

## Chapter 1: Preliminary Notes

Ever since mankind attempted to determine its relations and links to the objective world, the issue of forming a general philosophical notion of the world has occupied a central position in the human mind. In this investigation of ours, we do not intend to write the history of this issue in its philosophical, religious and scientific progress, as well as its long development throughout history.

Rather, our purpose is to present the basic notions in the modern philosophical field, in order for us to determine the following: (1) our position with regard to such notions; and (2) the notion, in the light of which our general view must be formed and on whose basis our principle in life must be based.

This notion can be attributed to two issues: one of them is the issue of idealism and realism; and the other the issue of materialism and theology.

In the former issue, the question is presented in the following way: 'Are the beings of which the world is constituted realities that exist independently of consciousness and knowledge; or are they nothing but forms of our thought and conception in the sense that reality is thought or knowledge, and, in the last analysis, everything is attributed to the mental conceptions?' Thus, if we eliminate consciousness or the 'I', (p. 208) then the whole reality will be removed.

These are two estimations of the issue. The answer, according to the former estimation, recapitulates the philosophy of realism or the realistic notion of the world. The answer, according to the latter estimation, is that which offers the idealistic notion of the world.

In the second issue, the question is presented in light of the philosophy of realism, as follows: 'If we accept an objective reality of the world, do we stop with objectivity at the limit of sensible matter, which would thus be the common cause of all the phenomena of existence and being, including the phenomena of consciousness and knowledge; or do we see beyond it to a further cause, an eternal and an infinite cause, as the primary cause of what we know of the world, including both its spiritual and its material realms?'

Thus, in the philosophical field, there are two notions of realism. One of them considers matter as the primary foundation of existence; this is the materialistic realistic notion. The other extends beyond matter to a cause above both spirit and nature; this is the theological realistic notion.

Therefore, there are three notions of the world at hand: the idealistic notion, the materialistic realistic notion and the theological realistic notion. Idealism may be expressed by spiritualism, since [it] considers the spirit or consciousness as the primary foundation of existence.

## 1. Correction of Errors

In light of this, we must correct a number of errors committed by some modern writers. The first is the attempt to consider the conflict between theology and materialism as an expression of the opposition between idealism and realism. They do not distinguish between the two issues that we have presented above.

Thus, they claim that the philosophical notion of the world is one of two kinds: either the idealistic notion or (p. 209) the materialistic notion. Therefore, the explanation of the world does not admit of more than two points of view. If you explain the world in a purely conceptual manner, and believe that conception or the 'I' is the primary source [of reality], then you are an idealist.

If, on the other hand, you wish to reject idealism and subjectivism, and accept a reality independent of the 'I', then you must adopt the materialistic notion of the world, and believe that matter is the primary principle, and that thought and consciousness are nothing but reflections of it and certain levels of its development.

But, as we have learned, this does not at all agree with the facts. Realism is not limited to the materialistic notion. Similarly, idealism or subjectivism is not the only thing that opposes and conflicts with the philosophical materialistic notion. Indeed, there is another notion of realism – namely, theological realism that accepts an external reality of the world and nature. Both spirit and matter, according to this notion, are attributed to a cause beyond the world and nature.

The second is the accusation made by some writers against the theological notion –namely, that it freezes the scientific principle in the natural sphere, and eliminates the natural laws and decrees that science uncovers and that are made more evident day by day. According to the claims of such writers, the theological notion links every phenomenon and every being to the theological principle.

This accusation has played an effective role in the materialistic philosophy, where the idea of God posits an intelligible cause of the natural phenomena and events that people observe, and attempts to justify the existence of such phenomena and events. With this, the necessity of such phenomena and events is completely eliminated if we can discover by science and the scientific experiments the real causes, as well as the laws of the universe that govern the world, and in accordance with which the phenomena and

vents are produced.

The malicious role that the church played in fighting the scientific progress and opposing the natural mysteries and laws disclosed by science at the beginning of the scientific renaissance in Europe aided in solidifying this accusation. (p. 210)

In fact, the theological notion of the world does not mean dispensing with natural causes or rebelling against any one of the sound scientific truths. Rather, it is the notion that considers God as a cause beyond [nature]. It imposes on the chain of agents and causes an ascent to a power above nature and matter. With this, opposition between it and any scientific truth is completely removed.

