RESEARCH ARTICLE

Spirituality transformation from metaphysical to metaverse

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Abstract: Human spirituality experiences dynamics, develops, and transforms along with the shifting of human culture and civilization from time to time. Auguste Comte has categorized the intellectual development stages into three, namely theological stage, metaphysical stage and positive stage. The three stages of intellect have a big contribution in shaping the living of spirituality in every age. However, today and in the future, humans will face a new civilization when they enter the digital world. Experts in digital technology field continue to develop new worlds that transcend reality and call it the metaverse. This research is intended to explain human spirituality in the shift from the metaphysical stage to the metaverse and to find out what has changed during the shift of these waves. The writer feels that this study is important since spirituality is an integral part of human life and requires full awareness in living it. The data to be used in this study were obtained by reviewing the literature (library research) and analyzed using the continuity and change theory. By using this theory, it is expected that this research will be able to find out what is sustainable and what changes in human spirituality in the course of the three waves above.

Keywords: Spirituality, Metaphysics, Materialism, Metaverse

Abstrak: Spiritualitas manusia mengalami dinamika, berkembang dan bertransformasi bersamaan dengan bergeraknya kebudayaan dan peradaban manusia dari masa ke masa. Ketika pandangan hidup manusia masih sangat dipengaruhi hal-hal metafisika (gelombang metafisika) tentu spiritualitasnya berbeda dengan manusia yang hidup dalam gelombang materialisme dan gelombang metaverse dilihat dari sisi spiritualitas. Penelitian ini dimaksudkan untuk menjelaskan spiritualitas manusia dalam pergerakan gelombang dari metafisik hingga metaverse serta mencari tahu apa yang tetap ada yang berubah selama adanya pergeseran gelombang-gelombang tersebut. Penulis merasa kajian ini penting karena spiritualitas merupakan bagian integral dalam kehidupan manusia dan perlu kesadaran penuh dalam menghayatinya. Data yang akan digunakan dalam penelitian ini diperoleh dengan cara mengkaji kepustakaan (library research) serta dianalisis menggunakan teori continuity and change. Dengan menggunakan teori ini diharapkan penelitian ini mampu menemukan apa yang berkesinambungan dan apa yang berubah dari spiritualitas manusia dalam perjalanan tiga gelombang di atas.

Kata kunci: Spiritualitas, Metafisika, Materialisme dan Metaverse

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1. Introduction

Spirituality plays an important role in human life. It contains multidimensional aspects of each person's life experience. According to Myers, spirituality is a power awareness that transcends the material aspects of life outside the individual (Prasetyo, 2016). However, human spirituality is not something stagnant. Human spirituality affects and is influenced by life experiences. In line with Chris Hartono's view which states that spirituality is a state of human existential life in which there is power to maintain, develop, and actualize life (Hartono, 2006). Therefore, the flow of world civilization which never stops experiencing changes should also contribute to how humans interpret their spiritual life.

Human life develops from something simple to complexity. The generalization of this change is divided into 3 stages, namely the theological stage, the metaphysical stage and the positive stage. These three stages of change by Auguste Comte are associated with human intelligence. In his thinking, the positive stage is the final stage (Chabibi, 2019). However, cyberspace technology presence raises further discussions concerning spirituality affected by cyberspace. The focus of this research is spirituality in three waves, namely the metaphysical wave, the materialism and the most recent is the metaverse. The theological wave came at its earliest when all phenomena were understood as manifestations of God’s power. At the metaphysical stage, many human behaviors are motivated by non-material things. On the wave of materialism, human life is filled with material objects. These material things motivate people to work harder in order to gain them. As for the metaverse, humanity is in the process of going there, where digital technology is reshaping human life, and spirituality is no exception. These three waves have distinctive characteristics in influencing human worldviews which later have implications for their spiritual life.

