

Religious Science According to Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī

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ABSTRACT: The view that science and religion are independent of each another would firstly aim to end the disagreement between these two epistemic fields, and secondly emphasise the role of science in addressing topics which are not specific to religion. Professor Jawādī Āmulī however through an innovative doctrine considers that the idea of science and religion being separate is the result of a false perception. He elaborates that their true relationship relies on locating reason within the pattern of religious knowledge. Hence reason, together with the Holy Qur'an and the *sunnah*, facilitates religious knowledge, and for this very reason rational scientific knowledge is not beyond the scope of religion. In fact, reason questions 'transmitted knowledge' rather than religion itself. If considered this way, science merges with religion, and there would be no such a thing as a non-religious science.

The present article addresses the foundations, principles and presumptions of this idea, and discusses the propositions of a 'religious science' and the Islamisation of the sciences.

KEYWORDS: science and religion, conflict between science and religion, independence of science and religion from each other, representation of facts in science and religion, religious science.

Introduction

Science is one of the most important products of human ratiocination, and

covers a broad range of human knowledge. It is both the focus of the relationship between reason and religion and one of the most important topics concerning the relationship between religious knowledge and human knowledge.

For many years now, the debate between science – which is a product of reason – and religion – a product of revelation – has preoccupied many thinkers, and different views have been introduced concerning the relationship between the two. The one that prevails is that they are separate disciplines, and it tries to end the tension between them by separating them and emphasising science's contribution to arenas which are not specifically religious. This explains why the role of rational, scientific thinking is stressed by sociologists, and that of religion has been weakened.

According to Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī, the clash between science and religion is a product of a false idea about their relationship, and is based on the point that rationality as such – which is the foundation of scientific thinking – stands opposed to religion. This implies that human knowledge is alien to religious knowledge, and that the claims of religion are beyond its compass. In other words, if religion speaks of things that science has observed, the two are liable to conflict with one another. The key to reveal their true relationship lies in locating reason within the paradigm of religious knowledge. The emphasis the Āyatullāh gives to the issue that reason, together with the effectively transmitted science of the Qur'an and the *sunnah*, contributes to religious knowledge. He says that religion includes both sources, which leads to the conclusion that neither rational knowledge nor scientific knowledge are beyond the scope of religious knowledge. Reason, as a source of religious knowledge, never stands opposed to religion, but contests transmitted knowledge. If reason, and consequently science, were located within the geometry of religious knowledge, there would be no conflict between science and religion or reason and religion. Reason and science are encompassed by religion, and if certain inconsistencies are found between man's rational and

scientific achievements and what is said in the Qur'an and certain *ḥadīths*, we would have to speak of inconsistencies between reason, or science, and 'transmitted knowledge/science.' Such cases should not be considered examples of disagreement between reason and religion, or science and religion.

As a result, science becomes religious and a non-religious science would not exist. If authentic transmitted knowledge/science (the Qur'an and the *sunnah*) reveals God's speech, then scientific knowledge discloses a picture of His creation and activity. Thus both are proofs of religious knowledge. Science and scientific knowledge are therefore not outside the scope of religious knowledge, and thus one cannot really speak of a conflict between them or prefer one to the other. After covering the foundations, principles and presumptions of this idea, the present article will discuss its function as a description of religious science and the prospect of an Islamisation of the sciences.

The Distinction between the Ontological and Epistemological Dimensions of Religion

If we consider religion as a system of beliefs, ethics and jurisprudence for guiding man to salvation, a question arises concerning its ontological origin. As a divine revelation, Islam considers God to be the unique ontological cause. Religion is a creation of God's pre-eternal Will and Knowledge, and none but God has any part in its formulation. Concerning epistemology, the question is how man acquires knowledge of the content of religion. A major concern in religious thought is the epistemic sources of religion, and how the ideas and rules of religion come about.

Professor Jawādī Āmulī emphasises the point that, together with authentic transmitted science, reason is an epistemological source of religion, although it does not contribute to its ontological dimension.

The Quiddity of Reason

Reason in this context is not the abstract reasoning of philosophy and rational argument, but the empirical reasoning of the sciences. It also includes

‘semi-abstract reasoning’ (as in mathematics) and the ‘pure reason’ of theoretical mysticism. Thus, when Āyatullāh Āmulī insists on locating reason within the framework of religious knowledge and parallel with transmitted science, reason not only takes into account philosophical and abstract reasoning, but also considers all four types of reason: empirical, semi-abstract, abstract and pure.