The reason for this is that it gives science the widest opportunity for discovering the mysteries and order of nature. At the same time, in the last analysis, it retains for itself the theological explanation which is the positing of a higher cause in a principle above nature and matter. Hence, the theological issue is not as its opponents wish to claim – namely, an issue concerning an invisible hand that sprinkles water in the atmosphere, that conceals the sun from us, or that acts as an obstacle between us and the moon, thus creating rain, a sun eclipse, or a moon eclipse.

If science reveals the causes of rain and the factors leading to its evaporation; and further, if science also reveals the causes of the sun's eclipse, and [if] we know that the celestial spheres are not equidistant from the earth, that the moon is closer to them than to the sun, and that it happens that the moon passes between the earth and the sun, thus concealing the sun's light from us; again; if science reveals the cause of the moon's eclipse, which is the passing of the moon in the shadow of the earth – this shadow extends behind the earth for around 900,000 miles – I say that if this information is available to a human being, then those materialists will imagine that the theological issue will no longer have a subject, and the invisible hand, which conceals from us the sun or the moon, is substituted for by the natural causes given by science.

However, this is only due to the misunderstanding of the theological issue, and to the undifferentiation of the place of the theological cause in the chain of causes.

The third is the spiritual character that has dominated both idealism and theology, so much so that spiritualism in the theological notion began to appear as having the same meaning as that of the idealistic notion. This caused a number of ambiguities. The reason is that spirituality can be considered as an attribute of each of (p. 211) the two notions.

However, we do not at all permit the negligence of the distinction between the two forms of spiritualism. Rather, we must know that by 'spiritualism', in the idealistic sense, one intends the realm which is opposite the sensible material realm that is, the realm of consciousness, knowledge and the 'I'.

Thus, the idealistic notion is spiritual, to the sense that it explains every being and every existent in terms of this realm, and attributes every truth and every reality to it. According to the claims of idealism,

the material realm is attributed to a spiritual realm.

As for 'spiritualism' in the theological sense, or in the theological doctrine, it is a method of viewing reality as a whole, and not as a specific realm opposite the material realm. Hence, the theology that asserts a supernatural, immaterial cause also asserts a link between all that exists in the general realm – be that spiritual or material – and the supernatural cause.

It believes that this link is one in whose light the human practical– and social position regarding all things must be determined. Spiritualism in the theological sense is a method for comprehending reality. It is equally applicable to the material realm and to the spiritual realm in the idealistic sense.

We can conclude from the previous presentation that the philosophical notions of the world are three. We have studied in the theory of knowledge the idealistic notion, since it is very much related to the theory of knowledge. We have also discussed its errors. Let us, therefore, take up in this investigation the study of the other two notions, the materialistic and the theological.

In the materialistic notion, there are two tendencies: the instrumental or mechanical tendency and the dialectical or contradiction tendency (that is, dynamic materialism).

## **2. Clarification of a Number of Points concerning These Two Notions**

Before we discuss the materialistic notion, including both of its tendencies, we must seek clarification about a number of points concerning the theological and the materialistic notions. This will be done in the following questions. (p. 212)

The first question is this: 'What is the basic feature that distinguishes each of the materialistic tendencies (the philosophical materialistic school) and the theological tendency (the theological school) from one another; what is the main difference (between them) that makes them two conflicting tendencies and two opposite schools?'

Casting one glance at these two schools determines for us a clear answer to this question: namely, that the basic distinguishing feature of the materialistic school in philosophy is negation or denial of what appears to be above the capacity of the experimental sciences. Thus, in the scientific field – that is, in the positive aspects of science that experimentation demonstrates – there is not something theological and something material.

Whether a philosopher is a theologian or a materialist, he accepts the positive aspect of science. From the point of view of science, the theologian and the materialist admit, for example, that radium produces a power of radiation as a result of an internal division, that water is composed of oxygen and hydrogen, and that the element of hydrogen has the lightest atomic weight of all elements.

They both also accept the other positive truths that appear on the scientific level. Hence, with regard to the scientific position, there is no theological philosopher and no materialist philosopher. Rather, these two sorts of philosophies exist, and materialism opposes theology when the issue of the existence of the beyond is presented. The theologian accepts a kind of existence free from matter that is, beyond the experimental field, its phenomena, and its powers.

