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Lesson 1: A Glance at the Course of Philosophical Thought

Lesson 1: A Glance at the Course of Philosophical Thought (From Its Origins to the Islamic Epoch)

[The Beginning of Philosophical Thought](#)

The history of human thought as well as the creation of man goes back beyond history. Wherever he has lived, thought has been an inseparable characteristic of man. Wherever he has placed his feet, he has taken thinking and intellection with him.

There is no certain and precise information about the unwritten thoughts of man except that which has been surmised by archaeologists on the basis of uncovered remains. However, written thought has remained behind as caravan of history has passed, since the time of written language.

Among the kinds of human thought, that which is related to the knowledge of existence and to its beginning and end, at first were mixed with religious beliefs. Therefore it may be said that one must look for the oldest philosophical thoughts among oriental religious thoughts.

Historians of philosophy believe that the most ancient collections that are purely philosophical or that are predominantly philosophical are related to the Greek sages, who lived approximately six centuries before Christ (peace be with him).

Scholars of that time are mentioned who have tried to come to know existence, and the beginning and end of the cosmos. In order to interpret the appearance and changes that occur in existents, they expressed different and occasionally contradictory opinions, and at the same time, they do not hide the fact that their thoughts were influenced more or less by oriental religious beliefs and culture.

In any case, the free atmosphere for discussion and criticism in the Greece of those days prepared the ground for developing and taking pride in philosophical thought. That area was turned into a nursery for philosophy.

Naturally, the beginning thoughts were not properly organized and arranged, and the problems for research were not precisely categorized, let alone that each category should have a specific name and title and characteristic method. In sum, all ideas were called science ('ilm), wisdom (hikmat) and knowledge (ma'rifat), and the like.

The Appearance of Sophism and Skepticism

In the fifth century B.C., scholars are mentioned who in the Greek language were called "sophists", that is, sage and learned. But in spite of their vast information they had about the knowledge then current, they did not believe in fixed truths, and they did not consider any thing to be definitely known or certain.

As reported by historians of philosophy, they were professional teachers who taught rhetoric and debate, and they trained defense lawyers for the courts, for which there was much demand at that time. This profession required the defense lawyer to be able to establish any claim and to be able to reject all sorts of opposing claims. Dealing with this sort of teaching which was often subject to fallacy, gradually brought about a kind of thinking according to which basically there is no truth beyond human thought!

You have heard the story of a man who jokingly said that in such and such a house sweets are being given away. In their simplicity, the people hurried to crowd around the door of the mentioned house. Little by little, the speaker himself began to harbor suspicions about the matter, and so as not to lose out on the chance for free sweets, he joined the line.

It seems as if the Sophists also were victims of this same fate. By teaching fallacious methods to establish and deny claims, little by little such tendencies came to appear in their own thinking, that basically truth and falsehood depend on human thought, and in conclusion that there is no truth beyond human thought!

The expression "sophism," which meant sage and learned, due to being ascribed to such mentioned people, lost its fundamental meaning, and it came to be used as a symbol and sign for a way of thinking according to fallacious reasoning. It is this same expression that in Arabic has taken the form "sufisti" and the term "safsatah" is derived from it.

The Period of the Flourishing of Philosophy

The most famous thinker who stood up against the Sophists and who criticized their ideas and views was Socrates. It was he who called himself philosophus, that is, a lover of wisdom. It is this same expression that in Arabic took the form filsuf from which the term falsafah is derived.

Historians of philosophy consider there to be two causes for the choice of this name: one is the humility of Socrates, who always was confessing his own ignorance, and the other is his objection to the Sophists who called themselves sages, that is, with the choice of this title, he wanted to make them understand: You, who for the sake of material and political aims engage in discussion and debate, teaching and learning, are not worthy of the name 'sage', and even I, who reject your ideas with the firmest of reasons, do not consider myself worthy of this title, and I merely call myself a lover of wisdom.

After Socrates, his student, Plato, who for years profited from his lessons, endeavored to establish the principles of philosophy, and then, his student, Aristotle, brought philosophy to the pinnacle of its flourishing, and formalized the principles of thought and reasoning in the form of the science of logic, as he formulated the pitfalls of thought in the form of a section on the fallacies.

Ever since Socrates called himself a philosopher, the expression philosophy has been used as opposed to sophistry, and it embraces all the real sciences, such as physics, chemistry, medicine, astronomy, mathematics and theology. Even today in many of the world's most renowned libraries, the books of physics and chemistry are classified under philosophy, and only conventional disciplines, such as vocabulary, syntax and grammar, are outside the realm of philosophy.

In this way, philosophy came to be considered as a common noun for all the real sciences, and it was divided into two general groups: theoretical sciences and practical sciences. The theoretical sciences include the natural sciences, mathematics and theology, and the natural sciences in their turn include the fields of cosmogony, mineralogy, botany and zoology, and mathematics is divided into arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music.

Theology is divided into two parts: metaphysics or general discussions of existence, and theology

proper. The practical sciences are divided into three branches: morality, domestic economy and politics.

1. Theoretical

a) natural sciences:

- the general principles of bodies,

b) cosmogony, mineralogy, botany, zoology

c) mathematics:

- arithmetic
- geometry
- astronomy
- music

d) theology:

- the general principles of existence
- divinity

2. Philosophy

a) Theoretical

- ethics (regarding the individual)
- domestic economy (regarding the family)
- politics (regarding the community)

The End of Greek Philosophy

After Plato and Aristotle, for some time their students occupied themselves with the compilation, arrangement and elaboration on the works of their masters, and more or less kept the market for philosophy brisk. It did not take long, however, for this briskness to be replaced by stagnation, and that prosperity and thriving began to fail, and in Greece there came to be few customers for the commodities of science and knowledge.

The masters of the arts and sciences came to dwell in Alexandria, where they engaged in research and education. This city remained the center of science and philosophy until the fourth century.

But when the Roman emperors converted to Christianity, and propagated the beliefs of the Church as official beliefs and ideas, they began to oppose the free realm of thought and science, until finally Justinian, the Eastern Roman Emperor, in the year A.D. 529, issued the edict to close the universities and schools of Athens and Alexandria, and the scholars fled for their lives, and they sought refuge in other cities and lands. In this reason the gleaming torch of science and philosophy was extinguished in the Roman Empire.

The Dawn of the Sun of Islam

Simultaneous with the above mentioned process (in the sixth century of the Christian era), in another corner of the world, the greatest event of history occurred, and the Arabian Peninsula was witness to the birth, mission and migration of the eminent Prophet of Islam, may the Peace and Blessings of Allah be with him and with his progeny.

He read the message of Divine guidance in the ear of the consciousness of the world. As a first step, he called upon people to acquire knowledge,^{[1](#)} and he held reading, writing and learning in the highest regard. He founded the greatest civilization and most thriving culture in the world. He encouraged his followers to acquire knowledge and wisdom from the cradle to the grave (min al-mahd ila al-lahd), from the nearest to the furthest points on the globe (even if to China, wa law bil-sin), and at whatever cost (wa law bi-safk al-muhaj wa khawdh al-lujaj).^{[2](#)}

The prolific sapling of Islam planted by the powerful hand of the Messenger of God (S) in the life giving radiance of Divine revelation and nourished by other cultures grew and yielded fruit. Islam absorbed the raw material of human thought according to proper Divine standards and changed them into useful elements in the forge of constructive criticism, and in a short period it spread its shade over all the cultures of the world.

In the shade of the encouragement of the Noble Messenger (S) and his impeccable successors, Muslims began to acquire various sciences, and the scientific heritages of Greece, Rome and Iran were translated into Arabic. They absorbed the useful elements and supplemented them with their own inquiries, and in most fields they were able to make important discoveries, as in algebra, trigonometry, astronomy, perspective, physics and chemistry.

Another important factor of the growth of Islamic culture was politics. The oppressive Umayyids and Abbasids who illegitimately occupied the seat of Islamic government felt a severe need for popular approval among the Muslims, while the Household of the Prophet, the Ahl al-Bayt, may the blessings of Allah be with all of them, that is, those who were the legitimate guardians (awliyah) of the peoples, were the source of knowledge and the treasury of the Divine revelation.

The governing regime had no means to attract people except threats and bribes. Hence, they tried to make their regime prosper by encouraging scholars and gathering authorities, and by using the Greek,

Roman and Iranian sciences, they tried to open a shop in opposition to the Ahl al-Bayt.

In this way, various philosophical ideas and types of knowledge and crafts with diverse motivations by means of friends and foes, entered the Islamic environment, and the Muslims began to inquire about, adopt and criticize them, and brilliant figures began to appear in the world of science and philosophy in the Islamic environment, each of whom developed a branch of the sciences by his own constant endeavors, and Islamic culture bore fruit.

Among them, the scholars of Islamic theology and doctrine reviewed and criticized the problems of divine philosophy from different viewpoints, and however much some of them went to extremes in their criticisms, this sort of criticism and nit-picking, questioning and raising doubts caused most of the Islamic thinkers and philosophers to try harder, leading to the enrichment of intellectual and philosophical thought.

The Development of Philosophy in the Islamic Epoch

With the widening of the realm of Islamic government and the inclination of different peoples to this life giving religion, many centers of learning of the world came to be included within the realm of Islam.

There was a great exchange of ideas among scholars, exchange of books among libraries and translation of these books from various languages: Hindi, Farsi, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, Hebrew, etc., into Arabic, which had become the de facto international language of the Muslims, and this accelerated the pace of the development of philosophy, the sciences and the crafts. Many books of the philosophers of Greece and Alexandria, and other reputable centers of learning were rendered into Arabic.

In the beginning, the lack of a common language and technical terms agreed upon by the translators, and the discrepancies regarding the principles of Eastern and Western philosophy made the teaching of philosophy difficult and made research and selection among these principles even more difficult. But it was not very long before geniuses such as Abu Nasr Farabi and Ibn Sina were able to learn the entire sum of philosophical thought of that time by their constant efforts.

With God given talents that flourished under the radiance of the light of revelation and the explanations of the Imams, they were then able to review and select from among the appropriate philosophical principles and to present a mature philosophical system, which in addition to including Platonic and Aristotelian ideas and Neo-Platonic thought from Alexandria, and the ideas of oriental mystics ('urafa) also included new thoughts and was thus able to excel over all the systems of philosophy of the East and West, although the largest portion of the new system was Aristotelian, and for this reason their philosophy had an Aristotelian and peripatetic color.

Later, this philosophical system came under the critical magnifying glass of thinkers such as Ghazali, Abu al-Barakat Baghdadi and Fakhr Razi. On the other hand, taking advantage of the works of the

sages of ancient Iran, and comparing them with the works of Plato, the Stoics and the Neo-Platonists, Suhrawardi founded a new school of philosophy, called Illuminationist philosophy, which had a more Platonic color.

In this way, new ground was prepared for the encounter among philosophical ideas and their development and ripening. Centuries later, great philosophers such as Khwajah Nasir al-Din Tusi, Muhaqqiq Dawani, Sayyid Sadr al-Din Dashtaki, Shaykh Baha'i and Mir Damad were able to supplement the enrichment of Islamic philosophy with their own brilliant ideas.

Then came the turn of Sadr al-Din Shirazi who introduced a new system of philosophy with his own genius and innovation which was composed of the harmonious elements of peripatetic and Illuminationist philosophies and mystical disclosures, to which he added profound thoughts and valuable ideas, and he called it transcendent theosophy (hikmat muta'aliyyah).

[1.](#) Consider the first verses revealed to the Prophet (S), "Read! In the Name of your Lord Who created... Who taught by the Pen...." (96: 1, 4).

[2.](#) Allusion is made here to several well-known hadiths attributed to the Prophet (S).

Lesson 2: A Glance at the Course of Philosophical Thought

Lesson 2: A Glance at the Course of Philosophical Thought (from the Middle Ages to the Eighteenth Century)

Scholastic Philosophy

After the spread of Christianity in Europe and the combination of the power of the Church with that of the Roman Empire, the centers of learning came under the influence of the apparatus of government to such an extent that by the sixth century (as was indicated previously) the universities and schools of Athens and Alexandria were closed.

This period, which lasted for about one thousand years, is called the middle Ages, and is characterized by the domination of the Church over the centers of learning and the programs of the schools and universities.

Among the prominent personalities of this era is St. Augustine, who tried to use philosophical principles, especially the views of Plato and the Neo-Platonists to explain the dogmas of Christianity. After him, a number of philosophical discussions were included in the programs of the schools.

However, the attitude toward Aristotelian thought was unfavorable for it was considered to be opposed to religious beliefs, and its teaching was prohibited. With the dominion of the Muslims in al-Andalus (Spain) and the penetration of Islamic thought in Western Europe, the ideas of Islamic philosophers such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) were more or less discussed, and the Christian scholars also became acquainted with Aristotelian views by means of the books of these philosophers.

Little by little members of the Church could not resist this wave of philosophical thought, and finally St. Thomas Aquinas accepted most of Aristotle's philosophical views which are reflected in his own books, and gradually, opposition to Aristotle's philosophy decreased, and even came to dominate some centers of learning.

In any case, in the Middle Ages philosophy not only developed in Western lands, but also went through a course of decline, and contrary to the world of Islam, in which the sciences and learning continually flourished and became increasingly enriched, in Europe the only discussions taught in the Church affiliated schools, and which came to be called scholastic philosophy, were those which could justify the dogmas of Christianity, dogmas which were not without deviation themselves.

It goes without saying that such philosophy could have no destiny but death and extinction. In scholastic philosophy, besides logic, theology, ethics, politics, and some natural philosophy and astronomy which were accepted by the Church, grammar and rhetoric were also incorporated into the curricula, and in this way, the philosophy of this period was considered more broadly [than at present].

