

The Critique of Atheistic Trends in the Higher Educational Institutions of Pakistan

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Abstract

Every liberal individual believes in humanism as a prime doctrine behind human existence on the planet. But realistically, humanism is a limited philosophical doctrine that sets humans above every religious belief. This philosophy premises on diversity and plurality, but fails to accept a man with a turban or a fundamentalist believer. An individual's self-interest reigns supreme in his life and he follows his own notions but fails to accept others practice their religion and follow their way of life. Similarly, secularism and individualism are orthodoxies to which millions of people deeply associate themselves and they extremely like to be more privileged and honored but hate religious fundamental practices of others. Many people feel proud to be labelled as open/liberal but call others the conservative. In every belief of a secular or liberal or humanist, lies contradiction because they are guided by some ill-constructed ideologies that belong to the west. In all these notions id est humanism, secularism, individualism and freewill, are vested the belief in power and value of individuality. But in fact, individuality is an ugly trap of conformity to the objective world that has resulted in ecological chaos. The basis of the crisis of human existence is individualism that centers upon self-interest. However, human life turns into garbage when it centers upon self-interest. This research study focuses on theories of humanism, secularism, individualism and freewill that work as a massage in developing agnosticism/skepticism among students in higher educational institutions of Pakistan. The promulgation of these doctrines has caused thousands of students turned to agnosticism or atheism in higher educational institutions of Pakistan due to lack of background knowledge of these concepts which increases their proneness to such sensationalized interpretations.

Introduction

The social environment in the higher educational institutions in Pakistan has been dramatically changing and so are the social relationships, families, norms of behavior and even social and religious values due to the widespread promulgation of the concepts of liberalism, conservatism, humanism and more softly logical reasoning, derived from the long historical processes of scientific revolution *id est* methodological individualism, empiricism and enlightenment. Methodological individualism has totally transformed individual behavior from the parlances of traditional cultural and religious values to a sophisticated, modern and more enlightened living standard. This transformation bred the germs of an unending quest for truth and reality in the so-called modern and enlightened individual. The enlightened individual stands to reason irrespective of trespassing the limits of sanctity and religious values while considering this power to reason as a legitimate right and authority vested in him since birth. This legitimacy of questioning gives birth to an irresistible habit in individuals particularly the youth studying in the higher educational institutions of Pakistan to criticize and question the existence of God, the existence of human and the purpose behind the creation of the universe, the transcendental power and reality etcetera. Two main reasons explain these tendencies among the youth in Pakistan. One reason is the embedded sensationalism in these arguments and the second reason is the attention-grabbing nature of this information (Faisal et al., 2021)¹.

The vexing effect of these concepts is very high. Huge attention is paid to such information by the young population in HEIs. Sensationalism or oversensationalism of the information spread through electronic media by the scholars or professors, either partially or completely converted to atheism, plays a role as a message to the youth to adopt and develop an irresistible habit of questioning and criticizing everything. These two factors have bred the germs of countering and scrutinizing the religious values and practices among the youth.

The most common concepts that influenced the thoughts of millions of people in Pakistan are the concepts of secularism, humanism, liberalism etcetera. The concept of secularization or secularism has quite negatively affected the thoughts of thousands of scholars associated with modern education. Primarily, the term secular or secularity is used opposite to religious or religiosity. One who considers himself secular means he is not religious or the one who considers himself religious means he is not secular. However, secularization in Pakistan is a process of dissociation from religious sects and affiliation with groups/clubs of high social status. This affiliation of a common man with clubs/groups of high social status is considered an honor or entitlement of high social privilege. But high social status is no more than a better living standard and adaptability to Western traits of clothing, food, relationships and communication. The perils of secularism are not that

catastrophic to believe the way students' adaptability to western traits of relationships is. This concept of moving away from religion and adapting to western style of relationship has been vastly eroding religious values and norms of behavior. One main reason for the huge inclination of the students towards the western style of relationship is the inherent sensationalism and thrill vested in the relationship of the opposite sexes. This sensationalism has a very strong coercive and compulsive force which every young man or woman defends and justifies by the argument of free will. They consider free will a universal and absolute term, more humanistic and nature centric. But the way free will is propagated by the atheists, has no concern with religion. In Islam, human existence on the planet must be disciplined and complied with the Quranic law. No individual on the planet is free from the bonds of morality, norms of behavior and law of the state. Similarly, human existence on the planet has a definite aim and the aim is to follow the ultimate law *id est* the absolute law – the Quranic law or the divine commandments.