The materialist, on the other hand, denies this, and limits existence to the specific experimental field. He considers the natural causes, which are revealed by experiments and touched by the hand of science, as the primary causes of existence, and nature as the only expression of this existence; whereas the theological tendency affirms that the human spirit or the 'I' is an immaterial subject, and that knowledge and thought are phenomena independent of nature and matter.

The materialist denies this, claiming that, in his analysis of the human body and in his observation of the operations of the nervous system, he has not seen anything outside the limits of nature and matter, as the theologians claim. (p. 213)

Further, the theological tendency asserts that the developments and movements that are revealed by science – be they mechanical movements subject to an external material cause, or natural movements not produced by experimentation from specific material causes – are, in the last analysis, attributable to an external cause beyond the fence of nature and matter.

The materialist opposes this, claiming that the mechanical movement as well as the natural movement are not linked to an immaterial cause, and that the natural movement is dynamic. It is self-sufficient, since the immaterial cause that the theologians have accepted does not appear in the experimental field.

Thus, it becomes fully clear that the opposition between theology and materialism is not with regard to scientific truths. The theologian, like the materialist, admits all the scientific truths that sound experiments make clear about the human body, the physiology of its organs, and the natural development and movement.

The theologian just adds and admits other truths. He demonstrates the existence of an immaterial spiritual side of human beings other than that which is exhibited by them in the experimental field. He also demonstrates a non-sensible, primary, immaterial cause of the natural and mechanical movements.

Since we have learned that the scientific field does not involve what is theological and what is materialistic, we know that the philosophical structure of materialism – since it is a school opposed to the school of theology – is based solely on the negation of abstract truths, as well as on the denial of existence beyond the limits of nature and matter, and not on positive scientific truths.

The second question is this: 'If compatibility between theology and materialism is the compatibility between affirmation and negation, then which of the two schools is responsible for giving evidence and

proof for its own affirmative or negative position?'

It may appeal to some materialists to rid themselves of the responsibility for giving proof, and to consider the theologian responsible for giving evidence for his claim, because (p. 214) the theologian is the one who has the affirmative position –that is, the one claiming existence [beyond nature]. That is why the theologian must justify his position and demonstrate the existence of what he claims.

The truth though, is that each of the two is responsible for offering evidence and reasons for his own tendency. Thus, as the theologian must demonstrate affirmation; so also is the materialist responsible for providing evidence for the negation, since he does not make the metaphysical proposition the subject of doubt. Instead, he denies it without restriction. But absolute denial, like absolute affirmation, is in need of proof.

Therefore, when the materialist claims that the immaterial cause does not exist, he implies in this claim that he has known the whole existence, and has not found in it room for an immaterial cause. He must, therefore, advance a proof in support of this general knowledge, and a justification of the absolute negation.

Here we ask again: 'What is the nature of the evidence that the theologian or the materialist may offer in this area?' Our answer is that the evidence for affirmation or for denial must be reason, and not direct sense experience.

This is contrary to the materialist view that usually considers sense experience as evidence for its own notion – claiming that the theological notion or the metaphysical propositions cannot in general be affirmed by sense experience, and that sense experience rejects those claims, since it analyzes human beings and nature and shows that there are no immaterial things in them.

If materialism is correct in its claim –namely, that sense experience and scientific truths do not constitute a proof for the theological tendency – then neither can they be a proof for absolute negation that determines the materialistic tendency. For we have already learned that the various kinds of scientific truths are not the subject of disputation between theology and materialism.

Rather, the disputation is concerned with the philosophical interpretation of those truths: the existence of a superior cause beyond the limits of sense experience. It is clear that sense experience cannot be considered as a proof for the negation of a truth outside its own limits.

Thus, if the natural scientist does not find (p. 215) an immaterial cause in his laboratory, this will not be anything other than a proof for the non–existence of such a cause in the empirical realm. As for negating the existence of such a cause in a realm above that of sense experience, this is something that cannot be inferred from sense experience itself.

In this clarification, we have asserted two things. First, materialism is in need of proving the negative

aspect that distinguishes it from theology, as metaphysics is in need of proving the affirmation and positiveness. And second, materialism is a philosophical tendency, as is theology.

We do not have scientific or experimental materialism; for science, as we have learned, does not affirm the materialistic notion of the world in order that materialism be scientific. Rather, all the truths and secrets that science discloses about the sphere of nature leave room for the assumption of a cause above matter.

