CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Research

The ideological shift occurring among certain segments of society is increasingly evident in the rising number of religious people in several countries, as recorded in the 2021 Saudi Arabia International Religious Freedom Report, which noted that 224,000 people identified as atheists.[1] While a survey in United States showed that the majority of people who chose to become atheists were scholars who craved logic.[2]

Thousands of western cultures that Muslims have accepted without sufficient understanding and knowledge, have resulted in a materialistic understanding of everything.[3] Secularism separates the measurable from the immaterial, blind rationalism, worship, divinity, and several supernatural things are replaced with doubt in only one creation of God,

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[1] U.S. Mission Saudi Arabia, "2022 Report on International Religiaus Freedom for Saudi Arabia" (U. S., 2023), https://sa.usembassy.gov/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom-for-saudi-arabia/.com.

[2] Michael Lipka, "8 Facts about Atheists," Pew Research Center, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/02/07/8-facts-about-atheists/.

[3] Alifah Fauziyah, "Perbandingan Pandangan Hakikat Manusia Antara Islam Dan Pemikiran Barat: Perspektif Teologis Dan Filsafat," *PERSEPTIF: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Humaniora* 1, No. 1 (2023): p. 17.

reason. Humans close off all possibilities and knowledge about divinity.[4]

Rational and material thought became highly valued, while anything that was unmeasurable, unempirical and irrational was not recognised as truth. Thought ended in utter emptiness, giving rise to misleading questions.[5] Instead of pursuing the truth from appropriate and logical sources, people fell into the trap of asking questions that were self-defeating. Starting from logic, events, to religious methodology with modern theory.[6] As Alister McGrath wrote in his book "The Dawkins Delusion": *Atheism is not the absence of belief in God, but a belief system that rejects God. It's a worldview that tries to make sense of reality without God, yet it fails to explain many of life's deepest questions.*[7]

The human sens of being able to do, know and utilise everything well to the point of neglecting the forces that can either thwart or succeed this continues to grow. Until a character develops and atheism is created,

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[4] Lukman Harun, "*Kritik Sayyid Quthb Terhadap Ateisme,*" (Yogyakarta: UIN Sunan Kalijag*a*, 2021), p. 4.

[5] Melissa Soenke, Mark J. Landau, and Jeff Greenberg, "Sacred Armor: Religion's Role as a Buffer against the Anxieties of Life and the Fear of Death.," *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality (Vol 1): Context, Theory, and Research.* 1 (2012): p. 30.

[6] Wildan Muzaki, *"Pemikiran Teeologi Badiuzzaman Sa ' Id Nursi,"* (Jakarta: UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, 2021), p. 23.

[7] Alister and Joanna Collicutt McGrath McGrath, *The Dawkins Delusion?* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2007), p. 45.

consciously or unconsciously. A character that is formed and integrated without knowing the accompanying psychological, sociological, theological and epistemological effects within themselves.[8]

Atheism in Arabic comes from the word *lahada-yulhidu-ilhadan* which which in the book *Lisan al-'Arab* is described as 'turning away from the truth towards evil' *al-ilhad: al-mayl 'an al-haqq ila al-bathil*. This context is mentioned only three times in the Qur'an, all of which are written in the form of *fi'l mudhari'* and not *faa'il (mulhid)*, as in QS. Al-A'raf (180), al-Fussilat (40), and an-Nahl (103). With these three verses, the meaning of mulhid refers to anyone who deviates in their beliefs, interpretation of the verses of Allah SWT, as well as their religiosity.[9]

One of them is conveyed by al-Maturidi in Ta'wilatu Ahli as-Sunnah when interpreting QS. Al-Fushshilat verse 40: *"yulhiduuna bir-Raf'i, ta'wiiluhu: inna al-ladziina yamiiluuna 'an qabuuli aayaatina, qaala abu 'uusajah: al-Ilhad: al-Mayl, wa akhdzu al-Lahdi min hadza"*. The context of *ilhad* in this verse carries the meaning of a group that deviates from the

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[8] Dr. Syofyan Hadi, *"Fir'aun Lintas Generasi dan Spasi"* (Serang: Penerbit A-Empat, Februari 2022), p. 43.

