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Chapter 2: Human Sciences and Being

Normativity versus Descriptivity

Allama Jafari is one of the contemporary Iranian thinkers who have looked at the nature of scientific inquiry in a very systematic fashion. Very little is known by the scientific community around the globe about his metatheoretical engagements on the nature of science and the relation of scientific rationality in natural sciences and the distinction of the former from humanities and all branches of knowledge that touch upon the question of human existence.

What is science? This has been one of the most perplexing questions in contemporary era as the building-blocks of rationality have undergone serious metamorphoses. For instance, Chalmers argues that science is not equivalent solely with empiricism.

In What Is This Thing Called Science? (1976) he outlines the shortcomings of naive empiricist accounts of science, and describes and assesses post–positivist attempts to replace them. Allama Jafari in Iran during 70s in a series of lectures on Sociology and Human Being approaches the questions of science, human sciences and the most crucial of all concepts within humanities, i.e. 'human being' in a very novel fashion, which will be unfolded along the course of this research.

Allama Jafari talks about 'scientific inquiry' in the context of his sociological debates. One may pause and ask what does it mean and how did Allama Jafari define the inquiry in a scientific framework?

In the philosophy of science, models of scientific inquiry have two functions: first, to provide a descriptive account of *how* scientific inquiry is carried out in practice, and second, to provide an explanatory account of *why* scientific inquiry succeeds as well as it appears to do in arriving at genuine knowledge of its objects. Such accounts tend to reflect different philosophical positions in epistemology.

In other words, the search for scientific knowledge extends far back into antiquity. At some point in the past, at least by the time of Aristotle, philosophers recognized that a fundamental distinction should be drawn between two kinds of scientific knowledge — roughly, knowledge *that* and knowledge *why*.

It is one thing to know *that* each planet periodically reverses the direction of its motion with respect to the background of fixed stars; it is quite a different matter to know *why*. Knowledge of the former type is descriptive; knowledge of the latter type is explanatory. It is explanatory knowledge that provides scientific understanding of the world. (Salmon, 1990)

Allama Jafari agrees that our inquiry should not only lead to explanation but also be based on certain rules. In other words, he argues that there is a fundamental rule in any scientific enterprise which is unchallengeable due to the nature of epistemological inquiry in relation to subject.

The issues which are discussed over have very general or common natures that are not appropriate to be considered as a subject for the scientific inquiry. (Jafari, 1976. Chapter 1) Said differently, in any scientific inquiry one needs to have a subject–matter and a set of problematiques as well as appropriate methods for analyzing the field of inquiry. To put it differently; within human sciences we need to distinguish between two broad realms of normative and descriptive fields.

This distinction would enable us to elaborate on the specificities of human sciences in contrast to other fields of knowledge such as physics, biology and mechanics or chemistry. In Allama Jafari's view, the general issue that is discussed within the context of human sciences is 'human being'. (Jafari, 1976. Chapter 1) This is to argue that the subject–matter does have deep– rooted effects upon the nature of problematiques and even how we approach the issues within the field of inquiry.1

By looking at the history of ideas one could easily discern that the study of human cultural life is not an easy task and as a matter of fact fraught with many serious controversies and heated debates which, some would suggest, could cast doubt upon the very possibility of having a *science of man*.

A cursory look at the terms which are related to the study of human life would reveal the complexity of this field of inquiry: *human science*, *humanistic social science*, *moral science*, *behavioral sciences*, *social science*, and *Geisteswissenschaften* or *spiritual sciences*.

In other words, we have different discourses whereby some prefer to emphasize on the moral aspect of human existence while others choose the behavioral dimensions of human activities and again some others influenced by the Romantic Movement favor to view the spiritual significance of human leben and still other scholars who endorse the scientific over against the humanistic approach to the study of human society.

In *Explanation and Understanding*, Georg Henrik von Wright, argues that human science (also, humanistic social science, moral science and human sciences) refers to the investigation of human life and activities via a phenomenological methodology that acknowledges the validity of both sensory and psychological experience. It includes but is not necessarily limited to humanistic modes of inquiry within fields of the social sciences and humanities, including history, sociology, anthropology, and economics.