The Interpretation of Free Will

Majority of the professors who are more inclined to atheism argue that free will is a universal and absolute phenomenon and human actions are entirely guided by the concept of free will – they are all free in their actions. This interpretation of free will is basically an illusion because it completely eradicates the difference between good and bad deeds, moral and immoral actions or the concept of reward and punishment. This interpretation of free will has poisoned the mind of thousands of students in higher educational institutions. Their proneness to such concepts has been a rudimentary cause to their inclination or diversion towards atheism. However, the entire physical science or scientific inquiry centers upon causality and this causality is universal. Every change has a cause and every scientific inquiry seeks to explore this cause. Suppose a researcher investigates to identify the cause of an infection and finally he concludes that this infection has no cause. This conclusion has no logic and seems ridiculous. Similarly, considering free will as complete independence or indeterminism is a scientific fallacy. In every scientific inquiry, cause and effect relationship is explored which means that absolute determinism is the foundation of every scientific inquiry (Bob Doyl, 2016)². Here the law of universal causality proves that human will is determined and it is not free. For example, $L = K(\sum X_i \dots\dots\dots X_n)$ where L is human life, K is determinant or the absolute constant and X_i to X_n are the sum of life events. Here the time from X_i to X_n is predetermined. X_i is the beginning of human life and X_n is the end of human life. The time from the beginning to the end is pre-defined and pre-determined but unknown. This shows that human will is not free rather than determined. However, life events between X_i and X_n reflect indeterminism or there is freedom of human will to exercise different activities of life or choose from the given options. For example, when we ask an individual to raise his right leg and he does so, but when he is

asked to raise his left as well and he fails to do that. It means that there are parameters where human will is free or indeterminated such as choosing a life partner, a right profession, a school to study in, diet to eat, clothes to wear etcetera but some life events are predetermined where human will is not free such as birth and death or the time to spend in this world or protect himself from a loss or damage etcetera. In an examination hall, a student has no authority to change the questions in the paper or extend the time of the examination paper but he has the option to leave the examination paper either blank or write something in it, he can attempt either of the given questions but his time is determined. Similarly, human will is partially determined and partially indeterminated. This theological conception of free will is compatible with the philosophy of determinism as well as indeterminism. Even the compatibilists believe that free will is compatible with determinism. Since, the God (*Allah*) has foreknowledge of every single event and he has the power to change it, however, fixed or determined will or life events are entirely dependent on God's will and they can never be changed because it is against the pattern of this world – or otherwise it could be a miracle. In other life events which are indeterminated, human will is free to choose from diverse options – good or bad, moral or immoral, ethical and unethical, legal or illegal etcetera in which humans are stood responsible for, and it is a test for the hereafter.

Secularism or Secularization

In Pakistan, every educated person considers himself a modern individual, more autonomous in his actions and belief. Modernism vested in him is basically derived from scientific education. The significance of scientific education in shaping the modern individual and society is far reaching. Since, scientific education is considered as a product of the western world, and it is believed that the progress which the western world has made in technological advancement and sophistication is because of the scientific revolution, therefore, every individual, group or state who distanced from scientific education is suffering. In addition, the modern individual is comparatively more inclined towards the western culture and norms (Janez, 2024)³. This argument is more valid and authentic which has been constantly haunting every individual studying in higher educational institutions and this perception has distanced them from their true belief. But this perception of modern education or dissociation from religiosity is developed among those students who are comparatively unaware of the Islamic history or the glorious past of the Muslim rulers who ruled the entire world for more than a thousand years and particularly the expansive contribution made by Muslim scholars to mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, sociology, history and philosophy. None of these scholars including Al-Khwarizmi, Alrazi, Ibni Khaldun, Ibne Sina, Ibni Rushd, Imam Ghazali, Shams Tabrez, Ibne Arabi etcetera were secular, nor were they taught modern education but their