It should be noted that for Āyatullāh Āmulī, the epistemic product of reason is found within religious knowledge if there is rational certainty, or as stated by the principles of jurisprudence, the type of scientific certainty of empirical, mathematical, philosophical and mystical knowledge. Therefore, conjecture which does not lead to rational certainty is not within the scope of religious knowledge, nor would it have religious authority.¹

Presenting Facts through Reason

Reason is important in this system since it determines facts that might otherwise depend on axioms and presuppositions. If an absolute, non-relative scientific knowledge were possible, it could then be absorbed into religious knowledge. However, certain errors occur, and it cannot be maintained that all the knowledge acquired by man through reason and the various branches of science is true and corresponds the actual world. Some scholars, after examining scientific knowledge, either reduce all the sciences to hypotheses and relativism, while others promulgate it as truth, and loosely speaking, consider every hypothesis or idea as having a share of the truth. This would contradict realism of the proposed system, for neither the factual world nor knowledge is relative. Only true knowledge that is certain, or a science which can lead to certainty, would fit within the paradigm of religious knowledge. For this reason, the idea that science as it exists is a relative construct of unprovable hypotheses and that absolute scientific knowledge representing the factual world is unattainable, is excluded from this analysis, where science is deemed to be a source of religious knowledge, together with authentic transmitted knowledge.²

From this it becomes clear that only a true science (i.e., a conjecture which is subsequently proven) could be used as a religious argument, but not a hypothesis. Strictly speaking, a hypothesis is not scientific, since it is neither demonstrated, nor a form of rational certainty. According to 'Allāmeḥ Ṭabāṭabā'ī, hypothesis is like the fixed arm of a compass against which we adjust the other. In other words, a hypothesis is established so that subsequent steps can be taken that could lead to a scientific theory. Therefore, hypothesis itself is not science. The scientific hypotheses, as long as it is unproven, can be neither science (in the usual sense of the term) nor a religious argument. Hence it conflicts with neither religion nor transmitted knowledge.

Therefore, those views in the philosophy of science according to which scientific propositions and the empirical sciences which are unable to provide authentic objective knowledge have little value, confirm the idea that there is a conflict between science and religion. According to such views, the natural and empirical sciences are not true knowledge and science, and cannot present trustworthy facts. Nevertheless, they are silent about religion, and silence is neither an argument for or against.

The views of Professor Jawādī Āmulī on a religious science that incorporates reason and science within its paradigm of knowledge easily defend the claim that there is no conflict between science and religion. His views affirm the objectivism of science, and dismiss ideas that deny the realism of science. According to him, at the highest level – that of certainty – science does not disagree with religion, even though it may disagree with the literal meaning of transmitted knowledge. Hence, the inconsistencies between science and transmitted knowledge as a source of religion (i.e., a conflict between transmitted knowledge and reason) would in turn be removed. When, at its highest level, science does not pose any kind of problem, there is no need to discuss the various views on scientific propositions and the representation of facts by the sciences. When the certainty of science does not conflict with religion, then whatever is identified as a 'conflict' by those who assume science to be incomplete would not occur at all.³

The Religious Authority of Science

In logic, 'authority' indicates a demonstration of the factual world. For logicians, an argument has authority if there is a necessary relationship between its premises and its conclusion. In the science of the principles of jurisprudence, authority means 'correct argumentation,' and is when there is complete accepted authority that allows of no opposition, and acting upon it is regarded as obedience.

According to Professor Jawādī Āmulī, the sciences which go beyond hypothesis and conjecture and have certainty or rational conviction are considered as having religious authority. Hence, they are permitted to make references to sacred legislature in case they have a juridical application as well. For example, if medical findings in the field of pharmacology go beyond mere conjecture, they should be taken into account for religious reasons. In other words, if someone knows that the findings and recommendations are certain, but ignores them, and as a result a patient's life is threatened, he is responsible according to the religion, and he has no excuse before God.

Since transmitted argument has religious authority, we are permitted to refer to it as a science which leads to an authentic conjecture, and hence to certainty (whether it concerns a legal ruling, information about the world, or what happens on the Day of Resurrection). This is the same as when reason has authority (in the discussion on empirical reasoning), it may be ascribed to religion. Then, just as with an authentic religious argument, the scientific finding which leads to certainty is of principal authority, and its content may be assigned to the Legislator and, in certain cases, be made conditional or restricted.