[9] Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, ed. 'Abdullāh al-Ḥabashī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1994), 3:375.

verses/signs that Allah SWT has given, or a tendency towards something that causes one to deviate from the right path.[10]

In selecting the focus of characters in various stories of denial of God in the Qur'an, the author classifies three major atheist figures from all the stories, namely Pharaoh, Namrud, and Qarun. Starting with Pharaoh with his arrogance and power, Qarun with his wealth and kingdom, to Namrud with his thoughts. These three interrelated dimensions of denial of the existence of Allah SWT made the author want to examine all three.[11]

One of the verses which Allah SWT said in QS. Qashash verse 38 is interpreted by ar-Razi as follows: "*And he believed that he was God, and he had determined that the nature of divinity was inherent in him, even though God is not like a creature, thus nullifying Pharaoh's divinity'*. Where Pharaoh, in his arrogance, claimed that the only God was himself. Therefore, no one else was worthy, including the God of Prophet Musa AS, namely Allah SWT.[12]

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[10] Imam Abu Mansur Al-Maturidi, *Ta'wilatu Ahli as-Sunnah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Islamiyyah, 2005), p. 280.

[11] Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *The Study Qur'an: A New Translation and Commentary* (The Institute for Religion and Civic Values The el Hibri Foundation, n.d.), p. 2146.

[12] Fakhruddin Ar-Razi, "Tafsir Al-Kabir", in Vol. 1, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2000), p. 531.

For a more comprehensive analysis, the author selected several books by exegetes as primary sources, namely: (1) Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib by Fakhru ad -Din ar-Razi because of its philosophical style of interpretation, (2) Tafsir Ta'wilat Ahlu as-Sunnah by al-Maturidi as a theological commentary, (3) Tafsir at-Tahrir wa at-Tanwir by Ibn 'Ashur with a social-modern style of interpretation, (4) Tafsir Ibnu Katsir by Ibn Katsir, which focuses on language and history, (5) and Tafsir Jalalain by Imam Jalaluddin Al-Mahalli and Imam Jalaluddin As-Suyuthi as a global exegesis that convinced the author in his final analysis.

Several stories of misguidance in the Qur'an are evidence of the dark spots that continue to be passed down from generation to generation even though Allah SWT has already dealt with them. With all His power and compassion, He never ceases to guide and direct His creatures to be better than before.[13] Although history has recorded in detail the many civilisational collapses caused by human destruction, from Ramses in the pre-Christian era to the emergence of Richard Dawkins in the modern age.[14]

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[13] Muhammad Zikri, "Kisah Kaum Tubba ' Dalam Al- Qur'an Menurut Mufassir Skripsi," (Riau: UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, 2022), p. 20.

[14] Rohmawati, "A Study of the Atheist View on Religion Studi Pandangan Ateis Terhadap Agama", p. 23.

One of the verses interpreted by ar-Razi interprets Namrud with the recognition of his oneness as a god who can turn on and off (namely the trick that with his food people live while with his sword people die). With this revelation that was revealed to Prophet Musa AS at that time *"make the sun rise from the west!"* immediately Pharaoh was silent and stopped by the assertion of the Qur'an al-Karim that nothing can match even make himself a god other than Allah SWT.[15]

Whereas in the past, misguidance occurred because of submission to the ancestors they revered, now their thinking has fallen prey to questions arising from their own ignorance.[16]   And unfortunately, Muslims have been swept up in this Western trend of continuing to deny the existence of God as a requirement of the theories brought forth by the church, power, termination, etc. This is also expressed by Richard Dawkins as follows: *"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser..."*[17]

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[15] Hanung Sito Rohmawati, "A Study of the Atheist View on Religion Studi Pandangan Ateis Terhadap Agama," *Syekh Nurjati: Jurnal Studi Sosial Keagamaan* 2, Vol. 2 (2022), p. 2.

[16] Muhtarom, "Ateisme Dalam AL-Qur'an" (Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, 2018), p. 27.

[17] Richards Dawkins, *God Delusion* (London: Bantam Press, 2006), p. 31.

Humans are preoccupied with rational answers and tendencies that are endless and ultimate, while the Qur'an is present as a source whose truth is unquestionable not as a product of creatures but the truth of the creator, Allah SWT.[18] Seeing the rise of atheism in society's ideology, contemporary ideological issues and their relevance in addressing the spread of atheism, which is often underestimated, became crucial reasons for the author. Therefore, in this study, the author analyses the relevance of the characteristics and arguments of divinity made by Qur'anic mulhid and modern atheists. Based on the verses of the story of mulhid in the Qur'an, the author correlates them with the concept of modern atheism to analyse atheism from era to era. Thus, the Qur'an remains relevant in addressing all issues that arise.

