



# The Contestation Of Religion And Science In The Perspective Of Conspiracy Theory: The Thought Of Karl Popper And Ibn Rushd

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## Abstract

This study explores the intersection between religion and science through the lens of conspiracy theory, specifically by examining the thoughts of Karl Popper and Ibn Rushd. Employing a qualitative method through literature review and philosophical-historical analysis, the research delves into the epistemological frameworks of both thinkers. The findings reveal that Karl Popper criticizes conspiracy theories as pseudoscience lacking falsifiability, while Ibn Rushd promotes the reconciliation of reason and revelation as a path to harmonize science and religion. This article identifies that external factors—such as political interests, cultural narratives, and media influence—often catalyze the conflict rather than inherent contradictions between religion and science. The novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary approach combining Western and Islamic philosophical perspectives to address contemporary sociocultural challenges. The study suggests that rational education and philosophical dialogue should be prioritized in shaping policies that aim to reduce societal polarization and promote constructive engagement between religious and scientific communities.

*Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi persinggungan antara agama dan sains dalam perspektif teori konspirasi melalui pemikiran Karl Popper dan Ibnu Rusyd. Metodologi yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif berbasis studi pustaka, dengan analisis filosofis-historis terhadap kerangka epistemologi kedua tokoh tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Karl Popper mengkritik teori konspirasi sebagai bentuk pseudosains yang tidak dapat diuji falsifikasinya, sementara Ibnu Rusyd menawarkan pendekatan harmonis antara akal dan wahyu untuk menjembatani agama dan sains. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa konflik antara agama dan sains lebih banyak dipengaruhi oleh faktor eksternal seperti kepentingan politik, budaya, dan media, bukan oleh kontradiksi internal keduanya. Kebaruan dari penelitian ini terletak pada pendekatan interdisipliner yang menggabungkan filsafat Barat dan Islam dalam menjawab tantangan sosial-kultural kontemporer. Implikasinya, pendidikan rasional dan dialog filosofis perlu menjadi bagian dari kebijakan publik untuk mengurangi polarisasi dan membangun sinergi antara komunitas keagamaan dan ilmiah.*

## A. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between religion and science is one of the discourses that is always interesting to study, especially because both are often considered as two realms with different methods, goals, and authorities. Religion is a system of beliefs and teachings that governs the relationship between humans and God, other humans, and their environment. (Robertson, 2015). Religion is often seen as the guardian of moral and spiritual values, while science is considered a tool for understanding natural phenomena rationally and empirically. (Amrullah, 2022). However, these differences often become triggers for conflicts, both in the intellectual and social realms, which then give rise to various conspiracy theory narratives. According to the Pew Research Center (Shines & Shines, 2020), the number of people who perceive science as a challenge to religious authority has grown, especially in the wake of global issues such as climate change, artificial intelligence, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Simultaneously, conspiracy theories have surged worldwide.

Conspiracy theories are attempts to explain the main causes of significant social and political events and conditions by claiming the existence of secret plans carried out by two or more people in power. (Douglas dkk., 2019). Conspiracy theories in the context of religion and science usually arise from the tension that exists between the two. For example, there is a view that accuses science of being a secular tool deliberately designed to discredit religion (Alkaf, 2020). On the contrary, there are also accusations that religion is used to suppress the development of science in order to maintain certain doctrines. Narratives like this show that conspiracy theories often arise from misunderstanding or suspicion towards the goals and methods of others.

Moreover, it is important to highlight how conspiracy theories can influence public perception of religion and science. Conspiracy theories often exploit the uncertainty or lack of understanding within society regarding certain issues, whether they are scientific or theological in nature (Syifani & Saputra, 2024). For example, in the case of climate change, conspiracy narratives can arise from the belief that science has been manipulated by certain groups to support specific political agendas. Another example, an issue that gained widespread attention and caused a stir in the world a few years ago, is the Corona Virus. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the coronavirus is a virus that infects the respiratory system, but many conspiracy theories and rumors have emerged about the origin of the virus being man-made or part of a global agenda to control the population, even claiming that the virus is not

real. WHO Director-General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, stated that the world is not only facing an epidemic but also an infodemic. He emphasized that fake news spreads faster and more easily than the virus itself, and its impact is equally dangerous. According to him, misinformation causes confusion and increases fear, which ultimately hinders the response to the outbreak. He added, "Incorrect information about the coronavirus might be the most contagious thing of all." (Lubis, 2021). Similarly, in the case of religion, conspiracy theories can arise from the assumption that religious authorities deliberately cover up certain facts to maintain their power. This article will attempt to answer fundamental questions, such as: Are conspiracy theories more often used to exacerbate conflicts between religion and science, or do they potentially serve as tools for seeking harmony? What is the role of culture, politics, and media in shaping this narrative?

