

## Prologue

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Seyed Javad Miri's book "Alternative Sociology Probing into the Sociological Thought of Allama M. T. Jafari" deals fundamentally with the modern antagonism between the religious and the secular, the sacred and the profane, religious revelation and profane enlightenment, faith and autonomous reason.

Erich Fromm and the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School defined religion as non-authoritarian, non-dogmatic humanistic X-experience, as movement toward Universality and Wholeness, as longing for the totally Other than the horror and terror of nature and history, for perfect justice, for unconditional love, and as the hope, that the murderer shall not triumph over the innocent victim, at least not ultimately.

They defined enlightenment with Sigmund Freud as the attempt to put Ego, where Id is, and as making the Unconscious conscious, as the effort, to free people from their fears, and to make them masters of their fate.

Seyed Javad Miri and his great teacher Allama M. T. Jafari stand on the humanistic, scientific side, being at the same time open toward the religious side. Both humanistic scholars have contributed much in theory and praxis to the prevention of alternative Future I – the entirely administered society, and of alternative Future II – the fully militarized society, and to the arrival of a possible alternative Future III – a free and just society, in which not only personal autonomy and universal, i.e., anamnestic, present, and proleptic solidarity, but also religion and enlightenment would be reconciled.

Seyed Javad Miri, reflects in his new book on the life work of Allama Jafari including mysticism, philosophy, jurisprudence, art, literature natural and social sciences and poetry.

He introduces Allama Jafari's work and its great Iranian wisdom, which reached a climax in Cyrus, and was different from Jerusalem, Athens, and Rome, their mythos, logos, and ethos, the seedbed societies of the Western civilization, into the globalizing modern Occident: Europe and America. Doing so, he

identifies the limits of the present day secular natural and social sciences in understanding and comprehending reality.

To be sure, he is well educated in and takes most seriously Western secular psychology, social psychology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy as “tools” to understand and comprehend “human being”. But he is also fully aware, that secular sociology fragments and compartmentalizes the human being, and thus doubles up the extreme division of labor and its alienating effects in modern civil society.

The secular methodology loses the totality of man, as once projected by Plato and the Neo-Platonists, and most recently by Allama M. T. Jafari: the unified tripartite framework of “human being” – body, psyche, and soul. Persia (Iran) and Europe are not only different; they also have much in common. However, Seyed Javad Miri is correct in his observation, that positivistic sociology is unable to account for human “wholeness” or “integratedness,” not to speak of bringing it about.

Seyed Javad Miri is aware that the dominance of positivistic sociology has damaged the study of human society. Since August Comte, the inventor of the names “positivism” and “sociology”, positivism means the anti-metaphysical metaphysics of “what is the case.”

As positivistic sociology describes, categorizes, mathematizes and puts into statistical form, what is the case in modern civil society, it fails to see and is blinded against what ought not to be, and what in terms at least the Abrahamic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – is against God and his will, and should therefore be changed.

The Mosaic Decalogue, which all three Abrahamic religions have in common, and which could be summed up in the Golden Rule, which all living world religions share, is revolutionary. Without stealing, murdering, and lying, no modern ruling class could possibly establish bloody retaliation and revenge among individuals as well as among nations.

Seyed Javad Miri is fully conscious of the fact that in the secular positivistic sociology instrumental or functional rationality dominates mimetic or communicative rationality. Secular modernity once promised more than instrumental rationality. But as it was immensely successful in terms of the functional natural sciences and technology, it neglected communicative rationality: It sold and lost its soul, including psyche and body.

Modern people travel in the technologically most advanced cars and airplanes, while their families fall apart at home, and the inner cities turn into wastelands, and the neighborhoods are without neighbors, and the wars, which are so costly in terms of human lives and property, take no end.

The life world, which includes family, neighborhood, friends, lovers, aesthetic and religious associations, and which is sometimes still characterized by communicative rationality, and which is still sometimes steered over the medium of religious or secular ethics and morality, suffers inner colonization from the economic subsystem of the total system of human condition and human action system, characterized by

functional rationality and steered over the medium of money, and by the political subsystem, which is also characterized by instrumental rationality, and is steered over the medium of power.