B. Problem Formulation

Considering breadth of the research, the author limits direction of research in the questions form below:

1. How are the characteristics of an atheist described in Qur'anic Stories?

2. What are the arguments of atheists used in Qur'anic Stories?

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[18] Misbahuddin Jamal, "Konsep Al-Islam Dalam Al-Qur'an," *Jurnal Al- Ulum* Volume. 11, (2011): 18.

C. **Purpose of Research**

With these objectives, the research is based on several objectives in the form below:

1. To systematically identify and classifify the characteristics of atheists described in Qur'anic Stories.

2. To recognize and analyze the qualifications arguments of atheists used in Qur'anic Stories.

D. **Significance of Research**

Through the problem formulation, author hopes the research will bring academic and practical benefits by following specifications:

1. Theoretical Significance:

    a. To add scientific treasures related to the Qur'anic research and theological issues.

    b. To develop an understanding of stories inside Qur'an

    c. To give a correlation approach of tafsir with modern philosophy.

2. Practical Significance:

    a. To provide public insight about the signs of atheism.

    b. To prevent the atheist expansion understanding in public

    c. To provide insight about the Qur'anic relevance in responding to modern atheism.

d. To provide the modern atheism answers logically based on the verses of Qur'an

E. Previous Research

Before proceeding to the next step, the author reviewed several previous studies for comparison with the current study. With this review, the author, supervisor, and readers can ensure that the study is not a repetition but rather novel in terms of its object, method, and focus.

In first study is a master's thesis by Imamul Wathoni from UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in 2021 entitled *"Islam dan Evidentialisme Ateis (Tinjauan terhadap Pemikiran Richard Dawkins)"*. It is a comparative philosophical study that examines Richard Dawkins' atheistic views based on the philosophy of scientific naturalism. The researcher states that epistemologically, what Darwin said is often related to transcendence/divinity, even though its truth and reality in ontology itself are uncertain. Thus, this study focuses on modern atheism without relating it to the perspective of Qur'anic interpretation of mulhid.

The second review is a master's thesis entitled *"Ateisme VS Teisme Modern"*, presented by *Helmy Hidayatulloh, M.A.* from UIN Syarif Hidayatullah in 2019. This descriptive comparative study compares the atheistic views of Bertrand Russell with those of the theist Nurcholis

Madjid. One of the areas of comparison is epistemology. For Bertrand, truth is based solely on reason, while for Nurcholis, reason is not everything; rather, divine revelation complements human reason. This study focuses only on a comparison of theoretical ideas without approaching Qur'anic interpretation.

Third study is Sapira Audia's undergraduate thesis entitled *"Pembuktian Eksistensi Tuhan dalam Perspektif Abu Hanifah 150 H/ 767 M"* at UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau in 2023. It is a literature study using a descriptive-qualitative method, which examines the thoughts of Abu Hanifah as one of the early theological figures (mutakallimūn) in proving the existence of God rationally and philosophically, so as to strengthen belief in God without abandoning the power of revelation. Unfortunately, this study does not specifically address the concept of mulḥid and its representation through Qur'anic atheist stories such as Pharaoh, Namrud, and Qarun.

The fourth study is *Lukman Harun*'s undergraduate thesis from UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta in 2021 on *"Kritik Sayyid Quthb terhadap Ateisme dalam Tafsir Fi Zhilal al-Qur'an"*. Using qualitative methods and a thematic (maudhu'i) approach to interpretation, Lukman criticises Sayyid Quthb's opinion that atheism is a form of rejection of God's

existence and a major threat to Islamic ideology, saying that Sayyid Quthb's opinion lacks historical context and overlooks theological deviations in the Qur'an. This research differs from the author's research, which examines mulhid as a Qur'anic concept and analyses it through various styles of interpretation.

Finally, the last study discussed is Akhmad Yusuf Hilmi's undergraduate thesis from UIN Syarif Hidayatullah in 2017 entitled 'Case Study of Blasphemy by Alexander (Malang Atheist) through Social Media in the Perspective of Islamic Law and Positive Law'. In its discussion, this study focuses on a normative legal case study of blasphemy on social media committed by Alexander. The results of the study show that although Alexander's actions constitute apostasy, according to the standards of wrongdoing in positive law, which are measured by behaviour and not thoughts, this cannot be categorised as a criminal act. Thus, Hilmi's previous research was limited to the legal aspect and did not focus on the theological aspect or the existence of rejection of divinity itself.