Setiawan has conducted research on homo digitalist spirituality which focuses on how to reconcile the gospel with cyber society in the postmodern era through digital content and products (Setiawan, 2022). Joni's research discusses the role of the theologian in providing a biblical basis when humans enter society 5.0 civilization (Gultom, 2022). Ngainun Naim's research explains the rise of spirituality in modern society which is not solely related to God but also has the function of psychological escape, obsession and momentary spiritual needs (Naim, 2013). Later, research on spiritual development dynamics was also written by Nove Kurniati Sari whose studies cover the spirituality development in individuals and relate it to Islamic education (Sari, 2020). Syaikhu Rozi’s research discusses the traces of spirituality in Islamic and Western traditions. In the West spirituality developed from the concepts of arete, archetypes and spiritual intelligence theory. As for Islam, traces of spirituality can be traced from the hierarchy of reason regarding human personality structure (Rozi, 2018).

Studies on human spirituality are still partial and do not capture the big picture of spirituality from every civilization development by describing human positions in the three waves and looking for what changes and what remains of the three waves which have implications for human spirituality. Therefore, this research seeks to reveal how times development can affect human spirituality by limiting the three major waves in human life, namely the wave of metaphysics, materialism and metaverse. This research is based on three questions, namely: 1) How is human spirituality in a space that changes from metaphysics to metaverse? 2) What remains and changes from the spatial transformation in terms of spirituality? 3) What are the implications of human spiritual changes? This study assumes that the early generations of humans in their every action are always motivated by non-material things, the supernatural, animist beliefs and dynamism so that in this phase spirituality occupies a big role in the wheel of human life and even spirituality becomes the basis of every human action. This phenomenon is also inseparable from human knowledge.
system which is still simple so that the understanding of all the phenomena that occur around it is also a manifestation of the transcendent.

Over time, since the introduction of an empirical way of thinking, metaphysics has been gradually shifted by materialism where something that is considered the truth is material and the human mindset is more realistic. Metaphysical things are not taken for granted but always require a rational explanation. Supernatural things are considered irrational, therefore they cannot be recognized as knowledge that is used as a reference in acting. This understanding certainly has an impact on life, although it does not necessarily remove metaphysics from human life. Currently the issue of meta universe/metaverse, which is a hot topic of conversation in the world, opens up new perspectives on human life in the future. Metaverse is a technological innovation that enables various human activities movement from real space to digital space through internet connections to form virtual reality including from religious and spiritual aspects. From the widespread use of digital media, humans have learned that the truth which humans believe is closely related to the information consumed from the media, whether it is factual or not. The digital world itself was created with a certain ideology. This phenomenon can be an illustration to see the possibility of what will happen to humans when the metaverse really becomes a part of human life and affects human spirituality.

2. Literature review

2.1. Spirituality

Spirituality is different from religion. McDonald argues that spirituality is a process of human existence and a great power in finding meaning and purpose in life. Spirituality does not only depend on one’s religion or beliefs. It covers several aspects. First, the cognitive aspect (philosophy) includes the search for meaning, purpose and truth, beliefs and values in life. Second, the experience aspects that include feelings, hope, love, relationships, peace of mind, comfort and support. The third aspect is behavior that reflects one’s beliefs and spiritual condition. Spirituality can be found by humans through religion, interaction with nature, music, art, scientific evidence and others. On the other hand, every religion contains answers from spiritual questions to shape human spiritual behavior (Prasetyo, 2016).

Good spirituality affects both the psychological and physiological aspects of humans. Human spirituality can be detected from how a person responds and struggles in the process of self-transcendence, resignation, integration and self-identity. According to Myers, spirituality is a power awareness that goes beyond the material aspects of life outside the individual. This awareness connects itself to the universe. Spirituality is the opposite of self-centeredness (Prasetyo, 2016). Spirituality according to Seyyed Hossein Nasr is sacred knowledge (scientia sacra) which is at the heart of every revelation and becomes the center of the core environment which includes and shapes tradition. Spirituality can come from revelation, it can also come from intellectual intuition that covers the light of the human heart and mind so that knowledge can be present, felt, experienced directly. Nasr argues, spirituality views all things as basically a reflection of “The Real” (Khoirudin, 2014).

