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# Status of Religion in Humanities in Post-Revolutionary Iran: Discourses and Strategies

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*Abstract: After the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, changing the curriculum of various disciplines of humanities became one of the priorities of the revolutionary elites and intellectuals. They tried to reconstruct humanities in line with the prevailing needs and conditions of the country to utilize them for the country's development. The present article is an attempt to study the following issues: To review different perspectives in this regard; to study the trend of developments in the field of humanities; to evaluate the impact of these changes on the production of knowledge in this field; to analyze the scientific outcome of these developments; and finally to depict the prospect of humanities in Iran as a developing country.*

Keywords: Humanities, Indigenization, Islamic Revolution, Iran

## Introduction

**T**HE STATUS OF metaphysical and religious teachings and beliefs in science has been a major topic of discussion in the history of science, and different views have so far been expressed about the issue.

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and inasmuch as the Iranian Revolution was basically a religious revolution and its ideal was the realization of a society founded on religious values, from the very first days, discussion on how to Islamicize political, social, and economic aspects of life became a primary concern of Moslem thinkers. In the post-revolutionary era, numerous debates have been held among the Iranian intellectuals on how to achieve these goals. The present article, while examining various viewpoints expressed on realization of the said goals, attempts will be made to respond to these questions: First, is it possible to speak of the impact of local and religious values on the humanities? Second, if such an impact is proven, in which areas of humanities can it be visible most? And third, which strategies have been adopted in Iran to materialize this impact?

## Theoretical Discussion: Religious Values and the Humanities

There are different viewpoints about the relationship between religion and science, or in other words, the relation of science and metaphysics. In this respect, the positivists and the Religious Circle Movement in the first half of the twentieth century adopted the extremist stance in separating science from metaphysics, because they maintained that the religious and metaphysical statements are meaningless and are not supported by experimental proof. Thus, they completely distinguish between the respective realms of science and religion, the latter as incorporating metaphysical teachings and meanings (Baoily, 1982; Durkheim, 1369).

However, with the growth of new viewpoints categorized as post-positivism in the second half of the twentieth century, the former views gradually were put to question, and the def-

inite boundaries between metaphysics and science gradually faded, and many thinkers emphasized the position of metaphysics and its role in science as opposed to the anti-metaphysical trend in science.

As one of the most eminent post-positivist thinkers, Popper believed that metaphysics can serve as an effective resource for the process of scientific discovery. He spoke of the influential metaphysics which, according to him, is a basis for scientific theorizing. Contrary to the positivists, he maintains that the social sciences cannot be precisely evaluated with the criteria applied to natural science because precise refutation is not possible in the humanities.

Agas (1959) states in this respect: 'When we endeavor to form a theory, we are generally supported by a universal approach. Certain principles are accepted before establishing the framework of the hypotheses as 'a priori' principles.'

Thomas Kuhn (1970) explains scientific theories on the basis of paradigms. The majority of the philosophers of science have interpreted this statement to mean that the paradigms in Kuhn's view are metaphysical patterns.

Imreh Lakatos made a more daring step in this field. He portrays the current position of metaphysical statements not only in the humanities but also in natural science. In brief, Lakatos views science within the framework of 'research programs'. In a research program, one may speak of the hardcore, the negative heuristics and the positive heuristics. The fundamental assumptions and basic precepts of each research program lie in its hardcore. Based on a methodological decision, the theorizer would regard the hardcore as immune from refutation and far from the attacks by opposing evidence.

Therefore, what in the opinion of Popper is metaphysical and cannot be refuted is placed by Lakatos in the center of the research program and thus, he disentangles in ideal form, the scramble between science and metaphysics.

On this basis, post-positivist views spoke of the influence of religion and metaphysics in the field of science and especially in the humanities, and this way, yielded a novel picture wherein, metaphysics is the source of significant effects on science as well as its formation and development.

In general, according to the existing views, no definite distinction can be made between metaphysics and science, or in other words, between religion and science, but rather, one may speak of the influence of religion and religious teachings on science.

### **The Viewpoints about Relationship between Religion and Humanities in Post-Revolutionary Iran**

Having regard to the above discussions, the issue of the impact made by religion on science has been a critical subject for the past decades among certain thinkers of the Islamic World. The concept of religious science has a record preceding the Islamic Revolution and is well recognized in a domain wider than Iran and even the Islamic world. In the years, 1931, 1977, 1982, and 1974, a number of international conferences were held in the field of Islamic education and edification in Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Malaysia, wherein the issue of Islamizing various scientific disciplines was deliberated. In the meantime, a number of scientific books and journals on Islamic science were published in different countries like Pakistan, Malaysia, Algeria, India, US, and UK (See: Alatas, 1995).