Scientific experimentation cannot prove, for example, that matter is not created by an immaterial cause or that the forms of movement and the kinds of development which science has discovered in the various aspects of nature are self-sufficient and not produced by a cause above the limits and sphere of experimentation. The same is true of every scientific truth.

Therefore, the proof in support of materialism cannot be based on scientific truths or direct sense experience. Rather, it is formulated in a philosophical interpretation of those truths and experiences, precisely as is the proof in support of theology.

Let us take development as an example of this. Science proves the existence of natural development in a number of fields. It is possible to posit two philosophical interpretations of this kind of development. One of them is that it proceeds from the heart of a thing, and is the result of a conflict assumed among contradictories in that thing. This is the interpretation of dialectical materialism.

The other is that it is the product of an immaterial superior cause. The progressive nature does not involve contradictories within itself. Rather, it involves the possibility of development. It is that (p. 216) immaterial superior cause that provides this possibility with actual existence. This is the interpretation of the theological philosophy.

We notice with clarity that the scientific notion is just (the assertion of] the existence of natural development. As for those two notions of movement, they are two philosophical notions, the soundness of one of which and the erroneousness of the other is not something about which one can be sure from direct sense experience.

The third question is as follows: 'If scientific experimentation is not sufficient by itself for demonstrating the theological and the materialistic notions alike, then is it possible for the human mind to find evidence for any of the two notions, since both of them lie outside the realm of experimentation, or must the mind yield to skepticism, to freeze the theological and materialistic issue, and to limit itself to the fruitful field of science?'

The answer is that human intellectual capacity is sufficient for studying this issue and for commencing with respect to it from experimentation itself, not by considering experimentation as a direct proof for the notion which we form about the world, but as a starting point. Thus, the proper philosophical notion of the world – the theological notion – will be posited by the independent rational information in light of the

interpretation of experiments and the experimental phenomena.

No doubt the reader remembers our study in the first investigation concerning the theory of knowledge of the rational doctrine, and how we demonstrated the presence of independent rational knowledge in a way that shows that the addition of rational knowledge to sense experience is something necessary not only with respect to our philosophical issue but also with respect to all scientific issues.

There is no scientific theory that rests on a purely empirical basis. Rather, it rests on the basis of sense experience and in light of independent rational knowledge. Therefore, our philosophical issue that investigates the supernatural world does not differ from any scientific issue that investigates one of the natural laws, or that reveals some natural powers (p. 217) or secrets. In all of this, sense experience is the point of departure. But in spite of that, sense experience is in need of a rational explanation if a philosophical or a scientific truth is to be inferred from it.

From these points, we draw the following conclusions. First, the materialistic school differs from the theological school in a negative aspect that is, in the denial of that which lies beyond the empirical field. Second, materialism is responsible for providing evidence for the negation, as theology must show evidence for the affirmation.

Third, sense experience cannot be considered a proof for the negation, since the non-existence of a superior cause in the empirical realm does not prove the non-existence of that cause in a superior realm not touched by direct sense experience. Fourth, the method adopted by the theological school in demonstrating its theological notion is the same method by means of which we prove scientifically all the scientific truths and laws.

### **3. The Dialectical Tendency of the Materialistic Notion**

We have said that there are two tendencies in materialism. One of them is the mechanical, instrumental tendency, and the other is the dialectical tendency. We have already touched upon the former tendency briefly in the second chapter of the theory of knowledge, when we took up in our study and scrutiny the physical idealism which was established on the ruins of mechanical materialism.

The latter tendency of materialism, which explains the world in a materialistic fashion according to the laws of dialectics, is the tendency that was adopted by the Marxist school. Thus, this school established (p. 218) its materialistic notion of the world on the basis of the tendency under consideration.

We quote from Stalin:<sup>1</sup>

The Marxist materialism proceeds from the principle which asserts that the world is naturally material, that the numerous events of the world are various phenomena of the moving matter, that the mutual relations among events and the mutual adaptation of these events to one another are, according to the dialectical method, necessary laws for the development of the moving matter, and finally, that the world

develops in accordance with the laws of the movements of matter and has no need of any universal mind.<sup>2</sup>

The materialistic notion considers matter or existence as the central point of the Marxist philosophy, because this point determines the Marxist view regarding life, and constructs for it a specific understanding of reality and its values. Without this point, it would not be possible to establish the purely material grounds of society and life. It has imposed on the Marxist doctrine a specific progression of thought and required it to establish its various philosophical aspects in the interest of this point.