contribution foreshadowed the thoughts of millions of western scholars for centuries. Even the entire Greek philosophy was influenced by the scholarly contribution of the Muslim world, where Plato himself admitted that he learned philosophy from the Priests of Egypt by spending ten years in Heliopolis. Similarly, Pythagoras also admitted that he learned mathematics from the Egyptian priests (Nathan Smith, 2022)⁴. Therefore, it was not secularism or dissociation from religiosity or religious norms and values which distinguished them in their disciplines rather they were staunch believers and strongly associated with their religion and followed religious duties whole-heartedly.

Many questions can be raised against secularism and these questions are comparatively more authentic but still the answers to these questions are vague. Firstly, is secularism completely a political or economic doctrine or does it inculcate both concepts? Secondly, why is people's belief evaluated through the lens of secularism and modernism? Thirdly, is modernism or modern society not the heritage of the tradition of religiosity? Fourthly, when secularism is a socio-political or politico-economic project then why it targets religion? The foundation of these and certain other arguments is the progression of cultures through the history of civilizations. It is a fact that certain cultures progress very fast while others do not, but it does not mean that the rudimentary cause of collapse is vested in religiosity or belief (Shulman, 2006)⁵.

Previously, many names of Muslim philosophers were changed to disguise their identity such as Ibni Sina was known as *Avicenna* and Ibni Rushd as *Averroes* (Nathan Smith, 2022)⁶ but merely changing or translating names neither wiped out their work nor their names. But one impact of this subversion is very dominant on students of higher education and that is the belief in Western education – the premises of which is secularism. Millions have been obsessed with the doctrine of secularism with a positive connotation. They believe that progress in international development and technological change can never be possible without dissociation from religiosity and this is the primary step in contaminating students minds – agnosticism. This process has cheapened the concerns for religion and valued secular standards and ideas. One embedded connotation of secularism is dislike or hatred of traditional and especially religious culture and practices that ultimately breed irreligiosity in students (Stark and Bainbridge, 2023)⁷. Moreover, their constant detachment from religion and hatred to religious practices results in provoking feelings of being secular and more privileged and distinguished. Associating with this class has been a symbol of hegemony and pride for students and teachers alike, however, these venomous feelings are dangerously fatal for belief which ultimately results in disbelief.

Propagation of Humanism

One of the rudimentary causes of agnosticism or skepticism that vastly

spreads among the students of higher education is the propagation of humanism. The slogan of putting human dignity, freedom and potentiality above all interests, has obsessed millions of students to believe in humanism. Here the notions of dignity, value and subjectivity reign supreme. These notions have been highly attractive and work like a massage in provoking feelings of agnosticism or skepticism. Though, humanism is neither a religion nor a belief and it is derived from the Latin word *humanitas* which means civilization or values related to liberal education. This concept emerged at the time of great renaissance with the aim of promoting poetry, literature and moral philosophy. Among the secular humanists, it is *eupraxophy* which means wise action (Kurtz, 2000)⁸. Whatever connotations this concept had but it was more a philosophical and cultural movement that placed humans at the center of everything. This concept has deep roots in western thoughts which focus on human dignity, freedom and subjectivity, premised on reason, rationality and logic. This concept reflects two perspectives; one is atheistic, and the other one is religious, but the common perspective is atheistic not religious. Millions of people across the globe have been following this doctrine because they believe that it is a universal concept. This universality has been very common and attractive especially among the educated class of society. However, the doctrine of humanism is literally a fixed category of identity in which reason and compassion are the fundamental tags of showcasing western civilization. The true aim of which is to dissociate people from divine oriented beliefs and entangle them in a more secular and human oriented doctrine.

