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ALLAMA IQBAL OPEN UNIVERSITY, ISLAMABAD

Course: Political System of Islam (1907) • Level: BS (Islamic Studies, English Version)

Semester: Autumn 2026

Assignment No. 1 (Units 1–4)

SOLVED ASSIGNMENT GUIDE

(For Study & Reference)

Note: This guide is prepared for study and reference purposes. Students are advised to read the relevant units of the course book, understand the concepts, and then write the assignment in their own words. Total marks of the assignment are 100 (pass marks 50); each question carries the marks shown with it.

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Question 1: State the Details of Secularism (20 Marks)

State the details of Secularism.

Introduction

Secularism is one of the most influential ideas that the modern West has produced, and no student of the political system of Islam can avoid it, because the modern Muslim world has been shaped — and often shaken — by the encounter between Islam and secularism. In simple words, secularism means the separation of religion from the state and from public life: political authority, law, education and public policy are to be organised on worldly, rational grounds, without reference to revelation or to any religious institution. The word itself comes from the

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Latin saeculum, meaning 'this age' or 'the present world', so a secular outlook is one that concerns itself with this world rather than with the world to come. Secularism must not, however, be confused with atheism. An atheist denies the existence of God; a secularist may personally believe in God but insists that belief is a private matter which should have no role in running the state. This distinction is important, because many people described as secular are religious in their private lives, while some states that call themselves secular in fact interfere heavily in religion. Secularism is therefore best understood not as a single doctrine but as a family of related ideas about the proper place of religion in society.

In the context of this course, secularism matters for three reasons. First, it is the ruling ideology, in one form or another, of most modern states, including many Muslim-majority states. Second, it directly challenges the classical Islamic position that religion and politics — din and dawla — form an integrated whole governed by the Shariah. Third, the debate between Islam and secularism is not merely academic: it affects constitutions, family law, education and the everyday rights of citizens in Pakistan and across the Muslim world. This answer therefore explains the meaning and definitions of secularism, traces its historical development in Europe, sets out its main principles and types, examines its arguments and its practical results, and finally evaluates it from the Islamic point of view.

Meaning and Definitions

Scholars define secularism in several ways, and the differences between the definitions reveal the different faces of the idea. George Jacob Holyoake, the English thinker who popularised the term in 1851, described secularism as a code of duty pertaining to this life, founded on

considerations purely human, intended mainly for those who find theology indefinite or inadequate. For Holyoake, secularism was a positive concern with human welfare in this world, not necessarily hostility to religion. The Oxford English Dictionary defines secularism as the doctrine that morality should be based solely on regard to the well-being of mankind in the present life, to the exclusion of all considerations drawn from belief in God or in a future state. The sociologist Peter Berger described the process behind the doctrine — secularisation — as the process by which sectors of society and culture are removed from the domination of religious institutions and symbols. The Turkish and French traditions add a stricter element: laïcité, in which the state not only separates itself from religion but actively supervises and restricts its public expression.

From these definitions three core meanings can be separated. First, secularism as institutional separation: no church or religious body controls the state, and the state sponsors no religion. Second, secularism as religious freedom and neutrality: the state treats all religions equally and protects the right of every citizen to believe or not to believe. Third, secularism as an ideology of worldliness: public reason, science and human welfare are considered sufficient guides for collective life, and revelation is excluded from public argument altogether. The first two meanings are largely political arrangements; the third is a worldview. Much confusion in Muslim debates comes from mixing these meanings together, so that a person who supports equal citizenship for all is accused of supporting the third, anti-religious meaning, while in fact the three can be held separately.

Historical Development of Secularism

Secularism was born out of the specific history of Christian Europe, and it cannot be understood apart from that history. In medieval Europe the Roman Catholic Church was not merely a spiritual body; it owned vast lands, collected taxes, ran courts, crowned and deposed kings, and claimed, in the doctrine of the two swords and in papal pronouncements such as Boniface VIII's Unam Sanctam (1302), supremacy over temporal rulers. The long struggle between popes and emperors — the Investiture Controversy of the eleventh and twelfth centuries — planted the first seeds of the idea that spiritual and temporal authority might be distinct spheres. Martin Luther's Reformation (1517) then shattered the religious unity of Europe. A century of devastating religious wars followed, culminating in the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648), which killed a large share of the population of central Europe. The Peace of Westphalia (1648), which ended it, taught exhausted Europeans a practical lesson: if rival religions could not destroy one another, the state would have to stand above them and keep the peace between them.

The Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries supplied the philosophy. John Locke's Letter Concerning Toleration (1689) argued that the care of souls is not the business of the magistrate, because faith cannot be produced by force. Voltaire attacked the intolerance and privilege of the French Church; the philosophes promoted reason and science against tradition; and the American and French revolutions put the new ideas into constitutions. The United States' First Amendment (1791) forbade an established religion while protecting its free exercise. The French Revolution went further, confiscating Church lands and, in its radical phase, attempting to replace Christianity with a cult of reason. In 1905 France passed its famous Law on the Separation of the Churches and the State. Meanwhile the scientific

revolution, industrialisation and urbanisation steadily shrank the social space religion occupied — the process sociologists call secularisation. In the twentieth century secularism was carried across the world by colonialism and by modernising rulers: most dramatically by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who abolished the Ottoman caliphate in 1924 and rebuilt Turkey as a strictly secular republic, and by communist states, which imposed an atheistic version of secularism by force.

Main Principles of Secularism

- Separation of religion and state: religious institutions do not control government, and government does not administer religion; law is made by human legislatures, not derived from scripture.
- Religious freedom: every individual may profess, practise, change or abandon a religion; the state may limit practice only where it harms others or public order.
- Equal citizenship: rights and duties do not depend on religion; there is no religious test for office and no second-class citizenship on grounds of faith.
- State neutrality: the state neither promotes nor persecutes any religion, and public funds and public institutions are not placed at the service of one faith.
- Supremacy of human-made law and public reason: legislation is justified by reasons accessible to all citizens — welfare, rights, evidence — rather than by appeal to revelation.
- Privatisation of religion: religion is regarded chiefly as a personal and voluntary matter of conscience and worship, centred on the individual's inner life rather than on law and public morality.

- This-worldly orientation: the aims of politics are security, prosperity, liberty and welfare in this life; questions of salvation belong to individuals and religious communities.

These principles are assembled differently in different countries, which is why secularism looks different in the United States, France and India. The American model is often called separationist but religion-friendly: a strict ban on establishment combined with vigorous protection of religious practice, so religion flourishes in public society even though the state is secular. The French model, laïcité, is assertive: the state guards public institutions — schools, courts, government offices — against visible religion, famously restricting conspicuous religious symbols such as the headscarf in public schools. The Indian model, shaped by a deeply religious and plural society, is one of principled distance: the state may engage with all religions even-handedly and may intervene in religious practices for social reform, as in the abolition of untouchability. These variations show that secularism is not a single blueprint but a set of answers to a common problem: how people of different faiths can share one state.

