

Alhassanain (p) Network for Islamic Heritage and Thought

Importance of the Problems of World View

An article from the journal al-Tawhid, on the importance of the problem of World Views, taking into consideration the Philosophical, Scientific and Metaphysical views.

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Introduction

Every activity engaged in by man, whether on the level of individual or social life, is undoubtedly a result of particular psychological drives and inclinations, and is fashioned with the aid of sense perception and bodily skills and powers under different temporal and spatial conditions.

For example, man is driven to eat and drink by his instinct to nourish himself, and is motivated to help the weak and the needy because of his emotions of sympathy for other human beings. Then, by using his sense organs, he identifies the desired foods or identifies the weak and needy to be assisted, and carries out the desired tasks through the use of his bodily faculties.

The above-mentioned activities could be said to possess the specific "human" characteristic when they are guided by his reason, in addition to his instinctive and emotional drives, which man shares with other animals. That is, the eating of food and the drinking of water should be done with the aim of maintaining one's health and strength, and the emotions and instincts must be satisfied within the framework of some rational principles and under the guidance of reason. In many cases, however, reason is overwhelmed by emotion and instinct, and is unable to perform an effective role. When this happens, the activity is considered devoid of any human value.

The practical guidance provided by reason is itself controlled by the general notions and ideas which constitute the fundamental basis of man's existence as an intelligent being. For example, the belief in the necessity of maintaining one's health, or the urge to make sacrifices for the sake of a higher aim, is based on particular conceptions of the individual and society.

It is these general conceptions and basic patterns of thinking that play the major role in giving shape and direction to man's efforts and struggles, and either make them meaningful and worthwhile in the human sense or deprive them of human meaning and worth. These basic patterns of thought are termed as 'world-view'. It is on account of the differences in world view that fundamental divergence in personal behaviour and social outlook takes place.

Just as the guidance provided by reason on practical matters is ignored in acts lacking in the 'human' character, when it loses all its effective force, so also the theoretical decrees of reason are not always given the attention they require. Many people never think of the 'why' of their actions, and do not build their lives on the basis of well-thought-out ideas. Such people either content themselves with imitating others, or are simply indifferent to fundamental questions, although perceptive observers find their behaviour to conform to a particular type of world-view.

For example, the conduct of an individual who thinks of nothing other than enjoyment of transitory pleasures and pursuit of selfish interest is consistent with an individualistic and materialistic world-view, even if he has not accepted materialism consciously as a reasoned philosophical viewpoint.

Therefore, our efforts and activities are 'human' and 'reasonable' when, firstly, they are performed not merely under the influence of animal instinct

but on the basis of understanding and under the guidance of reason; secondly, when they are based on a logical and coherent system of thought and a correct world-view, not on raw adopted notions, or on an illogical and incorrect world-view.

In view of the above-mentioned principle, the necessity for the selection of a reasonable world-view capable of lending itself to rational justification is clear. Moreover, the existence of strong and conflicting currents in the realm of thought and belief, and the vulnerability of undefendable beliefs clearly indicates the need for learning logical arguments which confirm the chosen world-view and the necessity of acquiring the capacity to defend it.

The Fundamental Problems of World-View

The world evidently consists of various kinds of phenomena, the study of whose characteristics has given birth to specialized fields of science. Moreover, despite the expansion in different spheres of knowledge and the vast number of wonderful and valuable discoveries made in various disciplines, there still remain, in our immediate surroundings and on this very planet, many things unknown, the effort to solve whose mystery has occupied our inquisitive scientists.

However, as already mentioned, man has always been confronted with a series of fundamental questions. The need to find correct and convincing answers to such questions is a pressing demand of his inner-most nature. Furthermore, since these problems concern matters outside the realm of the senses and empirical experience, their solution cannot be expected from the experimental sciences and must be provided by reason and logic alone.¹

It so happens that the correct solution of the aforementioned problems is of fundamental importance in giving meaning and value to human existence, and directing man's voluntary activities into proper channels.

The opposite of this is also true, in that giving wrong answers to these questions makes life empty, meaningless, and devoid of worthwhile goals, dragging man into the abyss of irreparable loss. Nor can man afford to ignore these fundamental questions, since by doing so he would, in addition to having to endure the pain of doubt, perplexity, and anxiety, deprive himself of the opportunity of attaining the ultimate aim of creation: perfection and everlasting felicity.

One of those fundamental questions which man must answer is whether the phenomena we encounter in our world owe their existence solely to material actions and reactions, without any participation or intervention of a nonmaterial power. Is there no nonmaterial power involved either in the emergence of the phenomena or in the existence of matter itself? Or, to put it another way, does matter constitute the totality of being, or does it constitute only a part of existence and relies on something beyond itself for its being?