Next, this article seeks to delve deeper into how religion and science interact within the context of conspiracy theories. First, research by (Abdullah, 2020) with the title Dialoguing Religion and Modern Science Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic, discussing the relationship between religion and science according to Ian G. Barbour, which is classified into four patterns: Conflict, Independence, Dialogue, and Integration in the context of the recent pandemic. Second, there is research from (Faizin, 2017) which critically analyzes the application of the integration of religion and science in the *Tafsir Ilmi* of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs. Third, the study by Syifani and Saputra (Syifani & Saputra, 2024) explored theological dimensions in scientific knowledge from a faith-based perspective. These studies share a similar interest in the intersection of religion and science. However, the key difference lies in the analytical perspective. This research introduces conspiracy theory as a critical yet underexplored lens to assess how tensions between religion and science are formed and perceived in society.

Thus, the researchers in this discussion highlight the thoughts of Karl Popper, a Western philosopher, and Ibn Rushd, an Eastern philosopher, which are used as a foundation to explore key issues, including the relationship between religion, culture, and political power; the points of convergence and divergence between religion and science; as well as how public belief in religion and science can shape conspiracy theory narratives. With this approach, it is hoped that ways to understand and bridge the tension between religion and science can be found, while also identifying the roots of the emergence of conspiracy theories that accompany this relationship. Various

unproven theories often seep into social life, changing perspectives, and sometimes dividing communities (Alam, 2021). To avoid overgeneralization, this research limits its scope to the thoughts of Karl Popper and Ibn Rushd as representative philosophers from Western and Islamic traditions. Their ideas are analyzed in the context of conspiracy theory to examine how both thinkers might respond to the modern tension between religion and science. This research does not seek to generalize all conspiracy theories or theological systems but focuses on their philosophical dimensions and implications in public understanding.

By understanding these dimensions, we can see that the conflict between religion and science is not as simple as often portrayed. On the contrary, this conflict is often influenced by external factors, such as political interests, cultural pressures, or even the psychological dynamics of society. This study aims to provide a new perspective on the relationship between religion and science through the lens of conspiracy theories, with the hope of reducing tensions and fostering more constructive dialogue between the two.

## **B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology is a part of science that studies how the procedures for seeking truth work (Muhammad, 1996). This study adopts a qualitative research design using a library research method. The research aims to explore and analyze the philosophical thoughts of Karl Popper and Ibn Rushd in understanding the dynamics of religion, science, and conspiracy theories. The approach employed in this study is both philosophical and historical. The philosophical approach allows the researcher to examine the epistemological foundations of both thinkers, while the historical approach helps contextualize their ideas within the socio-political realities of their respective eras.

The primary method used is document analysis, which focuses on reviewing and interpreting written texts related to the research topic. The data in this study are derived from two main sources: primary sources include original texts and writings by Karl Popper and Ibn Rushd, while secondary sources consist of academic journals, books, and relevant scholarly literature published in the last decade. The research instruments are in the form of reading guides and thematic coding tables, which assist in extracting and categorizing philosophical concepts such as falsifiability, rationality, revelation, and harmony. The data collection technique involves identifying, selecting,

and systematically reviewing literature relevant to the relationship between religion and science through the lens of conspiracy theory.

The data analysis process follows a descriptive-analytical technique, where the data are described, compared, and critically analyzed based on thematic relevance. Concepts and arguments from the texts are grouped and interpreted in light of the theoretical framework of both thinkers. To ensure data credibility and validity, this study applies source triangulation by comparing philosophical insights from various independent references. In addition, peer debriefing and expert consultation are conducted to maintain interpretive accuracy and reduce subjective bias.

## C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Biography and Thoughts of Karl Popper & Ibn Rushd

Karl Popper (1902–1994) was an Austrian-British philosopher known as one of the main figures in the philosophy of science. Popper's thinking was greatly influenced by the geopolitical situation of his time, especially the rise of totalitarianism (Aviña Gutiérrez, 2023). In 1928, Popper obtained his Doctorate with a dissertation titled "Zur Methodenfrage der Denkpsychologie" (The Problem of Method in the Psychology of Thought). However, he was not satisfied with the results of his dissertation and decided to delve into the field of epistemology, which focuses on the development of scientific theory. His efforts in this field became more intensive after he became acquainted with logical positivism that was developing in the Vienna Circle. Nevertheless, Popper did not belong to that group, as he was one of the sharpest critics of the ideas promoted by the Vienna Circle (Komarudin, 2014).