Arguments Given in Favour of Secularism

Supporters of secularism rest their case on history and on principle. Historically, they argue, mixing religion with state power produced persecution: heresy trials, inquisitions, forced conversions and religious wars in Europe, and analogous abuses elsewhere. A neutral state, they say, is the only reliable protection for both religious minorities and dissenters within the majority. In principle, they argue that in a plural society no single revelation can serve as the shared basis of law, because citizens reasonably disagree about religion; law must therefore rest on public reasons all can assess. They add that separation protects religion itself: a faith

allied to power becomes corrupt, clergy become courtiers, and religion is blamed for the failures of rulers — a point made even by some religious thinkers who support separation for religion's own sake. Finally, supporters credit secular institutions — universities free of theological control, science funded without doctrinal tests, courts applying one law to all — with the material progress, toleration and stability of modern states, and they note that some of the most peaceful and prosperous societies in the world today are secular in structure.

Criticism of Secularism

Secularism also has serious critics, and not only among Muslims. First, its claim to neutrality is contested: critics argue that secularism is itself a worldview with its own assumptions about God, man and the good life, so the secular state is not neutral ground but one contestant wearing the referee's shirt. When the French state bans the headscarf in the name of neutrality, a Muslim schoolgirl experiences not neutrality but the power of a rival doctrine. Second, the privatisation of religion is sociologically unrealistic: religions such as Islam and Judaism are not only systems of private belief but comprehensive ways of life with teachings on family, commerce, charity and justice, and believers cannot divide themselves into a private religious self and a public secular self without tearing their integrity. Third, the historical record is mixed: the twentieth century's most murderous regimes — Stalin's Soviet Union, Mao's China, Pol Pot's Cambodia — were aggressively secular or atheist, which disproves the simple claim that religion is the chief source of political violence and secularism the guarantee of peace. Fourth, classical secularisation theory has weakened: religion has not withered away as predicted; it remains powerful in the United States, has revived in the former communist world,

and shapes politics across Asia and Africa, leading sociologists such as José Casanova to speak of the deprivatisation of religion.

Secularism and Islam: The Islamic Evaluation

The classical Islamic position differs from secularism at its root, because Islam does not recognise a church separate from society in the first place. There is no priesthood mediating between God and man and no ecclesiastical institution competing with the state, so the European problem to which secularism was the answer — an over-mighty church confronting kings — never existed in the same form in Muslim history. Islam presents itself as din, a complete way of life: the Quran legislates, in principle or in detail, on worship, family, inheritance, commerce, crime and governance, and the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was simultaneously a prophet, a judge, a commander and the head of the community in Madinah. Sovereignty belongs to God (Quran 12:40), and the ruler's authority is a trust to be exercised within the Shariah. From this standpoint, the secularist claim that religion must be confined to private life asks the Muslim to amputate most of his religion, and the claim that human legislatures are the final source of law contradicts tawhid, the lordship of God over all of life. Thinkers such as Syed Abul A'la Maududi therefore rejected secularism outright, arguing that a Muslim state must be ideological, founded on God's guidance; and Allama Iqbal, in his 1930 Allahabad Address and his Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam, argued that in Islam the spiritual and the temporal are not two separate domains, since the state is, for Islam, an endeavour to realise spiritual principles in human organisation.

Yet the Islamic evaluation is not a simple rejection of everything secular states contain. Several goods that secularism claims — religious freedom, equal citizenship, the rule of law, freedom from forced belief — have strong roots within the Islamic tradition itself. The Quran declares 'There is no compulsion in religion' (2:256) and addresses the Prophet (peace be upon him) as a reminder, 'not over them a controller' (88:22). The Charter of Madinah constituted Jews and Muslims as one political community while leaving each group its religion — an early model of plural citizenship under a shared political order. Classical jurists protected the life, property and worship of non-Muslim citizens (dhimmis) as a matter of binding law, and the Ottoman millet system allowed religious communities wide autonomy. Muslim reformers have therefore distinguished between secularism as an atheistic or anti-religious ideology, which they reject, and secular elements such as impartial courts, merit-based administration, protection of minorities and freedom of conscience, which they can affirm on Islamic grounds. The real debate in the Muslim world today is not 'Islam or secularism' in the abstract, but which arrangements best realise the objectives of the Shariah — justice, welfare, dignity and the protection of religion, life, intellect, family and property — in modern conditions.

Table 1: The secular and the classical Islamic positions compared

Issue	Secular position	Classical Islamic position
Source of law	The people, through their legislature	God's revelation (Shariah), interpreted by human scholars
Place of religion	Private life and voluntary associations	All of life: worship, family, commerce and state
Basis of citizenship	Territory and law; religion irrelevant	Faith for Muslims; protected covenants for non-Muslim citizens
Aim of the state	This-worldly welfare, liberty and	This-worldly justice and welfare,

	order	ordered towards God
Religious freedom	Protected as an individual right	No compulsion in belief (Quran 2:256); worship of recognised communities protected

Conclusion

To conclude, secularism is the doctrine that religion should be separated from the state and confined largely to private life, so that law and public policy rest on human reason and this-worldly welfare. It arose from Europe's particular history of church power and religious war, was philosophised by the Enlightenment, and was institutionalised in different forms — American separation, French laïcité, Indian principled distance, and authoritarian variants in Turkey and the communist world. Its genuine achievements — ending religious persecution by the state, securing equal citizenship and freeing inquiry — deserve recognition. Its weaknesses are equally real: it is not as neutral as it claims, it misunderstands comprehensive religions, and secular regimes have committed their own enormities. For the student of the political system of Islam, the essential point is that Islam, having no church and viewing religion as a complete way of life under God's sovereignty, cannot accept secularism as a total ideology; but the values of justice, tolerance and freedom of conscience that secularism advertises are themselves Islamic values, grounded in the Quran and the practice of the Prophet (peace be upon him). The task of Muslim political thought is therefore not blind imitation or blind rejection, but a principled engagement that measures every modern arrangement against the objectives of the Shariah.

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Question 2: Describe the Details of Liberalism (20 Marks)

Describe the details of Liberalism.

Introduction

Liberalism is the political philosophy that places the freedom of the individual at the centre of public life. It is the native ideology of the modern Western state: its fingerprints are on written constitutions, bills of rights, free markets, elected parliaments and independent courts across the world. The word liberal comes from the Latin liber, meaning free, and although people who held liberal ideas existed earlier, liberalism as a self-conscious movement belongs to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when thinkers began to argue that government exists by the consent of free and equal individuals, that its power must be limited by law, and that each person has rights which no king, parliament or majority may violate. Because the political system of Islam is constantly compared with liberal democracy — and because many Muslim reformers and many Muslim critics both define their positions in relation to liberalism — a clear account of what liberalism actually teaches is indispensable for this course.

Liberalism, however, is not one fixed doctrine. It has changed over time, from the classical liberalism of John Locke and Adam Smith, which demanded a minimal state and maximum economic freedom, to the modern or social liberalism of the twentieth century, which accepts a welfare state and government intervention to make freedom real for the poor. It also contains internal tensions: between liberty and equality, between individual rights and majority rule, between free markets and social justice. This answer explains the meaning of liberalism, its historical development, its core principles, its classical and modern forms, the arguments for

and against it, and finally its relationship with Islam, indicating where the two converge and where they irreconcilably differ.