Notwithstanding the fact that certainty can rarely be found in the natural and social sciences, this causes no concern about their religious authority. This is also the case with transmitted argument having a source in religion. To have religious authority, the empirical sciences need not be demonstrated and certain. The main condition is that they go beyond conjecture and become rational conviction.⁴

As a result of the authority of reason, and rational and scientific knowledge being located within the geometry of religious knowledge, the recognition of a divine statement that corresponds to an authentic understanding of religious knowledge will be complete when the epistemological sources of religion are thoroughly studied. It is only in this way that we are permitted to introduce an issue which Islam might accept as being in accord with the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not in itself the whole of Islam except for those who believe so, just as with the *ḥadīths*, which play a smaller part. The Holy Qur'an, the *ḥadīths* and reason taken together can display the content of Islam and achieve an understanding of religion through religious argument.

The status of reason (in an extensive sense of the term) and its role in the epistemological formulation of religious knowledge is the foundation of Professor Jawādī Āmulī's thesis. However, this being so, an understanding of the Qur'an, the *sunnah* or a *ḥadīth* could be found to be in conflict with scientific and empirical knowledge or rational argument.

Religious Science, Atheistic Science, Secular Science

Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī is of the opinion that science is either religious or atheistic. There can therefore be no such thing as a secular science which takes a neutral position. The reason is that science cannot be neutral towards pure philosophy, and must either take a materialistic or a religious perspective on being and the world.

Empirical and scientific knowledge emerges from either a materialistic and atheistic intellectual environment according to which the world is the same as 'nature,' or within the framework of a philosophy according to which the world is a divine creation. There is no third option. Science is thus classified according to two kinds, which excludes any independent secular or neutral science. To explain this, he writes:

Science is does not essentially conflict with religion, and they may peacefully coexist. This is so for the philosophy of science. However, an

atheistic philosophy and outlook that conflict with religion have emerged and reversed the relationship. It is evident that the principles of atheism manipulate the philosophy of science and science itself as its instruments, and demand science to look at being from the viewpoint of physical experimentation and empirical knowledge. Such an atheistic outlook creates an atheistic philosophy of science which taints science. However, the natural and empirical sciences essentially have nothing to do with atheism, but if they are manipulated beyond their limits, they become instruments of disbelief, atheism and materialism.⁵

The scientist may have doubts about certain philosophical principles and the foundations of sciences (for example, whether the world has a beginning and end, or whether there is a creator or not). As a result, he may be a sceptical secularist rather than an atheist or a monotheist (*muwāḥhid*), but a secular, sceptical science makes no sense, since any reply to the questions of philosophy must be either affirmative or negative. Whoever replies on the behalf of science in the affirmative therefore considers science from a religious point of view.

Since it is true that the world was made by God, then science is inevitably divine, and there could never be an atheistic science. Science, if it is true science and not hypothesis, is a disclosure of nature and the world, and since the world is the act of God, then scientist discloses the act of God; and since science is an explanation and interpretation of the act of God, it is therefore religious. Then it is the scientist, not science as such, who relies upon an atheistic philosophy, and uses it as an instrument of his atheism by introducing a deviated interpretation of the world and rejecting ‘creation’ in favour of a process of nature.⁶

The Islamisation of the Sciences

For Professor Jawādī Āmulī, empirical science as it exists is defective, for it takes a horizontal path. It recognises no origin or end of nature and the world, nor

does it consider the knowledge it has acquired a gift from God and a divine blessing. This picture of a divided reality where there is no creation, no creator or purpose, and only the materials of nature are studied, with science considered a product of thought and not a gift from God, produces a dead science that studies objects like dead matter, since it is deprived of any cause or purpose.

To revive this dead matter, there should be a fundamental change of outlook to an Islamisation of how we look at nature and science, so instead of following a horizontal path we might ascend towards God. It is this defective way of looking at science which does not see nature as God's making, and leaves everything to chance, that regards any talk of God's power and creation to be myth or superstition. Whoever breathes in this poisonous environment finds nothing in nature except observable, material causes. Thus he is unable to understand that the All-Wise has created the world and administers everything. It is this same erroneous outlook, afflicted by a preoccupation with experimentation, that allows no room for prayer and supplication to affect natural events.

