – Presently, the information available to humanity doubles every year. This accelerating process of data increase induced specialists to seek out new ways to store this unbelievable capacity of data.
 8. – According to the report of the American National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse half of those who are arrested are intoxicated with alcohol. One third of all homicides and one fourth of all suicides have been reported to be accompanied by consumption of alcohol. Sixty seven percent of all instances of child molestation and thirty nine percent of all instances of rape are accompanied by alcohol consumption... The use of alcohol causes the death of at least twelve thousand Spaniards every year... Experts claim that more than half of deaths in driving accidents are caused by alcohol... (Ja'far Sakhvat, *Sociology of Social Deviations (Jami'ah Shan'at-i In'iraf-i Ijtim')*, pp. 113, 130.)
 9. – According to a public poll in America in 1968, fifty-two percent of participants declared that they feel lonely and depressed. (see: Honolulu Advertiser, Nov. 20, 1968, p. A3)
 10. – گر چه به ظاهر آن پری پنهان بود آدمی پنهان‌تر از پریان بود
نزد عاقل زان پری که مضمحل است آدمی صدبار خود پنهان‌تر است
خویشتن نشناخت مسکین آدمی از فزونی آمد و شد در کمی
خویشتن را آدمی ارزان فروخت بود اطلس، خویش را بر دلق دوخت
 11. – According to recent information, about six million American children suffer from depression. (Donald Mcnew, *Psychology of Stress*)
 12. – Technology is the implementation of applied sciences—which have practical and industrial value—in the industries and arts.
 13. – British philosopher and mathematician, Bertrand Russell, while indicating the plagues of technology, states: "Unlike

religion, it [technology] is ethically neutral: it assures men that they can perform wonders, but does not tell them what wonders to perform. In this way it is incomplete. In practice, the purposes to which scientific skill will be devoted depend largely on chance. The men at the head of the vast organizations which it necessitates can, within limits, turn it this way or that as they please. The power impulse thus has a scope which it never had before... Ends are no longer considered; only the skillfulness of the process is valued. This also is a form of madness. It is, in our day, the most dangerous form, and the one against which a sane philosophy should provide an antidote..." (Bertrand Russell, The History of Western Philosophy, p. 494.)

14. – As stated by the Holy Qur'an, the feeling of independence and self-sufficiency from God is the agent of insurrection and insubordination of humans toward Him:

﴿إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُفٍ ۚ إِنَّ رَأَاهُ أَسْتَفْنَىٰ﴾

"Surely humans are rebellious; for they see themselves self-sufficient." (S̄rah 'Alaq, 96:6-7)

15. – This fear is so extensive that it has become the subject of many acclaimed science fiction movies.

16. – Carl G. Jung, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, p. 284.

Source URL:

<https://www.al-islam.org/islamic-thought-book-one-muhammad-saidi-mihr-amir-divani/introduction-religion-modern-world>