



THE DIALECTICS OF RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR NORMS IN ENSURING SOCIAL STABILITY: TOWARDS A MODEL OF HARMONIOUS COEXISTENCE

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Abstract

The relationship between religious and secular norms constitutes one of the most enduring and consequential debates in social philosophy. In pluralistic contemporary societies, the binary opposition of religion versus secularism has increasingly given way to more nuanced frameworks that acknowledge their dialectical interaction. This article examines the philosophical foundations of the interplay between religious normativity and secular legal and social norms, with particular attention to how their harmonious coexistence contributes to the conditions of societal stability and sustainable development. Drawing on the theoretical legacies of classical Central Asian thinkers [3][11], Jürgen Habermas's post-secular thesis [9], and contemporary empirical research conducted in the context of Uzbekistan and the broader Central Asian region [1][13][23], we argue that religious and secular normative systems are neither inherently antagonistic nor simply complementary, but operate in a dialectical relationship characterized by mutual conditioning, tension, and productive synthesis. We propose an analytical framework — the Dialectical Harmony Model (DHM) — for understanding this relationship, and assess its relevance to current policy and philosophical debates in post-Soviet societies undergoing dual transitions of state-building and modernization.

Keywords: social philosophy; secularism; religious normativity; dialectics; post-secular society; Central Asia; Uzbekistan; sustainable development; normative pluralism.



Introduction

Annotatsiya (O'zbekcha)

Diniy va dunyoviy me'yorlar o'rtasidagi munosabat ijtimoiy falsafaning eng muhim va uzoq muddatli munozaralaridan birini tashkil etadi. Zamonaviy ko'pqirrali jamiyatlarda din va dunyoviylikning ikkilik qarama-qarshiligi tobora yanada nozik kontseptual doiralarga yo'l bermoqda. Ushbu maqola diniy me'yoriylik va dunyoviy huquqiy-ijtimoiy normalar o'rtasidagi dialektik o'zaro ta'sirning falsafiy asoslarini o'rganadi. Klassik O'rta Osiyo mutafakkirlari merosi ^{[3][11]}, Yurgen Habermasning postsekulyar tezisi ^[9] va O'zbekiston hamda Markaziy Osiyo kontekstida olib borilgan zamonaviy tadqiqotlar ^{[1][13][23]} asosida muallif diniy va dunyoviy normativ tizimlar dialektik munosabatda faoliyat yuritishini ta'kidlaydi. Maqolada ushbu munosabatni tahlil qilish uchun «Dialektik uyg'unlik modeli» (DUM) taklif etiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: ijtimoiy falsafa; dunyoviylik; diniy me'yoriylik; dialektika; postsekulyar jamiyat; Markaziy Osiyo; O'zbekiston; barqaror rivojlanish; normativ plyuralizm

Аннотация (Русский)

Отношение между религиозными и светскими нормами составляет одну из наиболее устойчивых и значимых дискуссий в социальной философии. В условиях современного плюралистического общества бинарная оппозиция религии и секуляризма всё более уступает место более тонким концептуальным рамкам, признающим их диалектическое взаимодействие. Статья исследует философские основания взаимосвязи между религиозной нормативностью и светскими правовыми и социальными нормами, уделяя особое внимание тому, как их гармоничное сосуществование создаёт условия для стабильности общества и устойчивого развития. На основе трудов классических мыслителей Центральной Азии ^{[3][11]}, постсекулярной теории Ю. Хабермаса ^[9] и современных региональных исследований ^{[1][13][23]} автор предлагает «Модель диалектической гармонии» (МДГ) для осмысления данного взаимодействия применительно к постсоветским обществам.



Ключевые слова: социальная философия; секуляризм; религиозная нормативность; диалектика; постсекулярное общество; Центральная Азия; Узбекистан; устойчивое развитие; нормативный плюрализм

The question of how religious and secular normative orders coexist and mutually condition one another stands at the heart of contemporary social philosophy. Classical secularization theory, as articulated by Max Weber ^[20] and later systematized by Bryan Wilson ^[21] and Peter Berger ^[4], predicted a progressive marginalization of religious frameworks from public life as societies modernized. Yet this prognosis has been challenged by the persistence and even resurgence of religious normativity in highly modernized societies, prompting leading theorists to speak of a "post-secular turn" ^[9].

