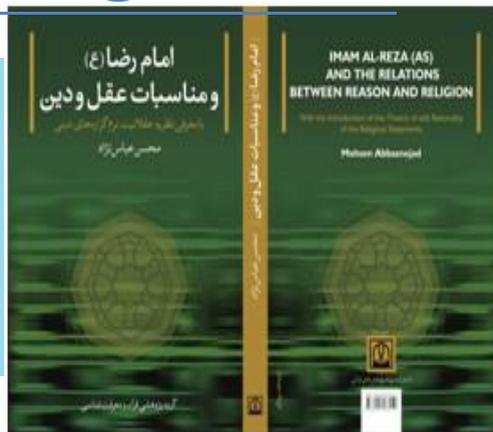


Imam Reza (A.S.) and the Relationship between the Reason and the Religion



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Mohsen Abbasnejad



1972-Mashhad

Mohsen Abbasnejad was took his BS in Mechanical Engineering but continued his studies in Philosophy. Having studied Islamic Jurisprudence and Usool in seminary under the great contemporary jurist and philosophy under a distinguished philosopher of the eastern world, he passed the highest levels of the seminary with flying colors.

Having authored number of works in such field as philosophy, philosophy of science and Hadith, and Jurisprudence, Abbasnejad is now serving on Quran and epistemology, and the director of the Quranic Research Foundation.

In addition to penning a six-volume collection on the basics of inter-relating science and the religion, some of his other books are as follow:

- Principles and basics of the Quran and Modern Science,***
- Imam Ali (A.S.) Managerial Approach,***
- Imam Ali (A.S.) Personal Lifestyle,***
- Basic Rights within religious Approach,***
- Some Elaborations on the Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (3 Vols.)***

About the book:

Explaining the relationship between the reason and the faith has been among the oldest distinctive issues with in the history of the religion. Having critically examine the meaning of the reason, the verisimilitude of the cognition and source of knowledge, this book would be then investigate the relationship between the reason and the faith from the Islamic perspective based on Imam Reza(a.s.)teachings. As for the doctrines regarding the relationship between the two, the views of those Muslim and Christian scholars who believe in the impossibility of rational explication of religious propositions including the atheists, Positivists, discourse analysts, Fideists and the adherents of reformed epistemology from the Christian world and the traditionalists (Ahl al-Hadith), Sufis, the Akhbaris, and the distinction school from the Muslim world are critically examined.

The author would then present a new perspective called "The Theory of Religious Propositions' Soft Rationality", trying to defending the possibility of rational explanation of religious beliefs in a novel way by proving the equal rationality of religious and scientific creeds through 4 principals and examining the soft verifiability of religious propositions and their flexibility within a well-defined framework.

Examining the relationship between the reason and the faith from the ethics point of views= by investigating different decrees of regarding the origin of the ethical decrees of the authors in question and deciding whether the ethical statements are of Akhbari or compositional nature, a new theory called " The Attributive

Theory in Ethics" would thus be proposed within the realm of ethics philosophy, followed by careful examination of the mutual requirements of the ethics and the faith. Proper understanding of the relationship between the reason and the faith is one of the main challenges faced by religions Mutakallimun and the theorist of the religions science from one hand and those interested in mingling theology and science on the other to which the author attempts to respond by offering two new theories.

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The opinions of supporters of the impossibility of rational explanation of religious beliefs in Christianity

Atheists

Atheists basically believe religion is superstition and all of its claims are nothing but big lies. The history of their emergence in the Christian world goes back to the Age of Enlightenment in the West. In 1798, at the peak of the Enlightenment, one of the advocates of religion was delivering a speech at the French Academy and suddenly shouts of protest were heard from every corner and one of the audiences cried out, “I swear there is no God. Please do not bring up its name here!”¹

There were quite a few atheists such as Holbach, who considered the matter substantive and denied the God and the soul. Other philosophers, such as W. K. Clifford, Brand Blanshard, Bertrand Russell, Michael, and Anthony Flew, argued the belief in God was irrational, illogical, or not compatible with epistemic standards.²

¹ Sajedi, Abolfazl, Religion from A New Perspective, Qom: Imam Khomeini Institute of Education and Research Publ., 2008, pp. 105.

