

The Study of the Creed and Sciences of the Shi'ah

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From a scientific point of view, the first conflict of all religions, civil and ethical laws would be against two basic human forces, viz. reason and the will. Reason without any restriction accepts whatever it understands, and, the will without any reservation and obligation can do whatever it wishes. Owing to their specific principles, religion and law restrict reason, and by their commandments and prohibitions obligate the will, no matter if it is in favour of an individual or society. They are, at least to this extent, against individual and collective freedom. Thus, every religion and law, from their beginnings, faces such obstacles. Hence, their success in wooing man's obedience, rests on persuading a person to overlook his absolute freedom and will power and willingly and earnestly surrender to them as having considerable convincing power. Definitely those religions that have succeeded to establish themselves in the past throughout the world enjoy such a convincing power.

Apart from civil codes that have the backing of the executive in the society, religious and moral rules do not, however, enjoy such support. As the human thought develops and social relations become more complicated, the success of the religious and moral rules in controlling man diminish. For, their success rests on proposing more convincing power as compared to other powers that influence man.

The cause of such weakness of religions has nothing to do with the progress of mankind and the emergence of civilizations or the incompatibility of religion with them. Rather, there is another chief cause, particularly in the case of ancient religions, that is the concealment of the original power of religion that in the course of time and in different places certain additions and subsidiaries attached to it, as a result of which they have lost their charm, flexibility and dynamism, have become stagnated, uninteresting, and perhaps for someone, irrational. It is possible to regain its original power to the extent that it appears as a religion that can respond to the religious feelings of contemporary man, but to do this a distinction must be made between the primary simple principles and those temporal and spatial additions. However, it is not an easy task to make such a distinction, for primary simple principles and the additions have intermingled with each other to the extent that it is not possible to do so in an ordinary manner nor even in a scientific manner. A new scientific inquiry is required to carry out this task. It is not possible to elaborate all aspects of such an inquiry, nor it is possible to explain it roughly in a way to be meaningful. At the same time, its meaning would be clear if we

group all of them under the title of 'Scientific Study,' and then proceed to know the meaning of .this concept

What is Scientific Study ?

We can present another definition of the term scientific study parallel with the tradition of religious studies centres. If we ignore the traditional meaning of ijihad which hitherto has been used in Usul al-Fiqh, since the advent of Islam and take it into account as a scientific method (a scientific method which is not seen in scientific books), then we can say in brief that ijihad , as a scientific method of all sciences, is the scientific reference of the problems to their primary principles and evidences, in other words, to understand the problems from their primary principles and evidences under certain specific conditions on the basis of certain premises and foundations to maintain its scientific characteristics.

Parallel to this scientific method of ijihad which is based on Aristotelian logic, we may explain scientific study as reference of any thought, belief, and incident, in general, all problems and speculative or practical affairs, both individual or collective, to their existential causes and establishing a scientific order between them on the basis of certain principles and laws, in a way a muhaqqiq (researcher) unlike a Muballigh (preacher) tries to understand the wherefore of an issue and has nothing to do with its approval or negation, truth or falsehood of the issues. But such an inquiry, i.e., trying to construe the existential causes of thought, beliefs, and incidents, in general exploring the existential causes of all problems and affairs, and their references to their causes, should be carried out under certain conditions and laws. After Descartes a new method of inquiry of natural sciences, based on empirical laws, came to light. Through Hegel, Geisteswissenschaften (spiritual sciences) also came to be dealt with by this method. Researchers in the Geisteswissenschaften in the nineteenth century sought to achieve the certainty of natural sciences in their respective fields. In this way a new method of inquiry in social sciences came into existence, keeping in view that the meaning, kind, and condition of experience depend on different sciences. This method, in so far as it concerns the past issues, is known as historical method, provided that here the term history is not to be construed as historiography in the special sense of history, but in the sense of a research method based on certain criteria, principles, and foundations.

