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*Luther's dissertation was about Fakhr-e Razi's<sup>1</sup> philosophy and theology. For almost one year, every Tuesday and Thursday, he came to Allameh Ja'fari's house and studied Fakhr-e Razi's 'Arbaein' [which translates as 'Forty'] with him. During these sessions, several questions were asked by Luther of Razi's book, and Ja'fari answered them. Hereunder, a significant number of these questions have been quoted:*

**Luther:** What is the definition of philosophy and theology from Eastern and Western point of views?

**Ja'fari:** Various definitions have been suggested of philosophy in the past and even in our time, both in the East and the West. Nevertheless, the most comprehensive and exhaustive definition of philosophy is what we have been handed down by Sadrulmuta'allehin Shirazi<sup>2</sup>, who in the articulation of which has extremely benefited from his predecessors. He states:

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1- See the translator's footnote on first page of Chapter 1.

2- Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Ibn Yahya al-Qawami al-Shirazi (1571–1640), also known as Mulla Sadra and Sadrulmuta'allehin ("the Foremost of Theosophers") is the founder of transcendent theosophy ("al-Hikmat al-Muta'alyah") in the history of Islamic philosophy. This new philosophical school is a synthesis of three intellectual perspectives, i.e. reason, gnosis and the Qura'n, whose fusion, in Sadra's view, can lead a philosopher to his primordial destination – the truth. Sadra's magnum opus is *al-Hikmat al-Mutaalyah fi al-Asfar al-Arbati al-Aqlyah* ("Transcendent Theosophy Concerning Four Intellectual Journeys") in nine volumes that serves the reader as an encyclopedia in Islamic Philosophy which deals with the perennial problems of philosophy in an active dialogue with other Islamic schools of philosophy – majorly peripateticism and illuminationism – and mysticism. (Translator).

*Philosophy is the knowledge of the reality of things within man's possibility.*

As you can see, the condition "within man's possibility" forestalls a serious challenge concerning this definition, since with our limited mental and perceptual tools, as well as the other cognitive apparatuses available to us, we cannot reach the reality of things "as they are". Thus, "within man's possibility" guarantees the intelligibility of this definition and reflects the true human ideal, i.e. reaching the reality of things.

In fact, it is a human ideal to touch the reality of things and be an honest beholder of it, but it is difficult to say how successful he has been in fulfilling this ideal. Thus, a considerable number of philosophers – of course, mostly in West – have stated that now that we cannot find any determinate subject-matter and a precise definition for philosophy, let us devote ourselves to those matters that should definitely be addressed by philosophy, such as the definition of matter, knowing the truth of motion, time, place, will, law, motive power of history and the like. Regardless of the definition that is proposed of philosophy, these are indisputable philosophical issues that have occupied many brilliant minds throughout history.

**Luther:** What is the basic cause of our inability to know the reality of things in your view?

**Ja'fari:** The other issue that I was about to address is the same thing you just mentioned. In defining and knowing things, we do not know the *real differentia* without which the definition will not be possible in perfect form. Real differentia is what essentially distinguishes one reality from other similar realities and allows us to say, for example, this is how an identity called water is defined. We do not have yet access to the real differentia of time and motion to distinguish them from other realities. As a result, whatever we make out of these matters is all based on logical differentia, the basis of which is usually assumed by thinkers in their intellectual pursuits. Notwithstanding, the real differentia is not merely contractual, but it is truly discerning. For example, if we say "Man is a thinking animal", we are actually differentiating man from other living creatures that are by no means a thinking being. But is this quality called thinking the real differentia? Or when we, for instance, say that "Man is a social animal", have we in fact managed to discover the reality of man by knowing this differentia (thought or sociality)? Those thinkers, who are almost not one-sided, will give a negative answer to this question. Therefore, we accept Sadrulmuta'allehin's definition for philosophy with the condition "within human possibility."

Of course, the problem-oriented method<sup>1</sup> has its own advantages in philosophy, including the fact that it helps philosophers not become bogged down in fruitless abstractions. The debate of time, space, contingency and the eternity of the world and so on and so forth, for example, has its privileges, say it does not leave man in ambiguity concerning the basic principles of issues. However, these debates are not honestly whole and systematic; as a matter of fact, they are incoherent and such a philosophical form of knowledge is not satisfactory for humanity indeed.

