

Prof. Filippini Ronconi

Subject: Philosophical and Theological Issues

Nationality: Italian/ Major: Eastern philosophy

Dialogue Date: 1970

This dialogue dates back to the conversation that Professor Ronconi had with Allameh Ja'fari at the conference held in Mashhad on the Millennium of Sheikh Tusi, the great Shi'ah Scholar.

Ronconi: I am very happy to have been fortunate enough to attend such a magnificent conference like this. During the past five days, during which I have been part of the panel on "philosophy and heresiology," a large number of philosophical principles and issues were discussed. Fortunately, many of the discussed issues had been researched thoroughly and all managed to find their final answers. Sadly, philosophy is now dead in the West, but it is still alive in your East, unless as Goethe, the German poet, says, "Once again, an Oriental breeze will blow and bring along a universal and coherent philosophy for the West." Here is my question: why is West not able to introduce a universal and systematic philosophy to humanity?

Ja'fari: To be honest, the analytical reflections in the West are very powerful and no one can deny this fact. The mode of thought that is featured by these analytical reflections has mistakenly been termed as "new positivism" under the influence of an excessive objectivism, while it was better if they mentioned that they have given the prominence to analytic method and adopted it as their chosen philosophical method. As Russell replied when he was asked to which school he belonged:

The only label that I have accepted is "logical atomism", but I am not so interested in labels and always try to avoid them.¹

Then, if the West were aware of its monopolization of the analytic method, it would have recognized this deficiency and tried to clear a room for the synthetic method in its philosophy and *weltanschauung*. If

1- Ja'fari, M. T. *An Analytical Exposition of the Russell-Wyatt Dialogues*.

such a consciousness had in fact emerged there, we would have had systematic philosophy in the West today.

The Westerners may have not understood that the excessive objectivism of twentieth century positivism was the swan song of this method. The analytic method cannot depict an integrated picture of the world as it studies all facts in isolation from each other. This insufficiency of the analytic method can be easily felt from the global yearning for universal and systematic philosophies that could only be achieved through the application of the synthetic method.

The example that I once used in a comparative seminar on the Islamic science of the soul and modern psychology in the conference hall at Ruzbeh Hospital – which was then under the direction of Prof. Mirsepasi in Tehran, and two seminars on psychiatry and psychology were held there each month– can also be applied in this case. To construct a good building, we necessarily need not to use such stuffs as unprocessed stones and timbers, and by the same token, it is not allowed in philosophy to use limited knowledge of issues and problems that has not been sufficiently researched. As a result, philosophy must be grounded in well-processed and established knowledge. I think this is the Achilles heel of Western philosophy that – despite the emergence of brilliant developments in such sciences as mathematics, chemistry, physics and the like – was not able to break the bondages of the analytic method and make its contribution to the discipline.

For example, Western scholars have proposed intelligent analyses of various types of time including contractual time, physical time, cosmic time and so on and so forth, but these analyses cannot offer us an integrative knowledge of the nature of time as such. This is a task that needs to be done by means of the synthetic method.

Ronconi: What do you mean by the synthetic method? Can this method be equally applied both in the East and the West in the face of their intellectual differences?

Ja'fari: According to the synthetic method, man is a being who dwells inside the world and is able to know it. Moreover, the knowledge that man obtains of the world determines his situation in world and orients his purposeful movement. Therefore, man needs to acquire a universal knowledge of the universe in view of the fundamental quadruple relationships so that he may achieve answers to his questions. Man's relationship with himself, his relationship with God, his relationship with the world and also his relationship with his fellow human beings, are the four basic relationships that the man must understand so as to have an integrative knowledge of existence and avoid being lost inside dispersed facts.

Thus, we see that man is able to apply the synthetic method as an existential emergency. As to the intellectual differences existing between the West and the East, I should say that these differences do not have any impact on the necessity of the application of this method, since both poles enjoy the same epistemic capabilities and methods, although there may be some scientific and philosophical propositions that they do not share. Of course, we should not forget the influence of the cultural element, which brings about changes in the quality of the application of this method in these regions.



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