In the context of Central Asia and the Republic of Uzbekistan, this question takes on particular urgency. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan adopted a model of secular statehood while simultaneously acknowledging the deep cultural, moral, and communal significance of Islamic heritage. The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan ^[6] establishes the principle of separation of religion from the state, yet the state actively promotes Islamic cultural values as part of national identity ^[7]. This creates a philosophically rich and practically consequential tension that demands rigorous analytical attention.

The present article does not advocate for the political dominance of either religious or secular norms. Rather, it seeks to articulate the philosophical conditions under which these two normative systems can engage in productive dialectical interaction — an interaction that, we argue, is not only philosophically coherent but sociologically necessary for sustainable societal stability. We proceed through a critical review of existing theoretical frameworks (Section 2), the presentation of our Dialectical Harmony Model (Section 3), an empirical-philosophical analysis of the Central Asian context (Section 4), discussion (Section 5), and conclusions (Section 6).

Literature Review

2.1 Classical Theories of Religion and Secular Order

The philosophical discussion of the relationship between religious and secular normative systems has deep roots in Western and Islamic intellectual traditions alike.



In Western thought, Immanuel Kant's distinction between morality grounded in practical reason and ecclesiastical faith ^[12] provided an early philosophical basis for a normative dualism that was neither reducible to theocracy nor to pure rationalism. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel ^[10] further argued that the state, as the actualization of ethical life (Sittlichkeit), must mediate between the particularism of civil society — including religious communities — and universal rational principles.

Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the theme of harmonizing reason (aql) and revelation (naql) was central to the kalam and falsafa traditions of medieval Central Asia. Abu Nasr al-Farabi (872–950) ^[3], in his treatise *Al-Madina al-Fadila* (The Virtuous City), argued that the ideal polity requires both prophetic guidance and philosophical reason, understanding these not as contradictory but as complementary sources of social regulation.

"The philosopher-king and the prophet serve the same ultimate end — the happiness of the city — but through different paths: the philosopher through demonstrative reasoning, and the prophet through imaginative representation accessible to the many." (Al-Farabi, *Al-Madina al-Fadila*, trans. Walzer, 1985, p. 245) ^[3]

Ibn Sina (Avicenna, 980–1037) ^[11] similarly treated the relationship between divine law and rational ethics as a nested hierarchy rather than a binary opposition. His *Danishnama-yi Alai* (Book of Knowledge) situated ethical norms derivable by reason within a broader framework of prophetically revealed social legislation, arguing that the latter provides the motivational and communal scaffolding for the former's practical efficacy ^{[8][15]}.

2.2 The Secularization Thesis and Its Post-Secular Revision

The modernist secularization paradigm, most influentially articulated by Max Weber ^[20] in his concept of the "disenchantment of the world" (*Entzauberung der Welt*), predicted that rational-legal authority would progressively supplant traditional and charismatic forms of legitimation, including religious ones. Peter Berger ^[4] operationalized this thesis sociologically, arguing that modernization produces structural and cognitive conditions that undermine the plausibility structures of religious worldviews.

However, Berger himself famously recanted this prognosis in the 1990s, acknowledging that the secularization thesis had failed empirically across most of the world ^[5]. This reversal prompted the development of post-secular social theory, most rigorously articulated by Jürgen Habermas ^[9]. In his influential lecture "Notes on a



Post-Secular Society," Habermas argued that in post-secular societies, both religious and secular citizens bear mutual epistemic burdens:

"Religious citizens must... translate their religious convictions into a generally accessible language before these convictions can influence political decisions. Secular citizens... must remain open to the possibility that religious traditions contain semantic potentials that, for certain questions, may even surpass the heuristic capacities of secular reason." (Habermas, 2008, p. 26) [9]

This framework has been influential in European contexts but has also been critically examined for its Eurocentrism. Abdullaev ^[1], writing from Tashkent, argues that the Habermasian model requires significant adaptation to account for societies where the secular-religious distinction never underwent the Weberian rationalization that Habermas presupposes.