The Renaissance and the Comprehensive Change in Thinking

From the fourteenth century the ground was being prepared for a comprehensive change by means of various factors. One factor was the flourishing of nominalism (the fundamentality of naming) and the denial of the existence of universals in England and France.

This philosophical tendency played an effective role in undermining the foundations of philosophy. Another factor was that the natural philosophy of Aristotle became a matter of controversy at the University of Paris.

Another factor was the murmurings of the incompatibility of philosophy with Christian dogma, and in other words, the incompatibility of reason and religion. Another factor was the manifestation of disagreements between the temporal rulers and the authorities of the Church, and among the Christian authorities themselves there were also disputes which led to the emergence of Protestantism.

Yet another factor was the cresting of humanism and the tendency to deal with the problems of human life while disregarding metaphysical problems. Finally, in the middle of the fifteenth century, the Byzantine Empire collapsed, and a complete change (political, philosophical, literary and religious)

appeared throughout Europe, and the institutions of the papacy were attacked from every side. In this course, the weak scholastic philosophy reached its final destiny.

In the sixteenth century, interest in the natural and empirical sciences became intense, and the discoveries of Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo shook the foundations of Ptolemaic astronomy and Aristotelian natural philosophy. In a word, in Europe all aspects of human affairs were subjected to disturbance and instability.

The papal institutions were able to withstand these roaring waves for quite some time, and scientists were brought before the inquisition with the excuse of their opposition to religious dogmas, that is, for their views on natural philosophy and cosmology which were accepted by the Church for the exegesis of the Bible and religious doctrines. Many were burnt in the fires of blind fanaticism and selfishness of the authorities of the Church. However, eventually the Church and papal institution were forced to withdraw in shame.

The ruthless fanatical behavior of the Catholic Church had no effect but to give the people a negative attitude toward the authorities of the Church, and in general toward religion, and likewise the downfall of scholastic philosophy, that is, the only current philosophy of that period, brought about an intellectual and philosophical vacuum, and finally the appearance of modern skepticism.

During this process, the only thing that made progress was humanism, and a desire for natural and empirical science in the cultural arena, and a tendency toward liberalism and democracy in the field of politics.

The Second Phase of Skepticism

For centuries, the Church had spread the views and ideas of some philosophers as religious beliefs, and Christians had accepted them as certain and sacred, including Aristotelian and Ptolemaic views of cosmology which were upset by Copernicus, and other unbiased scholars also realized their invalidity. We have already mentioned that the dogmatic resistance of the Church and the ruthless behavior of the authorities of the Church with respect to the scientists brought about adverse reaction.

This change in thoughts and beliefs and the toppling of the intellectual and philosophical foundations [of the Middle Ages] brought about a psychological crises in many of the scholars, and raised doubts in their minds such as: how can we be sure that other beliefs we hold are not invalid, and that one day their invalidity will not become evident? How can we know that newly discovered scientific theories will not also be invalidated someday?

Finally, a great scholar named Montaigne denied the value of science and knowledge and he explicitly wrote, how can we be sure that the theory of Copernicus will not be invalidated in the future? He once more expressed the doubts of the skeptics and sophists in a new way, and defended skepticism, and

thus another phase of skepticism appeared.

The Peril of Skepticism

The attitude of doubt, in addition to being a painful psychological plague, also involves great spiritual and material perils for society. With the denial of the value of knowledge, there can be no hope for the advancement of the sciences and learning, likewise no room remains for moral values and their magnificent role in human life, as religion also loses its intellectual basis.

Rather, the greatest blows are directed toward religious dogmas, beliefs unrelated to material and sensible affairs. When the flood of doubt flows through the hearts of the people, naturally, the beliefs about the super natural are the most vulnerable. Therefore, skepticism is an extremely dangerous plague that threatens all aspects of human life with destruction, and with its spread no ethical, legal, political or religious system can remain stable, and it provides an excuse for all sorts of crimes, injustice and oppression.

For this very reason, the struggle against skepticism is a duty of all scholars and philosophers, and it is also a responsibility for religious leaders, and it is also a matter about which counselors, politicians and social reformers must be diligent.

In the seventeenth century various activities were undertaken to shore up the ruins of the Renaissance, including struggle against the perils of skepticism. The Church tended to cut off the dependence of Christianity on reason and science, and fortified religious doctrines through the heart and faith. However, philosophers and scholars sought a firm and unshakable basis for knowledge and value, so that intellectual fluctuations and social upheavals would not destroy them.

Modern Philosophy

The most important effort of this period for salvation from skepticism and the revitalization of philosophy was that of Rene Descartes, the French philosopher who is called “the father of modern philosophy”.

After much research and meditation, he devised a plan by which to bolster the footings of philosophical thought; his principle may be summarized in his famous proposition: “I doubt, therefore I am,” or “I think, therefore I am”, that is, if one follows the way of doubt regarding the existence of everything, one will nonetheless never be able to doubt one’s own existence.

Since doubt is meaningless without one who doubts, the human existence of doubters and thinkers is also indubitable. Then he tried to formulate specific laws of thought similar to mathematical laws and to solve the problems of philosophy on their basis.

In that period of intellectual tumult, the thought and views of Descartes were a source of reassurance for many scholars; and other great thinkers, such as Leibniz, Spinoza and Malebranch, also sought to

reinforce the groundwork of modern philosophy. Nevertheless, these efforts were unable to bring about a harmonious philosophical system having certain and consolidated foundations.

On the other hand, the attention of the majority of scholars had turned toward the empirical sciences, many of whom displayed no interest in research in philosophical and metaphysical problems.

Because of this, a strong, firm and well-supported philosophical system did not come into existence in Europe, and although collections of philosophical views and ideas occasionally were proposed in the form of specific schools of philosophical thought which within certain limits were able to win more or less of a following, still none of them was able to become permanently established, as remains the case.

The Fundamentality of Experience and Modern Skepticism

While rational philosophy was being revived on the continent of Europe, and reason was about to find its own place in the understanding of truth, another tendency was making progress in England, which was based on the fundamentality of sense and experience, called empiricism.

The beginnings of this tendency go back to the end of the Middle Ages and to William of Ockham, an English philosopher who was a proponent of the fundamentality of naming, and was also actually a denier of the fundamentality of reason.

In the sixteenth century, Francis Bacon, and in the seventeenth century, Hobbes, who were also English, both relied upon the fundamentality of sense and experience, but those who are known as empiricists are another three English philosophers: John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume, who discussed the problems of knowledge from the end of the seventeenth century until about one century later, and while criticizing the views of Descartes regarding “innate knowledge”, they considered the source of all knowledge to be sense and experience.

Among them, John Locke was the most moderate and nearest to the rationalists. Berkeley was an avowed proponent of the fundamentality of naming, i.e., a nominalist, but (perhaps unconsciously) he resorted to the principle of causation, which is a rational principle, and likewise he had other views that were incompatible with the fundamentality of sense and experience.

But Hume remained completely loyal to the fundamentality of sense and experience, and to its implications and he bound himself to skepticism regarding the metaphysical, and to an acceptance of the reality of natural phenomena. In this way, the third phase of skepticism in the history of Western philosophy took shape.

Kant's Critical Philosophy

Hume's thoughts are among those which formed the groundwork for the philosophical ideas of Kant, and in his own words, “It is Hume who awakened me from my dogmatic slumber,” and Kant especially found

agreeable Hume's explanation of the principle of causality, which was based on the idea that experience cannot establish a necessary relation between cause and effect.

For many long years Kant thought about the problems of philosophy, and wrote many essays and books. He offered a specific philosophical view which in comparison to similar sorts of views was more durable and acceptable. But he finally arrived at the conclusion that theoretical reason does not have the ability to solve the problems of metaphysics and that the rational principles in this field lack scientific value.

He explicitly declared that problems such as the existence of God, the eternity of the soul and free will could not be established by rational proofs, but that belief and faith in them is implied by the acceptance of an ethical system, in other words, it is an accepted principle of the precepts of practical reason, and that it is ethics which calls us to faith in the resurrection, not the reverse.

For this reason, Kant must be considered as a reviver of ethical values, which after the Renaissance were subject to instability and were in danger of fading and being obliterated. On the other hand, he must be considered to be one of the destroyers of the foundations of metaphysical philosophy.

Lesson 3: A Glance at the Course of Philosophical Thought

Lesson 3: A Glance at the Course of Philosophical Thought (In The Last Two Centuries)

Objective Idealism

As was indicated earlier, after the Renaissance, no stable philosophical system came into existence, but rather different philosophical schools and views constantly have been and are being born and dying. The number and variety of schools and “-isms” has increased since the nineteenth century. In this brief overview there is no occasion to mention all of them, and we shall merely provide a brief mention of some of them:

After Kant (from the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century) a number of German philosophers became famous, whose ideas more or less found their source in the thought of Kant. They sought to compensate for the weak points in his philosophy by using mystical sources, and although there were differences among their views, what they had in common was that they began from an individual viewpoint and paid heed to the explanation of being and the appearance of multiplicity from unity in a poetic way, and they were called “Romantic philosophers”.

Among them, Fichte, who personally was a student of Kant, was extremely interested in free will, and among the views of Kant, he emphasized the fundamentality of morals and practical reason. He said, “Theoretical reason observes the system of nature as necessary, but within ourselves we find freedom and a desire for voluntary actions, and our consciences design a system that we must attempt to realize. Hence we must consider nature to be subordinate to the ego, and not independent and unrelated to it.”

It is this tendency towards freedom which drove him and other romantics such as Schelling to accept a kind of idealism and the fundamentality of the spirit (a characteristic of which was considered to be freedom). This school of thought was further developed by Hegel, and it took the form of a relatively coherent system of philosophy, and was called objective idealism.

Hegel, who was a contemporary of Schelling, imagined the world to be the thoughts and ideas of the absolute spirit, and that between them [the spirit and its thoughts and ideas] there are logical relations rather than causal relations, as held by other philosophers.

According to Hegel, the course of the appearance of ideas is from unity to multiplicity, from the general to the specific. At the first level, the most general idea, the idea of being, is posited, from within which the opposite, i.e., the idea of nothingness, emerges.

Then they become mixed and take the form of the idea of “becoming”. Becoming, which is the synthesis of being (thesis) and nothingness (antithesis), in its turn is posited as a thesis, and its opposite appears from within it, and from the mixture of them a new synthesis occurs.

This process continues until it reaches the most specific of concepts. Hegel called this threefold (triadic) process “dialectic”, and he fancied that this was a universal law for the appearance of all mental and objective phenomena.

Positivism

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Frenchman Auguste Comte, who is called the father of sociology, founded an extreme form of empiricism called positivism, whose basis was limited to that which is given directly by the senses, and from one perspective it was considered the opposite of idealism.^{[1](#)}

Comte even considered the abstract concepts of science that were not obtained from direct observation to be metaphysical and unscientific. He even went so far as to consider metaphysical propositions to be basically absurd and meaningless words.

Auguste Comte held that there were three stages of human thought: first, the divine and religious stage, which relates events to supernatural causes. Second is the philosophical stage, which seeks the cause of events in invisible substances and natures of things. Third is the scientific stage, which instead of looking for the reason why phenomena occur, deals with the question of how they occur and their

interrelationships, and this is the stage of positive science.

It is strange that he at last confessed that religion is necessary for man, but he set humanity as its object of worship. He considered himself to be the messenger of this creed, and he set up rituals for individual and group worship.

The creed of the worship of man, which is a perfect example of humanism, found some followers in France, England, Sweden and in North and South America, who formally converted to this creed and established temples for the worship of man. It influenced others indirectly in ways that cannot be mentioned here.

Rationalism and Empiricism

Western philosophical schools are divided into two general groups: rationalist and empiricist. An obvious example of the first group in the nineteenth century is the idealism of Hegel, which even found followers in Britain; and the obvious example of the second group is positivism, which is still current today.

Wittgenstein, Carnap and Russell may be considered supporters of this school of thought. Most of the divine philosophers have been rationalists, and most of the atheists are empiricists. Among the minor philosophers was McTaggart, who was a British Hegelian and an atheist.

The proportionate relationship between empiricism and the denial or at least skepticism regarding metaphysics is clear, and it was such that the progress of positivist philosophies was followed by materialist and atheistic inclinations. The lack of strong competitors on the side of the rationalists prepared the ground for the prevalence of such inclinations.

As was mentioned, the most famous of the rationalist schools of thought during the nineteenth century was the Idealism of Hegel. Despite its attraction which was a result of its relatively coherent system, its breadth, and its capacity for looking at problems from different perspectives, it lacked a strong logic and firm reasoning, and it was not long before it became the subject of criticism even by its own adherents.

Among them there were two kinds of simultaneous but different reactions in opposition to it, one of which was led by Søren Kierkegaard, a Danish cleric, the founder of existentialism, and another was led by Karl Marx, a Jewish born German: the founder of dialectical materialism.

Romanticism, which appeared to justify human freedom, finally took the form of an inclusive philosophical system in Hegelian Idealism, and it introduced history as a great fundamental process that advances and progresses on the basis of dialectical principles. In this way it deviated from the basic course, for on this view, the individual will lose its fundamental role. Hence, it became subject to much criticism.

One of those who severely criticized the logic and history of Hegel was Kierkegaard, who emphasized

individual responsibility and the free will of man in his own self-construction. He considered the humanity of man to be due to an awareness of individual responsibilities, especially responsibilities toward God, and he said that it is closeness, nearness and relation to God which makes a man human.

This tendency which was supported by the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, led to the appearance of existentialism. Thinkers such as Heidegger and Jaspers in Germany, and Marcel and Jean-Paul Sartre in France adhered to this sort of philosophy from different perspectives, theistic and atheistic.

