

ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

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H. Bergson, the famous French philosopher of the twentieth century, wrote that he did not become a Christian because of his loyalty to Judaism. Islam denounces this kind of loyalty and stresses that man should be loyal only to the truth. I am Muslim not because my parents were Muslims. I am Muslim because I searched for many years in the East and West and I found that Islam alone is a complete and true religion.

The moral crisis of our time is directly related to the misconception and extrapolation of scientific theories. I will dwell on these questions in order to bring out better the soundness of Islamic teachings on human knowledge.

Renaissance was an intellectual movement that had been developed under the influence of ancient cultures during XV and XVI centuries in Western Europe. However, it is unfair not to mention here that Muslims had a significant part in the awakening of the Renaissance's spirit. Muslims ruled from 711 to 1492, almost eight hundred years in Spain and made great efforts, without prejudice, for the development and spreading of knowledge. They had imported Greek ideas and philosophy to France and Italy.

This new spirit gave a new impulse to mathematics and experimental sciences. The speedy progress of these sciences in XVI Century raised hopes for a prosperous and happy humanity. In his "Discours de la Methode", Descartes, who is one of the initiators of the sciences, has written:

"It is possible to reach a knowledge useful for life, discovering the power and actions of fire, water, atmosphere, heavenly bodies, space and other bodies around us, we may use them for proper purposes and thus become masters and possessors of nature."

Unfortunately, this hope did not last too long. It was soon changed into a heart-breaking deceit. Man discovered the forces of nature and liberated them from the chains of the physical world, but he failed to put them at the service of mankind. These forces were soon mastered by the selfish biological nature of man, which had been unleashed, in its turn, by misinterpretation and extrapolation of Darwin's theories. Today, the biological man, much to Descartes's surprise, endangers life on earth with chemical and nuclear warfare.

Methodical doubt of Descartes and scepticism of Hume illustrate that initiators of science themselves were not thinking that science could grasp the reality.

For them, science was a product of human spirit inventing new ideas which have to be verified through experimental process. In fact, experience alone does not lead to truth. Experience by itself is rather in favor of Aristotle who had maintained that earth was motionless and the elements were endowed with specific weight or lightness. Man had to invent many ideas in order to prove that these conclusions of Aristotle based on immediate experience, were erroneous. Thus, the establishment of scientific facts implies hypotheses leading to a proper direction.

Also, W. James has criticized the concept of scientific truth as the image of reality and the spirit as a mirror. He pointed out that this truth has an import only in the act of verification, which requires often our entire physical and mental activity. Whenever, our spirit ceases to work properly, the illusion takes place. Fichte, the German philosopher, asserted that illusion is the result of our activities suffering certain limitation.

These observations bring us to the essential aspect of the modern school of thought which gives more importance to the manner of establishing the scientific facts than these facts themselves. This school sees in science a continuous effort of reason to approach the reality and condemns the narrow positivism that might reduce science to a new scholastic system.

The French philosopher, Augustin Cournot had rightly emphasized on the relative position of science. Indeed, a few years after his passing away in 1877, scientists began to use the notion of relativity extensively. In physical science, A. Einstein announced his "Special Theory of Relativity" in 1905 and his work entitled "The Foundation of the General Theory of Relativity" was published in 1915.

However, the educational programs in the West, which have been adopted by Islamic countries, seem to be based on a quite different understanding of science. They do not disclose the real nature and limits of scientific theories and give a wrong idea about the infallibility of sciences. Thus, these programs have induced the young generations to err.

The most misleading are Marx and Freud's assumptions. Marx and Freud both did not have a philosophical depth. They misinterpreted and extrapolated Darwin's theories. Darwin tried to prove that natural selection is at the origin of species and the struggle for the control of food supply is an essential component of this process. We all know that natural

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selection has been never regarded as totally convincing. Many other theories have been advanced for filling its gaps. But in spite of these attempts, the real cause of life's evolution is still unknown. The French philosopher-biologist, Jean Rostand, wrote in his book entitled "Biology and Humanism": "I dare to admit that the mainspring of evolution remains entirely unknown to us at the present time."