The above question, which itself can be analyzed into a number of other questions, is not limited to the properties and characteristics of any particular group of physical creatures, so that it may be answerable by some specific science through its own particular method.

It is, on the contrary, a philosophical question, which must be studied by reason through intellectual speculation and analysis, even though the starting point for such speculation is empirical knowledge in its widest sense, which includes inner and direct experience as well.

The answer to the above question, whether in the positive or the negative, constitutes a part of one's world-view, plays an important role in forming a basic aspect of a person's intellectual approach which may be called "ontology".

Another basic question is whether the life of each individual human being is limited to the few years he lives in this world, or whether there is another life for him after he passes away, much longer and probably even an everlasting one. And this question in turn raises another one: Does man,

beside possessing a physical body, also possess a soul which can continue to live after the death of the body or not? Then, there is the last question, which is also related to the first ontological question, whether being is equivalent to material existence or is wider than that.

The solution to the above-mentioned problem also, whatever it may be, constitutes another aspect of an individual's world-view, which may be called here 'anthropology'.

And finally, the third fundamental issue to be settled before turning one's attention to the details and selecting a particular course for one's life is: What is the most certain way of knowing the best program for individual and social life? Is there any fool-proof way beside the usual ways commonly adopted by most people which so often lead to contradictory results, which would guarantee the certainty of results?

The importance of the last question becomes more evident when the answer to the second question is in the affirmative; that is, when we conclude that man is immortal and that one must prepare beforehand for the felicity of afterlife through conscious effort during the limited period of this life.

When such a belief is accepted, the need for a sure way of determining the relationship between the two lives, and an elaborate plan that would guarantee everlasting felicity becomes clearer. And the more the importance ascribed to the everlasting life, the greater is the significance of the path leading to felicity in it. This issue may therefore be called the problem of "methodology." Accordingly, the fundamental problems of world-view are: ontology, anthropology, and methodology.

Evaluating the Fundamental problems

The solution of the aforementioned fundamental problems is of foremost importance, because it plays a basic role in shaping and giving direction to man's personal and social life, and, logically, should be taken up before any other issue. Also, it is of special significance because it involves unlimited gain and loss. In other words, if the answer to the fundamental questions raised is in the affirmative, the possibility is opened up for man of deriving infinite benefit from his life.

If it is proved that being is not coextensive with matter, and that the world has a supreme Creator who is the Maker, Sustainer, and Nourisher of all things, and possesses infinite power, knowledge, and mercy, and if it is proved that man's life is not limited to this short, worldly existence, but that it is followed by an everlasting life accompanied either by felicity or misery, and that our life in this world is a preliminary stage in which we determine the course of our life in the Hereafter through our voluntary actions, and if it is proved that there is a guaranteed method for obtaining the knowledge of a correct life-program that can take care of our felicity in both the lives, and that this method has been communicated by the Almighty God through His chosen messengers to mankind in general, it will have a tremendous impact on man's life.

In fact, the value given to the vital human activities by such a view of reality is incomparably greater than the combined worth of all the advancements made by science and the discoveries and inventions made by man. This is so because however great the value of these inventions and discoveries may be, it is still finite and limited, while the value of this view is unlimited since it makes it possible for man to attain unlimited and everlasting felicity. And it is obvious that the unlimited cannot be compared with the limited.

The objection may be raised here that the probability of the fundamental questions being answered positively is so small that it is not worth considering. It should be kept in mind, however, that however small this probability may be ($1/n$), it would still retain its positive value since its multiple is infinity; ($\text{infinity} \times n = \text{infinity}$).

To put it in the language of economics, the 'expected value' of any investment depends on two factors: (1) the percentage of probability of success, and (2) the estimated amount of the profit. It is the product of these two that determines the 'expected value.'

For example, if we want to see which of two business ventures is more profitable for investment, it is not enough to take into account the percentage of probability of each one alone. We should also consider the estimated amount of profit each venture is likely to yield. Thus, if the percentage of the probability of success in the first venture is 10%, while that of the second venture is 20%, but if the amount of the profit the first venture is likely to yield is ten times that of the second venture, then we must conclude that the expected profit in the first venture is five times greater than that in the second one, despite the fact that the probability of success in the first venture is half of that of the second one. This is so

because the product of the two multiples in the first case ($0.1 \times 10 = 1$) is five times greater than that in the second case ($0.2 \times 1 = 0.2$).