Dialectical Materialism

After the Renaissance, when philosophy and religion in Europe went through a crisis, atheism and materialism more or less came into vogue, and in the nineteenth century, some biologists and physicians such as Vogt, Buchner, and Ernst Haeckel emphasized the fundamentality of matter and the denial of metaphysics, but the most important materialist school of philosophy was that founded by Marx and Engels.

Marx took dialectical logic and the fundamentality of history from Hegel, and materialism from Feuerbach, and he considered the economic factor to be fundamental to social and historical changes, which he supposed to take shape according to dialectical principles, especially on the basis of opposition and contradiction. He introduced the economic factor as the cornerstone of all aspects of human life, and he considered all other aspects of culture and society to be subordinate to it.

He held that the history of man has various stages, which begin with the first level of primitive communism then passes through the stages of slavery, feudalism and capitalism until it reaches socialism and the government of the workers, and at last leads to communism, that is, the stage in which ownership is completely abolished and there will be no need for any state or government.

Pragmatism

At the conclusion of this brief review, let us take a glance at the only philosophical school of thought brought about by American thinkers, at the threshold of the twentieth century, the most famous of whom is William James the renowned psychologist and philosopher.

This school, which is called pragmatism (i.e., the fundamentality of action) considers a proposition to be true which possesses practical use. In other words, truth is a meaning constructed by the mind in order to obtain more and better practical consequences.

This point has not been explicitly proclaimed by any other philosophical school, although its origins may be found in the words of Hume, according to which reason is considered the servant of human passions, and limits the value of knowledge to its practical aspect.

The fundamentality of action in the mentioned sense was first presented by the American Charles

Peirce, and then was developed into a philosophical propensity by William James, a propensity which found adherents in America and Europe.

James, who called his way radical empiricism, differed with other empiricists about how to determine the realm of experience. In addition to outward sensory experience, he included psychological and religious experience. He considered religious beliefs, especially the belief in the power and mercy of God, to be useful for mental health, and for this very reason, true.

He himself suffered a mental breakdown at the age of twenty-nine, was cured due to his attention to God, and His Mercy and Power to change man's destiny. For this reason, he emphasized prayer and supplication, but he did not consider God to be absolutely perfect and infinite, but rather, he imagined that there was also progress for God, and that basically, the lack of progress is equal to stagnation and is a sign of imperfection.

The root of this extreme and aggressive progressivism can be found in some of the words of Hegel, including his introduction to *The Phenomenology of Mind*, but more than any, Bergson and Whitehead recently emphasized it. William James emphasized free will and its creative role, and in this respect he was of like mind with the existentialists.

A Brief Comparison

With this brief glance at the course of man's philosophical thought, in addition to becoming acquainted with a short history of philosophy, it has also become clear how after the Renaissance Western philosophy has gone through ups and downs, and how tortuous has been its course, and at the present time it is shaking with contradictions.

Although from time to time subtle discoveries are made by some of the philosophers of those lands, and very precise problems are posed, especially regarding knowledge, and likewise, although enlightening flashes shine from some intellects and hearts, no stable and powerful philosophical system has been brought about.

Illuminating intellectual points have not been able to design a well-founded straight line for thinkers, but rather disorders and disturbances have always and continue to govern over the philosophical atmosphere of the West.

This is different from the state that has governed Islamic philosophy. For Islamic philosophy has always followed a straight and thriving way, and with the existence of tendencies which from time to time have appeared, it has never deviated from its main course, and various subordinate tendencies are like the branches of a tree which grow in different directions and have added to its growth and flourishing.

It is hoped that this progressive course with the efforts of religious thinkers will continue in this way so that the other dark environs may be enlightened by the illuminating rays of its light to release lives from

aimless wanderings.

[1.](#) Earlier this sort of philosophy was proposed by Saint Simon, and the roots of this thinking may be found in Kant.

Lesson 4: The Technical Meanings of Science and Philosophy

Introduction

In the first lesson it was indicated that the expression “philosophy” was applied from the beginning as a general term for all the true sciences (as opposed to conventional sciences), and in the second lesson we indicated that in the Middle Ages the realm of philosophy was extended to include some of the conventional sciences such as literature and rhetoric.

In the third lesson we learned that the positivists set scientific knowledge in opposition to philosophical and metaphysical knowledge, and they considered only the empirical science to be worthy of the name “scientific”.

According to the first meaning, which was also prevalent in the Islamic period, philosophy has various divisions, each of which is called a special science, and naturally there was no conflict between science and philosophy. However, the second meaning appeared in Europe during the Middle Ages, and was abandoned by the end of that period.

According to the third meaning, which is presently current in the West, philosophy and metaphysics are set in opposition to science. Since this meaning also has gained currency to some extent in Eastern countries, it is necessary to explain something about science, philosophy and metaphysics and the relations among them. Additionally, the divisions of the sciences and their classification will be mentioned.

After the treatment of this topic, we will remark on some especially important points about equivocation, differences in meaning and the technical meanings of a word, neglect of which is a cause of much confusion and fallacy.

Homonymity

In all languages (as far as it is known), words can be found each of which has a literal meaning, a commonly accepted meaning and a technical meaning. This is called homonymity, ishtirak al-lafzi. For

example, in Farsi, the term dush has the meaning of 'last night', 'shoulder' and 'shower', and the term shir is used for 'lion', 'milk' and 'faucet'.

The existence of homonymity plays an important role in literature and poetry, but in science, and particularly in philosophy, it brings about many difficulties, especially since the different meanings for a word are often so close to each other that distinguishing them becomes difficult. Many errors are made due to this sort of homonymity, and occasionally even authorities fall into this trap.

For this reason, some of the great philosophers, such as Ibn Sina, obliged themselves to clarify the meanings of various terms and differences among their technical senses before engaging in precise philosophical discussion in order to prevent confusion and error. By way of example we will mention a case of homonymity which has many applications and often leads to misunderstandings, and that is the term jabr.

The literal meaning of jabr is to compensate or remove a deficiency, later it was used with the meaning of "bone setting", and perhaps it assumed this meaning because bone setting is a way of compensating a kind of deficiency, and possibly it was first used for bone setting and later was generalized to the compensation of any sort of deficiency.

A third meaning of this word is to force or place under pressure, and perhaps it assumed this meaning as a result of generalization of a requirement of bone setting, that is, since bone setting usually requires that the broken member be placed under pressure in order that the bone may be fit together, this meaning was generalized to include any pressure exerted by someone on another which forces the other to do something involuntarily.

Perhaps this was first used for cases of physical pressure and then for cases of mental pressure, and finally this concept was expanded to include any sort of feeling of pressure, even when not brought about by another person.

Up to this point we have reviewed the concept of jabr from the perspective of its literal and commonly accepted meanings. Now we should introduce the technical meaning of this expression in science and philosophy.

One of the scientific meanings of jabr is that which is used in mathematics, that is, a kind of calculation in which instead of numerals letters are used, and perhaps this meaning was coined because in algebraic calculations positive and negative quantities compensate each other, or because the unknown quantity on one side of an equation becomes known by attending to the other side or by transferring its members, which is a kind of compensating.

Another technical meaning is related to psychology, which is used as the opposite of free will. Similar to this is the problem of 'free will and determinism' which is studied in theology. This term is also used in ethics, law and fiqh, the explanation of which would take too long.

Since the distant past the concept of jabr (as opposed to free will) has been confused with certainty, necessity and philosophical necessity (wujub falsafi). In reality, the term was mistakenly used for certainty and necessity, as in foreign languages “determinism” is viewed as equivalent to it.

In conclusion, the illusion is created that every case in which the necessity of cause and effect is accepted, there cannot be free will, and conversely, the denial of necessity and certainty are taken to imply free will. The effect of this illusion on several philosophical problems is manifest, among which is that the [early] theologians denied causal necessity in the case of voluntary agents, and following this, they accursed philosophers of failing to consider God the Exalted as voluntary.

On the other hand, the jabriyyun (determinists) considered the existence of a certain fate as a reason for their own position, and opposing them, the Mu`tazilites, who believed in the free will of man, denied that there is a certain destiny. Although the certainty of destiny is irrelevant to jabr, in reality these disputes, which have a long history, occurred because of confusion between the concept of jabr and that of necessity.

Another unfortunate example is that some physicists have raised doubts about or denied causal necessity in the case of some phenomena of microphysics, and opposing them, some Western theists have attempted to prove the existence of the Will of God on the basis of the denial of necessity for these phenomena, imagining that the denial of necessity and rejection of determinism in these cases would imply the proof a free power.

In conclusion, the existence of homonymity, especially in cases, in which the meanings are near to or similar to one another, brings about problems in philosophical discussions. These difficulties are redoubled when in a single science a term has many technical meanings, as in the case of the expression ‘intellect’ (‘aql) in philosophy, and the terms ‘essential’ (dhati) and ‘accidental’ (‘aradhi) in logic. Therefore, the need to explain meanings and to determine the intended meaning in every discussion is clear.

The Technical Meaning of “Science”

Among the expressions which have various and confusing applications is the term ‘ilm (science, knowledge). The literal meaning of this word and of its synonyms in other languages, such as danesh and danestan in Farsi, are clear and require no explanation; but ‘ilm has various technical meanings, among which the most important are:

1. Certain belief corresponding to reality, which is the opposite of simple and compound ignorance, even if used in a single proposition.
2. The set of propositions considered to be relevant to one another, even if the propositions are singular and specific. And it is in this sense that ‘ilm is also applied to the science of history (knowing specific

historical events), the science of geography (knowing the specific conditions of different areas on the globe), the science of rijal [the study of the transmitters of hadiths] and biography.

3. The set of universal propositions which are considered pivotal in some field, each of which is applicable to numerous instances, even if these propositions are conventional, and it is in this sense that 'ilm is applied to conventional as opposed to 'real' (haqiqi) sciences, such as vocabulary and grammar. However, singular and specific propositions, such as those mentioned above, are not considered 'ilm in this sense.

4. The set of universal 'real' (haqiqi) (i.e. not conventional) propositions which are pivotal in some field. This sense includes all the theoretical and practical sciences, including theology and metaphysics, but it does not apply to singular and conventional propositions.

5. The set of real propositions which can be justified by sense experience. This is the very sense in which the positivists employ the term, and on this basis the non-empirical sciences and learning are not considered to be 'ilm (science).

The restriction of the expression 'science' ('ilm) to the empirical sciences is not a matter of controversy as far as this merely concerns the coining of terms and fixing terminology, however, the fixing of this term by the positivists is based on the particular view of those who imagine that the scope of certain and real human knowledge is limited to sensible and empirical things.

They consider thinking which goes beyond this to be meaningless and fruitless. However, unfortunately, this sense has come to prevail across the surface of the earth, according to which science is set in opposition to philosophy.

The scope of certain knowledge, the refutation of positivism and the proof that there is real knowledge beyond the realm of sense and experience shall be postponed until the discussion of epistemology. We next turn to the explanation of the concept of philosophy and metaphysics.

The Technical Meaning of "Philosophy"

Thus far we have become acquainted with three technical meanings of philosophy: the first meaning includes all of the real sciences; the second meaning additionally includes some of the conventional sciences; the third meaning is specific to non-empirical knowledge and is used for the opposite of science (in the sense of empirical knowledge).

In this sense, philosophy includes logic, epistemology, ontology (metaphysics), theology, theoretical psychology (as opposed to empirical psychology), aesthetics, ethics and politics, even if in this area there are more or less differences of opinion and sometimes it is employed only for first philosophy or metaphysics, and this may be considered a fourth technical meaning of "philosophy". [1](#)

The expression “philosophy” also has other technical uses, which usually occur modified by an adjective or a genitive construction, as in “scientific philosophy” and “the philosophy of the sciences”.

Scientific Philosophy

This expression is also used in various ways.

A. Positivism: Auguste Comte, after condemning philosophical thought and metaphysics and denying universal rational principles, divided the basic positive sciences into six fundamental branches, each of which has its own characteristic laws, as follows: mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology and sociology.

He wrote a book called *Course of Positive Philosophy* in six volumes, and he treated the totality of the sixfold science in accordance with his so-called positive method. He devoted three volumes of the set to sociology, even though the basis of this positive philosophy lies in some dogmatic non-positive claims.

In any case, the content of this book, which is in fact program for the investigation of the sciences and especially the social sciences, is called positive philosophy, or scientific philosophy.

B. Dialectical Materialism. Marxists, contrary to positivists, emphasized the necessity of philosophy and the existence of universal laws. However, they hold that these laws are obtained from the generalization of the laws of the empirical sciences, not from rational and metaphysical thought.

Hence, they called the philosophy of dialectical materialism “scientific philosophy”, for, according to their own claims, it is obtained from the achievements of the empirical sciences, even if it is no more scientific than the philosophy of positivism.

Basically, scientific philosophy (if “scientific” is taken to mean “empirical”) is an oxymoron, such as “a clean shaven man with a beard”, and in comparative discussions, their claims have been subject to criticism.

C. Another sense of scientific philosophy is synonymous to “methodology”. It is clear that every science depending on its sort of problems requires its own specific methods of research and verification.

For example, the problems of history cannot be solved in the laboratory by means of the analysis and synthesis of various elements, and likewise, no philosopher can establish the year in which Napoleon attacked Russia or whether he was victorious or defeated by means of philosophical and mental analysis and inference.

These sorts of problems are to be solved by means of review of the relevant documents and the evaluation of their validity. In general, science in the general sense may be divided into three types according to the methods of research and inquiry used for solving their problems: intellectual sciences,

empirical sciences, and narrative and historical sciences.

A science by the name of ‘methodology’ has appeared in order to review the kinds and levels of the sciences and to determine the general and specific methods of each of the three types of science, which is occasionally called scientific philosophy, as it is also sometimes called practical logic.