2.2. Metaphysics

Metaphysics is the study of something that goes beyond physics (Derrida, 2002). In Comte’s view, the metaphysical stage is a transition from the theological stage to the positive stage. When the theological stage of humans requires gods to explain all phenomena, later in the metaphysical stage it is characterized by human belief in the laws of nature in the abstract in the form of philosophical thoughts that explain reality with abstract
causes, ideas and powers. At this stage the divine power is still quite strong (Biyanto, 2015). Metaphysics interprets something that exists as a general principle that can be found in all things whether animate or inanimate, real or intangible to religious. Archie J. Bahm views that every human being with the ability to think will question himself, his life and his future where these questions will lead humans to answers that exist in physical life in the world.

In the branch of philosophy, metaphysics overcomes and seeks clarity from sensory experience that is individual. Therefore, Louis O. Katsoff says that metaphysics is very useful in understanding today’s worldviews. Anton Bakker says that there are two schools of metaphysics, namely monism (a single reality, both material and spiritual). The opposite of monism is pluralism which views reality as plural and consists of autonomous units without any intrinsic relationship. Anthropologically, an example of metaphysics that influences human behavior is the awareness that humans are a microcosm, aka a small universe. Disturbance to nature therefore becomes disturbance to humans as well. And vice versa, taking care of nature means taking care of yourself (Suprapto, 1996). This is an example of human behavior that is influenced by the level of spirituality.

2.3. Materialism

Materialism when viewed from a philosophical point of view means the view that matter is the basis of everything that exists, even the basis of the universe. Mental and spiritual entities are rejected or reduced to matter (Derrida, 2002). Meanwhile, when viewed from a social perspective, in the materialism phase, humans prioritize the objects ownership and work hard to fulfill this, so that they do not consider non-material issues. Success and happiness are in turn material oriented.

The consequences of this materialist outlook are not simple for human life. Materialism is formed by market forces controlled by several institutional forces, including political, economic, technological, anthropocentric, and competitive forces. The materialism that forms materialistic behavior is basically negative, although the owner rarely realizes it. A materialist tends to maintain his consumptive nature in order to maintain his status (successful, rich, etc.). This has implications for feelings of less happiness and satisfaction with life and has the potential to experience psychological illness (Mulyono, 2011).

2.4. Metaverse

Metaverse is an extension of the real world that allows individuals to penetrate and engage through three-dimensional environments. With the new technologies involvement and progressive improvements, the virtual world will look very different in the days to come. The digital future will become more interactive, more vibrant, more tangible and more multimedia with powerful computing devices and smart wearables. It becomes a digital copy of the physical world that allows interaction between humans in the form of an avatar. This three-dimensional environment is realistic and allows real time interaction. Metaverse can be accessed via computers or smart devices that can immerse users in the online environment. Metaverse can also be said to be a new world resulting from the real world and the virtual world merger. There are no physical boundaries in metaverse. Even so, there are still many challenges that require to be overcome before metaverse becomes integrated into the physical world and everyday life (Lee et al., 2021).

With regard to spirituality, Yasraf Amir Piliang argues that metaverse as cyberspace is capable of changing human views on spirituality, religion with all its aspects to views on God. It is not impossible that in its later development, metaverse will also become a channel for conducting religious communication and practice as well as spreading and accommodating human spirituality expression. Metaverse can contribute to many changes
in the form and way humans carry out spiritual and religious activities in artificial spaces (Wijayanto, 2022).