² *Ibid.*

According to them, no system of religious beliefs can meet the criteria for rational proof of religious propositions and since there is not enough evidence to prove religious claims, there is no reason to believe in them. Clifford (1845-1879 A.D.), the British mathematician and one of the most hardliner rationalists, stated,

“Always, everywhere, and for everyone, believing in anything based on insufficient evidence is a mistake . . . no system of religious beliefs can satisfy this strict burden of proof (which must rule all of our beliefs), and therefore, a wise (and morally committed) person should not have religious beliefs.”³

The huge number of books that denied religious beliefs and were written from the Age of Enlightenment onward in the West, demonstrates there are numerous supporters of atheists in the West who do not see any reasonable approach to accepting religious claims. But as we will show later, contrary to the ideas of these people, there is strong evidence to prove religious claims that at least are acceptable similar to scientific propositions and have the same level of rationality.

Positivism

Logical Positivism is a philosophical trend initiated by a circle of Western thinkers, physicists, mathematicians and philosophers between 1922 and 1936 in Vienna. People like Otto Neurath, Carnap, Ayer, led by Moritz Schlick, were members of this circle, a.k.a. Vienna Circle. They held regular discussion and review meetings and published their own internal journals and many books.

³ Michael Patterson *et al.* (2004). *Religious Intellect and Belief; Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, translators Ahmad Naraghi and Ebrahim Soltani, Tehran: Tarhno, pp. 73 - 74.

Logical Positivists presented the principle of “empirical verification” as a criterion for propositions. Ayer, the Vienna Circle spokesman stated,

“The criterion that we use to assess the authenticity of the propositions relating to reality is the principle of empirical verification. We say that a state has a real meaning for a certain person, if he and only he, knows how to empirically investigate the meaning that the statement implies, that is, if he knows what observations in what situations direct him to accept that statement as a true proposition or reject it as a false proposition.”⁴

Accordingly, only two categories of statements make sense, scientific laws and theories that point to the outside world and whose truth or falsehood are verifiable through experimentation. Analytic statements that are nothing but a logical and mathematical tautology.⁵

Therefore, the necessary condition for the meaningfulness of declarative sentence is to be empirically verifiable. In other words, the actualization of the proposition must have some effect in the outside world. All Positivists agree on the principle of empirical verification but they take different approaches to it. Some assume the meaningfulness of proposition needs empirical proof, and others have emphasized empirical verifiability, and yet others like Popper emphasized falsifiability principle, i.e. a meaningful proposition is the one whose falsehood or contradiction of the proposition in the outside world can be proved.

Accordingly, the following propositions become meaningless.

⁴ Ayer. *Language, Truth, and Logic*, pp.35.

⁵ Sajedi. *The Language of Religion and Quran*, pp. 80.

Metaphysical propositions, Metaphysical claims, and propositions are not meaningful because they cannot be empirically proved. Ethical propositions, Carnap and Ayer believed that we do not have anything such as ethical and value propositions, e.g. the statement “theft is bad”, indicates our feelings about theft and does not describe reality.

Religious propositions, these propositions are not informative or meaningful because they cannot be empirically proved.⁶ Positivism is a reflection of the scientific authority in the recent centuries that was based on the knowledge derived from the empirical method. A method based on reliable inferences from observation, experience, and sensory data. Positivists came to the conclusion that a knowledge that is somehow based on the sensory experience is unfounded, absurd and meaningless.

“It cannot be said in a meaningful way that there is a non-empirical world of values, or humans have immortal souls, or there is an Almighty God.”⁷

They believe that if an object is beyond the reach of our experience, it would be meaningless to perceive it because there is no possibility of reviewing it in collective minds. The transcendental world of the pious is not accessible and trustworthy compared to the material world as experienced by empirical scholars. Therefore, Philips denies that the language of reality is appropriate for religion.

⁶ Abbas Nejad, Mohsen (2006). The Basics and Prerequisites of the Relationship between the Quran and Current Sciences, Mashhad: Foundation of the Hawzeh and University Quranic Studies, pp. 191.

, The Basics and Principles of the Relationship between the Quran and the Science of the Day, Mashhad: The Quranic Studies Foundation and University, 2006, p. 191

⁷ Ayer, A. J. (1946). Language, Truth and Logic, rev. edn, Gollancz, London. 1st ed., pp. 31.