A science that seeks to understand everything in nature through the narrow lens of observable material causes and experience is unable to comprehend the profound point that there is another division, alongside the division of the sciences into different areas, to be considered. In a religious system we learn that, together with mundane teaching methods, there is another kind of science that depends upon a different teacher. Divine knowledge comes from God, and to see God as the agency of all knowledge is one of the foundations of an Islamisation of the sciences.

Korah's⁷ way of thinking is a great obstacle to the Islamisation of science. The problem was that he thought his wealth and success were due to his own efforts, and he did not consider the part played by God. He did not believe in the Unity of divine activity, and he said: 'I have been given it only on account of knowledge I possess (28:78).'⁷ In the fields of education and science many people think the same way as Korah, and are of the opinion that their

knowledge is solely the result of their own individual talents. As long the existing attitude towards science persists, and the cause and purpose of the world are neglected, with Korah's logic prevailing, one cannot expect the sciences to be Islamised.

Two extremes in such a project should be avoided. It should not be assumed that, if sciences such as physics and chemistry were Islamised, they would be totally different. This type of idea comes about by thinking that the relation between a religious science and modern science is similar to that between hand-woven carpets and those manufactured in factories. The assumption is then that a religious science would be something quite different. Yet when we realise that there would not be some other kind of physics and chemistry, we may be led to believe that an Islamic science would be unnecessary. The idea of the Islamisation of the sciences involves a reconciliation between science and religion, which would include reason within the pattern of religious knowledge, and eliminate the falsely assumed separation of science and religion. It would not discard empirical methodology and propose a completely new mechanism. A science that is truly scientific, and not pure conjecture, can be nothing but Islamic. A science which studies the Book of divine creation and unveils its mysteries is inevitably religious, and it would make no sense to divide it into religious and non-religious, or Islamic and non-Islamic.

Hence, when physics develops into rational certainty, and is not more or less hypothetical, it is certainly Islamic, even if the physicist is an atheist or a sceptic. That he has cut off the natural world because of his atheism, and does not believe in creation, does not mean that his understanding of nature and his discoveries, if they are certain and truly scientific, have no religious validity as a way of interpreting God's activity.⁸

Professor Jawādī Āmulī summarises the conditions and necessary attitudes which would lead to an Islamisation of the sciences as follows:

If we seek to Islamise the empirical sciences and the university

textbooks, first of all, the word ‘nature’ should be replaced by ‘creation.’ This means that if a scientist discusses how a mineral reacts, or the characteristics of a plant species, and the word is changed in this way, he thinks about how these things are created.

Secondly, it should be taken into account that the Creator is the Agent of Origin; in other words, the Wise Creator has prepared the scene of creation in such a way that it has particular effects and characteristics.

Thirdly, we should consider the worship of God and the spreading of justice as the ultimate purpose.

Fourth, an authentic transmitted argument, such as a Qur’anic verse or a sound *ḥadīth*, should be taken as a focus of discussion.

Fifth, transmitted confirmation and transmitted argumentation should be employed.

Sixth, debate should not be simply ‘according to reason,’ nor should claims be made ‘according to reason.’

Finally, each part of creation should be interpreted in relation to the others, and interpreted on the basis of creation, like an interweaving totality; for each and every being in the system of creation is a token, a word and an expression amongst other tokens, words and expressions of the comprehensive Book of divine creation.⁹

The Contribution of Transmitted Argument in an Islamisation of the Sciences

In some of the previous sections it was noted that transmitted sources play a role in the formation of religious knowledge. Therefore one should not assume that authentic transmitted sources (the Qur’an and *sunnah*) have no contribution to make to the sciences.

This illusion of irrelevance has been caused because it is sometimes assumed that the words of the Qur’an and the sayings of the Infallibles that speak of the world and nature do not have the detail found in scientific claims. The

ḥadīths do not speak of new discoveries about matter, new planets, blood circulation, or the nervous system and so forth, and so it seems that the empirical sciences have the upper hand. Those who think in this way overlook the same thing if it occurs in the scientific field. But to understand the religious sciences in terms of beliefs, morality and jurisprudence, there should be scholarly analysis, without which the transmitted sources would not reveal their teachings. The Qur'an and the *ḥadīths* teach principles and enlighten one's horizons, and it is up to scholars in the various branches of the Islamic sciences to extract the hidden, finer points from these principles.