In fact, as we aforementioned, the analytic method in philosophy<sup>2</sup> has the advantage that by its application, man is allowed to encounter a limited range of problems, but this approach turns a deaf ear to the synthetic nature of reality. To state the matter otherwise, it deprives us from the synthetic knowledge<sup>3</sup> of those particulars that constitute the universe as a whole.

There is no doubt that this method is also a human desire, particularly the desired method of sublime thoughts. It is not indeed unlikely that someone with a shallow knowledge is contented with this method, but for those individuals who are in possession of enlightened minds and seek to behold the universe from a broader aspect, these issues and also the problem-oriented method shall not prove to be satisfying.

**Luther:** Which one of these two methods is more significant in your final analysis?

**Ja'fari:** Both methods have their own respective values. The analytic method helps the human mind to penetrate deep into the constitutive elements of existence as far as possible and present the propositions abstracted from them to the scientific community. On the other hand, the synthetic method allows man to reach an integrated vision of existence. In this latter method, science, knowledge and even life are not insulated phenomena cut off from principles and foundations. Some may argue that our portrayal of analytic and synthetic methods

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1- The problem-oriented method is a minimalistic view of philosophy that is grounded in the belief that if we cannot reach a perfect definition of philosophy as an independent discipline and epistemic enterprise, at least we can pursue it through problems. Allameh Ja'fari's views on this method have been elaborated in one of his works, *A Survey of the Philosophy of Science* (2007).

2- The analytic method in philosophy refers to a methodology upon which universal notions are being reduced into particular concepts through analytic methods until no more particular notion would be reached anymore, and with these basic particular notions, a proposition is constructed.

3- Synthetic knowledge stands at the heart of a research program in which the thinker appraises his propositional understanding of relations of natural facts in a broader context.

is the very method of holism,<sup>1</sup> but they must take it into earnest consideration that it is the spirit of authentic Oriental philosophy that tries to deal with existence in its wholeness, both with respect to its creator and personal identity as well as with regard to its relationship with "ego", in the same way that it addresses particular analytic issues of philosophy.

Thus conceived, philosophy no longer has any condition, and being unconditional is indeed a peculiarity of philosophy now. To put it differently, philosophy does not submit to the pre-established principles of humanly made schools of thought and cultures and precipitated epistemic factors. This is to say, the philosopher is alone with his thoughts, even though his mind-set has been shaped within the horizon of scientific issues. The philosopher struggles to understand by his own self and does not rely on anything else but his speculations. Has such a philosophy ever been crafted so far? Could one indeed create a convincing systematic well-made *weltanschauung* which has all philosophical issues in view without resorting to pre-established principles? This needs an excessive deal of good opinion to believe it.

It has been claimed that in philosophy, everything should be sketched and understood by the individual himself. Has the history of mankind ever witnessed such a thing? Have human beings not developed preordained principles under the influence of their cultures? Do human orientations in life not wield a delicate and intangible impact on their worldviews? And aren't men influenced by these cultural principles? I do not give negative answers to these queries. Said otherwise, it is quite unlikely that the human brain may get itself involved in abstraction to such an extent that not to be touched by any predetermined principle. Thus, it is a wholly wrong belief that theology is inferior to philosophy just because it relies on the words of prophets or religious leaders! This mind-set needs to be revised. Now let us see what the definition of theology or *Kalam* is.

*Kalam* consists of the knowledge of religious beliefs through affording arguments and clearing doubts. This is exactly what has been said by Abdulrrazaq Kashi and others in the definition of this discipline.

Theologians have repeated this latter definition with a few modifications and differences, but it seems that theology and theological debates have been more extensive than this. We need to cast a closer look on Khajeh Nasiruddin Tusi's *Tajrid al-Eteqad* ["The Purification of Belief"] along with the glosses that have been written on it, e.g. Allameh Helli's *Kashf ul-Murad* ["The Point Discovered"] and

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1- The theory that entities are complete units and should be related to as such and not separated into parts. (Translator).