Meaning and Definitions

In its broadest sense, liberalism is the belief that human beings are born free and equal in dignity, that they possess reason with which to direct their own lives, and that political authority is justified only when it protects their freedom under the rule of law. The political scientist Andrew Heywood defines liberalism as the ideology founded on the belief in the importance of liberty and equal rights, in which government is necessary to protect individuals from being harmed by others but must never become so powerful that it threatens liberty itself. John Locke, often called the father of liberalism, grounded the doctrine in natural rights: in his Second Treatise of Government (1689) he argued that men possess by nature rights to life, liberty and property, that they form governments by consent to protect those rights, and that a government which violates them may lawfully be resisted. John Stuart Mill supplied liberalism's most famous boundary line in On Liberty (1859): the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others — the celebrated harm principle.

Two distinctions help to fix the meaning. First, liberalism as used in political philosophy must not be confused with the everyday American usage in which 'liberal' simply means left-of-centre, nor with theological liberalism, which reinterprets religious doctrine. Second, liberalism is built on a particular picture of the human being: the autonomous individual who stands before, and in a sense above, his community and traditions, choosing his own conception of the

good life. Philosophers call this individualism, and it is liberalism's foundation stone. Everything else in the doctrine — rights, toleration, limited government, free markets — is built upon it, and it is also the point at which other traditions, including Islam, most often press their questions.

Historical Development

Liberalism grew out of the breakdown of the medieval order. The Reformation asserted the individual conscience against the Church, the scientific revolution asserted individual reason against inherited authority; and the rising commercial classes demanded security of property and freedom of contract against feudal privilege and royal interference. The English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution of 1688 curbed the monarchy and produced the Bill of Rights (1689). Locke theorised these events; Montesquieu added the separation of powers; Voltaire and the French philosophes attacked intolerance and censorship. The American Declaration of Independence (1776) proclaimed liberal principles as self-evident truths — that all men are created equal and endowed with unalienable rights — and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789) announced them to Europe, though the French Revolution also showed, in the Terror, how the language of liberty could license new tyrannies.

The nineteenth century was liberalism's classical age. Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations (1776) had already supplied its economics: markets coordinate themselves through an 'invisible hand', and prosperity follows when the state leaves trade free — laissez-faire. Liberal governments dismantled guilds and monopolies, extended the franchise step by step, abolished slavery in the British Empire (1833) and spread free trade after the repeal of the Corn Laws (1846). Yet

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industrial capitalism also produced slums, child labour and destitution, and thinkers such as T. H. Green argued that freedom is empty for a man who is starving, illiterate or crushed by economic necessity. From this criticism grew modern liberalism: J. M. Keynes justified state management of the economy, the Beveridge Report (1942) designed the British welfare state, and liberals came to support public education, social insurance and labour law as conditions of real freedom. After 1945 liberal democracy, chastened by fascism and communism, became the dominant order of the West; after 1989 some proclaimed it the final form of government, though the rise of populism, inequality and new authoritarianisms has since made that confidence look premature.

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Core Principles of Liberalism

- Individualism: the individual is more important than any social group; society is composed of self-directing persons, each with his own life to lead.
- Freedom (liberty): the supreme political value, understood classically as negative freedom — absence of coercion — and in modern liberalism also as positive freedom, the real capacity to act, requiring education, health and a minimum of wealth.
- Reason: faith in human rationality and in discussion, science and progress; tradition and revelation must justify themselves before reason's tribunal.
- Equality: all individuals are of equal moral worth; liberalism therefore demands formal equality — equal legal and political rights — and equality of opportunity, though classical and modern liberals differ over equality of outcome.

- Toleration: willingness to allow beliefs and ways of life of which one disapproves; born of religious conflict, it extends to all peaceful diversity, and protects minorities and dissenters.
- Consent and constitutionalism: government rests on the consent of the governed and must be limited by a constitution, the rule of law, independent courts and the separation of powers, so that power can never become absolute.
- Private property and, classically, the free market: property is a natural right and an engine of independence and prosperity; the state's economic role is, for classical liberals, confined to defence, justice and public works.

These principles hang together as a system. Because individuals are rational and of equal worth, no one is born to rule another; because they may nevertheless harm one another, government is necessary; because governments themselves are the greatest potential threat to freedom, government must be limited, divided and accountable; and because reasonable people disagree about ultimate questions, the state must tolerate diversity and remain neutral between citizens' conceptions of the good. When liberals invoke 'rights', they mean claims that hold even against democratic majorities — which is why constitutional courts, empowered to strike down legislation, are a characteristically liberal institution, and why liberalism and pure majoritarian democracy are not the same thing, a distinction that matters when liberalism is compared with Islamic ideas of shura and majority opinion.

Classical and Modern Liberalism

Table 1: Classical and modern liberalism compared

Feature	Classical liberalism	Modern (social) liberalism

Leading thinkers	Locke, Adam Smith, J. S. Mill, Herbert Spencer	T. H. Green, J. A. Hobson, Keynes, John Rawls
View of freedom	Negative: freedom from interference	Positive: real ability to develop and act
Role of the state	Minimal 'night-watchman' state	Enabling state: welfare, education, regulation
Economy	Laissez-faire free market	Managed market economy; redistribution accepted
Equality	Formal legal equality only	Equality of opportunity backed by social provision
Typical policies	Free trade, low taxes, sound money	Welfare state, public health and schooling, labour rights

John Rawls' A Theory of Justice (1971) gave modern liberalism its most influential philosophical statement. Rawls asked what principles free and equal persons would choose behind a 'veil of ignorance', not knowing their own wealth, talents or status. They would choose, he argued, equal basic liberties for all, and would permit social and economic inequalities only where they benefit the least advantaged — the difference principle. Rawls' theory shows liberalism's continuing power to renew itself, but also its abstraction: its ideal chooser has no religion, culture or attachments, which is precisely what communitarian critics such as Michael Sandel, and many religious thinkers, find unreal. People do not experience themselves as unencumbered choosers; they find themselves already members of families, communities and faiths that partly constitute who they are.

Criticism of Liberalism

Liberalism's critics come from several directions. Socialists and Marxists argue that formal freedom conceals real domination: the worker who is 'free' to accept any wage or starve is not

meaningfully free, and property rights protect accumulated advantage; hence liberal equality before the law co-exists with radical inequality in life. Communitarians argue that liberalism's atomistic individual is a fiction, that identity and obligation come from community, and that liberal societies corrode the families, neighbourhoods and traditions on which they themselves depend — a corrosion visible in loneliness, family breakdown and declining social trust in the most liberal societies. Conservatives object that liberal rationalism undervalues tradition, religion and settled moral norms, and that its moral neutrality leaves a vacuum that consumerism fills. Feminist critics historically noted that classical liberalism's 'individual' was male: women were long denied the vote, property and education by liberal states, and the public/private split left domination inside the family untouched. Finally, liberalism is accused of hypocrisy abroad: liberal empires preached freedom at home while ruling colonies by force, and contemporary liberal states are charged with imposing their values on other societies in the name of universal rights.