In the Christian world too, during the recent three decades this issue has been vigorously discussed and even certain conferences have been held thereupon. Today, the expression

theist science is well recognized in western cultural and scientific circles. In general, as of 200 years ago when western science penetrated the Islamic world, different reactions were made to the admission of the new science in the world of Islam. Certain viewpoints regarded modern science as incompatible with Islam and thus rejected it (such as Wahabis and Salfis). Another group welcomed this modern science with open bosoms and made great efforts to have it established. From the viewpoint of the latter group, the cure to the backwardness of the Islamic societies lies only in their submission to the modern science and replacement of the religious worldview with the scientific one (Like Seyed Ahmad Khan in Pakistan).

Certain views have only sought to demonstrate the compatibility of Islam with modern science (See works of Mahdi Bazargan in Iran). Other Moslem thinkers maintain that the findings of modern science must be separated from its philosophical attachments. While these thinkers appreciate the efforts of western scientists to unravel the mysteries of nature, they warn Moslems against certain materialistic requirements of modern science. According to the latter group, modern science can only describe certain properties of the physical world, and cannot have a legitimate claim to all areas of knowledge. Modern science must be fit into the context of the Islamic worldview. They believe that at this elevated level, knowledge is better recognized and the role of science in making us closer to God would be materialized (Nasr, Seyed Hossein-1997).

In the post-revolutionary Iran, this issue has become of special importance among Moslem thinkers. This state of affairs resulted from various causes. First, inasmuch as the Iranian revolution was an Islamic movement having in view, the realization a society based on religious values, from the very beginning, the discussion on rendering religious the various aspects of political, social, and economical life gained prime concern of the Moslem thinkers. The second reason was the belief in comprehensiveness of the religion. By their interpretation of this comprehensiveness, Moslem thinkers maintained that Islam is a global religion, in the sense that one can seek the solution to all human needs in Islam. Therefore, Islam has defined all scientific facts and affairs, including the generalities and the specific ones, or the principles and the consequents. In other words, the religion incorporates the principles and the generalities.

On this basis, they spoke of the unity of the realm of science and religious knowledge. In their opinion, 'religious knowledge in fact indicate the same everlasting rules and practices sought by all disciplines. Thus, such rules serve as a balance in weighing the definite findings of various branches of science and depict their truth or untruth...' (This belief is originated in interpretation of certain Qoranic Verses, such as Nahl, 89). This belief is originated in interpretation of certain Qoranic Verses, such as Nahl, 89 Consequently, this group defended religious humanities.

Third, by emphasizing the distinction between religious anthropology and secular anthropology, they believed that since the subject of the humanities is to understand human behavior, failure to present a true image of the human being may be an inappropriate presumption for scientific theories. Therefore, they maintained that the humanities must be based on depiction of a true picture of the human being which, in their opinion, is identical with the one portrayed by the religion, and wherein, the human being is a creature with both physical and higher aspects.

Fourth, they thought that due to the alien nature of the humanities in the third world, these disciplines are not in conformity with the culture and cultural infrastructures of such societies and therefore, are of limited proportion to their local needs. Thus, reconstruction of these



disciplines of science by accepting the intellectual and cultural influences of these societies may contribute to the applicability of such science to the special needs of those societies (See :Imam Khomeini,1989).

Viewing the above premises, developments in the arena of the humanities based on religious objectives became of special importance among these thinkers. However; as regards the religion's manner of influencing the humanities, three approaches were introduced. One group, by adopting a minimal approach and being influenced by the positivist standpoint maintain that science and religion are two distinct areas and the only impact of the religion is to employ the services of science in favor of the believers (Mansuri-,2008,p67-; Malekian-,2007,p137).

On the other hand, a second group has adopted a maximal stance and believes that while religion can play a significant role in the preliminary stage of scientific activity, i.e. determination of the hypotheses, raising of questions and assumptions, and method of data gathering, it can also be effective in the phase of judgment and achievement of the results. This group in fact, raises the deficiency of knowledge in the existing humanities and believe that the current branches of humanities are even unable to identify the effective elements of the phenomena, and are faced with limitations of approaches and methods, means and domain. By introducing the more elevated ranks of being and by opening new horizons and presentation of new epistemological methods and means, religion can compensate for this deficiency and reveal other aspects of reality and the natural elements of the phenomena so far unknown to the experimental scientists. They supported a special science instituted by religion which has fundamental differences in the basic precepts and methods with the existing disciplines. They also spoke of the necessity of radically and fundamentally revising the humanities and codification of an Islamic psychology, Islamic sociology, etc (Mirbagheri-,2005 ,p116-).

