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Religious Texts and Public Reason: Reframing Authority in Plural Societies

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Abstract:

The presence of religious texts in the public sphere has become a major issue in contemporary political and philosophical thought, particularly within societies characterized by cultural and normative pluralism. The significance of this topic lies in rethinking the relationship between religious authority and the requirements of a public sphere based on rational deliberation, democratic legitimacy, and mutual recognition. This study addresses the following question: How can religious texts preserve their doctrinal and symbolic specificity while contributing to the construction of a shared culture in a pluralistic public sphere?

The study aims to examine the epistemological and communicative conditions that enable the constructive integration of religious texts into public debate. It also explores the role of critical rationality and interpretive openness in transforming religious authority from a closed source of legitimacy into a shared ethical and cultural resource. Methodologically, the research adopts a critical-analytical philosophical approach, combining hermeneutical analysis with a comparative reading of Jürgen Habermas's theory of communicative rationality and the contributions of contemporary Arab-Islamic thinkers, including Mohammed Arkoun, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, Taha Abderrahmane, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd.

The findings indicate that the challenge does not reside in religious texts themselves but in the epistemological and political frameworks through which they are interpreted and mobilized in public contexts. The study demonstrates that interpretive openness and the distinction between the sanctity of the text and the historicity of interpretation are essential for sustaining pluralism and public dialogue. It concludes that religious texts can contribute positively to the public sphere when reformulated within a

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framework of public justification and communicative rationality, thereby fostering shared values, mutual recognition, and democratic coexistence in plural societies.

Keywords:
Public Sphere; Religious Texts; Communicative Rationality; Pluralism; Arab-Islamic Thought.

Introduction

The presence of religious texts in the public sphere constitutes one of the most complex issues in contemporary philosophical and political thought. This complexity stems from the intersection of doctrinal commitments and cultural identity, as well as the interaction between religious reference systems and modern state structures grounded in pluralism, legal neutrality, and democratic legitimacy. Religious texts are no longer confined to private belief or ritual practice; rather, they increasingly inform debates on legislation, identity, justice, human rights, and the ethical foundations of coexistence. This development necessitates a rigorous theoretical framework that moves beyond the binary logic of exclusion or domination and examines the normative conditions under which religious discourse may legitimately participate in public deliberation without compromising its specificity or undermining cultural commonality.

The concept of the public sphere was reformulated in modern political philosophy by Jürgen Habermas as a discursive arena structured by rational-critical debate among citizens. Moreover, in the context of post-secular societies, Habermas acknowledged that religious discourse can contribute meaningfully to public deliberation, provided that its claims are translated into a language accessible to all participants in democratic discussion. In parallel, modern Arab-Islamic thinkers—including Mohammed Arkoun, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, Taha Abderrahmane, Hassan Hanafi, and Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd—have engaged critically with the relationship between religious text, reason, modernity, and society. Their approaches range from historical and epistemological critique to hermeneutical analysis. They also include ethical reconstruction, each offering distinct insights into the conditions under which religious discourse may be rearticulated within plural public spaces.

Against this background, the present study addresses the following central question: How can religious texts preserve their doctrinal and symbolic

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specificity while contributing to the construction of a shared culture within a pluralistic public sphere? This overarching question gives rise to several subsidiary inquiries: What are the limits of the transition of religious discourse from the private to the public domain? How should the relationship between the sanctity of the text and the historicity of interpretation be understood? Does the presence of religious texts enrich public deliberation, or does it threaten the neutrality and inclusivity of democratic institutions? The article proceeds from the assumption that the core problem does not reside in religious texts themselves, but in the epistemological and political frameworks through which they are interpreted and mobilized in public contexts.

The article proceeds from the assumption that the core problem does not reside in religious texts themselves, but in the epistemological and political frameworks through which they are interpreted and mobilized in public contexts. On this basis, the study advances the following hypotheses:

The capacity of religious texts to contribute constructively to the public sphere depends on a clear distinction between private doctrinal commitments and publicly justifiable discursive formulations.