Marx transplanted Darwin's assumptions to the social sciences. He maintained that economic conditions determine the forms of human societies, institutions and intellectual activities. Now these conditions themselves mainly proceed from an endemic struggle of classes for the control of food supply. Thus, political and philosophical thoughts, religion, arts, literature and music bear the indelible brand of this struggle. According to Marx, religion is an opium cultivated by some shrewd men for exploitation of the people. This is what he means by his slogan: "Religion is the opium of the masses".

Thus, Marx insulted human intelligence by his anti-religious statements. Durkheim, the founder of sociology, denies categorically the emotional incriminations of Marx. He maintains that religion could not have persisted so long without a rational and spiritual ground. Mankind could not have been as naïve as to be cheated by prophets for thousands of years.

Freud also had been impressed by Darwin who tried to show that man descends from animal. Precisely, Freud had noticed, besides the greed for food, on which Marx based his philosophy, another driving power in the animal kingdom, which is the sexual drive. He tried to explain man, on the basis of this power, in every stage of his mental and spiritual evolution. In fact, sublimation in final analysis, is nothing but the transmutation of sexual energy to intellectual or spiritual activities. For Freud, Beethoven's symphonies are the products of this process. Thus, Marx and Freud deny the independent creative power of human spirit, distort human reality, reduce man to the level of animal and undermine the moral and spiritual values.

I end these preliminary observations with the statement of the French academician, F. Brunetiers: "It is now obvious that science cannot serve mankind as a moral guide."

The Holy Qur'an proclaims the human reason the most wonderful of the wonders of this creation and appeals to it for distinguishing truth from error:

"Let there be no compulsion in religion — truth stands out clear from error". The Holy Prophet said: "Reason is the root of my religion".

Qur'an leads man through the channel of reason to the mysteries of this Universe and asks him to think about the Ultimate Reality causing this phenomenal

show. However, Qur'an has not passed over the limitation of the human reason. It reveals that the inner essence of the Universe is beyond the grasp of man's understanding, and man is unable to know the hidden relationship of God, the Prime cause, to this creation. It emphasizes the relative character of discursive knowledge by disclosing that it is conditioned by time and space. "To God belong the EAST and the WEST: withersoever ye turn, there is the presence of God. For God is all-pervading, all-knowing."

Thus, Holy Qur'an shows that the EAST and the WEST are notions which belong to the concept of space, while divine existence is free from all spatial conditions. It is also pointed out in Qur'an that "No vision can grasp Him (God) but His grasp is over all vision. He is above all comprehension. Yet He is acquainted with all things."

Thus, God because of His omnipresence, which is an absolute condition of His Unity, is not perceivable through three dimensional forms of human perception. Time as a series of discontinuous segments (duree) is a way in which God manifests himself in space, while He is without a beginning (agali) or an end (abadi) in time and in space.

As far as the law of causation is concerned, Qur'an discloses the will of God at the origin of the causal chains bringing about this creation. It is revealed in Qur'an that "to Him is due the primal origin of the heavens and the earth: when He decreeth a matter, He saith to it be and it is."

However, the words "primal origin" indicate that the universe was not created at once in its present form, and that time and space appeared with actualization of initial cause. Thus, time, space and causation are coessential features of the known world. Time and space are inconceivable without causation and this is also true in the reverse order. Man's consciousness has been developed in the bosom of causal changes in time and space, and categories of intellect dealing with the outside world are necessarily formed according to the conditions of man's physical existence. Therefore, the intellect has no grasp on the inner essence of this creation.

However, Qur'an does not let man live in despair and ignorance of the Ultimate Reality. It indicates other ways for man to rise to the understanding of his Creator. Besides intelligence, man is also endowed with a spiritual power which is his divine part and gives him a transcendental dimension. According to Qur'an, spirit enables man to reach three different stages of certainty or faith in God in three ways which are *Ilm ul-Yaqin*, *Ayn ul-yaqin* and *Haqq ul-yaqin*.

In the light of Qur'an's teachings, Muslim scholars discussed the concepts of time and space and the law of causation, and disclosed the real nature and

limitations of man's intellect.