Following this introduction , a question may born in mind about the extent to which inquiry on Islam in general and the Shi'i creed in particular benefited from this method. From the nineteenth century onward, this method was used by the Orientalists in dealing with Islam. Despite their importance, their works covered only the political, economic, and social aspects of Islam and failed to touch the inner causes of Islam, that is, ideological and intellectual

factors which were effective in the spiritual and ideological development of Islam, moreover they constitute the superstructure of political, economic, and social matters as well. Regarding the Shi'i creed studies also, this problem seems to be greater than other problems, that is, they not only committed the above-mentioned error, but they based their research works only on Sunni sources on the Shi'ah or they studied the Shi'ah in an atmosphere under the influence of Sunni attitudes to the Shi'ah.

If we view all the books and articles on Islam and Islamic countries in the West (as I have done with the journal *Abstracta Islamica* since 1943 onward) we would come to know that out of one hundred articles on Islam only two articles are related to non-Sunni Islam, and out of seven articles or books on the Shi'ah, only one of them is related to the Ithna 'Ashari (twelver) Shi'ah. That is, out of 350 books and articles on Islam only one book is related to the Ithna 'Ashari (twelver) Shi'ah which is less than books on the Ismalis or Zaydis.

At present, we have nothing to do with the causes. Let us look at some of the ironical comments in those books about the Shi'ah: Shi'ah Islam is nothing than a political sect; the Shi'ahs are followers of the Mutazalites; the Shi'ah revived the ancient Iranian dynasty system in the life of the Prophet's children lives. Shi'ah believe in the distortion of the Qur'an. Shi'ah equate their Imams with the Prophet (S.A.W.). Shi'ah under the influence of Christians believe in the sacrifice of a holy person (the third Imam (A.S.) to save the ummah from their sins. Finally, Shi'ah is a Sufi sect. Such comments are still common, and permeate the West even through the Encyclopedias of Islam. So, only through a proper scientific inquiry it is possible to prove that such allegations are unfounded.

Besides these two reasons, i.e. (1) the need to distinguish the primary principles from the subsidiaries or unreal impressions, and (2) discerning and distinguishing different intellectual and ideological layers, the following reasons also can be cited:

1. Among the Shi'i sources, there is a great deal of material concerning the ideas of other Shi'i sects. So, through a scientific inquiry it is possible to analyze their views and trace their historical background. In the light of such analysis the distinct schools of thought will be known and their basic differences with that of the Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ah (twelver) would come to light and indirectly it would help to know their simple and clear principles.
2. Unlike Sunni Muslims, the Ithna 'Ashari Shi'ah retained the tradition of philosophy in their study centres, particularly after the fourth century onward and made great contribution to the development of philosophy without dislocating it from its philosophical path and transforming it into an imaginary form as Isma'ilis did. Along with such development in philosophy, they achieved successes in spiritual sciences in regard to scientific thought and terminology, as

well. The verdicts of persons like Ignaz Goldziher and Franz Rosenthal etc. are unfounded by saying that Islamic Sciences in the Shi'i world are not dynamic. A scientific inquiry about these sciences and the development of Greek philosophy would delineate their mutual effects, a mutual effect other than what is believed in the West.

3. An inquiry into the origin and the development of Shi'i studies and sciences would not only distinguish the scholars of different areas and beliefs but it paved the way for a comparative studies of different schools of thoughts in Islam in general and Sunni Islam in particular.

Altogether, many common points and new bases other than the prevalent one would emerge.

4. If in the future, at any place, such wishes come true and the foundation of a kind of critique and scientific inquiry into Islamic sources and schools of thought was laid down, then scientific inquiry into the Shi'ah would bear certain hallmarks owing to their material and formal sources.

5. Although the Shi'i sciences and thoughts developed in a direction different from that of the Western sciences, yet, there are certain achievements in certain branches of science parallel with Western thought. To bring to light such achievements and contrast them with scientific achievements in the West would bring out certain hallmarks of the Western sciences, and at same time it would give a chance to Muslims to be familiar with the Western scientific method and their common points with them.