Interpretive openness—understood as recognition of the historicity and plurality of understanding—is a necessary condition for transforming religious particularity into a shared cultural resource.

Both the total exclusion of religious references and their imposition as binding authority undermine the principle of pluralism upon which the legitimacy of the public sphere rests.

Methodologically, the study adopts a critical-analytical philosophical approach. It employs hermeneutical analysis to examine the dynamics of religious textuality and comparative reading to engage with contemporary debates on religion and public reason. Furthermore, it draws upon a critical-constructive perspective aimed at transcending reductionist positions by articulating a balanced framework that simultaneously acknowledges pluralism and safeguards the normative unity of the public sphere.

Accordingly, this article contributes to ongoing philosophical debates on the place of religion in modern societies by reconceptualizing the conditions of its public presence. It argues that the integration of religious texts into the contemporary public sphere is neither a matter of exclusion nor of unconditional inclusion, but rather a question of transformation: sacred authority must be rearticulated as publicly justifiable discourse. Such transformation requires communicative rationality, epistemological self-

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critique, and moral reconstruction capable of sustaining plural coexistence. The challenge, therefore, is neither to secularize the public sphere in a way that eliminates religious reference, nor to sacralize it in a way that excludes difference, but to cultivate a communicative horizon in which religious particularity can function as a moral and cultural resource oriented toward the common good.

First: The Public Sphere and the Transformation of References

The concept of the public sphere is central to contemporary political philosophy. It refers to the space between the state and civil society where public opinion is formed through free and rational debate among citizens. Jürgen Habermas systematically formulated this concept in his book The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, arguing that the bourgeois public sphere in modern Europe emerged as a space for critical debate on public affairs based on the principles of rational argumentation and public accountability (Habermas, 1989, pp. 27–30). However, this model was not entirely neutral, as it was linked to specific historical and social contexts and was influenced by the transformations of capitalism and the media, which led to the erosion of its original critical character (Habermas, 1989, pp. 181–195). However, the importance of the concept lies not only in its historical description but also in its normative character. Habermas argues that the legitimacy of political decisions in modern societies depends on their rational justifiability within an open deliberative space. Hence, the presence of religious references in this space raises a theoretical problem: Can a discourse based on the authority of revelation be integrated into a sphere grounded in the principle of shared rational justification?

In his later works, particularly in Between Naturalism and Religion, Habermas modified his earlier position, which tended to neutralize religion in the public sphere. He acknowledged that religious discourse can contribute to the formation of public opinion, provided that it is subject to what he calls the "translation proviso", that is, the reformulation of its content in a language that all citizens—believers and non-believers alike—can understand and, in principle, accept (Habermas, 2008, pp. 131–137). The debate thus shifts from a binary of exclusion or domination to a communicative horizon based on mutual recognition.

This shift in the conception of the public sphere reflects a deeper transformation in the nature of references within contemporary societies. The public sphere is no longer monolithic; rather, it has become a pluralistic arena

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in which religious, secular, ethical, and cultural discourses intersect. In his analysis of the relationship between knowledge and power in The Archaeology of Knowledge, Michel Foucault argues that discourses do not operate in a vacuum but are organized within networks of power that determine what is considered legitimate or acceptable in the public sphere (Foucault, 1972, pp. 49–55). Therefore, the presence of religious texts cannot be understood solely in terms of their content but must also be analyzed in relation to their position within the structures of power and knowledge.

In the Arab-Islamic context, the debate takes on an additional dimension due to the historical overlap between religion and politics. In his critique of Islamic thought, Mohammed Arkoun called for the reopening of the "field of reflection" within Islamic heritage, arguing that closed orthodox readings of texts have prevented their integration into a modern critical space (Arkoun, 1984, pp. 45–52). Meanwhile, in his critique of the Arab mind, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri argued that the modernization of the Arab public sphere requires dismantling the rhetorical and gnostic structures that have governed the production of knowledge and replacing them with a demonstrative rationality capable of establishing a shared dialogue (al-Jabri, 1982, pp. 311–320).