The conclusion that may be drawn from the above example is that it is highly preferable to handle problems whose solution promises unlimited benefit, even if our chances of solving them be very small. Furthermore, the value of insight into such problems cannot be compared to that of any other science, even if the results produced by these sciences be one hundred per cent certain and reliable.

Thus, indifference to the various aspects of one's world-view and negligence of its fundamental problems is not a reasonable and rationally justifiable attitude. Answering these fundamental questions in the negative without any sufficient evidence is even more unjustifiable.

The Spiritual and Materialist Philosophies

Although the fundamental questions facing man have been answered in different ways and the differences in these answers have created various philosophies and schools of thought, yet by taking into account the positive and negative answers, we can distinguish and divide the various philosophies into the two general categories of materialist and spiritual. Islam is a perfect example of the spiritual schools of thought², whereas the most prominent contemporary example of the materialist schools is Marxism.

The tenets of the Islamic world-view are none other than the well-known threefold doctrines of the faith.³

These are: the belief in the One God (al-tawhid); the belief in resurrection on the Day of Judgement (al-ma`dd); the belief in what God has revealed to His prophets (wahy, nubuwwah). In other words, Islam answers in the affirmative to each of the fundamental questions, and considers faith in them to be the real basis of man's happiness and felicity. It undertakes the solution of life's all other problems by relying on these three basic doctrines.

In fact, it considers all solutions as the branches of a tree whose roots are these three principal beliefs. On the contrary, the materialist philosophies deny the existence of anything nonmaterial, do not believe that man has any life except this brief earthly existence, and deny the assurance held out by revelation.

Although the fundamental doctrines of the Islamic faith have been expounded and proven throughout the past centuries and on various levels, and there does not remain any doubt or uncertainty about any of them, this does not affect the basic fact that the contemporary strength of any set of beliefs hinges on two sorts of studies: one devoted to proving the validity of those beliefs, and the second, devoted to refuting contrary viewpoints.

In other words, a double insight is necessary. In the case of Islam, unless the points of disagreement with other ideologies are identified, the areas that are made the targets of the opponents' criticisms and attacks are pinpointed, and a proper defense consisting of clear and logical answers is provided to the common Muslim individual, we cannot be sure of the stability of the faith on the level of the general public, and be certain of the people's steadfastness in the face of the waves of challenging ideologies.

More-over, just as in the past ideological and theological books were written in accordance with the intellectual challenges of the times and with the aim of answering their prevailing doubts, so must the ideological discussions of today be formulated in accordance with the philosophies and schools of thought now current, and with the aim of repelling their ideological attacks.

What makes defensive discussions specially essential today is that materialist philosophies are not being set forth for the mere purpose of proposing solutions to the fundamental theoretical questions, but are, in fact, being propagated in order to serve the political interests of the superpowers who consider exploitation of the emotions of the world's hardworking and simple people as the best means of attaining their colonialist aims.

Thus in order to disarm the people of their deep-rooted, liberating spiritual world-view, they have taken recourse in a philosophy tuned to the shallow understanding of the majority of workers and farmers.

At the same time, they have tried to adorn materialism, which is one of the most reactionary and baseless of the ancient dogmas, with scientific embellishments, and pretend that it is a modern and “scientific” philosophy. Nor have they spared the use of all sorts of sophistry, analogism, and misrepresentation to achieve this end.

The truth of the matter is that the superpowers have used materialism, which is based on empiricism, as a means of attracting the uneducated masses and as an excuse for sanctioning their propensities for improper and unethical conduct. In order to deceive the educated classes, they have borrowed some of the postulates of the experimental sciences and incorporated them into materialism.

Moreover, to make sure that the probable rejection of these postulates does not destroy the foundations of their philosophy, they have taken refuge in “dialectical logic,” presenting all truths to be relative and variable, so that scientific progress not only would not invalidate their doctrines, but would, on the contrary, appear to support them.

We may maintain, therefore, that defending the positions of Islamic ideology, clarifying any of its ambiguities which may lend themselves to misrepresentation, and exposing all those who have made spiritual philosophy the target of unfair and dishonest accusations, is not only an authentic philosophical and intellectual duty and a divinely ordained obligation in regard to guiding the Muslims and strengthening the foundations of their faith, but is also an Islamic social responsibility in regard to defending Islam and the existence of the Muslim countries, which have become targets of ideological, political, and colonialist attacks by the communist block.

It must be pointed out here that by emphasizing the necessity for ‘double insight’ and ‘two-faceted defense’ we do not mean to say that such insight and understanding is the ‘sufficient cause’ for creating faith and inclination towards the right path, or that the only reason for being drawn towards atheism and other devious paths is ignorance about correct, logical, and convincing answers to criticisms.