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that previous research has been limited to individual perspectives of philosophy, theology, or law without correlating them with one another, nor with an

interpretive approach to the stories in the Qur'an. Thus, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the concept of mulhid based on a multi-interpretative analysis (al-Māturīdī, al-Rāzī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Jalālayn, and Ibn ʿĀshūr) of the verses in the Qur'an, while also linking it to the concept of modern atheism.

F. Theoretical Framework

In this study, the author uses a thematic (mawdu'i) interpretation approach to comprehensively examine the theme of atheism in the verses of the Qur'an. As an interpretation method that focuses on a particular theme, several verses with explanations from mufassir (exegetes) on the theme are included to analyse the issue.[19] As ʿAbdu al-Hayy al-Farmawi argues, studying verses in relation to their thematic connections will result in a more complex understanding of life. Thus, with this approach, verses can be better understood and fully applied in human life.[20]

The research is deepened with a philosophical style, especially when the author analyses the behaviour of the mulhid figures in the Qur'an (Pharaoh, Namrud, and Qarun) and relates them to modern atheist

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[19] Aldomi Putra, "Metodologi Tafsir," *Jurnal Ulunnuha* 7 (2018): 46.

[20] ʿAbd al-Hayy al-Farmāwī, *al-Bidāyah fī al-Tafsīr al-Mawḍūʿī: Dirāsah Manhajiyyah Mawḍūʿiyyah* (Kairo: al-Ḥadārah al-ʿArabiyyah, 1977), 15.

concepts. This philosophical interpretation is in line with that carried out by Fakhru ad-Din ar-Razi in correlating revelation and reason in a balanced manner.[21] He also said that reason is the way to understand the power and divinity of Allah SWT. With this, the correlation between verses and philosophy does not distance a Muslim from faith, but becomes one of the ways to understand the truth.[22]

Therefore, through this study, the researcher attempts to reveal the aspects/types of atheism discussed directly in the stories contained in the Qur'an. The following are the steps taken by the author:

1. Identify several stories of mulhid in the verses of the Qur'an (Pharaoh, Namrud, and Qarun) that are related to their concept of divinity, then analyse them through the interpretations of several mufassir with a continuous theme.

2. Correlate the verses with contemporary ideological issues of secularism, pluralism, and nihilism, which have led to an increase in atheism in the world according to philosophical dimensions.[23]

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[21] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1999), 1:7.

[22] Muhtarom, "Ateisme Dalam Al-Qur'an", (Semarang: UIN Walisongo, 2018), p. 186.

[23] Muhammad Roy Purwanto, "Filsafat Eksistensial Nietzsche dan Wacana Agama: Studi Filsafat Nietzsche dan Kontribusinya dalam Dekonstruksi Wacana Agama," *An-Nur Jurnal Studi Islam* 1, No. 2 (2005), p. 298.

3. Analyse the characteristics and theological arguments of Qur'anic atheism based on the correlation between the movements that occurred in the classic stories of atheism in the Qur'an and modern atheistic concepts. [24]

G. Research Methods

There are several methods used by the author in compiling this paper depending on several aspects of review, namely:

1. Type of Research

   The author used a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature review method, as described by Sugiono, who stated that literature research is research that collects data or information from various literature relevant to the issue. [25] Through literature review, the research was conducted by analysing the characteristics and theological arguments of Qur'anic atheism through various academic writings, ranging from tafsir books, books, journals, and several relevant written sources. This study was not conducted in the field because the object of study was textual and historical in nature

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[24] Fakhruddin Ar-Razi, *Tafsir al-Kabir*, (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2000), p. 335.

[25] Sugiyono, *Metodologi Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif Dan R & D* (Bandung: CV. Alfabeta, 2020).

rather than empirical, thus literature review was the only way to study it.[26]

2. Source of Data

By collecting several pieces of literature that touch upon the research discussion, the author uses the documentary method as a data collection technique.   With the content analysis type of documentary, the author explores and understands the meaning contained in the interpretive text in depth, highlighting the theological and philosophical aspects of the verses of the story of Mulhid in the Qur'an. With several sources collected, the data sources were qualified into two parts, namely:[27]

a. Primary Data Sources

As the main reference, we rely on several books and books as the main data sources, namely:

1) *Tafsir Mafatih al-Ghaib* by Fakhru ad-Din ar-Razi,

2) *Tafsir Ta'wilat Ahlu as-Sunnah* by al-Maturidi.