Imam Ghazali is well known for his strong criticism of reason. In his work entitled, "Tehafat el-falasepha" — (vanity of philosophers), he discloses the illusive character of philosophy based on pure reason. In this sense he is certainly an early forerunner of E. Kant, the German philosopher.

For Jalaludin Rumi, who has really assimilated the substance of Qur'an, time and space are the conditions which determine the form of man's information on this phenomenal world. He points out that human knowledge obtained through the forms of time and space is mediate, relative and of no avail for grasping the Absolute Reality.

According to Rumi, man's intellect grows with the understanding of the outside world and at this stage, his knowledge is based on reasoning through symbols which do not correspond to reality. This stage is the childhood of human awareness. A child, for instance, does not really know the sexual pleasure other than he has been told that it is sweet like "holva". A child tries to explain things in his world by their likeness and differences and cannot see the hidden and intimate causal relationship between them. In the same way intellect, which explains the realities in the world by a rational relationship cannot see the real cause behind the rational harmony and order within this creation. In fact, the fine and precise adjustments in the realm of life are considered by science to be the results of a series of accidents.

As I said before, Qur'an establishes three degrees of certainty or faith which correspond to three different stages of human awareness. Many Sufis and Muslim scholars have commented on the ayat (verses) of Qur'an related to these stages. Here, I restrict myself again to Rumi's views.

Rumi says that God has breathed in man His spirit; this spirit is the source of man's liberty, it gives him not only the freedom of choice, but the possibility of transcending the world and his own physical and psychological conditions. In this line of thought he wrote: "Man's body is like a ladder of black ebony and he has another one of white ivory in his inside, he has to climb both of them in order to reach the light of truth". Rumi designates by the ladder of black ebony, the intellect, which cannot alone bring man out of the dark well of his senses. He has to resort to the ladder of ivory, which is his spirit, in order to reach the light of truth. He explains the same idea in his verses about Miradj:

"The ascension (Miradj) is, the very being of man, he rises in himself, by departing from the outside world, which is darkness, toward inside, which is the realm of light and from there toward his creator."

Rumi says that the man who has surpassed mental

childhood and become aware of the possibilities of his consciousness, and awakened to the transcendental nature of his soul, passes beyond the analytical and adopts a synthetical way of thinking.

For him, the rational harmony of this world, which springs from one will through separate series of causes, is the most significant characteristic of Being. The Law of Causation is simply a question of technicality — this is to say — adjustment of the means to an end. The most amazing is the blue-print of this world in the mind of the Creator. It is impossible to disclose this blueprint by knowing only properties of the material used in the construction of this world. Thus, Rumi who looks for total knowledge is not really interested in the bio-chemical processes which are at the origin of flower, fruit, animal and man. He is rather amazed (hyran) by the harmonious aspect of their existential relationship, which is an obvious and mysterious indication of their belonging to a common scheme.

It is not important, for Rumi, to know how consciousness resulted from bio-chemical changes in the bosom of matter. The most amazing is its latent possibility within the Being encompassing the Universe.

When man is awakened to all these mysterious aspects of existence and sees in them the manifestation of a transcendental will and submits himself to this will, he reaches the certainty of *Ilm ul-yaqin* — (certainty of knowledge). Qur'an reveals: "God created the heavens and the earth in true (proportion) verily and that is a sign for those who believe." In another ayat is stated: "On the earth are signs for those of assured faith, as also in your own selves: will ye not then see?"

According to Rumi the signs in man's soul lead him to *Ayn ul-yaqin* (certainty of vision). He says that the encounter with God in "self" gives sight to the eyes. Once man reaches this stage, he has no other choice but to be a wonder-struck (*hayran*) in the face of Eternity. The wonder (*hayrat*) is the awakening of reason to the mysteries of creation. In this sense, wonder is a stage on the way of (*marifat*) Gnos. This is why Sufis say that knowledge of God cannot be obtained, except by a reason inflamed with wonder. Since wonder is recognition of the inexplicable, the inclination of the soul to beauty is a wonder, among many others, which leads to transcendence. In this connection, Rumi wrote: "I know, O son, that everything in the Universe is a jug which is (filled) to the brim with wisdom and beauty. It (everything in the Universe) is a drop of the ocean of His beauty 'Twas a hidden treasure, because of its fullness, it burst forth and made the earth more shining than the heavens."