3. Method

The focus of this research is human spirituality in metaphysical, materialism and metaverse waves. The reason underlying research on spirituality is since spirituality is a dimension that is owned or attached to everyone wherever it is and at any time. It is just that this dimension can experience change, development, reduction, one of which is influenced by situations outside of a person’s self. In this study, the external situations chosen are phases of human life that are closely related to metaphysical/supernatural things (metaphysical waves), phases when material issues absorb human focus (materialism waves) and phases when humans are very intimate with sophisticated digital technology (wave metaverse). These situations influence human spiritual experience and behavior. Later, the selection of the three situations is due to the symptoms that form the pattern that human life moves from all-spiritual, all-material to all-technological phase. Therefore, this is an interesting matter to examine its implications for spiritual life.

This type of research is literature research (library research). The data extracted in this study is qualitative data sourced from books, scientific journal articles and other literature. This study uses analysis using the continuity and change theory. Continuity and change are two elements contained in historical thinking. Both of these aspects involve the ability to recognize, analyze and assess the dynamics of historical continuity and change over a historical range. In addition, this aspect relates to a larger historical process. Historical complexity can be laid out in the form of continuity and change. It can be determined by comparing something in the present and the past or two things in the past. Sequencing events based on time is also important in this historical thinking (Alfian, 2018).

With this analytical model, this research will look for what has changed and what has remained in human spirituality during the wave shift from metaphysics, materialism to metaverse. With this kind of analysis, researchers hope to find a concept of spirituality that is not trapped in the situation and context of civilization. In other words, this research intends to find a universal meaning of spirituality that is appropriate to be applied in every era.

4. Result

4.1. Metaphysics

In the era of metaphysics, the debate among philosophers questioned the universe which was placed in the religious dimension. It takes place around the Middle Ages. Here is explored the general principles behind everything both animate and inanimate objects, tangible as well as abstract and religious. The questions in this phase refer to the nature of humans and the universe. Knowledge of this metaphysics affects the view of life and real life. The end of metaphysics study leads to an analysis of the Supreme Being existence as the answer to all changes in natural processes. Therefore, humans are very close to nature. Objectively, humans correlate with other humans as part of nature. Humans are a reflection of nature, and nature is a reflection of humans. Humans and nature define each other and give implications to each other. Formally, the world is very open to humans since humans are the only ones who question the world, unlike other creatures that depend on their habitat. In the mythological stage, humans are influenced by the universe in the form of socio-mystical (scope of power). Magi has a big role for humans. Humans always see a real form towards a higher power (Suprapto, 1996).
Human activity in metaphysical phase is a form of transcendental communication (Handayani et al., 2011) is human communication with the Highest or between humans and forces beyond human mind capability based on love. Human mindset at this stage is irrational. This communication is the result of human interaction with deep contemplation concerning its creation and something that cannot be perceived by the senses but is believed to exist (metaphysical existence).

4.2. Materialism

In the materialism phase, the human way of thinking is in an epistemological framework based on logic, the elaboration of hypotheses as deduction from the frame of mind and verification of hypotheses to test their truth factually. According to Jujun S. Suriasumantri, a logical frame of mind contains arguments whose explanations are rational (Handayani et al., 2011). At this stage humans have distanced themselves from nature so that they are no longer captivated by some kind of mystical experience. Humans and nature are placed in a ratio framework. Here something is detached from something else in order to find the substance of one thing. For example, humans, objects, values, nature and God are things that each stand alone (Suprapto, 1996).

Materialism is centered on an external orientation when a positive self-view is attached to the possession of things, money, power and an image that will be perpetuated by feedback from others. These inherent material things will become a person’s identity having a symbolic meaning, beyond an object usage for humans. There are those who say that materialism is a sign of prosperity and there are also those who argue that materialism cannot be judged as something good or bad due to materialism is an institution that exists in society (Mulyono, 2011). August Comte argued that the more modern society is, the more religion is abandoned. However, reality shows that there is an increase in modern society’s infatuation with spiritual values. There is a difference in that spirituality is not only related to divinity but has a function as a psychological escape, obsession and a momentary spiritual need. Material things that are so sparkling and dazzling in the modern era in fact make humans lose the spiritual which is a fundamental aspect of life. For example, industrial progress that moves people to pursue material and physical pleasures has pushed aside the realm of the human mind (Cathrin, 2021).