However; a third group exists who supports a middle standpoint. They stress the influence of religion on the main scientific elements in the pre-evaluation stage, in the sense that by virtue of the statements derived from religious texts, one may in this stage raise questions, establish hypotheses, and theorize at this stage, while we can apply experimental scientific methods in the evaluation and demonstration of the hypotheses (See:Soroush-,1990).

This group of intellectuals which comprises the majority of the Moslem thinkers may be regarded as proponents of the prevalent view among the Moslem theorists. According to this view, having regard to the effects of religion on our manner of considering the world, it can be influential in the field of science. The religious science is in fact a type of science shaped under the effect of the questions, hypotheses, and presumptions of a religious scientist who has a specific view to the world and being.

In accordance with the third viewpoint, the influence of religion in the field of humanities can be summarized in the following main lines:

### ***The Effect of Religious Motivations and Teachings on the Selection of the Problem and the Subject of Research***

Since the motive of the scientists in pursuing a specific question reflected in the form of research programs is of a close bearing to the psychological and philosophical views of individuals, in fact, the philosophical and ideological concerns of each researcher may affect the formation of questions. In other words, the research problems can indeed be of a selective nature, and not as direct and neutral materials in the hands of the researchers. Certain onto-

logical assumptions are required so that in their context, one can form and arrange the problems to be researched by scientists as provided to them by the religion.

### ***The Effect of Religious Teachings on Formation of Presumptions and Research Hypotheses***

A hypotheses is a plausible solution to a research problem. However, the main point lies in the very notion of 'plausible'. Why a researcher considers hypothesis A as plausible while the other regards hypothesis B to be so? In fact, it is on the basis of the presumptions of each researcher that his hypothesis can be considered as plausible. In other words, by considering and relying on his own presumptions, a researcher attaches a higher truth possibility to a certain hypothesis. Therefore, if we discard his presumptions, his hypothesis will lose ground and becomes invalid.

On the other hand, according to some of these thinkers, when a research problems is formed, the researcher starts to ponder on the matter and by resorting to other concepts and probably by modeling methods, tries to render the problem intelligible for himself. Undoubtedly, a bunch of concepts are available to the researcher, but the question of which one he should actually use will require certain criteria. At this juncture too, the metaphysical assumptions of the researcher serve as deciding factors for preference of certain concepts over others. In other words, the type of concepts and proper models for understanding and appreciating the matter will take shape in the same environment that the very problem has been formed. For example, belief in the principle of causality will lead the researcher to resort to causal analytical models. If our researcher believes in non-causality instead of the principle of causality, definition of the causes and effects will not find a room in his research and he would prefer a description based on probability, or the individual will. Meanwhile, if his intellectual background is based on the final ends, he may prefer a scientific description based on the final rational and conscious causes or reasons for the individual (Bagheri-,2005,p122).

### ***The Impact of Religious Assumptions on the Observation Method of the Researcher***

According to certain post-positivists philosophers and historians of science, by having definite presumptions, the world is seen in a specific way, and by changing those presumptions, a different observation of the same state of affairs would occur. The effect of metaphysical presumptions cannot be fully discarded in the observation phase. This effect can be witnessed at least in limiting the perspectives as well as interpreting what is observed.

In other words, contrary to the positivist belief that observation is distinct from and prior to theory, the post-positivist approach considers pure observation which is free from theory as impossible and on this basis, Islamic intellectuals maintain that religious assumptions may provide wider aspects of human existence and further data and more comprehensive insights for the researchers.



### ***The Role of Religious Beliefs in Orientation and Application of Scientific Research***

Religious science may provide appropriate direction in applications of science, while preventing its destructive uses. As mentioned by a researcher, 'the direction and application of scientific researches in different value systems may be quite visibly different and since human values have mostly an organic relation with religious beliefs, such a belief may still be considered as related to the direction of science and technology.

Hence, the Islamic thinkers, based on Islamic narratives wherein, science accompanied with faith has been introduced as a means to achieve well-being, believe that the tool of science should be applied in the light of religious worldview, so that it prevents scientists from participating in projects intended for human destruction, while providing the grounds for utilization of science to corroborate human values in the contemporary world (Golshani-,1998,p23).

### **Development Strategies in the Field of Humanities in Post-Revolutionary Iran**

According to the mentioned approach, the development strategies in humanities after the revolution in Iran were defined on the following main lines through the framework of the High Council of Cultural Revolution (established with the goal of planning the future cultural path of the universities in accordance with the Islamic culture):

#### ***Reinforcement of the Religious Worldview and Anthropology of the Researchers***

Reinforcement of such foundations and motives may provide the grounds for the effective role of religion in the process of researches (including problem-identification, definition of hypothesis, etc) and to this end, and in order to further familiarize the students with Islamic culture and augmentation of the foundations for intellectual and moral edification, certain subjects such as Islamic Knowledge were introduced as general courses in all university disciplines.