It is clear, therefore, that the public sphere is no longer a space closed to a single reference point but has become a dynamic arena in which different references negotiate standards of legitimacy and recognition. The question is no longer: Is the religious text present in the public sphere? Rather, it becomes: How is it present, and under what epistemological and discursive conditions? Answering this question requires an understanding of the structural transformations that have affected the very concept of the public sphere and the transition from a conflictual conception of authorities to a dialogical conception that establishes cultural commonality without eliminating particularities.

1. The Theoretical Roots of the Public Sphere and Its Normative Structure

The concept of the public sphere is one of the founding concepts of modern political philosophy. It refers to the space between the state and civil society where public opinion is formed through free discussion of common issues. Jürgen Habermas presented the most influential theoretical formulation of this concept in his book The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, in which he defined the bourgeois public sphere as a communicative space based on the independence of individuals from political authority and their

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ability to engage in public criticism grounded in the principle of rational argumentation (Habermas, 1989, pp. 27–31).

However, the importance of this concept lies not only in its historical description of the emergence of the public sphere in eighteenth-century Europe, but also in its normative dimension. Habermas argues that the legitimacy of modern authority is based not only on legal procedures but also on the possibility of justifying decisions within an open communicative space, where arguments are considered equal regardless of the social positions of those who present them (Habermas, 1989, pp. 54–56). The public sphere is thus based on three fundamental normative conditions: openness and public participation; equality among interlocutors; and reliance on the force of the better argument rather than the argument of force.

Habermas later developed this normative dimension in his theory of communicative action, distinguishing between instrumental reason, which is oriented toward utility, and communicative reason, which is oriented toward understanding. He emphasized that the public sphere should be built upon a form of rationality aimed at reaching free and rational agreement rather than the imposition of will (Habermas, 1984, pp. 285–293).

However, this normative construction raises a fundamental question concerning the nature of the discourses that can participate in the public sphere: must they be secular in character, or is it sufficient that they be publicly justifiable? In his later works, particularly in Between Naturalism and Religion, Habermas acknowledged that "post-secular" societies cannot exclude religious discourse from the public sphere. Nevertheless, he stipulated that its content must be reformulated in language that is understandable to all through what he called the "translation proviso," so that it becomes negotiable among citizens with different religious and intellectual backgrounds (Habermas, 2008, pp. 131–137).

In this sense, the normative structure of the public sphere is not based on the exclusion of particular or private references, but on their transformation into forms that are open to public scrutiny. A reference—whether religious or secular—gains legitimacy in the public sphere only to the extent that it can present itself within a shared rational horizon. This defines the theoretical framework that allows the question of religious texts to be raised not in terms of their doctrinal truth, but in terms of their ability to integrate into the logic of public argumentation.

Therefore, the theoretical grounding of the public sphere reveals that the issue of the presence of religious texts is inseparable from the normative structure

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that governs the public sphere itself. The more this sphere is based on the recognition of pluralism and the use of communicative reason, the more it becomes possible to transform religious particularity into a moral contribution to the construction of a shared culture, rather than turning it into an instrument of domination or exclusion.

_2. The Reconfiguration of the Public Sphere in Light of Pluralistic Values and Cultures

The public sphere in contemporary societies is no longer a space structured around a single reference point, as envisaged by the classical liberal model. Rather, it has become an arena in which multiple value systems, cultures, and religions intersect. This structural transformation affects not only the nature of the actors within the public sphere but also the normative foundations upon which the concept of legitimacy itself is based. Modern society is no longer religiously or culturally homogeneous; instead, it has entered what may be described as a "post-secular" phase, in which religion continues to exist within the public sphere alongside secular perspectives, without either dissolving into the other.