¹ Cf. Falsafah ‘Umumi ya Ma ba’d al-Tabi’ah, the Farsi translation of Paul Foulquie, *Traité élémentaire de philosophie*, (Paris: 1951), Vol. 3, *Métaphysique*, Ch. 6, "The Fundamental Problems of Metaphysics"; *Khulasah-ye Falsafah*.

Lesson 5: Philosophy And The Sciences

The Philosophy of the Sciences

In the previous lesson we mentioned that sometimes the term “philosophy” is used in genitive constructions such as “philosophy of morals”, “philosophy of law”, etc..

We shall now explain this sort of usage.

This sort of expression is sometimes used by those who restrict the term “science” to the empirical sciences, and who use the term “philosophy” for fields of the human sciences which are not susceptible to proof by sensory experience.

Instead of saying, “the science of theology”, for example, such people say “the philosophy of theology”, that is, the use of “philosophy” in the genetic construction is merely for the sake of indicating the kind of matter under discussion and its topics.

Likewise, those who consider problems which are both scientific and evaluative to be “unscientific”, and who hold that there is no objective basis in reality for them but consider them to be merely governed by the desires and inclinations of people, sometimes consider these sorts of problems to belong to the realm of philosophy.

So, for example, instead of speaking of the “science of morals” they say, “the philosophy of morals”, and instead of speaking of “the science of politics” they say, “the philosophy of politics”. Sometimes this sort of expression is used in another sense, and that is to explain the principles of other sciences.

In addition, matters such as the history, founders, goals, methods of research, and the course of development of a science are also discussed under this rubric. This sort of expression is not peculiar to the positivists and those of like mind to them, but those who consider philosophical and evaluative knowledge to be “science” and who consider their methods of research and inquiry to be “scientific”, also use this sort of expression.

Sometimes, in order to avoid confusion with the previous usage, they add the word “science” to the genetic construction. For example, they say, “the philosophy of the science of history” in contrast to “the philosophy of history”, or they say, “the philosophy of the science of morals” in contrast to “the philosophy of morals” in the previous sense.

Metaphysics

One of the terms which are used in contrast to “science” is the term “metaphysics”. Hence, it is necessary to explain something about this word. This term is derived from the Greek *metataphysica* by dropping the extra *ta* and transforming the *physica* to “physics”, to take the form “metaphysics”. It has been translated into Arabic as *ma ba’d al-tabi’ah* (that which is after physics).

According to that which has been narrated by the historians of philosophy, this word was first used as a name for one of the books of Aristotle, which occurred following his *Physics*, and which included general discussions of existence. In the Islamic Age this came to be called *umur ‘ammah* (general affairs), and some of the Islamic philosophers have considered it suitable to use the expression *ma qabl al-tabi’ah* (that which is prior to physics).

Apparently, this discussion is different from that of theology or *uthulujiyyah*. But in the books of the Islamic philosophers, these discussions are combined, and together they are given the name “divinity in the general sense”. Likewise, theology is specified by the name “divinity in the specific sense”.

Some have taken the term metaphysics to be equivalent to “trans-physical”, meaning that which is beyond physics, and they consider the use of this name for this part of ancient philosophy to be an instance of using a general name for something more specific, for in divinity, in the general sense, God and abstract things (beyond physics) are also discussed. However, it seems that the first meaning is the correct one.

In any case, metaphysics is used for a collection of theoretical intellectual problems, which are a part of philosophy (in the general sense). Nowadays, the term philosophy is sometimes restricted to these problems, and one of the new meanings of “philosophy” is metaphysics.

The reason that the positivists considered these kinds of problems to be unscientific, is that they are susceptible to verification by sensory experience. Likewise, Kant considered theoretical reason to be insufficient for the verification of these problems and he called them “dialectical” or debatable from two standpoints.

Science, Philosophy, Metaphysics and the Relations among

them

Keeping in mind the different meanings mentioned for science and philosophy, it becomes clear that the relation among science, philosophy and metaphysics differs in accordance with these different meanings. If “science” is used for awareness, in an unqualified sense, or if it is used for a group of related propositions, it becomes more general than philosophy, for it would then include particular propositions and the conventional sciences.

If it is used in the sense of real universal propositions, it becomes equivalent to philosophy in its ancient sense. If it is used in the sense of empirical propositions, it becomes more specific than philosophy in the ancient sense, and it contradicts the modern meaning of philosophy (i.e., the set of nonempirical propositions). Likewise, metaphysics is a part of philosophy in the ancient sense, and is equivalent to it in one of its modern meanings.

It should be noted that the contrast between science and philosophy in the modern sense, as is intended by the positivists and those similar to them, is used to denigrate the value of philosophical problems and to deny the nobility and station of reason and the value of intellectual understanding, while this is not correct.

In discussions of epistemology it will be made clear that the value of intellectual understanding is not merely any less than that of sensory and experiential knowledge, but is even of an even higher level than these. Even the value of experiential knowledge itself will be found to be due to the value of intellectual understanding and philosophical propositions.

Therefore, the restriction of the term science for empirical knowledge and the term philosophy to that which is non-empirical is acceptable if merely a matter of terminology, but one must not misuse the contrast between these terms to pretend that the problems of philosophy and metaphysics are just idle speculation.

Likewise, the label “scientific” does not establish any advantage for any sort of philosophical tendency, and basically, this label is like a patch which does not match the fabric of philosophy, and it can be considered a sign of the ignorance and demagoguery of those who affix it.

The claim that the principles of a philosophy such as those of dialectical materialism are obtained from empirical laws is wrong, for the laws of no science are generalizable to any other science, let alone to all of existence. For example, the laws of psychology and biology cannot be generalized to physics or chemistry or mathematics, and vice versa. The laws of these sciences have no use outside their own realms.

The Division and Classification of the Sciences

The question will be posed here concerning what basically is the motivation for the separation of the science from one another. The answer is that recognizable problems form a broad spectrum, and although within this spectrum some problems have a close relation to one another, others are completely alien to one another.

On the other hand, the acquisition of some kinds of knowledge is dependent on that of others, and at least the understanding of one kind may help in the understanding of another, while for other sorts of knowledge this sort of relation does not exist. With regard to the fact that the acquisition of all the kinds of knowledge is impossible for a student and assuming that it would be feasible, not all people have the motivation for it.

Likewise, the talents and tastes of individuals with regard to the acquisition to different sorts of subjects are different, and given that some sorts of knowledge are related to one another and that the acquisition of some are dependent on others, for this reason, teachers since long ago have decided to classify appropriately related topics together, and to so determine the specific sciences and types of knowledge.

Different sciences are categorized and the need of each science for others is clarified, and consequently their relative priorities are determined so that, firstly, one who has a specific talent and taste will be able to find that which he seeks from among the masses of innumerable problems and he may find the way to reach his goal.

Secondly, one who would acquire a different field of knowledge should be able to find where to begin, so that the way may be prepared for knowledge of this other field and to facilitate its acquisition.

In this way, the sciences have been divided into various parts, and each part, in turn, has been placed in a specific category and level, which include a general division into the theoretical and practical sciences, and the theoretical sciences are divided into the natural sciences, mathematics and divinity, while the practical sciences are divided into ethics, household economics and politics, which were mentioned before.

The Standard for Distinguishing among the Sciences

Now that the necessity for classifying the sciences has become clear, another question may be posed. What are the criteria and standards for the categorization of the sciences and for distinguishing among them?

The answer is that the sciences may be classified according to various standards, the most important of which are:

1. According to the methods and procedures of research. Earlier we indicated that all problems cannot

be the object of study and research by a single method, and we also indicated that all sciences, with regard to their general methods of inquiry, can be divided into three groups:

A. The rational sciences, which may be investigated by means of rational proofs and mental inferences alone, as with logic and divine philosophy.

B. The empirical sciences, which are verifiable by empirical methods, such as physics, chemistry and biology.

C. Narrative sciences, which can be investigated on the basis of narrated and historical documentation, such as history, biography (*ʿilm al-rijal*) and Islamic jurisprudence (*ʿilm al-fiqh*).

2. According to the goal and telos. Another standard on the basis of which the sciences may be classified is the benefits and consequences which result from them. These are the goals and ends which the student takes into consideration when learning them, such as material and spiritual goals, or individual and social goals.

It is obvious that one who desires to find the way for the realization of his own spiritual perfection needs to study various matters which are not needed by one who is interested in obtaining wealth through agriculture or industry. Likewise, a leader of society needs another kind of knowledge. Hence, the sciences may be classified in accordance with these various goals.

3. According to the subject matter. The third standard according to which the sciences may be distinguished and separated is their subject matter. With regard to the fact that every problem has a subject, and a number of problems are collected under an inclusive topic, this inclusive topic may serve as that about which the various subordinate questions pivot, as numbers are the subject of arithmetic, volume (continuous quantities) is the subject of geometry and the human body is the subject of the science of medicine.

The classification of the sciences in accordance with their subject matters provides a better way to secure the goal and motivation for separating the sciences since by using this method the internal relations and harmony among problems and their order and arrangement is better preserved.

For this reason, since long ago it has been noted by great philosophers and scientists. However, in subdivisions other standards may be taken into consideration. For example, one may establish a science called theology, whose problems turn about the subject of God the Almighty. Then it may be subdivided into branches which are philosophical, gnostic, or religious, each of which may be investigated by a specific procedure.

In reality, the standard for this subdivision would be the method of research. In the same way, the subject of mathematics may be divided into various branches each of which may be indicated on the basis of a specific goal, such as the mathematics of physics and the mathematics of economics. In this

way, the composition of different standards is brought about.

Whole and Universal

The inclusive topic which is taken into consideration for the subjects of a problem and on the basis of which science appears with the meaning of a collection of related problems, sometimes is a universal topic and has many individual instances, and sometimes it takes the form of a whole and has numerous parts.

An example of the first kind is the topic of number or amount, which has various types and classes each of which is composed of the subject of a specific problem. An example of the second kind is the body of man which has numerous organs, limbs and parts, each of which is the subject of a section of the science of medicine.

The basic difference between these two sorts of subjects is that in the first kind, the topic of the subject of the science is applied individually to the subjects of its problems which are its particulars, as opposed to the second sort in which the topic of the subject is not applied individually to the subjects of the problems, but rather is predicated to the collection of parts.

The Branches of the Sciences

From what has already been explained, it has been found that the classification of the sciences is for the sake of facilitating teaching, and to fulfill the aims of education to the extent possible. In the beginning when human knowledge was limited it was possible to classify all of it into a few groups.

For example, it was possible to consider zoology to be a single science and it would even include problems related to man. However, gradually when the circle of problems expanded, especially after various scientific instruments were made for the investigation of empirical problems, the empirical sciences more than others, were divided into various branches, and every science was divided into more particular sciences. This process is still increasing.

In general, the subdivision of the sciences takes several forms:

1. One form is that in which the small parts are taken from the subject as a whole, and each part becomes the subject of a new branch taken from the mother science, as endocrinology and genetics. It is clear that this kind of division is specified to sciences in which the relation between the subject of the science and the subject of the problems is the relation between a whole and its parts.

2. Another form is that in which more particular types and more limited classes are taken from the universal topic, as entomology and bacteriology. This sort of subdivision occurs in sciences in which the relation between the subject of the science and the subject of the problems is that between universal and particular, not between a whole and its parts.

3. Another form is that in which the various methods of research are considered a secondary criteria and while retaining the unity of the subject, new branches appear. This occurs in cases in which the problems of a science may be investigated and solved in different ways, as in philosophical theology, mystical theology and religious theology.

4. Another form is that in which different goal may be considered as subcriteria and problems appropriate to each goal are introduced as a specific branch of the mother science, as was mentioned in the case of mathematics.

Lesson 6: What is Philosophy?

The Relation between Subjects and Problems

We have thus far become acquainted with various philosophical terms, and now it is time to clarify the subject of discussion of this book, and to explain what we mean by philosophy and what problems are to be discussed in this book. Before defining philosophy and giving a brief introduction to its problems, it is good to provide some further explanation about “subject”, “problem” and “principles” of the sciences and the relations among them.

In the previous lessons we said that the term “science” according to four of the five mentioned meanings is applied to a collection of propositions which are considered to be interrelated. Furthermore, it became clear that different relations distinguish the separate sciences.

It has also become evident that the best relation among different problems to be considered as a standard for distinguishing among the sciences is the relevance among their subjects, that is, the problems whose subjects comprise the parts of a whole or the particulars of a universal take the form of a single science.

Therefore, the problems of a science consist of propositions whose subjects are under the umbrella of an inclusive topic (whole or universal). The subject of a science is that very inclusive topic which embraces the subjects of its problems.

Here we had better mention that it is possible for a topic to be the subject of two or more sciences, and that the differences among them may be due to their goals or methods of research. However, another point must not be overlooked, which is that sometimes a topic which is considered for the subject of a science is not absolutely the subject of that science, and in reality it has a specific restriction, and the differences among these restrictions for a single subject causes the appearance of several sciences and the differences among them.

For example, “matter”, with regard to its internal composition and characteristics related to synthesis and analysis of elements becomes the subject of the science of chemistry, and with regard to its outward changes and the characteristics appropriate to them it becomes the subject of the science of physics.

Another example is “word”, which with regard to changes which occur in its construction becomes the subject of the science of morphology, and with regard to the changes in inflection it becomes the subject of the science of syntax.

Therefore, one should be careful about whether the inclusive topic is the subject of a certain science absolutely, or with specific restrictions and qualifications. How often an inclusive topic becomes the subject of a general science absolutely, and then with the addition of restrictions it takes the form of subjects for specific sciences.

For example, in the well known classification of philosophy according to the ancients, body is the subject of all the natural sciences, and by adding restrictions it takes the form of the subjects of mineralogy, botany and zoology, etc. Regarding the quality of the branches of the sciences, it was indicated that some divisions are obtained by restricting the scope of a subject and by adding qualifications to the topic of the mother subject.