He stated, “As the saying that ‘the existence of God is a fact’ does not make any sense.”⁸ They consider the use of language is limited to situations that are known to us, and since we live in the material world, we can speak meaningfully only about material reality. Logical Positivism, with its principle of empirical verification, had a vast influence and lasting impact, especially in the early twentieth century under the influence of the then current Western-style scientism. But it was a short time victory. It underwent many criticisms which resulted in a lot of modifications. In such a way that even Ayer, as one of its main theorists, criticized Logical Positivism.

Critique of the principle of empirical verification of Logical Positivism

A while ago in 1938, Isaiah Berlin noted that “the principle of verification or verifiability, after playing a decisive role in the history of modern philosophy . . . was not accepted as the definitive criterion of empirical meaningfulness, because such acceptance leads to completely irrational conclusions.”⁹ One of the main problems of this theory is its “self-destruction.”

Based on this theory, anything that cannot be empirically verifiable is nonsense, while this theory itself represents a general proposition and, as we said, is not empirically verifiable. Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976), who was the Ayer’s mentor and a Logical Positivist in the beginning and then departed from it, noted the consequence of this theory to render all philosophical claims, including the achievements of the Vienna circle meetings that were published in the journal

⁸ Trigg, Roger (2006). *Rationality and Religion*, translator Hassan Ghanbari, Qom: Islamic Culture and Sciences Research Center, pp. 250.

⁹ استينزبي. *Science, Intellect, and Religion*, pp. 59.

“Erkenntnis” meaningless. He stated, “Logical Positivism had another unintended outcome, i.e. since it equaled metaphysics with nonsense and only considered science to be meaningful, it was trapped in a question that was automatically raised, Now, which side should we, the anti-nonsense philosophers, take? Are the sentences that form the Erkenntnis¹⁰ the journal itself, metaphysical? If not, then are they physics or astronomy or zoology? What about the theorems and equations abundant in the principles of mathematics?”¹¹

As Trigg has stated, Positivism implies this implicit hypothesis that all reality is the material reality. Or, because we are in the material world, we can only speak of material reality, but this is a metaphysical claim in itself.

According to the religious people, the world is filled with non-material beings such as the soul, angels, jinn and many other non-material things. And even human beings have other existential dimensions apart from the material body and many things that happen in humans do not have the properties of the material world. Muslim philosophers have proven that “knowledge”, which is the most important human attribute, has an immaterial existence. Therefore, the at most, what can be said is that the senses are not qualified to comment on paranormal, not to deny the use of language in relation to any immaterial matter. It is possible to define the criteria according to which immaterial events can be expressed in a meaningful way.

¹⁰ Erkenntnis was the magazine published by the Logical Positivism center.

¹¹ Khorramshahi. Logical Positivism, pp. 33 - 34. For further details, see Sajedi, The Language of Religion and the Quran, pp. 90.

“A common meaning can be stated for real things, and that is making a difference. When we say that X exists or is real, it means the world with X is different than the world without X. There are different realities and empirical facts are only one type of them. Mathematical facts, symbolic realities, realities based on credibility.

Basically, the foundation of religious faith is faith in the invisible (Gheyb). The invisible cannot be perceived with sensory experience. This does not mean that there is no evidence for religious concepts and faith in the invisible, but these subjects are such that do not directly yield to the test and their evidence is circumstantial. The rationality of faith means that the process of attaining faith is a reasonable and rational process, even though the subject of faith itself does not directly come within the limits of the senses.”¹²

Moreover, even if the empirical criterion for the meaningfulness of propositions is to be emphasized, many Quranic propositions are fairly meaningful. The statement “by remembering God, the hearts rejoice”¹³, can be experienced; i.e. it can be tested via experimental methods to show its truth. It can also be shown by empirical methods that real believers are less fearful of death. Therefore, the truth of the proposition that “faith eliminates or reduces the fear of death” is proven.

It is also mentioned in the religious teachings that Allah is the companion of the lonely, “O’ companion of the one who has no companion”¹⁴, which can be tested whether religiosity eliminates the feeling of loneliness of mankind? This proposition can be proven or rejected, so it is subject to the principle of

¹² Sadeghi. Introduction to Modern Theology, pp. 77 - 78.

¹³ Ar-Ra`d 13:28.