Rumi sees another sign in dissatisfaction of man in the world. There is something, he says, in man which is incommensurate with his physical life, his knowledge

and his spiritual universe. In the famous "Song of the Reed", Rumi shows this dissatisfaction.

Harken to this reed forlorn
Breathing, ever since, was torn
From its rushy bed, a strain
of impassioned love and pain
The secret of my son, though near,
None can see and none can hear.
Oh, for a friend to know the sign
And mingle all his soul with mine;
'Tis the flame of love that fired me.
'Tis the wine of love that inspired me.
Wouldn't thou learn how lovers bleed,
Hearken, hearken to the reed.

Another sign in man's soul is the concept of an absolute being from which man drives out all significance and value.

Man's perpetual move toward unity (tawhid) is also a sign which leads to transcendence. In fact, man is not satisfied with one mode of encompassing or with all modes united together, he aspires to a fundamental unity.

Hafiz, the famous Persian poet, believes that the Presence of God can be felt through His signs. He wrote:

"To see your face, sour-seeing eyes are needed.
This is not within the power of my world-seeing eyes."

Finally comes the state of Haqq ul-yaqin. This is the union with God through love. The knowledge obtained through previous stages leads to the love of God. There is a close connection between love and knowledge. This connection is disclosed in Hadith Qudsi of Hidden Treasure:

I was a concealed treasure. I loved to be known
so the world is revealed.

The Greeks then have not linked the world love with knowledge accidentally. In doing so, they have created the term philosophy (love of knowledge) which is in reality the definition of consciousness itself. In fact, knowledge or knowing presupposes a desire or love; without this desire consciousness is inconceivable.

Ghazali says:

Man must love God . . . If he does not, then it is because of his ignorance of himself and his Creator, for love is the fruit of knowledge.

Also, Ghazali, like other sufis considers the spirit, in accordance with Qur'an's teachings, as the real cause of creation and the actualization of divine attributes in man as the last stage of human evolution: I quote from Ihya:

What may be mentioned is the nearness of the servant to his Lord in attributes which call for imitation and patterning himself on the character of the Lord . . . such attributes as knowledge, piety, goodness, kindness and spreading mercy and good

among God's creatures.

In the line of thought, Rumi says:

"In the presence of God two self's cannot be contained. You say I and He say I. Whether you die in front of Him, or He will die in front of you so that there may not be duality, but it is impossible and inconceivable that God dies, because He is eternally living . . . You have to die so that He may raise himself in you and duality disappear."

Nietzsche and J.P. Sartre proclaimed a few years ago that God is dead. These pseudo-philosophers were confused. They could not see what is really dying. Indeed, God does not die because He is eternally living. What is dying is humanity in front of rising animal within man. Precisely, the events that are taking place in the present world make us believe that the animal within man is prevailing with a frantic desire of destruction.

We may conclude that Islam makes Ilm or knowledge, which includes sciences, an obligation for women and men, and recommends to seek it, even in China. However, Islam does not admit self-sufficiency of sciences. Sufis pointed out that Ilm by itself, alone, is like a harmful snake, but when it is guided by the heart, it becomes a helpful friend. The heart in Sufis' language designates the Faith in God. Faith in general, is, in the modern language, the answer of the mind-computer to the questions raised through its dialogue with the Universe. This answer depends on the way the mind is programmed. Some sufis express this idea in these words, "Knowledge of man and (marifat) that he has of God depend entirely on his education. Science provides a partial philosophy, gives general and (marifat) full information through the three ways that I have previously explained. The agnostics who are not awakened to the inner aspect and wonders of creation are not programmed to reach the Ultimate Reality. They are misled by superficial and partial information, they do not reach Unity (Tawhid) and they live in the darkness of nefs ul-lawwama: The soul ravaged by conflicting ideas.

Oh, Allah, give us the wisdom and the courage to be true Muslims, to know the real enemies of Islam and fight them, to serve high purposes of your religion, to carry out our obligations toward those Muslims who are making Jihad for Your glory. And finally, raise us with your love above the prejudices and conflicts created by the idol of narrow nationalism.