Sometimes spontaneous social movements like “Occupy: Wall Street” turn against such inner colonization of the life–world, and try to stop and to break it more or less successfully.

Seyed Javad Miri understands the “humanities” as a methodology of thought, which does not separate physicality from spirit or from metaphysics, or from religion, as the positivistic social sciences have done since the end of German idealism, and its last great metaphysicians and their transcendental or dialectical logic, the first new one after Aristotle, of which Marx became the heir, turning it upside down and secularizing it, and which Lenin transformed into the likewise profane ABC of revolution and liberation. Of course, secular liberation is not against the theology of the three Abrahamic religions.

Theology is rather the necessary source and precondition of liberation, as Ernst Bloch, Walter Benjamin, and Erich Fromm have made clear enough. A theology, which while it aims at religious redemption, remains, nevertheless, still open for the secular happiness of the people as the goal of politics, alone can help historical materialism to solve its metaphysical and religious problems in terms of an anamnestic solidarity with all those victims, who became martyrs of freedom, without ever experiencing alternative Future III – the realm of freedom on the basis of natural and economic necessity, and without ever having had their day in court as they fought against the arrival of alternative Future I – the totally administered society, and of alternative Future II – the entirely militarized society.

It is not without good reasons, that there exist today Jewish, Christian and Islamic liberation theologies on all continents, which are of greatest actuality.

Seyed Javad Miri observes rightly, that there are individualistic and collectivistic schools present in modern sociology. The division of these schools reflects the antagonism of individual and collective in bourgeois society. So far positivistic sociology has not been able to reconcile this discrepancy.

Liberalism, the philosophy of civil society, is atomistic even still when it is socially modified by the principle of subsidiarity as it is the case in the Roosevelt or New Deal liberalism, which is practiced today in America by the Obama Administration. What is missing in modern liberal capitalist society is universal solidarity.

The unresolved antagonism between the individual and the collective as well as the discrepancy between the rich and the poor classes, the bourgeoisie and the “precariat,” drives civil society beyond itself into alternative Future I, II or III.[2](#)

Seyed Javad Miri is right, when he identifies, what Max Weber called “rationalization” as “falsely assumed progress.” The sociologies who follow Weber, e.g. structural functionalism, overlook the dialectic of enlightenment. Enlightenment does indeed mean rationalization. However in the real historical process this rationalization often turns against itself. More rationalization of a corporation often

means also more irrationality. Enlightenment also means integration.

But often integration leads to more disintegration historical materialism. It is accepted in most forms of sociology, on the Right and on the Left. It cannot be denied, that projection takes place in religion, like in any other domain of human life, e.g. between lovers. However, all projections need a screen against which the projection takes place. That is also true for religion.

The existential theologian Paul Tillich, the friend of Max Horkheimer, the founder of the critical theory of society of the Frankfurt School, and the teacher and friend of Theodor W. Adorno, and the friend of Fromm argued correctly, that from the fact, that anthropological projection takes place in religion it cannot be concluded, that there is no more place for theology any longer: Also religious projection needs a screen, which has elicited it throughout many world religions for centuries: the totally Other than the phenomenal world with all its injustices.

Seyed Javad Miri would like to reconcile humanistically humano-centered: and theo-centered world views. If it is true, that on one hand the humano-centered secularization process of the past four centuries in the Western civilization, which today is even globalized, cannot really be stopped, and on the other hand, that the world religions have greatly contributed to the humanization of the human species at least in the past 6000 years, then the question arises, how the progressive elements in these religions can be rescued through their inversion or translation into the secular discourse of the expert cultures, i.e. sociology, anthropology, psychology, political economics, philosophy, etc., and through it into the communicative action of the life world, and through social movements even into the behavior in the economic and political subsystems of modern and post-modern action systems.

Such inversion of semantic materials and potentials of religion into the discourse of the expert cultures could lead to a reconciliation of humano-centered and theo-centered world views on the secular side.