6. An exploration into these issues in scientific and proper investigative way and finding out certain principles and bases which Shi'ahs consider the rational principles of their thought may result in the emergence of a new movement from within Islam without interference of any external factors which are alien to the spirit of Islamic and scientific thought. As a consequence of which, on the one hand Islamic original forces would find a new life, and on the other hand religious people would get convincing answers proportionate to their time and progress of mankind. Following such reasons on the importance of setting about an inquiry into Shi'i sources, let us now embark on a problem which is common among the Westerners and the Easterners and discuss their solutions as well. I mean to discuss the mutual incompatibility of duties, it in other words, the incompatibility of certain cases in which an ethical value stands against other values. Or in the ethical sense of the words, when an ethical value stands incompatible with other values. To trace the origin of this controversy, it is necessary to distinguish the differences among the three notions of virtue, duty and ethical value.

When an ethical act occurs not accidentally but voluntarily by an agent who is trained to do so, then such a voluntarily state in Islamic ethical language, that state of the soul is called virtue. This is the viewpoint of Greek and Islamic schools of thought. There is no conflict between virtues, so far as they are attributes of the soul, for example, courage and chastity. There is no

incompatibility among these issues. Ethical duty is the same ethical act in regard to the necessity of its emanation or performance by human beings. In the Western ethical schools, Kant is considered to be the exponent of ethical duty. Contradiction and conflict between the .ethical duties is debatable and conceivable

Ethical Values

Besides virtue and duty, there is another ethical dimension which is called value. Value is ethical matter per se, irrespective of the agent or subjective state of the agent and irrespective of the necessity of doing or leaving it by human beings. For instance, the very good and bad itself, etc., Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann are the exponents of this idea. There are also contradictions among values.

After such an introduction, we proceed to propose the problem as such; when in certain cases two duties, ethical values or legal values come to be incompatible, in a way the agent is bound to follow one and leave the other one, now the question is whether the agent is guilty for abandoning his duty or ignoring the other ethical value and should he be blamed and punished or is there an alternative to it. Greek philosophers and Christian ethical philosophers ascribe such contradiction to the contradiction of ethical and non-ethical issues, not the contradiction of two ethical issues. In his book *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant discusses this issue and denies any conflict between two ethical duties. In his view, a duty is a principle and rational rule. Thus, contradiction of two rational duties at the same time which both are indispensable is inconceivable, for, in this case they would not be called rational rules. Conflict may occur, but between their arguments not the duties. Therefore, such conflict of the duties stems from the conflict of their reasons and after a rational study we would conclude that the reasons of one of the duties versus the other one is poor to create duty, that is, a practical rule. Keeping in view the classification of the duties, Kant proposes the solution of the problem as follows: if two arguments contradict each other, it is not the practical reason that says that the sound one should exist, rather, sound argument itself would exist. It is to be concluded that on Kant's approach the conflict between two opposing reasons has nothing to do with agents.

This solution is in keeping with Kant's philosophy and his way of thought. He refers all duties as rules to practical reason and in his view it is impossible to set up two opposing rules on general systems of duties. This solution is not applicable to those schools of thought that do not believe that duties, like rules, stem from practical reason, or do not believe in any convincing power higher than individual power, like social or divine power.

Nicolai Hartmann, one of the founders of the schools of ethics, says that conflict of ethical values is one of the metaphysical problems of ethics. He believes in gradation of values and is

of the view that a person (agent) should act according to the ethical values that he feels stronger and sound and ignore the other one which he considers weaker. At the same time, he confesses that if a person ignores a weak ethical value he would be sinful. In this case, the human being would be always sinful. Hartmann considers it the destiny of human beings. Indeed, the Christian idea of the innate sin of man underlies such belief, moreover, in this theory also certain principles and assumptions are taken for granted without referring to an agent.

The Shi'i Approach

Let us now study this problem within the framework of Islamic tradition in general and Shi'i scientific tradition in particular and assess the solution. In our tradition we did not face this problem in such form, rather it appeared in the form of conflict of proofs (adillah, amarah, and usul) or tazahum (interference) of rules. And their solutions appeared in the form of takhsis (specification), taqayyud (qualification), takhassus, wurud, hukumat, tarjih, takhayyur, etc. It is clear that we have nothing to do with two duties in a general or a particular sense, or it is not the case of absolute and determined concepts. There are other solutions based on the following facts:

1. Acceptance and surrender before divine legislation.
2. Taking for granted the existence of the difference between strong and weak proofs, e.g., amarah and usul.
3. Admitting that every human being is responsible according to its capacity, therefore, a person may not face two opposing duties, so by obtaining one of them he would be free from any sin.