Our purpose is simply to indicate the importance of defensive arguments alongside the affirmative ones, and to emphasize that these two activities are some of the necessary conditions for creating a stable faith, though are not the sufficient condition for it.

There are other conditions necessary for the stability of faith, specially in regard to the masses of people, the most important of which is spiritual readiness and freedom from moral corruption.

Just as hedonism and moral irregularities may be caused by belief in materialism, belief in materialist philosophies may also be occasioned by strong attachment to bodily pleasures and moral corruption; since one's love of pleasures and lusts may lead him, unconsciously, to search for and be attracted by philosophies which promote and sanction such conduct, and to

avoid all schools of thought which teach abstinence from such endless pursuit of carnal pleasures.

It is, therefore, necessary that the real seeker after truth should cleanse himself of all moral impurities and all selfish and carnal desires, and, relying on nothing except logic and reason for guidance, liberate himself from the bondage of blind imitation of individuals, groups, or nations, simply because they possess some kind of social, political or technical superiority.

Spiritual Philosophy and Scientific Truths

A glance at the fundamental philosophical questions, to which spiritual and materialist philosophies give contradictory answers, clearly shows that the areas of contention between the two opposing points of view have nothing to do with experimental matters.

Whatever the solutions found to scientific problems, they would not in any way affect the way these philosophical questions are answered. For example, accepting or rejecting Euclid's theory of space, holding to the view that mass is absolute or relative, or the validity or invalidity of the theory of mutation in biology, and other conflicting theories in the various sciences—none of these tell us anything about whether the divine or the materialistic philosophies are true; since the subject of discussion in philosophy is not the same as that of the experimental sciences, and the methods of investigation used in the two fields are completely different from each other.

It is wrong to imagine, therefore, that it is materialistic philosophy alone that accepts scientific facts and affirms the validity of the laws governing the transformations and interactions of physical phenomena, while spiritual philosophy denies them and sets forth the theory of creation in their place. The materialists hold that belief in the theory of creation finds its genesis, in the distant past, in man's ignorance of the physical causes of phenomena. Therefore, now, when due to the advances in the experimental sciences, the system of physical causation has been fully discovered, there is no room left for such notions as that of creation or the dependence of phenomena on the will of the Creator.⁴

We know, however, that the dispute between the spiritual and the materialist points of view is not about affirming or denying the relationship between various phenomena, the nature of such relationships, or the laws which govern nature. What the dispute is about is whether the material world, with all the relationships existing between its various parts, be they known or as yet undiscovered by us, depends on a Being which transcends matter or not.

It is obvious that if such a dependence does exist, it would not be of the sort that exists between material bodies, and, therefore, cannot be studied by experimental methods; because just as the nonmaterial Being (if it exists) cannot be known through sense experience, the dependence of material phenomenon on it, also, cannot be studied through laboratory instruments. In order to make this point even clearer, we must briefly discuss philosophy and the experimental sciences, the fundamental differences between the problems with which they deal, and the methodologies which they employ.

Philosophy and Science

By the way of an introduction we would like to remind the readers that there are many words which have a number of meanings. At times one of them has a wider and more general signification than the others. Sometimes the use of such words may lead to misunderstanding, and it is necessary to make sure that one understands the exact sense in which a word is being used. In philosophy, there are a number of such terms; for example, 'potentiality,' 'possibility,' 'soul,' 'reason,' and so on.

Among the terms that share common significations are the words 'philosophy' and 'science.' In the past the word philosophy (lit. 'the love of wisdom') was applied to all branches of knowledge, including the natural sciences, mathematics, divinities, ethics, and politics.

Every branch of knowledge had a special methodology of its own, although sometimes it happened that inappropriate methods were used; for example, a problem belonging to the natural sciences was investigated through a purely rationalist approach, whereas it should have been studied through the experimental method.

In the Middle Ages other branches of learning were added to the aforementioned list, until it came to include almost all the thinking of that age.

After the Renaissance, and specially from the seventeenth century onward, those sciences whose method of enquiry was experimental, gradually separated from philosophy, and the term eventually came to be applied exclusively to that branch of learning the problems of which lay outside the realm of experiment and could be solved only through a purely rational, theoretical method.

This branch of learning is called "metaphysics" or "the first philosophy". The term "philosophy" is also used to refer to the process of explaining the basic principles necessary for investigating the problems of a particular science, such as the philosophy of science and the philosophy of ethics.

The word "science," which literally means "knowledge," is technically used to mean systematized knowledge of problems dealing with a particular subject. According to this definition, the term "science" could also be applied to metaphysics. In recent centuries, however, the usage of the term has become more limited, and has come to refer to the experimental sciences alone, in opposition to philosophy.