Among the possible qualifications to add to the topic of the subject is “the restriction of absoluteness” (qayd itlaq), which means that in that science principles are discussed which are proved for the essence of the subject generally, or absolutely, without considering any specific characteristics.

In conclusion, it is to include all individuals of the subject. For example, the principles and qualifications are established for body in general, absolutely, whether mineral or organic, whether vegetable or animal or human. In this way one can determine the subject to be “absolute body”, and this sort of problem may be further specified to specific sciences.

The sages have thus specified the first section of physics to cover such principles with the names sama‘ tabi‘i (elementary general physics) and sama‘ al-kiyan (elementary general astronomy), then they specified the groups of bodies for specific sciences such as cosmology, mineralogy, botany and zoology.

This same work can be done for more particular subdivisions of the sciences. For example, the problems related to all animals can be taken as a specific science whose subject is the animal, absolutely, or animal qua animal. Then specific principles may be discussed for each kind of animal in other more specialized sciences.

In this way, body in general makes up the subject matter for the section of ancient philosophy called natural science, and absolute body makes up the subject of the first part of physics sama‘ tabi‘i (elementary general physics). Each of the specific bodies, such as the cosmic bodies, the mineral bodies and living bodies make up the subjects of cosmology, mineralogy and biology.

In the same way, living body in general makes up the subject of the science of general biology, and absolute living body makes up the subject of a science which discusses the principles of all living existents, and the kinds of living existents form the subjects of the particular branches of biology.

Here a question may be posed as to if a principle is common among several kinds of universal subjects, but does not include all of them, in which science should such principles be investigated? For example, if something is common among several kinds of living existents, it cannot be considered an accidental property of living body absolutely, for it does not include all living existents, but on the other hand, to abandon it to any of the relevant particular sciences would be repetitive. So, where must it be placed?

The answer is that usually this sort of problem is also discussed in a science whose subject of discussion is absolute, and the principles of absolute subjects ('awaridh dhatiyah, essential accidents) are defined as follows: a principle which is established for the essence of the subject before being modified by the qualifications of the particular sciences.

Really, the looseness of this definition is preferable to the repetition of the problem. As in the case of first philosophy or metaphysics, some philosophers have said that in it precepts and accidents are discussed which are established for an absolute existent (or an existent qua existent), prior to being qualified by the qualification of 'natural' or 'mathematical'.

The Principles of the Sciences and their Relationships with Subjects and Problems

We have found that in each science a series of appropriately related propositions and in reality, the proximate aim and motivation for learning and teaching that science are to analyze those propositions that are to prove that their predicates are true of their subjects. So, in every science it is assumed that a subject exists, and that predicates may be proved true of parts or individuals of this subject.

Therefore, before dealing with the presentation and analysis of the problems of any science, one needs to have prior knowledge of a series of things:

1. Knowledge of the whatness and concept of the subject.
2. Knowledge of the existence of the subject.
3. Knowledge of principles by means of which the problems of that science are solved.

Such knowledge is sometimes self evident and without need of exposition or acquisition, in which case there would be no difficulty. But sometimes this knowledge is not self evident and needs exposition and proof. For example, it is possible that the existence of a subject (such as the spirit of man) is a matter of controversy, and it is considered possible that it is a fantasy and unreal, and in such a case its real existence must be proven.

Likewise, it is possible for there to be some doubt about the principles on the basis of which the problems of a science are solved, and so it is necessary that these principles are first proven, otherwise the conclusions which are derived from them will not have scientific value and certainty.

These sorts of matters are called “the principles of the sciences” (mabadi ‘ulum), and they are divided into conceptual (tasawwur i) principles and assertive (tasdiqi) principles.

The conceptual principles which consist of the definitions and expositions of the whatnesses of the things under discussion are usually presented in the science itself in the form of an introduction. However, the assertive principles of a science are different. Often they are discussed in other sciences.

As was previously indicated, the philosophy of each science is really another science which undertakes the explanation and establishment of the principles of that science. Finally, the most general principles of the sciences are discussed and investigated in first philosophy or metaphysics.

Among them, one may mention the “principle of causality” which is relied upon by the scholars of all the empirical sciences. Basically, scientific research is done with the prior acceptance of this principle, for this research revolves around the discovery of causal relations among phenomena, but this principle itself is not provable in any empirical science, and the discussion of this principle takes place in philosophy.

The Subjects and Problems of Philosophy

From what has been said it follows that the best way to define a science is by specifying its subject, and if it has restrictions, they should be subject to exact attention. Then the problems of that science may be introduced as propositions which revolve about the above mentioned subjects.

On the other hand, the specification of a subject and its qualifications depends on determining the problems which are intended for the exposition of a science, that is, it is to a certain extent dependent on convention and agreement. For example, if we consider the topic “existent”, which is the most general concept for a real thing, we will see that all the subjects of real problems come under its umbrella.

If we consider the subject of science, it will include all the problems of the real sciences, and this science is philosophy itself, in the sense of the ancients. The presentation of such an inclusive science is not compatible with the aims of the classification of the sciences. There is no choice but to consider the subjects in a more limited way in order to fulfill the mentioned goals.

The ancient teachers first considered two groups of theoretical problems each of which revolved about its own specific set of issues. One group of them was called physics and the other was called mathematics. Then each of these was divided into more particular sciences. A third group of theoretical problems about God also could be presented, and it is called theology (ma‘rifat al-rububiyyah). However, another group of theoretical intellectual problems remains, whose subjects go beyond those

already mentioned, and it is not specified to any particular subject.

It seems that for these problems they did not find any particular name to be appropriate, and since it was discussed after physics it was called metaphysics (ma ba'd al-tabi'ah). The position of these problems in relation to the other problems of the theoretical sciences is the same as the position of elementary physics with relation to the natural sciences, and just as the subject of the former is "the absolute body", the subject of metaphysics is "the absolute existent" or "the existent qua existent", so that only problems which are not specified to the subjects of any particular science are presented under it, although these problems (of metaphysics) do not include all existents.

In this way the specific science called metaphysics came to exist, and later was called "the universal science" ('ilm kulli) or "first philosophy" (falsafah ula). As we previously indicated, during the Islamic era the problems of metaphysics were assimilated to the problems of theology and was called divinity in the general sense (ilahiyyat bi al-ma'na al-a'm).

Occasionally other problems, such as those of resurrection and the means to man's eternal felicity, and even some problems concerning prophecy and imamate also are appended to it, as is seen in the section on divinity in (Ibn Sina 's) Shifa'. If all of these problems are considered to be the main problems of one science, and none of them are impositions or digressions, then the subject of this science would have to be considered very broadly.

The determination of a single subject for such various problems would be no easy task. For the same reason, various attempts have been made to determine the subject and to explain that all of these predicates are essential properties (awaridh dhatiyyah) of it, though it has not been very successful.

Anyway, there are three alternatives: either, theoretical problems other than physics and mathematics may be considered as a single science with a single affected subject, or the standards and criteria of their coherence and unity is to be taken as the unity of their aims and ends, or every group of problems which has a specific subject is to be taken as a specific science, including the universal problems of existence, which are discussed under "first philosophy", according to one of the specific senses of "philosophy".

It seems that this last is the most suitable of the alternatives, and that therefore the various problems in Islamic philosophy which are presented as philosophy and hikmat, are considered to be several specific sciences.

In other words, we will have a series of philosophical sciences all of which share a rational method, but we will apply the term absolute philosophy to "first philosophy", and the main purpose of this book is to present the problems of first philosophy. However, since their solutions depend on the problems of knowledge, we must first present epistemology and then we may review the problems of ontology and metaphysics.

The Definition of Philosophy

Considering that philosophy is equivalent to first philosophy or metaphysics, and its subject is the absolute existent (not the existent absolutely), we can define it as follows: a science which discusses the states of the absolute existent; or a science which addresses the general states of existence; or a set of propositions and problems regarding the existent in so far as it is an existent.

Several characteristics of philosophy have been mentioned, among the most important of which are the following.

1. Contrary to the empirical and narrative sciences, the method for solving the problems of philosophy is the rational method, although this method is also employed in logic, theology, philosophical psychology and some other sciences such as ethics, and even in mathematics. Therefore, this method is not particular to first philosophy.
2. Philosophy undertakes to prove the assertions which are the principles of the other sciences, and this is one of the ways in which the other sciences stand in need of philosophy. Hence, philosophy is called the mother of the sciences.
3. In philosophy a criterion is obtained for distinguishing true states of affairs from imaginary and spurious ones, and hence, the main purpose of philosophy is sometimes considered to be knowledge of true states of affairs and the distinction of them from illusion, but it is better to consider this as the purpose of epistemology.
4. The characteristic of philosophical concepts is that they are not obtained from the senses or experience, such as the concepts of cause and effect, necessary and contingent, material and immaterial. These concepts are technically called philosophical secondary intelligibles, and they are explained in the section on epistemology.

In view of these characteristics one can find out why philosophical problems only can be proved by the rational method, and why philosophical laws are not obtained by way of generalizing from the laws of the empirical sciences.

Lesson 7: The Position of Philosophy

The Essence of the Problems of Philosophy

In the previous lesson a definition of philosophy was presented, and it was concluded in brief that this

science discusses the general states of existence. However, this is not sufficient to discover the essence of philosophical problems.

Of course, the exact understanding of these problems is achieved when they are in practice investigated in detail, and naturally, the more deeply one delves into them and comprehends them, the better one will know the truth about them. However, before beginning, if we are able to obtain a clearer view of the problems of philosophy, we will be better able to understand the benefits of philosophy; we will proceed with more insight and vision and with increased eagerness and interest.

For this purpose, we begin by mentioning some examples of other problems of the philosophical sciences, indicated the difference between them and the problems of other sciences. Finally, we will deal with the explanation of the essence of first philosophy and the characteristics of its problems.

For every man, this basic and vital question is presented: Is his life ended with death, and after it is there nothing left but the decayed parts of his body, or is there a life after death?

It is clear that the answer to this question cannot be obtained from any of the empirical sciences such as physics, chemistry, geology, botany, biology, and others like them. Likewise the calculations of mathematics and the equations of algebra contain no answers to these questions.

Hence, another science is needed to investigate these and similar problems with its own methodology, and to clarify whether man is merely this physical body or whether he has another reality which cannot be sensed called the spirit. On the hypothesis that there is a spirit, is it able to persist after death or not?

It is obvious that the investigation of this sort of problem is not possible by the methods of the empirical sciences. Rather, one should use rational methods to solve such problems. Naturally, another science is needed to investigate such nonempirical problems. This is 'ilm al-nafs, or philosophical psychology.

Likewise, other problems, such as those of the will, and volition which are the basis of human responsibility, must be established in this science. The existence of such a science and the value of the ways of solving problems presented in it depend upon the proof of the existence of the reason and the value of rational knowledge.

Therefore, another science is needed to investigate the sorts of knowledge and to evaluate them until it becomes known what intellectual perceptions are, and what value they may have, and what problems they can solve. This is also another philosophical science called epistemology.

Regarding the practical sciences, such as morals and politics, there are also basic and important problems which the empirical sciences cannot solve, including the recognition of the truth of moral good and evil, virtue and vice, and the standards for determining and distinguishing praiseworthy and blameworthy deeds. Inquiry into this sort of question needs a specific philosophical science or sciences, which in turn are in need of epistemology.

With more careful attention it becomes clear that these problems are interrelated, and as a whole are related to the problems of theology, the study of the God Who has created the body and spirit of man and all existents of the world; the God Who manages the cosmos with a special order; the God Who causes people to die and again will raise them to life to be rewarded or punished for their good and bad deeds, good and bad deeds which are performed with volition and free will, etc.

Knowledge of God the Almighty and His attributes and deeds form a series of problems which will be investigated in the science of theology (divinity in the specific sense). All of these problems are based on a series of more general and more universal problems, whose scope also embraces sensory and material affairs, such as the following.

Existents are in need of one another for their generation and persistence, and among them there are passive and active relations, actions and reactions, and causes and effects. All existents which are within the range of man's sense and experience are perishable, but there must be another existent which is imperishable, and rather for which nothingness and imperfection are barred.

The arena of being is not restricted to material and sensible existents, nor is it restricted to changing, altering and moving existents, rather there are other kinds of existents which do not have these characteristics and are not in need of time and place.

The discussion about whether change, alteration, perishability and dependency are implications of being, in other words whether there is a stable, fixed, imperishable and independent existent, is a discussion whose positive resolution leads to a classification of existents into the material and the immaterial, the stable and changing, the Necessary Existence and contingent existence, etc.

Until this sort of problem is solved, for example, until necessary existence and immaterial existences are established, sciences such as theology, philosophical psychology and the like will have no basis or foundation. It is not only the solution to such problems which requires rational argument, but if one wishes to disprove these matters this also requires the employment of rational methods, for just as sensation and experience by themselves are unable to prove these things, they are also unable to disprove or deny them.

In this way, it has become clear that there is a series of important and basic problems for man which cannot be answered by any of the specific sciences, not even by the specific philosophical sciences. There must be another science by which to inquire into them, and this is metaphysics, the general science, first philosophy whose subject is not specific to a kind of existent or determined and particular essence.

Inevitably, its subject must be the most universal concept which is applicable to all real and objective things, and this is the term "existent". Of course, what is meant is not existent in that respect in which it is material, and not in that respect in which it is immaterial, but rather in that respect in which it is an existent, that is, the absolute existent, or existent in so far as it is an existent. Such a science has the

position of being what is called “the mother of the sciences”.