Humanism is commonly perceived as a universal narrative that guides humans towards a more diverse understanding of humanity. Diversity and plurality are the two fundamental apparatuses of this narrative with the propagation of developing a universal standard of human identity that transcends every narrow conception. Similarly, one of the primary objectives of this universal project is to prepare people to embody traits of diversity and plurality beyond every societal and religious restriction/norm. This process of indoctrination has been contaminating minds with the poison of diversity and plurality but realistically humanism itself is a narrow concept. Narrow in a sense that it undermines and desecrates peoples' beliefs and does not accept religious identity. It values reason and rationality more than religious belief and norms. While religious belief is the primary and ultimate objective behind human existence on the planet. This belief signifies the relationship between humans and their creator. Religious belief or spiritualism is the fundamental right of every individual, and its rejection is no less than infringement upon people's rights. But how can diversity entail infringement? Does diversity not mean absorbing and esteeming all humans beyond ethnic, religious, geographical and racial boundaries? Here diversity and plurality are the ideals of humanists but realistically these sugar-coated concepts never exist.

The project of humanism puts humans above everything, while measuring human dignity with material possession. But in fact, man by nature is greedy and this greed is infinite which can never be satiated with material possession. In this regard, human dignity is an immeasurable concept because it is individual-centric and varies from individual to individual. For one person dignity is vested in his respect or self-esteem, for others it is reflected in more possession of land, power, authority, resources etcetera. Hence, human dignity is an indeterministic concept that can never be measured with power, nor with possession of resources or authority. It can never be quantified by means of materialistic possession. Human dignity, as propagated by humanists, is associated with bodily needs and particularly more rights advocating but neither protection of human rights nor possession of resources guarantee human dignity or satisfaction. Since, dignity is a man-made concept, therefore, it can never be absolute rather relative and every relative concept results in differentiation. Every relative concept or variable passes through different stages of boom and contraction. While measuring human dignity with material possession, it means that it varies with variation in possession of wealth or resources. One is not dignified by possessing more wealth by illegal means, rather his dignity declines in the eyes of people. The latency of this humanistic perspective is evident in the form of huge social and economic inequality, oppressive relationships and unending human conflicts. Realistically, human dignity, freedom and potentiality are the tools of concealment of historical oppressive and imperialistic division of the global world at the hands of the west but masquerade as the prime standard of human existence.

Liberal Individualism

Liberalism or liberal individualism is used as an identity by majority of the students studying in the higher educational institutions of Pakistan. Calling oneself a liberal means he/she is doing justice and harmless to others. One is comparatively more privileged when known with the label of "liberal". A liberal means more open, fascinating and tolerable. Accepting everything related to social relationships, belief and cultural traits. The logic behind this conception of liberalism or openness is to rethink one's identity, belief, social relationship, cultural traits and association as human beings to move forward the way the western people progressed. It means that progression, civility and development are vested in liberalism or liberal individualism. This logic of progression behind liberalism has been constantly haunting millions of students in the higher educational institutions of Pakistan. But does liberalism really mean to rethink one's identity or belief to progress? Does progression in the modern world require rethinking of one's identity or belief? Is western progression of modernization and development transcultural? Similarly, liberalism or liberal individualism and its role in eroding individuals' identity and belief is quite venomous.

Conception of the self in the modern world is comparatively more elevated when it is determined by reason (Shyamalima, 2019)⁹. Human reason reigns supreme in constructing the self in the contemporary world that is more disembodied and dissociated. However, liberation of the self or its autonomy from collective cause or social or legal bonds is merely an illusion because human existence premises on group life and group life requires common law to regulate individual behavior to maintain order and ensure common benefit. To ensure common benefit, the primary objective must be social or collective life while individual life must be secondary, because individual life is the derivative of the social process. But contrary to this common benefit, the doctrine of liberalism or liberal individualism emphasizes individual freedom with the aim of unleashing human potential and prioritizes individual life over social life. The state is set aside while individual autonomy and freedom is set as the epicenter of the universe. Individuals are to be sovereign in their behavior and actions. However, the belief of individual sovereignty erodes the roots of human existence on the planet, because the purpose behind human existence does not emerge from within rather from the social world. Every individual is a social actor and restrained by social laws. Nobody is exempted from the law rather everyone is subject to comply with the law and obey the rules and accept the norms of behavior and value what he believes in.