According to the latter definition, philosophy and science each possesses its own distinct subject matter and methodology. That is, philosophy's subject of study consists of the general problems of existence, which are in the main part abstract and are also called, "secondary concepts,"⁵ and its method is rational and theoretical. Science, on the other hand, is concerned with the study of the accidental properties of particular objects the existence of which is taken for granted; its method is experimental.

For example, physics deals with matter and energy and their interactions in the fields of mechanics, acoustics, optics, heat, electricity, magnetism, radiation, atomic structure, and nuclear phenomena; chemistry studies the composition, structure, and properties of substances and the transformations they undergo. Physiology investigates the organic

processes and phenomena of living organisms, while psychology discusses mental conditions and characteristics.

However, none of these sciences has any-thing to say about the essential nature of the subject it studies or the fundamental principles underlying its methodology. In other words, neither physics and chemistry express any opinions about the existence of matter, nor physiology and psychology discuss the reality of life and the soul. Nor does any of these sciences examine the principle of causal-ity and its subordinate laws.

What philosophy concerns itself with are general abstract questions such as: cause and effect, permanence and change, the material and the abstract, the contingent and the necessary, etc. And since these issues are not directly connected with sense perception, the problems related to them cannot be settled empirically.

The key to their solution must be found in rational investigation and analysis. The way these rational investigations are carried out and the value of their findings constitute the subject matter of an important part of modern philosophy known as “epistemology.” It follows then that we cannot expect scientific progress to help us in resolving philosophical disputes, and science to act as a referee in the quarrel between spiritual and materialist philosophies.

Unfortunately, there have been numerous attempts in the history of science and philosophy to invoke scientific laws or theories for help in the solution of philosophical problems, or to tip the scale in favour of a particular metaphysical position.

On the contrary, others have sought refuge in the philosophical mode of reasoning and the rational method to help them solve a scientific problem. This, despite the fact that such intrusions are dangerous for both philosophy and science, and keep them from following the paths appropriate to their fields of study and solution of their problems through the use of methods prescribed by the nature of those problems.

As an example of such unjustified intrusion, we can mention the sort of argument some modern physicists have used to “prove” the existence of necessity in the relationship between cause and effect (determinism) by referring to findings in the field of macro-physics, while other physicists have pointed to certain phenomena observed in micro-physics as evidence that no such necessity exists.

There is yet a third group that has endeavoured to reconcile the two positions by proposing that determinism is valid in the case of macro-physical phenomena and invalid in the case of micro-physical ones. All this while any philosopher knows that the law of causation is a general philo-sophical and metaphysical law which is, according to the definitive judgement of reason, fixed and unchanging.

What we must do is to search in nature for cases which would verify the law of causation through experimental investigations. What we definitely shouldn't do is to consider the discovery of a few examples of its applicability as a proof of its validity, or the inability to apply it in few cases as evidence of either its invalidity or lack of generality; since such failure is definitely a result of the inadequacy of our instruments.

In fact, it is the self-evident principle of causality that has moved scientists to seek the causes of phenomena and to discover the laws and secrets of nature. To attempt, therefore, to prove this metaphysical principle through reference to physical phenomena and the discoveries of the experimental sciences is like trying to play the flute by blowing through its wrong end.

It should not go unsaid, however, that philosophy and science are related to each other in a number of ways, the most important of which is that philosophy proves the existence of the subject matter and the validity of the fundamental principles of the sciences, while the sciences provide a widening background for philosophical inquiry. In any case, there should be no mixing of either their problems or methods and no expecting of solutions to scientific problems from philosophy or of philosophical problems from science.

Scientific Philosophy

Admitting the existence of problems that must be investigated on a philosophical plane, Marxism has tried to pretend that these problems can be solved by using the discoveries made by the experimental sciences.

The way Marxist writers go about doing this is that they first give an example from nature, and follow it with an example drawn from social or historical phenomena. Their third step is to draw a general conclusion by forcing a connection between these two examples, thereby, in their own imagination, proving the philosophical principle in question.

Supposedly, the whole exercise authorizes them to call their philosophy as “scientific” and as based on discoveries made by the experimental sciences. Although this procedure may have some effect on those who are unfamiliar with philosophical problems and scientific methodology and are, therefore, unable to distinguish the weak points and fallacies hidden in this line of reasoning, it has no philosophical value and is considered a form of sophistry and public fraud by those who are knowledgeable in such matters.