The Principles of Philosophy

In the previous lesson it was said that before beginning to solve the problems of any science, one should recognize the principles of that science. So, we may now ask, “What are the principles of philosophy?” “And in what science should these be determined?”

The answer is that the recognition of the conceptual principles of the sciences, that is, the knowledge of the concept and essence of the subject of the science, and the concepts of the subjects of the problems of the science usually are obtained in that very science itself. In this way, the definition of the subject is presented in the introduction to the text, and the definitions of the particular subjects of the problems are defined in the introductions to each discussion.

However, the subject of philosophy (existent) and its concept are self-evident and in no need of definition. Therefore, philosophy has no need for these conceptual principles. However, the subjects of its problems, as in other sciences, are defined at the beginning of every discussion.

The assertive principles of the sciences are divided into two groups: one is the affirmation of the existence of the subject, and the other is the principles which are employed for the establishment and determination of the problems of the science.

However, the existence of the subject of philosophy has no need of being established, for the principle of being is self-evident, and is undeniable by any rational person. At least every one is aware of the existence of themselves, and this suffices for knowing that the concept of “existent” has an instance.

Hence, other instances may be discussed and investigated. In this way a problem appears for philosophy about which the sophists, skeptics and idealists on the one hand, and other philosophers on the other hand have disagreed.

As for the second group of assertive principles, that is the principles which are the basis for solving problems, these are divided into two groups: one is the theoretical principles (i.e., not self-evident), which must be proved in another science, and are called the conventional principles, and as was previously indicated the most general conventional principles are established in first philosophy, that is, some of the philosophical problems are used to establish the conventional principles of other sciences.

First philosophy itself basically has no need for such conventional principles, although it is possible that in other philosophical sciences, such as theology, philosophical psychology, and ethics, principles may be employed which are established in first philosophy or in some other philosophical science, or even in an empirical science.

The second group of principles is self-evident propositions which have no need to be proven or

explained, such as the proposition of the impossibility of a contradiction. The problems of first philosophy need nothing more than such principles, and these principles do not need to be proven, let alone to be proven in another science.

Therefore, first philosophy has no need for any other science, whether rational or empirical or narrative. This is one of the most important characteristics of this science, although logic and epistemology are exceptions, because the reasoning for the establishment of philosophical problems is on the basis of the principles of logic, and it is on this basis that philosophical truths are capable of being known rationally, that is, the existence of the intellect and its ability to solve the problems of philosophy be settled.

But it may be said that what is basically needed by philosophy are the self-evident principles of logic and epistemology, which cannot really be considered “problems” and to be in need of proving, and the explanation which are given of them are really explanations for admonition. Further explanation of this is to be found in Lesson eleven.

The Aim of Philosophy

The proximate and immediate aim of any science is the awareness of man of the problems which are presented in that science, and the quenching of man’s innate thirst for understanding the truth. For one of the basic human instincts is the instinct to search for the truth or unquenchable limitless curiosity.

The satisfaction of this instinct fulfills one of man’s psychological needs, although this instinct is not equally active and animated in all individuals, but in no individual is it completely dormant and ineffective.

Normally every science has indirect benefits and consequences which somehow influence man’s material and spiritual life and fulfills man’s other natural and innate desires. For example, the natural sciences prepare the ground for the greater exploitation of nature and a better material life, and are related by a single intermediary to man’s natural and animal life.

The mathematical sciences are two removes from these aims, although they may also have influence in another way on the spiritual life and human dimension of man, and this is when they are mingled with knowledge of philosophy and divinity and gnostic (‘irfani) attention of the heart, and when they present them phenomena of nature in the form of effects of the power, greatness, wisdom and mercy of God.

The relation of the spiritual and human dimensions of man to the philosophical sciences is closer than the relation to the natural sciences, and, as was indicated, the natural sciences are also related to the human dimension of man with the aid of the philosophical sciences. This relation is manifested in theology and then in philosophical psychology and ethics more than in others.

For divine philosophy acquaints us with God, the Supreme, and we become aware of the attributes of beauty and majesty, which prepares the ground for our relation to the source of infinite knowledge, power and beauty.

The philosophical science of the soul ('ilm al-nafs) facilitates knowledge of the spirit and its attributes and characteristics, and makes us aware of the essence (jawhar) of humanity, and extends our vision in relation to the truth of our own selves, and leads us beyond nature and beyond the limited bounds of time and place, and it brings us to understand that man's life is not limited and restricted to narrow dark framework of worldly and material life. Ethics and morals show the general way to the adornment and trimming of the spirit and heart, and the acquisition of eternal felicity and ultimate perfection.

As was previously indicated, in order to obtain all of this valuable knowledge, the problems of epistemology and ontology must be solved. Hence, first philosophy is the key to these precious and unending treasures which promise felicity and eternal benefits. It is the blessed root of the "good tree" which produced the fruits of various spiritual and intellectual virtues and boundless spiritual and divine perfections. It plays the largest role in preparing the ground for human perfection and sublimity.

In addition to this, philosophy provides worthy help with the avoidance of satanic temptations and the rejection of materialism and atheism. It safeguards one from intellectual perversions, lapses and deviations. It provides one with undefeatable arms in the arena of the combat of ideas. It enables one to defend correct views and tendencies and to attack and charge invalid and incorrect thoughts.

Therefore, in addition to playing a positive and uniquely constructive role, philosophy also has an irreplaceable defensive and combative role. In the expansion of Islamic culture and the destruction of anti-Islamic cultures, it is highly effective.

Lesson 8: The Method of Philosophical Inquiry

The Evaluation of the Rational Method

In the previous lessons it has been repeatedly said that philosophical problems must be investigated by the rational method, and that the empirical method is of no use in this area. However, those who have come more or less under the influence of positivist thinking imagine that this is reason for the imperfection and worthlessness of philosophical thought, because they think that the empirical method is the only sure and scientific method and that no certain conclusions can be obtained by the rational method.

On this basis, some imagine that philosophy is the infancy of the sciences and they consider it to be the duty of philosophy to present hypotheses for solving scientific problems, and even Karl Jaspers, the German existentialist philosopher, writes: "Philosophy yields no certain knowledge and as soon as knowledge is accepted by all as certain with decisive reasons, then that knowledge cannot be considered philosophical, but rather, it at once becomes transformed into scientific knowledge."

Others who have been intimidated by Western industrial and scientific progress reason that Western scientists have achieved bewildering and daily increasing scientific progress only when they abandoned the deductive and rational methods and began to employ the inductive and empirical methods.

Evolutionary progress was especially hastened since the time of Francis Bacon, who emphasized the empirical method. This is the best reason for the superiority of the empirical method to the rational method.

Unfortunately, some of the new Muslim thinkers and imitators who accept this reason would hang a medal of honor on the chest of Muslim scholars as if they had been inspired by the Noble Qur'an to confront and challenge Greek culture and to replace the deductive and rational method by the inductive and empirical method, so that later, the influence of Islamic culture in Europe would cause the awakening of Western scientists and their awareness of this victorious method.

This fantasy has gone so far that some of the ignorant imagine that the research method which is presented by the Noble Qur'an for solving all problems is none other than the empirical and positivist method. They even imagine that the problems of theology, fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) and morals must be investigated by this method.

Of course, it should come as no surprise that those whose eyes are fixed on that which is given by the senses, who have closed their eyes to that which is beyond sensory perception, who have denied the power of reason and rational understanding and who consider rational and metaphysical concepts to be invalid and meaningless should also deny any place for philosophy among the human sciences.

They consider it to have no role but explaining some terms current in languages, and that its dignity must be reduced to that of linguistics. They present its function to be that of offering hypotheses for the solution of the problems of the sciences.

This is most unfortunate, that someone who calls himself a Muslim, who is acquainted with the Qur'an, should relate such intellectual perversions and decadence to the Noble Qur'an. They consider this to be cause for the honor of Islam and for Muslim scholars.

Here, we do not intend to criticize positivist ideas, which are the basis of such fantasies, and in comparative discussions these will become more or less familiar. However, we consider it necessary to explain more about the rational and empirical methods so that the weaknesses of the arguments which have been made in this area become clear.

Analogy, Induction and Deduction

Attempts to discover what is unknown on the basis of what is known are of three forms:

1. Inference from particulars to another particular, that is, when two subjects are similar to one another

and a judgment about one of them is known, we may infer the same judgment about the other, on the basis of the similarity which exists between the two of them. For example, if two people are similar and one of them is intelligent, we say that the other is also intelligent.

In logical terms this is called *tamthil* (analogy) and in the terminology of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) it is called *qiyas*. It is obvious that the mere similarity of two things does not imply that the common judgment about them is certain, and thus, analogy is of no use for obtaining certainty and has no scientific worth.

2. Inference from particulars to a universal, that is, when we investigate the individuals of one essence and it is found that they share a common property, we may infer that this property holds of the essence, and that it occurs in all of its instances. In logical terms this is called induction, and it is divided into two kinds: complete induction and incomplete induction.

In complete induction it is assumed that all the individuals under consideration are investigated and that their common property is observed in all of them. It is clear that in practice this is impossible, for even if all the present instances of a whatness could be investigated, there would be no way to investigate all past and future instances.

At the very least, the possibility would remain that in the past or in the future there could be instances of that essence. Incomplete induction occurs when many of the instances of whatness are observed and a property common to them is attributed to all individuals of that essence.

But this intellectual inference will not lead to certainty, for there will always be the possibility, no matter how weak, that some of the individuals which have not been investigated lack this property. Therefore, in practice, certain and indubitable conclusions cannot be obtained by induction.

3. Inference from universals to a particular, that is, first a predicate is proved for a universal subject and on the basis of this the judgment about the particulars of that subject becomes clear. In logic this sort of intellectual inference is called *qiyas* (deduction), and it yields certainty under the conditions that its premises are certain and the deduction also has a valid form. Logicians have allocated an important section of classical logic to the explanation of the material and formal conditions of certain deduction, proof.

There is a famous problem which has been raised regarding deduction. If a judgment is known to hold generally, the application of that judgment to all instances of the subject will also be known. But then there would be no need for the formulation of a deductive argument. The scholars of logic have answered that a judgment for a major premise may be known in summary form, but in the conclusion it becomes known in detail.

Meditation on the problems of mathematics and the ways of solving them shows how useful deduction is, for the method of mathematics is that of deduction, and if this method were not useful, none of the problems of mathematics could be solved on the basis of mathematical principles.

A point which must be mentioned here is that in analogy and induction there is a hidden form of deduction, but nevertheless, in the cases of analogy and incomplete induction this deduction does not constitute a proof and is of no use for obtaining certainty.

If, however, this sort of hidden deduction did not exist, there could be no form of inference at all, no matter how speculative. The hidden deduction of analogy is this: this judgment is true for one of the similar objects, and every judgment which is true of one of a pair of similar objects is also true of the other.

It is to be noted that the major premise of this deduction is not certain. In incomplete induction there is a similar speculative deduction, that is, there is a suppressed major premise in it such as: "Every judgment which is proved for many individuals of a whatness is proven for all the individuals of that essence."

Even if induction is considered valid by way of the probability calculus, it will still need deduction. Likewise, empirical propositions are in need of deduction if they are to take the form of universal propositions, as is explained in the books of logic.

It is to be concluded that reasoning about a problem always must take the form of an inference from universal to particular, although this intellectual inference will sometimes be performed explicitly and clearly, as in logical deduction, and sometimes in a hidden form, as in analogy and induction.

Sometimes it yields certainty, as in deductive proofs and complete induction, and sometimes it does not bring certainty, as in rhetorical and polemical deductions, analogy and incomplete induction.

Rational Method and Empirical Method

As was previously mentioned, deduction brings certainty when in addition to having a valid form, and satisfies logical conditions, each of its premises is also certain. If certain propositions themselves are not self-evident, inevitably they should lead to self-evident ones that are they should be inferred from propositions which have no need of rational proof.

Logicians have divided self-evident propositions (badihiyyat) into two general groups: primary self-evident propositions and secondary self-evident propositions. One of the types of secondary self-evident propositions is considered to be "empirical" (mujarrabat), that is, propositions which are obtained by experience.

According to them the experience is not a method which is the opposite of the deductive method, and it not only includes the deductive method but it may also serve as one of the premises in another deduction. Therefore, it is not proper to equate induction and experience nor to take deduction and experience as opposites.

Of course, experience has a variety of other meanings, but this is not the proper place to discuss them.

However, taking the empirical method to be the opposite of the rational method is based on considering the rational method to be limited to the deductive method where the only premises are those of pure reason.

These premises are those which are either primary self-evident propositions or are implied by them (not merely by empirical propositions), such as all of the syllogistic proofs which are employed in first philosophy, mathematics and for many of the problems of the philosophical sciences.

The difference between this and the empirical method is not that one of them employs deduction and the other induction. Rather, the difference is that the rational method is supported solely by primary self-evidence while the empirical method is supported by empirical premises, which are considered to be secondary self-evident propositions. Far from being a flaw in the rational method this is the greatest distinction of the rational method.

Conclusions

With the points which have been mentioned here in summary form, it becomes clear how weak and far from the truth are the positions mentioned [of the positivists], because:

Firstly, it is not correct to equate experience and induction.

Secondly, it is incorrect to consider the empirical method as the opposite of the deductive method.

Thirdly, neither induction nor experience is without need of deduction.

Fourthly, both the rational and empirical methods are deductive, and the distinction of the rational method is that it relies upon primary self-evident propositions, contrary to the empirical method which relies upon empirical propositions, premises whose value never reaches the level of the value of primary self-evident propositions.

It should be noted that this topic requires further explanation and investigation; and some of principles of classical logic are debatable, while we have merely indicated the materials necessary to the extent required to dispel some fantasies in this regard.

The Scope of the Rational and Empirical Methods

Despite the advantages which the rational method has over the empirical method, it is not applicable to all sciences, and likewise, the empirical method has its own specific scope and cannot be applied to philosophy and mathematics.

