

Epistemic Authority through Apologetic Register: A Linguistic Analysis of Scientific Code-Switching in the Debate *Does God Exist?*

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Abstract

The under-view study anticipates appraising the lexical and discursive patterns inferred by the speakers in a theological debate, *Does God Exist?* It is intended to uncover the nexus between theological discourse and modern scientific concepts to deduce how epistemic authority is constructed linguistically. Specifically, the study is meant to deconstruct how code switching as a rhetorical device constructs epistemic authority, reframe the hierarchy of fact vs. faith, and formulate the “hybrid apologetic register” that harmonises Islamic theology with scientific empiricism. To accomplish the objective, the study makes use of a qualitative research design and an interpretive descriptive approach. It is done through multifaceted linguistic analysis by operating sociolinguistic, lexical, semantics, cognitive linguistic and Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings of the study designate a “linguistic turn” in theological debate, sponsoring the “scientization” of theological debate. Code switching and lexical borrowing acts as a rhetorical tool for legitimising and positioning epistemic authority. The study concludes that the debate acts as an emergence of “a hybrid apologetic register” where orthodox Islamic theology is synchronised with a modern Western analytical lens. Furthermore, the debate sets a new dynamic by reversing the hierarchy of fact vs. faith.

Keywords: *Apologetic Register, Epistemic Authority, Faith vs. Fact, Code-switching, Atheism vs. Theism, Science vs. Theology, Probability vs. Necessary Being*

Introduction

Language never acts as a neutral medium of communication in a post-colonial context, like Pakistan and India. Rather, it is a dynamic tool to emphasize identity, elite and epistemic authority. Pakistani linguistic landscape is a precise “diglossia hierarchy”, where English functions as superstrata of the power elite, and of intellectual hegemony. Here, Urdu only actions as a national vernacular or matrix index (Rahman, 2015). Conventionally, Islamic theological discourse, especially in South Asia, is linguistically derived from classic Arabic lexicons along with high register Urdu. These Arabic and Urdu expressions originate their authority from “scriptural traditions”. But due to the advent of digital and AI, an overriding discursive swing takes place where theological orators are operating wordlists that are apposite or harmonise with empirical science and Western analytical lens, along with the Urdu matrix, which obliges to authorize metaphorical assertion (Bigliardi, 2014).

Such dynamics are ostensible in contemporary debates relating to the existence of God. With the occurrence of “New Atheism” and secular “rational” notions in the digital age, it has prompted modern current theological scholars to go beyond conventional scriptural annotation. This shifting phenomenon has specified birth to a “hybrid apologetic register” as a linguistic medium, which welded Islamic theology derived from traditional scriptures to complement with high-branded English phraseology, such as “entropy, fine-tuning, and contingency” (Guessoum, 2018). Recent studies have centred on sociolinguistic notions from Pakistan, proclaim that Urdu to English code switching is not circumscribed to mere rhetoric or convenience tenacities, but acts as an insignia to oblige as a strategic move of “modernity” and “intellectual competence” on the part of consumers (Batoool, 2025; Khan et al., 2024).

Afore this study, the intersection between religion and science has been the concern of researchers from a theological perspective. Hence, there is a dearth of such studies from a linguistic perspective. There is a dearth of studies in relation to lexical adoptions and how these structure the debate. Consequently, the study under-view is envisioned to bridge these gaps by endowing a systemic linguistic dissection of the theological debate “Does God Exist?” (2025). Through the exploration of scientific and philosophical terminologies inferred from English through code switching, the study targets to scrutinize how theological discourse is “scientized” to frame a new epistemic authority. Accordingly, the study is designed to uncover that code switching is a deliberate linguistic trick to dismantle the secular monopoly of “reason”.

Factually, and historically theological sermons, exclusively Islamic discourses in the South Asian region have been positioned linguistically on classical expressions which are derivative from either conventional Arabic scripts or through high register Urdu (Rahman, 2015). Conversely, due to the high branded-ness of modern science, analytical philosophy, and the advent of digitalisation, the discursive shift has transpired from orthodox to lexicon from modern science, such as “entropy, fine-tuning, Quantum Indeterminacy”, even in theological and Urdu debate, i.e., matrix language.