We do not deny that there has been a fragmentation in the sciences caused by the extensive specialization of the various fields, and there is, therefore, a need for synthesizing the results of their investigations and bridging the gaps separating the numerous fields of science.

Nor do we have any objection to such an endeavour's being called “scientific philosophy,” since there is no ethical or legal injunction against coining new terms and names. What we do object to, however, is the abuse of terms and covering up of facts under misleading labels. This, we believe, is reprehensible and must be fought against.

It should be kept in mind that Marxist writers have not created their so-called “scientific philosophy” in order to serve the world of science and scholarship, by making a synthesis of the results of the investigations of the different sciences, and by connecting the endeavours of the diverse fields with one another.

Far from such altruistic aims, their real motivation is to provide a justification for their baseless ideology and a philosophical foundation for their immature and inconsistent ideas.

Moreover, even though the very notion of relying on scientific findings for finding solutions to metaphysical problems is incorrect and unfruitful—and as it has been stated before, philosophical issues cannot be settled in such a manner—the Marxists are not even loyal to this misguided approach, since they ignore many irrefutable scientific facts, and rely, instead, on weak and unproven theories lacking any scientific value whatsoever.

And when the fallacy of these theories is proven, instead of learning a lesson from all the wasted effort and recognizing the futility of their approach, or having recognized it, admitting it, they move on with undaunted courage to grasp at another theory, and through peculiar intellectual acrobatics at which they are so adept, set it forth as further proof of the validity of dialectical materialism.

We shall leave an examination of the fumbling and public deceptions of the Marxists to some future occasion and simply state the fact that the notion of a “scientific philosophy”—in the sense of a philosophy that attempts

to solve philosophical problems through the application of the methodology of the experimental sciences with reliance on scientific discoveries alone-is an anomaly unacceptable to any competent thinker.

And the adjective “scientific” for philosophy not only does not add anything to its worth, since it ascribes to it a characteristic inappropriate to philosophy, but it simply exposes the bankruptcy of its originators which proves that they were unable to distinguish the boundaries separating science from philosophy and the correct method of tackling philosophical problems. It seems that our Marxist wizards justify this blatant contradiction as an example of “dialectical contradiction,” and set it forth as a highly advanced philosophical phenomenon to the credulous devotees of “dialectics.”

Another point to be noted here is that just as ascribing the term “scientific” to discussions of philosophical issues is caused either by ignorance, or intentions to deceive the public, to denigrate and condemn them as “unscientific” is also a form of distortion and abuse of the prestige of the word “scientific”. And just as being characterized as “scientific” adds nothing to the value of metaphysical investigations, their being labelled as “unscientific” does nothing to bring down their value either.

Since, as we mentioned before, being “scientific” means that a subject must lend itself to empirical verification, whereas the quality that purely theoretical problems transcend the realm of sense experience is essential to them, and is not a shortcoming or defect on their part.

In other words, just because something is outside the realm of sense experience and cannot be proved through experimental methods, it does not mean that it is worthless or unverifiable. It means, rather, that it should be analysed with the help of the rational method and by the means of the self-evident axioms -of reason. Moreover, as shall be demonstrated later, scientific problems themselves are in need of metaphysical and rational principles.

Metaphysics

We said earlier that the word “philosophy” has a number of meanings one of which is synonymous with “metaphysics”. It should be kept in mind, however, that the word “metaphysics” itself has various meanings—a fact that may give rise to confusion and misunderstanding.

Derived from the Greek term *meta physika*, [lit., the (works) after the physical (works)], metaphysics is the name given to that part of philosophy which concerns itself with the general principles of existence, and it appears that the ancient philosophers dealt with this subject after the section dealing with the natural sciences (physics) as a matter of didactic convenience.

Thus it came to be called “after physics.” As we said earlier, when all the other fields of learning separated from philosophy, what was left behind was metaphysics.

Since metaphysics deals with nonmaterial existence, a misunderstanding has arisen that metaphysics deals with supernatural phenomena, and this misunderstanding has in turn caused spiritual philosophies to be branded as “metaphysical.”

The fact of the matter is that metaphysical considerations are not limited to theistic philosophies; the materialist schools are in as much need of metaphysics as others. This is the case because anyone who wishes to discuss the general and fundamental principles of existence—principles which do not fall within the exclusive domain of any particular science—must enter the realm of metaphysics, irrespective of the sort of conclusions he might reach.

For example, a discussion of the principle of causality is a philosophical and metaphysical one, and although it is considered to be an axiom and used as such by all the experimental sciences, they cannot investigate it through the use of the scientific method and prove its validity. This is so even though their investigations are based upon it, and the formulation of universal scientific laws is possible only because of the law of causation.