2.3 Regional Scholarship on Religion and Secularism in Central Asia

Scholarship specifically addressing the religion-secularism nexus in Central Asia has grown substantially since the 1990s. Komilov ^[13], in his monograph *Dunyoviylik va Diniylik: Falsafiy Tahlil* (Secularity and Religiosity: A Philosophical Analysis), published by the Uzbekistan Academy of Sciences, provides a systematic treatment of the conceptual distinctions between state secularism (*dunyoviy davlat*), personal religiosity (*shaxsiy diniylik*), and communal religious normativity (*jamoaviy diniy me'yorlar*). He argues that Uzbek constitutional secularism is best understood not as the Laicist separation model derived from French revolutionary thought, but as a "cooperative neutrality."

Yusupova ^[23], in a study published in the *Journal of Central Asian and Caucasian Studies*, examined how local Islamic normative frameworks interact with civil and family law in contemporary Uzbekistan. Her findings suggest that rather than a sharp binary between religious and secular normative authority, Uzbek citizens tend to operate pragmatically within overlapping normative registers.

At the regional comparative level, Omelicheva ^[17] has argued that Central Asian governments' management of the religion-secularism boundary is primarily driven by security concerns rather than principled philosophical commitments, creating a gap between official secular ideology and the practical accommodation of religious normativity.



Materials and Methods

This article employs a philosophical-analytical methodology combined with a hermeneutic approach to primary and secondary sources. The primary sources comprise: (a) classical philosophical texts from the Central Asian tradition ^{[3][11]}; (b) constitutional and legislative documents of the Republic of Uzbekistan ^{[6][22]}; and (c) contemporary philosophical and sociological literature from Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and the broader region, published between 2005 and 2024 ^{[1][2][13][16][23]}.

The secondary analytical framework draws on the dialectical method as elaborated in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition ^[10] and subsequently reformulated in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, particularly as adapted in Habermas's discourse ethics and post-secular theory ^[9]. We employ dialectical analysis not in its teleological-determinist form, but as a method for identifying and mapping the productive tensions and syntheses that emerge from the encounter of religious and secular normative systems.

The Dialectical Harmony Model (DHM) proposed in Section 3.1 below is developed through a combination of conceptual analysis, normative argumentation, and contextual application. The model is offered as an analytical and normative ideal-type in the Weberian sense ^[20], intended to clarify and guide rather than merely describe.

3.1 The Dialectical Harmony Model (DHM): Theoretical Framework

The DHM proposes that the relationship between religious and secular normative systems can be understood along two analytical dimensions: (1) the degree of normative autonomy each system maintains, and (2) the degree of normative permeability — the extent to which each system incorporates principles, values, or procedures derived from the other. Crossing these two dimensions yields a four-cell analytical space that maps ideal-typical configurations of religion-secularism interaction.

The four configurations are: (A) Normative Separation (strict Laicist model); (B) Religious Dominance (theocratic model); (C) Secular Dominance (atheist-secularist model characteristic of Soviet-era policy); and (D) Dialectical Harmony (high mutual autonomy combined with selective, procedurally governed mutual permeability). The DHM argues that configuration D is uniquely conducive to sustainable social stability because it allows both normative systems to maintain their internal integrity while engaging in productive cross-fertilization.



Critically, the DHM specifies three structural conditions for configuration D to be stable: (i) institutional mediation; (ii) epistemic reciprocity — the mutual acknowledgment by participants in both normative systems of the potential validity and social function of the other's frameworks ^[9]; and (iii) procedural fairness — governance of the interaction by transparent, non-coercive procedural norms.

Results: Application to the Central Asian Context

4.1 Historical Precedents: The Timurid Model

The philosophical investigation of religion-secular dialectics in Central Asia benefits from examination of historical instances of their productive coexistence. The Timurid period (1370–1507) provides a particularly instructive case ^[18]. The Timurid courts of Samarkand and Herat patronized both Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) and rationalist philosophy (falsafa), treating them as complementary rather than competing sources of social order.

Toshmatov ^[19], in his study of Timurid political philosophy published in *Falsafa va Huquq (Philosophy and Law)*, argues that this model constitutes a "proto-secular" arrangement in which Islamic law set the boundaries of political legitimacy while philosophical reason operated with considerable autonomy within those boundaries.