It's use of an empirical methodology that encompasses psychological experience contrasts to the purely

positivistic approach typical of the natural sciences which exclude all methods not based solely on sensory observations. Thus the term is often used to distinguish not only the content of a field of study from those of the natural sciences, but also its methodology. (von Wright, 1971. Pp 4–8) To complicate the question, one could take into consideration the very concept of science in the context of, what Rene Guenon terms as 'The Reign of Quantity'.

To put it differently, ambiguity and confusion regarding usage of the terms 'science', 'empirical science', and 'scientific method' have complicated the usage of the term 'human science' with respect to human activities. The term 'science' refers to 'scientia' i.e. 'knowledge'.

'Science' may be appropriately used to refer to any branch of knowledge or study dealing with a body of facts or truths systematically arranged to demonstrate the operation of general laws. Nonetheless, according to Positivists, the only authentic knowledge is scientific knowledge which comes from positive affirmation of theories through strict scientific method. As a result of the positivist influence, the term *science* is frequently employed as a synonym for *empirical science*.

Empirical science is knowledge based on the scientific method, a systematic approach to verification of knowledge first developed for dealing with natural physical phenomena and emphasizing the importance of experience based on sensory observation. However, even with regard to the natural sciences, significant differences exist among scientists and philosophers of science with regard to what constitutes valid scientific method. (Popper, 2002)

In the course of the 20th century, usage of the term has been extended to the study of human social phenomena as well. Thus, the natural sciences and social sciences are commonly classified as science, whereas the study of classics, languages, literature, music, philosophy, history, religion, and the visual and performing arts are referred to as the humanities.

Imprecision in regard to the meaning of the term *science* is aggravated by the common employment of the term formal science with reference to any one of several sciences that is largely concerned with abstract form that cannot be validated by physical experience through the senses, such as logic, mathematics, and the theoretical branches of computer science, information theory, and statistics.

We can even make the situation more complex by relating other conceptions on the study of human being such as the approach endorsed by people like Droysen, Windelband, and Dilthey who firmly opposed what they considered as the Comtean intrusions into traditionally humanistic areas.

Partly in reaction to the establishment of positivistic philosophy and the latter's Comtean intrusions into traditionally humanistic areas such as sociology, non– postivistic researchers in the humanistic sciences began to carefully but emphatically distinguish the methodological approach appropriate to these areas of study, for which the unique and distinguishing characteristics of phenomena are in the forefront (e.g. for the biographer), from that appropriate to the natural sciences, for which the ability to link phenomena into generalized groups is foremost.

In this sense, Droysen contrasted the humanistic science's need to *comprehend* the phenomena under consideration with natural science's need to *explain* phenomena, while Windelband coined the terms idiographic for a descriptive study of the individual nature of phenomena, and nomothetic for sciences that aim to define the generalizing laws. (von Wright, 1971. Pp 4–8)

Geisteswissenschaften and the Intelligible Model

Dilthey brought nineteenth–century attempts to formulate a methodology appropriate to the humanistic sciences together with Hume's term 'moral science", which he translated as Geisteswissenschaft – a term with no exact English equivalent. Dilthey attempted to articulate the entire range of the moral sciences in a comprehensive and systematic way. Meanwhile, his conception of "Geisteswissenschaften" encompasses also the abovementioned study of classics, languages, literature, music, philosophy, history, religion, and the visual and performing arts. He characterized the scientific nature of a study as depending upon:

- 1) The conviction that perception gives access to reality
- 2) The self-evident nature of logical reasoning
- 3) The principle of sufficient reason

But the specific nature of the *Geisteswissenschaften* is based on the *Erleben*, the *Verstehen* of the meaning of expressions and *understanding* in terms of the relations of the part and the whole – in contrast to the *explanation* of phenomena by hypothetical laws in the *natural sciences*. Thanks to the recent developments, "human science" has been used to refer to a philosophy and approach to science that seeks to understand human experience in deeply subjective, personal, historical, contextual, crosscultural, political, and spiritual terms.

Human science is the science of qualities rather than of quantities and closes the subject-object split in science. In particular, it addresses the ways in which self-reflection, art, music, poetry, drama, language and imagery reveal the human condition. By being interpretive, reflective, and appreciative, human science re- opens the conversation among science, gnosis, poetry, theology, religion, art, and philosophy.