The concept of liberalism presented by Kant, Nietzsche, John Lock and Hume, influenced thoughts of many philosophers, however, their interpretation of liberalism or liberal individualism is quite diverse. John Lock's concept of the pre-political existence of individual rights foreshadowed thoughts of many scholars because it is the foundation that considers individual rights above the affairs/interference of the state. Since, individualism values individual and ensuring its liberty, therefore, no external force *id est* state or agency can impose anything that hampers this liberty. Here, an individual is the epicenter of society, and its interests are valued and placed above all political, social and religious constraints. The fundamental aim of this liberty is to foster individuals reach their potentiality. The premises of this potentiality is the establishment of an unrestrained and unleashed self. An autonomous self, independent of all constraints, is considered comparatively a better self in which self-directive power of the individual reigns supreme and individual's interests stand above everything. But can self-directive power of the individual comply with and enable social order that promotes collective benefit? Of course not, because when an individual rides on the intrinsic necessity for liberty and autonomy, then it struggles for the abolishment of everything that is contingent to this autonomy and protects everything that supports this intrinsic necessity, irrespective of all religious, cultural or political norms and sanctity. Similarly, Kant's interpretation of liberty means the removal of immaturity from human actions and this naivety could be removed by the process of enlightenment.

An enlightened individual is comparatively a better moral man, more knowledgeable and rational. Kant's model of morality is based on enlightenment and rationality in which freedom is man's moral right (Jackson, 2007)¹⁰. But this freedom is to increase oneself in knowledge and freely express himself while participating in all social and political affairs. John Stewart Mill's pleasure and pain principle focuses more on the economic well-being of people, however, his concept of happiness for the greater number of people can only be achieved by ensuring individual freedom. An unrestrained individual can guarantee greater happiness to a greater number of people. Mill's individual is comparatively a rational and moral individual, and this morality and rationality is natural. It means that every individual is a moral individual, and this morality is guided by nature or an invisible hand. Mill's concept of freedom is not only political and economic but also from the social customs and traditional beliefs. Removing every traditional belief, custom and rituals from individual life is the true freedom that would contribute more to human happiness. Similarly, Nietzsche argued that traditional customs and beliefs declined individual's virtues. Associating with traditional beliefs and customs caused greater harm to human values. The cast and class systems were the output of traditional social practices that resulted in the destruction of European society. Nietzsche believed in the self-directive power of the individual as the ultimate justification of his actions. Individual judgement reigns supreme in his actions and every single action of the individual is justified by his self-directive power. At the center of human behavior lies human reason and his self-directive power stands above all. That is what Nietzsche called the essence of individual freedom (Shyamalima, 2019)¹¹.

Contrary to the philosophy of individual freedom, individual behavior, when unrestrained by law, results in chaos and confusion. By nature, humans are greedy and the lust for power is dominant in every human irrespective of his morality or instinctive drive. The power to dominate others is an instinctive drive that never allows moral traits breed in individual unless he is restrained by an external power. In an unrestrained individual, self-directive power always preserves the "self" and that is biologically embedded and instinctive. Moreover, John Lock, Kant, Hume and Nietzsche all focus on individual freedom from different perspectives but common among them is materialistic conception of the self in which definition of the self emerges from within the self. Individuals are sovereign and their sovereignty transcends every legal, social, political and religious boundary. This conception of individuality is completely unnatural, and it vanishes the very purpose of human existence on the planet. What we call a "human" is basically the combination of body and soul. Fulfilling bodily needs does not guarantee the contentment of the soul or spiritual healing, because spiritual healing takes place through a metaphysical connection associated with human memory and imagination not with the five senses of the body. Liberalism or liberal individualism as depicted in philosophical