In this context, Jürgen Habermas acknowledged that the hypothesis of the gradual decline of religion in modern societies has not materialized in the manner predicted by classical secularization theories. Consequently, the public sphere is now required to reintegrate religious discourse within a pluralistic horizon (Habermas, 2008, pp. 17–25). According to Habermas, a post-secular society is not based on the exclusion of religion but rather on the coexistence of different references within a shared communicative space, provided that the rules of public argumentation are respected.

However, this plurality does not refer only to the diversity of religious affiliations; it also includes the plurality of modes of rationality themselves. In this regard, the analysis of Michel Foucault in The Archaeology of Knowledge is particularly relevant. Foucault shows that discourses are formed within epistemic systems that determine what can be said and what is excluded from being said (Foucault, 1972, pp. 21–30). The public sphere, therefore, is not a completely neutral arena but rather a space in which relations between knowledge and power are organized, and where legitimacy is produced through specific discursive mechanisms. Thus, the reconfiguration of the public sphere also implies a redistribution of symbolic positions of power among different actors.

In the Arab-Islamic context, this transition has taken on a more complex character due to the historical intertwining of religion and politics. In his

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critique of Islamic thought, Mohammed Arkoun pointed out that Islamic societies have rarely experienced a sharp separation between the sacred and the political. As a result, reconstructing the modern public sphere requires a critique of traditional epistemological structures that have confined legitimacy to a single interpretation of the text (Arkoun, 1984, pp. 62–70). Similarly, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri argued in his critique of the Arab mind that modernizing the Arab public sphere requires dismantling the rhetorical and gnostic structures that have governed the production of knowledge and replacing them with a rationality capable of managing plurality (al-Jabri, 1982, pp. 332–340).

On the other hand, Taha Abderrahmane offers a different interpretation. He argues that, in the spirit of modernity, the pluralism of values cannot be resolved simply through the secularization of the public sphere. Instead, it requires the establishment of a moral modernity that accommodates religious authority within a humanistic system of values (Taha Abderrahmane, 2006, pp. 115–124). In this perspective, pluralism is transformed from a source of conflict into a source of moral enrichment, provided that it is reformulated within a dialogical framework.

It is therefore clear that the reconfiguration of the public sphere in light of cultural and value pluralism does not merely signify an expansion in the number of actors; rather, it represents a transformation in the very structure of legitimacy itself. Legitimacy is no longer grounded in a single dominant reference point but in the capacity of different actors to negotiate shared standards of recognition. The presence of religious texts within this sphere cannot be understood outside this broader transformation, where the fundamental challenge lies in transforming doctrinal particularities into deliberative contributions that can be understood and justified within a pluralistic space.

3. The Problem of Religious Authority in the Contemporary Public Sphere

The problem of religious authority in the contemporary public sphere becomes evident in the tension between its specific doctrinal source and the nature of the public sphere itself, which is grounded in shared rational justification. While religious texts derive their authority from faith and from the recognition of their legitimacy by a particular community, the public sphere—within its normative structure—presupposes the possibility of questioning any discourse on the basis of open argumentation. This raises a fundamental question: how can a discourse of devotional origin be integrated

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into a discursive space without losing its specificity or imposing itself upon non-believers?

In this context, Jürgen Habermas argues that post-secular societies are required to reorganize the relationship between faith and the public sphere, allowing religious discourse to participate in public debate, provided that it is subject to what he calls the "translation proviso," that is, the transformation of its content into a language that can be shared by all citizens (Habermas, 2008, pp. 131–137). However, this condition raises an epistemological problem: can religious concepts be translated without emptying them of their symbolic content? And is translation alone sufficient to guarantee the neutrality of the public sphere?

On the other hand, the analyses of Michel Foucault reveal an additional dimension of the issue, namely the relationship between discourse and power. Religious texts do not appear in the public sphere as abstract meanings but rather within networks of power that determine the conditions of their acceptance or rejection (Foucault, 1972, pp. 49–55). Thus, the problem is not limited to the negotiability of religious authority; it also extends to its position within the symbolic structure of society and to whether it functions as a tool of domination or as a moral reference for criticism and accountability.