Nonetheless, there is a scarcity of research with regard to the utilization of apologetic debate markers from epistemic authority and to deconstruct the arguments of the opponents. The principal problem, for which the study is commenced, is with respect to the dearth of linguistic assurances regarding hybridization with theological discourse or arguments. Henceforth, this study is fundamentally concentrated on pedagogical and Lexico-semantics subtleties of language in Pakistan (Mahboob, 2017), disdaining the rhetorical scheme of

religious "Scientism". Additionally, the current study does not fully evaluate how far the strategic utilisation of English terminology reframes "speculative probabilities" into "theological certainties." It is supplemented by Guessoum (2018) that devoid of systemic analysis of the said register, it is not conceivable to claim how far modern theological debate and arguments dismantle the secular monopoly of rationality linguistically.

Rationale of the Study

The under-view study is imperative as it has juxtaposed disciplines, i.e., Sociolinguistics, CDA, and theology. Its rationale is instituted on three fundamental dynamics. First, the high-status brand borrowing of English lexicons. In the Pak-Indian context, English is not simply a capital of communicative drive, but a chronicle of "cultural capital" (Rahman, 2015). This study is vital to evaluate how effectually theological speakers devour English as a code-switching to showcase their "intellectual competence". Additionally, practice of modern scientific expressions such as "infinite regress and epistemology", the theological reciters, especially Islamic scholars, are countering the allegations of conformist and stereotypical mindset of Muslim as a counter-narrative to navigate in the digital age (Piela, 2020). Second, the study is imperative as it is destined to uncover the mechanics of persuasion, essentially in an age of ideological polarisation. The study climaxes how linguistic techniques, i.e., epistemic modality, consign varied "truth values" to contrary arguments. Through Fairclough's (2015) model, this study is intended to unearth the role of the "power of definitions", like fact vs. faith, which is manipulated in the theological debate to reverse the burden of proof on the challenger. Third, the study is momentous because it contributes to the appraisal and documentation of Urdu to scientific code switching. The study has branded a "hybrid apologetic register" which synchronizes classical Islamic perceptions with modern scientific notions of metaphysics. It has prominently augmented the debate that conformist theological belief organisms are linguistically acclimatizing to modern science empiricism (Jang, 2014), which acts as a strategic interplay between religion and science, faith vs. fact in the Global South.

Purpose Statement

The current study is anticipated to evaluate the semantics as well as sociolinguistic function of the English terminology, i.e. scientific and philosophical, in an Urdu theological debate "Does God Exist?" Explicitly, the study is expected to deconstruct how code switching and lexical deriving are exploited as a rhetorical manoeuvre to emphasise epistemic authority, to reframe the hierarchy of fact vs. faith, i.e., science and religion, and to articulate a hybrid apologetic register that harmonises Islamic theology with that of modern scientific empiricism.

Research Objectives

Keeping in view the purpose statement, the overview study is anticipated to endorse the subsequent research objectives

1. To appraise the function of code-switching and lexical borrowing in legitimising the speaker's intellectual credibility

2. To evaluate the persona of semantics devices in framing scientific notions as "probabilities" and theological claims as "facts"
3. To identify the role of metaphor in structuring theistic arguments for a Creator
4. To explore the power of definition in shifting the burden of proof onto atheism to brand atheism "irrational" and theism "scientific"

Research Questions

1. How does the integration of specialised English terms in the Urdu debate contribute to affirming the epistemic authority of the speakers?
2. What linguistic strategies are implied to shade science as "tentative" and God as "logical necessity"?
3. How do conceptual metaphors in borrowed lexicons outline the linguistic edifice of the "Designer"?
4. How do discourse semantics features redefine atheism as "irrational" and theism as "scientific"?

Literature Review

There has been an inclusive array of studies accessible with regard to religion, power and language, exclusively in a postcolonial context. To contextualise the under-view study, previous studies are synthesised across three foremost dynamics, i.e., the facade of English in Pakistan, the framing of epistemic authority in theological discourse, and the "scientization" of the Islamic apologetic approach. In the linguistic context of Pakistan, languages are inferred as "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu, 1991). In the view of Tariq Rehman (2015) English acts not only as a colonial relic, but as a leading caretaker of socioeconomic and scholarly authority. This hierarchy is further intensified by digitalisation. Abbasi and Alvi (2021) measured competence in English as substitutes to "progress" and "rationality". To them, the Urdu matrix is circumscribed purely to tradition and culture.