dominion is literally an illusion because the conception of the self is completely an abstract and disembodied consciousness. Human consciousness is embodied in five bodily senses and two senses associated with soul. Focusing on one while neglecting the other is no less than an illusion or what makes human life meaningless. In addition, the true aim of human existence turns into garbage when it centers upon self-interest. Self-interest erodes every single identity by acknowledging one's own idea. Self-interest confines individual into isolation but humans are completely worthless in isolation so is their purpose of life unless they are connected in relationship with others. It means that the doctrine of liberal individualism ends in vain with all the characteristics of modernism, rationality and reason.

Since, the undergoing discussion is about the connotations derived by the young people from the doctrine of liberalism in the higher educational institutions in Pakistan, therefore, we raise few simple questions to every liberal or person associating himself/herself with liberalism. Firstly, is it not meaningless that a person derives his own meaning from life by pursuing his own notions? Secondly, does the purpose of life not turn into garbage when it centers upon self-interest? Thirdly, is escapism not the base of individuality or liberal individualism in the contemporary world? Of course, the substitute for liberalism is escapism when the "self" roams around what pleases and avoids what pains, and one keeps on pretends to be open to every notion of life. Idealistically, to be liberal means to be open to everything but realistically it is tantamount to conservatism or narrowness when one rejects religious and cultural norms and values of human relationships and rides on his own notions of life where self-interest stands above all.

Conclusion

Since, the philosophical paradigms of humanism and liberalism are socio-political, but the main target behind their promulgation is religion, therefore, before we associate ourselves with any of these philosophical paradigms, we must know the historical legacy of their emergence. Similarly, secularism was solely a political movement, but it was constantly indoctrinated into people's mind as a religious evolutionary process, more adaptable to modernism and cultural diversity and plurality. This concept negatively affected millions of people and now it is considered a social privilege to be labelled secular. The concept of freewill is juxtaposed as freedom from all socio-cultural, religious and political restraints. But realistically it is an illusion because when human behavior centers upon self-interest and freedom, it loses its purpose in life.

Thousands of students in higher educational institutions have been constantly haunted by the doctrines of humanism, secularism and liberal individualism. They are highly inclined to these concepts because of the inherent sensationalism or attractiveness in their presentation. The promulgation of these concepts in higher educational institutions has been

contributing to the development of agnosticism among the students' community. One main reason that caused huge damage to their belief is vulnerability or lack of background knowledge of students about the philosophical dominion of these doctrines. The philosophical dominion of neither liberalism nor humanism is religiosity, however, their promulgation mainly targets religious belief. Similarly, the philosophical territory of secularism is politico-economic stability and prosperity not the culmination of religious belief, but it is used as a symbol of social privilege and honor and a weapon against religious affiliation. But is modernism not the heritage of the tradition of religiosity? Why are peoples' beliefs evaluated through the lens of secularism and modernism? Many people believe in liberalism, and they feel proud to be labeled as liberal/open but fail to accept a man with a turban. Others call themselves humanists and they believe in plurality and diversity but hate religious practices. But is it not meaningless that a person derives his own meaning from life by pursuing his own notions? Does the purpose of life not turn into garbage when it centers upon self-interest? Is escapism not the base of individuality or liberal individualism in the contemporary world? One's self-interest reigns supreme in all affairs and he follows his own notions of life, while believing in diversity and plurality but deliberately rejects the religious and cultural norms of human relationships. Why is a written manual prepared for every manufactured car or a machine? Why is a horse reined, a dog leashed and a bull ringed? Simply, to make them meet the purpose behind their existence. Similarly, there is a manual for all humans to follow, to meet the purpose of their life and this manual is the divine book consisting of divine commandments to be followed by all humans irrespective of their gender, creed, color or geography. The glorious "Quran" is a universal truth and the last of all revelations that culminates all previous historical scripts. The true aim behind human existence on the planet is to follow the commandments of the Lord and to spend life the way the Lord wants.



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