If there were no great scholars such as Shaykh Murtaḍā Anṣārī and Ākhūnd Khurāsānī, would the authorisation of the earlier forms of acquittal be explained in their present forms? They manage to infer many points by reflecting upon a few *ḥadīths*, such as 'doubt does not invalidate certainty',¹⁰ and the *ḥadīth* of *Raf'*.¹¹ In just the same way, many terms of transaction within jurisprudence are derived from certain *ḥadīths*. Thus, the point is not that there is no material in the Qur'an and the *ḥadīths* from which scientific ideas can be inferred, but the heedlessness of scientists in the various natural and human sciences towards the existing religious sources. If the empirical scientists reflected upon the *ḥadīths* and Qur'anic verses on cosmology and nature in the same way as the great jurists, then empirical science would achieve much.¹²

Discussion and Conclusion

It might be useful to sum up certain points. First, this thesis tries to explain two main problems: the problem of the conflict between reason and religion (or more specifically, between reason and religion), and the possibility, or even necessity, of an Islamisation of the natural and human sciences. The conflict between reason and religion is solved if reason were to operate within the paradigm of religious knowledge. Reason, together with transmitted knowledge, is already considered an epistemological source of religion. But in order to Islamise the sciences, certain fundamental views should change. In

fact, the outlook of scientific study should be redirected so that a religious science might result. This change of outlook should cause no change in the prevailing content and methods of science.

A second point is that Jawādī Āmulī's suggested solution addresses the problem – and even if there seem to be inconsistencies, they would in fact be due to differences between science and transmitted argument as a source of religion amongst others. His ideas of a science are not based on the proving of facts and scientific realism, but a science which becomes certain by demonstrating facts which agree with religion. It is evident that this kind of science would not conflict with religion.¹³ As a matter of fact, achievements in many branches of science could be located within the paradigm of religious knowledge, if they are reasonable and can be demonstrated. Locating science within the paradigm of religious knowledge would not change its status. As for any conflict, it may be safely claimed that there is none, whether or not the sciences represent the factual world. If there is any conflict at all, it is between science and transmitted knowledge.

Another consideration is that these ideas about an Islamisation of the sciences emphasises the fact that changes in the existing content and methodology of the empirical sciences do not make them religious. Rather it is a result of making changes in the philosophical view, and considering science as a divine creation. Evidently this proposal does not expect an Islamisation of the sciences to open new horizons that will change the content of science. However, the emphasis placed by Professor Jawādī Āmulī on reflecting upon the Qur'an and the *ḥadīths* that mention scientific matters shows that, if the transmitted sources of religion are taken into account by scientific theory, ideas would come forth which otherwise would not. Therefore this would lead to certain developments. And it is not the case that there is no contextual difference between the two approaches, one of which accepts the religious text as a source and is open to scientific study, while the other does not refer to these transmitted arguments to prove scientific theory at all. The two cannot

produce an identical science. It goes without saying that if the scientist made use of the transmitted sources of religion, he would come to different conclusions from those reached by a scientist who overlooks them. Finally, this thesis emphasises that those natural and empirical sciences which produce certainty and rational conviction are certainly Islamic. One can assume this is true, but it causes a problem in the actual world. Many contemporary philosophers of science have serious doubts about whether much of science is factual. In any case, the thesis has to face the challenge of proving the possibility of gaining certainty and rational conviction in the field of the empirical sciences.

Notes

1. 'Ābdullāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Manzilat-e 'Aql dar Hindasab-ye Ma'rifat-e Dīnī*, Qum: Esrā Publications, 1386 S.H., 25-26.
2. *Ibid.*, 146.
3. *Ibid.*, 111.
4. *Ibid.*, 118.
5. *Ibid.*, 130.
6. *Ibid.*, 130.
7. Korah(Qārūn) was a very wealthy member of the Tribes of Moses (the Children of Israel).
8. *Ibid.*, 143.
9. *Ibid.*, 141.
10. Muḥammad Ibn Ḥasan al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī, *Wasā'il al-Shī'ah*, Beirut: Dār al-'Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 1403 A.H., vol. 1, 245.
11. Muḥammad Ibn Ya'qūb Kulaynī, *Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, Tehran: 'Ilmiyyah Islāmiyyah Publication, 1363 S.H., 463.
12. 'Ābdullāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Manzilat-e 'Aql dar Hindasab-ye Ma'rifat-e Dīnī*, 14.
13. *Ibid.*, 111.