*Sharhi Tajrid* by Mulla Ali Qushchi, to see whether they only speak about religious truths or of the general principles of ontology as well. These are definitely issues that philosophers are concerned with and discuss them as philosophical issues. Khajeh Nasiruddin Tusi, who is not a theologian proper but theology only features an aspect of his multifaceted thought, argues:

*The first chapter on existence and non-existence and defining them as immovable reality (existence) and movable reality (non-existence), or defining them as something that can be reported on (existence) and what cannot be reported, and other definitions that are all circular regress (these definitions are not real).*

These issues belong to the domain of the philosophical universe of discourse, like the debate over existence and non-existence, quiddity, cause and effect and others, and all of these are discussed in theology. Therefore, it is unfair to limit theology to the argumentative discussion of religious beliefs and the clarification of doubts. Had theologians from sects such as Imamyah, Asharites and Mutazilites not discussed atomic particles? There is a book entitled *Madhab al-dhurra inda al-muslimin wa al-aqatuhu bi-madhāhib al-Yūnān wa al-Hunūd: wa-maahu falsafa Muhammad ibn Zakariyā al-Rāzī* ("Muslim Takes of Atomism and Its Relationship with Greek and Hindu Schools of Thought along with the Philosophy of Zakariya-ye Razi") by Dr. S. Pines that has been translated by an Egyptian called Abdulhadi. This book has garnered the ideas and positions of more than a hundred theologians of atoms. In those days, these were not discussed physically, but it was disputed that whether physical objects can ultimately be reduced to indivisible atoms or not. It is far more evident that this issue is not directly relevant to theology in its proper sense. Moreover, they have dealt with time, space and causality as well as many other significant issues that certainly could have been interesting and of avail for philosophers if they dared to leave their ivory tower and take a look upon them. Thus, it is a peculiarity of theology that seeks to understand its problems based on traditions and transmitted prophetic wisdom. These traditions have a hundred percent authenticity there.

It needs also to be mentioned that it is a big mistake to give the upper hand to philosophy on the pretext that the authority of tradition and narration in the theology has broken the monopoly of reason. The science of *Kalam* is primarily concerned with the articles of faith that must be grounded in reason without appealing to emulation in any form. When you decide to expand the debate over the pillars of belief, you will have to turn to philosophical principles. In other words, since religious beliefs, say resurrection, are established upon reason, it is in fact a philosophical and rational issue.

*The world, galaxy and stars would be a plaything*

*If this long day of the terrestrial had no tomorrow.* (Nasir Khosrow)

It might be said that many philosophical issues do not have an argument of such strength and power. As persons who are in search of the lawfulness and order of majesties and values, the sense of obligation, philanthropy, services and beauties in this world, you need to know that if a "tomorrow" is not accepted for this life, no single one of these latter categories will have any foundation. How could you want a more powerful argument than this? Thus, we must be completely careful in distinguishing between theology and philosophy.

Accordingly, the basic difference existing between these epistemic disciplines lies in the fact that in theological knowledge, besides reason, religious resources are also approached as the means of the clarification of hidden aspects of reason and backstage activities of intellection, while the philosopher resorts to standard methods of reason – which are based on senses and other perceptual devices – and does not see it necessary at all to incorporate concealed rational factors into his arguments.

For example, in Islam, physical resurrection is supposed to be one of the articles of faith, but the philosopher may see himself unable to accept it due to a number of issues like "non-existence is impossible to be restituted" and content himself with spiritual resurrection, while in *Kalam*, intellection gets intensified and substantiates the rationality of physical resurrection in light of the station of lordship and based on the law of similarity that states that two similar objects share the same sentence.

*Luther's dissertation on Islamic philosophy and Fakhr-e Razi was appreciated as a brilliant study. He published it and sent a copy of it to Ja'fari. Many people helped him collect his required works and documents, among whom late Hajj Sheikh Abdulhussein Ibnuddin was also helpful for Luther when it came to addressing many theoretical problems.*