Recent studies have asserted that code switching has involved from communicative convenience to strategic tool of identity. Khan and Ali (2024) deliberated bilingual speakers of Pakistan devour code-switching to articulate a "hybrid identity" which interconnects amongst indigenous heritage and the global conception of modernity. In the opinion of Idrees et al. (2025), speakers switch to English to pronounce "professionalism, formality and authority." They have claimed it through empirical evidence and are of the view that speakers revert to the Urdu matrix for sheer emotional intimacy. It is pertinent to originate from their study why conformist theological debaters were exhausting Arabic and Urdu, and why there is an urgency to utilise English register.

The conception of epistemic authority seats assert on source knowledge as centred on theology. Zagzebski (2012) extricates "authority to command," i.e. legal and political, and "authority to believe", i.e., epistemic. In the modern age, epistemic authority has confronted its legitimacy. To steer this challenge, religious scholars are interlaying "authority shifts". According to Cheong et al. (2025), religious and theological orators are embracing new communicative configurations. Alsaawi (2020) is of the notion that in bilingual sermons the religious figures switch language not for convenience, but to emphasise authority and to engross an assorted audience. Conversely, the appraisal of previous studies arguments that the

shift in register is restricted between Arabic, Urdu and English, especially in the South Asian context. Swapping from source language to scientific register, i.e. metaphysics, and cosmology is an explicit zone which is not premeditated yet, so the current study is wished-for to bridge that gap.

The intersection between science and Islam has been a governing area of study in the recent past, as Leif Steinberg labelled it "Islamisation of science", Jan et al. (2023) encapsulated this debate as "scientific religion", Bigliardi (2014) entitled it "scientific exegesis." Despite the all-encompassing exertions on the part of researchers, a critical gap subsists between the assimilation of science and Islam. First, there is a contextual gap. Frequently, studies on code switching centre on media discourse and academic discourse. There is no research on theological debate with regard to code-switching. Second, although studies on the subject of the lexical borrowing of English in a general context are frequent, there is scarcely any study on scientific terminology borrowing.

For that reason, the current study is anticipated to bridge the existing gaps through analysing "Does God Exist?" by dint of operating a "hybrid apologetic register." It will be done through showcasing the linguistic outlines of debate, how faith, i.e., theology, is reframed into fact, i.e., science, by means of scientific lexicons borrowing.

Methodology

The underpropped study denotes a qualitative research design. A descriptive interpretive approach is castoff to attain the objectives of the study. The chief intention of the study is to appraise the linguistic, i.e. sociolinguistic, pragmatic, lexical and discursive strategies implied in an Urdu theological debate. It centres on the interface between theological discourse and scientific terminology to comprehend how an epistemic influence is linguistically positioned. Data is designated purposively from a theological debate *Does God Exist?* (2025) Henceforward, the corpus comprises a specified set of lexical terms extracted from the debate. In addition, the dataset is restricted to 24 scientific terminologies and 38 philosophical terms inferred in the said debate. The criterion of inclusion is strictly centred around the expressions where speakers manoeuvre code switching, i.e., shifting to English and calquing, i.e. brand borrowing.

Table 1

Dataset of Code-switching Terminologies

Scientific Terms	Philosophical Terms	& Logical
<i>Atheistic Presupposition, Big Bang Theory, Burden of Proof, Cause & Effect, Consciousness, Contingency, Design Argument, Empirical Evidence, Epistemology, Fine-Tuning, First Cause, Hypothetical, Infinite Regress, Law vs Law Maker, Metaphysical Reality, Naturalism, Necessary Being, Objective Truth, Philosophical Argument, Probability,</i>	<i>Agnosticism, Causation, Conclusion, Correlation, Empiricism, Explanatory Power, Falsification, Holistic View, Inference, Law Giver, Logical Fallacy, Materialism, Metaphysics, Observable, Premise, Rational Argument,</i>	<i>Assumption, Claim, Consistency, Determinism, Evidence, Fact, Free Will, Hypothesis, Logical, Natural Law, Ontology,</i>

<i>Randomness, Self-Existing, to Exist</i>	<i>Rationality, Universe Began</i>	<i>Reductionism, Limitation, Subjective Teleology, Unobservable</i>	<i>Scientific Skepticism, Opinion, Theory,</i>
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To evaluate the data systematically, multifaceted linguistic frameworks activate as a theoretical underpinning for the study. In order to analyse the social function of English terminology, sociolinguistics acts as a theoretical framework. To appraise the definitions of the specified lexicons manipulated in the debate, lexical semantics is castoff. To unveil the mental models, cognitive linguistics, and to uncover discursive patterns, power dynamics and ideological context, Critical Discourse Analysis is operated as a theoretical framework. Code switching, epistemic modality, metaphoric theory, binary opposition and the power of definitions are the strategies that are being expended to analyse the dataset.