In contemporary Arab-Islamic thought, this problem has taken on a clearly critical dimension. Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, in his book The Concept of Text, argued that religious texts, even if their source is transcendent, remain subject to human interpretation, and that confusing the sanctity of the text with the sanctity of its interpretation leads to the closure of the public sphere to pluralism (Abu Zayd, 1990, pp. 24–31). Likewise, Hassan Hanafi, in Heritage and Renewal, called for the reorientation of religious authority toward issues of liberation and social justice, arguing that its presence in the public sphere should be critical rather than authoritarian (Hanafi, 1980, pp. 101–108).

As for Taha Abderrahmane, he maintains that excluding religious authority in the name of neutrality impoverishes the public sphere morally, since instrumental reason alone is insufficient to establish higher value standards (Taha Abderrahmane, 2006, pp. 132–140). However, he also stipulates that religious authority must be reactivated within a moral dialogue rather than in a coercive or exclusionary manner.

It therefore becomes clear that the issue of religious authority in the public sphere cannot be reduced to a binary choice between acceptance and rejection. Instead, it operates on three interrelated levels:

The epistemological level: the distinction between the text and its

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interpretation, and between the sacred and the historical.

The discursive level: the translatability of religious discourse into a shared public language.

The political-ethical level: the position of religious authority between value contribution and symbolic hegemony.

Accordingly, the contemporary challenge is not to secularize the public sphere in a way that excludes religion, nor to sacralize it in a way that eliminates pluralism. Rather, it is to develop a framework that allows religious authority to transform from a closed authority into a moral resource open to dialogue. This is where the philosophical challenge of this study lies: rethinking the conditions for integrating religious texts into the public sphere in a manner that balances doctrinal particularity with cultural commonality.

Second: Critical Rationality and the Construction of the Common

Critical rationality is one of the fundamental pillars for the construction of a cultural common within the public sphere, particularly in light of the plurality of references that characterizes contemporary societies. The common ground is not understood here as a given or as a homogeneous identity; rather, it is conceived as the result of a critical dialogue that subjects different references—religious and secular alike—to the criteria of public argumentation and rational justification.

In this context, the conception of communicative rationality developed by Jürgen Habermas is closely linked to the possibility of establishing a common ground based on understanding rather than domination. Habermas argues that legitimacy in modern societies depends on what can be justified within a space of free discussion among equals (Habermas, 1984, pp. 285–293). Critical rationality, therefore, does not entail the exclusion of value references; rather, it requires subjecting them to public scrutiny so that they gain legitimacy only to the extent that they can defend themselves through argument.

However, within the Arab-Islamic context, critical rationality has been associated with the project of dismantling traditional epistemological structures that have hindered the formation of a modern public sphere. In his critique of the Arab mind, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri sought to analyze the patterns of thought within the intellectual heritage—rhetorical, mystical, and demonstrative—emphasizing that building a modern cultural common ground requires a reconsideration of demonstrative reasoning based on inference and critical analysis (al-Jabri, 1982, pp. 299–310). From this perspective, the common ground is not constructed through the mere

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acceptance of heritage but through its reinterpretation in light of modern rational standards.

In a different, though not contradictory, direction, Mohammed Arkoun, in his critique of Islamic reason, proposed broadening the horizons of rationality itself by integrating historical and anthropological approaches into the study of religious texts. He argued that criticism does not undermine faith; rather, it liberates it from closed orthodox readings (Arkoun, 1984, pp. 41–48). In this sense, critical rationality becomes a means of reopening the possibilities of meaning within the heritage, not merely a mechanism of deconstruction. This interpretive orientation resonates with anthropological approaches that emphasize the hermeneutical understanding of religious meanings and symbols within changing cultural contexts (Krib, 2023, pp. 156–158)

Similarly, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd, in his concept of the text, emphasized that recognizing the historicity of understanding is a prerequisite for liberating religious texts from ideological exploitation. Distinguishing between the text and its interpretation allows it to be integrated into a pluralistic public debate without undermining its religious authority (Abu Zayd, 1990, pp. 24–31). Here, critical rationality converges with the demand for common ground, since such a common ground can only be achieved through the acceptance of interpretive pluralism.