Furthermore, in many branches of humanities, certain specialized subjects were defined and incorporated as the background of those branches among the Moslem intellectuals of the past centuries, while efforts were made to train a group of committed researchers.

#### ***Improvement of Relations between Religious (Seminary) Scholars and the Researchers of Various Branches of Humanities***

The leaders of the revolution emphasized expansion of relations among the elite intellectuals in religious fields and the humanities as an important method to provide for raising of important questions and problems in respect of religion. In this line, the unity of religious schools and universities was defined both as a goal and a mechanism to achieve the objectives of the cultural revolution and as an effective step to revitalized the humanities.

This cooperation was always stressed by Imam Khomeini who mentioned it as a strategic cooperation and a means to find out practical solutions.

On this basis, and in order to increase the discourse among the religious scholars and the university professors as well as to prepare the appropriate scientific contents in the branches of humanities, the Office for Cooperation between Religious Schools and Universities was established and a number of scientific meetings were held among the professors of different disciplines of humanities and the religious scholars interested in the subjects of those disciplines (The Office of Cooperation Between Religious Schools and Universities; The Records; 1982).

Establishment of the Organization for Study and Publication of University Books in Humanities (SAMT) in 1984 was another measure in this respect so that through cooperation of the religious and academic professors, the university textbooks on humanities could be prepared and published (SAMT, 2001).

### ***Promotion of Interdisciplinary Approaches***

For the purposes defined above, interdisciplinary branches of study have been significantly reinforced in Iran and efforts have been made to create new branches of academic studies by blending the religious teachings and the current disciplines of humanities, and the proper personnel be trained in these fields. For this purpose, the religious and academic centers organized within the framework of the academic structure were established. Foundation of Imam Sadigh University and Shahid Motahari Faculty of Higher Education in Tehran, as well as Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Center, Mofid University, and Bagherol-Oloom University in Qom are the eminent examples of such activities (Fozi,2006,p510), while of course, in their establishment, wider social requirements have also been taken into account (Sarafzadeh,2006,p352).

### ***Efforts to Use Applied Methods in Humanities***

One of the major orientations of the humanities in the recent decades has been more employment of applied methods in the humanities in accordance with local needs in order to solve social problems and satisfy the requirements of a religious society. Hence, certain measures have been adopted to achieve this end. Imam Khomeini emphasized the Islamizing of the universities in the sense of making the universities beneficial to the society and deny the dependency of the academics, and called for creation of necessary grounds in universities to train academicians who are independent persons thinking of national interests and committed to human values (Imam Khomeini-,1989,p223). The following statement made by the late Imam expressly depicts his notion of the Islamizing of science. He says, ‘Some thought that science is of two kinds... An Islamic geometry and a non-Islamic one. An Islamic science of physics and a non-Islamic one. And some made the false impression that Islamizing of universities would mean that they teach only the Islamic jurisprudence and principles... these are common mistakes caused by some who are trapped in their own mistakes. What we intend to say is that our universities are not beneficial to the nation. In the past fifty years we could not become self-sufficient... we intend to say that our universities must serve the purposes needed by our people. It means that the universities must become independent...’ (Imam Khomeini,1989 ,p310)

In order to remove these problems and establish a stronger relation between the researches and the social needs, the High Council of Cultural Revolution managed to revise the academic

curricula of the humanities and by adding or removing certain subjects and modifications in the major headlines, tried to make them more compatible with the requirements of the country and provide for training of creative personnel in various scientific fields. Meanwhile, an institution named the Academic Jihad was established in 1980 and pursued such affairs as establishment of relations between universities and the tangible needs of societies, and trying to solve the social and economic problems of the country by relying on the intellectual powers of the universities in the form of task forces and long-term projects for the goal of self-sufficiency and independence of the country (The Cultural Revolution Committee-,no 1p13). In general, the Academic Jihad was the pioneering force in preparation of the required space for identification of social needs and problems, and in this way, tried to expand the spirit of research and innovation on a large scale and leave valuable achievements.