In order for Marxism to have the right to determine the central point once and for all, it chose this point to be one of certainty, as we have learned in the theory of knowledge. It declared that human beings have the cognitive capacities that enable them to speak with certainty about a specific philosophy of life and to unravel the innermost secrets of existence and the world. It rejected the doctrine of absolute skepticism and even frozen subjectivism. By doing so, it attempted to give the main axis – the materialistic notion – a decisive quality. (p. 219)

Subsequently, it put forth a general criterion of knowledge and of the truth of sense experience. It considered necessary rational knowledge as improbable, and denied the rational logic which is independent of sense experience. All of this was for the purpose of avoiding the elimination of the possibility of the central point and the limitation of the human capacity by rational logic, particularly in the empirical field.

At this stage, Marxism faced a new problem – namely, if the human ideational criterion is the senses and the sense experience, then the information that people acquire by means of the senses and the sense experience must always be true and must be considered as a primary criterion for weighing ideas and knowledge. Now, are the scientific empirical conclusions indeed so? Further, is the truth of the theories which are established on the basis of sense experience always secure?

Marxism falls between two dangers. If it admits that the information which is based on the ground of sense experience is not free from error, then sense experience falls short of being a primary criterion of truth and knowledge. If, on the other hand, the Marxists claim that the theory which is derived from sense experience and application is above error and ambiguity, then they clash with the reality which no one can deny: the reality that many scientific theories, or many of the laws that people have attained by way of studying the sensible phenomena have proved to be false and not in agreement with reality. Thus, they fell from the scientific throne that they had been mounting for hundreds of years.

If the scientific or empirical notions should be false, and [if] rational logic is eliminated, then how can one declare a philosophy of certitude, or establish a school whose ideas are characterized by decisiveness?

Marxism has insisted on erecting sense experience as the highest criterion. It rid itself of this difficulty by positing the law of movement and development of the sciences and ideas due to [its consideration of] the mind as a part of nature. By virtue of this, the mind realizes the natural laws (p. 220) in full. Thus, it

develops and grows as nature does.

The scientific development does not mean the elimination of the previously mentioned scientific notion. Rather, it expresses an integral movement of truth and knowledge. Truth and knowledge are truth and knowledge, but they grow, move and ascend continuously.

Thus, all the self-evident propositions and truths are abolished; for all thought moves along the path of development and change. Hence, there is never a fixed truth in the realm of thought, nor can one be certain of the self-evident propositions that we now know, such as our knowledge of the following: 'The whole is greater than the part,' and 'Two plus two equals four'. This knowledge acquires another form in its developmental movement – thus, we know the truth at that point in another manner.

Since the movement that Marxism posited as the law of thought and of nature in general does not proceed other than from a power or a cause, and (since), according to Marxism, there is no reality in the world other than matter, it states that movement is the result of the contradictions of the internal content of matter, and that these contradictions are at war with one another, thus causing matter and its development. For this reason, Marxism cancelled the principle of non-contradiction. It took dialectics as a method of understanding the world, and placed its materialistic notion within the scope of this method.

With this, it became clear that all the philosophical aspects of dialectical materialism are linked to the central point– that is, to the materialistic notion – and are formed for the purpose of establishing and preserving this point.

Eliminating the self-evident propositions and making them subject to change, or accepting contradiction and considering it as a general natural law, as well as reaching the other similar strange conclusions that Marxism drew, is nothing but an inevitable progression of the advance that began from the Marxist materialistic notion, and a justification of this advance in the philosophical field.

1. Joseph Stalin, (1879–1953). He was a Marxist theoretician, a political and a military leader. He was born in Soviet Georgia to a modest family. His father was a shoemaker. At nineteen years of age, he joined the revolutionary underground. In 1917, he became the editor-in-chief of Pravda, and in 1922, he was appointed secretary general of the Communist Party, and Lenin's successor. In 1942, he became commander-in-chief, and led the war against Germany in 1943.

2. Al-Madda ad-Dialaktikyya, p. 20.

---

**Source URL:**

<https://www.al-islam.org/our-philosophy-falsafatuna-sayyid-muhammad-baqir-al-sadr/chapter-1-preliminary-notes#comment-0>