On the other hand, Taha Abderrahmane reminds us in The Spirit of Modernity that the desired form of rationality should not be limited to its instrumental dimension; rather, it should be a moral rationality capable of establishing shared human values (Taha Abderrahmane, 2006, pp. 119–126). Criticism, if detached from the ethical dimension, may lead to excessive relativism that dismantles the common ground instead of building it.

It therefore becomes clear that critical rationality constitutes both an epistemological and an ethical condition for building a cultural common within the public sphere. On the one hand, it subjects different references to the criteria of argumentation and justification; on the other hand, it opens the way for transforming particularities—including religious particularities—into symbolic and ethical resources that can be shared. Thus, the integration of religious discourse into the public sphere is achieved neither by imposing its authority nor by excluding it, but by subjecting it—like all other forms of discourse—to the logic of criticism and dialogue that forms the normative basis of democratic commonality.

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_1. Communicative Rationality as a Normative Basis for the Public Sphere

Communicative rationality represents one of the most prominent normative frameworks through which the nature of legitimacy in the contemporary public sphere can be understood. Jürgen Habermas developed this concept in his major work The Theory of Communicative Action, in which he distinguished between instrumental reason—directed toward control and the achievement of utility—and communicative reason, which is oriented toward the search for understanding among individuals through argumentation (Habermas, 1984, pp. 285–293). In this framework, rationality is not measured by its technical effectiveness but by its capacity to produce free and rational agreement grounded in mutual recognition.

Based on this conception, the public sphere becomes a space in which issues are not decided by the force of authority or closed references, but rather by the force of the better argument. According to Habermas, participants in the public sphere implicitly assume a set of deliberative conditions: truthfulness of speech, validity of normative claims, sincerity of the speaker, and the justifiability of arguments (Habermas, 1984, pp. 99–104). These conditions constitute the normative structure that guarantees the possibility of reaching a rational and non-coercive understanding.

However, the significance of communicative rationality is not limited to its procedural dimension; it also extends to an ethical dimension, since mutual recognition among individuals is a prerequisite for discussion itself. From this perspective, the public sphere is not merely a forum for the exchange of opinions, but a space of recognition in which individuals are equal in their right to speak and to be held accountable. Hence, the concept of political legitimacy becomes linked to the principle of "public justification," that is, the acceptability of a decision to all those affected by it (Habermas, 1996, pp. 107–110).

In light of this, the question of religious authority acquires a particular significance. Religious discourse is not excluded from the public sphere simply because it is religious; rather, its legitimacy depends on its willingness to engage in public reasoning. In Between Naturalism and Religion, Habermas acknowledged that religious discourse can contribute to enriching ethical debate in pluralistic societies, provided that its content is reformulated in a language accessible to all participants—namely, within the conditions of communicative rationality (Habermas, 2008, pp. 131–137).

Accordingly, communicative rationality establishes a normative conception

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of the public sphere based on three main pillars: the primacy of argument over authority; the accountability of claims to public scrutiny; and the recognition of plurality within a shared communicative framework. In this sense, communicative rationality represents the philosophical condition for the possibility of constructing a shared culture that cannot be reduced to a single perspective.

Thus, recognition of plurality within a shared communicative framework makes it possible to form a common cultural horizon that is not based on forced consensus but on an open and critical process of dialogue. It also allows for the integration of different references—including religious ones—into the public sphere, not as unquestioned authorities, but as discourses that can be justified within a democratic communicative horizon.

2. Critique of Traditional Epistemological Structures and the Reinterpretation of Heritage

The critique of traditional epistemological structures is a fundamental epistemological condition for building a shared culture within the public sphere. The closure of inherited modes of thinking and their transformation into unquestionable references limit the possibility of rational and pluralistic dialogue. The public sphere cannot function in the presence of forms of "supercritical knowledge" that monopolize truth and exclude other interpretations. Rather, it presupposes that all discourses—including religious ones—remain open to review and debate.