Even if someone wants to reject the principle of causality or any of its subordinate laws, he would still have to engage in a metaphysical discussion, and as they say, “philosophy can be refuted only through philosophy.”

Recently an English philosopher, Robin George Collingwood, has written a treatise on metaphysics in which he has described it as a series of presuppositions which can neither be proved nor disproved. He says that these presuppositions are accepted unconsciously under certain conditions and rejected under a different set of conditions.'

Mr. Collingwood's treatise is a jumble of confused ideas, a product, according to one commentator of his works, of his days of illness. It represents a subjective statement or hypothesis devoid of any philosophical value, and cannot be counted as an inquiry into the nature of metaphysics.

Considering what has been said above, it becomes clear that issues of importance in the First Philosophy are also relevant to the physical sciences, and whatever general issues fall outside the framework of science, would be considered as metaphysical.

Moreover, even if the doctrine of dialectical materialism should be proven to be true, it would also be a metaphysical principle; since dialectical materialism, as its adherents claim, is not limited to any specific sphere or science, but applies to all natural, social, political, historical, or intellectual phenomena.

Therefore, there is no opposition between dialectical materialism and metaphysics. There would, however, be opposition between materialism and metaphysics if the latter is taken to signify the 'realm of the supernatural.' Thus the opposition assumed by the Marxist writers between dialectics and metaphysics is completely groundless and without foundation.

The nature of metaphysical problems is such that they have given rise to differing and even contradictory judgements regarding them. And even though man's nature thirsts for answers to them and, as said before, the human character of man's existence depends on correctly solving some of these problems, yet some European thinkers have judged them as insoluble, while others have considered them useless and even meaningless.

It is obvious that a thorough examination of the aforesaid characteristics of its problems and the numerous opinions expressed on the subject of metaphysics, is outside the scope of this work, requiring far more space. I hope to undertake such an attempt in the future, when I shall examine in detail the misunderstandings that have given rise to such judgements, and explain the issues in simple terms. Here, I shall content myself with mentioning the following points:

A. Since man's immediate and ordinary perceptions are acquired through the medium of the senses, shallow thinking people imagine that there is nothing beyond the perceived world, or, more precisely, beyond the range of our sense perceptions. And if, supposedly, such a thing did exist, it cannot be verified. It was this kind of shortsighted-ness that caused the Children of Israel to say to Moses:

"...We shall never believe in you [and affirm your prophethood] until we see God manifestly (with our eyes)"(2:55)

The position of those who say that the soul does not exist since we cannot find it through surgery is similar.

In answer to such shortsighted views, it would suffice to say that there are many things in this very physical world that cannot be perceived through the senses, such as electricity, electromagnetic waves, and other things, whose existence is considered certain by the concerned sciences.

People who deny the existence of anything beyond the range of our senses must either deny all these realities, or admit that knowledge is not limited to that gained through direct sense perception; and that reason can apprehend the existence of the supersensible through the knowledge of its perceptible effects.

B. Exclusive reliance on sense perception (despite its errors and shortcomings) can justify only abstinence from making any judgements regarding the supersensible world. It certainly cannot justify any categorical denial of the supersensible world. It follows, then, that the empiricists have no right to deny the existence of a world lying beyond the range of senses.

They must adopt an agnostic attitude towards the subject, allowing the probability of its existence, and act in accordance with the denial of such a probability.

C. There is a set of metaphysical principles the validity of which cannot be denied by any reasonable man although they cannot be verified by the senses. The nature of these principles is such that even if someone does try to deny them, he will end up by unconsciously affirming them. For example, the law of contradiction is a metaphysical conception, which cannot be perceived through any of the senses.

Not even the individual concepts which constitute it can be apprehended through any of the senses. That is, the idea of contradiction is not 'perceived' by the senses. Despite it, however, no reasonable person can deny the validity of this self-evident principle, and even the claim that it is invalid proves its validity.

If someone says that contradiction is possible, can he, at the same time, believe that it is impossible and that it is possible? And if he is told that his claim, although one hundred per cent correct, is also one hundred per cent wrong, would he accept it? Of course not. It is thus proven that the very claim that this principle is invalid proves its validity.

It is clear that all those who have stated the view that contradiction is possible or necessary, either had some other meaning of "contradiction" in mind, or have not understood the meaning of the concept correctly. Otherwise, the impossibility of contradiction-if its meaning is correctly understood-is far too obvious to be questioned by any reasonable person.

The existence of such principles as mentioned above proves that man possesses a faculty of apprehension other than the senses, a faculty that can apprehend certain realities independently. Thus we cannot say that the content of a particular proposition is unknowable or unverifiable just because it is outside the range of perception.