Liberalism and Islam

The encounter between liberalism and Islam produces both real agreements and real disagreements, and honesty requires stating both. There is agreement, first, on the dignity of the human person: the Quran declares 'We have honoured the children of Adam' (17:70) and grounds human worth in creation and moral responsibility. There is agreement on freedom of belief: 'There is no compulsion in religion' (2:256), and the Prophet (peace be upon him) is told that his duty is only to convey the message (5:99). There is agreement on the rule of law and the limitation of rulers: the classical doctrine makes the ruler subject to the Shariah, removable

for injustice, and the caliph Abu Bakr, in his inaugural address, asked the people to correct him if he deviated — authority accountable to a higher law and to the community. There is agreement on consultation (shura, Quran 42:38), on the protection of property ('Your blood and your property are sacred', from the Farewell Sermon), on freedom of trade within moral bounds, and on the sanctity of contract. Muslim thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries — Khayr al-Din al-Tunisi, Muhammad Abduh and others — argued precisely that the constitutionalism and legal security Europeans enjoyed were not foreign to Islam but recoveries of what Islam had originally taught and Muslim practice had lost.

The disagreements are equally real, and they cluster around liberalism's foundation: the autonomous individual. In Islam, freedom is not the absence of all bonds but the right ordering of bonds — above all the bond with God. Man is khalifa, God's trustee on earth (Quran 2:30), and his liberty is exercised within a moral law he did not invent. Where liberalism makes individual choice the final authority — the state neutral even between virtue and vice, so long as others are not harmed — Islam holds that some choices are wrong in themselves and that law and society may properly uphold public morality; the harm principle is too narrow, because it ignores harm to the soul, the family and the moral fabric, and because 'harm to others' steadily expands or contracts with fashion. Hence the familiar flashpoints: family law, sexuality, blasphemy, interest-based finance and the public place of religion. A Muslim can therefore be, and many Muslims are, supporters of constitutional government, free elections, independent courts, free speech within bounds and market enterprise, while declining liberalism's philosophical claim that autonomy is the highest good. Scholars describe such positions variously as Islamic constitutionalism or as a principled distinction between liberal political

arrangements, many of which Islam can endorse, and liberal philosophy, which it cannot accept wholesale.

Conclusion

To conclude, liberalism is the ideology of individual freedom under limited, lawful government. Born from Europe's religious conflicts and commercial rise, theorised by Locke, Smith and Mill, it developed from a classical form — minimal state, free market, formal equality — into a modern form that enlists the state to make freedom effective through welfare and education, a development crowned philosophically by Rawls. Its permanent contributions are immense: the very ideas that rulers are accountable, that citizens hold rights against the state, that conscience may not be coerced and that law must rule, are liberalism's gifts to the modern world, including to Muslim societies that have adopted them. Its permanent questions are equally significant: whether the autonomous individual is a true picture of man, whether formal freedom without economic security is hollow, and whether a society can cohere when it agrees on procedures but on nothing else. For the student of Islam's political system, liberalism is neither an enemy to be caricatured nor a gospel to be swallowed whole; it is a powerful interlocutor whose political safeguards Islam can largely affirm, but whose ultimate account of man and freedom Islam must respectfully, and firmly, dispute.

Question 3: Write about Democracy (20 Marks)

Write about Democracy.

Introduction

Democracy is the most widely praised — and most widely practised, at least in name — system of government in the modern world. The word comes from the Greek demos, the people, and kratos, rule: democracy is rule by the people. In the definition made famous by Abraham Lincoln, it is 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. Yet these simple phrases conceal difficult questions. Who are 'the people'? How do they rule — directly, or through representatives? Does democracy mean only a method of choosing rulers by majority vote, or does it also include rights, liberties and limits that majorities may not touch? And for the student of the political system of Islam, a further question dominates all others: can a system in which the people's will is the highest law be reconciled with a faith in which sovereignty belongs to God and law is given by revelation? Every Muslim-majority country that holds elections — Pakistan, Turkey, Indonesia, Malaysia, Bangladesh — lives inside that question.

This answer therefore proceeds in steps. It defines democracy and distinguishes its main forms, traces its historical development from Athens to the modern democratic wave, sets out the essential features and preconditions of a working democracy, weighs its merits and defects honestly, and then examines the long and rich debate about Islam and democracy: the points of harmony, the points of tension, and the ways Muslim scholars have proposed to hold the two together.

Meaning, Definition and Forms

Political scientists define democracy in two broad ways. The minimal or procedural definition, associated with Joseph Schumpeter, treats democracy simply as a method: that institutional

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arrangement in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote — in short, free elections in which governments can be thrown out. The fuller definition adds the conditions that make elections meaningful: universal adult franchise, freedom of speech, press and association, more than one genuine party, an independent judiciary, and protection of minorities, so that today's losers can become tomorrow's winners. Robert Dahl called such a system 'polyarchy' and listed its institutions: elected officials, free and fair elections, inclusive suffrage, the right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative sources of information and associational autonomy. A state may hold elections without these freedoms — the world is full of 'electoral authoritarian' regimes — which is why counting ballot boxes alone does not tell us whether a country is democratic.

Democracies also differ in form. Direct democracy, practised in ancient Athens and in a few Swiss cantons and referendums today, lets citizens decide issues themselves; it is impossible as the routine method of governing a large modern state. Representative democracy, the standard modern form, has citizens elect representatives who deliberate and legislate on their behalf. Parliamentary democracy (Britain, Pakistan, India) fuses the executive with the legislature: the prime minister governs only while he commands the assembly, which makes governments accountable daily but sometimes unstable. Presidential democracy (the United States, Indonesia) separates the executive from the legislature and fixes its term, which gives stability but can produce deadlock. Finally, political scientists distinguish liberal democracy, where majority rule is restrained by constitutional rights, from illiberal or majoritarian democracy, where an elected government claims an unlimited mandate — a distinction of great importance for religious and ethnic minorities everywhere.

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Historical Development

Democracy first appeared in the Greek city-state of Athens in the fifth century BCE. Under reforms associated with Cleisthenes (508 BCE) and Pericles, free male citizens voted directly in the Assembly on war, law and policy, chose many officials by lot and could ostracise dangerous leaders. But Athenian democracy rested on exclusions that shock modern readers: women, slaves and resident foreigners — the majority of the population — had no political rights, and the system could act with terrifying injustice, as when the Assembly condemned Socrates to death in 399 BCE. Rome contributed republican ideas — mixed government, citizenship, law — rather than democracy itself. After Rome's fall, democratic practice survived only in fragments: in the assemblies of free cities, in church councils, in the Icelandic Althing, and in the tribal and communal consultations found in many societies, including the Arabian majlis and the shura tradition of Islam.