Data is analysed keeping in view categorisation, contextual and discursive mapping-based analysis. In the first phase, terms extracted from the debate were characterized into scientific, i.e., logical and epistemic categories. In the second phase, each term was scrutinized, keeping in view its syntactic as well as semantics context. In the third phase, each term was appraised in terms of its argumentative function. In spite of its multifaceted layers, the study is restricted to merely lexical analysis, which is further delimited to purely specific terminology recycled in "Does God Exist?" Henceforth, the under review study unwraps avenues for future aspirants and grasses gaps such as full-text phonetic, thematic and rebuttal constituent analysis of the debate.

Data Analysis

Table 2

Summary of Linguistic Analysis of Dataset

Linguistic Category	Key Terminology	Linguistic Function	Discourse Function	Theological Function
Socio-linguistics	Big Bang, Epistemology, Fine Tuning, Infinite Regress	Lexical Borrowing, Code Switching	Legitimation	Endorsement of Religion via Modern Science
Semantics	Probability, Hypothetical, Fact, Law, Necessity Being, Assumption	Modality (low vs. high)	Hierarchy of Truth	Possibility vs. Necessity Being
Cognitive Linguistics	Law Giver, Fine Tuning,	Metaphors, Teleological	Inference Generation	Creator Defence via Linguistic

	Design Watchma ker, Structure	Legal Linear		Metapho r
Structura lism	Objective vs. Subjectiv e Truth, Law vs. Chaos, Design vs. Randomn ess	Binary Oppositio n	Exclusion	Denying God = Chaos & Irrational ity
Philosoph ical	Self Existing, Necessar y Being, Continge ncy	Mapping, Calquing	Harmoniz ation	God of Quran & God of Science are single being
Pragmati cs	Presumpt ion, Burden of Proof, Scientific Limitatio n	Boundary Work, Presuppos ition Triggers	Defensive Framing	Defend God via falsifying empiricis m
Lexical Semantic s	Infinite Regress, Rationalit y	Semantics Expansion & Restrictio n	Labelling Opposing views (Coercion)	Justify Creator via definitio n power

Findings and Results

Sociolinguistics Analysis

Code Switching: It is anticipated to appraise the association between matrix language, i.e., Urdu, and embedded language, i.e., English, in the debate “Does God Exist?” In the Pak-India context, English obliges as a super-strata language that is what is grasped in the debate. When the speaker denotes intra-sentential or English expressions as code switching they operate, “fine-tuning” and “infinite regress” in an Urdu debate. It is a measure of prestigious brand-borrowing. Moreover, through the exploitation of lexicons those are accustomed to Western Academia, the speakers in the debate tip-off towards “epistemic signalling.” They have an explicit resolve by specifying in their debate, though it is theological, yet it is neither conventional nor outdated. Rather, it is centred on modern scientific designs. It also designates that theological concepts are enfolded in the duster of philosophical and scientific phraseology during religious and theological discourse.

Register Hybridization: Apart from code switching and brand borrowing terminology, the discourse of the debate generates a hybrid register. It is done through the interspersing or blending of “Islamic scholasticism”, “Western philosophy” and modern, up-to-date astrophysics on the part of the speakers. Islamic scholarly expressions castoffs in the debate are “Samad, Wajib-ul-Wajood and Ilum-ul-Kalam.” “Contingency, ontology and

epistemology” oblige the drive of Western philosophy of analytical debate. Terminologies such as “fine-tuning, entropy” and “Big Bang” are derived from modern Astrophysics. The exploitation of a hybrid register in the debate disregards the obstacle of “cognitive dissonance” between religion and science. In addition, the hybrid register presents the debate as a uniform, cohesive linguistic pattern or approach.