One of his most famous contributions is the concept of falsification, which is the idea that a theory can only be called scientific if it can be tested and potentially falsified. In the context of conspiracy theories, Popper had a critical view. He considers conspiracy theories are often based on the assumption that all major events in the world are orchestrated by certain groups, whereas the reality is often more complex and involves many uncontrollable factors. According to Popper (K. R. Popper, 2019), conspiracy theories tend to be reductionist and cannot be scientifically verified because they lack a strong empirical basis. This approach reflects the view of science as a tool for approaching truth through continuous testing, not through absolute claims. Thus, conspiracy theories are often considered a form of pseudoscience that contradicts the principle of falsification.

Ibn Rushd's full name is Abu al-Walid Muhammad bin Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Rushd. He was born in Cordoba in the year 520 AH/1126 AD into a family that was very concerned with knowledge, especially in the fields of fiqh and law (Andersen, 2022). Furthermore, Ibn Rushd is known as one of the main figures in the tradition of Islamic philosophy and is often regarded as a link between Greek philosophy and modern Western thought. One of Ibn Rushd's main contributions is his effort to reconcile religious revelation with philosophy and science. In his famous work, *Tahafut al-Tahafut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence), he criticized Al-Ghazali's thought, which he considered too skeptical of philosophy (Yamani, 2020).

Ibn Rushd also developed the theory of the unity of intellect (akal) or monopsychism, which is related to the concept of universal knowledge. This concept states that there is a single universal intellect possessed by all humans, and through this intellect, they can access the same knowledge. This theory of the unity of intellect has interesting implications in the context of universal knowledge, where individual knowledge can become part of the universally accumulated knowledge over time (Gunawan, 2023). Therefore, Ibn Rushd argued that religion and science have different domains but complement each other. Religion provides moral and spiritual guidance, while science offers a rational understanding of the universe. He also emphasized the importance of human reason as a tool for understanding God's laws in this world. This view shows that Ibn Rushd saw harmony, not conflict, between religion and science.

## 2. Conspiracy Theories in the Perspective of Popper and Rusyd

Popper and Ibn Rushd have different approaches to conspiracy theories. Popper sees conspiracy theories as a form of unscientific thinking, often arising from fear or misunderstanding of the world's complexity. For Popper, conspiracy theories are an obstacle to the development of science because they disregard the principles of rationality and falsifiability. In his book titled *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (K. Popper & Gombrich, 2013), explaining that conspiracy theories often seek a "total explanation" for complex events, blaming certain groups without strong empirical evidence.

For example, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, a theory emerged that the virus was deliberately created by certain groups for economic or political gain. Popper would criticize this theory because of its unfalsifiable nature (it cannot be proven wrong) and its lack of basis in scientifically tested data. Relevance to Religion

and Science is Conspiracy theories in this field often position science as a conspirator against religious beliefs. Therefore, Popper would assert that science has no agenda other than seeking the truth through empirical methods.

On the contrary, Ibn Rushd may not directly discuss conspiracy theories, but his views on the harmony between religion and science can provide a framework for understanding conspiracy narratives that involve both. He would likely view conspiracy theories as a result of misunderstandings regarding the roles of religion and science in human life. Ibn Rushd's perspective emphasizes the importance of education and dialogue to reduce the tensions that often serve as the basis for the emergence of conspiracy theories. A contemporary example is the debate about evolution. In some religious circles, the theory of evolution is considered a conspiracy to undermine religious teachings about the creation of humanity. Ibn Rushd would argue that revelation and science do not contradict each other, but should be seen as two different ways of understanding the truth.

### **3. The Relationship between Religion, Culture, and Political Power**

Religion often becomes an inseparable element of culture, and in many societies, religion also plays an important role in politics and power. This relationship creates a complex dynamic, where religion is not only a source of spirituality but also a tool for legitimizing power. In the context of conspiracy theories, this dynamic is often transformed into a narrative that positions religion as a party attempting to maintain its hegemony over science or vice versa.

One classic example is the conflict between the Catholic Church and scientists during the Renaissance, where figures like Galileo Galilei faced resistance because their views were considered contrary to religious doctrine. (Azhar, 2017). In the narrative of conspiracy theories, such events are often interpreted as evidence of a "religious conspiracy" to suppress freedom of thought in order to maintain power. On the contrary, science is also not free from conspiracy accusations. For example, certain religious groups often claim that the theory of evolution or the concept of the Big Bang is an effort by science to "erase" God from the creation of the universe. This narrative creates deep tension between religion and science, which is often exacerbated by political and media factors.