It follows, therefore, that the solution to metaphysical problems must be found through the rational method; that is, through the application of self-evident axioms, solutions to non-empirical problems are found. Moreover, if used correctly, this method can lead to results even more definite than those attained in the empirical sciences. In fact, as already pointed out, the certitude of the results attained by the empirical sciences and their generality depend entirely on metaphysical principles.

Every human being, throughout life, perceives things both inside and outside himself. Mostly these perceptions are attained through natural means, and sometimes through artificial devices. In any case, neither an isolated perception nor all of them could be said to constitute a "science," in the sense of a set of general principles. Every human being, throughout life, perceives things both inside and outside himself. Mostly these perceptions are attained through natural means, and sometimes through artificial devices. In any case, neither an isolated perception nor all of them could be said to constitute a "science," in the sense of a set of general principles.

Perception acquires scientific value only when it transcends the limits of the particular and the personal and enters the realm of generality. Moreover,

these generalities cannot be in the form of simple concepts, but must take the composite form of postulates consisting of a number of concepts possessing a special relationship amongst them.

For example, the seeing of different colours and shapes, the hearing of various sounds, and other sense-data, give man some knowledge about objects existing in his environment; but this knowledge is not what is meant by the word “science.”

In other words, the particular bits of information thus obtained do not constitute the science of physics or chemistry, or any other science, even though they are more or less connected with scientific issues. Such postulates, for instance, as “the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles,” “metals expand when exposed to heat,” and “the atoms of one element can be changed into those of another element,” etc. are scientific statements.

As it can be clearly seen, these notions do not represent particular perceptions of any particular individual, and are not subject to any limitation of time or space. That is, just as they are true of the triangles, metals, and atoms of the past and the present, they are also true of the triangles, metals, and atoms of the future. Nor are these truths in any way affected by spatial considerations. This is the characteristic which distinguishes scientific concepts from particular perceptions.

Now we have to see how man can come to possess the faculty of being able to pass judgement equally on past, present, and future. It is obvious that none of the senses has the ability to look into the past and the future in the manner mentioned above, and the sense perceptions, if they be in accordance with reality, can portray only such phenomena as exist at the time of perception, not those which have long ceased to exist or have not yet come into existence.

There is no doubt that these general postulates, which are based on particular perceptions and are abstracted from them, are transformed through a certain intellectual process into general, definite, and necessary laws. This being so, the next question that presents itself is: how and according to what laws does the human mind extend particular perceptions and turn them into general postulates, and that too in a definitive form, invulnerable to skepticism?

In answer we can say that whenever we perceive two phenomena either together or following one another, we realize that there exists a relationship between them called “the causal relationship,” and thus foresee that whenever the cause is present the effect would also be present. For example, whenever heat is produced in metals, their expansion would also follow.

However, without going into meticulous philosophical considerations, it can be said that what we can perceive through the senses is either the simultaneous existence of two phenomena or the fact that one of them follows the other.

But by what means do we perceive that the existence of one phenomenon depends on that of another? And, secondly, even if we determine that such a dependence does exist in a particular case, how do we know that such a

dependence has existed in the past and will exist in the future, in all locations?

Of course, we admit that all scientists do understand the things just mentioned, and it is on the basis of this understanding that they pursue scientific research and seek for the causes of various phenomena and their interrelationships.

We should know, however, that this understanding is not the work of sense organs and the perceptual faculties related to them, -but is the work of another inner faculty called “intellect” which is capable of comprehending fixed realities unconditioned by spatial and temporal limitations. One such unchanging reality is the law of causality and its corollaries to which all scientific laws owe their generality and certainty.

Moreover, since these perceptions (rational truths) have not been apprehended through the medium of sense and experience and cannot be verified by any of the experimental sciences, they are therefore metaphysical truths.

In conclusion we can say that not only man's knowledge is not limited to perceptions gained through sense and experience, but the laws of the empirical sciences are themselves in need of non-empirical knowledge and metaphysical principles.

Notes

1. This matter shall be discussed in greater detail later on.
2. This is not to say that Islam is one kind of philosophy; what is meant is that the basic principles of Islamic faith concern issues which fall into the same category as philosophical ones. To put it another way, Islam has philosophical foundations just as Marxism does
3. The two other principles of Islamic belief, that is, `adl (justice) and imamah, are in fact implicit in the doctrines of al-tawhid and nubuwwah (prophethood).
4. This is one of the most notorious fallacies propagated by the Marxists.
5. That is, concepts that are formulated as a result of rational analysis; such as, necessity, contingency, and causation

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