This is due to, firstly, the modernization paradigm influence which tends to be how I belong, not how I become meaningful. Second, modern life demands excessive productivity and utilizes time as effectively and efficiently as possible so that there is no spare time left for inner reflection or even fear of solitude. Third, the spirit that was originally accommodated by religion later ran towards “art”. Fourth, humans are no longer easily grateful, amazed and moved since life becomes prosaic (not poetic) in a rationalist nature. Fifth, the use of language tends to be technical and material. Sixth, religion is mixed with consumerism. Seventh, the family as the basic unit of human spirit is increasingly fragile. Eighth, there is a principle that whoever is strong wins and the spirit is included in the part that is not strong enough. Disappointment with materialism and rationalism gave rise to a quasi-religion movement which became a counter to secularism. The religious revival was marked by a movement of religious and spiritual fundamentalism. On the one hand, this phenomenon can be seen as a revival of fundamental awareness. However, on the other hand, this phenomenon can also be seen as simulacra of mysticism in which spirituality is used as therapy (Naim, 2013).

4.3. Metaverse

Metaverse is a new world which is the latest development of cyberspace. Related to this, Yasraf Amir Piliang argues that the spirit tends to be defined as bits of electronic
information that are abstract, live and reproduce. This view certainly requires a more concrete explanation. He added that

God is considered as the incarnation of human mind, intelligence and power in the forms of computer simulations which are considered to have powers that are close to those belong to God. Cyberists develop a vision of humans who no longer want to be subject to the authority of powers outside themselves. Holy places are also transformed into cyber mosques, virtual altars, virtual temples, cyber synagogues which are artificial and only exist in the form of computer bits. This is a challenge in religious life. This optimism in religion and spirituality field departs from cyberspace productivity as a medium of religious communication between religious communities on a global scale (Piliang, 2017).

Yasraf's view is perhaps a consequence at a very far-reaching stage, although it does not rule out the possibility of a society existence trapped in such a spiritual space. He added that there are contradicting opinions which say that cyberspace can damage spirituality and religious life. Cyberspace in fact does not provide space for concentration, contemplation or specificity as a nature of consciousness in the spiritual world due to attention and awareness are absorbed in technology and the effects therein which are models of speed, instantaneousness, and continuity of the flow of image changes. Solemnity will not be achieved in haste, panic, hysteria, which arise as an effect of operational speed and image changes (Piliang, 2017).

The fascination it produces, the visual oddity it creates, the speed with which it operates, the instantaneousness or temporality of the images that appear, the shallowness, the images that are displayed all become a veil covering true spiritual vibrations. What develops is not spiritual power, but extraction of speed, extraction of games and extraction of special effects. From these two camps, opinions emerged that mediated between the two, for example Zaleski, Slouka, Gand and Bola who overcame this by taking the good side of technology as an inevitability of changing times but rejecting the dark sides of ideologues, visions and pseudo spirituality behind cyberspace world. Nevertheless, efforts to foster spirituality through cyberspace platforms are still being intensively carried out both by individual clergymen and by religious communities (Fernando & Larasati, 2022). Despite understanding its potential for shallowness, cyberspace is still believed to have power that can influence its users, certainly, including in terms of spirituality.

5. Discussion

In the past, life was dominated by metaphysics. Traces of these symptoms can still be found in traditional society habits where activity requires sacred, supernatural and spiritual matters. Likewise in science development, before metaphysics even though it could not be sensed, it had a big influence on epistemology building. This is different from modern civilization which relies on rational and positivistic ways of thinking and abandons theological and metaphysical ways of thinking. Culture in positivism is built from knowledge that is free from myths, beliefs and metaphysics (Afifi, 2022).