Of course, this division between the ranges of these methods is not conventional, but is required by the nature of the problems of the sciences. The kind of problem in the natural sciences requires that they be

solved by the empirical method and from premises obtained by sensory experience, for the concepts which are used in these sciences and which make up the subjects and predicates of their propositions are those which are obtained from sensible things. Naturally, sensory experiences are also required to prove them.

For example, merely by using philosophical and rational analysis, no philosopher, no matter how much mental effort he makes, can discover that bodies are composed of molecules and atoms, or what elements must be combined to form a given chemical matter and what properties it will have, or what living existents are composed of, and under what material conditions they survive, and what things cause sickness in animals and humans, and how various diseases may be cured and treated, so this sort of problem and thousands of others like them can only be solved by the empirical method.

On the other hand, the problems which are related to immaterial things can never be solved by means of sensory experience, nor can they be denied by the empirical sciences. For example, with what sensory experience, and in what laboratory, and by means of what scientific instruments can the spirit and immaterial things be discovered or their absence be established?

Furthermore, it is the propositions of first philosophy which are composed of secondary philosophical intelligibles, that is, of concepts which are obtained by means of mental effort and rational analysis. It is only possible to prove or disprove their relations or unity by means of reason. This sort of problem must be solved by the rational method and by reliance on rational self-evident propositions.

From this, it becomes clear how weak the position is of those who confuse the ranges of the empirical and rational methods and who try to establish the superiority of the empirical method over the rational method, and who imagine that the ancient philosophers only used the rational method, and that it is for this reason that they were unable to make successful scientific discoveries.

However, the ancients also used the empirical method in the natural sciences, and among them Aristotle, with the help of Alexander of Macedonia prepared a large garden in Athens, and grew various kinds of plants and animals there, and he himself observed their states and characteristics.

The rapid advance of modern scientists must be considered to be the result of the discovery of new scientific instruments, their endeavors to solve natural and material problems, and the focusing of their thoughts and ideas on discovery and invention, not a result of a turning of their backs on the rational method and its replacement by the empirical method.

Let it not remain unsaid that in cases in which the means and instruments of experience were insufficient for solving a given problem, the ancient philosophers tried to compensate for this deficiency by postulating hypotheses, and probably, in order to confirm or explain these hypotheses they sought the help of the rational method.

However, this was due to the immaturity of their philosophical thought and the inadequacy of their

empirical instruments, not an indication of their failure to heed or underestimation of the empirical method, and this is no reason to think that the function of philosophy is to provide hypotheses and the function of science to confirm them by scientific methods.

Basically, in that period, there was no distinction between science and philosophy, and all of the empirical sciences were also considered to be parts of philosophy.

Lesson 9: The Relation between Philosophy and the Sciences

The Relations among the Sciences

Although the sciences, in the sense of collections of appropriate problems, are separated and distinguished from one another according to different criteria, such as their subjects, aims, and methods of inquiry, they are still related to one another. Each of them is able, to some extent, to assist with the solution of the problems of another science.

As was previously indicated, mostly, the positive principles of every science are presented in another science, and the best example of the benefit given to one science by another can be found in the relation between mathematics and physics.

The relations among the philosophical sciences are also clear, and the best example of this can be found in the relation between morals and philosophical psychology, for one of the positive principles of the science of morals is the possession of will and freedom of man without which moral goodness and evil, praise and blame and reward and punishment would be meaningless.

This positive principle must be established in the philosophical psychology (*`ilm al-nafs*), which discusses the characteristics of the human soul by the rational method. There is more or less of a relation between the natural and philosophical sciences, as well. In order to solve some problems which are raised in the philosophical sciences, one can employ premises which are established in the empirical sciences.

For example, in empirical psychology it is demonstrated that sometimes despite the existence of necessary physical and physiological conditions for seeing and hearing, perception does not take place. Perhaps all of us have had the experience of meeting a friend but failing to see him because the focus of our mental attention was elsewhere, or a sound may have caused our eardrums to vibrate although we did not hear it.

This subject can be used for premises to solve one of the problems of the philosophical science of the soul, and it may be concluded that perception is not simply due to the category of material interaction, otherwise perception would always take place when the material conditions were satisfied.

Now the question may be raised as to whether such relations also obtain between philosophy (i.e., metaphysics) and the other sciences, or whether there is an impenetrable wall and no relation between them.

In response it must be said that there are relations between philosophy and the other sciences, although philosophy is not dependent on the other sciences, and even has no need for positive principles which are established in other sciences. On the one hand, it assists other sciences and satisfies some of their fundamental needs, while on the other hand, it benefits from the other sciences in one sense.

We shall now briefly investigate the interrelations between philosophy and the sciences in two sections.

The Assistance given by Philosophy to the Sciences

The fundamental assistance given by philosophy (i.e., metaphysics) to the other sciences, including the philosophical and non-philosophical sciences, is confined to explaining their assertive principles, that is, the establishment [of the existence] of non-self-evident subjects and the establishment of the most general positive principles:

A. The establishment of the subject of science. We know that the problems of every science turn about a subject which includes the subjects of the problems of that science. When such the existence of such a subject is not self-evident, it needs to be established, and this establishment is not within the scope of the problems of that science, for the problems of every science are limited to propositions which represent the states and accidents of the subject, not its existence.

On the other hand, in some cases, the establishment of a subject by means of the research methods of that science is not possible. For example, the methods of the natural sciences are empirical, but the real existence of their subjects must be established by the rational method.

In such cases, it is only first philosophy which can assist these sciences and establish their subjects by rational proof. This relation between philosophy and the sciences has been considered by some authorities to be a general relation, and that all the sciences without exception are in need of philosophy for the establishment of their subjects, and some have even gone further to assert that the establishment of the existence of all things is the responsibility of metaphysics.

Every proposition which has the form of a haliyyah basitah (simple existential proposition), that is one whose predicate is "existent", such as "Man is existent," is considered to be a metaphysical proposition.

The apparent meaning of this claim, however, seems to be an exaggeration, but there is no doubt that

the non-self-evident subjects of the sciences are in need of proofs which are composed of universal and metaphysical premises.

B. Establishing positive principles. As has been repeatedly indicated, the most general principles required by all the real sciences are discussed in first philosophy, and the most important of them is the principle of causality and its subordinate laws, which we explain as follows:

All scientific endeavors turn about the discovery of causal relations between things and phenomena. A scientist who spends long years of his life in the laboratory to analyze and synthesize chemicals searches to discover what elements cause the appearance of what material, and what properties and accidents will appear in it, and what factors cause the analysis of compounds, that is, what is the cause for the appearance of these phenomena?

Likewise, a scientist who sets up an experiment to discover the microbe which causes a disease and the medicine for it really is searching for the cause of that disease and its cure.

Hence, scientists, prior to beginning their scientific endeavors, believe that every phenomenon has a cause, and even Newton, who discovered the law of gravity, by observing the falling of an apple, was blessed by this same belief. If he had imagined that the appearances of phenomena are accidental and without a cause, he would never have been able to make such a discovery.

Now the question is: In what science is this very principle which is required by physics, chemistry, medicine and other sciences to be investigated? The answer is that the investigation of this rational law is not appropriate to any science but philosophy.

Likewise, the subordinate laws of causation, such as the law that every effect has a specific and suitable cause, for example, the roaring of a lion in the jungles of Africa does not cause a man to be afflicted with cancer, and the singing of a nightingale in Europe would not cure him.

Also the explanation of these and the following laws are worthy of no science but philosophy: the law that wherever a complete cause occurs, its effect will also necessarily come into existence, and until a complete cause occurs, its effect will never be existent.

After their experiments, scientists remain in need of the principle of causality, for the immediate results of their experiments are nothing but the fact that in the cases tested specific phenomena have occurred simultaneously or following other phenomena.

The discovery of a universal law, and the claim that this cause always brings about the appearance of certain effects, requires another principle which can never be obtained by experimentation.

The correct view is that this principle is the very principle of causation, that is, a scientist can present a universal law with certainty only when he has been successful in discovering the common factor in all cases, and he has found the existence of the cause of phenomena in all the cases tested. In this way it

may be said that whenever and wherever such a cause occurs, the phenomenon of its effect will come into existence.

Also, this law can be accepted in a universal form which admits no exceptions only when the law of the necessity of causation is accepted; otherwise, it may be considered possible that the existence of the complete cause does not always necessitate the appearance of its effect, or that the occurrence of the appearance of the effect is possible without the existence of its complete cause. In this way, the universality and necessity of the above mentioned law would be flawed, and its certainty would be lost.

Of course, the discussion about whether experience can discover the complete and exclusive cause of a phenomenon is another matter, but in any case, the necessity and certainty of a universal law (given that such laws can be discovered in the natural sciences by empirical methods) depends on the acceptance of the principle of causation and its corollaries.

The proof of these laws is part of the assistance given by philosophy to the sciences.

The Assistance given by the Sciences to Philosophy

The most important assistance given by the sciences to philosophy takes two forms:

A. The demonstration of the premises of some proofs. At the beginning of this lesson we indicated that sometimes in order to solve some problems of the philosophical sciences empirical premises can be used. For example, from the absence of the occurrence of perception despite the existence of material conditions the conclusion may be drawn that perception is a non-material phenomenon.

Likewise in order to establish the existence of the spirit one may employ the biological fact that the cells of the bodies of men and animals gradually die and are replaced by other cells so that during several years all the cells of the body (except the cells of the brain) are replaced, and by adding the fact that the structure of the cells of the brain also gradually change with the consumption of their contents and renewed nourishment, for individual unity and the persistence of the spirit are cases of consciousness and are undeniable.

The body, however, is constantly in a state of change. Hence, it becomes clear that the spirit is other than the body, is persistent and unchangeable. Even in some proofs of the existence of God the Exalted, such as the proof from motion and the proof from creation, in one sense, empirical premises are used.

Now, regarding this relation which exists between the natural and philosophical sciences, the relation between them and metaphysics can be established in this way, in order to solve a metaphysical problem, such as, that existence is not equivalent to matter, and that being material is not a characteristic of all of being and is not an accident of all existents.

In other words existence may be divided into the material and the non-material, for this a premise may

be employed that, for example, is obtained from philosophical psychology, and its establishment, in turn, will all be accomplished with the assistance of the empirical sciences.

Also, in order to establish the fact that dependence is not an inseparable implication of being and that there is an independent existent (the Necessary Existent), the proofs from motion and from creation are used, which are based on empirical premises.

This relation between the natural sciences and philosophy does not contradict that which was explained before, that philosophy is not in need of the other sciences, for the way of establishing the mentioned facts is not limited to these kinds of proofs, and for each of them there are proofs of pure philosophy, which are composed of primary self-evident premises and those given by consciousness (propositions which refer to presentational knowledge), as will be explained in the appropriate place, God willing.

In reality, the setting forth of proofs consisting of empirical premises is for the sake of the indulgence of those whose minds are not sufficiently trained to completely understand pure philosophical proofs, which are composed of pure rational premises which are far from the mind familiar with sensory affairs.

B. Preparing new grounds for philosophical analysis. Every science begins with a number of basic and universal problems, and they develop in order to elaborate and explain specific and particular cases with the appearance of new fields which sometimes appear with the aid of other sciences.

Philosophy is no exception to this rule, and its first problems are limited, and it has developed and will develop with the appearance of wider horizons, horizons which sometimes are discovered by mental efforts and the exchange of ideas and thoughts, and sometimes through the guidance of revelation, or by gnostic disclosures, and sometimes they appear by means of things which are established in other sciences, which prepare the ground for comparison with other philosophical principles and new rational analyses, such as the problems of the truth of revelation and miracles given by religion, and other problems, such as the world of images and forms, given by the gnostics (ʿurafa).

These have prepared the grounds for new philosophical investigations. Likewise, the progress of empirical psychology has opened up new problems for the philosophical science of the soul.

Therefore, one of the services the sciences render to philosophy, a cause for the broadening of its vision, the widening of the range of its problems, its development and fruitfulness is to prepare new subjects for philosophical analysis and comparison with its general principles.

For example, in the modern age when the theory of the transformation of matter to energy and the composition of particles from compressed energy were presented, a problem was posed for the philosopher as to whether it is possible for something to occur in the material world which lacks the basic attributes of matter, and for example, has no volume? Is it possible for something which does have volume to be transformed into something without volume? Given that the answer to these questions is negative, it will be concluded that energy does not lack volume, despite the fact that this is not provable

by sensory experience.

Likewise, when energy was introduced by some physicists as being of the same family as motion, the question arose as to whether it is possible that matter, which is assumed to have come into existence from compressed energy, to be homogeneous (ham sinkh) with motion. Is it possible for matter to lose its essential properties by being transformed into energy, or with the transformation of some atomic particles into "fields" (according to some hypotheses of modern physics)? Basically, is physical matter the same as the body discussed in philosophy? And what relations are there between physical matter and other concepts, such as force, energy and field, and the concept of body in philosophy?

It is clear that this service rendered by natural science to the philosophical sciences, especially metaphysics, does not mean that philosophy is in need of them, even if the range is broadened for philosophical activity and manifestation with the problems which are raised as an effect of the progress of the sciences.

The Relation between Philosophy and Gnosis ('Irfan)

At the end of this lesson it is good to indicate something about the relation between philosophy and 'irfan, and for this purpose there is no alternative but to give a brief explanation about 'irfan.

'Irfan literally means knowing, and in technical terms it is applied to special perceptions which are obtained through the focusing of one's attention on the interior of the soul (not by means of sensory experience nor by rational analysis), and in the process of this spiritual wayfaring (sayr wa suluk) some disclosures usually are obtained which are similar to "visions" and sometimes there is the exact presentation of something which occurred in the past, present or future, and sometimes it needs an interpretation, and sometimes it appears as an effect of being possessed by the devil.