Modern democracy was rebuilt between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries. England's Glorious Revolution (1688) established parliamentary supremacy; the American Revolution (1776) and Constitution (1787) created a large-scale republic with a written constitution and a bill of rights; the French Revolution (1789) proclaimed popular sovereignty but slid into terror and empire, teaching democrats that majority passion needs constitutional restraint. The nineteenth century gradually widened the franchise — to working men, then, after long struggle, to women (New Zealand first, 1893; Britain and the United States after the First World War). The twentieth century saw democracy's darkest reversal in fascism and communism, its recovery after 1945, decolonisation, which brought democratic constitutions to Asia and Africa (Pakistan and India among them), and what Samuel Huntington called the 'third wave' after

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1974, which carried democracy to southern Europe, Latin America, East Asia and, briefly, parts of the Muslim world. The twenty-first century has added a sobering chapter: democratic backsliding, in which elected leaders erode courts, media and election bodies from within — proof that democracy, once won, is never permanently secured

Essential Features and Preconditions

- Popular sovereignty and political equality: ultimate authority rests with the people, and each citizen's vote counts equally — one person, one vote, one value.
- Free, fair and periodic elections: held under universal adult franchise, by secret ballot, administered by an independent election authority, with genuine choice between candidates and parties.
- Rule of law and constitutionalism: rulers and ruled alike are subject to known law; a constitution limits every organ of the state, and an independent judiciary enforces those limits.
- Fundamental rights and freedoms: freedom of speech, press, assembly, association, movement and religion, protected against the majority of the day.
- Separation and division of powers: legislature, executive and judiciary check one another; a free media and civil society act as a fourth check.
- Responsible and accountable government: the executive must answer to the legislature and, through elections, to the people; peaceful transfer of power to the opposition is the system's defining test.

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- Protection of minorities: majority rule is tempered by rights and by the principle that the majority's mandate is to govern for all, not to crush or permanently exclude the minority.

Experience shows that these institutions flourish only on certain social foundations. A reasonable level of literacy and education lets citizens judge issues and detect lies; a free and plural media supplies the information self-government requires; a middle class and a measure of economic security reduce the desperation that feeds extremism; political parties, trade unions, professional bodies and other associations of civil society train citizens in cooperation; and above all a democratic culture — tolerance of opponents, willingness to lose an election and trust that rivals will also play by the rules — turns paper institutions into living practice. Where these are weak, as Pakistan's own history of alternating civilian and military rule illustrates, constitutions remain fragile however elegantly they are drafted.

Merits and Defects of Democracy

Democracy's merits are substantial. It is the only system that rests government on consent, and therefore the only one that treats citizens as dignified agents rather than subjects; as the Quran itself honours human dignity (17:70), this carries moral weight beyond the West. It provides a peaceful method of changing rulers, replacing the bullets of revolution with the ballots of election. It protects freedom: because rulers must face criticism and eventual judgement, they hesitate to become tyrants, and the rights that shield the citizen also shield religion, learning and enterprise. It tends to produce better decisions over time, because errors can be exposed and corrected, and Amartya Sen famously observed that no substantial famine has ever occurred in a functioning democracy with a free press, since rulers who must face voters and

newspapers cannot ignore mass starvation. And it educates: participation develops public spirit, compromise and respect for opponents.

Its defects are just as real, and honest study requires naming them. Majority rule can become majority tyranny: a permanent majority may oppress a minority, and history's list of democratically elected persecutors is not short. Democracies are vulnerable to demagogues who flatter popular prejudice, to money, which buys media and influence and tilts the field towards the rich, and to voter ignorance and short-termism, which punish governments for necessary but painful policies. Decision-making is slow, coalition politics can be unstable and corrupt, and party competition often degenerates into the pursuit of power for its own sake, dividing the nation into hostile camps. Plato's ancient warning — that democracy, prizing freedom above all, may decay into licence and then invite a tyrant — and the modern spectacle of elected strongmen dismantling democracies from inside show that these are not theoretical risks. The mature conclusion of political science is Churchill's: democracy is the worst form of government except for all the others that have been tried — a system valued less for the wisdom of its decisions than for its protection against the worst abuses of power.

Islam and Democracy

The relationship between Islam and democracy has been debated by Muslim scholars for over a century, and three broad positions can be identified. The first rejects democracy outright: sovereignty (hakimiyya) belongs to God alone, legislation is God's prerogative, and to let a human assembly permit what God has forbidden or forbid what He has permitted is, in the strong formulation of Sayyid Qutb and in the practice of groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, a form of

shirk — setting up rivals to God. The second position accepts democracy fully and reads Islam through it, arguing that Islam contains no detailed constitutional blueprint for the modern state and that Muslims may therefore adopt democracy as the best available vessel for Islamic values of justice and consent. The third and most widely held position distinguishes between democracy as a philosophy — the absolute sovereignty of the people's will — and democracy as a set of procedures and safeguards: elections, consultation, accountability, rule of law, protected rights and peaceful transfer of power. Philosophically, this position says, the Muslim amends one premise: the people's authority is real but delegated and bounded, exercised as God's trustees (khilafa) within the limits of the Shariah. Procedurally, it finds democracy not merely permissible but a faithful modern expression of Quranic principles.

The Quranic and historical roots claimed for that third position are considerable. The Quran commands consultation: the Prophet himself is told to 'consult them in the matter' (3:159), and the believers are praised as those 'whose affair is consultation among them' (42:38). The Prophet's successor was not designated by hereditary right: Abu Bakr was chosen by the community's deliberation at the Saqifa and confirmed by the general pledge (bay'a), and Umar, before his death, appointed a six-member council to elect the next caliph — an early electoral college. The bay'a itself was a contract of consent, which women also gave (Quran 60:12). Rulers in classical theory held office under conditions, could be criticised publicly — a Bedouin could challenge Umar's use of cloth from the treasury, and a woman corrected him on the question of dowries, and he accepted the correction — and lost legitimacy by injustice. Justice is commanded absolutely, 'even against yourselves or your parents' (4:135); the dignity of every human being is affirmed (17:70); and there is no compulsion in religion (2:256). Pakistan's own

Constitution embodies the third position: its Objectives Resolution (1949), now a substantive part of the Constitution, declares that sovereignty belongs to Allah, that authority is a sacred trust exercised by the people's chosen representatives within the limits prescribed by Him, and that democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice as enunciated by Islam shall be fully observed.

Table 1: Democracy and the Islamic political tradition

Question	Unbounded majoritarian democracy	Position of the Islamic tradition
Who is sovereign?	The people, without limit	God; human authority is a delegated trust (khilafa)
Source of law	Whatever the majority enacts	Shariah sets the framework; human legislation operates within it
How are rulers chosen?	Free elections	Consent of the community: shura, bay'a — in modern form, elections
Can rulers be removed?	By election or impeachment	Yes: accountability in this world; the unjust ruler loses legitimacy
Minorities	Protected by constitutional rights	Protected by covenant and law: life, property, worship and honour guaranteed

Conclusion

To conclude, democracy is government by the people: a system in which rulers are chosen in free elections, power is limited by law and rights, minorities are protected, and governments can be changed peacefully. From its narrow Athenian beginnings it has grown, through revolution, reform and repeated collapse, into the standard of legitimate government across the world, and its survival depends as much on democratic culture and social foundations as on

constitutional text. Its strengths — consent, accountability, protection against tyranny, self-correction — are genuine; so are its weaknesses — majority tyranny, demagogy, the power of money and the fragility of its norms. For Islam, the considered judgement of the mainstream of modern scholarship is that democracy as a philosophy of unlimited popular sovereignty conflicts with the sovereignty of God, but democracy as a method of consultation, consent, accountability and limited government fulfils, rather than violates, the Quran's political principles. The Islamic state is therefore best described not as a theocracy ruled by clerics, nor as a secular majoritarianism, but as a constitutional order in which an elected, accountable government rules a free people within the moral and legal limits set by the Shariah — democracy with a higher law above the majority, which is, after all, what the best democratic theory also demands.