### ***Establishment of Theorization Seats***

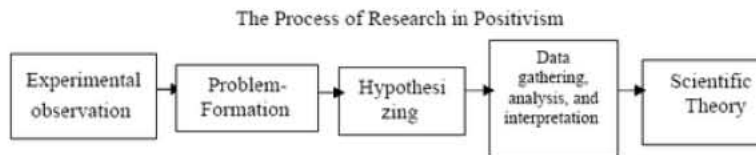
In order to improve the spirit of creativity and innovation in presenting novel theories in the field of humanities which can be affected by religious presumptions, and based on the emphasis of Imam Khomeini, the political and religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the effect of creating a movement software to produce science, the theoretical seats were introduced by the High Council of the Cultural Revolution and are gradually expanding with the aim of directing the researchers to local and religious theorizing under the current encouragement systems. The main purpose of this scheme is to encourage the intellectuals as well as the scientific centers of the country to produce research theories in humanities by relying on Islamic foundations in order to get rid of the translated and imported dogmatism as well as the fanatic views in the field of Islamic theories in humanities.

The practical methodology is so that the holders of novel scientific innovations as well as the interested specialists may through their respective faculties submit their innovations in theoretical fields (as well as any critics or scientific activity of a novel nature in the humanities) and enjoy the benefits of such seats. Therefore, one may say that these theorizing, critique, and scientific deliberation seats are grounds for production and growth of knowledge as well as pre-requisites to enrich the scientific ideas and the process of science.

Application of the innovations achieved in line with national independence, critique of the translated versions of scientific knowledge in the field of humanities to correct the one-way direction of science in Iran, creation of new scientific opportunities especially in designing interdisciplinary branches in scientific and research centers of the country, providing for intellectual and scientific independence, are among the achievements of theoretical seats. The advantages of these seats for scientific promotion has been recognized by the Ministry of Science. Among the supportive measures envisaged by the said Ministry, we may refer to entitlement to the benefits of the fund for supporting of young researchers and their introduction to the national foundation of the intellectuals, as well as their participation in the Farabi Festival for the Humanities, publication of the achievements of the seat, intellectual property rights, and granting the position of distinguished professor, sabbaticals, granting the right of promoting the students to higher levels upon the discretion of the holder, etc (Quoted from the Minister of Higher Education, Dr. Zahedi,2008.).

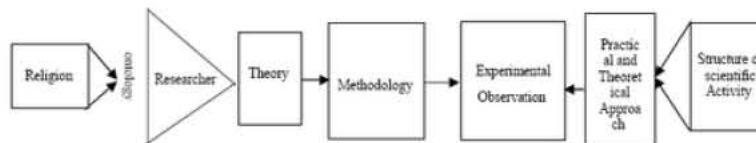
## Conclusion and Future Prospects

In general, we may say that the relation between religion and science has a major bearing on the definition of science. If we adopt a positivist view to science, religion and religious teachings would become a clearly distinct domain from science with no mutual influence. Because in the positivist view, the scientific definition of the matter and problem-formation results from experimental observation, while such observation is, in their view, devoid of any value and is neutral. Therefore, by limiting the scientific research in mere experimental methods, they deny metaphysics and consider introduction of metaphysics to the world of science as bearing negative consequences.



However, if the definition of science is based on modern approaches and post-positivist views, one may speak of an effective relationship between science and religion. In accordance to modern views, scientific theory is prior to observation and the theory is in its turn influenced by the researcher's epistemology, worldview, and ontology. In this way, by affecting those foundations and precepts, religion can provide the researcher with a new viewpoint and help him create new theories on this basis. In fact, the influence of religion on theoretical foundations and precepts would be certain. This impact over the presumptions would provide for raising of questions, hypotheses, and the method of selecting the concepts and research models and even data collection and method of observation.

The Process of Scientific Research in Post-Positivist Views and the Effects of Religion in this Process



On this basis, some thinkers in Iran who have been influenced by positivist approaches have denied any possible influence of religion on science, while others, by emphasizing on new post-positivist approaches have stressed the impacts of religious teachings on the theoretical foundations and precepts of the researchers, and maintain that improvement of this trend would open a wider horizon before the researchers and would result in new scientific theorizing.

Viewing the fact that the main thrust of humanities is to know man who has much more complex aspects compared to other beings, it is obvious that applying wider religious horizons may provide newer aspects in this activity and provide for further researches by scientists.

On the basis of this idea, and in order to strengthen this idea, they have developed various approaches to improve the theoretical foundations of religion as well as the researchers' epistemology and ontology which were addressed in this article.

The results of this approach have not yet been fully realized in the field of humanities but have provided for serious criticism of the foundations of the current humanities, which can be well felt in the scientific environment of the country in the domain of the humanities. Criticism of the existing situation may contribute to improvement of the bases of the humanities viewing the wider horizons opened by the religious teachings, while a more comprehensive view of the existential aspects of human being would provide for further theorizing in these disciplines.

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