¹⁴ Majlisi, Bihar al-Anwar, vol. 91, pp. 387 - 391.

verifiability (falsifiability). If we do not limit our experience to the worldly experience, then there are many other subjects that can be proven or rejected in postmortem situation, such as limbo life, resurrection, paradise, and hell; therefore, one can talk about religious topics in a meaningful way. At least a part of them are suitable for empirical examination and their meaning is not dependent on their empirical verifiability. One can assume there is a situation in which the religious proposition proves false.¹⁵

Also, the propositions that state the God's Messenger is a God's Messenger is based on miracles that everyone feels, as well as the proposition "Quran is the book of God" where the Quran's challenge (Tahaddi) is its empirical proof. Many of the advantages and disadvantages of worship rituals are also empirically verifiable. Especially that, based on Shia sect, all dos and don'ts have intrinsic advantages and disadvantages that by clarification, can be empirically verified and that is enough to render religious propositions meaningful. Because according to Positivists, a proposition is meaningful when one can assume empirical conditions that render it meaningful. If the statement "alcoholic drink is prohibited (haram)" implies the proposition that "alcoholic drink is harmful", the proposition can be proven or rejected empirically.

Since the logical positivists have not provided a clear proof for the "verifiability" criterion, and there are numerous reasons to reject this claim, it is better to refer to the convention to find out the meaningfulness of the statements. The convention holds that the meaningfulness criterion lies in observing the syntax and grammar. It is enough for a proposition to create a clear image in the mind and its structure

¹⁵ Sadeghi. Introduction to Modern Theology, pp. 82 - 83.

does not conflict with grammar, and that proposition will be reasonably meaningful. Of course, the possibility of communicating between the languages of science and religion does not imply full agreement of these two languages. Certainly, there are differences between the two. An example of the characteristic of the religious language is the existence of Muhkamat (perspicuous verses of the Quran) and Mutashabehat (metaphorical expressions of the Quran) in the Quran verses and the narrations from the family of the Messenger. The Definitive is referred to the cases in which the corresponding meaning is completely clear. But the Alternative is statements whose corresponding meaning misleads the individual and one should refer to the Definitive in order to find out their true meaning.

Imam Reza said, “Whoever refers the Quran’s Alternative to its Definitive is guided to the straight path.”¹⁶ Then he said, “Like the Quran, there are Alternative and in our anecdotes. So, you must refer to their Definitive and do not follow the Alternative without respecting the Definitive or you will go astray.”¹⁷

The special characteristic of the “transcendent subject” in religion is the use of symbolic language and “Alternatives” in order to overcome slang restrictions and provide a framework for transcendental concepts of religion. But this level of distinction does not fundamentally differ between the language of religion and the language of science. In the case of science, sometimes certain conceptual or allegorical models are used due to limitations and it does not change the nature of the language.

¹⁶ Horemeli (1997). *Al-Fsol Al-Muhammad Fi-Osol Al-Aeme*, Qom: Imam Reza Islamic Knowledge Institute, vol.1, pp. 573.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Atheists and skeptics have highly criticized religious people throughout history. In the Imam Reza debates, there are many problems were posed by atheists and seculars; however, the words of the religious people have never been considered meaningless and unimaginable. But at most, the authenticity of the religious people's arguments has been disputed. This clearly shows that there was a possibility of speaking meaningfully about religious concepts and the parties to the dispute were debating on the authenticity of religious propositions, not their meaningfulness.

Nevertheless, there have been some restrictions on the interpretation of religious concepts. One of the atheists in a debate with the Imam asked Imam to explain the concept of "God" and he rejected the possibility of doing so, and in response, stated the reason for his opinion as follows, "Because anything that has a limit, its being extends to that limit, and since it has arrived at a limit, it can be extended and because it can be extended, by the same token it can be reduced. So, it has no limit. It would not extend and would not be reduced; it would not be decomposed, and could not be perceived by the intellect."¹⁸

But these language constraints for the explanation of the metaphysical concepts, from that aspect that they can be explained, are not such as to render religious propositions meaningless. Because nothing is stated in that section in which the human concepts and intellects cannot understand it, and in the section where the intellect understands, there are meaningful and reasonable statements, and hence, there were many controversial discussions in the latter section between the proponents and the opposition through history.

¹⁸ Sadoq. Oyoum Akhbar Al-Reza, translator Hamid Reza Moostafid, and Ali Akbar Ghaffari, vol.1, pp. 267.

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