Semantics Analysis

It is pertinent to the analysis of the texts or debate that the way lexicons are operated to construct, magnify, or confine denotation functions to advance the theological debate.

Epistemic Modality: In the debate, the speaker assigns assorted “truth values” to both scientific and religious terms. Key terms “theory, randomness assumption, hypothetical probability” are emblems of weak modality, as these are applied to Atheism or to science. These are outlined semantically by the speaker; hence, they are tentative. For instance, “Big Bang” is recycled to deduce “how”, but it flops to explain the concept of “why.” Conversely strong modality is exploited through the expressions “truth, logic, fact and necessary” for the reason that these are applied to theism. Theological perceptions are framed as “absolute” rather than a belief system. For illustration, God is positioned as a “necessary being.” Linguistically speaking, the debate borders the position of Atheism as a “speculation” and Theism as “deduction.” *Semantics Expansion and Restriction:* Calquing is castoff to oblige the tenacity of semantics expansion through terms such as “contingency”. It is an English as well as philosophical term which is consumed to incorporate the Islamic conception of “Muhtaj”, i.e. “dependant” or “needy”. This semantics notion of expansion has bridged the gap between “Leibniz” i.e. “contingency” and the Quranic concept of “Al-Samad” which signifies “the self-sufficient”. Otherwise, the term “rationality” confines the connotation of rationality itself. It is destined to suggest rationality as “acceptance” of causality as well as God. It obliges as a trap, which is a linguistic trap, and that is intended to designate that denying God is correspondent to rebuffing reason and logic as far as scientific and analytical arguments of debate are concerned.

Cognitive Linguistic Analysis

It is castoff to appraise the consumption of mental models and metaphors on the part of the speakers to address the audience worldwide. It is done through the consumption of teleological, legal and linear metaphors. The concept “the universe is an artefact” is a teleological metaphor, and it is outlined through linguistic terminology such as “watchmaker, fine-tuning, design and structure”. If it is assumed or signalled that the universe is an “artefact” or “machine”, then linguistically it denotes the requisite for a “manufacturer. Furthermore, the debate denotes that “randomness” cannot oblige the resolve of “order.”

The exploitation of legal metaphor is noticeable through the concept that “nature is a kingdom”. Linguistically, it is positioned through the manipulation of “evidence, natural law, burden of proof and law giver” in the debate. The debate is portrayed as a courtroom trial through the usage of “law” to presuppose “legislative authority”. It designates that laws are endorsed; they do not materialise out of chaos. These metaphors

prompt towards the existence of the “supreme legislator” of the universe.

To end with, the linear metaphor is positioned through “time is a chain.” In the debate, it is linguistically articulated through “cause and effect, infinite regress, and first cause”. Existence is contextualised as a linear “chain of dominoes”. Infinite regress is inferred as a “cognitive error” that necessitates the “first mover.”

Pragmatic Analysis

It denotes towards speech acts and argumentative patterns of the debate that are pertinent to the exploitation of language to persuade or sway the viewers or audience. Presupposition triggers are positioned through the expressions “atheistic presupposition”. In the debate, contrasting or antagonistic viewpoint is acknowledged as “bias”, which turns as an endeavour on the part of the speaker to nullify the “neutrality of the scientific notion”. Pragmatically, such triggers act as transference of the burden of proof. Instead of evidencing God’s existence on the part of the theist, the atheist is queried to argue or rationalise why it is anticipated that God does not exist.

Additionally, scientific delineations or boundary marking are inferred in the debate through terms such as “metaphysical, observable vs. unobservable, empirical vs. rational”. The debate designates a high-pitched pragmatic borderline between domain one, that is, science, and domain two, that is, theology. Science is circumscribed to observable or physical being while theology or philosophy takes into account metaphysics, and unobservable being. It obliges as a “safe zone” for the existence of God. If linguistically science is marked as limited to physical being, it cannot logically distance itself or refute the metaphysical God.

Structural Analysis

The implication of the debate can be fabricated through a structuralist approach, and it is designated through the exploitation of binary oppositions. The audience is bound to receipts either pole one or pole two, with no room for the middle ground. Pole one is that of the Theistic or positive interpretation, while pole two is grounded on the atheistic or negative conception. Pole one is positioned through the terms “rationality, necessary, design, objective truth, and law Giver”. And pole two is demonstrated through terminology such as “subjective opinion, blind, chance, absurdity, randomness and contingency.” As far as the linguistic presumption of these poles is concerned, in the debate, pole one is rendered as a valid option while pole two is coated as unstable, both logically and linguistically, through the exploitation of binaries.