In other words, to study the being of human self in an individual and collective fashion have sensitized us to be conscious about the intricate nature of human societal dimensions which are deeply fugacious. Allama Jafari has been conscious about this fugacious nature of human self and vehemently emphasized on indivisible mode of being in the fabric of human personality.

However, he is conscious that to study a subject one needs to have an appropriate approach as well as logic of categorization which would enable us to comprehend the question in a systematic fashion.

Allama Jafari argues that if this broad concept (i.e. human being) is to be considered within the scientific

realm then it should be broken down into more specific issues and categorized into more detailed problematiques.

This is tantamount to argue that the subject matter of human sciences is this particular aspect of human being and within this specific field of inquiry we are concerned solely with this peculiar dimension of human being. For instance, when we take into consideration the subject of jurisprudence as a field of scientific inquiry it will be evident that human individuals in their social relations are engaged in a reciprocal process of right and debt which constitutes the frame of human agency in the middle of social action, which, in turn, is the subject of science of law.

On the other hand, human being is capable of expressing her/his own emotions in a creative fashion which could be the subject matter of art that is an aspect of human reality. As perceiving art and being an artist are aspects of being a human being then art and issues related to creative cognitions are surely parts and parcels of human sciences. (Jafari, 1976. Chapter 1)

Human Being and the Myth of Creation

Allama Jafari regards "human being" in an integral fashion where all dimensions of being should be integrally incorporated within the body of self. To understand the integral approach of Allama Jafari vis-à-vis the pre-epistemological notion of human person one needs to reread the multilayered features of modern mythological conception of "Man". In other words, what is the dominant archetype of modernist narrative of human being within the body of disciplinary episteme? The modern concept of 'Man' is deeply intertwined with the mythical image of *Prometheus*.

The mythical character of Prometheus has a mythological importance which does not concern us in this context. On the contrary, the modernist interpretation of this myth is what makes this mythological story of profound significance in our comparative sociological studies.

The question that interests us is not the mythologem of *Prometheus* but the prophecy concerning the *liberation* of *Prometheus*, which is developed into a *poesis* on the future of humankind. This liberation has been interpreted as Enlightenment which came to be synonymous to man's release from his self–incurred tutelage in the Kantian perspective.

In other words, the modern liberty in the Western context has taken a mythical dimension where Zeus and Prometheus waged war against each other and finally Reason (metaphysical interpretation) or Fire (mythical construal) won over religion (as the ecclesiastical establishment) or God (as the epitome of transcendental values).

This story which runs over, between and under the modern stream of disciplinary weltanschauung is not shared by Allama Jafari. In other words, we are faced with two cosmogonies and myths of creations: the Euro- Hellenic cosmogony and genesis and the Koranic cosmogony and genesis.

In the former, Prometheus stands against Zeus and brings the torch of gnosis to humanity where Zeus has kept humanity in the darkness while in the latter *Iblis* is working against Adam and Eve – whereas Allah endows upon Adam (the person who is made from clay without having any gender attributes) the ability to contemplate and think. In other words, in the former the road to redemption is to stand against God while in the latter the path to realization is to embrace God.

These archetypical images and myths run through these disciplinary and primordial discourses and at metatheoretical levels cause deep-rooted differences which one should take into consideration if we agree that sociology is about to found the parameters of 'sane society' and 'self-realized personality'.

Two of the most important demarcating factors in the context of human sciences discourses are *scientia imago* and *homo imago*, namely what kind of images of science and human person we hold in the frame of our discursive paradigm. There are scholars who argue that the human being becomes dehumanized when studied "scientifically".

Prominent sociologists and psychologists have charged that any "natural science" of persons either must, or usually does, "depersonalize" or "reify" the subject of study. Specific issues have been raised about the image or concept of the human being ("determined" "free" etc.) and about the appropriateness of applying a natural science perspective to the study of persons.

The charges are serious and mounting day by day in all corners of the globe where non–Eurocentric or alternative discourses are taken seriously by theorists, for instance, in Iran and other parts of the Islamic World. In other words, the contemporary theories on self does not consider the being of human person embedded in any kind of 'permanent selfhood' equipped by a 'universal conscience' which is capable of discerning the 'path of transcendental realization' beyond the 'boundaries of socio–cultural constructions'.