The topics which the gnostics ('urafa) explain as their own interpretations, disclosures and findings of conscience, are called "scientific gnosis" ('irfan-e-'ilmi). Sometimes by adding reasonings and inferences they take the form of philosophical discussions.

There is also an interrelation between philosophy and gnosis which is investigated in the following two sections.

The Assistance given by Philosophy to Gnosis ('Irfan)

A. Real gnosis is acquired exclusively through bondage to God and obedience to His orders. Bondage without knowledge is impossible, and this knowledge requires philosophical principles.

B. The recognition of correct gnostic disclosures is achieved by their comparison with the standards of reason and the (religious) law, and by one or more intermediaries they go back to principles of philosophy.

C. Since gnostic visions are a sort of interior perception and are completely personal, their mental interpretations are achieved by means of concepts and these are then transformed into others by means of terms and expressions, and in view of the fact that most gnostic truths are beyond the level of common understanding, precise concepts and proper terminology must be e

The Assistance given by Gnosis ('Irfan) to Philosophy

A. As was previously indicated, gnostic disclosures and visions raise new problems for philosophical analysis which help with the broadening of vision and the development of philosophy.

B. Where problems are solved in the philosophical sciences by means of rational proof, gnostic visions are considered a powerful corroboration, and in reality, that which is understood by the philosophy by means of reason is found by the gnostic by means of visions of the heart.

Lesson 10: The Necessity of Philosophy

The Man of the Age

The sun has newly risen from its bed of the green waters of the sea, and flashes its golden rays on the sleepy faces of the voyagers of as ship, voyagers who have just awakened from last night's slumber, and who, with minds at ease and unaware of all else, have begun eating and drinking and amusing themselves. The ship, as always, advances through the limitless ocean.

Meanwhile, somebody who seems brighter than the others starts to think a bit, and then turns to his shipmates and asks, "Where are we going?" Somebody else who seems to have been roused from his sleep, ask the same question of the others in wonder, and.... Some are so intoxicated with their enjoyments and amusements that they pay no heed to him, and continue with their own affairs without thinking of answering this question. But little by little, the question spreads until it reaches the crew and the captain. They also repeat the question without having an answer for it. At last, a question mark hangs in the atmosphere of the ship and a strange horror and embracing distress appear.

Is this imaginary scene not the story of the people of the world, who have boarded the great ship of the earth, and while revolving about themselves in cosmic space, they travel through the limitless ocean of time? Are they not like cattle feeding, as it says in the Qur'an:

"They take their enjoyment and eat as cattle eat" (47: 12).

And it also says:

“they have hearts, but understand not with them; they have eyes, but perceive not with them; they have ears, but they hear not with them. They are like cattle; nay, rather they are further astray. Those— they are the heedless.” (7:179).

Yes! This is the story of the people of our times, who along with the amazing progress of technology have become afflicted with puzzlement and wandering and knows not from where they have come and to where they are going, and to which direction they must turn, and which path they must take.

This is why absurdism, nihilism and hippie-ism have appeared in the space age. Like a cancer they attack the soul, thought and spirit of civilized man, and like termites eat away at the pillars of palace of humanity and weaken it.

These questions raised by conscious people who have roused the semiconscious have compelled thinkers to seek answers to them. A group of those ready to think correctly have obtained correct, illuminating and orienting answers. They know the true purpose, and they eagerly follow the straight path.

However, those who are under the influence of immature thought and psychological factors imagine that there is no beginning and no end to the caravan, and that there are always ships which appear upon the ocean, and by means of roaring waves are aimlessly pulled this way and that. But, before they reach the safe and tranquil shore, they drown in the sea,

“They say, there is nothing but our present life; we die and we live, and nothing but Time destroys us” (45:24).

In any case, these questions are wily-nilly raised for the conscious person: What is the beginning? What is the end? What is the right path toward the aim? It is obvious that the natural and mathematical sciences have no answer to them, so what is to be done? In what way is the correct answer to these questions to be obtained?

In the previous lessons the way to find answers to these questions has been indicated, that is, each of these three basic questions is related to a branch of philosophy and must be investigated by rational methods. All of them require metaphysics or First Philosophy. Hence, we must begin with epistemology and ontology and then deal with the philosophical sciences to find correct answers to these questions and others like them.

Social Schools

Wandering and bewilderment which have befallen space age man are not limited to individual and personal problems, for attendant social problems have also crystallized in various political and economic schools and systems, and although these artificial systems have failed to prove themselves worthy and complete, there are still wandering societies of people who have not given them up, and even those who

have been disillusioned continue to plod along in the same deviant directions seeking new artificial systems woven from the same cloth.

Each time a new “-ism” appears in the arena of ideology, a misled group is attracted to it, and a brawl and tussle gets underway. It does not take very long before they fall, broken and unfulfilled until the time when they appear again under a new name, new color and scent to deceive another group.

It seems that these unfortunate misled people have vowed never to listen to the call of the truth and not to listen to words of divine leaders, and they gripe, “Why are your hands empty of the silver and gold and all that glitters in this world? If you speak the truth, why are the white and red palaces not in your control?”

Yes, these are the followers of those whose stories are repeatedly whispered by the Noble Qur'an into the ears of the people of the world. But where are the ears of the listeners?!

Anyway, as an invitation by way of wisdom, one should say: social systems must be arranged on the basis of awareness of the nature of man and all his existential aspects, with regard to the purposes of his creation, and in recognition of the factors which enable him to achieve the final goal. Finding such a complicated formula is beyond the mental capacities of ordinary humans.

That which can be expected of our thought is knowledge of fundamental problems and general foundations of these systems which should be established more firmly and steadfastly, that is, knowledge of the Creator of the cosmos and man, knowledge of the purposefulness of human life, and knowledge of the way opened by the Wise Creator for man so that he may journey and progress toward the final goal.

Then it is time for the heart to turn toward Him, to head down the path and following the divine guides to take firm steps, and without doubt or wavering to fare the way and make haste.

If one fails to benefit from the God given blessing of reason, does not think of the beginning and end of being, fails to solve the basic problems of life, selfishly chooses his own way, and brings about a system and sets his own powers and those of others for its sake, then such a one will suffer the consequences of his own selfishness, foolishness, licentiousness, aberrant thinking and perversities. Finally, one must not blame others for his lack of fulfillment and misfortunes.

Yes! Finding the correct ideology depends on having the correct world view, and until the bases of the world view are firmly established, until its fundamental problems are properly solved and until opposing temptations are dispelled, one cannot hope to find a fair, useful and effective ideology. Until one knows what there is one will never be able to discover what ought to be.

The fundamental problems of a world view are the same threefold questions for which the awakened consciousness innate to man seeks definite and convincing answers. It is not without reason that Islamic

scholars have called them the “principles of religion” (usul al-din): theology answers the question: “What is the beginning?”; the study of the resurrection answers the question of “What is the end?”; the study of revelation and prophecy answers the questions of “What is the way, and who is the guide?”

It goes without saying that the correct and definite solution to these questions depend on philosophical and rational ideas. In this way, we are led by another route to the importance and necessity of the problems of philosophy, and prior to all of them, those of epistemology and ontology.

The Mystery of Humanity

There is a third way to come to appreciate the importance and necessity of philosophy which can motivate those who are of extraordinary aspiration and who seek advancement, and it is that the true humanity of man depends on the gains of philosophy, and the explanation of this is as follows:

All animals are known to have the characteristic that their actions are performed with consciousness and will which spring from the instincts. An existent which has no sort of consciousness is outside the realm of the animals. Among the animals there is a distinguished kind whose understanding is not limited to sensory perception and whose will does not conform to natural instincts, but who has another perceptive power called the intellect, such that man’s will takes form in the light of his intellect. In other words, what distinguishes man is his own vision and inclinations.

So, if one limits oneself to sensory perceptions alone, and does not benefit from his own intellectual powers, and his movements are entirely determined by his animal instincts, then in reality, he is nothing more than an animal, or rather, according to the Qur’an, he is even further astray than the beasts.

Therefore, the real man is one who uses his own intellect in order to determine the most important aspects of his destiny, and on that basis comes to know, in a general way, how to live, and then, in all seriousness, he fares the way.

From what has been explained previously it became known that the most fundamental problems facing the conscious human being which play a crucial role in the social and individual destinies of man are the same fundamental problems of a world view, problems whose ultimate and definite solutions depend on philosophical efforts.

We may conclude that without the benefit of that which is obtained through philosophy, neither individual nor social felicity is possible, nor the achievement of the true perfection of man.

The Solution to Some Problems

Regarding these explanations, it is possible that some doubts may be raised, the most important of which will be mentioned with answers to each of them.

Objection 1: These explanations can establish the necessity of philosophy only when the world view is restricted to a philosophical one, and the way to solve its fundamental problems is limited to philosophy, while other world views exist as well, such as the scientific world view, the religious world view and the mystical ('irfani) world view.

Answer 1: As has been repeatedly explained, the solution to these sorts of problems is beyond the scope of the empirical sciences, and therefore, there is really no such thing as the "scientific world view" (in its proper meaning). However, regarding the religious world view, it can only be of use when we know what the true religion is. And this, in turn, is based on knowledge of the Prophet and the One Who sent him, that is, God the Exalted, and it is clear that basis of the content of revelation one cannot prove the one who sent it or the one who received it.

For example, one cannot say that since the Qur'an says that God exists, His existence has been proven! Regarding the mystical world view, as was indicated in the section on the relation between philosophy and gnosis ('irfan), it depends on prior knowledge of God the Exalted, and prior knowledge of the correct way of spiritual wayfaring, which must be established on the basis of philosophical principles. Hence, all ways ultimately lead to philosophy.

Objection 2: In order for one's efforts to solve the problems of a world view and of philosophy to be worthwhile, one should be optimistic about reaching a conclusion to one's efforts. But considering the depth and breadth of these problems, one cannot have much hope for success. Therefore, instead of wasting one's life along a way whose destiny is uncertain, one had better investigate those problems for which there is more cause for hope of a solution.

Answer 2: First, the hope for a solution to these problems is no less than the hope for reaching an end to scientific efforts to discover scientific mysteries and conquering the forces of nature. Secondly, the value of estimation depends upon more than one factor, that is, its quantity of risk, rather, another factor must be taken into consideration, and that is the value of the outcome, and it is the result of multiplying these two factors which determines the value of an estimation.

Considering that the outcome here is infinite human felicity for eternity, no matter how weak the probability, the value of the estimation is more than the value of the probability of success by any other way whose outcome is finite and limited.

Objection 3: How can one be certain of the value of philosophy when many scholars have been opposed it and there are even ahadith which find fault with it?

Answer 3: Opposition to philosophy has originated from various people with various motivations, however, opposition from aware scholars and impartial Muslims really meant opposition to the set of current philosophical ideas, some of which—at least in the view the opponents—were not compatible with Islamic doctrine. And if there are some credible ahadith in which fault is found with philosophy, it is with the above mentioned meaning in which it is applicable. However, what we mean by philosophical

efforts is the use of the intellect in order to solve those problems which can be solved only by rational methods.

And the necessity of this work is emphasized in the unambiguous verses of the Noble Qur'an and honorable ahadith, and abundant examples of these efforts may be observed in ahadith and even in the text of the Noble Qur'an, such as the reasoning about tawhid and the resurrection in the Book and the Sunnah.

Objection 4: If the problems about [the proper] world view are investigated by rational and philosophical methods in the Book and sunnah, then what need do we have for philosophical books and the discussions presented in them, discussions which are often derived from the Greeks?

Answer 4: Firstly, the presentation of philosophical discussions in the Book and Sunnah does not change their philosophical essence. Secondly, there should be no objection to extracting this set of problems and arranging them in the form of a science, as was done in the case of fiqh and usul, and the other Islamic sciences.

The fact that the origins of these discussions are in the books of the Greeks, and even that they have been adapted, does not take away from the value of these problems, as is also true in the case of arithmetic, medicine and astronomy.

Thirdly, in the Book and Sunnah the doubts which were investigated were those which were current in that epoch, and this does not suffice to answer the objections one encounters almost every day from atheistic schools of thought. Rather, according to that which has been emphasized in the Noble Qur'an and the words of religious leaders, rational efforts must be expanded until they suffice for the preparation for the defense of true beliefs and replies to every sort of objection raised against them.

Objection 5: The best argument for the inadequacy of philosophy is the differences which exist among philosophers themselves, and attention to these differences brings about a loss of confidence in the correctness of their methods.

Answer 5: Differences regarding theoretical problems is an unavoidable feature of every science. The scholars of fiqh have differences of opinion about the problems of that subject, while these sorts of differences are no reason for the invalidity of the science of fiqh or the special methods of that science.

Likewise, the existence of differences between two mathematicians about a mathematical problem is no reason for the invalidity of mathematics. Attention to these differences should be a powerful motivation for devoted thinkers to increase their efforts and endeavors, to persist and persevere until they discover more certain results.

Objection 6: People have been observed who have made admirable studies in the philosophical sciences, but with respect both to personal and moral problems and to social and political matters they

have weaknesses. So how can philosophy be considered the key to individual and social felicity?

Answer 6: The emphasis on the importance and necessity of philosophy does not mean that this science is the complete cause and sufficient condition for the possession of the correct ideology and behavior which accords with it, rather it means that it is a necessary condition for obtaining a desirable ideology, that is, following the right path depends on knowing it, and knowing the straight path depends on having a correct world view and solving its philosophical problems.

If someone takes a proper first step, but his second step falters or deviates, this is no reason for saying that the first step was also deviant, rather the cause of the faltering or deviation should be sought in the second step.

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