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[26] Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Jakarta: Yayasan Obor Indonesia, 2008), 3.

[27] Feny Rita Fiantika, Mohammad Wasil, and Sri Jumiyati, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*, ed. Yuliatri Novita, 1st ed. (Padang: PT. Global Eksklusif Teknologi, 2022), 12, https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=O-B3eJYAAAAJ&hl=en.

3) *Tafsir Jalalain* by Imam Jalaluddin Al-Mahalli and Imam Jalaluddin As-Suyuthi

4) *Tafsir at-Tahrir wa at-Tanwir* by Ibnu 'Ashur

5) *Tafsir Ibnu Katsir* by Ibnu Katsir

b. Secondary Data Sources

In order to deepen and present the research more precisely and well, the author complements several sources as a supporting backing of the research:

1) The book of *The Message of The Qur'an* by Muhammad Asad

2) The book of *The Study Qur'an: a New Translation and Commentary* by Sayyed Hossein Nasr

3) Book *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an Index Volume* by Jane Dammen Mc Auliffle

4) The book *Fir'aun Lintas Generasi dan Spasi* by Syofyan Hadi

5) Book *Islam and Nihilism: my poison and my cure* by Yusuf Ponders

6) Arabic and English dictionaries

3. The Technique of Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, researchers applied the Descriptive analysis method. The analysis was conducted to examine the

relevance of the stories of the disbelievers in the Qur'an with the characteristics and arguments of modern atheism that the author obtained from several literary sources, so that the results could be presented clearly and in depth.[28]

Furthermore, the results found during the analysis were described comprehensively through the literary evidence that had been collected. As Sugiyono states, descriptive analysis aims to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts and relationships between the phenomena under investigation.[29] The reasons for using this method are as follows:

a. The researcher systematically explains the characteristics of groups that oppose the concept of divinity in the Qur'an and its relevance to modern atheism.

b. This method is suitable for describing phenomena in their actual state, without any intervention from the researcher.

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[28] Lexy J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2019), 248.

[29] Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan: Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D* (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2019), 147.

c. This research analyzes the thought patterns of groups that reject the concept of divinity in Qur'an and relates them to the characteristics of modern atheism.

At the beginning of discussion, several contemporary issues related to the main theme of the research are analysed, then several verses of the Qur'an concerning the concept of God are identified. The author analyses the correlation between the stories of godlessness in the Qur'an and modern atheistic concepts. The explanation is described through several works of exegesis, starting from Tafsir Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb, Tafsir Ta'wīlāt Ahl al-Sunnah, Tafsir al-Jalālayn, Tafsir al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr, to Tafsir al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm. It is supplemented with explanations from literature on modern atheism. This provides a final relevance of the direction of atheistic thought from era to era.

H. System of Research

In accordance as university research, the author compiles his research with the following systematics:

In the first chapter, the author writes the problems that underlie the discussion of this theme well in the background of the problem in order to find out the problems that can be solved by this discussion.

Furthermore, the formulation of the discussion is written in the form of questions, followed by the purpose of writing, the academic and practical benefits of writing, theoretical research studies and previous studies. In order to ensure that this research work does not repeat previous research. Then it is explained next about the author's method of collecting, obtaining and even processing data in order to create this paper.

In the second chapter, variables are discussed as a basis for the discussion that has been discussed previously. Starting from the meaning of the denial of the deity of *ilhad* in the Qur'an, and also the modern concept of atheism along with its development. The discussion of each vocabulary is nothing but to facilitate understanding in the next discussion, and how the reader can understand the meaning of this discussion.

In the third chapter, the discussion continues with solving the problems that have been formulated previously in the formulation of problems theoretically and analytically. That is, with the identification of the verses of the story of the increase of divinity along with its interpretation. The explanation is further deepened by deepening the discussion theologically and rationally through several *mufassir* figures

and modern atheists so that research can get congruent analysis results on how atheists think about divinity in the atheist view.

The author continues to close the discussion in chapter 4 with conclusions and suggestions for further researchers to perfect the research, and for the community to continue to be careful of the understanding that is scattered out there.