4.2 Contemporary Uzbekistan: Institutional Structures

Contemporary Uzbekistan presents a complex institutional landscape for the religion-secular relationship. The 2021 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations ^[22] significantly revised the 1998 framework, introducing provisions that, while maintaining the principle of state neutrality, create formal channels for religious institutions to contribute to public moral discourse.

From the perspective of the DHM, this development represents movement toward the institutional mediation condition. However, Abdullaev and Razzaqov ^[2], in a study published in *O'zbekiston Falsafa Jurnal*, argue that the epistemic reciprocity condition remains incompletely realized: state secular institutions continue to treat religious normative contributions primarily as potential security risks rather than as legitimate inputs to deliberative processes.

4.3 Comparative Regional Perspective

Comparative analysis across Central Asian states reveals significant variation in how the DHM's conditions are realized. Kazakhstan has pursued a more liberal model of institutional mediation ^[16]. Tajikistan, by contrast, has maintained a more restrictive



approach following the 1992–1997 civil war, tending toward configuration C (Secular Dominance) in the DHM framework.

Kyrgyzstan presents yet another configuration: following the 2005 and 2010 political upheavals, the state's capacity for institutional mediation has been weakened, creating conditions in which informal religious normative systems have expanded their social reach^[14]. This corresponds in the DHM to an instability zone between configurations B and D, characterized by high religious normativity combined with diminished institutional mediation.

Discussion

The preceding analysis suggests several important conclusions. First, the assumption embedded in classical secularization theory^{[4][21]} that modernization necessarily produces normative conflict between religious and secular frameworks is not supported by either the historical evidence from the region or the contemporary institutional analysis. The Central Asian case, read through the DHM, points instead toward a conditional compatibility between religious and secular normative systems. Second, the DHM contributes a clarification to the post-secular debate^[9] by specifying more precisely the structural conditions under which Habermas's ideal of post-secular dialogue can be realized. Habermas's framework identifies the epistemic conditions but underspecifies the institutional and procedural conditions. The DHM's emphasis on institutional mediation and procedural fairness provides a more operationalizable framework for policy analysis.

Third, and most significantly for social philosophy, the analysis reveals that the dialectical interaction between religious and secular norms is not merely an accommodation of pre-existing fixed systems, but a genuinely productive philosophical process in which both systems are transformed through their encounter. This is consistent with the Hegelian understanding of dialectics as involving *Aufhebung*^[10] — simultaneous cancellation, preservation, and elevation of the interacting terms. Al-Farabi's vision of the virtuous city^[3], in which prophetic and philosophical authority are not simply coexistent but mutually constitutive, may be understood retrospectively as an early articulation of precisely this dialectical logic.

The limitations of this study must be acknowledged. The DHM is an ideal-typical analytical construct that necessarily simplifies the complex empirical diversity of religion-secular interactions. Future research should develop more fine-grained



typologies within each of the DHM's four configurations, and should complement the philosophical-analytical approach with systematic empirical sociological research.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the relationship between religious and secular norms is best understood through a dialectical rather than a binary or purely complementary framework. Drawing on the Central Asian philosophical tradition ^{[3][11][13]}, the post-secular theory of Habermas ^[9], and contemporary regional scholarship ^{[1][2][7][19][23]}, we have proposed the Dialectical Harmony Model (DHM) as an analytical tool for mapping configurations of religion-secular interaction and assessing their implications for social stability.

The DHM identifies configuration D — Dialectical Harmony — as uniquely conducive to sustainable societal stability, and specifies three structural conditions (institutional mediation, epistemic reciprocity, procedural fairness) whose realization is necessary for this configuration to be stable. Applied to Uzbekistan and the broader Central Asian context, the model suggests that while significant progress has been made in developing institutional mediation structures, the epistemic reciprocity and procedural fairness conditions remain incompletely realized, representing both the primary philosophical challenge and the primary practical opportunity for the region's continued development.

The deeper philosophical point is that the productive coexistence of religious and secular normativity is not a condition to be achieved once and then maintained, but an ongoing dialectical process requiring continuous philosophical reflection, institutional innovation, and civic engagement. The rich intellectual heritage of Central Asia — in which the harmony of reason and revelation was not a naïve piety but a sophisticated philosophical achievement — provides both inspiration and resources for this ongoing work.

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Declaration of Competing Interests

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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