Of course, one should take into consideration that the concept of 'depersonalization' is a very multifaceted notion within human science discourses. While in psychiatric context the concept of *depersonalization*, for instance, refers to an anomaly of the mechanism by which an individual has self–awareness (Radovic & Radovic, 2002. Pp 271–9) nevertheless the idea of depersonalization within the context of social psychology, in general, and identity– theories, in particular, has a different meaning by referring to 'the stereotypical perception of the self as an example of some defining social category'. (Turner & Oakes, 1986. p 238)

However, it seems that when social theorists speak about depersonalization they refer to a subjective experience of unreality in one's sense of self. In addition, there is another state related to 'self' where the sense of lack is not connected to the inner tapestry of being but aimed at the external dimensions of reality.

In other words, while depersonalization is about the unreality of one's sense of self, the unreality of the external world is what social psychologists call *derealization*, i.e. feelings of *déjà vu* or *jamais vu*.

Although most authors currently regard depersonalization (self) and derealization (surroundings) as independent constructs, many do not want to separate derealization from depersonalization. (Radovic & Radovic, 2002) How would Allama Jafari view these problems?

As one may note, at the bottom of these debates on self is the question of reality and how we perceive reality and what we consider as the nub of realness. In other words, when we reduce the concept of reality into a discursive construction and treat it as an epiphenomenon then what is at stake is not a psychological question but the loss of metaphysics of self which is of essential nature. To put it differently; the question is not the loss of self but the self which has been lost in the midst of constructive policies in a city where soul has no place in its universe.

Allama Jafari has focused on human identity based on the spiral theory of human self where there is no dissociation between various levels of being. In current theories of self, one comes across a dissociative picture of human self where body, psyche and soul are in a disintegrative state of relationship. In other words, a human reality in the discursive paradigm is characterized by partial or complete disruption of tripartite reality which constitutes the very basis of human self.

Allama Jafari argues that human being is constituted of three dimensions of body, psyche and soul. Of course it should be noted that the psyche as such cannot be the subject of scientific inquiry as itself is constituted of various different dimensions and each is the domain of distinct field of disciplinary investigation such as psychology (and its various sub–disciplines), psychiatry (and its different sub–disciplines), and psychoanalysis (and its diverse schools of inquiry). (Jafari, 1976. Chapter 1)

The Scientific Inquiry and The Concept of Human Being

One of the most important tasks in any scientific inquiry is how to classify various fields of knowledge into different disciplines and domains. Allama Jafari has paid a systematic attention to sociology based on the subject matter of sociological inquiry, i.e. 'human being'.

He argues that in the sociological investigation, the subject matter of the inquiry is 'human being' and for this reason one should clarify the specific domain of sociological analyses within the fields of human sciences. In order to reach at the nub of our research we should leave broad generalizations aside and look at the question in a specific fashion.

This is an immemorial tradition in all branches of knowledge which is not only a productive approach but also a scientific prerequisite. Because if the topics overlap each other this would lead to a chaotic epistemological state of affairs which would finally divert us from adequate understanding of the subject matter in a substantive fashion. (Jafari, 1976. Ch. 1)

To put it otherwise; when we, for instance, working within the field of jurisprudence and law we should conceptualize specific kinds of relationships based on the concepts of right and debt among social

agents as to discuss abruptly in the middle of a legal debate problems related to anatomy would, to say the least, seem ridiculous and bizarre. (Jafari, 1976. Ch. 1) In other words, it may seem to the uninitiated scholars that Allama Jafari takes side with individualists over against collectivists or vice versa.

The debates on the primacy of agency over against structures or the difference between the proponents of individualism versus collectivism are part and parcel of Allama Jafari's emphasis on "Human Being" in metatheoretical reflections. We need to elaborate at some lengths these terms before deciding the overall position of Allama Jafari in this regard.

In a nutshell, one could argue that the term individualism refers to the moral stance, political philosophy, ideology, or social outlook that stresses the moral worth of the individual. Individualists promote the exercise of one's goals and desires and so value independence and self-reliance while opposing most external interference upon one's own interests, whether by society, family or any other group or institution. (Gray, 2008) On the other hand, the concept of collectivism is defined as the theory and practice that makes some sort of group rather than the individual the fundamental unit of political, social, and economic concern.