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Question 4: Write about Modernism (20 Marks)

Write about Modernism.

Introduction

Modernism is the outlook, and the movement, that celebrates the modern: reason over tradition, science over revelation, progress over inheritance, and the new over the old. As an intellectual force it is younger than the civilisations it has challenged, yet in barely three centuries it has transformed every society on earth — including every Muslim society. The railway, the printing press, the modern school, the nation-state, the laboratory and the smartphone are its works; so are the questions it forces upon every believer: if science explains

nature, what is left for religion to explain? If reason is the measure of truth, what authority remains for revelation? If each generation must surpass the last, what value has the example of the first generations of Islam? The political system of Islam, which rests on a revealed law and a Prophet-centred tradition, meets modernism not as an abstract philosophy but as the air of the age; understanding it is therefore essential for this course.

Modernism must be distinguished from mere modernity and from modernisation. Modernity is the historical period and social condition that began in early-modern Europe: urban, industrial, scientific and individualist. Modernisation is the process — industrialising, building bureaucracies, spreading literacy — by which societies acquire modern institutions. Modernism is the ideology that welcomes and worships these changes: the conviction that the modern is not only inevitable but good, that the past is a darkness from which mankind has escaped, and that tradition, including religious tradition, must either adapt to reason and science or disappear. This answer defines modernism, traces its development, sets out its main features, surveys Islamic modernism as a special and important case, and weighs modernism's achievements and its failures.

Meaning and Historical Development

At its core, modernism is confidence: confidence that human reason, unaided by revelation, can discover truth; that the scientific method can be extended from nature to society; that history moves forward, upward; and that man can become, in Francis Bacon's phrase, the master of nature, and in the Enlightenment's bolder phrase, the author of himself. The philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) supplied its method — doubt everything inherited, accept only what

reason makes clear and distinct. Isaac Newton's Principia (1687) supplied its triumph: the heavens themselves obeyed mathematical laws man could discover. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment — Locke, Voltaire, Rousseau, Kant, the Encyclopaedists — generalised the lesson to politics, morality and religion: Kant defined enlightenment as man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity, daring to think for himself. The nineteenth century added Darwin's evolution (1859), which displaced man from the centre of creation; Marx, who recast history as material struggle; Nietzsche, who announced the 'death of God' in European culture; and Freud, who dethroned reason itself by revealing the unconscious.

In the arts and architecture, modernism became a style as well as a philosophy: the clean lines of the Bauhaus, the abstract canvases of Picasso and Kandinsky, the stream-of-consciousness novels of Joyce and Woolf all broke deliberately with inherited form in the name of making it new. Politically, modernism powered both liberal capitalism and communism — rival twins, each claiming science and progress — and it powered the modernising dictatorships of the twentieth century, from Atatürk's Turkey to the Shah's Iran to the Ba'athist states, which tried to drag their societies into modernity by decree: unveiling women, latinising alphabets, closing religious schools, importing codes wholesale. By the mid-twentieth century the modernist project seemed irresistible. Yet its catastrophes — two world wars launched by the most 'advanced' nations, the Holocaust organised with bureaucratic and industrial efficiency, the gulag, the atomic bomb, and a growing ecological crisis — cracked its confidence, and from that crack postmodernism would grow. Modernism survives, but as one voice among others, no longer as the unquestioned spirit of the age.

Main Features of Modernism

- Rationalism: unaided human reason is the supreme and sufficient judge of truth; claims that cannot be rationally or empirically verified — miracles, revelation, the unseen — are doubted or dismissed.
- Faith in science and technology: the scientific method is the model of all knowledge; technology is expected to conquer disease, poverty and scarcity, and its advance is treated as progress by definition.
- Belief in progress: history is a story of ascent from superstition to enlightenment; the new is presumed better than the old, and the future is the court of appeal against the past.
- Rejection or revision of tradition: inherited beliefs, customs and authorities have no claim merely because they are inherited; each must justify itself before reason, utility and the present generation.
- Individualism and autonomy: the individual, freed from community, caste, guild and church, is the unit of society and the author of his own values and life-plan.
- Secularism and humanism: man, not God, is placed at the centre; public life is organised without reference to religion, and human welfare in this world becomes the highest good.
- Universalism and planning: the truths of reason and science are the same everywhere, so one model of development — industrial, urban, educated, secular — is prescribed for all societies, and the state is expected to engineer society towards it.

Two internal tensions should be noticed, because they explain modernism's troubled history. The first is between its promise of liberation and its love of control: the same movement that

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freed the individual from tradition built states of unprecedented power, which planned economies, re-educated populations and treated human beings as material for social engineering — what critics call high modernism, whose failures, from collectivisation to disastrous urban schemes, James C. Scott catalogued in Seeing Like a State. The second tension is between reason's claim to universality and the particular cultures it invaded: modernism arrived in Asia and Africa largely in the baggage of colonial empires, so that for colonised peoples 'modernise' was heard as 'become like your conquerors', and resistance to colonialism and defence of tradition naturally fused — a fusion still audible in Muslim debates today.

Islamic Modernism

The Muslim world's encounter with modern power began as a military and economic shock: Napoleon's invasion of Egypt (1798), British rule in India, and the defeats of the Ottoman Empire forced the question that created Islamic modernism — why had Muslim societies fallen behind, and what must change? The modernist answer, given by a remarkable line of thinkers, was: Islam itself is not the obstacle; Muslims' stagnation, blind imitation (taqlid) and abandonment of reason are. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) preached Muslim unity and the revival of science and philosophy, arguing that Islam, rightly understood, honours reason. His disciple Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), Grand Mufti of Egypt, sought to reform Islamic education at al-Azhar, reopened the gate of ijtihad (independent reasoning), and argued that every Quranic teaching survives rational scrutiny and that Islam anticipated modern values of consultation, welfare and knowledge. In India, Sir Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–1898) founded the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh (1875) to give Muslims modern education, and

controversially reinterpreted scripture so as to remove any conflict with the laws of nature, which he regarded as God's other book. Rashid Rida, Sayyid Ahmad's successors, and in the next century Fazlur Rahman carried the project forward: Rahman proposed a systematic method of moving from the Quran's specific rulings to their moral purposes and back to modern conditions.