In religious traditions, God is often believed to be the main orchestrator of the governance of the universe. This belief creates a narrative of the "divine conspiracy,"

where every event in the world is considered part of a divine plan. However, this view often clashes with the narrative of science, which emphasizes natural laws that can be explained rationally without the need for divine intervention. On the contrary, conspiracy theories that accuse science of being a human tool to control knowledge also frequently emerge. For example, the theory that climate change is a "hoax" created by global elites to control natural resources shows how conspiracy theories can be used to question the authority of science. This conflict shows that both religion and science can be both subjects and objects of conspiracy theories.

Thus, from the explanation above, the researchers found a convergence between religion and science in their goals (Karl Popper & Ibn Rushd) both seeking the truth, although the methods used are different. Ibn Rushd sees revelation and reason as two complementary aspects in understanding reality, while Popper emphasizes the importance of rationality in the pursuit of truth. However, the point of divergence arises in the realm of epistemology, where religion often relies on faith, while science prioritizes empirical evidence.

The next discussion is related to culture. Culture plays an important role in shaping the way society views the world, including beliefs in conspiracy theories. In this context, the mythological culture passed down through generations, such as taboos or prohibitions, often serves as the basis for conspiracy narratives that develop in society. Mythological cultures tend to use symbols, stories, and beliefs that are not always based on empirical facts but have significant normative power in social life. For example, in the culture of the Archipelago, there are prohibitions such as the taboo of leaving the house at Maghrib because it is believed that one will be disturbed by supernatural beings (Pratiwi & Vera, 2023). Although initially intended to regulate social behavior, this belief can transform into a conspiracy narrative when applied outside its context.

Popper would see mythological culture as a challenge to rationality and falsifiability. He would argue that conspiracy theories originating from mythological cultures are often difficult to test because they rely on beliefs that cannot be empirically proven. Popper might suggest a scientific educational approach to replace mythological narratives with more logical explanations. Whereas Ibn Rushd would argue that mythological culture is part of a tradition that needs to be reinterpreted in the light of reason and revelation. He would encourage the use of reason to understand the symbolic meaning of taboos without having to reject them outright. Ibn Rushd's

perspective emphasizes harmony between tradition and science, so that mythological beliefs can be approached philosophically without causing sharp conflicts.

Lastly, the conspiracy in power politics that often emerges in the contemporary era is the accusation of manipulating election results through technology, such as quick count methods, social media algorithms, or foreign interference. For example, in the 2016 United States presidential election (Bofa dkk., 2022), a narrative has emerged that Russian interference through social media propaganda and hacking of certain candidates' email servers is a planned effort to influence the election outcome. This narrative is supported by claims that there is a "global elite" or certain groups controlling technology to secure specific political agendas.

In the context of election manipulation, Popper would argue that such allegations must be scientifically tested with concrete evidence. If there is no independently verifiable evidence, the theory does not meet the criteria of falsifiability and merely becomes speculation that harms the democratic process. Popper would also remind us that placing too much trust in such narratives can lead to mass paranoia that undermines public trust in institutions. Furthermore, Ibn Rushd might also highlight the importance of education and political literacy in society. He would emphasize that excessive suspicion towards technology or foreign powers can be overcome by enhancing the public's understanding of the electoral system and the technology used. In this way, conspiracy narratives can be minimized.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

From this discussion, it was found that conspiracy theories in the relationship between religion and science often arise due to the public's misunderstanding of both domains. Karl Popper views conspiracy theories as an obstacle to the development of science due to their unfalsifiable nature and tendency to be reductionist. On the contrary, Ibn Rushd offers a harmonious approach by emphasizing the importance of using reason to understand revelation and scientific phenomena. The conflict between religion and science, often exacerbated by conspiracy theory narratives, is actually influenced by external factors such as culture, politics, and media. This article asserts that philosophical dialogue involving the principles of rationality and education can be a solution to reduce tension and build a deeper understanding of the roles of religion and science in human life. Harmony between the two can be achieved through an inclusive and truth-seeking approach.

The findings of this study imply that public policy should support rational education and encourage philosophical dialogue as strategic responses to the rise of conspiratorial narratives. Educational institutions and media platforms must be involved in fostering critical thinking, reducing misinformation, and bridging gaps between religious and scientific worldviews. Interdisciplinary approaches, especially those rooted in philosophy and cultural literacy, should be embedded in curricula and policymaking processes. Future research could explore how conspiracy theories influence religious communities' responses to scientific innovation in specific cultural or regional contexts. Additionally, empirical studies involving interviews or surveys could provide further insights into how individuals navigate the tension between religious belief and scientific information in the era of digital disinformation.

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