These statements, however, may not be convincing reasons to a person who does not believe in these principles. Here we can refer to the views of two eminent Shi'i jurists, namely Shaykh Muhammad Hasan the author of Jawahir and Shaykh Murtada Ansari. They use the two rules of wurud and hukumat to clarify their positions. They mean to say that sometimes a proof can nullify the theme of the other proof, that is, repudiate its soundness, or a proof can limit or expand the scope of the subject or even predicate another proof.

Owing to the foregoing idea and Kant's views we can conclude that Kant's solution was that the contradiction of the two duties should be referred to conflict of their proofs, that is, one proof ultimately would emerge as a plausible proof and the other one would be rejected as a proof for being weak. Following such ideas of Kant and keeping in view those points in the notion of wurud (apart from its application in religious issues), the following solutions could be proposed without impairing the soundness of either proof. Now it should be considered whether in a

special case of the opposition of two proofs, one of those proofs can nullify the subject of the other proof in such a way that the second proof maintains its nature and loses its hujjiyat (its authority as a proof) or not? If it is possible, then we can conclude that only one proof and one moral value is directed towards the agent, and without undermining either of the duties the agent would keep away from the arena of contradiction. Here we may have some name for

warid (the dominant proof) or not.

However, this solution may not be useful to the school of values, but this is applicable to the laws rooted in divine rules as well as ethical and civil laws on daily life of human being, which have certain causes and certain advantages. They can be executed easily without constructing it on certain limiting and particular principles. Similarly, we can use from certain points available in the notion of hukumat, that is, we can say that two opposing proofs or duties or values retain their authority as proofs in a real sense of the word, and only in the cases of the

contradiction between two proofs one of them would supervise and limit the other's scope.

This approach less than the former approach, i.e., wurud relies on certain axioms which may contradict those of other schools of thought. It can be implemented even in moral values, and civil code and duties. The aforementioned approach signifies the meticulousness of Shi'i scholars and their way of resolving the problems related to the daily life of mankind, and while supporting the forgoing six proofs it shows how it is possible to carry out a scientific inquiry into creeds and schools of thought as well as how to participate in human civilization and interplay with them and pave the way for further development on the bases of the potentials of the Shi'ah. To realize such a wish is possible only in an open and fair atmosphere by real and

hardworking scholars who are free from any subjective passion and ambition.

In order to attain this goal, the University of Cologne set up a centre for the study of the Shi'i sciences and creed in 1965, and it has thus far collected eight thousand books on the Shi'i school of thought on different branches ranging from fiqh, usul, kalam, rijal, philosophy, and history. It is interesting to note that this centre did ' not have even a single book on the Shi'ah previously. Since 1967, when I participated in the Congress of Orientalists in Wurtsburg, Germany and gave a report on the importance of the study of Shi'i sciences and creed, special attention has been paid to this issue and more than ten articles have been written on this topic by Professor Erwin Graef and myself, and more than ten books are to be written. Such success paved the way for further progress in our work and established our relation with other research .centres as well

Notes:

1. This article addresses those who are specialized in Islamic studies, thus, it refrains from

dealing with it in detail.

2. Cf. R. Srothmann, "El Schi'a" in Encyclopedia of Islam. Handbuch der orientalistik, 8. Band, Religion, Brill, 1910; 1. Goldziher, Vorlesungen fiber den Islam, Heidelberg, 1910; Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung, Leiden, 1952; Th. Noeldeke, Geschichte des Korans, Leipzig 1909. 3. Cf. The Technique and Approach of Muslim scholarship, Rome 1947.

4. Nicolai Hartmann and Max Scheler.

5. Cf. H. Thielicke, Theologische Ethik, Tübingen, 1965.

6. Kant, Metaphysik der Sitta, Philosophische Bibliothek.

7. Cf. N. Hartmann, Ethik, Berlin 1945.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Particularly Professor Dr. Erwin Graef and Dr. Wolfgang Wagner; the Finance and administrative deputy of the university contributed a lot in establishing the Centre for Studying .the Shi'i Creed and Sciences