Islamic modernism achieved much. It created the schools and universities through which Muslims entered modern professions; it defended Islam against the charge of irrationality; it supported constitutional government against despotism; and it recovered ijtihad as a living instrument. But it also attracted strong criticism from two opposite sides. Traditional scholars charged some modernists with bending the Quran to whatever the West currently believed — explaining away miracles, reinterpreting clear rulings on interest, inheritance or family law — so that revelation ended up following fashion while claiming to lead. Islamists such as Maududi charged modernists with the opposite failure of nerve: accepting the West's questions as the only questions and fragmenting Islam into a private ethic. Secular critics, conversely, found the modernists inconsistent: if reason is sovereign, why retain revelation at all? The debate remains open, and its terms — authenticity versus adaptation, taqlid versus ijtihad — structure almost every controversy in contemporary Muslim thought, from Islamic finance to bioethics to the role of women.

Achievements and Failures of Modernism

Modernism's achievements are written across modern life. It broke the power of dogma over inquiry and thereby released science, which has doubled life expectancy, defeated diseases that

killed prophets' contemporaries by the million, fed billions and connected the planet. It inspired the abolition of slavery, the extension of education to the poor and to women, and legal and political reforms that curbed arbitrary rulers. Even its fiercest religious critics use its instruments — hospitals, universities, printing, broadcasting, the internet — to spread their message, which is itself a kind of tribute. Where modernism taught humility before evidence, respect for the individual conscience and suspicion of unaccountable power, it taught truths that a Muslim can recognise as consistent with the Quran's own summons to reflect, to travel the earth and observe, and to let no soul bear another's burden.

Its failures are equally undeniable. Modernism's confidence curdled into arrogance: it mistook European civilisation for civilisation itself, licensed colonial domination as a 'civilising mission', and in its communist and fascist perversions murdered on a scale no traditional society could achieve. Its material success has been accompanied by spiritual desiccation — the disenchantment of the world, in Max Weber's phrase — leaving affluent societies reporting epidemic loneliness, anxiety and meaninglessness. Its treatment of nature as mere raw material produced climate change and mass extinction, a crisis rooted precisely in the refusal of limits that revelation teaches. And its central prediction failed: religion did not die. The resurgence of Islam, the growth of Christianity in the global South and the persistence of faith in the most modern societies show that modernism misunderstood something permanent in human nature — the need for transcendence, moral certainty and belonging that neither consumption nor technique can supply.

Table 1: The modernist outlook and the Islamic outlook

Question	Modernist answer	Islamic answer
Highest source of truth	Human reason and science	Revelation, with reason as its honoured interpreter
Direction of history	Automatic progress, upwards	Moral rise and fall; progress must be chosen and guarded
Attitude to tradition	Suspect until justified by reason	Respected; reformed through ijtihad where it departs from revelation
Man's place	Master of nature, author of himself	Trustee (khalifa) of God on earth, accountable for the trust
Goal of life	This-worldly welfare and self-realisation	God's pleasure, expressed in justice and welfare in both worlds

Conclusion

To conclude, modernism is the ideology of the modern age: rationalist, scientific, progressive, individualist and secular, born in early-modern Europe, triumphant in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and now chastened by its own catastrophes. It compelled every tradition, Islam included, to answer questions it could not evade, and Islamic modernism — from Afghani and Abduh to Sir Syed and Fazlur Rahman — was the creative Muslim response: recover reason and ijtihad, embrace science and education, and show that fidelity and renewal can coexist. The balanced Islamic judgement accepts modernism's instruments and many of its insights — the dignity of inquiry, the fight against ignorance and despotism, the relief of suffering — while rejecting its metaphysics: reason is a lamp God gave, not a god itself; progress is a task, not a law of history; and tradition at its best is not a chain but a treasury. The mature position is neither to worship the modern nor to flee from it, but to judge it — taking from every age what serves God's purposes and refusing what corrupts them.

Question 5: Describe Postmodernism (20 Marks)

Describe Postmodernism.

Introduction

Postmodernism is the name given to the mood, movement and philosophy that emerged in the West in the second half of the twentieth century as a reaction against modernism. If modernism believed in reason, science, progress and universal truth, postmodernism doubts them all. It suspects every grand claim to truth as a disguised claim to power, celebrates plurality, difference and irony, and treats language, culture and identity not as reflections of a given reality but as constructions that make reality what it is. The term sounds academic, yet postmodern ideas are now the common currency of everyday life: 'that is your truth', 'everything is relative', 'who are we to judge?', the collapse of trust in experts and institutions, news fragmented into competing narratives, identities assembled and displayed like consumer choices — all of these are postmodernism at street level. For the student of the political system of Islam the subject is doubly important. Islam is a religion of one God, one final revelation and universal moral claims — in postmodern vocabulary, a grand narrative if ever there was one. Yet some Muslim writers have also found in postmodernism an unexpected ally against Western universalism and secular arrogance. This answer explains what postmodernism is, how it arose, its main ideas and thinkers, its influence, the criticisms made of it, and its significance for Islam.

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Meaning and Emergence

The French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard gave postmodernism its most quoted definition in The Postmodern Condition (1979): 'Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives.' A metanarrative is a big story that explains everything and legitimises everything else — the march of Progress, the triumph of Science, the liberation of the Proletariat, the manifest destiny of a nation, and, in the eyes of its critics, the claims of revealed religion. Modernity, said Lyotard, believed such stories; the postmodern condition is the loss of that belief, leaving a plurality of little stories, language games and local truths, none able to command universal assent. The word postmodern had circulated earlier in architecture — where it named a playful rebellion against the bare glass boxes of modernist building, ornamented, ironic and borrowing freely from historical styles — and in literature and art, before philosophers generalised it into a diagnosis of the whole culture.

The causes of the turn are not hard to find. Two world wars, the Holocaust and the atomic bomb destroyed the easy faith that reason and progress were making mankind better; the most rationally organised societies had organised slaughter. Decolonisation exposed 'universal' Western values as the local customs of empires, preached abroad and violated at home. The failure of communism discredited the last great secular metanarrative in Europe. Within philosophy, the ground had been prepared: Nietzsche, the great forerunner, had argued that truths are interpretations serving a will to power; Saussure's linguistics showed that words mean by difference from other words, not by touching things directly; and the later Wittgenstein dissolved fixed meanings into shifting language games. From the 1960s, a brilliant generation of French thinkers — Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze, Baudrillard — turned these

suspicions into a system, and through the universities, especially literature and cultural studies departments, their ideas conquered the humanities and then the wider culture.

Main Ideas and Thinkers

- Rejection of universal truth and metanarratives (Lyotard): there is no single story of history or single foundation of knowledge; there are only local, plural, competing accounts, and every claim to universality masks someone's interest.
- Truth as power (Michel Foucault): what an age counts as truth is produced by its institutions — clinics, prisons, universities, media; knowledge and power are inseparable ('power/knowledge'), so the task of thought is to expose whose interest a 'truth' serves, and to give voice to suppressed, subjugated knowledges.
- Deconstruction (Jacques Derrida): texts undermine their own apparent meanings; binary opposites (speech/writing, reason/madness, West/East, male/female) secretly depend on and privilege one term; meaning is endlessly deferred (différance), so no text, including a sacred one read carelessly, delivers a single final sense controlled by its author.
- Simulation and hyperreality (Jean Baudrillard): in a media-saturated consumer society, images and signs no longer represent reality but precede and replace it; copies without originals — brands, celebrities, virtual worlds — become the hyperreal in which people actually live.
- Death of the author and of the subject: the autonomous, rational self of liberalism and modernism is dissolved into language, culture and desire; the author does not master his text, and the self does not master itself.