In this context, Mohammed Abed al-Jabri presented an ambitious epistemological project in his critique of the Arab mind, through which he sought to analyze the patterns of knowledge formation in Arab-Islamic heritage. He distinguished between the rhetorical, the gnostic, and the demonstrative modes of reasoning. Al-Jabri argued that the dominance of rhetorical and gnostic structures weakened the critical effectiveness of reason, which was reflected in the cultural and political spheres (Al-Jabri, 1982, pp. 299–310). Therefore, in his view, rebuilding the public sphere requires reconsidering the demonstrative mode of reasoning, based on logical argumentation and proof, as the foundation for establishing a modern rational common ground.

Similarly, Muhammad Arkoun went even further in his critique of Islamic thought by calling for religious heritage to be subjected to historical, linguistic, and anthropological analysis. He also proposed expanding the scope of what he called "the unthought" in Islamic culture (Arkoun, 1984, pp. 41–48). In his view, the problem does not lie in the religious text itself, but in

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the epistemological framework that confined its interpretation within narrow orthodox boundaries, thereby preventing its integration into a modern epistemological horizon. Thus, the critique of heritage becomes an act of liberating meaning rather than a break with identity.

In the same vein, Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd emphasized in The Concept of Text that the religious text, as linguistic discourse, is subject to the laws of human and historical understanding. Confusing the sanctity of the text with the sanctity of interpretation leads to the perpetuation of a single reading and its transformation into an absolute authority (Abu Zayd, 1990, pp. 24–31). Therefore, rereading heritage does not mean undermining its authority; rather, it means recognizing the historicity and relativity of understanding, which opens the door to the plurality of interpretations necessary for establishing a pluralistic public space.

It is clear that the critique of traditional knowledge structures does not aim to abolish heritage or exclude it from the public sphere, but rather to reintegrate it within a critical and rational horizon. Cultural commonality cannot be built on the unconditional acceptance of heritage, nor on a radical break with it. Instead, it requires a deconstructive and reconstructive reading that distinguishes between the renewable value dimension of heritage and the cognitive patterns that hinder interaction with modernity.

Therefore, rereading heritage is a necessary step in transforming religious authority from a closed authority into a cultural resource open to dialogue, and from unquestionable certainty into a discourse that contributes to building common ground through critique and interpretation. The more the text is reopened to multiple interpretations, the stronger its integration into the public sphere becomes—as an enriching element rather than a structural obstacle to pluralism.

3. From Instrumental Reason to Moral Reason: Towards a Shared Foundation of Values

If critical rationality constitutes an epistemological condition for managing plurality within the public sphere, it remains incomplete unless it is complemented by an ethical dimension capable of establishing shared values that transcend instrumental calculations. As analysed by Jürgen Habermas, instrumental reason tends to reduce human action to the logic of efficiency and control, which leads to what he describes as the "colonisation of the lifeworld" by market and administrative systems (Habermas, 1984, pp. 332–356). In order to preserve its communicative character, however, the public sphere requires a form of rationality oriented toward understanding and

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normative agreement rather than technical control.

In this context, Habermas's concept of communicative rationality is linked to the possibility of establishing moral norms from within dialogue itself, through what he calls the "ethics of discussion." According to this approach, a moral rule is considered legitimate to the extent that it can be accepted by all those affected by it within a free and non-coercive discussion (Habermas, 1990, pp. 65–66). Thus, shared values become the outcome of a deliberative process rather than a pre-given reality imposed in advance.

However, some thinkers argue that the procedural framework alone may not be sufficient to establish a solid ethical foundation, especially in cultural contexts where religion remains deeply rooted as a source of meaning. Among the most prominent of these thinkers is Taha Abd al-Rahman, who criticised the reduction of modernity to its instrumental dimension and called for the establishment of a "moral modernity" grounded in spiritual values rather than technical reason alone (Taha Abd al-Rahman, 2006, pp. 119–126). In his view, the common good is not built solely through procedural consensus, but also through the revival of a moral conscience capable of guiding public action toward the collective good.