Table 3
Summary of Binary Opposition

Pole 1	Pole 2
<i>Theistic (+)</i>	<i>Atheistic (-)</i>
<i>Rationality</i>	<i>Absurdity</i>
<i>Objective Truth</i>	<i>Subjective Opinion</i>
<i>Necessary Being</i>	<i>Contingent</i>
<i>Law Giver</i>	<i>Blind Chance</i>
<i>Design</i>	<i>Randomness</i>

Discussion

The findings designate a paramount “linguistic turn” in contemporary theological debate in Urdu. Conventional binaries between religion and “scientific authority” are dismantled through the manipulation of language or linguistic markers. Secondly, the debate sockets toward the “scientization” of the theological debate. English code switching tip-offs towards the distinctive intellectual legitimacy of English as a post-colonial mindset. The debate has further defied, rather than overturned, the hierarchy of “fact vs. faith”. The speaker has acquired the applause of the audience not purely on empirical grounds or evidences but through conceptual metaphoric structures, i.e. teleological, legal and linear metaphors.

Through a hybrid register, the debate clues towards a modern “apologetic discourse”, which signposts to the audience that believing in God is scientifically as well as linguistically valid and justified. The exploitation of scientific as well as English, i.e. Western philosophy, is a strategic tool on the part of the speaker to occupy “intellectual territory” of the argument. In addition, the discourse or the debate arguments that speaker one is neither rebuffing science nor western philosophy, i.e. practice of English, rather he is dismantling the opponent’s arguments through “appropriating vocabulary” and lexicons. He delineates “Big Bang” as mere probability. And God as “necessary fact.” The speaker one triumphs the debate even before it climaxes through the utilisation of the power of definition.

Speaker one, through “lexical appropriation”, dismantles the viewpoint of the speaker two, the opponent. The usage of authority construction through the exercise of English terminology out-shuns the perception of denunciations that theology is outdated. It is done so because English is reckoned as an esteemed brand in Pak-Indian context. Speaker one not only earned the debate because his arguments were centred around fact and logic but also through “definitional power”. He demonstrated by dint of implying “rationality” in such a fashion that necessitates God. Last but not least, the existence of God is portrayed as a metaphoric and linguistic compulsion by speaker one through metaphors such as “chain, law and machine.”

Conclusion

The study under-view has generated a structural and systemic linguistic appraisal of the specified register being inferred in a theological debate, “Does God Exist?” in the Urdu matrix. The outcomes of the study denote that the exploitation of scientific and philosophical terminology is not only intended for translational or flow compulsion, but it is a well-thought-out rhetorical approach. It is destined to outstrip the conception of orthodox theology and to brand the debate line up with modern empiricism. The epistemic authority is constructed by the speaker through prestigious brand borrowing and code switching to emphasise a scientific phenomenon. Through terms “infinite regress, entropy and fine-tuning”, undermines the “conventional cleric” of stereotypical theological debate.

English and scientific lexicons shot as discourse markers that signal the competency of the speaker one on the subject of science contained by his own linguistic context. Through the exploitation of model asymmetry and semantics framing by dint of scientific philosophies such as “Big Bang, assumption, probability and hypothetical” signpost low certainty, while linguistic markers such as “law, fact, rationality, and necessary

being" are suggestive of high certainty. It is indicative of the fact that Atheism is grounded on speculation, while Theism is instituted on logical ground.

The said debate profoundly count on the terms "design, law giver, watchmaker" which are symptomatic of teleological metaphors through metaphoric necessity. The speaker one has fashioned a linguistic environs where the existence of the Creator is more than a sheer theological conviction but a logical necessity. Last of all, the operation of a hybrid register in the debate, where the speaker juxtaposed classical Islamic theology and Western scientific concepts, project God as "a necessary being" and "self-existing." Finally, the power of definition of "rationality, truth and evidence" on the part of the speaker one supports him to dismantle the secular monopoly of "reason" by affirming God as the ultimate "scientific fact."

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