Seyed Javad Miri differentiates between a first and second nature of man, between instincts and social survival. Here the problem is how to relate adequately the first nature of instincts and the second nature, which individuals receive through cultural socialization.

The massive, explosive breakthrough of the libidinous aspects– porno industry – and the aggressive aspects – war industry – of the Id, the will to life in individuals and collectives, in the modern Western culture, leads us to speak with Freud of the “discontents of civilization”, if not of a failed civilization.

The solution may lay with what the mystics suggested, and what Marx took up: the idea of the humanization of nature and the naturalization of man. So far the bourgeois drive to control and exploit selfishly and absolutely the external as well as the internal nature in the interest of capitalism and of private property and profit, has prevented such reconciliation between the first and the second nature and has promoted their further alienation.

There are ecological catastrophes going on in the ecology of nature and of man. Reconciliation between

man and nature could take place in alternative Future III—a classless and free society. If man's killer instinct, as it is expressed in one retaliation or thievery war after the other, and in the always growing and always more sophisticated weapon industry cannot be sublimated and humanized, the survival of humanity on this planet may very well be threatened.

What Seyed Javad Miri calls the humanistic and naturalistic approaches to the study of society could be combined in the effort to achieve alternative Future III – a free society, in which not only the antagonism between the sacred and the profane, and the discrepancy between the personal autonomy and the universal solidarity, but also the contradiction between nature and man could be reconciled.

Those sociological approaches can, of course, not be value-free in Max Weber's sense. To be sure, already the intentional or unintentional interference of the sociologist into his or her own object of study renders a value – free sociology impossible. In any case, the humanistic and naturalistic sociological approaches could not be satisfied with the mere positivistic study of what is the case, but would also have to point out its potential and what ought to be in a positive or negative way, and initiate the consequent, necessary practical changes. Seyed Javad Miri's new book, inspired by the great work of his teacher Allama M. T. Jafari, is doing precisely that in the most excellent way, as he is building a strong bridge between the great Iranian culture and the West.

1. Rudolf J. Siebert was born in Frankfurt, Germany. He studied history, philology, philosophy, sociology, psychoanalysis, and theology at the University of Frankfurt, the University of Mainz, the University of Munster, and the Catholic University of America, Washington D.C. from

1947 – 1955. Professor Siebert has taught, lectured, and published widely in Western and Eastern Europe, the United States, and Canada. He is a professor of Religion and Society in the Department of Comparative Religion at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA. He is the director of the Center for Humanistic Future Studies at Western Michigan University since 1980, the director of the international course on the "Future of Religion" in the Inter-University Center for Post-Graduate Studies in Dubrovnik, Yugoslavia / Croatia since 1975, and the international course on "Religion and Civil Society" in Yalta, Crimea, and Ukraine since 1999. The Inter-University Center is sponsored by the University of Simferopol, Simferopol, Ukraine, and Western Michigan University.

Professor Siebert's main works are *The Critical Theory of Religion: Frankfurt School*, and *From Critical Theory to Critical Political Theology: Personal Autonomy and Universal Solidarity*.

From 1955 to the present, Professor Siebert has developed the critical or dialectical theory of religion out of the critical theory of society, from the endeavors of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt, globally known as the "Frankfurt School," and in continual discourse with sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, economists, philosophers, religiologists, and theologians from the United States, Canada, England, Belgium, Holland, France, Germany, Yugoslavia / Croatia, Israel, and Columbia.

The dialectical theory of religion emphasizes the three global alternative futures of society: Future I – the totally administered society; Future II – the entirely militarized society; and Future III – the reconciled society. It stresses the three global alternative futures of religion: Future I – religious fundamentalism; Future II – total secularization; Future III – the open dialectic between the religious and the secular aiming at a post-modern reconciliation between a reformed religion and a transformed secular enlightenment. Rudolf Siebert and his late wife Margaret nee Noyes had eight children and, now, 14 grandchildren.

[2.](#) The economist Guy Standing coined the term “precariat” to try to describe the reality of low wage workers in our modern, global economy.

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