From another perspective, the analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge developed by Michel Foucault shows that the absence of a moral dimension may lead to the reproduction of hidden forms of domination within rational discourse itself (Foucault, 1977, pp. 27–28). Therefore, establishing a shared set of values requires constant critical vigilance in order to prevent the public sphere from becoming merely a mechanism of technical control or a tool of symbolic exclusion.

In light of this, the transition from instrumental reason to moral reason does not imply rejecting modernity or denying its achievements; rather, it involves expanding its normative horizon to include deeper ethical and humanistic considerations. Within this perspective, religious authority can contribute to enriching the public sphere—not as an unquestionable authority, but as a moral resource that helps orient public debate toward values such as justice, dignity, and responsibility. Likewise, studies on religious narratives have shown that sacred texts may function as shared symbolic resources that strengthen dialogue and reinforce common ethical horizons across communities (Ben Habib, 2022, pp. 1058–1060).

Accordingly, establishing a shared set of values within the public sphere requires an integration between critical and communicative rationality on the one hand, and moral awareness on the other. Common ground is not achieved

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merely by managing differences, but by producing a unifying normative horizon that enables multiple references—religious and secular—to interact within a dialogue that preserves particular identities while fostering mutual recognition.

Conclusion:

This research demonstrates that the issue of the presence of religious texts in the public sphere cannot be reduced to a binary choice between exclusion and inclusion, nor to a simplistic opposition between secularism and religiosity. Rather, it concerns the nature of the normative structure that governs the public sphere itself. As shown in the theoretical framework, the public sphere is not merely a neutral arena for discourse, but a communicative space structured by norms of argumentation, public justification, and mutual recognition.

The analysis of shifting reference frameworks reveals that the plurality of values and cultures in contemporary societies has not eliminated religion from the public sphere; instead, it has reintroduced it within a new horizon that requires religion—like all other worldviews—to engage under the conditions of rational discourse. The resulting tension, therefore, does not stem from the intrinsic nature of religious texts, but from the ways in which they are interpreted and embedded within closed epistemological structures that impede dialogue. Critique of traditional epistemologies further indicates that reinterpreting heritage constitutes an epistemological prerequisite for integrating religious authority into a pluralistic space. In this process, the text shifts from being treated as an ultimate authority to functioning as a semantic resource open to interpretation and critical inquiry. Distinguishing between the sanctity of the text and the historicity of its interpretation opens a pluralistic horizon that enables transcendence of interpretive closure without severing ties to identity.

Moreover, the transition from instrumental reason to moral reason highlights that the construction of shared values cannot be achieved through deliberative procedures alone. It requires a normative horizon grounded in responsibility, dignity, and justice. Common ground is not merely a technical compromise among differences, but the outcome of a critical-ethical process that integrates particularities within a broader framework of recognition.

Accordingly, the central theoretical conclusion of this article can be formulated as follows: the integration of religious texts into the public sphere is both possible and legitimate, provided they are transformed from a closed system of reference into a discourse translatable into publicly accessible

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language, and from unquestionable certainty into a moral resource contributing to the construction of common ground through mutual recognition and reasoned argumentation. In this sense, religion is not the antithesis of the public sphere, but one of its potential components—when it engages within the horizon of critical rationality.

The contemporary challenge, therefore, lies neither in excluding religious discourse from the public sphere nor in allowing it to operate without normative constraints, but in reformulating the relationship between religious particularity and cultural commonality within a communicative framework that safeguards plurality while preserving unity. This perspective opens further avenues for research into the communicative translation of religious discourse and the possibility of developing a communicative model suited to non-Western cultural contexts, thereby rethinking the relationship between religion and modernity beyond reductive binaries.

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