- Relativism and pluralism in values: moral and aesthetic judgements are products of cultures and perspectives; there is no neutral standpoint from which to rank them — a claim applied to religions, civilisations and lifestyles alike.
- Irony, pastiche and play (Richard Rorty and the arts): postmodern culture mixes high and low, sacred and comic, past styles and present media, and prefers irony — saying without quite meaning — to solemn commitment.

It is important to see that these thinkers did not form a single school and often denied being 'postmodernists' at all; Foucault called himself a historian of systems of thought, Derrida resisted labels. Postmodernism is therefore better pictured as a family resemblance — a shared suspicion of foundations, hierarchies and final vocabularies — than as a creed with articles. It is also strongest as criticism and weakest as construction: it excels at unmasking and destabilising, and has little to say about what should be built, believed or obeyed. Its defenders reply that this is the point: after the grand systems delivered the gulag and the gas chamber, a thought that refuses total answers is not empty but honest.

Influence and Effects

Postmodernism's influence spread far beyond philosophy seminars. In architecture and design it restored colour, ornament and historical reference. In literature and film it produced self-referential, fragmented works that play with their own fictionality. In the social sciences it inspired postcolonial studies: Edward Said's Orientalism (1978), itself influenced by Foucault, argued that Western scholarship about Islam and the East was not innocent knowledge but an instrument of domination — an argument that permanently changed how Muslim and Western

scholars alike read colonial texts. In law and politics it fed identity politics and multiculturalism: if universal norms are masks of power, then marginalised groups — ethnic, religious, sexual minorities — must assert their own narratives and demand recognition of difference rather than assimilation. In everyday culture its effects are visible in the decline of deference to experts and established media, the rise of social media in which every user is his own narrator, and the 'post-truth' politics in which emotional narrative defeats fact — a development many postmodern thinkers themselves deplored, since a weapon forged against official lies proved equally serviceable for unofficial ones.

Criticism of Postmodernism

The criticisms of postmodernism are severe and come from almost every direction. The first is self-contradiction: the statement 'there is no universal truth' is itself offered as a universal truth; if all narratives are masks of power, so is postmodernism, and it saws off the branch on which it sits. Philosophers such as Jürgen Habermas call this a performative contradiction. The second is moral paralysis: if no standpoint exists from which to judge, on what ground does the postmodernist condemn racism, colonialism or cruelty — condemnations postmodernists passionately utter? Relativism borrows the moral capital of the very universalism it denies. The third is obscurity and irresponsibility: critics from Noam Chomsky to the physicist Alan Sokal — who in 1996 published a deliberately nonsensical parody article in a postmodern journal, which accepted it — charge that jargon conceals emptiness and that the denial of objective reality is a luxury belief: bridges, vaccines and aircraft obey truths that are not narratives. Fourth, political critics on the left, such as Terry Eagleton, argue that postmodernism arrived just in time to

serve consumer capitalism: it dissolves solidarity and grand projects of justice into lifestyle choices and marketable differences. Finally, ordinary experience rebels: people do not in fact live as relativists; they grieve, accuse, forgive and sacrifice on the assumption that some things are really true and really wrong.

Postmodernism and Islam

Muslim responses to postmodernism divide characteristically, into welcome for its criticism and rejection of its conclusions. The welcome is genuine. Postmodernism undermined the West's claim that its secular, liberal path is the universal destiny of mankind — the very claim against which Muslim thinkers from Iqbal onwards protested. It vindicated, from within Western philosophy itself, the suspicion that 'reason' and 'science' as preached by colonial administrators were entangled with power. Muslim scholars such as Ziauddin Sardar engaged postmodernism seriously, using its tools against Western arrogance while warning that it could not be Islam's home. Postcolonial criticism influenced by postmodernism helped Muslims recover their own history from orientalist distortion, and its respect for plurality and difference resonates with the Quran's declaration that God made mankind into nations and tribes so that they may know one another (49:13), and with the classical civilisation of Islam, which housed many schools, sects and cultures under one faith.

The rejection is, at the level of first principles, total. Islam is built upon truths it holds to be universal, revealed and certain: that God is one, that Muhammad (peace be upon him) is His final Messenger, that the Quran is His speech, and that justice, mercy and the sanctity of life bind all human beings in all ages. A philosophy that treats every truth-claim as a power-move

cannot accommodate revelation except by re-describing it as one more narrative — which is precisely to deny it. Where postmodernism dissolves the self, Islam summons the self to account; where it defers meaning endlessly, Islam holds that God has spoken clearly and that interpretation, though human and fallible, aims at a real intended meaning and is disciplined by language, context and the consensus of scholarship; where it celebrates irony, Islam asks for sidq — truthfulness — and commitment. Nor can a Muslim accept moral relativism: the Quran condemns the powerful who devour the wealth of orphans and the merchants who cheat the measure in terms meant for every market and every century. The balanced conclusion reached by most Muslim thinkers is therefore one of selective use: postmodernism as a solvent of false Western absolutes may be used carefully, the way one uses a strong medicine; postmodernism as a worldview is incompatible with Islam, and indeed with any serious moral life. Some add a shrewd historical note: the West, having used modernism's universal reason to rule the world, discovered postmodern doubt just as others began to invoke universal rights against it — timing that Muslims may be forgiven for noticing.

Table 1: Modernism and postmodernism compared

Feature	Modernism	Postmodernism
Truth	One, universal, discoverable by reason	Plural, local, constructed in language
Grand narratives	Believed: progress, science, liberation	Rejected: 'incredulity toward metanarratives'
The self	Autonomous, rational author of its life	Fragmented product of language and power
History	Forward march of progress	No direction; only competing stories
Culture	Hierarchy: high art, serious purpose	Mixing of high and low; irony and pastiche

Religion	To be superseded by reason	One narrative among others; sometimes an ally against secular reason

Conclusion

To conclude, postmodernism is the late twentieth-century reaction against modernism's certainties: defined by Lyotard as incredulity toward metanarratives, armed by Foucault's analysis of power and truth, Derrida's deconstruction and Baudrillard's account of simulation, and expressed in pluralism, relativism, irony and the celebration of difference. It performed real services — exposing the arrogance of empires and experts, recovering suppressed voices, and teaching suspicion of every claim that power makes about itself. But it is self-refuting when it universalises its denial of universals, morally parasitic on the values it claims to dissolve, and incapable of grounding the justice it demands. For Islam, it is therefore a useful critic and an impossible creed: Muslims may gratefully accept its demolition of secular Western absolutism and its defence of plurality, which the Quran itself grounds more firmly in creation and revelation; but they must decline its final teaching, for a faith that begins with 'Read, in the name of your Lord' cannot end by doubting that anything true has been said. The postmodern age, with its hunger for meaning amid collapsing narratives, may in fact be an age unusually open to Islam's claim: that truth exists, that it has been spoken, and that it liberates rather than oppresses those who receive it.

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