When humans experience progress in the field of science and technology, materialism dominates in various fields of life. Spirituality and religion are part of the culture industry, they are also part of all light, shallow, easily digestible, average, illusive and entertaining qualities so that they are deprived of the qualities of depth, transcendence, reflection, intellectual and sacred. Instead of providing enlightenment, religion becomes part of the world of pleasure, entertainment, enjoyment, messages and illusions that are played as commodity logic (Piliang, 2017). The age of information, mass media and visual culture development today also poses a serious challenge to the methods, ways and techniques of
conveying religious teachings. Religion and culture industry are now in the arena of ideological battle to win the attention, awareness and recognition of the subject (Yohana, 2023).

Cyberspace is considered capable of serving all human interests, including in matters of religion/spirituality. Cyberspace is empowered to transform spiritual activities such as worship to religious organizations. Efforts to understand the cyberspace radical effects have also been made by theologians, spiritual teachers and philosophers. Cyber thinkers (cyberists) provide views on Net-Religionist representations that deny all forces within and outside of humans themselves, particularly mysticism (deity, God) and masters (state, king, democracy). This condition has several characteristics, one of which is the phobia of the highest truth and supreme power (God) so that God is seen as nothing more than an illusion that creates a false awareness about forces outside of humans. For Net-Religionists the real religion is evolutionism which is built on classical assumptions concerning human power (Sitti Nurchalifa Umaternate et al., 2021).

William Indict argues that spiritual perception is often blocked in most people’s minds (Indict, 2015). Decades ago, most people could not have imagined that humans would spend a large part of their lives engaged in the virtual world of digital media. Today, most people cannot imagine life without digital media. In the writer’s o (Fernando et al., 2023) observation, digital technology has been included in sacred rituals with spiritual nuances. The digital media existence in it can be considered as a distraction that reduces the sacredness and solemnity of carrying out rituals. Despite the call to temporarily put down their digital devices, many congregations are still busy taking pictures and videos during the ritual procession. This can be a real example that can be found in everyday life how digital technology has an impact on the appreciation of spirituality.

For people who grow up in a digital environment, shifts in the balance of sensory perception occur automatically and unconsciously. People intuitively know that digital media is changing our environment and therefore changing minds. Humans step across theoretical cultural threshold into digital culture. Humans today have almost reached the point of limitless processing potential. When this occurs, infinite abstraction facilitates integral awareness. Digital simulation will create super clear virtual reality. Technology complexity will create mystical implications (Indict, 2015).

6. Conclusion

Philosophy at the stage of metaphysics attempt to relate all appearances and sensory experiences to a power existence behind them that is supernatural, spiritual and is essential. Whereas philosophy in the materialism phase explains that all processes in human life are within a scientific and empirical framework so that they are detached from spiritual matters. And in the metaverse era that intersects with post-modernism, scientists have discussed how humans through their technological innovations can carry out various spiritual denials such as denying death and realizing a new spirituality in a space that is not bound by physical laws, namely cyberspace. The mindset of the metaphysical-materialism-metaverse phase is irrational-rational-irrational. In the metaphysical era, many supernatural things affect humans so that their way of thinking becomes irrational.

In the materialism era, human thinking is completely rational. Meanwhile, in the metaverse phase, humans return to thinking irrationally, however not due to metaphysical influence matters, but due to various matters influence in meta universe, which are simulacra of various matters in the real world. At the present time, the view of human life on earth is becoming richer. Apart from being built from a metaphysical and materialist
perspective, technological sophistication has also brought humans to a phase of “disruption” in various fields. All views are accommodated in this era so that there is no single truth and there is also something that is truly established that leads humans to all kinds of uncertainty. Therefore, social scientists remind people to return to true spirituality by reviewing, re-understanding and implementing spirituality according to each person’s beliefs and religion.

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Contributions of the authors in this article: Wiji Nurasih contribute as concepts an and interpreters. Ainiyatul Latifah contribute to collecting data. Adil Hassan Ibrahim Mohamed contribute as critically revising the article. All authors agree to take responsibility for all aspects of this work.

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