Positivism According to Islamic Perspective
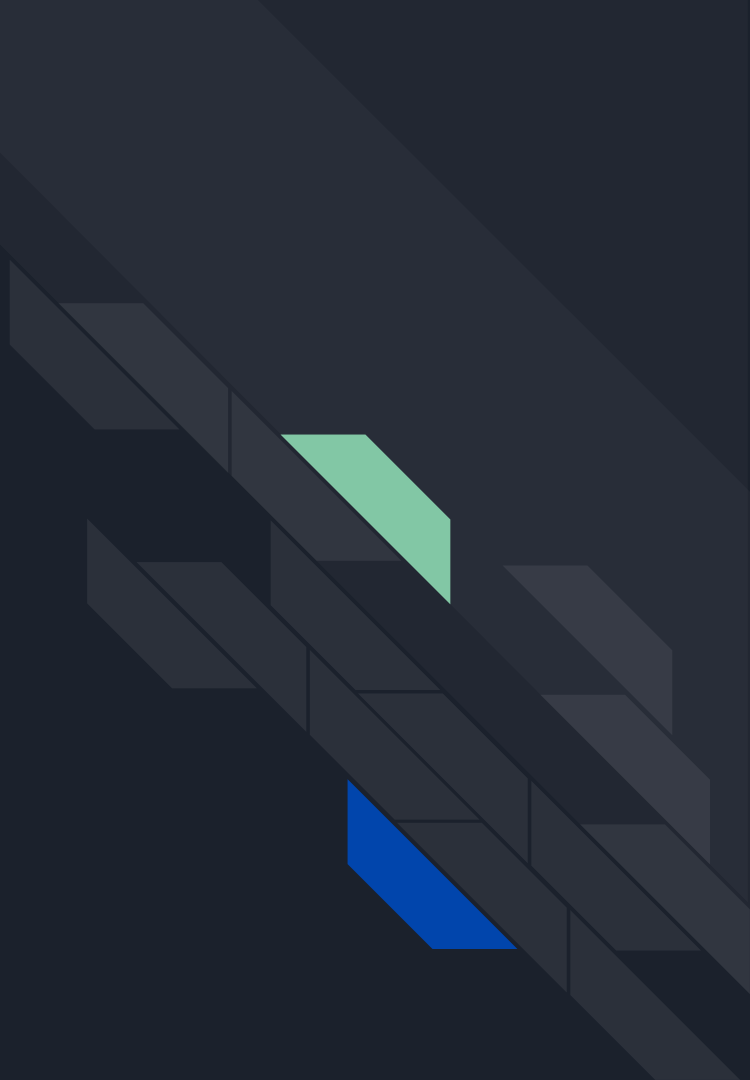
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Introduction

Founded by: Auguste Comte in the 19th century

Definition : Positivism is a philosophical (aproach) system recognizing only that which can be scientifically verified or which is capable of logical or mathematical proof, and therefore rejecting metaphysics and theism

"If you can't measure it, test it, or observe it—it doesn't count as real knowledge."

Key Principles of Positivism

Empiricism : Knowledge must come from sensory experience and observation.

Scientific Method : All inquiry should follow the methods of the natural sciences—hypothesis, testing, and verification

Rejection of Metaphysics : Concepts that cannot be observed or tested (like the supernatural or abstract metaphysical claims) are considered meaningless in this framework.

Unity of Science : All sciences, from physics to sociology, should share a common methodology

Historical Development of Positivism

▶ **Late 18th Century Origins:** Emerged in Europe from natural sciences (physics, chemistry, mathematics). Advocated for observable, measurable knowledge; rejected speculati

▶ **Expansion to Human Sciences:** Extended to geography, philosophy, and other human disciplines.

▶ Scientific Worldview Promoted empirical methods as the only valid way of knowing.

▶ **Impact on Religion in the West** especially post-biblical criticism within Christianity.

▶ **Impact on Islamic Discourse:** Western scholars began using positivist methods to study Islamic thoughts.

Positivism figures
Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825)

- French thinker; early positivist - later focused on social reform.
- Regarded as a founder of modern industrial society theory.

Positivism figures
Auguste Comte (1798–1857)

- French philosopher, founder of positivism and sociology.

- Worked closely with Saint-Simon,

- Authored two major works:

- Course of Positive Philosophy (1830–1842)

- System of Positive Polity (1851–1854)

The Impact of Positivism

Modern State Formation

- Influenced the **decline of absolute monarchies** in 18th–20th Europe.
- Promoted **rational governance, political liberalism, and separation of powers**, including secularism

Rise of the Vienna Circle (1920s)

- Group of scholars **emphasizing empirical & theoretical verification.**
- Reinforced **rejection** of **metaphysics and ethics** in favor of pure science.

Islam and Its Perspective on Positivism (Part 1)

- Positivism **limits reality to empirical facts**, ignoring **metaphysical and spiritual dimensions**.
- **Islamic worldview (تصور) sees حقيقة**(ultimate reality) as both physical and metaphysical
- Comte's "three stages" model of knowledge **(theological → metaphysical → positive) does not fit Islamic history**
- **Secularization**, a by-product of positivist thought, **contradicts** Islam's unity of life **(dunya and ākhirah).**

Islam and Its Perspective on Positivism (Part 2)

1. **Multiple dimensions:** Islam recognizes scientific, spiritual, and metaphysical aspects of nature.

2. **Ethical framework:** Islam upholds its own values and principles (Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿah) rather than purely materialist or positivist interpretations.

3. Through **Qurʾān and Sunnah** affirms both **physical reality and the unseen**, **rejecting a purely empirical worldview.**

"Qur'anic view of Positivism"

ٱلَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ ٱللَّهَ قِيَٰمًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِى خَلْقِ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتِ وَٱلْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هَٰذَا بَٰطِلًا سُبْحَٰنَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ ٱلنَّارِ

[Ali Imran (3) verse : 191]

"Those who remember Allah... and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth..."

🔍 This verse describe Islamic "empiricism with transcendence"

Conclusion

Positivism, rooted in Western secular thought, cannot coherently interpret Islamic doctrines. While useful in natural sciences, it is methodologically incompatible with Islam's revelation-based worldview.

References

Article:
Positivism According to
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*(Muhammad Taqiyuddin & Fitra awalia
Rahmawati
University of Darussalam Gontor)*

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For Further Reading: Books

Islamic Thought: An Approach to Reform	Taha Jabir Al-Alwani
The Positive Philosophy	Auguste Comte
Islam and the Secular State	Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im
The Islamization of Knowledge	Ismail Raji al-Faruqi
Science and Civilization in Islam	Seyyed Hossein Nasr
Risalah untuk Kaum Muslimin	Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas

For Further Reading: Article

Auguste Comte's Positivism and Its Implications for Islamic Education	Link
Islamic Positivism and Scientific Truth	Link
Positivism and Tradition in an Islamic Perspective	Link
Islam in Ziya Gökalp's Positivist Thought	Link
Positivism According to Islamic Perspective	Link