In theory, collectivists insist that the claims of groups, associations, or the state must normally supersede the claims of individuals. (Ratner & Lumei, 2003. p 72) The quarrel over the primacy of individualism versus collectivism is not over yet and in current sociological discourses one may encounter aspects of these debates under different names such as the problem structure versus agency.

Central to sociological theory are the concepts of structure and agency. Structures are typically seen as the more fixed and enduring aspects of the social landscape. As used by Durkheim and others working within a similar tradition, structure is a metaphor that denotes qualities of society that are akin to the skeleton of a body in the field of anatomy, or to the frame of a building in architecture.

Durkheim's work was heavily influenced by his desire to establish a sphere of study for sociology that was distinct from both biology and psychology. To this end he insisted that there are structured ways of acting, thinking, and feeling that are general throughout a society and that act as external constraints over its members.

This was to emphasize the role of society in the process of causation, as opposed to individual or group agency. Some writers taking issue with this position went to the other extreme. Weber, for example, emphasized the role of individuals and rejected the idea that terms such as "society" or "group" could refer to any reality other than that of individuals and their actions. For writers seeking to include both structure and agency in their analytic frameworks, the Durkheimian emphasis on structures is maintained.

Now, however, agency is conceived as the more processual, active, dimension of society – analogous to the physiology of an organism. However, these quarrels have not been solved within social theoretical discourses yet. In other words, the problematique has undergone some changes and the most notable

position is the one presented by Anthony Giddens who argues for the *structuration theory* rather than conventional rivalries.

The theory of structuration, proposed by Anthony Giddens (1984) in *The Constitution of Society*, is an attempt to reconcile theoretical dichotomies of social systems such as agency/structure, subjective/objective, and micro/macro perspectives. The approach does not focus on the individual actor or societal totality but social practices ordered across space and time. Its proponents adopt this balanced position, attempting to treat influences of structure (which inherently includes culture) and agency equally. *See structure and agency*.

Simply put, the theory of structuration holds that all human action is performed within the context of a pre-existing social structure which is governed by a set of norms and/or laws which are distinct from those of other social structures. Therefore, all human action is at least partly predetermined based on the varying contextual rules under which it occurs.

Although Giddens attempted to overcome the dilemmas of structure versus agency but the question is not settled considering the multifaceted critiques leveled at the very project of structuration by scholars such as Gregor McLennan. Now, one could look at the position presented by Allama Jafari who seems to lean towards the individualist position while not ruling out the importance of collectivist critiques.

In other words, one could briefly state that Allama Jafari believes in the existence of intrinsic rights of the individual. He believes in the intrinsic value of the felicity of the individual, which gives rise to the rights of the individual. To put it otherwise, he does not either endorse individualism or collectivism but the communal right of individuated self-realized people in the context of human society. To put it differently, Allama Jafari argues that:

... if someone, for instance, puts emphasis on the role of society then this kind of researcher may argue for the position of collectivism over against individualism A collectivist may argue that there is no such a thing as individual or autonomy of individual before the pivotal position of society. But how could one argue that there is no individual and everything is reducible to the 'social'? Just tell me who discovered the law of gravity? Wasn't Newton?

Weren't only Newton and no other person who discovered the law of gravity? In every person there are characteristics which belong to the milieu we are from; there are other features which are very personal and unique; and again there are qualities which belong to our personalities in a very unique fashion ... all these could interfere in the pursuit of knowledge in a very peculiar manner

Of course, this is not to argue that these interferences are detrimental for the sanity of humanity's culture ... and neither against the values dominant in the cultures of scientific enterprises As aforementioned a person who has chlorosis and sees everything in yellow ... is not guilty ... as this is a state s/he finds her/himself in As far as the condition of chlorosis is concerned the person in question is not guilty but when s/he attempts to draw conclusions based upon this state and generalize that yellowness is an

aspect of reality ... then we may be in epistemological danger (Jafari, 1976. Ch. 4)

1. Within disciplinary social sciences, one could mention the works of Clifford Geertz who attempted to turn anthropological concerns towards the frames of meaning within which various peoples live out their lives. In other words, the role of meaning in the universe of human person is an issue which could be compared in the works of Allama Jafari and Clifford Geertz. Very little is known about the similarities between these two thinkers in relation to the constitutive role of meaning in the makeup of human self and human community.

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